

No.
67

***"IF YE THEN BE RISEN WITH CHRIST, SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH
ARE ABOVE, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."***
COL.3.1

POSTURE IN PRAYER.

An Address (revised)

At 65, St. Mary Axe,

29th June, 1915

by

PERCY W. HEWARD

***Correspondence welcome: Scriptural literature for Believers
Gottlieb-Daimler-Str.1 – 74343 Sachsenheim – GERMANY***

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POSTURE IN PRAYER.

An Address by Mr. Heward, 65 St. Mary Axe, June 29, 1915.

OUTLINE:

1. Who can pray and how?
 2. The posture of the heart,
 3. Outward reverence.
 4. Scripture allusions to kneeling, standing, sitting and their teaching from God to us.
 5. "Lifting up holy hands".
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Our subject, beloved friends, is entitled "Posture in Prayer". I think it possible that the title may be misunderstood. It may suggest something which is mechanical, but I do desire that God would grant unto us by His Holy Spirit a spiritual time throughout the evening. It is well for us to realize at the outset what prayer is, and who can pray. There are so many theories of prayer, and I do not mean that I wish to occupy any of your time with a merely theoretical "argument", we want to have the practice of prayer. We want to experience spiritual power in prayer, and not only talk about prayer. But it is well to spiritually search the Scriptures and search our hearts that we may know thus WHO can pray, what prayer is, and how prayer must be made. I am not now dealing with that general recognition of God as Creator which is the duty of every creature I am not now speaking of that natural and national repentance which we find marked with respect to Nineveh, when the people, yea, and the beasts, cried mightily unto God. Even animals cry unto God and He gives them food. This is a real relationship, and the sin of sinners does not separate them from this. But it is not access into the holiest. From the standpoint of spiritual relationship to the Lord, those who are outside Christ have no power of prayer. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord", and God says, "When ye make many prayers I will not hear". We read elsewhere of those who shall call upon the Lord and He will NOT answer them. Beautifully in the Psalm titles etc. have we a contrast. The prayer of the destitute, the prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, the prayer of Moses the man of God. Yes we need to be men of God that we may pray. Our first prayer was when we were destitute, and now our prayer keeps on because we are NEVER destitute of the mercy and truth in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As to the "how" of prayer, let us ever be reminded that we have acceptance in Christ alone, through Him we have access in one Spirit unto the Father. There is no other "how". The "how" of prayer is linked necessarily and perpetually with our beloved Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but the word "how" suggests further thoughts and brings before us the posture of the heart, How should our hearts be when we pray unto our gracious Heavenly Father? "My heart" says the Psalmist, "standeth in awe of Thy Word". We find elsewhere the beautiful expression "Thy servant hath found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee". The posture of the heart must be receptive, for God to put the prayer inside it. The posture of the heart must be reverent, that we may approach God with due humility, for the meek will He guide, but the proud He knoweth afar off. It is impossible to pray if our heart is haughty. "Because thine heart was tender" we read respecting Josiah and certain blessings were vouchsafed to him, Oh that we may have tender hearts, then shall we pray with a holy heartiness, for unless our prayers are in accord with the right condition of heart they are words, and nothing more. We should realize in this connection the greatness of God, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable", and when we think of all that He is, and of His glory and that He humbles Himself to see the things in heaven and the things before Him are as nothing, and yet He deigns not to hide Himself from our breathing, for our cry, surely we must come with a true heart and link deepest reverence with the full assurance of faith. Let us serve God says the Scripture acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. We are not to speak to God carelessly, thoughtlessly, commandingly, "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few", is the testimony of Ecclesiastes, with respect to those under the sun, and though our words may be many more because we are put above the sun, yet all our merits are in Christ, and consequently as soon as we have any confidence apart from Christ, as soon as we draw near with any support apart from our beloved Lord Jesus, with anything of natural self confidence, there is something seriously wrong, and we must not be surprised if God refuses to listen to such "prayer". But though I would put this in the first place, and desire that we might consider whether we are really among the called of Jesus Christ, and that we might also be occupied with the thought of our Lord and access in Him, and the true condition of a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, that we MAY come boldly to the throne of grace; - though I would put this at the very first and lay a primary stress upon it, yet I cannot forget that this subject was proposed with respect to outward posture in prayer. Nor is such a

