The Risks of Prayer
Read Psalm CVII.
Isaiah 1.
Proverbs XXVIII. 9

"Even his prayer shall be abomination"
This verse settles the only essential point: it is possible that prayers should become abominations. David Psalm CXX: 7 speaking of God's enemy and his own says in words seemingly imprecatory but really designed only as prophetic: "and let his prayer become sin" intimates the samething: but his son Solomon, or the author of this proverb says "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."

I have promised to speak tonight on the risks of prayer. Can prayer then involve risks? Is not that a contradiction in terms? And is it no risk that prayer may
become and sometimes does become an abomination, a sin?

One case of risk in prayer is given in the immediate text, as realized in the man who turns away his ear from hearing God's law. In ancient times, copies of the law scarce-laborious transcription manually - absence of printing etc. Acquaintance with the law not through eye but ear - not by reading but hearing. Hence the phrase here used indicates a fractious, rebellious man who having his prejudices strongly and obstinately set, and indulging habits strongly and directly counter to the law of God, his pocket and purse at war with his conscience and soul: gain and God
his rival sovereigns. He is trying to serve God and Mammon. Such a man, knowing that the judgment of God and the witness of the law are against them that commit such things, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them. Such persons fret even under the reading of the law of God. They cannot will not face its testimony, and they turn their ears away from hearing the law, perhaps literally, but certainly practically, for they refuse to obey. The prayers of such are an abomination. Why? Because if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. Ps. 66:18.

Here is the first risk then: Idolatry. Idolatry is for an idol is anything which is pre-
fered to God or allowed to rival Him. Let me here state the position unmistakably. Any man who holds an opinion knowing it to be contrary to the word of God; any man who indulges a practice and justifies himself in it, knowing it to be opposed to the spirit of God's law, is an idolater as much as though he were a Hindu, Buddhist, Brahmin or Pagan of any superstition. He never can offer an acceptable prayer unless he put away that opinion or practice or purposes to do so.

This kind of idolatry alarmingly prevalent. There are men and women professing religion, who will literally turn away their ears from the hearing of the law. I have known those
who objected to the reading of the LVIII of Isaiah as though it were an abolition document. And it is no wonder if some who defend human of passion jure divino, turn away their ears, when the Prophet says: "Is not this the fast? Not long since, being present at a prayer meeting when the 8 of Romans read, There is ele I proceeded, having been called on ele to remark that Paul compared the estate of sin to slavery & the estate of regeneration to Emancipation & liberty. There was some who were annoyed ele because I was forthwith introducing politics ele

These are perhaps extreme cases, but

Knowing that he was a just and holy man to serve him. When he heard him, he did many things and heard him gladly. But when he touched his tender point, rebuked his unnatural adulterous marriage etc.

If you are so sensitive or doubtful even about your views or practices that you cannot stand up and face the witness of God's word without being condemned—don't turn away but put away. Else your prayers never reach God save to offend sin—abomination. Above all if you know to avoid this risk, two things first a purpose and endeavor to put away every sin.

Second, to perform every duty. Pray purposefully; for only of indulged sin.
II The next risk is a negative one heartlessness. The command of God is very frequent and very urgent. Ps. 119: 45-8 I entreated thy favor with my whole heart. verse 145 I cried with my whole heart. When ye shall search for me with all your heart. Etc. Jer 29: 13

Heartlessness—absence of heart—has two forms: Intellectualia + Formalia. Intellectualia itself has phases: 1 the Rhetorical + 2 the properly intellectual.

Rhetoric has no place in prayer. In great crises, men are always simple, Saxon, direct. A hungry man: "give me bread" a thirsty man: a rhetorical request would be contradiction. Much of our praying not praying.
painting- series of beautiful figures, poetic pictures, sublime apostrophes or sweet meditations not fervent petitions
Not always intentional - sometimes forgetful
When obviously intentional, disgusting - A celebrated unitarian minister most eloquent prayer offered to a Boston audience". This praying to ourselves or to our hearers or not to God! Matt 6: 5. Christ's warning etc
Sometimes forgetful. Mr Elliot at Reman's Meditation on the rapture of a soul that sees Christ longing to soar away - our remembering etc. Compare the liturgy of Eng. ch.
Risk of making our prayers mere intellectual performances especially in public!
2. Formality or formalism. From lips or teeth outward. Absence both of heart or intellect. Falling into stereotyped expressions, whose meaning we never think of. "Whom to know is life eternal" "Superfluity of naughtiness" "Made ready for us" Always danger in uniformity of expression, even in Lord's prayer. Hence history of liturgies, their introduction into church—similar of choirs—inclination to do things by prayer. It is well every time you pray to use different forms— or at least those which are easily understood and even then we must ever keep thinking not how but what we are saying it, letting thought flow into most natural or
Risk of formal prayers: spiritless to ourselves, meaningless to others, offensive, abominable to God.

Pray about real sorrows, sins, needs etc., not in general terms meaning nothing.

Lam. III: 41. Let us lift up our heart, with our hands unto God in the heavens.

All other prayer is at least insincerity. Coupled with heartlessness we always find laziness, hurry, laziness of posture as though we were preparing to sleep, not pray, laziness of intellect, of language or often, the mere laziness of silence. Floating in atmosphere of prayer, but not the clouds in higher realms but mist near earth. Hurry as through a thankless task.
III. Worst risk of prayer—Hypocrisy. Distinguish from formality & insincerity because a positive element. By Hypocrisy I mean praying to God in direct opposition to our cherished desires & determinations 1. to overcome sins 2. to cultivate graces. Thy will be done means sometimes my will be done. We pray sometimes against the very sins which we do not intend to give up. Pray for God's guidance when we are not willing to follow it, seeing it don't means to.

Impenitent men don't pray. Absence of sincerity makes prayer impossible.

By Hypocrisy, I mean that of Christians, not willing to have their prayers answered. Theoretical spirituality, etc.
Idolatrous Christians: the dearest idol etc.
not ready to give up wealth etc. "Dramatic
devotion."
Avaricious man praying that he may not love
money, while he does not mean etc.
Envious, jealous Christians, praying self for
getfulness. Ambitious for humility, vindictive
live for forgiving spirit while cherishing hate
selfish for self-denial, untruthful for sin-
cerity.
Park Church at Newark
Church at Binghamton - prayer with a
Proviso
We tell God we believe that He is the rewarder
and yet never look for answers.
Commonest form of this hypocrisy is praying out of temper, in an angry frame, etc. insulting God by asking Him to forgive us as we for

give, etc.

Again, praying because we dare not lay it a
side, we dare not pray our real desires.

Suppose I pray for grace to preach only for the

glory of God, etc.

Suppose you pray for grace to subordinate ev
eything to Christ's cause and go out to argue
yourself into conscientious neglect of it for
money-making.

Unhypocritical prayers are in a sense answered
when we pray; and when you pray for a more charit
able Spirit, prayer itself shows that it is begotten.
I shall mention another form of sin very common and very serious—that of carnality, where we mistake the movings of fleshly and carnal affections for the inspiration and aspiration of spiritual desire and holy craving. Israel in the wilderness prayed for flesh to eat; but they asked amiss because they asked that they might consume it upon their lusts. Appetite not aspiration was praying. The Psalmist says he gave them their request and sent leanness unto their soul. How often will ambition and avarice pray. If God should answer our self-praise and self-request in stead of our life request—our nominal prayer, we fear it would be a curse-leanness to the soul. Yet if God answered at all it will be
our real desires. He may do this in two ways. 1. By answering us not according to the letter but the spirit of our request—which is itself spiritual

leanness.

2. By giving us literally our carnal request and offsetting it with leanness, when we ought to have prayed for fatness of soul. As when a man has ambition after office and prays to be successful in gaining it—God may give it without strength to meet its temptations. How true: ye know not what ye ask. How often we pray for some chosen result which our carnality confuses into a real blessing. We know not what to pray for as we ought. This is one of our infirmities. Elijah in mids of his

We run the risk of refusal & rejection whenever we lack steadfast belief in God's promises. Whenever we have prevalent in us a worldly spirit. Whenever we lack sincerity or spirituality of desire. Whenever in ourselves forget the glory of God. Whenever we lack consistent appropriate action. Whenever we fail to rely on atonement & intercession of Christ.

Isaiah 1:13-17. Risk of coming to God with blood &c.
In conclusion we run no risk of God hiding his face. Sunlight the man who goes into darkness & complains: the sun is hidden. Lords arm not shortened. S.B. II: 57.

"To specificity of object we need to add purity of purpose that we may escape idolatry, simplicity of utterance to escape formality, intensity of desire to escape intellectuality, and honesty of yearning to escape hypocrisy."

"The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. If the Spirit prayeth in you for you and through you, praying in the Holy Ghost."
Would not wonder if the nation had for 50 years been rejected in prayer to God because her hands were full of blood. The time is never past when I intend to hold my tongue on the great truths of human equality and human unity expressed in God's omniscience and constituting the new commandment of the new dispensation that yello

cgod forbid that in this hour when this nation is rising like the phoenix from its own ashes to a new and glorified life there should be one of us left who would believe most remotely that emancipation of injustice for which God is chastising us or deny those grand truths which by the discipline of these bitter years of war he has taught us to recognize. The man who by complicity or sympathy with slavery has helped to prolong this struggle one hour is guilty in so far of the blood of every soldier slain in battle.
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