

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

19th March 2006

Read: Jude v.v.17-25

Text: v.20

Prayer as a Means of Grace

I wish to focus your attention today on some words in particular in this 20th verse of Jude – “*Praying in the Holy Ghost.*” Casting your minds back over recent weeks you will remember that in our consideration of the issue of the edification of the body of Christ or the Church of Christ, it was pointed out that the Lord has appointed certain means by which His people will be edified or built up. These means are known as ‘The Means of Grace’, the chief of which is the word of God. It is the chief means of grace for the simple reason that the other means of grace are derived from the word or owe their existence to the word. It is only on the basis, authority and light of Scripture, that prayer and the sacraments can ever be a means of grace to the souls of God’s people. But, having focused last week on the word or the Scripture as a means of grace, today I wish to consider prayer as another means by which the Church of God receives grace & more grace from her living Head.

It is interesting that the reference to prayer in our text is set within the framework of edification by the word. Notice how this verse commences – “*But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith.*” The verb “building up” is this same word noted on previous occasions in various verses such as Eph 4: 12 in the words “*the edifying of the body of Christ...*” that is, the building up of the body of Christ. The word in the original text signifies “going on with a building already begun.” In other words, the foundation is laid and on that foundation or basis the edifying or building up of the believer is to proceed & continue.

Notice in Jude 20 that the foundation is plainly in view – “*building up yourselves on your most holy faith.*” What is that ‘most holy faith’? The answer is given, I would suggest, in v.3 in the words “*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*” The reference is to that which has been given by divine revelation to God’s people for which they are to contend and which they are to preserve – namely, “the faith” or the word of God. The faith, the truth, the word, the Scripture – has been delivered to the saints, and they are to contend for it because it is the foundation of all. Thus, as v.20 signifies, this same divinely revealed & holy faith is the foundation of all; and on its basis alone the Church is edified or built up.

Therefore, within the context of being edified on the basis of the faith or the word, Jude exhorts believers to pray “*in the Holy Ghost.*” In other words, prayer is spoken of here in the context of edification, underlining that prayer is represented in Scripture as a means of grace and as a means of edification. I think it also interesting that prayer as a means of grace is in this text set alongside the word, which, as noted is essentially in view in the expression “*your most holy faith.*” The point is very clear: praying that edifies is prayer that is born out of our knowledge & understanding of our ‘most holy faith’, the Scriptures of truth. The two are inseparable, namely the word and prayer. Any understanding of Scripture will lead to prayer; and from another perspective, the understanding of Scripture is revealed as a result of earnest prayer & seeking after God. See 1 Pet 1: 10 – “*Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently.*” The Old Testament prophets enquired or prayed in their diligent search of the very Scriptures that they wrote, with the result that they gained a deep and real understanding of the mind of God, meaning that they would have been edified greatly.

Prayer, therefore, is one of the means of grace for the Church as a whole and for the believer in particular. Thus, it must be clearly understood that we are considering the subject of prayer from that perspective – as a means of grace, a way by which edification is to be pursued & enjoyed. Prayer itself as a general subject is vast & entails a tremendous extent of study & application to our hearts. But in this series of messages and in today’s message in particular, we are focusing only on the theme of prayer as a means of grace.

Moreover, our text provides us with the precise framework within which we may deal with the issue of prayer as a means of grace. Note the words – “*Praying in the Holy Ghost.*” I believe & I put it to you strongly that these words provide us with the secret as it were as to how prayer is a means of grace to the Church – it is when “*praying in the Holy Ghost...*” that the soul is going to be edified & strengthened. It is important to note the exact sense of these words: they mean – “*praying by the Holy Ghost...*” i.e. praying by means of His help & assistance. The point, therefore, is that as the Spirit of God gives help & enablement, prayer becomes a means of grace and the Church is edified. With that fact in mind let us note how the Spirit of God helps us in the ministry of prayer.

I. NOTICE FIRST, THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EXISTENCE OF PRAYER

When our text speaks of “praying in (or by) the Holy Ghost” it teaches that it is only by the power of the Spirit that prayer will ever exist within the human heart. These words indicate that without the Holy Spirit there is no genuine praying whatsoever. Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit who produces prayer in the soul.

Note that v.20 where our text lies is in the form of a contrast with the preceding verses. V.20 begins with the words “*But ye beloved...*” and goes on to speak of “praying in the Holy Ghost.” It is evident that a contrast is being drawn; and what it is, is seen in v.v.18, 19 which speak of ungodly men pursuing their wickedness, living lives separate from God, indulging their sensuality and then this awful feature – “*having not the Spirit.*” They are devoid of the Spirit in contrast with God’s beloved people in v.20. Moreover, note in v.18 that reference is made to what those who have not the Spirit actually are by way of thoughts & words – they are “mockers.” Mockery of the things of God is the evidence of the absence of the Spirit, but prayer is the demonstration of His presence. So then, there is a vivid contrast presented between those who have not the Spirit and those who have. The first group mock

God, but the second group, God's people, seek him in prayer. They pray in the Spirit. Thus the Spirit produces prayer in the soul. See Acts 9: 11 – "*Behold, he prayeth.*" This is a divine observation for these are Christ's words to Ananias about Saul of Tarsus. The words denote something most striking – Saul the Pharisee was truly & genuinely praying for the very first time in his life! Pharisees were notorious for their vain show of prayer, Matt 6: 5 – no doubt Saul of Tarsus had, for he had been a Pharisee of the most rigid kind. But in reality he had never prayed until that day on the Damascus Road. Not only does the Lord draw attention in v.11 to Saul's praying, but note also v.v.5 & 6 – here is Saul praying addressing Christ as "Lord" and enquiring after Him & His will. Now see 1 Cor 12: 3 – "*no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.*" That is, recognising Christ as Lord & submitting to Him as Saul of Tarsus did when he cried from the dust in true faith, brokenness and repentance.

