The Efficacy of Prayer
1 John V. 14. 15.

This verse needs no elaborate expounding. The apostle John is here expressing the characteristic confidence of the Christian that his prayer is graciously heard. This is the confidence we have that we know that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us: and if we know that He heareth us, etc., etc. God's hearing and bestowing are in this sense one: his hearing and our having go hand in hand, in our important sense identical. Combining the definitions of Lorange and other catechisms, we have: Prayer is our offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, by the help of His Spirit, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His merci
I propose this morning not so much to discuss the theme
as to make suggestions with regard to the Power of
Prayer, especially in view of the fact that few sub-
jects on the whole demand and receive more of the
public thought.
Fix in the mind, that prayer in the Christian sense is not
simply "asking God for something, which is or which
is conceived to be a good for body, mind, or soul.
The very underlying notion of prayer is communing
with God. Now communing is always mutual and
reciprocal. Communing, it implies a feeling on
both sides which we call sympathy, an approach
on both sides which we call fellowship, an activity
on both sides which we call communications.
A beautiful natural symbol of this communion with God may be found in the mutual relations of sun and earth in spring time. The great source of light and life shines on the barren soil; light it, warms it, quickens it, but the earth is responsive as well as receptive; the bands of ice dissolve, the brooks give way and activity begins, in root and branch, in sap and bud, and by and by blooms and leaves and fruits appear. So a soul in order to bring the spiritual and communicative nature of man into this receptive and responsive state, Godward. Indeed much of what we call prayer is ordnary yet the spiritual communion and communication with God, sunning oneself in his rays, and growing fruitful under his beams.
Hence this truly complete definition of prayer has been framed to include several grand elements.

1. Presentation of desires, requests, confessions, adoration and thanks.

2. Agreement in substance with his will.

3. Assistance of the Holy Spirit

4. Intercession of Christ, use of his name or merits.

When there is this communion with God, a positive sympathy with him insures substantial agreement with his will, implies the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and the reliance upon his merits and mediation of Christ.
Observe however that while true prayer involves or implies these several elements, it by no means follows that we are always conscious of them all.

Some of the most natural functions of the body are exercised without thought or consciousness, and we call them involuntary, as in breathing. In a healthy body respiration is an unconscious act. A Swiss peasant being asked how it was with his constitution, said he did not know as he had any constitution. That is the healthy condition. And so it is not inconsistent with the higher spiritual frame that one shall not at the time feel conscious that the Spirit of God is working in him, or that the conception of dependence on Christ must be distinct and
with all atheistic philosophy we can out of patience. Eriémus has been thrown out of the school of philosophy because his system virtually atheistic. Even Hume: "Swine of Eriémus' heel."

3. Practical. A man raised corn and in one field every stroke on Sunday. He boasted to his neighbors of his success, for it was a fine crop. A secular editor remarks: one important item left out in calculation: God is not bound to settle all accounts with a farmer in month of October.

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definite. That prayer of the publican was short and
simple, an mere expression of an overburdened heart
conscious perhaps only of sin and misery and need.
Yet the spirit wrought in that heart, breathed that re-
quest; it was agreeable to God's will and the man went
down to his house justified, having hardness removed.

In speaking of the power of prayer, it is well to
start on the negative side and work toward the pos-
itive, on the natural and work toward the super-
natural. For while I have not the slightest conscious
hinge of skepticism concerning the positive and su-
pernatural efficiency of Christian prayer, I think
nothing is gained by hesitating over the natural
benefits which are associated with it.
1. The Natural Power of Prayer. By this I mean the results which are wholly natural in their character, which are seemed independent of any direct or active response of God to our requests.

