

Chapter I.

The use of prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit therein.

The works of the Spirit of God towards believers are either general, and not confined with a respect unto any one duty more than another, or particular, with respect unto some especial duty. Of the first sort are *regeneration* and *sanctification*, which, being common unto them all, are the general principles of all actings of grace or particular duties in them. But there are, moreover, sundry especial works or operations of this Holy Spirit in and towards the disciples of Christ, which, although they may be reduced unto the general head of *sanctification*, yet they fall under an especial consideration proper unto themselves. Of this sort is the *aid or assistance which he gives unto us in our prayers and supplications*.

I suppose it will be granted that prayer, in the whole compass and extent of it, as comprising meditation, supplication, praise, and thanksgiving, is one of the most signal duties of religion. The light of nature in its most pregnant notions, with its practical language in the consciences of mankind, concurs in its suffrage with the Scripture in this matter; for they both of them jointly witness that it is not only an important duty in religion, but also that without it there neither is nor can be the exercise of any religion in the world. Never any persons lived in the acknowledgment of a Deity, but under the conduct of the same apprehension they thought the duty of vows, prayers, and praises, incumbent on them, as they found occasion; yea, although they found out external, ceremonious ways of solemnizing their devotions, yet it was this duty of prayer alone which was their natural, necessary, fundamental acknowledgment of that Divine Being which they did own. Neither are there any considerable stories extant recording the monuments of the ancient heathen nations of the world, wherein (to the shame of degenerate Christianity it may be spoken) there are not more frequent accounts given of their sacred invocations and supplications unto their supposed gods than are to be found in any of the historical monuments and stories concerning the actions of Christian nations in these latter ages. This, therefore, is the most natural and most eminent way and means of our converse with God, without which converse we have no present advantage above the beasts that perish but such as will turn unto our eternal disadvantage in that misery whereof they are incapable. This is the way whereby we exercise towards him all that grace which we do receive from him, and render him an acceptable acknowledgment of that homage and revenue of glory which we are never able to exhibit in their due kind and measure. Of what use and advantage the due performance of this duty is unto ourselves no man is able fully to express; every one can add somewhat of his own experience. But we need not insist on the commendation of prayer, for it will be said, "By whom was it ever discommended?"

And I wish I saw reason to acquiesce in that reply; for not only the practice of the most, but the declared opinions of many, do evidence that neither the excellency of this duty nor

its necessity doth find such acceptance and esteem in the minds of men as is pretended. But this being not my present design, I shall not farther insist upon it; for my purpose is not to treat of the nature, necessity, properties, uses, effects, and advantages, of this gracious duty, as it is the vital breath of our spiritual life unto God. Its original in the law of nature, as the first and principal means of the acknowledgment of a Divine Power, whereof the neglect is a sufficient evidence of practical atheism (for he that prayeth not says in his heart, "There is no God"); its direction in the Scripture, as to the rule, manner, and proper object of it; the necessity of its constant use and practice, both from especial commands and our state in this world, with the whole variety of inward and outward occasions that may befall us, or we may be exercised withal; arguments, motives, and encouragements unto constancy, fervency, and perseverance in the performance of the duty of it, with known examples of its mighty efficacy and marvellous success; the certain advantages which the souls of believers do receive thereby, in spiritual aids and supplies of strength, with peace and consolation; with sundry other of its concernments, although much treated of already by many, might yet be farther considered and improved. But none of these is my present design. The interest of the Holy Spirit of God by his gracious operations in it is that alone which I shall inquire into.

And it cannot be denied but that the work and actings of the Spirit of grace in and towards believers with respect unto the duty of prayer are more frequently and expressly asserted in the Scripture than his operations with respect unto any other particular grace or duty whatever. If this should be called into question, the ensuing discourse, I hope, will sufficiently vindicate and confirm its truth. But hereby believers are instructed, as in the importance of the duty itself, so in the use and necessity of the aid and assistance of the Spirit of God in and unto the right discharge or performance of it; for where frequent plain revelations concur, in multiplied commands and directions, with continual experience, as it is with them in this case, their instruction is firm, and in a way of being fixed on their minds. As this rendereth an inquiry hereinto both necessary and seasonable, (for what can be more so than that wherein the spiritual life and comfort of believers are so highly concerned, and which exhibiteth unto us so gracious a condescension of divine love and goodness?) so, moreover, the opposition that is made in the world against the work of the Spirit of God herein, above all other his operations, requires that something be spoken in the vindication of it.