thought unnecessary. We remember how David made a mistake when the ark was put in a cart instead of on the priests' shoulders, and when God dealt severely with this sin. David was seen humbled and told the Levites the difficulty was because they sought not God after the right order. There is a due order in prayer, and we need by the grace of God to find out whatsoever He has revealed. I do not mean that we are blessed under law in a Mosaic sense. We are not to think, "I must pray so many times a day". We are not to spend our time in making arrangements for the mechanical part of prayer. We may be very orthodox and very frigid, we may be very exact, and very cold; we may be acquainted with due order so that we exalt ourselves and despise others. It is possible to make an idol of everything, and truth as an idol is dangerous. We must never consider Truth apart from Him Who is THE Truth, if our bodies pray more than our hearts there is something wrong. But there are some people who lay a great stress when you speak with them on that which is within^{oh} they say, "our hearts are in fellowship with the Lord, we love Him, that is the great matter", and when you want them to have Scriptural arrangements they do not care about these things. Their hearts are right; they tell us. Every extreme is dangerous. There are some who disparage details, but the Lord's own testimony seems clear even as to small commandments and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; and again, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone. When Scripture gives us any hint upon outward posture, if we are disciples, we do well to pay spiritual attention. Need I say that Scripture implies there should be outward reverence. The body is to be the expression of the heart. Present your bodies a living sacrifice. The body is not merely to be viewed as "the body of this death". We have a physical frame that THEREWITH we may glorify God, and present our members instruments of righteousness. We do not want our bodies simply to pray, but when we pray we want our bodies to be brought into harmony with the prayer, that our physical frame may be part of the living sacrifices. It is true God hears prayer from most unlikely surroundings. Jonah in the fish is a precious example. The great thing is not to be occupied first with outward appearance, but with heart condition. But when there is right heart-condition, there will be care as to outward appearance before Him, whenever possible. Scripture lays a stress upon different forms of outward reverence, and a stress in both the earlier and the later Scriptures, and surely we want to please our God by approaching Him in a rightful way. Surely we must feel there is something out of harmony with the glory of God when our prayers are presented while we are slovenly and careless. There is something out of harmony with the glory of God when we too easily settle down with most care for our own comfort, while we are engaged in prayer, I do not mean there is any merit in discomfort. We are not to apply some ritualistic penance, God is not a Taskmaster, but if we make ourselves too "comfortable" in our prayer when gathered together we shall probably be training others in habits of irreverence, and the mind is apt to become less active when the body is TOO "restfully" placed.

Scripture refers to kneeling, standing, and sitting in various connections. What is its testimony regarding these attitudes with respect to prayer? Shall we turn to a few Scriptures? 2Chron. 6:13, "Solomon had made a brazen scaffold of five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood, and KNEELED DOWN UPON HIS KNEES before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven". Psalm 95:6, "O come let us worship and BOW DOWN, let us KNEEL before the Lord our Maker". Dan. 6:10, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber before Jerusalem, HE KNEELED UPON HIS KNEES three times a day and prayed". The kneeling did not do instead of praying. He knelt AND gave thanks before His God, as he did aforetime, Luke 22, "And He, says verse 41, "was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed". Acts 7:60, "And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge, and when he had said this, he fell asleep". Acts 9:40, "But Peter put them all forth and kneeled down and prayed, and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise, and she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up". Acts 20:36, "And when he had thus spoken he kneeled down and prayed with them all". Acts 21:5, "And when he had accomplished those days we departed and went our way, and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city, and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed. Eph. 3:14, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would grant you" etc. Moreover we know that it was customary to bow the knee to the heathen idols. We read of those who bowed the knee to Baal, and in a future day all must bow the knee to the Lord. While in this connection we might notice an intensified form which goes beyond kneeling, - the falling on the face. Ezek. 11:13, "And it came to pass that when I prophesied, that Pelatiah, the son of Benaiah, died, then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice and said, Ah, Lord God, wilt Thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" 2Chron. 7:3, "And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground, upon the pavement, and worshipped and praised the Lord." Matt. 26:39, - "And He went a little further, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt". We recollect Satan's request,