Thus, the existence of prayer is due to the production of it in the heart by the Spirit. The Puritan, the Rev. William Jenkyn – "Wherever the Spirit is, there will be praying in the Spirit: if the Spirit live in us He will breathe in us. God never yet had, nor ever will have, *a dumb child.*" They who are the Lord's, name Him 2 Tim 2: 19. They who are saints "*call upon the name of Jesus Christ,*" 1 Cor 1: 2. In His production of prayer the Spirit acts as the Spirit of adoption or sonship, Rom 8: 15 & Gal 4: 6. What a solemn conclusion flows from all of this: as without the Spirit there is no prayer, so without prayer a man shows himself to have nothing of the Spirit, Zech 12: 10.

II. NOTICE SECOND, THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EXPRESSION OF PRAYER

Jude refers to praying by the Spirit, thus he means that prayer is given its expression from our hearts & lips through the enablement of the Spirit of God. There are various features that characterise the expression of prayer when praying in the Holy Ghost.

1. There will be faith in the expression of prayer.

One of the titles of the Spirit is "*the Spirit of faith...*" 2 Cor 4: 13. This title is to be understood with regard to the experiences of God's people. Thus, He is the Spirit of faith in that as He is sent into our hearts from Christ, He enables us to go back to Christ, believing that the Lord will hear us when we pray.

Note – there must be real & true faith in our hearts to enable us to pray, for we pray to the invisible God & Christ, 1 Pet 1: 8; Heb 11: 1 & 27. The heathen can only go through their form & ritual of prayer when they see their idols & images. But God's people are given the Spirit of faith that they might express themselves in prayer to their unseen God and expect Him to answer.

In particular, by the Holy Ghost there is especially faith in the expressing of prayer in the sense of being assured of the acceptance of both us and our prayers. See Eph 2: 18 – note that the divine Trinity is in view here with regard to prayer. Through Him, i.e. Christ the Mediator, we have access to the Father. That is, by the merits of Christ's atoning sacrifice we have access, Heb 10: 19, 20. But it is 'by one Spirit' that this is so. In other words, the Spirit of faith enables us to believe that the merits of Christ's death prevail for our access to God the Father; and He enables us to believe that God will hear us. This is the full assurance of faith, Heb 10: 22. It is by the Spirit of faith that we apply God's promises and expect God's answers.

2. There will be fervency in the expression of prayer.

Scripture makes it clear that prayer that is begotten by the Spirit is fervent. The Spirit in person is marked by fervency. He is symbolised by fire & wind, Acts 2: 2 & 3. His intercession in the saints is described as *groanings*, Rom 8: 26. These are details that are indicative of the power & force of the Spirit's operation – the fervency of His activity. Note – men who spoke *for* God were fervently moved by the Spirit, 2 Pet 1: 21 where *moved* means 'borne along' or 'carried'. Surely then He works fervently in those who speak *to* God – He does as is seen in the descriptions of prayer in Scripture. *Knocking & seeking*, Matt 7: 7, 8; *wrestling*, Rom 15: 30 for this is the significance of the word 'striving'. Remember Jacob at Peniel, Gen 32: 25 & Hosea 12: 4, 5. The Lord strengthened Jacob to wrestle in prayer & obtain the blessing. *Burning of incense*, Psalms 142: 2 – incense could only ascend when ignited. Thus, the Spirit ignites our affections & longings and unctionizes our souls that we might pray with fervency. James 5: 16 – in the original "effectual prayer" means *operative*. The idea is of prayer being operated within; wrought in our hearts by the Spirit and blazing upwards to God to obtain the blessing.

III. NOTICE FINALLY, THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER

When there is praying "by the Holy Ghost" then He begets prayer of the right essence; that is prayer that is according to the will of God. Note Rom 8: 26, & 27, and 1 John 5: 14, 15 – these Scriptures refer to praying according to the Lord's will. But the Romans Scripture shows that it is by praying in the Spirit that we are enabled to pray according to God's will – and this is of the very essence of prayer. Note this principle – *the Spirit of God will not stir us up to desire what His word forbids us to desire*. Therefore, we must fill our hearts & minds with the Spirit's word, the Scriptures of truth, in which there is revealed to us the mind & will of God for our lives.

See 2 Samuel 7: 18-29 – this passage records one of the most marvellous prayers ever uttered by a man of God, King David. He went to prayer after Nathan the prophet was sent to him with God's message that David's son Solomon would build the temple and establish the kingdom. David responded by praying over what God had revealed to him. Thus, throughout the prayer there is reference after reference to what the Lord had said – see v.v.19, 21, 25, 27, 28 & 29. It was that word that moved David's heart to pray and filled his soul with such expectancy, v.27b. By the Spirit the word was brought to him through the Nathan the prophet; and obviously when David went to pray he was "*praying in the Holy Ghost.*"