But the enmity hereunto seems to be peculiar unto these latter ages, I mean among such as pretend unto any acquaintance with these things from the Scripture. It will be hard to find an instance in former ages of any unto whom the Spirit of God, as a Spirit of grace and supplication, was a reproach. But as now the contradiction herein is great and fierce, so is there not any difference concerning any practical duty of religion wherein parties at variance are more confident and satisfied in and about their own apprehensions than they are who



dissent about the work of the Spirit of God in our prayers and supplications; for those who oppose what is ascribed by others unto him herein are not content to deny and reject it, and to refuse a communion in the faith and practice of the work so ascribed unto him, but, moreover, such is the confidence they have in their conceptions, that they revile and speak evil contemptuously and despitefully of what they do oppose. Hence ability to pray, as is pleaded, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost is so far from being allowed to be a gift, or a grace, or a duty, or any way useful among men, that it is derided and scorned as a paltry faculty, fit to be exploded from among Christians; and at length it is traduced as an invention and artifice of the Jesuits, to the surprisal and offence of many sober persons; the unadvisedness of which insinuation the ensuing discourse will manifest.

Others, again, profess that of all the privileges whereof they are made partakers in this world, of all the aids, assistances, or gifts which they receive from or by the Spirit of God, that which he communicates and helps them withal in their prayers and supplications is the most excellent and inestimable; and herein they have, living and dying, in all troubles, distresses, temptations, and persecutions, such assurance and satisfaction in their minds, as that they are not in the least moved with all the scorn and contempt that are cast upon their profession and practice in the exercise of the gift which they have received, but rather judge that they contract the guilt of great sin to themselves by whom this work of the Spirit is reproached. Hence I know not any difference about religious things that is managed with greater animosities in the minds of men and worse consequents than this which is about the work of the Spirit of God in prayer; which, indeed, is the hinge on which all other differences about divine worship do turn and depend. It may, therefore, be well worth our while, yea, it is our duty, sedately and diligently to inquire into what the Scripture teacheth us in this matter; wherein we must acquiesce, and whereby all experiences on the one side or the other must be tried and regulated. Two things, therefore, I do propose unto myself in the ensuing discourse, concerning both which I shall plainly and briefly endeavour the satisfaction of indifferent and unprejudiced readers; — and these are, first, To evince *that there is promised and actually granted an especial work of the Spirit of God in the prayers or praises of believers under the New Testament*; secondly, To declare the *nature of that work, wherein it doth consist*, or the manner of the operation of the Holy Spirit therein. And if in these things no impression can be made on the minds of men possessed with those mighty prejudices which reject their very proposal and all consideration of them with contempt, yet it may be of use unto them who, being not biassed with the undue love or hatred of parties of men, nor elated with high valuations of their own conceptions above those of others, whom they think they have reason if not to hate, yet to scorn, do sincerely desire to live unto God, and to prefer the performance of their duty unto all other considerations, endeavouring to subdue their inclinations and affections thereunto. Nor do I desire more of any reader but



that he will grant that he is herein conversant about things which will have an influence into his everlasting account.



Pneumatologia

Author(s): Owen, John (1616-1683)

Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library

Description: *Pneumatologia*--or, 'Owen on the Holy Spirit,' as the work has generally been called--is perhaps one of the best known, and most highly esteemed of John Owen's treatises. *Pneumatologia* is divided into five parts. The first part contains a general and preliminary account of the Holy Spirit. The second part addresses the operations of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments. The third part discusses the doctrine of regeneration. The fourth part addresses the doctrine of sanctification, and the role of the Holy Spirit in it. The final part contains arguments extolling the reader to holiness. This is a beloved treatise, as John Newton once wrote to a correspondent: "We are favoured with many excellent books in our tongue, but I with you agree in assigning one of the first places as a teacher to Dr. Owen. I have just finished his discourse on the Holy Spirit which is an epitome, if not the masterpiece of his writings."

Tim Perrine

CCEL Staff Writer