

**PART THREE OF**

*a treatise by*

**JOHN BUNYAN**

*entitled*

**PRAYER**

**I WILL PRAY WITH THE SPIRIT  
AND WITH UNDERSTANDING ALSO**

*or,*

**A DISCOURSE TOUCHING PRAYER;  
WHEREIN IS DISCOVERED, SPIRITUALLY  
ENLIGHTENED TO SEE THE PROMISES  
AND TO BE ENCOURAGED**

*“I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the  
understanding also...”*

—1 Corinthians 14:15

Introduction and Treatise Compiled & Edited by  
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**Riverside, California**  
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This treatise was written in 1662 and published in 1663, while John Bunyan was in prison. Our reading of this work, as well as the editor's advertisement, come from a three volume collection edited by George Offor, Esq., and entitled, *The Whole Works of John Bunyan*. George Offor's edition of Bunyan's works was published in Glasgow in 1862.



John Bunyan was born in Elstow, England, near Bedford, on November 28, 1628. After squandering much of his life away in worldly wantonness, Bunyan was converted to the Christian faith and soon afterward, became an excellent expositor of the Holy Scriptures. He was imprisoned in November 1660 for the crime of preaching without a license from the state church. He remained incarcerated for twelve years, with only a few, and brief occasions of liberty. Though he may have began writing his famous *The Pilgrim's Progress* while in prison, Bunyan finished the work a few years after his release in 1672. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was published in 1678. Bunyan also wrote many other excellent works such as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, *A Vindication of Some Gospel Truths Opened* and *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate Clearly Explained and Largely Improved For the Benefit of All Believers*. A contemporary with such men as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Richard Baxter, John Bunyan is recognized as possibly one of the greatest of the Puritan writers. Bunyan died on August 31, 1688, after taking ill from traveling through inclement weather. He was buried at Bunhill Fields.

George Offor's "Advertisement By the Editor" is not in our audio reading of Mr. Bunyan's treatise on Prayer. It is, however, very worth the time to read. You will find it with Part One of this treatise.

I have also included some footnotes that I thought might be helpful. Still, my desire is to use the footnotes very sparingly, so as not to disturb the flow of this work.

## **PRAYER**

### **I WILL PRAY WITH THE SPIRIT AND WITH UNDERSTANDING ALSO (PART TWO)**

*"I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also"*  
—1 Corinthians 14:15

## USE AND APPLICATION

FOURTH. I shall now speak a word or two of application, and so conclude with, First, A word of information; Second, A word of encouragement; Third, A word of rebuke.

USE First, A word of information.

For the first to inform you; as prayer is the duty of every one of the children of God, and carried on by the Spirit of Christ in the soul; so every one that doth but offer to take upon him to pray to the Lord, had need be very wary, and go about that work especially with the dread of God, as well as with hopes of the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

Prayer is an ordinance of God, in which a man draws very near to God; and therefore it calleth for so much the more of the assistance of the grace of God to help a soul to pray as becomes one that is in the presence of him. It is a shame for a man to behave himself irreverently before a king, but a sin to do so before God. And as a king, if wise, is not pleased with an oration made up with unseemly words and gestures, so God takes no pleasure in the sacrifice of fools (Ecclesiastes 5:1-4). It is not long discourses, nor eloquent tongues, that are the things which are pleasing in the ears of the Lord; but a humble, broken, and contrite heart, that is sweet in the nostrils of the heavenly Majesty (Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15). Therefore for information, know that there are these five things that are obstructions to prayer, and even make void the requests of the creature.

