

**The Testimony of Church History Regarding  
the Intimate Relationship between God’s Word and Prayer  
from ‘Lord...Thou Saidst’**

**AMBROSE**

Ambrose (340—397), whose preaching led to the conversion of Augustine recommended the Scriptures as a source of spiritual food:

“We ought for a long while to bruise and refine the utterances of the heavenly Scriptures, exerting our whole mind and heart upon them, that the sap of that spiritual food may diffuse itself into all the veins of our soul.”<sup>1</sup>

**AUGUSTINE**

Perhaps the best known of the early church fathers was Augustine (354—430)...His prayerful longing was to confess to the Lord the entire Bible:

“Let me confess unto Thee whatsoever I shall find in Thy books, and hear the voice of praise, and drink in Thee, and meditate on the wonderful things out of Thy law; even from the beginning, wherein Thou madest the heaven and the earth, unto the everlasting reigning of Thy holy city with Thee.”<sup>2</sup>

**MARTIN LUTHER**

The German reformer, Martin Luther (1483—1546), related from his own experience his dependence upon the Word of God for his prayer, and declared the need for prayer in the study of the Scriptures....Luther who had learned the secret of mingling the Word with his prayer, also “always combined prayer with the study of the Word.”<sup>3</sup> In 1518 he replied to a friend’s inquiry regarding the best method of studying the Scriptures:

“It is very certain, that we cannot attain to the understanding of Scripture either by study or by the intellect. Your first duty is to begin by prayer.”<sup>4</sup>

**MADAME GUYON**

Jeanne Guyon (1648—1717), commonly known as Madame Guyon, possessed a deep knowledge concerning living in union with God’s will and the denial of the self. In her book *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer*, she advocated the meditative reading of God’s Word to “taste and digest” the divine truths, as a way of preparing oneself for prayer:

“Meditative Reading is the choosing [of] some important practical or speculative truth, always preferring the practical, and proceeding thus: whatever truth you have chosen, read only a small portion of it, endeavoring to taste and digest it, to extract the essence and substance thereof, and proceed no farther while any savor or relish remains in the passage: then take up your book again and proceed as before, seldom reading more than half a page at a time, for it is not the quantity that is read, but the manner of reading, that yields us profit.

“Those who read fast reap no more advantage than a bee would by only skimming over the surface of the flower, instead of waiting to penetrate into it, and extract its sweets. Much reading is rather for scholastic subjects than divine truths: indeed, to receive real profit from spiritual books, we must read as I have described; and I am certain, if that method were pursued, we should become gradually habituated to, and more fully disposed for[,] prayer.”<sup>5</sup>

### **PHILIP JACOB SPENER**

In 1675 German Pietist, Philip Jacob Spener (1635—1705), published a statement protesting the corrupt conditions of the state church in Germany. He expressed his “heartfelt desire for a God-pleasing reform” based upon “a more extensive use of the Word of God.”<sup>6</sup> Spener realized that to merely hear the Word is not sufficient, but the Word should be digested and allowed to penetrate the inner man. To this end he said:

“Let it penetrate inwardly into your heart and allow the heavenly food to be digested there, so that you get the benefit of its vitality and power.”<sup>7</sup>

### **AUGUST HERMANN FRANCKE**

One of Spener’s students, August Hermann Francke (1663—1727), followed him in calling the deadened church to a life of personal piety and devotion. Among Francke’s students was the evangelist and Moravian Brethren leader, Count Nicholas Zinzendorf (1700—1760).... Francke concludes by showing that this is the way to gain true pleasure in the Scripture:

“So one may remain at every little verse in the Bible and as Luther says, ‘Knock on every little twig, whether there would be some berries that would fall off.’ Should at the beginning one think it somewhat difficult and should the prayer not flow at once, one may go on, to try the same on another twig. If the soul is only hungry, the Spirit of God will not leave it undernourished.”<sup>8</sup>

### **GEORGE WHITEFIELD**

George Whitefield (1714—1770) was known for his effective outdoor evangelism in both Europe and America....The following excerpts from his journals show how he received nourishment and enjoyment from the Word:

“My mind being now more open and enlarged, I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed, and drink indeed, in my soul. I daily received fresh life, light, and power from above.”<sup>9</sup>

### **JONATHAN EDWARDS**

The preaching and writing of Jonathan Edwards (1703—1758) coupled with that of Whitefield sparked a spiritual awakening in the New England colonies. In his later years Edwards described his early contact with the Scripture:

“The first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, 1 Tim. 1:17. *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.* As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being...I kept saying, and as it were singing, over these words of scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy him, and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection.”

## **ANDREW MURRAY**

Andrew Murray (1828—1917), the well-known Christian teacher of South Africa, spoke and wrote extensively about the believer's fellowship with the Lord....Vitality for a life in Christ comes from prayer with God's Word as its base. Murray encourages us to turn the Word into prayer:

“How blessed would the inner chamber be, what a power and an inspiration in our worship, if we only took God's Word as from Himself, turning it into prayer, and definitely expecting an answer.”<sup>11</sup>

Heart-to-heart fellowship with the Lord, according to Murray, involves the interaction of God's Word and prayer:

“The Word comes from God's heart, and brings His thoughts and His love into my heart. And then the Word goes back from my heart into His great heart of love, and prayer is the means of fellowship between God's heart and mine.”<sup>12</sup>

How can a believer practice turning God's Word into prayer? In *The Prayer Life* Murray offered this practical advice for a profitable and powerful prayer life:

“Read a few verses from the Bible. Do not concern yourself with the difficulties contained in them; You can consider these later; but take what you understand, apply it to yourself, and ask the Father to make His Word light and power in your heart. Thus you will have material enough for prayer from the Word which the Father speaks to you.”<sup>13</sup>