moreover, the Christ should fall down and worship him.

Standing is brought before us first, suggestively, of Abraham "Abraham stood yet before the Lord", and we have that intense pleading of Gen.18 - 1 Sam.1, we are told how Eli was sitting on a seat by a post and Hannah was praying, and he misunderstood her, and when she came back, years after, the Lord having answered the request, she said, "I am the woman that STOOD by thee here praying unto the Lord". We have already seen Solomon standing in 2 Chron.6:12, as well as kneeling. Note Neh. 9:2-5, And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and STOOD and confessed their sins. Verse 5, STAND UP and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever, and blessed be Thy glorious Name which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Mark 11:25, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also Who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses". Rev.7:9, "And after this, I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, ... STOOD before the throne, and cried with a loud voice", a voice of praise.

Sitting: you recollect how that when God graciously revealed to Nathan what He would do for David, "Then" says 2 Sam. 7:18, "Went king David in and SAT before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto". This is unusual. When our beloved Lord gave thanks before passing on the bread, we read, He commanded the multitude first to sit down, and in Matt. 26, as they were eating Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave to the disciples. Now this eating was linked with the reclining, and there is no evidence that the reclining was varied on this occasion. We are not told of any such alteration of attitude. Indeed we ~~WOULD SEE FROM ALL THESE PASSAGES THAT VARIOUS ATTITUDES ARE MENTIONED~~ would see from all these passages that various attitudes are mentioned, all of which have a spiritual lesson. It is not without a meaning that we are told of Ezra CASTING HIMSELF DOWN when he prayed, for prayer is a casting of ourselves down; and this leads to a solemn thought, that attitude is meaningless unless it be the expression of a condition of HEART. The bowed knee without the bowed heart is worse than useless. The standing up without the exulting in the Lord is out of place. The sitting before the Lord without the calm meditation of worship is quite unfitting. The sitting down at a meal and thanksgiving then is quite unfitting unless we know that all our rest depends upon the merit of Christ. But who of us can say that the thoughts which are expressed in the actions are fixed in our minds? We so often do things because we HAVE done them, and because OTHERS do them. What we want is that our actions should be expressive of that which we feel. Hence the great idea is not primarily we must kneel down, but our hearts must kneel down, so that it will be natural to kneel down. You have sometimes noticed a speaker moving his hands while speaking, quite inappropriately, not at all expressing that which is being said, but the reverse. You may perhaps have seen a speaker TRYING to use his hands to express his actions, but painfully conscious that he is trying. We do not want this painful consciousness that we are trying with respect to prayer. Means of blessing are a danger as soon as we are occupied with the means. Oh we do need to be careful, beloved friends, with respect to this. If we go on a journey, we may perhaps have to travel by train, and we obtain our ticket that we may travel, but if, when we get to the end of our journey, we are simply occupied with the ticket, we make a grave mistake. It is so easy to be occupied with the means, and that which should lead us to a blessing becomes a positive hindrance. I do not mean sweep aside all forms on this account. If God has appointed forms we do well to have them. There are some who would say, Never mind about baptism, the great thing is to have its spiritual counterpart. There are some who would say, Never mind about the Lord's table, if you have communion: that is enough. Spiritual communion with God is all that is needed, they will tell us. They err. But if we become occupied with baptism as a goal instead of as a type and a steppingstone, if the bread and the fruit of the vine at the Lord's supper are the things on which our mind is set rather than on Him Whom they signify, we are being led astray by the very means which are Divinely intended to be full of blessing to those who are in the right condition of heart. So is it with prayer. We are not to spend our time thinking how we must kneel, and how we must stand, rather are we to have such a sense of the glory of the Lord that the arrangements which He has shown to befit His blood bought-people will become spiritually natural to us, and we shall discern their typical beauty and realize thereby MORE of what He is, and not less. Every time we kneel it should remind us more of the glory of our God as well as be a witness to others that we will not bow a knee to Baal, but that our bowing is altogether unto the Lord Whom we honour and glorify and exalt, and before Whom we realize our natural nothingness, but toward Whom we have a way of access because of way of acceptance. I suppose beloved friends, the Scriptures at which we have looked will show that there cannot be a "This do" of human decisiveness. One thing is plain, careless slovenliness is out of place, a lolling attitude in prayer hardly suggests acquaintance with God. This is perhaps easier in private prayer than when we are held back from certain actions in public. Moreover, private prayer may often be longer, and at times when we are more weary we all realize how apt we are in our private prayer to fall short of becoming reverence. I would not wish only to speak to you in this matter, or to suggest that I can merely blame you. I desire, beloved friends, to realize more myself, with heart sorrow for failure, of the gracious way in which the Lord welcomes His people's praying, and of the solemn manner in which we sometimes take advantage of the welcome to approach Him without due reverence. Oh that we may not presume on His love. The Holy Spirit will never lead to carelessness. Christ the