1. When men regard iniquity in their hearts, at the time of their prayers before God. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" my prayer (Psalm 66:18). For the preventing of temptation, that by the misunderstanding of this may seize thy heart, when there is a secret love to that very thing which thou with thy dissembling lips dost ask for strength against. For this is the wickedness of man's heart, that it will even love, and hold fast, that which with the mouth it prays against: and of this sort are they that honour God with their mouth, but their heart is far from him (Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:31). O! how ugly would it be in our eyes, if we should see a beggar ask an alms, with an intention to throw it to the dogs! Or that should say with one breath, Pray, you bestow this upon me; and with the next, I beseech you, give it me not! And yet thus it is with these kind of persons; with their mouth they say, "Thy will be done"; and with their hearts nothing less. With their mouth say, "Hallowed be thy name"; and with their hearts and lives thy delight to dishonour him all the day long. These be the prayers that become sin (Psalm 109:7), and though they put them up often, yet the Lord will never answer them (2 Samuel 22:42).

2. When men pray for a show to be heard, and thought somebody in religion, and the like; these prayers also fall far short of God's approbation, and are never like to be answered, in reference to eternal life. There are two sorts of men that pray to this end.

(1.) Your trencher chaplains, that thrust themselves into great men's families, pretending the worship of God, when in truth the great business is their own bellies; and were notably painted out by Ahab's prophets, and also Nebuchadnezzar's wise men, who, though they pretended great devotion, yet their lusts and their bellies were the great things aimed at by them in all their pieces of devotion.

(2.) Them also that seek repute and applause for their eloquent terms, and seek more to tickle the ears and heads of their hearers than anything else. These be they that pray to be heard of men, and have all their reward already (Matthew 6:5). These persons are discovered thus,

- (a.) They eye only their auditory in their expressions.
- (b.) They look for commendation when they have done.
- (c.) Their hearts either rise or fall according to their praise or enlargement.

(d.) The length of their prayer pleaseth them; and that it might be long, they will vainly repeat things over and over (Matthew 6:7). They study for enlargements, but look not from what heart they come; they look for returns, but it is the windy applause of men. And therefore they love not to be in their chamber, but among company: and if at any time conscience thrusts them into their closet, yet hypocrisy will cause them to be heard in the streets; and when their mouths have done going their prayers are ended; for they wait not to hearken what the Lord will say (Psalm 85:8).

3. A third sort of prayer that will not be accepted of God, it is, when either they pray for wrong things, or if for right things, yet that the thing prayed for might be spent upon their lusts, and laid out to wrong ends. Some have not, because they ask not, saith James, and others ask and have not, because they ask amiss, that they may consume it on their lusts (James 4:2-4). Ends contrary to God's will is a great argument with God to frustrate the petitions presented before him. Hence it is that so many pray for this and that, and yet receive it not. God answers them only with silence; they have their words for their labour; and that is all. Object. But God hears some persons, though their hearts be not right with him, as he did Israel, in giving quails, though they spent them upon their lusts (Psalm 106:14). Answ. If he doth, it is in judgment, not in mercy. He gave them their desire indeed, but they had better have been without it, for he "sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). Woe be to that man that God answereth thus.

4. Another sort of prayers there are that are not answered; and those are such as are made by men, and presented to God in their own persons only, without their appearing in the Lord Jesus. For though God hath appointed prayer, and promised to hear the prayer of the creature, yet not the prayer of any creature that comes not in Christ. "If ye shall ask anything in my name." And whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). "If ye shall ask anything in my name," &c. (John 14:13-14), though you be never so devout, zealous, earnest and constant in prayer, yet it is in Christ only that you must be heard and accepted. But, alas! the most of men know not what it is to come to him in the name of the Lord Jesus, which is the reason they either live wicked, pray wicked, and also die wicked. Or else, that they attain to nothing else but what a mere natural man may attain unto, as to be exact in word and deed betwixt man and man, and only with the righteousness of the law to appear before God.

5. The last thing that hindereth prayer is, the form of it without the power. It is an easy thing for men to be very hot for such things as forms of prayer, as they are written in a book; but yet they are altogether forgetful to inquire with themselves, whether they have the spirit and power of prayer. These men are like a painted man, and their prayers like a false voice. They in person appear as hypocrites, and their prayers are an abomination (Proverbs 28:9). When they say they have been pouring out their souls to God he saith they have been howling like dogs (Hosea 7:14).