## **HANNAH WHITALL SMITH**

Hannah Whitall Smith (1832—1911) is widely known for her book on Christian living, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*. In *Everyday Religion* she described the way to take the words of God:

“If we will take the words of God, i.e., His revealed truth, into our lips and eat it; that is, if we will dwell upon His words and say them over and over to ourselves, and thoroughly take in and assimilate their meaning in a common-sense sort of way, we shall find that our soul-life is fed and nourished by them, and is made strong and vigorous in consequence.”<sup>14</sup>

## **GEORGE MÜLLER**

George Müller's long life (1805—1898) was a testimony of prayer and faith. He believed that “you can never pray aright until He has spoken to you from His Word.”<sup>15</sup> Thousands of recorded answers to prayers provided the sole means of raising up and supporting homes for many orphans. [This account gives] vivid testimony of his experience of mingling the Word with prayer:

“I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament, from the beginning, early in the morning....When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation.”<sup>16</sup>

## **CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON**

The reputation of C. H. Spurgeon (1835—1892), a diligent and powerful British minister during the last century, came at least in part, from his unique ability to use figurative language and dramatic illustrations in presenting the truths of God's Word. Spurgeon described the interdependence of God's Word and prayer using vivid illustrations:

“It is a great thing to pray one's self into the spirit and marrow of a text; working into it by sacred feeding thereon, even as the worm bores its way into the kernel of the nut. Prayer supplies a leverage for the uplifting of ponderous truths.”<sup>17</sup>

“New veins of precious ore will be revealed to your astonished gaze as you quarry God's Word and use diligently the hammer of prayer.”<sup>18</sup>

“Use prayer as a boring rod, and wells of living water will leap up from the bowels of the Word. Who will be content to thirst when living waters are so readily to be obtained!”<sup>19</sup>

## **DWIGHT L. MOODY**

Dwight L. Moody (1837—1899) “was an untiring Bible student. He usually rose about daybreak in summer, in order to have a quiet season alone with his Bible and his God, while his mind was fresh, and before the activities of the day divided his attention.”<sup>20</sup> Moody encouraged his readers to have a time alone with God:

“I never have seen a man or woman who spent fifteen or twenty minutes alone with God every day that didn't have the dew all the while. I have never known one to backslide, either. You never get more than one day's journey from Christ if you come to Him every morning. Shut the world out. Get closeted with God and you will learn His secrets. I like to get up at five o'clock in the morning and turn the key and be alone, and let God talk with me.

“...How can we bring our thoughts into captivity and have fellowship with God, instead of thinking of ourselves and everything under the sun?

“Prayer is important, but there is something else as important. When I pray I am talking to God; when I read the Bible God talks to me. We need both...”<sup>21</sup>

## **A. B. SIMPSON**

The messages and hymns of A. B. Simpson (1844—1919) continue to inspire the Lord's children....In *The Life of Prayer* Simpson encouraged us to appropriate God's promises by prayer:

“Happy are they who suspend their desires until they know their Father's will, and then, asking according to His will, they can rise to the height of His own mighty promise, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” [John 15:7]. “Thus saith the Lord,...Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me” [Isa. 45:11]. What more can we ask of ourselves and others than that God's highest will, and that for us, shall be fulfilled?

“How shall we know that will? At the very least, we may always know it by His Word and promise, and we may be very sure we are not transcending its infinite bounds if we ask anything that is covered by a promise of His Holy Word, but we may immediately turn that promise into an order on the very Bank of Heaven and claim its fulfillment by all the power of His omnipotence and the sanctions of His faithfulness.”<sup>22</sup>

## W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS

A minister, scholar, and teacher, W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861—1924) showed the weakness of prayer life to be due to a lack of knowing God through His Word:

“God’s Word is the fuel of our prayer. As we open the page in the morning, the promises prompt us to prayer, the examples incite us to prayer, the warnings urge us to prayer, the hopes of glory stir us to prayer—everything in the portion taken for our meditation can be turned into prayer...Depend upon it, hiding God’s Word in the heart is the secret of prayer, and the reason why our prayer-life is so weak and barren is that we do not know God through His Word.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S. Ambrose, “De Abel et Cain lib. ii. c. vi.,” W. H. Hutchings, *The Life of Prayer* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Pusey (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 245.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor G. Bunch, *Prevailing Prayer* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1946), p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Merle D’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> Jeanne Guyon, *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* (London: Allenson & Co., 1907), reprinted in *A Short Method of Prayer and Other Writings* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), pp. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Phillip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964), pp. 29 and 87.

<sup>7</sup> Phillip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> August Hermann Francke, “August Hermann Francke’s Kurzer Unterricht” *Die Bibel*, trans. William Jaques (Halle: Drud & Bertag, 1877), p. VI.

<sup>9</sup> George Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards: Basic Writings*, ed. Ola Elizabeth Winslow (New York: New American Library; 1978), pp. 83-84.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Murray, *God’s Best Secrets* (Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1962), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Murray, *God’s Best Secrets* (Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1962), p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Murray, *The Prayer Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1941), p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah Whitall Smith, *Everyday Religion* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1893), p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen F. Olford, *Manna in the Morning* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1900), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Basil Miller, *George Müller Man of Faith and Miracles* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1941), p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1955), pp. 43-44.

<sup>18</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1955), p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1955), p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1900), p. 441.

<sup>21</sup> D. L. Moody, *Short Talks* (Chicago, IL: The Moody Press, 1900), pp. 111-112.

<sup>22</sup> A. B. Simpson, *The Life of Prayer* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1967), p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Life Abiding and Abounding* (Chicago, IL: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1910), p. 15.