presume on His love. The Holy Spirit will never lead to carelessness. Christ Who was the Lord of Glory is brought before us as reverent in prayer, and He was our Saviour and He was our Example. Certainly Scripture seems to suggest that generally in meetings kneeling, or standing (the former particularly associated with a sense of need, and the latter with a sense of praise) that these should be the usual habit. Hindrances in the way should be removed. The standing and the kneeling may not be so comfortable physically, but they have blessings wrapped up in them, yet I suppose we all recognize that God can hear the prayer of His weak children lying down ill in bed, - and in like manner there may be those who cannot physically kneel. There is no Divine statement Thou must kneel, and where God is silent we would not demand, but those who have a clear conscience upon this matter, through physical infirmity, would be the last surely, to draw back others who have not that physical infirmity. Rather would they desire that such should make manifest their due devotion by kneeling, or by standing, most frequently when gathered together. The Scripture references to sitting down with respect to a meal seem to me suggestive. Though gladly welcoming further guidance from God upon the subject, my own practice is to remain sitting throughout the breaking of bread, as well as sitting when there is thanksgiving at an ordinary meal. I do not mean to remain sitting in prayers after the breaking of bread, but in the prayers of thanksgiving which accompany that breaking of bread. Personally this seems to me in accord with the Scripture: but as I said just now, I would gladly welcome any further thoughts from Scripture upon the subject. As to other times, I do feel that gathered believers, as well as believers in private prayer, should usually be kneeling or standing. If one condition is more difficult for any personal reasons, there is the other. I suppose most of us naturally kneel in private, and we remember the case of Daniel. There are many other details which might be mentioned. I suppose we realize a certain principle underlying the closing of the eyes. It is that our mind may not be distracted. It is not that we are commanded to close our eyes. But we desire to avoid anything which would lead us off thinking of that which we wish would fill our minds. Moreover we have a responsibility to others, and we know how that with children and wandering believers, how often the opened eyes are very harmful to thoughts concerning God. There may be certain Scriptures which refer to prayer in the open air where the eyes were lifted up toward heaven. "These words spake Jesus and lifted up His eyes to heaven". Personally I take the language to involve a similar principle to our closing the eyes. The eyes looking up to heaven would be off all of earth, and moreover, there would be a suggestive attitude of the way into God's presence, and His glory in heavenly places. Moving about during prayer, I mean the moving about of others while any are praying, is oft-times harmful. Children of God sometimes come in late to a meeting, step forward to their places, regardless of the way they are distracting the devotion of those who would center their minds on the Lord, and regardless of the hindrance to unsaved ones, young and old, who may be present. I think this point needs Scriptural emphasis, that those who have a tender conscience from the Lord may realize it, and act accordingly.

