
XV. Paul and His Requests for Prayer - Part I

I desire above all things to learn to pray. We want to sound the reveille for the Christian warriors. We desire to find truth of the lack of real praying. What is it? Why is it? Why so little time spent in prayer when Christ, who had command of His time, chose to spend great part of it in INTERCESSION? "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." We believe the answer to be the desire is in the heart, but the will is undisciplined, the motive is present, but the affections have not melted under hours of heavenly meditation; the intellect is keen, yet not for hours of tireless research. The intellect and the affections have never been linked together by the sealing of the blessed Holy Ghost to do or die for God's glory in the secret places, with doors shut, lusts crucified.--Rev. Homer W. Hodge.

The many requests of Paul for prayer for himself, made to those to whom he ministered, put prayer to the front in Paul's estimate of its possibilities. Paul prayed much himself, and tried hard to arouse Christians to the imperative importance of the work of prayer. He so deeply felt the need of prayer that he was given to the habit of personal praying. Realizing this for himself, he pressed this invaluable duty upon others. Intercessory prayer, or prayer for others, occupied a high place in his estimate of prayer. It is no surprise, therefore, when we find him throwing himself upon the prayers of the churches to whom he wrote.

By all their devotion to Jesus Christ, by all their interest in the advance of God's kingdom on earth, by all the ardor of their personal attachment to Jesus, he charges them to pray much, to pray unceasingly, to pray at all times, to pray in all things, and to make praying a business of praying. And then realizing his own dependence upon prayer for his arduous duties, his sore trials and his heavy responsibilities, he urges those to whom he wrote to pray especially for him.

The chief of the Apostles needed prayer. He needed the prayers of others, for this he practically admitted in asking for their prayers. His call to the apostleship did not lift him above this need. He realized and acknowledged his dependence on prayer. He craved and prized the prayers of all good people. He was not ashamed to solicit prayers for himself nor to urge the brethren everywhere to pray for him.

In writing to the Hebrews, he bases his request for prayer on two reasons, his honesty and his anxiety to visit them. If he were insincere, he could lay no claim to their prayers. Praying for him, it would be a powerful agent in facilitating his visit to them. They would touch the secret place of the wind and the waves, and arrange all secondary agencies and make them minister to this end. Praying puts God in haste to do for us the things which we wish at His hands.

Paul's frequent request of his brethren was that they would "pray for him." We are to judge of the value of a thing by the frequency of asking for it, and by the special and urgent plea made for it. If that be true, then with Paul the prayers of the saints were among his greatest assets. By the urgency, iteration and reiteration of the request, "Pray for me," Paul showed conclusively the great value he put

upon prayer as a means of grace. Paul had no need so pressing as the need of prayer. There were no values so appreciated and appreciable as the prayers of the faithful.

Paul put the great factor of prayer as the great factor in his work. The most powerful and far-reaching energy in Paul's estimate is prayer. He covets it and hoards it as he seeks the prayers of God's people. The earnestness of his soul goes out in these requests. Hear him in this entreaty for prayer he is writing to the Romans:

"I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers for me."

Prayers by others for Paul were valuable because they helped him. Great helpers are prayers. Nothing gives so much aid to us in our needs as real prayers. They supply needs and deliver from straits. Paul's faith, so he writes to the Corinthians, had been much tried, and he had been much helped and much strengthened by God's deliverance. "Ye also helping by prayer." What marvelous things has God done for His favored saints through the prayers of others! The saints can help the saints more by fervent praying than in any other way.

In the midst of envy and detraction, and in perils by false brethren, he writes thus to the Philippians:

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation though your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

"According to my expectation, and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or death."

Shame was taken away, holy boldness secured, and life and death made glorious by the prayers of the saints at Philippi for Paul.

Paul had many mighty forces in his ministry. His remarkable conversion was a great force, a point of mighty projecting and propelling power, and yet he did not in his ministry secure its results by the force of his epochal conversion. His call to the apostleship was clear, luminous, and all-convincing, but he did not depend on that for the largest results in his ministry.

Paul's course was more clearly marked out and his career rendered more powerfully successful by prayer than by any other force.