When therefore thou intendest, or art minded to pray to the Lord of heaven and earth, consider these following particulars.

1. Consider seriously what thou wantest. Do not, as many who in their words only beat the air, and ask for such things as indeed they do not desire, nor see that they stand in need thereof.

2. When thou seest what thou wantest, keep to that, and take heed thou pray sensibly.

Objection. But I have a sense of nothing; then, by your argument, I must not pray at all.

Answer. 1. If thou findest thyself senseless in some sad measure, yet thou canst not complain of that senselessness, but by being sensible there is a sense of senselessness. According to thy sense, then, that thou hast of the need of anything, so pray (Luke 8:9); and if thou art sensible of thy senselessness, pray the Lord to make thee sensible of whatever thou findest thine heart senseless of. This was the usual practice of the holy men of God. "Lord, make me to know mine end," saith David (Psalm 39:4). "Lord, open to us this parable," said the disciples (Luke 8:9). And to this is annexed the promise, "Call unto me and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not," that thou art not sensible of (Jeremiah 33:3). But,

Answer. 2. Take heed that thy heart go to God as well as thy mouth. Let not thy mouth go any further than thou strivest to draw thine heart along with it. David would lift his heart and soul to the Lord; and good reason; for so far as a man's mouth goeth along without his heart, so far it is but lip-labour only; and though God calls for, and accepteth the calves of the lips, yet the lips without the heart argueth, not only senselessness, but our being without sense of our senselessness; and therefore if thou hast a mind to enlarge in prayer before God, see that it be with thy heart.

Answer. 3. Take heed of affecting expressions, and so to please thyself with the use of them, that thou forget not the life of prayer.

I shall conclude this use with a caution or two.

Caution 1. And the first is, take heed thou do not throw off prayer, through sudden persuasions that thou hast not the Spirit, neither prayest thereby. It is the great work of the devil to do his best, or rather worst, against the best prayers. He will flatter your false dissembling hypocrites, and feed them with a thousand fancies of well-doing, when their very duties of prayer, and all other, stink in the nostrils of God, when he stands at a poor Joshua's hand to resist him, that is, to persuade him, that neither his person nor performances are accepted of God (Isaiah 65:5; Zechariah 3:1). Take heed, therefore, of such false conclusions and groundless discouragements; and though such persuasions do come in upon thy spirit, be so far from being discouraged by them, that thou use them to put thee upon further sincerity and restlessness of spirit, in thy approaching to God.

Caution 2. As such sudden temptations should not stop thee from prayer, and pouring out thy soul to God; so neither should thine own heart's corruptions hinder thee. (Let not thy corruptions stop thy prayers). It may be thou mayest find in thee all those things before mentioned, and that they will be endeavouring to put forth themselves in thy praying to him. Thy business then is to judge them, to pray against them, and to lay thyself so much the more at the foot of God, in a sense of thy own vileness, and rather make an argument from thy vileness and corruption of heart, to plead with God for justifying and sanctifying grace, than an argument of discouragement and despair. David went this way. "O Lord," saith he, "pardon mine iniquity, for it is great" (Psalm 25:11).

USE Second. A word of encouragement.

And therefore, secondly, to speak a word by way of encouragement, to the poor, tempted, and cast down soul, to pray to God through Christ. Though all prayer that is

accepted of God in reference to eternal life must be in the Spirit—for that only maketh intercession for us according to the will of God (Romans 8:27)—yet because many poor souls may have the Holy Spirit working on them, and stirring of them to groan unto the Lord for mercy, though through unbelief they do not, nor, for the present, cannot believe that they are the people of God, such as he delights in; yet forasmuch as the truth of grace may be in them, therefore I shall, to encourage them, lay down further these few particulars.

