

Quotes on Prayer

by

Jonathan Edwards

If we enjoy so great a privilege as to have the prayer-hearing God revealed to us, how great will be our folly and inexcusableness, if we neglect the privilege, or make no use of it, and deprive ourselves of the advantage by not seeking this God by prayer.

To lead a holy life is to lead a life devoted to God; a life of worshipping and serving God; a life consecrated to the service of God. But how doth he lead such a life who doth not so much as maintain the duty of prayer? A prayerless life is so far from being a holy life, that it is a profane life. He that lives so, lives like an heathen, who calleth not on God's name; he that lives a prayerless life, lives without God in the world.

The same hope which leads men to sin in this world will lead to hell hereafter. Why therefore will you retain such a hope, of which your own experience shows you the ill tendency, in that it encourages you to lead a wicked life? For certainly that life is a wicked life wherein you live in the neglect of so well known a duty as that of secret prayer, and in the disobedience of so plain a command of God, as that by which this duty is enjoined. And is not a way of disobedience to God a way to hell?

When we go before God in prayer with a cold, dull heart, and in a lifeless and listless manner pray to him for eternal blessings and those of infinite import to our souls, we should think of Christ's earnest prayers that he poured out to God, with tears and a bloody sweat. The consideration of it may well make us ashamed of our dull, lifeless prayers to God, wherein, indeed, we rather ask a denial than ask to be heard; for the language of such a manner of praying to God, is, that we do not look upon the benefit that we pray for as of any great importance, that we are indifferent whether God answers us or not. The example of Jacob in wrestling with God for the blessing, should teach us earnestness in our prayers, but more especially the example of Jesus Christ, who wrestled with God in a bloody sweat. If we were sensible as Christ was of the great importance of those benefits that are of eternal

consequence, our prayers to God for such benefits would be after another manner than now they are. Our souls also would with earnest labour and strife be engaged in this duty.

It is indeed a very wonderful thing, that so great a God should be so ready to hear our prayers, though we are so despicable and unworthy: that he should give free access at all times to every one; should allow us to be importunate without esteeming it an indecent boldness; should be so rich in mercy to them that call upon him; that worms of the dust should have such power with God by prayer; that he should do such great things in answer to their prayers, and should show himself, as it were, overcome by them. This is very wonderful, when we consider the distance between God and us, and how we have provoked him by our sins, and how unworthy we are of the least gracious notice. It cannot be from any need that God stands in of us; for our goodness extendeth not to him. Neither can it be from anything in us to incline the heart of God to us; it cannot be from any worthiness in our prayers, which are in themselves polluted things. But it is because God delights in mercy and condescension.

In our coming to God, and praying to him for such and such things, there is a show that we are sensible we are dependent on him for them, and that he is sufficient to give them to us. But men sometimes seem to pray, while not sensible of their dependence on God, nor do they think him sufficient to supply them; for all the while they trust in themselves, and have no confidence in God.—they show in words as though they were beggars; but in heart they come as creditors, and look on God as their debtor. In words they seem to ask for things as the fruit of free grace; but in heart they account it would be hard, unjust, and cruel, if God should deny them. In words they seem humble and submissive, but in heart they are proud and contentious; there is no prayer but in their words.

God is sometimes represented as if he were moved and persuaded by the prayers of his people; yet it is not to be thought that God is properly moved or made willing by our prayers; for it is no more possible that there should be any new inclination or will in God, than new knowledge. The mercy of God is not moved or drawn by anything in the creature; but the spring of God's beneficence is within himself only; he is self-moved; and whatsoever mercy he bestows, the reason and ground of it is not to be sought for in the creature, but in

God's own good pleasure. It is the will of God to bestow mercy in this way...God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be antecedent to the bestowment of mercy; and he is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayer, as though he were prevailed on by prayer.—When the people of God are stirred up to prayer, it is the effect of his intention to show mercy; therefore he pours out the spirit of grace and supplication.

It is a gross mistake of some natural men, who think that when they read and pray they do not add to their sins; but, on the contrary, think they diminish their guilt by these exercises. They think that instead of adding to their sins, they do something to satisfy for their past offences; but instead of that, they do but add to the measure by their best prayers, and by those services with which they themselves are most pleased.

Consider the great benefit of a constant, diligent, and persevering attendance on this duty (*prayer*). It is one of the greatest and most excellent means of nourishing the new nature, and of causing the soul to flourish and prosper. It is an excellent mean of keeping up an acquaintance with God, and of growing in the knowledge of God. It is the way to a life of communion with God. It is an excellent mean of taking off the heart from the vanities of the world and of causing the mind to be conversant in heaven. It is an excellent preservative from sin and the wiles of the devil, and a powerful antidote against the poison of the old serpent. It is a duty whereby strength is derived from God against the lusts and corruptions of the heart, and the snares of the world.

Let me direct you to forsake all such practices as you find by experience do indispose you to the duty of secret prayer. Examine the things in which you have allowed yourselves, and inquire whether they have had this effect...If you seek the good of your souls, forsake these practices. Whatever you may plead for them, as that there is no hurt in them, or that there is a time for all things, and the like; yet if you find this hurt in the consequence of them, it is time for you to forsake them. And if you value heaven more than a little worldly diversion; if you set a higher price on eternal glory than on a dance or a song, you will forsake them.

Many vicious persons, who make no pretence to serious religion, commonly attend public prayers in the congregation; and also more private prayers, in the families in which they live,

unless it be when carnal designs interfere, or when their youthful pleasures and diversions, and their vain company call them.....But they (hypocrites) in a great measure leave off the practice of secret prayer....They sometimes do a little to quiet conscience, and just to keep alive their old hope; because it would be shocking to them, even after all their subtle dealing with their consciences to call themselves converts, and yet totally to live without prayer...Hypocrites never had the spirit of prayer given them. They may have been stirred up to the external performance of this duty, and that with a great deal of earnestness and affection, and yet always have been destitute of the true spirit of prayer.