

No 255.

Arthur T. Ross

7

The Risks of Prayer

Read Psalm. CIX.

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 same thing: 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 & obstinately set, and indulging habits strongly & directly counter to the law of God, his pocket & purse at war with his conscience & soul: gain and God



his rival sovereigns - he is trying to serve God  
& mammon. Such a man, knowing that the  
judgment of God & 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 abomina-  
tion. 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. Idola-  
try it is for an idol is anything which is pre-

ferred 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 & 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 hindoo Buddhist, Brahmin or Pagan of any superstition. He never can offer an acceptable prayer unless he puts away that opinion or practice or purposes to do so.

This kind of idolatry alarmingly prevalent. There are men & 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 op-  
pression 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  
etc I proceeded, having been called on etc - to  
remark that Paul compared the estate of sin  
to Slavery & the estate of regeneration to Eman-  
cipation & liberty - there was some who were  
annoyed etc because I was forsooth introd-  
ucing politics etc

These are perhaps extreme cases - but  
Herod & John. Mark 6:20. Herod feared John



knowing that he was a just & holy man observed him. When he heard him he did many things and heard him gladly. But when he touched his tender point - rebuked his incestuous & adulterous marriage etc.

If you are so sensitive or doubtful even about your views or practices that you cannot stand up & face the witness of Gods word without being condemned - dont turn away but put away etc. Else your prayers never reach God save to offend. sin - abomination above all if you know. To avoid this risk no things first a purpose & endeavor to put away every sin.

Second to perform every duty. I say purpose; 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: 458 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: Intellectuality. & Formality. Intellectuality itself two 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: word-



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 & not to God! Matt 6: 5. Christ's warning etc

Sometimes forgetful. Mr Elliot at Beman's Meditation on the rapture of a soul that sees Christ - longing to soar away - but 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 & intellect.

Falling into stereotyped expressions, whose meaning we never think of. "Whom to know aright 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 &c



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 tho'  
we were preparing to sleep not pray - laziness of  
intellect - of language or oftener the worse laziness of silence.  
Floating on atmosphere of prayer;  
but not as clouds in higher realms but must 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 mean to.

Impenitent men don't pray. Absence of piety 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, vindic-  
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 forgive. etc.

Again, praying because we dare not lay it aside & 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 everything to Christ's cause & go out to argue yourself into conscientious neglect of it - for money making.

Unhypocritical prayers are in a sense answered when we pray. as when you pray for a more charitable spirit - prayer itself shows that it is begotten



I shall mention another form of risk very common  
and very serious - that of Carnality, where we  
mistake the movings of fleshly & 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 of-  
ten will ambition and avarice pray of God,  
should answer our real heart's request in-  
stead of our lip request - our nominal pray-  
er; we fear it would be a curse - leanness to  
the soul. Yet if God answers 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 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 construes into a real blessing. We know not what to pray for as we ought - this is one of our infirmities. Elijah in midst of his



usefulness: Take my life from me. Moses Lord shew  
me thy glory: you ask for death answers God. James  
John. Children - having what they desire &c. see  
Lay. 320. & 321. Elisha exclaims teach us what we sh  
Lay unto him for we cannot order our speech (a right  
by reason of darkness.

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

Isaiah 1: 13-17. Risk of coming to God with blood &c  
for last page

In conclusion we run no risk of Gods hiding his face. Sunlight & the man who goes into darkness & complains: the sun is hidden. Lords arm not shortened. S.B. II: 51.

For 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.



I would not wonder if this Nation had for 80 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 & human unity expressed in God's Word made &c and  
constituting the new commandment of the new dispensation. that ye love  
&c. God 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 shelter most remotely that incarnation of injustice for  
which God is chastising us or deny those grand truths which by the dis-  
cipline 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 in our hour is guilty in so far of the blood  
of every soldier slain in battle &c

Prepared for Nomalkonn. June 10 + 11. 1863.  
Reached at Nomalkonn Thursday Evg. June 11 1863  
Waterford. N.Y. Wednesday Evg. April the 5<sup>th</sup> 1865

$$\begin{array}{r} 120 \\ - 18 \\ \hline 960 \\ 120 \\ \hline 2160 \end{array}$$