

Entreaty for the Word of Truth

by J. K. POPHAM

"And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." (Psalm 119:43)

There was a very deep-rooted reason in the psalmist for this petition. It was a sense of his own great tendency by nature to let the word slip which he had heard, to depart from the Lord, a root reason this; and also his great weakness and inability to stand fast in an evil time. It would seem that he was persecuted and reproached. So he prays, "Let Thy tender mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation according to Thy word. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me; for I trust in Thy word. And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." And he was sure that unless the Lord kept the truth in his mouth, he could not hold it. Every child of God has the same root reason, and can pray the same prayer with respect to the word of God. "Lord, let neither myself nor the devil take it away. Keep it, keep it in me, keep it for me. I am disposed to apostatize. The tendency that is in the whole world to evil, is in myself; the weakness that is in human nature, the inability to hold anything that is good, I myself possess. Therefore this is my petition: "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." We do not fully know the blessing that a sense of our depravity is to us. We do not fully appreciate the blessing that a sense of weakness is. But God, when He will favour people, keeps alive in them a sense of what they are in themselves; and that makes the word exceedingly suitable to them. That makes prayer, as it were, their very life and breath. "Hold Thou me up, keep me, and I shall be well kept; sustain me, and I shall stand. Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, do not let it be far from me. Let it be, as Moses said to Israel, and as the apostle Paul quotes it, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach" (Rom. 10:8). By the mouth in the Scriptures we are to understand that by which the heart expresses itself: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Christ speaks of His own mouth: "All the words of My mouth are in righteousness" (Prov. 8:8). He speaks of the mouth of the wicked. "The froward mouth do I hate" (Prov. 8:13). It is said of a priest, "The priest's lips should keep knowledge" keep the truth, that is, "and they should seek the law at His mouth" (Mal. 2:7). It is because what we speak ordinarily we speak out of our hearts. "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart;" so that when the word of truth is in a person's mouth, properly it comes from his heart. "Keep the word of truth in my heart, and then it will be in my mouth." And the prayer, "Take it not utterly out of my mouth," sets before us this truth, that One only is able to keep it there. We deserve to lose it, we are sometimes afraid of losing it. An individual will be afraid of it, as he feels his weakness and wickedness. A church will be afraid of it, as it perceives the readiness with which the human mind receives error, with which the tongue utters and mutters mischief against the Lord. And this leads me to make two remarks; one, respecting a person, and the other, respecting a church.

1. Respecting a person. What is man's heart? It is just a fountain of wickedness, and is always entirely in God's sight. Why is a man's throat declared to be "an open sepulchre" (Rom. 3:13)? Because it emits that which is in the heart; sends forth that which is within. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles a man, says Christ; but it is that which comes out of the heart that defiles the man. So speaks the Lord (Mar. 7:20). It is a solemn thing, then, when you consider

and feel, as you will do under God's teaching, the extreme wickedness of your own heart, and its readiness to receive wrong things, and to send forth wrong thoughts in utterance. I say it is a solemn thing for you to realize; and as you are under God's teaching, it will cause you to send out many prayers that God would not take the word of truth utterly out of your mouth; that He would not allow you to make a profession without power, that He would not permit you to say you are what you are not, nor to lose the profession many mouths that have spoken truth, which speak error, and why not you? Why not the poor preacher in the pulpit? What in us is there to keep us? We feel the truth of Jer. 17:9, and fear. How is it that we, in any measure, are following God? What danger there is of slackness, of indulging the flesh, and of walking in wrong things! When we perceive this, it will be an alarm, and an occasion of strong cries, "O keep me!"