1. That scripture in Luke 11:8 is very encouraging to any poor soul that doth hunger after Christ Jesus. In Luke 11:5-7, he speaketh a parable of a man that went to his friend to borrow three loaves, who, because he was in bed, denied him; yet for his importunity sake, he did arise and give him, clearly signifying that though poor souls, through the weakness of their faith, cannot see that they are the friends of God, yet they should never leave asking, seeking, and knocking at God's door for mercy. Mark, saith Christ, "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity," or restless desires, "he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." Poor heart! thou criest out that God will not regard thee, thou dost not find that thou art a friend to him, but rather an enemy in thine heart by wicked works (Colossians 1:21). And thou art as though thou didst hear the Lord saying to thee, Trouble me not, I cannot give unto thee, as he in the parable; yet I say, continue knocking, crying, moaning, and bewailing thyself. I tell thee, "though he will not rise and give thee, because thou art his friend; yet, because of thy importunity, he will arise and give thee as many as thou needest." The same in effect you have discovered, Luke 18, in the parable of the unjust judge and the poor widow; her importunity prevailed with him. And verily, mine own experience tells me, that there is nothing that doth more prevail with God than importunity. Is it not so with you in respect of your beggars that come to your door? Though you have no heart to give them anything at their first asking, yet if they follow you, bemoaning themselves, and will take no nay without an alms, you will give them; for their continual begging overcometh you. Are there bowels in you that are wicked, and will they be wrought upon by an importuning beggar? Go thou and do the like. It is a prevailing motive, and that by good experience, he will arise and give thee as many as thou needest (Luke 11:8).

2. Another encouragement for a poor trembling convinced soul is to consider the place, throne, or seat, on which the great God hath placed himself to hear the petitions and prayers of poor creatures; and that is a "throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). "The mercy-seat" (Exodus 25:22). Which signifieth that in the days of the gospel God hath taken up his seat, his abiding-place, in mercy and forgiveness; and from thence he doth intend to hear the sinner, and to commune with him, as he saith (Exodus 25:22),—speaking before of the mercy-seat—"And there I will meet with thee," mark, it is upon the mercy-seat: "There I will meet with thee, and" there "I will commune with thee, from above the mercy-seat." Poor souls! They are very apt to entertain strange thoughts of God, and his carriage towards them: and suddenly to conclude that God will have no regard unto them, when yet he is upon the mercy-seat, and hath taken up his place on purpose there, to the end he may hear and regard the prayers of poor creatures. If he had said, I will commune with thee from my throne of judgment, then indeed you might have trembled and fled from the face of the great and glorious Majesty. But when he saith he will hear and commune with souls upon the throne of grace, or from the mercy-seat, this should encourage thee, and cause thee to hope, nay, to "come boldly unto the

throne of grace, that thou mayest obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

3. There is yet another encouragement to continue in prayer with God: and that is this:

As there is a mercy-seat, from whence God is willing to commune with poor sinners; so there is also by his mercy-seat, Jesus Christ, who continually besprinkleth it with his blood. Hence it is called “the blood of sprinkling” (Hebrews 12:24). When the high-priest under the law was to go into the holiest, where the mercy-seat was, he might not go in “without blood” (Hebrews 9:7).

Why so? Because, though God was upon the mercy-seat, yet he was perfectly just as well as merciful. Now the blood was to stop justice from running out upon the persons concerned in the intercession of the high-priest, as in Leviticus 16:13-17, to signify that all thine unworthiness that thou fearest should not hinder thee from coming to God in Christ for mercy. Thou criest out that thou art vile, and therefore God will not regard thy prayers; it is true, if thou delight in thy vileness, and come to God out of a mere pretence. But if from a sense of thy vileness thou do pour out thy heart to God, desiring to be saved from the guilt, and cleansed from the filth, with all thy heart; fear not, thy vileness will not cause the Lord to stop his ear from hearing of thee. The value of the blood of Christ which is sprinkled upon the mercy-seat stops the course of justice, and opens a floodgate for the mercy of the Lord to be extended unto thee. Thou hast therefore, as aforesaid, “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,” that hath made “a new and living way” for thee, thou shalt not die (Hebrews 10:19-20).

