

§ xxi. Having spoken about preaching, it is now proper to speak about praying, since there is a similar controversy about it. The religion of our adversaries is almost all outward, and its actions are the mere products of man's natural will and abilities. Just as they can preach when they please, they can also pray when they please, and therefore they have their fixed and prescribed* prayers. I don't meddle with the controversies among them about this, since some of them are for set prayers like a liturgy and others are for prayers which are conceived at the moment.¹ It is enough for me that all of them agree that the motions and influence of the Spirit of God are not necessary before their prayers. For this reason they have set times in their public worship, e.g. before and after preaching, and in their private devotions, such as morning and evening, before and after meals, and similar occasions, at which they precisely set about performing their prayers by speaking words to God whether they feel any motion or influence of the Spirit or not. Some of the most prominent of them have confessed that they have often* prayed in this way without the motions or help of the Spirit, and have acknowledged that they sinned in doing it; nevertheless they said they consider it their duty to do it, although it is a sin to pray without the Spirit.²

¹ *ex tempore* in original English and in Latin.

² Latin: & *tamen eodem tempore affirmarunt, velle se certis istis temporibus sine interruptione precare, etiamsi absit Spiritus, licet sic faciendo adhuc peccarent*, "and nevertheless at the same time they affirmed that they wanted to pray without interruption at certain of

We freely admit that prayer is very beneficial and is a necessary duty, and all Christians are commanded to pray frequently; but since we can do nothing without Christ, we cannot pray without the concurrence and help of his Spirit. To better understand the controversy, consider that prayer is twofold: inward and outward. Inward prayer is a secret turning of the mind towards God: the mind is secretly touched and awakened by the Light of Christ in the conscience, and bowed down under the sense of its iniquities, unworthiness, and misery. Then the mind looks up to God, joining with the secret shining of the Seed of God, and breathes towards him and constantly breathes forth some secret desires and aspirations towards him. It is in this sense that we are so frequently commanded in Scripture to “pray continually” (Luke 18:1; I Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Luke 21:36), which cannot be interpreted as outward prayer, because it is impossible for people to be on their knees all the time, expressing words of prayer; that would prevent them from fulfilling other duties which are no less positively commanded. Outward prayer happens when the spirit is retired inwardly and feels the breathing of the Spirit of God arising powerfully in the soul. Then when the motion and influence of the Spirit increases even more, the soul receives strength and liberty to bring forth either audible sighs, groans, or words, whether in public meetings, in private, or at meals, etc.

Inward prayer is necessary at all times, and so, for as long as a person’s day of visitation lasts, he never lacks some influence, more or less, for practicing it. No sooner does he retire his mind and consider himself in God’s presence, than he finds himself practicing inward prayer.

these times, although the Spirit was absent, recognizing that in doing that they sinned still more.”

Outward prayer requires a greater additional influence and motion of the Spirit. Just as it cannot be practiced continually, so also it cannot be done effectively on the spur of the moment until the person's mind is acquainted with inward prayer for some time.³ Therefore those who are diligent and watchful in their minds and often retire in inward prayer are more able to use outward prayer often, because the holy influence accompanies them more constantly. Being better acquainted with and accustomed to the motions of God's Spirit, they can more easily perceive and discern them. Indeed, those who are most diligent have closer access to God, and he takes delight in drawing them by his Spirit to approach and call upon him. So when many are gathered together in this watchful mind, God frequently pours out the Spirit of prayer among them and stirs them up to prayer, which edifies and builds them up in mutual* love.

Because outward prayer depends on the inward and must follow from it, and because outward prayer cannot be acceptably performed except when accompanied by an additional influence and motion of the Spirit, therefore we cannot set times in advance to pray outwardly, which would impose a necessity of speaking words at such and such times whether or not we feel this heavenly influence and assistance. We believe that would be tempting God, and coming before him without due preparation.

We think it is appropriate for us to present ourselves before God in this inward retirement of the mind, and to proceed further only when his Spirit helps us and draws us to it; we find that the Lord accepts this. And sometimes the Lord chooses to keep us in this silent place without allowing

³ Latin: *ita nec tam subito efficaciter præstari potest donec animus aliquantulum internam expertus sit*, "so it cannot be presented effectively so suddenly, until the mind is a little experienced in the inward."

us to speak, in order to test our patience and teach us not to rely on outward actions or to satisfy ourselves, as too many people do, with saying our prayers. He does this so that our dependence on him may be firmer and more constant, waiting for him to hold out his scepter and permit us to draw near to him with greater freedom, and with more influence of the Spirit upon our hearts. However, we do not deny that sometimes, at particular moments, God may give power and liberty to bring forth words or acts of outward prayer very quickly, indeed as soon as the mind turns inward, so that the soul can hardly discern any previous motion. The inspiration and the act of bringing it forth may be, so to speak, *simul & semel*,⁴ nevertheless what Bernard says is true, that “all prayer is tepid which is not preceded by inspiration.”⁵ . . .

