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# PLEADING WITH GOD AND ARGUMENT IN PRAYER

by  
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Another trial of faith confronted them in the orphan work. A twelvemonth previous there were in hand seven hundred and eighty pounds; now that sum was reduced to one thirty-ninth of the amount--twenty pounds. Mr. and Mrs. Mueller, with Mr. Craik and one other brother, connected with the Boys' Orphan House, were the only four persons who were permitted to know of the low state of funds; and they gave themselves to united prayer. And let it be carefully observed that Mr. Mueller testifies that his own faith was kept even stronger than when the larger sum was on hand a year before; and this faith was no mere fancy, for, although the supply was so low and shortly thirty pounds would be needed, notice was given for seven more children to enter, and it was further proposed to announce readiness to receive five others!

The trial-hour had come, but was not past. Less than two months later the money-supply ran so low that it was needful that the Lord should give by the day and almost the hour if the needs were to be met. In answer to prayer for help God seemed to say, "Mine hour is not yet come." Many pounds would shortly be required, toward which there was not one penny in hand. Then, one day, four pounds came in, the thought occurred to Mr. Mueller, "Why not lay aside three pounds against the coming need?" But immediately he remembered that it is written:

"SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY IS THE EVIL THEREOF."\*

He unhesitatingly cast himself upon God, and paid out the whole amount for salary then due, leaving himself again penniless.

\*Matt. vi.34.

At this time Mr. Craik was led to preach a sermon on Abraham, from Genesis xii, making prominent two facts: first, that so long as he acted in faith and walked in the Light of God, all went on well; but that, secondly, so far as he distrusted the Lord and disobeyed Him, all ended in failure. Mr. Mueller heard this sermon and conscientiously plied it to himself. He drew two most practical conclusions which he had abundant opportunity to put into practice:

First, that he must go into no byways or paths of his own for deliverance out of a crisis;

And, secondly, that in proportion as he had been permitted to honour God and bring some glory to His name trusting Him, he was in danger of dishonouring Him.

Having taught him these blessed truths, the Lord tested him as to how far he would venture upon them. While in such sore need of money for the orphan work, he had in the bank some two hundred and twenty pounds, intrusted to him for other purposes. He might *use their money for the time at least*, and so relieve the present distress. The temptation was the stronger so to do, because he knew the donors and knew them to be liberal supporters of the orphans; and he had only to explain to them the straits he was in and they would gladly consent to any appropriation of their gift that he might see best! Most men would have cut that Gordian knot of perplexity without hesitation.

Not so George Mueller. He saw at once that this would be *finding a way of his own out of difficulty, instead of waiting on the Lord for deliverance*. Moreover, he also saw that it would be *forming a habit of trusting to such expedients of his own, which in other trials would lead to a similar course and so hinder the growth of faith*. We use italics here because here is revealed one of the *tests* by which this man of faith was proven; and we see how he kept consistently and persistently to the one great purpose of his life-- to demonstrate to all men that to *rest solely on the promise of a faithful God* is the only way to know for one's self and prove to others, His faithfulness.

At this time of need-- the type of many others-- this man who had determined to risk everything upon God's word of promise, turned from doubtful devices and questionable methods of relief to *pleading with God*. And it may be well to mark his *manner* of pleading. He used *argument* in prayer, and at this time he piles up *eleven reasons* why God should and would send help.

This method of *holy argument*-- ordering our cause before God, as an advocate would plead before a judge-- is not only almost a lost art, but to many it actually seems almost puerile. And yet it is abundantly taught and exemplified in Scripture. Abraham in his plea for Sodom is the first great example of it. Moses excelled in this art, in many crises interceding in behalf of the people with consummate skill, marshalling arguments as a general-in-chief marshals battalions. Elijah on Carmel is a striking example of power in this special pleading. What a zeal and jealousy for God! It is probable that if we had fuller records we should find that all pleaders with God, like Noah, Job, Samuel, David, Daniel, Jeremiah, Paul, and James, have used the same method.

Of course God does not *need to be convinced*: no arguments can make any plainer to Him the claims of trusting souls to His intervention, claims based upon His own word, confirmed by His oath. And yet He will be inquired of and argued with. That is His way of blessing. He loves to have us set before Him our cause and His own promises: delights in the well-ordered plea, where argument is piled upon argument. See how the Lord Jesus Christ commended the persistent argument of the woman of Canaan, who with the *wit of importunity* actually turned his own *objection* into a *reason*. He said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the little dogs."\*

\*Cf. Matt. vii.6, xv. 26,27. Not kusin [Greek transliteration], but kunariois [Greek transliteration], the diminutive for little pet dogs.

"Truth, Lord," she answered, "yet the little dogs under the master's tables eat of the crumbs which fall from the children's mouths!" What a triumph of argument! Catching the Master Himself in His words, as He meant she should, and turning His apparent reason for not granting into a reason for granting her request! "O woman," said He, "great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt"-- thus, as Luther said, "flinging the reins on her neck."

