

THE PRAYERS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Introduction

In his book, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, D. A. Carson wrote, *I doubt if there is any Christian who has not found it difficult to pray. In itself this is neither surprising nor depressing: it is not surprising, because we are still pilgrims with many lessons to learn; it is not depressing, because struggling with such matters is part of the way we learn.*

What is both surprising and depressing is the sheer prayerlessness that characterizes so much of the Western church. It is surprising, because it is out of step with the Bible that portrays what Christian living should be; it is depressing, because it frequently coexists with abounding Christian activity that somehow seems hollow, frivolous, and superficial. Scarcely less disturbing is the enthusiastic praying in some circles that overflows with emotional release but is utterly uncontrolled by the Spirit.

I wish I could say I always avoid these pitfalls. The truth is that I am part of what I condemn. But if we are to make headway in reforming our personal and corporate praying then we shall have to begin by listening afresh to Scripture and seeking God's help in understanding how to apply Scripture to our lives, our homes, and our churches.

Carson's words resonate so well with the sentiments of my own heart, and I'm sure yours as well. We hate hollow, frivolous, flat prayers, and we especially hate the fact that we pray them (e.g. prayers around the dinner table or at bedtime)! We have heard prayers that were theologically precise but passionless, or the reverse: filled with passion but poor theology. We get invigorated when we get a taste of true praying, like when we are with more mature Christians who have walked with God a number of years.

If we are invigorated by hearing them pray, how much more invigorated would we be if we could pray with those who walked and talked with the Lord Jesus - the apostles? Remember, they are the ones who heard Jesus pray and said, "Lord, teach us to pray!" And He did! Many of the apostles prayers are recorded in the N.T. Few things to note:

- Many sermons preached, books written on *The Lord's Prayer*, but not apostles'! (I have two. At the time the earlier was written, author unaware of any other book!)
- Survey of NT reveals startling fact: **Book of Acts**, which supplies us with most info about the apostles, records not a single prayer of theirs in 28 chapters!
 - More historical than devotional
 - Emphasis is on what the Holy Spirit did through them rather than in them.
 - Thus, their public deeds are more prominent than their private practices.
 - Yet clearly they were men of prayer - **6:4; cf. 9:40; 10:9; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8** - all these references indicate that they *did* pray, but they don't tell us what they prayed. We see the substance of their prayers in their epistles.

The Apostle Paul

- Eight times as many prayers in his epistles as in all of theirs. It is true that Paul wrote twice as many epistles as all the other apostles put together, but ...
- Preeminently it's because Paul was a man of prayer. The first thing said of Paul after his conversion: "Behold, he prays..." (Acts 9:11). This is what God took note of and made known to Ananias in a vision.
- This set the tone for the rest of Paul's life and ministry. He would be marked as a man of prayer. If we would be men/women of prayer, lots we can learn from Paul!

For the next few months - perhaps from now till summer - we will explore the prayers of Paul as recorded in his epistles. We will undergo an expository study of these passages beginning next week. But for tonight, I want to point out key features of Paul's prayers.

POWERPOINT (Acronym)

P - Priority of Prayer

For pastors/elders: Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 2:1; 3:14-15; cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5. Where did Paul get the power? Prayer! Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 4:12 - "Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

For all believers: 1 Tim. 2:8 - "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." Cf. Phil. 4:6; et. al.

Corrie ten Boom: "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?" What did she mean by that? Prayer should never be our last resort, but our first response!

R - Relationship in Prayer

"Our Father which art in heaven..." - While there is an appropriate measure of variety in Paul's prayers, you'll find that the most frequent manner in which God is addressed is as **"Father"**:

- "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3)
- "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3)
- "the Father of glory" (Eph. 1:17)
- "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:14)

Hudson Taylor: I am taking my children with me, and I notice that it is not difficult for me to remember that the little ones need breakfast in the morning, dinner at midday, and something before they go to bed at night. Indeed I *could* not forget it. And I find it *impossible* to suppose that our heavenly Father is less tender or mindful than I... I do not believe that our heavenly Father will ever forget His children. I am as very poor father, but it is not my habit to forget my children. God is a very, very good Father. It is not His habit to forget His children.

A - Appreciation in Prayer

Rom. 1:8: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all...." This clause captures spirit of thanksgiving & praise that characterizes all of Paul's prayers. **"First"** - thanksgiving should occupy prominent place in our prayers (Phil. 4:4, 6) Paul's prayers express not only praise to God but appreciation for fellow believers.

Y - Yearnings in Prayer

Focus clearly is not so much on *temporal* needs as *spiritual* needs. Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus serves as a good example: Eph. 1:17-19; 3:16-19 - Yet how many of our prayers emphasize the temporal over the spiritual. [Look at typical prayer list](#), and you'll find they're very disproportionate!

E - Expansiveness of Prayer

Paul's general custom was to pray for the whole household of faith (**Eph. 3:18** - "that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width..."). - True of evangelistic praying, too. - **1 Tim. 2:1**: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men."

Not wrong to pray for ourselves any more than it is to pray for temporal needs. Not a matter of *right and wrong* but a matter of emphasis. - We see this inclusive spirit in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us [not just me] this day our daily bread ... Forgive us ... Lead us ... Deliver us...."

R - Regularity of Prayer

Prayer was to Paul what air is to us - what water is to fish. It was the atmosphere in which he lived. "**Pray without ceasing**" (1 Thes. 5:17). What he **mandated** of other believers he **modeled** in his own life. - *Not a drudgery but a delight*.

In one region of Africa, the first converts to Christianity were very diligent about praying. In fact, the believers each had their own special place outside the village where they went to pray in solitude. The villagers reached these special places for prayer by using their own private footpaths extending from their own individual huts. Whenever a believer saw grass overgrowing one of these paths due to non-use, he/she would go to fellow Christian and say with great concern, "**Grass grows on your path!**"

Has grass grown up over your path? Join us for this series, and it won't be long till you'll be walking it once again with great frequency.