Besides, Jesus is there, not only to sprinkle the mercy-seat with his blood, but he speaks, and his blood speaks; he hath audience, and his blood hath audience; insomuch that God saith, when he doth but see the blood, he “will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you,” &c., (Exodus 12:13).

I shall not detain you any longer. Be sober and humble; go to the Father in the name of the Son, and tell him your case, in the assistance of the Spirit, and you will then feel the benefit of praying with the Spirit and with the understanding also.

USE Third. A word of reproof.

1. This speaks sadly to you who never pray at all. “I will pray,” saith the apostle, and so saith the heart of them that are Christians. Thou then art not a Christian that art not a praying person. The promise is that every one that is righteous shall pray (Psalm 32:6). Thou then art a wicked wretch that prayest not. Jacob got the name of Israel by wrestling with God (Genesis 32). And all his children bare that name with him (Galatians 6:16). But the people that forget prayer, that call not on the name of the Lord, they have prayer made for them, but it is such as this, “Pour out thy fury upon the heathen,” O Lord, “and upon the families that call not on thy name” (Jeremiah 10:25). How likest thou this, O thou that art so far off from pouring out thine heart before God, that thou goest to bed like a dog, and risest like a hog, or a sot, and forgettest to call upon God? What wilt thou do when thou shalt be damned in hell, because thou couldst not find in thine heart to ask for heaven? Who will grieve for thy sorrow that didst not count mercy worth asking for? I tell thee, the ravens, the dogs, &c., shall rise up in judgment against thee, for they will, according to their kind, make signs, and a noise for something to refresh them when they want it; but thou hast not the heart to ask for heaven, though thou must eternally perish in hell, if thou hast it not.

2. This rebukes you that make it your business to slight, mock at, and undervalue

the Spirit, and praying by that. What will you do, when God shall come to reckon for these things? You count it high treason to speak but a word against the king, nay, you tremble at the thought of it; and yet in the meantime you will blaspheme the Spirit of the Lord. Is God indeed to be dallied with, and will the end be pleasant unto you? Did God send his Holy Spirit into the hearts of his people, to that end that you should taunt at it? Is this to serve God? And doth this demonstrate the reformation of your church? Nay, is it not the mark of implacable reprobates? O fearful! Can you not be content to be damned for your sins against the law, but you must sin against the Holy Ghost?

Must the holy, harmless, and undefiled Spirit of grace, the nature of God, the promise of Christ, the Comforter of his children, that without which no man can do any service acceptable to the Father— must this, I say, be the burthen<sup>1</sup> of your song, to taunt, deride, and mock at? If God sent Korah and his company headlong to hell for speaking against Moses and Aaron, do you that mock at the Spirit of Christ think to escape unpunished? (Numbers 16; Hebrews 10:29). Did you never read what God did to Ananias and Sapphira for telling but one lie against it? (Acts 5:1-8). Also to Simon Magus for but undervaluing of it? (Acts 8:18-22). And will thy sin be a virtue, or go unrewarded with vengeance, that maketh it thy business to rage against, and oppose its office, service, and help, that it giveth unto the children of God? It is a fearful thing to do despite unto the Spirit of grace (Compare Matthew 12:31, with Mark 3:28-30).