This case stands unique in the word of God, and it is this use of argument in prayer that makes it thus solitary in grandeur. But one other case is at all parallel,-- that of the centurion of Capernaum,\* who, when our Lord promised to go and heal his servant, argued that such coming was not needful, since He had only to speak the healing word. And notice the basis of his argument: if he, a commander exercising authority and yielding himself to higher authority, both obeyed the word of his superior and exacted obedience of his subordinate, how much more could the Great Healer, in his absence, by a word of command, wield the healing Power that in His presence was obedient to His will! Of him likewise our Lord said: "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel!"

\*Matt. viii.8.

We are to argue our case with God, not indeed to convince Him, but to convince *ourselves*. In proving to Him that, by His own word and oath and character, He has bound Himself to interpose, we *demonstrate to our own faith* that He has given us the right to ask and claim, and that He will answer our plea because He cannot deny Himself.

There are two singularly beautiful touches of the Holy Spirit in which the right thus to order argument before God is set forth to the reflective reader. In Micah. vii.20 we read:

"Thou wilt perform the *truth* to Jacob,  
The *mercy* to Abraham,  
Which thou hast sworn unto our fathers,  
From the days of old."

Mark the progress of the thought. What was mercy to Abraham was truth to Jacob. God was under no obligation to extend covenant blessings; hence it was to Abraham a simple act of pure *mercy*; but, having so put Himself under voluntary bonds, Jacob could claim as *truth* what to Abraham had been mercy. So in 1 John i.9:

"If we confess our sins

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,  
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Plainly, forgiveness and cleansing are not originally matters of faithfulness and justice, but of mercy and grace. But, after God had pledged Himself thus to forgive and answer the penitent sinner who confesses and forsakes his sins,\* what was originally grace and mercy becomes faithfulness and justice; for God owes it to Himself and to His nature to stand by His own pledge, and fulfill the lawful expectation which His own gracious assurance has created.

\*Proverbs xxviii.18.

Thus we have not only examples of argument in prayer, but concessions of the living God Himself, that when we have His word to plead we may claim the fulfillment of His promise, on the ground not of His mercy only, but of His truth, faithfulness, and justice. Hence the holy boldness with which we are bidden to present our plea at the throne of grace. God owes to His faithfulness to do what He has promised, and to His justice not to exact from the sinner a penalty already borne in his behalf by His own Son.

No man of his generation, perhaps, has been more wont to plead thus with God, after the manner of holy argument, than he whose memoir we are now writing. He was of the elect few to whom it has been given to revive and restore this lost art of pleading with God. And if all disciples could learn the blessed lesson, what a period of *renaissance* of faith would come to the church of God!

George Mueller stored up reasons for God's intervention. As he came upon promises, authorized declarations of God concerning Himself, names and titles He had chosen to express and reveal His true nature and will, injunctions and invitations which gave to the believer a right to pray and boldness in supplication-- as he saw all these, fortified and exemplified by the instances of prevailing prayer, he laid these arguments up in memory, and then on occasions of great need brought them out and spread them before a prayer-hearing God. It is pathetically beautiful to follow this humble man of God into the secret place, and there hear him pouring out his soul in these argumentative pleadings, as though he would so order his cause before God as to convince Him that He must interpose to save His own name and word from dishonour!

These were His orphans, for had He not declared Himself the Father of the fatherless? This was His work, for had He not called His servant to do His bidding, and what was that servant but an instrument that could neither fit itself nor use itself? Can the rod lift itself, or the saw move itself, or the hammer deal its own blow, or the sword make its own thrust? And if this were God's work, was He not bound to care for His own work? And was not all this deliberately planned and carried on for His own glory? And would He suffer His own glory to be dimmed? Had not His own word been given and confirmed by His oath, and could God allow His promise, thus sworn to, to be dishonoured even in the least particular? Were not the half-believing church and the unbelieving world looking on, to see how the Living God would stand by His own unchanging assurance, and would He supply an argument for the skeptic and the scoffer? Would He not, must He not, rather put new proofs of His faithfulness in the mouth of His saints, and furnish increasing arguments wherewith to silence the cavilling tongue and put to shame the hesitating disciple?\*

In some such fashion as this did this lowly-minded saint in Bristol plead with God for more than threescore years, *and prevail*-- as every true believer may who with a like boldness comes to the throne of grace to obtain mercy find grace to help in every time of need. How few of us can sincerely sing:

I believe God answers prayer,  
Answers always, everywhere;  
I may cast my anxious care,  
Burdens I could never bear,  
On the God who heareth prayer.  
Never need my soul despair  
Since He bids me boldly dare  
To the secret place repair,  
There to prove He answers prayer.

\*Mr. Mueller himself tells how he argued his case before the Lord at this time. (Appendix F. Narrative, vol. 1, 243, 244)