

Original Contributions.

Is Prayer Natural?

NUMBER II.

Christ tried to teach Nicodemus that if he would study God's ways in natural things, more he would understand God's ways in spiritual things far better. We have need to "study" nature and revelation both, very faithfully and honestly, if we would become "workmen, approved unto God," unto science and unto common sense.

In my former article I showed that prayer was a *natural force*, among the higher animals, and that God answers their prayers through other natural forces and agencies through which he always operates. Prayer that cannot be answered through these agencies or means, cannot be "according to his will," and are, therefore, vain. But we said that God in nature, will help us to understand God in revelation. Now we know that in the case of animals, there must be a relation of sympathy between the one that cries or prays, and the one that answers. There must be a tie of sympathy, of affection or of interest (or of all these) between them. There must be a correspondence between the heart and *language* of the one who prays, and the heart, or feelings of the one prayed to. Ordinarily, the cry or language of one species of creatures, awakens no response or sympathy in another of a different kind. But the cry or prayer of any of the dependent and helpless creatures, must be one of *real want*; and that want is indicated by the very tone and voice of the cry. The calf, the lamb, and all other young animals may "bawl" or "bleat," or cry for hours sometimes through mere habit, perversity or fretfulness, and the parent mother will pay no attention to it; she knows that its cry is a "hollow mockery," and a spurious imitation of its real and true prayer, and that it has no real want to be supplied. She will pay no attention to its prayer except when the cry indicates *real need*. This is but a natural confirmation of all the teachings of Scripture. "When you pray, use not *vain repetitions*, as the hypocrites do." "Be not deceived for God is not mocked." Christ "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, and was heard." Why should man be guilty of the empty form of prayer, or

"with lip service only, when his heart is far from him?" It was not until the Israelites "cried unto God by reason of their bondage" in Egypt, that "God heard their groaning, and had respect unto their cry." God also said to them afterward, that "if thou afflict the widow or fatherless child, in any wise, and they cry unto me, I will surely hear their cry." Job says that God "will hear the cry of the afflicted," and David says that "he forgets not the cry of the humble, for his ears are open to their cry," and "the ears of the Lord are open to the cry of the righteous." Christ has assured us that "God will avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him." But James says to some, that "ye ask and receive not because ye ask amiss." John explains more fully the natural philosophy of prayer, when he says, "If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if he hear us, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

Nature then, as well as the Bible, teaches us very plainly that our cry to God should be genuine, and one prompted by real actual want, and neither vain, spurious or hypocritical. Imagine one calf laying a wager with another, (*a la* Prof. Tyndall) that it could so dissemble as to deceive its parent dam, and obtain an answer to its cry? A calf might be silly enough to make such a bantering proposition, but no cow of ordinary instinct, would be foolish enough to pay the least attention to it! To her the sham would be too apparent. And still, by their conduct it would seem that a great many must think that our Creator has less perception and wisdom than many of the animal mothers! As the ant may teach the sluggard wisdom, so many of the young animals might teach us much in regard to the nature and philosophy of real prayer.

The whole spirit and genius of Christianity (when we understand it) is in direct opposition to every kind of *formal* worship. If we should only eat when the stomach craves food, is it not equally true that we should only pray when the heart really craves and desires something. Indeed *can* we really pray unless this is the case?

I am not now speaking of "thanksgiving" and "praise," which very properly constitute the larger portion of our so-called

"prayers;" but I am speaking of the philosophy of real, actual prayer. Another important feature remains to be considered.

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Sleep.

TEXT—"Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ shall give the light," Eph. 5:14.

Most certainly these persons addressed, whatever their condition was, are commanded to *awake* from their sleep and "ARISE from the dead." Then they were asleep and among the dead. We find a passage in Paul's writing to Timothy which sheds upon this theme a flood of light: "That they may awake themselves out of the snare of the devil who are taken captive by him at his will." 2 Tim. 2: 26. According to this text *that sleep consisted in being in captivity to the devil*. Men are in captivity to the devil when they are doing his will and wickedness of whatever kind or caste is his will; hence men are his captives or prisoners, (for they are in his snare or trap) whenever they engage in any kind of wickedness. The word captive is in the Greek "taken alive."

This sleep then is not the sleep of death, for Paul affirms that they are "taken alive," by him at his will. We see then clearly that they are not literally dead nor among the literal dead.

Now from what we have already seen we are prepared for the declaration of the same writer as to their condition, "you who were dead in trespasses and in sins hath he quickened." These persons who were asleep were "dead in trespasses and in sins," and their awakening consisted in "recovering themselves out of the snare of the devil." They were commanded to awake out of sleep and arise from the dead to something. What, then, is the object to which they are commanded to arise? "Awake to righteousness and sin not." 1 Cor. 15: 34. Propositions govern the objective case. Righteousness is in the objective case in this declaration, and hence is the object to which they are commanded to awake.

It is very evident, indeed, that these parties were not literally asleep nor literally dead, for they are commanded to "awake themselves," and commands are given neither to men asleep nor dead. They themselves were to do the *rising* and recovering themselves

out of the snare of the devil. This awakening consisted of freeing themselves from the power of the devil. They had the ability to free themselves from the power of Satan or else God would not command them to do so. Not only are they ordered to recover themselves from the devil, but they are commanded to *win* themselves for the conflict. Arm yourselves with the mind of Christ. 1 Pet. 4: 7. The only arms necessary to successfully defeat Satan is the mind of Jesus. To all those who awake and arise there is a promise given. "Christ shall give you light." They needed light for they were in darkness and no wonder they were sleepy. The light they needed comes from Christ. What is the light then that Christ gives, for his is the "Son of Righteousness." "In him was life and the life was the light of men." Jno. 1. The life of Jesus was the light given to men. He showed them the beauty of holiness in a perfect life. But the light of that perfect life and example comes to us through the written life of Jesus or the Gospel. Therefore Paul calls it "The light of the glorious Gospel of Christ," and says it "shines into them." 2 Cor. 4: 4. Christ then shines through the Gospel, and into men's hearts. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts," and what does God shine in men's hearts for? "To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." He shines in men's hearts to give light, the light of knowledge, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This light reaches the heart *through the mind*. "For the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ should shine into them." He blinded the minds of them that believe not, because that is the only possible door of entrance to their hearts, and if he can get them to close their eyes and ears against the Gospel, there is no danger of its light getting into their hearts through their minds. Sometimes, however, Satan succeeds in taking the word away from the heart, even after it reaches it. In the parable of the sower the Savior said: "The wayside hearer, or those by the wayside are they that hear, then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts." Luke 8: 12. Why make