Paul urges the Roman Christians to pray for him that he may be delivered from unbelieving men. Prayer is a defense and protection against the malignity and machinations of evil men. It can affect men because God can affect them. Paul had not only unbelieving enemies with whom to contend, but many Christians were prejudiced against him to an extent which rendered it questionable whether they would accept any Christian service at his hands. Especially was this the case at Jerusalem, and so prayer, powerful prayer, must be used to remove the mighty and pernicious force of prejudice, inflamed and deep-seated.

Prayer on their part for him must be used for his safety, and also that a prosperous journey and God's will might bring him speedily and surely to them, in order to bless and refresh mutually the Roman Christians.

These prayer requests of Paul are many-sided and all-comprehensive. How many things does his request to the Roman Church include! The request for their prayers, like the Church to whom it is directed, is cosmopolitan. He beseeches them, entreats them, a term indicating intensity and earnestness, "for the sake of Jesus Christ, to strive with him in their prayers for him." This he desires that he may be delivered from evil and designing men, who might hinder and embarrass him in his mission, then further that his service for the poor saints might be accepted by the saints, and that he might ultimately come unto them with joy that they might be refreshed.

How full of heart earnestness is his request! How tender and loving is his appeal! How touching and high is the motive to the highest and truest form of prayer, "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake!" Also for the love we bear to the Spirit, or for the love which the Spirit bears to us; by the ties of the holy brotherhood. By these lofty and constraining motives does he urge them to pray for him and to "strive with him" in their mutual praying. Paul is in the great prayer struggle, a struggle in which the mightiest issues are involved and imperiled; and he is in the midst of this struggle. He is committed to it because Christ is in it. He needs help, help which comes alone through prayer. So he pleads with his brethren to pray for him and with him.

By prayer enemies are to be swept out of the way. By prayer prejudices are to be driven out of the hearts of good men. His way to Jerusalem would be cleared of difficulties, the success of his mission would be secured, and the will of God and the good of the saints would be accomplished. All these marvelous ends would be secured by marvelous praying. Wonderful and world-wide are the results to be gained by mighty praying. If all apostolic successors had prayed as Paul did, if all Christians in all these ages had been one with apostolical men in the mighty wrestlings of prayer, how marvelous and divine would have been the history of God's Church! How unparalleled would have been its success! The glory of its millennium would have brightened and blessed the world ages ago.

We see in Paul's requests his estimate of the far-reaching power of prayer. Not that prayer has in it any talismanic force, nor that it is a fetish, but that it moves God to do things that it nominates. Prayer has no magic, potent charm in itself, but is only all potent because it gets the Omnipotent God to grant its request. A precedent basis in all prayer as expressed or understood by Paul is that "Ye strive together with me in your prayers for me." It is of the nature of a severe conflict in which Paul's soul is engaged, a wrestle, a hand-to-hand fight. The strain is severe and exhaustive to all the energies of the soul, and the issue is tossed in uncertainty. Paul in this prayer struggle needs reinforcements and divine help in his striving. He is in the midst of the struggle, and will bear the brunt, but he solicits and pleads for the help of others. Their prayers are just now needed, He needs help to offer intense prayers.

Prayer is not inaptly called "wrestling," because it is a most intense struggle. To prayer there are the greatest hindrances and the most inveterate foes. Mighty evil forces surge around the closets of prayer. Enemies strong and strongly entrenched are about the closets where praying is done. No feeble, listless act is this praying done by Paul. In this thing he has "put away childish things." The commonplace and

the tame have been retired. Paul must do this praying mightily or not do it at all. Hell must feel and stagger and under the mightiness of his prayer stroke, or he strikes not at all. The strongest graces and the manliest efforts are requisite here. Strength is demanded in the praying done by Paul. Courage is at a premium in it. Timid touches and faint-hearted desires avail nothing in the mind of Paul which we are considering. Enemies are to be faced and routed and fields are to be won. The most unflagging and invincible bravery and the highest qualities of Christian soldierhood are demanded for prayer. It is a trumpet call to prayer, a chieftain's clarion note, sounded out for earnest, persistent prayer as the great spiritual conflict rages.