But now we come to our last point, which with me is one of the most important, as to attitude, because I feel it is a point that we have all largely overlooked, and which we need to consider before the Lord. You will recollect in EX. 17, we are told of Moses' hands being lifted up and while his hands were lifted up Israel prevailed, and we read in the last verse of the chapter, in the margin, of the hand on the throne. Not only are we told in Scripture of the lifting up of prayer for the remnant, (Isa. 37:4), but for example, in Psa. 134:2, "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless the Lord". Psalm 141, "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice". This assumes a lifting up of the hands but the strongest passage as command, stronger I believe than any passage regarding kneeling, is 1 Tim. 2, "I will that the males pray in every place lifting up holy hands without wrath and doubting". I have often thought of the spiritual teaching involved, Lifting up holy hands and not to lift up unholy hands. Only those walking with God can rightly lead an assembly in prayer. Holy hands. It is not only a holy heart, but holy hands. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?... He that hath clean hands"; - and there must be a likeness to the Lord on the part of His people. You will notice that the standing and the kneeling are both affecting the WHOLE being. Have you noticed these words, "Kneeled on his knees". They are rather a concern to me, for some of us find it far easier, I suppose, to kneel on one knee and to partly support ourselves on the other foot, but there seems a Scriptural stress on the knees, and standing, we know, involves the TWO feet. The feet and the hands are thus both occupied with respect to prayer. The whole BEING spends itself. In like manner we have the lifting up the eyes to heaven in the case of our beloved Lord, as if to suggest the direction of the body. The lifting up holy hands is a command with respect to assembly prayer, without wrath. Pray for unkind persecutors, without any wrath to them. Pray for unlikely ones without doubting. Lift up the hands, keep nothing back. Be doing nothing else, occupied with nothing else. I do not mean that we are simply to spend our time in thinking of lifting up our hands, but there is a spiritual teaching in connection therewith, and personally I feel that the physical action should be brought before believers, and that it would be far preferable for Christian brethren in prayer in an assembly of the Lord's people, at least during part of that p

part of that prayer, to lift up their hands. There is the suggestiveness of laying HOLD of the promise. There is the suggestiveness of the hand on the throne, as EX. 17:16 margin - implies; and there is the measure of the same strain that is involved in the kneeling on the knees. I believe, moreover, the lifting up of the hands, in part, involves a lifting up of the head, and there seems a stretching forward of the whole being, and the mind toward Him Who is in heaven. This would, moreover, prevent that which is sometimes a trial to many of the Lord's people, ----The head being bowed down, quite appropriate sometimes in private prayer; often in public prayer, (if I might use the word thinking of THE public, the people of God), often in public prayer becomes a hindrance to the Amens of others, for they cannot hear the words that are spoken. These may seem details, but I believe that they need to be remembered before the Lord, and if we have grieved Him in this matter, we should seek from Him guidance as to the future, that we may know whatever is acceptable unto Him, and to His glory. I shall welcome most definitely any suggestions from the Lord's people, for I have no wish to propose anything as a mere innovation, as a merely human arrangement, but I do feel at least that in the prayer for all classes of men, for kings and all that are in authority which is linked with the beginning of meeting together, and probably in other prayers as well, there should be the lifting up of the hands as the evening sacrifice and resting upon that wondrous sacrifice which never loses its merits, in which and in Whom, and in the Spirit, we can now draw near unto God with a confidence that blood-bought ones, who are not possessed of unholy hands, blood-bought ones, REDEEMED TO judge sin in themselves, are always and HEARTILY WELCOME unto their Father in heaven.