3. As this is the doom of those who do openly blaspheme the Holy Ghost, in a way of disdain and reproach to its office and service: so also it is sad for you, who resist the Spirit of prayer, by a form of man's inventing. A very juggle of the devil, that the traditions of men should be of better esteem, and more to be owned than the Spirit of prayer. What is this less than that accursed abomination of Jeroboam, which kept many from going to Jerusalem, the place and way of God's appointment to worship; and by that means brought such displeasure from God upon them, as to this day is not appeased? (1 Kings 12:26-33). One would think that God's judgments of old upon the hypocrites of that day should make them that have heard of such things take heed and fear to do so. Yet the doctors of our day are so far from taking of warning by the punishment of others, that they do most desperately rush into the same transgression, viz., to set up an institution of man, neither commanded nor commended of God; and whosoever will not obey herein, they must be driven either out of the land or the world.

Hath God required these things at your hands? If he hath, show us where? If not, as I am sure he hath not, then what cursed presumption is it in any pope, bishop, or other, to command that in the worship of God which he hath not required? Nay further, it is not that part only of the form, which is several texts of Scripture that we are commanded to say, but even all must be confessed as the divine worship of God, notwithstanding those absurdities contained therein, which because they are at large discovered by others, I omit the rehearsal of them. Again, though a man be willing to live never so peaceably, yet because he cannot, for conscience sake, own that for one of the most eminent parts of God's worship, which he never commanded, therefore must that man be looked upon as factious, seditious, erroneous, heretical—a disparagement to the church, a seducer of the people, and what not? Lord, what will be the fruit of these things, when for the doctrine of God there is imposed, that is, more than taught, the traditions of men? Thus is the Spirit of prayer disowned, and the form imposed; the

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<sup>1</sup> Same as "burden."



Spirit debased, and the form extolled; they that pray with the Spirit, though never so humble and holy, counted fanatics; and they that pray with the form, though with that only, counted the virtuous! And how will the favorers of such a practice answer that Scripture, which commandeth that the church should turn away from such as have “a form of godliness, and deny the power thereof”? (2 Timothy 3:5). And if I should say that men that do these things aforesaid, do advance a form of prayer of other men’s making, above the spirit of prayer, it would not take long time to prove it. For he that advanceth the book of Common Prayer above the Spirit of prayer, he doth advance a form of men’s making above it. But this do all those who banish, or desire to banish, them that pray with the Spirit of prayer; while they hug and embrace them that pray by that form only, and that because they do it. Therefore they love and advance the form of their own or others’ inventing, before the Spirit of prayer, which is God’s special and gracious appointment.

If you desire the clearing of the minor, look into the jails in England, and into the alehouses of the same; and I trow<sup>2</sup> you will find those that plead for the Spirit of prayer in the jail, and them that look after the form of men’s inventions only in the alehouse. It is evident also by the silencing of God’s dear ministers, though never so powerfully enabled by the Spirit of prayer, if they in conscience cannot admit of that form of Common Prayer. If this be not an exalting the Common Prayer Book above either praying by the Spirit, or preaching the Word, I have taken my mark amiss. It is not pleasant for me to dwell on this. The Lord in mercy turn the hearts of the people to seek more after the Spirit of prayer; and in the strength of that, to pour out their souls before the Lord. Only let me say it is a sad sign, that that which is one of the most eminent parts of the pretended worship of God is Antichristian, when it hath nothing but the tradition of men, and the strength of persecution, to uphold or plead for it.

## THE CONCLUSION

I shall conclude this discourse with this word of advice to all God’s people.

1. Believe that as sure as you are in the way of God you must meet with temptations.
2. The first day therefore that thou dost enter into Christ’s congregation, look for them.
3. When they do come, beg of God to carry thee through them.
4. Be jealous of thine own heart; that it deceive thee not in thy evidences for heaven, nor in thy walking with God in this world.
5. Take heed of the flatteries of false brethren.
6. Keep in the life and power of truth.
7. Look most at the things which are not seen.
8. Take heed of little sins.
9. Keep the promise warm upon thy heart.
10. Renew thy acts of faith in the blood of Christ.
11. Consider the work of thy generation.
12. Count to run with the foremost therein.

Grace be with thee.

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<sup>2</sup> TROW, *v.i.* To believe; to trust; to think or suppose. (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary)