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Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts. — Malachi 3:10.

Proof is not the same as experimentation. In the latter the end is indefinite. In proving one works toward a given end. In experimenting we proceed without knowing where we shall come out. In proving we aim to come out at a point that is explicitly set before us. For example, in geometry we have this proposition: If one straight line meets another straight line, the sum of the two adjacent angles will be equal to two right angles. The student aims to prove this proposition true. If he knew nothing of geometry he might simply put the angles together to find out what they would make. That would be experiment. But the proposition being given, he seeks to verify it.

Having pointed out this distinction, let me remind you that God does not invite us to experiment with Him. He does not invite us to take the Gospel and make a sort of trial trip with it for a short distance, and then, if we are satisfied that it is seaworthy and safe, to engage a permanent passage to the Kingdom of Heaven. No! He makes the definite declaration at the outset that the Gospel is sufficient to save to the uttermost all who accept it. Then He says: Prove whether or not that is true. Do not try it
and then take it. Take it and then try it. Do not experiment on it and see if it is worthy of your confidence; but, believing that God's word is worthy of all acceptation, accept it and spend your life in demonstrating its worth.

Is it not true that much of our praying and laboring is of the tentative and experimental sort? We work to see what will come of it. We pray to test what the effect will be. We throw out our efforts and wonder what results will follow, instead of fixing our eyes on a definite result and bending all our energies to that end. If great consequences do ensue we exclaim over them as wonderful instead of treating them as a matter of course, even as the farmer treats the harvest when he has sown the seed. All this goes to show that we are experimenting with God rather than proving Him. "Isn't it an astonishing exhibition of unbelief," says an eminent writer, "that if a prayer of ours is answered we regard it as such a remarkable thing that we must tell everybody about it for weeks afterward, as though some strange thing had happened?" "The sum of the angles of a triangle equal two right angles," says geometry. And the student, figuring it out, proves it true, and feels no astonishment at the issue. He would have been confounded if it were otherwise. But when the Bible says, "Ask and it shall be given you," and we prove it we are amazed at the truth and fidelity of God, and consider it a discovery worthy of telling about for months. It amounts to saying, Mathematics is true without a doubt, but when the Bible is proved true, wonder, O my soul, and be astonished with a great astonishment.

Should we not reverse all this and take answer to prayer for granted as surely as an answer in mathematics? What, astronomy so sure in its laws that the arrival of a comet or an eclipse of the sun may be calculated to a minute, and

nobody dreams of a miscarriage; and geometry so absolute that we can compute the height of a mountain and the area of a plain without fear of error in our calculation, yet doubt God's word! Nay, astronomy is but the measuring of the heavens, and geometry the measuring of the earth, yet God says, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."

*He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.—Luke 18:1.*

Amid all the doctrinal defections now apparent in the church, I contend that the greatest trouble is in the life, not in the creed. Heart failure is what the Church of God is dying of, not head failure! And yet there is no need of this weakness; for the heart of the church is in heaven, and if we only keep our communion with that heart through prayer, we may have the vigor and impulse of the living Christ constantly imparted to us. I believe that it is the breaks in our Christian life which are the source of our greatest weakness. When it is a question of growth, let us remember that the continuous hold of a child is more effectual than the intermittent grips of a giant. Jesus has wrapped up the whole secret in this principle: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done for you." Great spasms of prayer, violent storms of intercession at the gates of heaven, followed by long stretches of cold and barren praying, this is not the method by which we are to win great riches of grace and glory. The prayers that remain rooted in one place are the prayers that prevail. This petition for blessing fixed like a plant in the garden of the Lord, to be looked to and tended daily, is the kind of praying which
truly enriches the Christian life. I know not why it is, but it does not seem to be God’s way to open the door of heaven at the first knock of intercession. If He were to do so, the privileges of the mercy-seat would become so cheapened that they would bring little spiritual enrichment to the soul. So it is, perhaps, that God perseveres in His silence, that He may train us to persevere in seeking. But “our God shall come and shall not keep silence,” if only we show Him that we are so desperately in earnest that we cannot take denial. Therefore, let me exhort you, my brethren, to renewed watchfulness at this point. “Backsliding always begins at the closet door.” If the sources of spiritual life are neglected, the stream must certainly dry up. Let us not forget that our life is not in our own veins and arteries. Our life is hid with Christ in God. Every answered prayer is a pulse beat of the heart of Jesus. Live in Him constantly then; pray in Him unceasingly. Thus by patient continuance shall you attain unto eternal life. This is the goal which is set before us. “He that believeth on the Son hath life” indeed; has it in principle, in germ. For this very reason are we exhorted “to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life,” that as life is now in us in its beginnings, we may enter into life in its fullness.

Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates; waiting at the posts of my doors.—Proverbs 8:34.

There are few words of more present-day importance than these. Amid the clamor and tumult of human voices it is hard for God to get a hearing. People will hear this teacher and that teacher, this preacher and that preacher. But it is exceedingly difficult to get them to shut out all human sounds for a while, and erase from the tablets of memory all human impressions, while they turn their ear to God, and say, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” The world clamors for good speakers. God covets good hearers. And let us be sure that, in the Lord’s estimation, no man can be a good speaker, however eloquent and finished and fervent, unless he has first learned to listen well. God help us, and all who preach His word, so that before we knock at men’s hearts with our message we have watched at the Lord’s gate and waited at the posts of His door to find out what He would have us to say.

We watch daily at His gate to learn His will, to find out to what service He would set our hands, and upon what errands He would command our feet. This is the posture of a servant of the Lord. We have fallen too much into the idea that we are to be served by God rather than to serve Him. So we come to His door and knock, saying, “Give us this day our daily bread”; and we knock again, saying, “Forgive us our trespasses.” This we ought to do. But how many of us (and how often) come with these words: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Such habitual beggars have we been at God’s door, when we should have been servitors waiting on His bidding. Lazarus with his sores, lying at Dives’ gate; the lame man with hand outstretched before the Gate Beautiful of the temple—these I fear, represent the attitude of the majority of Christians. They come with the sores of sin and sorrow to be healed, with their burdens of poverty and wretchedness to be relieved. If perchance they have no present sense of pain or misery they hardly think they have need to come at all. Shame on us, Christian brethren, that we have so degraded our calling into being spiritual paupers, when Christ has ordained us to be “stewards of the manifold grace of God.” God forgive us if we have been coming to Him day after
day as suppliants with empty palms, saying, “Give, give,” and help us today to come as servants, saying, “Take me, O Lord, and use me wherever Thou mayest choose.”

It was a glad surprise to me recently when of the scores of beggars whom I have fed at my door, one came back. As I met him, expecting only a repetition of the old request for alms, he greeted me with a manly self-respecting expression on his face, and said: “Sir, you gave me food the other day. I have come back to ask you to give me work in return for it.” He was the only one out of the many hundreds I have helped to make such a request. How is it in the church, which Christ has redeemed and which has fed daily on His bounty? “Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine”—the nine who should have returned to give glory to God for their salvation by offering to Him their bodies and their substance, their time and their talents? So many pleas for pardon and never one denied; so many prayers for blessing, and never one withheld; but so rarely an offer for service to delight the Lord who bought us, and show our gratitude to Him. Is it surprising that when so few come to proffer their service, and they so infrequently, He should bring out this golden benediction, this diadem of blessing, for the man who comes every day asking to be sent on His Master’s errands, to be set about his Master’s business? “Blessed is the man that watcheth daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.”

I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers.—Philemon 3.

Wholesale intercession is always a dangerous tendency. Prayers that are so inclusive that they cease to be incisive, which take in so many interests that they take hold of none

—who has not been wearied at such comprehensively feeble intercession? Believing Christians have as much need to be on guard against platitudinarianism as against latitudinarianism. Evangelical vagueness of desire and petition is a weariness to God and man, and we are inclined to approve the blunt irreverence of an evangelist who impatiently broke in upon an aimless prayer with the exclamation, “Do ask something of God, brother.”

Instead of praying for our Lord’s blessing on our mission fields, for example, and on our missionaries in general, let us get a list of names and take some of them before the throne of God each day. The heartfelt solicitude of the Apostle to the Gentiles nowhere comes out more manifestly than in the frequent recurrence of the words, “Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.”

If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it.—John 14:14.

Why should we ask? Can the finite move the Infinite? Can the human bend the Divine? So some question the propriety of prayer. We answer that the relation of the human to the Divine is mutual. God’s willingness to give is exercised through our willingness to receive; and in the order of divine providence, the Lord needs the action of our will as much as we need the action of His will. In the old-fashioned watch there is the mainspring and the hairspring. The hairspring does not move the mainspring but is moved by it. And yet the mainspring depends on the hairspring to take off the power that was stored up in it. By tick after tick of this little spring, the motion coiled up in the central spring is released and communicated to the mechanism. So we say our will does not move God’s will; it is moved by it. Yet God’s will is dependent on the sub-
mission and choice of our will in order that He may bless us and give us the things that we need.

This is what prayer is. It is the expression of our will, our desire, our consent concerning the things which our Father in heaven is willing to give us. That which is the outcome of mere self-will is not prayer, and has no guarantee of answer. God seeks to give us the things that are best for us, and in proportion as we desire to have these things He can enrich us unto all bountifulness. Hence, observe how rigidly He binds His gifts to our prayers. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit"—to whom? To them that need Him? To them that are mistakenly trying to get along without Him? No! "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." It is the same with other benefits. "How much more," says Jesus, "shall your Father in heaven give good things"—to whom? To the poor and needy and suffering? No! but "to them that ask him." Thus God conditions His gifts upon our seeking and requesting them. As the servant is bound only by the doorbell, and is not called upon to stand on the steps and hail every passer-by, saying, "My master is at home, and would be pleased to see you," but is expected to respond to every pull of the bell, so the Holy Spirit, the servant of God, is sent to wait on those that call upon Him, and give gifts to those who seek for them.