§ xxii. First, it is clear that there is a necessity for this inward retirement of mind before prayer so that we may feel the Spirit drawing us into prayer, because in most of the places where prayer is commanded, it says that watching must go before it; in Matthew 24:42; Mark 13:33, and 14:38, and Luke 21:36 it is evident that watching was to happen before prayer. Now what is the purpose of this watching? It is waiting to feel God’s Spirit drawing us into prayer, so that it may be done acceptably. For since we are to “pray always in the Spirit”⁶ and cannot pray acceptably by ourselves without the Spirit, it must be the case that watching before prayer is recommended to us for this purpose, so that we may watch and wait for the seasonable time to pray, which is when the Spirit moves us to do it.

Second, the necessity of the Spirit’s motion and support* is abundantly clear in what the apostle Paul writes:

⁴ Latin: “at one and the same time.”

⁵ Bernard of Clairveaux, *On Loving God*, chapter VII.

⁶ Ephesians 6:18

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groans which cannot be uttered. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27). *First*, this states that human beings are unable, in themselves, to pray or call upon God from their own wills, even if they have received the faith of Christ and are sanctified by it in some measure, as was the church of Rome, to whom the apostle was writing. *Secondly*, it says that only the Spirit can help people to pray, and without it they cannot pray acceptably to God or beneficially to their own souls. *Thirdly*, it describes the manner of the Spirit’s intercession, with “unutterable sighs and groans.” And *fourthly*, it says that God graciously receives the prayers that are presented and offered to him by the Spirit, the prayers that are offered according to his will. Now it certainly must be judged* that this kind of prayer affirmed by the apostle is most consistent with the other testimonies of Scripture which instruct* and command us to pray. And so I argue this way:

Argument: If a man does not know how to pray, and cannot do it without the help of the Spirit, then praying without the Spirit has no purpose for him, but is completely without benefit.

The first is true, therefore the last is true.

Third, the necessity of the Spirit for true prayer is shown in Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20, where the apostle commands us to “pray always in the Spirit” and to “be watchful for this purpose”; in other words, it’s as if he said that we should never pray without the Spirit or without watchfulness. And Jude shows us that prayers which are in the Holy Spirit tend to “build us up in our most holy faith.”

Fourth, the apostle Paul says explicitly (1 Corinthians 12:3) that “no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the

Holy Spirit.” If we cannot name Jesus as Lord except by the Holy Spirit, far less can we call upon him acceptably without the Spirit. For that reason the same apostle declares (1 Corinthians 14:15) that he will “pray with the Spirit” etc. This is clear evidence that it was not his custom to pray without it!

Fifth, all prayer without the Spirit is abomination; that is the prayer of the wicked (Proverbs 28:9). The saints have confidence that God will hear them, if they “ask anything according to his will” (1 John 5:14). If the prayer is not according to his will, there is no reason for confidence that he will hear it. Our adversaries acknowledge that prayers without the Spirit are not according to the will of God; therefore those who pray without it have no reason to expect an answer. To tell someone to pray without the Spirit is the same as to tell him to see without eyes, work without hands, or walk without feet. To ask someone to begin praying before the Spirit moves him to do it (in greater or lesser measure) is to ask him to see before he opens his eyes, or to walk before he stands up, or to work with his hands before moving them.

§ xxiii. Finally, this false concept of praying without the Spirit, and not thinking it necessary to wait to feel the Spirit moving us to prayer, has been the source of all the superstition and idolatry among those who are called Christians, and those many abominations by which the Lord is provoked and his Spirit is grieved. Many deceive themselves nowadays, as the Jews did in the old times, thinking it is sufficient to pay their daily sacrifices and make their customary offerings. So they think everything is all right⁷ and create a false peace for themselves, like the whore in Proverbs,⁸ because they have made their daily

⁷ Latin: *Hinc semet beant*, For this reason they bless themselves.

⁸ Proverbs 7:14

sacrifices of morning and evening prayers. It is obvious that their constant practice of these things does not influence their lives and behavior at all, but they mostly remain as bad as ever.⁹ Indeed it is very frequent, both among Papists and among Protestants, for them to leap (so to speak) out of their vain, light, and profane behavior and jump into their customary devotion at their regular times, and then when that is scarcely finished and the words to God have barely left their mouths,* the previous profane talk comes back, so that the same wicked profane spirit of this world is moving them in both activities. If there exists any such thing as vain worship, or abominable prayers which God doesn't hear (and certainly it does exist, as the Scripture testifies in Isaiah 66:3, Jeremiah 14:12), certainly prayers which are done in man's will and by his own strength without God's Spirit, must be in that category.

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XI § xxi, xxii, xxiii (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 329-331, 333-335; and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 252-257.

⁹ Latin: *cum plerumque nihilominus no meliores, sed pejores potius in dies evadant*, since most of them turn out not at all better, but rather turn out worse day after day.