The cultivation of a prayerful frame is itself an ample answer to prayer. We all feel the influence of natural lusts which weighs down, hinders our progress, impedes our upward flight. Prayer, when directed against these lusts, is itself and in itself a bower. Take occasion. A man becomes conscious of the fact that he is greedy of gain, that covetousness of money is making an abject slave of him. His high emotion begins to be stimulated, to rebel against this tyranny of a lower appetite. And he begins to pray
Earnesty to be delivred from this Enslaving passion. to be enabled to see the true nature + uses of worldly Gain, to have his supreme aim upon more Enduring riches. Now that man's hunger for deliverance from greed is a reviving of deliverance; it is the rash of a file across his flettons, a blow at the face of the golden calf. Like a man in a boat pulling towards shore though the shore moves not he is constantly nearing it. He is climbing up Jacob's ladder, though as yet he is not conscious of any descending angel coming toward him. There is no little force in these lines of Sowers. The thing we long for that we are to

Some thought illustrated by Appetite, Selfishness vs. Venemolness and by power of an ideal's image in Self-conquest.
Now I am not sure but this is one of the very ways in which God answers prayer, for he works as much by natural as by supernatural processes. He awakens in us desires for higher, nobler and holier standards of living. The very reflection, meditation, self-examination, which fix thought on noble heights, make us dissatisfied with materialism, sensualism, animalism lift us higher.

So of appetite. Let a man pray for power to subdue lust, to conquer love of pleasure, intemperate indulgence and he has his hand in the very throat of appetite.
2. The spiritual power of prayer. We now ascend a step, but as yet do not touch the more positive direct and creative forms of answered prayer. If there be anything on which the word is explicit it surely is plain in declaring that the receiving of spiritual blessings depends on receiving, preparation to receive. The Lord's arm is not shortened, etc. The difference—the fluctuation in our religious life is attributable not to God but to ourselves. God is ever ready, willing, anxious to bless: we are not, to be blessed. Often when we shudder at a request it is not from the heart, and if God shaketh how he would say: Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup? etc.
He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Now it is a fact well known that nature abhors a vacuum. We are surrounded on all sides by some fluid form substance waiting to fill every cavity. The atmosphere actually presses upon us. The ocean weighs heavily upon its bed, and we are unconscious of the pressure of the atmosphere only because we have a resisting medium within.

Now in some such manner do God's blessings compass us with an elastic medium, and they actually press upon us for acceptance. Would not for the persistence of pride, self-sufficiency and rebellion we should have felt the pressure of these blessings.
The moment resistance ceases, and our soul imprints of peace or a spiritual void is created, and this absence of love and grace comes in to fill it.

The power of prayer lies in this: that it opens the soul to spiritual impressions, light, love, life. It creates receptivity to spiritual forces. It makes it possible for us to receive the blessings which God is always ready to bestow, and which it requires only readiness in us to make truly our own.

Here is another of the divinities of Prayer. God employs it to make the soul ready for those blessings which are constantly in waiting for those whose eyes are open and ears often to see and hear.
The supernatural power of prayer. By this I mean to indicate the positive and direct blessings which come to the praying soul. Nothing that has been said as yet has reached to the core of this great question. So deny or even doubt the supernatural power of prayer is to believe that God deals differently with different souls in different ages of history, and to deny the inspiration of holy Scripture. I do not propose therefore to attempt any laborious argument to prove the divine efficacy of true prayer. Bacon says it ought to be an axiom not to hold a controversy with any man when there is a disagreement on first principles. The power of prayer is so unequivocally declared in Scripture and illustrated by so many and such eminent examples
that to question it implies disagreement upon a question as fundamental as this: are the Scriptures reliable records, inspired of God? And to move to such a mind the Efficacy of prayer, necessitates an examination into the whole matter of their authenticity, authority, genuineness, integrity, inspiration.

We assume then of necessity the infallibility of the inspired word, and may gather from it a two-fold proof of the power of prayer with God. It is no mere dumbbell exercise in which by a purely natural process we obtain a certain development of spiritual being. If the Bible teaches anything it teaches that true prayer secures blessings directly from God, otherwise unattainable.
As to the promises to prayer they are so numerous as to defy citation now and here. But a few may be given as representative.

Matt. 7:7. Ask and ye shall receive.

John 14:13, 14. and xvi:7, 16.

James 1:5.