But there is a limit to the things we may ask of God. Let us not forget this, lest our prayers be "will-worship" instead of worship in spirit and truth. Does not the Lord say, "Ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you"? But the beloved disciple who records these words sets others over against them: "We know that if we ask anything

according to his will he heareth us." We are at liberty to ask, and have the promise of receiving anything within the circle of God's sovereign love. Praise God that He has nowhere promised to step outside that circle. All holy wills revolve around the Divine as the planets in their orbits around the sun. If there is to be no collision or discordance, each must yield implicitly to the central orb, and all must chime together in that celestial music, "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven."

Every one that asketh receiveth.—Matthew 7:8.

One sin is that of taking the good things of life without asking, of assuming that they are ours without saying "by your leave" to God. But there is the opposite sin of asking without taking. For this is how the Lord's words should be understood—"Every one that asketh taketh." Like roguish boys ringing door-bells and then running away for sport, so many pray. They have no deep sense of need; they are happy and prosperous and well-fed; but they must keep up appearances, so they call at God's door morning by morning and ring. But they never wait for Him to come out and answer. The word of Scripture is that we "pray always with all prayer and supplication, watching thereunto with all perseverance." As one drops an important letter in the mail-box and eagerly scans every mail for a reply, so we should be alert for answers to our prayers. Is God the only slack correspondent? Does He alone let important letters go unanswered? Yet the dead-letter office of prayer is filled with unclaimed letters—God's answers which have never been called for by those for whom they were meant. O Christian, you question whether God hears you when you pray. Is it not time you considered whether
you hear God when He answers? “Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto thee,” says the psalm. Unspeakingly glorious is the privilege of prayer—to speak face to face with God, and commune with Him as friend with friend. How little we appreciate the height and glory of such an audience! But God gives another beatitude in the words of Solomon, “Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates.” Here is the suppliant who prays and then tarryeth for an answer, who waits at the door until the Lord comes forth and gives the blessing that was asked, who will not be driven from the gate though all the dogs of doubt and unbelief are set upon him to scare him thence. Blessed is the man who so waits and watches.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities and healeth all thy diseases.—Psalm 103.

Present-day discussion about the healing of disease through prayer is evidently not so much the result of speculation as of the pressure of incontrovertible facts. Cases are multiplying of persons who testify to that which has come to them in answer to prayer, and thus facts are crying out and pleading that the testimony of God be not rejected. No promise could be more explicit than that in James: “The prayer of faith shall heal the sick.” We know not why we have any more authority for setting it aside as belonging to another age but not applicable to ours than we have to treat the words, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” as outmoded. “All scripture is profitable,” and no scripture has become outlawed through passage of time. Our effeminate faith may have made it hard to credit God’s great promises, but it cannot render His power to fulfill them any less.

It may be well for us to reflect on the nature and extent of Christ’s redemptive work. Does it include the body as well as the soul? Does it aim to deliver the flesh from its infirmities as well as the spirit from its sins? If so, we may still repeat without fear the Apostle’s prayer: “I pray God your whole soul, body and spirit be presented blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In Jesus’ earthly ministry we have the question strikingly answered. He treated man as a double being, made up of soul and body. He did not deal with man in fragments; He did not help man by halves; He extended healing grace to man’s entire person, and constantly joined forgiveness of sin and the restoration of the body together. This fact is immensely significant. What Christ revealed as the true object of His ministry is the proper object of our prayer and faith. “Thy sins are forgiven thee”; “Rise, take up thy bed and walk” Mark 2:9; “Sin no more”; “Thou art made whole” (John 5:14). Such conjunctions might be multiplied. They indicate clearly that Jesus exercised a twofold ministry, that of pardoning and that of healing, one directed toward the soul and the other toward the body.

The final consummation of Christ’s ministry toward man is of this same double character, sanctification, the perfect recovery of the soul from sin, and resurrection, the perfect recovery of the body from disease and infirmity—the perfected spirit and the perfected body brought together in eternal reunion. This is the final finished work of Jesus Christ. Now, has Christ dropped one of His offices in the continued heavenly ministry He is carrying on? That He still forgives sins no one doubts. That He still
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heals disease is deemed by many a very hazardous opinion. It is skepticism as to God’s relation to the entire man that runs through our whole popular theology. No wonder that those who deny the resurrection of the body—and their name is legion—should deny the possibility of healing faith. This is part of the same system of unbelief. Those who cannot credit the final and perfect restoration of the body cannot, of course, believe in any partial restoration. Healing is but a partial restoration, a hint and intimation given now of what shall be when God shall exercise for the final restoration that “mighty power” by which He “is able to subdue all things unto himself.” Recovery from disease is a foreshadowing of that blessed recovery from death, by which “this corruptible shall put on incorruption and this mortal shall put on immortality.” We cannot well believe the whole without believing in the parts; we cannot accept the greater without accepting the less.

We call for honest and consistent faith here. We look to the cross in faith because there Christ “bore our sins in his own body on the tree.” May we not look at the cross in faith for yet another blessing, as we remember the saying that “himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses?” Is it legitimate to pray on the first ground, “Forgive us our trespasses,” and only presumption to pray on the other ground, “Heal thou our sicknesses”? 