2. Look at a church made up of sinners gathered together by grace and the providence of God, making a good profession. There are very solemn warnings in the Scripture with respect to a church. Seven churches in Asia had sent to them seven letters, one to the angel of each church; and you know that several of them were very, very much corrupted, and they stood in danger. Christ said to them, "Repent, or else I will come quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." And are we in no danger? Is there no danger with respect to us? What child of God, what member of a church, would say No? Now, if we are left to error, to receive it, to hold it, if we err seriously here, what a solemn thing it will be for us! "O but we are in no danger," one may say. You do not know how much you are in danger at the moment you say that. You in no danger, we in no danger, with such hearts as we have!-just simply full of all heresies against Almighty God, full of all corruptions, and we in no danger? The Lord grant we may not think that; for we are in serious danger as we are fallen sinners. And if we feel it, if we have any realization of the peril of a church, how that, though no living child of God can be lost, and no purchase of Christ's blood can ever sink into hell, yet a church, as a church, may lose its church state according to those letters, it will rightly exercise us, and cause us to cry out as a church, as individuals do, when under the teaching of the Spirit, "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." Then may we regard this prayer as expressing what the psalmist desired; namely, to have the truth in its power, in its simplicity, in its glory, with him, in his very heart. Also our desire, that it may be in us, as the word is by Paul, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart." It is a great blessing to have it there.

I would speak a little, as enabled, of the word of truth as follows. The word of truth is a quickening word. The word does quicken, and the psalmist prays, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken Thou me according to Thy word." It is not regeneration that is here intended, but a reviving, the movings of the blessed Spirit in and by the holy Scriptures, applied, opened, explained, and made what Christ says, spirit and life. We need this. There is no more tendency in a stone of its own weight to fall and cleave to the ground, than there is a tendency in us to fall and cleave to the dust. We just naturally fall away from God and His things. The weight of sin in us is such that at every moment, if we are not held up by the Holy Ghost in the truth, we fall away from the truth and from God. If you are not conscious of it, it is a sad thing for you. He who knows his natural tendency to sin is favoured. He who feels that he is naturally disposed to fall away from Almighty God and the holy and blessed gospel of Jesus Christ, is a blessed person, because, realizing that weakness, that tendency, that strong corruption, his cry will be, "Lord, quicken me. If I am begotten again as a kind of firstfruits by Thy word, quicken me

continually by Thy word; for I cleave to the dust." And this quickening we may speak of in several respects.

1. With respect to faith; faith in the Lord Jesus, faith in the atonement, faith in the Throne of grace. This faith, quickened by the eternal Spirit, ever moves Godward. It is an uplifting grace. It is a grace that can never live comfortably away from its Author and its End. It is a grace that will purify your hearts, that will gather you up to Shiloh; that has a quick ear to listen to what the Shepherd says; a keen eye to discover the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only hope of His people; an eye that reaches heaven, and loves to see Him, the Lord of life and glory, seated at the right hand of God. But how can this faith keep moving? The world could as soon hold itself up without the word of Christ, as our faith, if we have true faith, could keep itself moving and standing and acting without the word of God brought to it by the Holy Ghost. So we need the Lord to keep the word of truth in our hearts, that faith may be quickened from time to time. Without this blessed word we sink. Faith has many enemies. You could pack your gardens with artificial flowers, and I venture to say you would have no trouble from fly or any enemy. No living fly will set on an artificial thing. But if you have a living flower in your garden, that flower has a living enemy. And if God has given faith to any of us, that faith has an enemy, unbelief; and the devil and the world and corrupted reason and every sort of thing that flesh loves, faith will find opposing it. If, then, faith has such enemies, how can it live and overcome them? You cannot live without bread, and faith cannot hold on without nourishment. We must be nourished, if we are to be kept alive in our souls, and moving in our faith. So may the Lord give us a word that will quicken our faith, and keep it fixed on Himself. The word does it. Yes. Some can say they have found that a chiding word has been a strengthening of their faith. A passing glimpse of the Lord has been a strengthening of their faith. A promise, an invitation dropped upon the heart by the Spirit, has moved faith. Whatever the Lord is pleased to speak, to say, to a sinner, or whatever touch He gives him of grace and mercy, will be a strength to faith. And surely we need it. There is a solemn scripture in the Revelation: "Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die;" and God only knows how near to that word "ready to die" some of us may be. May He, then, not take away the word of truth utterly out of our mouth. The word of truth, I say, will be a real strength and support to faith.

And we need the clean, strengthening word of God in our mouth and in our heart, to move us in prayer, that we may pray without ceasing; that we may walk according to that scripture, "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). It is a great thing to be praying people. Says Christ, "Let me hear thy voice" (Song 2:14). We need Him to give us a voice that is, want, real necessity, and the feeling through faith that He only can supply the want. It is a blessing indeed to have this voice given; for, speaking of the soul's want, He says, "Open thy mouth wide," or, "Open out your requests; bring your cases, your troubles, difficulties, oppositions, weaknesses, fears, corruptions, devils, temptations, providential trials,-bring them to Me." That is, "Open thy mouth, let Me hear thy voice." It is a great thing for the Lord to keep a word alive in you, that being quickened thereby, you may be alive and lively in prayer.

"Prayer was appointed to convey
The blessings God designs to give;

Long as they live should Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live."

Depend on it, my friends, if we are lively, prayer will be lively. We shall want the blessing of God, the presence of God, the liberty of the gospel, a knowledge of Christ's Person, glimpses of Him, touches of His power, sensations of His love; and for these things, all of them covenant blessings, He says, "I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them" (Eze. 36:37). Our leanness will often bespeak prayerlessness, and prayerlessness will lead one to conformity to some wrong things. Slackness in soul will be followed by conformity to some evil, some worldliness, some indulgence of the flesh, some idleness of hands in the ways of God.

"And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." We need the word of God also to quicken us in respect of love, love to Jesus Christ and His, love to Him is His ways, especially love to the glory of God in Christ. For when a soul is rightly led, it is led to seek the glory of God in Christ. All the glory of man is made as the flower of grass; and the glory of God in Christ is that abiding glory of the new covenant, of which Paul speaks, the ministration of life, of glory, of righteousness; by which ministration Christ is brought near, made precious, made the Chiefest among ten thousand, and the altogether Lovely, the God of providence, the God of grace, the God of justification, and the God of peace, the Way to the Father, the Way to the Trinity, the Way to the love and mercy of God. And if we are rightly led into this, then we love the glory of God. Yes, when you have lost your own glory, then you will want the glory of God. Men lose their own glory from time to time; the longer a Christian lives, the more he will lose his own glory; the more he will believe that "all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of grass;" and then the more he will believe this, that the glory of Christ is the only glory to possess and boast of. "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord," and of Him (Ps. 34:2). So we need the word of truth here, for the word of truth is the gospel, and the gospel is the revelation of the glory of Christ. And the glory of Christ is revealed and given to black sinners, hell-deserving sinners, poor, guilty wretches, people whose only natural tendency is in the wrong direction, away from God, downward, and downward, and downward. It does not take a moment to say that, but O the pain of learning it. What have I gone through, to learn a little of this! The light of God, the instruction of the Spirit, will bring you to see your own glory to be shame; and then, when the glory of Christ the Redeemer, the Surety, the High Priest, the Intercessor, the Way to God, the Giver of life, the good, the only good, of the soul, is discovered, then I say you will love that glory. "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth." It may be on a person's lips without any love for the glory of God in it; but if the Spirit is pleased to teach us, and put the word of the gospel into our hearts, then our mouths will say, "Lord, bring this glory, reveal this glory in me, let me know it, let me possess it."

And "take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth" as a sanctifying word. The prayer of the Lord Jesus was this: "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth." Mingling is displeasing to God. Whenever Israel mingled with the nations round about, God was angry, and punished them. And although, as I said, no living soul will ever sink into hell, yet a living soul may sink a great deal into the world, and be in it for a long time; and when God will bring that soul out of it, there will be some trouble. It is a great thing for God to sanctify a person, to set a person apart by the truth, apart from the world in two ways. First, from the world in himself. We need not go outside of self to find the world. The world is set in the hearts of the sons of men,

and their hearts are fully set in them to do evil. You could go through the world without being hurt, if you had no world in yourself. It is that which is within you that makes that which is without so dangerous, dangerous to your conscience and to your affections. Now when it pleases God to send a reproof from some part of the Word, it is a very sanctifying thing. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise." When it pleases the Holy Ghost to speak a word of direction, that is a sanctifying word; for it draws him out of himself, and brings him in his nakedness, in his necessities, in his weakness, to the footstool of mercy. And so the word sanctifies the soul unto God. It is not something in the man making him more holy and less sinful; but it is the word of God separating him from himself. And then, secondly, there will follow, of a gracious necessity, a sanctifying of the person from the external world. The associations of it may be very attractive to some in certain ways. You may have certain friendships which seem very harmless, but if you are brought to examine the effect of them on your spirit, you will find they are very harmful; and then, as the Lord is pleased to teach you, you will want to be cut off from them. Not always to be cut off naturally, but spiritually to be cut away from them, and say, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united" (Gen. 49:6). You cannot keep the world, and have the Lord of life and glory with you; He will never allow it. If you will walk with the world in certain things and friendships, then you will walk without Him. And when the day comes for Him to say, "Now you shall be for Me, and not for another," you will be made sick by the smiting word of the living God, and probably in some outward things too. And you will find then how solemn a thing it is, and how difficult, to be separated. When men are in business, they must deal with the world, they cannot help it; that is not condemned. Not to have to do with it, you must leave it, as Paul says. Some of God's people have been kept spiritually minded in their avocations. How lively have their souls been made in their businesses! That is a different thing altogether from a person's voluntarily going after this and after that. Mingling with the world displeases Him who has chosen a person to be a vessel of mercy. And when God will fill that vessel, the emptying will be very bitter. If any of you are in this snare and case, I warn you that you will find the emptying to be very bitter. It may break your heart, it may break your health, it may break a good deal; but the end will be good. "Sanctify them through Thy truth." "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. 6:17). "What communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?" What fellowship can there be between a living soul and a dead, God-hating world?

And then, "Take not the word of truth" from me as it is a girdle. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning" (Lu. 12:35). Never, never can the loose, flowing garments of our old nature, our corrupt hearts, be anything but a hindrance. And when enemies and the devils and troubles come, and many, many things militate against the moving of a soul Godward, then, then to have the word of truth preserved in you, to gird up the loins, and gather and bind up your soul unto God, is a very great mercy. "Stand therefore," says Paul, "having your loins girt about with truth;" and then he says, "Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men" (Eph. 6:14; 1 Cor. 16:13). What a great thing it is to stand fast in the ways of God! No man can do it, unless it please God to give to him the girdle of truth. The doctrines of the gospel, the grace of the Lord Jesus, the promises of the gospel, the blessings of the everlasting covenant, as they are revealed and opened and made over to the soul by the eternal Spirit, and received by faith, these are to the soul what a girdle is to the body, a binding, a strengthening. My brethren, we shall never stand fast in any conflict, never stand fast in the ways of truth, except as, and in so far as, the girdle of divine

truth, the covenant blessings of God in Christ, the blood of the everlasting covenant, and the righteousness of Christ are brought home to us, and made a strengthening to us. And how near we may feel at times to a destitution of the truth, fainting, giving up, yielding to fear and unbelief! How these things mark and mar and impoverish us, some of us know; how much we all, who belong to the Lord, need to have the girdle of truth about our loins. Nothing will do but divine truth, the everlasting gospel. Everything will fail you but that which God gives and preserves in you. Any truth you take on trust, any doctrine you receive without the Holy Spirit, will fail you. The doctrine will not fail of itself, but you will lack it when you most need it. How many people will fail in the days of trial that are coming to the world and to the church, God only knows. I could never tell you how I fear apostatizing. O the fears I have had of coming short! When the test comes, whatever it may be, it will be very solemn; and then an empty profession will fly away. And then, if you stick to the world as long as to that day, if you belong to God, your friendships will fly, and you will be left naked and shamed. But if the truth comes, and binds your soul, and holds you up, then, however fearful a creature, nervous and weak as you may feel, the truth will keep you. Hart says,

"Bind thy golden girdle round thee,
Truth to keep thee firm and tight;
Never shall the foe confound thee
While the truth maintains thy fight."

Nothing else will, depend upon it.

"Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth" as it is a light. The word of God is a light to the feet and a lamp to the path of the people of God. It is a great thing for the truth to show you which way to go, what way to walk in, how to follow Jesus Christ, how to cleave to Him, and not to nourish and retain things which conscience tells you are displeasing to Him; it is a great thing. Does the word shine on your path? It may show you many a wrong step that you have taken. Does it shine into your hearts? It will show you there many a wrong feeling and passion and evil that you have had, and which you have thought perhaps not so very much wrong. And does the word come as a light to show you the Person of Christ, the work of Christ, the cross of Christ, the blessed Way He is to the Father, the Foundation He is to a sinking soul, the Rock of Ages smitten to supply the soul with living water, the Bread He is, coming from heaven, to nourish faith? It is a great thing for the light of God thus to instruct a poor sinner. You will never see these things rightly unless the word shines. You may see them in the letter; but that will not nourish your soul. But when there is that mysterious, that unspeakable enshining, that will do the turn. I say it is inexpressible, but it is understood. It is so different from anything else. Head knowledge, that makes you think well of yourself, makes you a vain thing, a very proud person. But the enshining, that light that mysteriously steals in upon your spirit, a surprising light it is, gathers your eyes, and takes them away from yourself and your weakness, and all the things that trouble you, and takes them to the King of kings and Lord of lords, to the Intercessor and the Saviour and the Friend of sinners, it is that that is safe, it is that that helps, it is that that strengthens and instructs; it is that that is the Unction that teacheth of all things, and "is truth, and is no lie."

"Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth" as it is a sword, the sword of the Spirit. By this you may fight your way through hosts of devils. Did you ever find it so? Was it ever once in your experience, that you had the word of God so in your mouth and in your heart that you could say to everything and everybody and every trouble and every devil that opposed you, "Hinder me not: I want God and Christ and the Spirit and salvation and justification and sanctification and heaven; and I will fight my way." If we have it not, then we shall prove an easy prey to some lust, to some devil, to some failing, set for our feet.

"Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth" as it is a word that expresses the covenant of grace; that expresses that blessed compact made in the Trinity and by the Trinity, to bring wretches to heaven. If you ever see by the Spirit that great sheet that was let down to Peter, who heard that heavenly voice sounding in his ear, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" ah, if you, a creeping thing, find yourself in that sheet; that is to say, in the covenant that was then represented, in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, in the fractious work of the eternal Spirit calling Gentiles, and making them one with Jesus Christ; what a sight you get, what a blessing you get! What had God cleansed? Creeping things and fowls of the heaven. Yes, He called them clean. To Peter they appeared unclean, but said the word, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." And the word is, "They shall be My people, and I will be their God, Jew and Gentile, I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people; and they shall not teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Me from the least of them unto the greatest of them; for I will forgive their sins and remember their iniquities no more" (Heb. 8:10,11). That is the covenant, my friends, and God has said it. A little of this in your heart and mouth will make heaven; and when you with your mouth confess, and with your heart believe, that Jesus died and rose again, and is the Head of this covenant, then salvation is yours, and yours in experience.

And lastly, "Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth" as it is a word of promise, a word of glory. It was a great and glorious word that the Lord Jesus kindly spoke to His disciples, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." O the glory of it! This is the prospect. No earthly heir can have any prospect compared with this. An heir to a throne, to an empire, is only an heir to something that will vanish away one day. But to be an heir of God, a joint heir with Christ, and have a promise that God will take you to Himself, and you shall share in His blessed kingdom; this is a substance that God lets down into the heart of a sinner, and he is sure of it. It is in his mouth and in his heart.

Do you feel in danger? are you afraid of losing the word, of missing it, as Paul says, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God" (Heb. 12:15); lest professing it, he should not possess it? Then this prayer will suit you, it will suit you as an individual; and if we as a people realize our weakness and our enemies, and the devils that are within us and without us, it will be a suitable prayer to us: "Take not the word of truth away from us." If the Lord should walk among us, what would He see? May He grant there may be no prevailing heresy, no prevailing evil to provoke Him to threaten to remove the candlestick. I can but say, as I have said before, we are in a solemn time; and the Lord's absence is very, very visible to some people, and the lack of power is mournfully felt and acknowledged by some. What He will do with us as a nation,

what will become of the churches that profess the truth, I do not pretend to say; but I do, speaking in a general way, believe that solemn times are upon us, and that the churches will know it. "All the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts" (Rev. 2:23). The whole world shall know it, for the center of the world is the church. There will begin the judgments of God. May, then, this be our prayer, may this be our petition, poor people we are, we need it; ministers need it, greatly need it. They may be supposed to have some knowledge of truth, but it will only be dry and sapless and useless, if they only speak out of naked knowledge. Hearers need it; they may think they can discern the truth, but they may be blind all the while. So we need the Holy Spirit greatly, to do for us that for which the psalmist here prays, and for which he prays in another place in different words, "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." Let the gospel continue, let it be in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance in our hearts and in our midst. Amen.