This very Emphatic as drawing encouragement from the example of Eljah.
We may do well to gather in a group a few of these witnesses, purposely omitting any instance where the answer may be accounted for either by natural result or even remarkable coincidence.

Judges xii: 7-40. Gideon derived special miraculous encouragement from God, when commissioned by Him to go and smite the Midianites. Two signs were granted him: first his offering of flesh and unleavened cakes was consumed by fire: and next the wool flax was wet while all the Earth round was dry and then dry while all the ground about was wet with dew.

Judges xvi: 28. Samson prayed for superhuman strength to lift from their very bases the pillars in the Philistin temple of Dagon.
1 Kings 10:3. comp. 11:9. Solomon's two marked prayers one for wisdom, one for God's special presence in his temple. Both answered directly by God.

2 Kings 19:15. Hezekiah's prayer against Sennacherib.

Now wonderfully answered. 185,000 Assyrians smitten in one night by the Angel of death!

20:5-6. Also 11. Hezekiah's fatal illness. God granted recovery in three days, and prolonged his life fifteen years, after he had declared unto him that he was about to die, according to nature's decree.

Then as a sign to manage the weakness of faith the shadow on the dial of Ahaz went back ten degrees.

Jonah 2:10. Thrown by great fish, after 3 days of captivity imprisonment in the belly thereof, but 0 upon dry land.


XVIII. 38-39: Consummation by fire of sacrifices, etc.


If it may be objected that all these are instances of a purely miraculous intervention, we reply that the examples are all too many conclusive. For it will be observed that among the most frequent objections to the whole doctrine of prayer as a practical power, has been this that God cannot be supposed to interfere directly with the condition of the creature, so as to interrupt at all the ordinary processes of nature. We are told that nature is uniform in working, that to expect any change in favor of human beings is a folly and an absurdity. Now if it be true that God has actually reversed the very wheels of nature at times in answer to prayer, how much more
may we look for His intervention where no miraculous intervention is needful, where the answer may come in the line of natural processes, and not in opposition to them. If in answer to prayer God has raised the dead, may we not expect He will save from death? If He has miraculously with held rain for three and half years, may we not hope He will hear prayer that a family natural drought may come to an end?
As to the philosophy of prayer we have only to say that if it is beyond our power to explain it, it is no surprising thing.

Romans VIII. 27. 28. Comp. John XV. 7. give us the whole scriptural theory of prayer. viz. that it is the voice of the Holy Spirit breathing through the desires and requests of the regenerate soul. The presence of God in the heart moves us to ask him after things according to the will of God, and because there can be no conflict in God, the answer is sure.

To adopt this philosophy is to answer one very frequent objection: "I have prayed and no answer has come." Much of our so-called prayers but the creation of habit, education, sense of duty etc.
or even the unconscious breathing of carnal and selfish desire, and not the voice of holy aspiration. And it is not therefore true prayer.

Again much so called prayer is offered in such a condition of voluntary and habitual disobedience that it cannot be the voice of holy yearning. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." It cannot be a breathing of spiritual yearning. But if "my words abide in you," or if a man keeps in harmony with the Spirit, he will be drawn into same direction.
Another objection often urged is that prayer argues a God who is not unchangeable.

Now, of course there can be neither conflict nor change in the divine counsels. But we all know that in some way, God's sovereignty consists with our freedom. Reason and Revelation affirm his sovereignty as beyond a doubt. Consciuosness affirms our freedom of choice and action as equally undoubted. Now all we can say is that the same will which decrees results also decrees processes, means to ends, and that in God's sovereign plans, prayer must enter as a factor to be taken into account.
There are three views of prayer.

1. Scriptural. In which this is especially to be noted.
   All true prayer is offered in submission to divine will.
   It is not dictatorial, imperious, final. Even our Saviour: If it be possible... nevertheless. Or.
   Compare my grace sufficient or.

2. Philosophical. In which all supernatural power is denied which cannot be brought into the naturalism of the day. In reply to which we have only to say it is atheistic, and the basis of Tyndall's experiments is atheistic, for it makes the whole force of prayer to hang on the result of an arbitrary and unauthorized experiment.