



The Doctrine of Prayer

Notable Acts and Epistle Prayers and Their Lessons

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. There is much reference to prayer in the Acts of the Apostles as well as the epistles in the New Testament.
- B. Some of the prayers are recorded and others are referred to with the components of what was included in the prayer.
- C. At the end of this lesson is a list of most (no doubt some were missed due to human error) of these instances of prayer in Acts and the epistles. The larger portion would fall under a “spiritually” minded prayer if we were to categorize them as either spiritual or physical.
- D. Truly, that which is spiritual is what will last and be rewarded in eternity but that which is physical is temporal. It would do us well to pray more for that which pertains to the spiritual man than the physical man.

II. A COMMUNAL PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS

- A. The context of the prayer
 - 1. Peter and John went up into the temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1).
 - 2. As they entered through the temple gate called Beautiful, a lame man asked alms of them (Acts 3:2).
 - 3. Instead of giving him alms, in the name of Jesus, Peter healed the lame man, who immediately leaped up and went into the temple praising God (Acts 3:4-10).
 - 4. All the people in the temple came wondering at Peter and John and so Peter proceeded to preach Jesus unto them (Acts 3:11-26).
 - 5. The preaching of Jesus grieved the priests and Sadducees who laid hands on Peter and John and put them in hold till the next day (Acts 4:1-3).
 - 6. The next day they were questioned (Acts 4:5-7) and then commanded not teach anymore in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18) and were threatened (Acts 4:21).
 - 7. Upon being let go, Peter and John went to their own company and reported all that had just took place (Acts 4:23).



B. The prayer recorded

Ac 4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

C. The lessons from the prayer

1. The right response to opposition for preaching the gospel.

- a. Peter and John had just recounted to everyone how that they were commanded and threatened by the religious leaders to no longer preach in the name of Jesus.
- b. This threatening would extend to anyone who would dare to preach the name of Jesus, impacting the hearts of those hearing this report.
- c. Instead of cowering in fear or taking matters into their own hands, these people brought the matter to the Lord for him to deal with it.
- d. In verse 28, we read how that the people requested the Lord to “behold their threatenings”. They wanted the Lord to get involved in what was happening to them and help them.
- e. Man has a tendency to bristle with pride or cower with fear when opposed and neither response is biblical and correct. The best response to opposition in serving the Lord is praying for the Lord’s intervention in the matter.

2. The communal aspect of the prayer.

- a. Another important consideration from this prayer is the fact that it was communal.
- b. The scripture commands Christians and local churches to be unified speaking the same thing, having the same mind and judgment, and being of one accord (1 Corinthians 1:10 and Philippians 2:2).



- c. When the brethren heard the report from Peter and John, “they lifted up their voice to God with one accord” (Acts 4:24).
 - d. Their hearts and minds were all unified and though it was likely that only one individual was praying out loud, they were all praying together in heart and were able to say amen.
 - e. Prayer is a communication unto the Lord from the heart and when we make that communication out loud with others then we are uniting our hearts with God and those we are praying with.
 - f. Communal prayer helps lead to a unified body of believers.
3. The spiritual focus of the prayer
- a. A third lesson we can glean from this prayer is from the request they made.
 - b. They did not focus their request on the people opposing them by asking the Lord to remove them out of their way.
 - c. No, their request was for themselves to have boldness in the Lord to continue preaching.
 - d. Their focus was spiritual in nature. Clearly, they were intimidated by the threatenings and they desired a spiritual need to be met in order to press forward in service to the Lord.
 - e. They could have taken a more physical approach by focusing on their enemies and asking the Lord to destroy them but instead they were most aware of their spiritual need of boldness.
 - f. While we will have physical needs to pray for, we need to remember that ultimately “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

III. A REQUEST TO STRIVE TOGETHER IN PRAYER

A. The context of the prayer

1. Paul had a great desire to visit this church in Rome (Romans 15:23).
2. He planned to take a journey into Spain and would visit them first but was currently going to go to Jerusalem to give unto them a contribution from the saints at Macedonia and Achai (Romans 15:24-27).
3. When he had performed that task, he would come by them into Spain (Romans 15:28).



B. The prayer recorded

Ro 15:30 Now 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 to God for me;

31 That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which *I have* for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;

32 That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.

33 Now the God of peace *be* with you all. Amen.

C. The lessons from the prayer

1. Paul made his needs known to others so they could pray with him.

- a. Paul had a desire in his heart for something and it was something that he was praying about for himself.
- b. Yet, it was not enough for Paul to keep this prayer request and the burden of his desire to himself.
- c. He made his heart, desire, and needs public to the brethren and beseeched them that they would also join in prayer with him for these things.
- d. Some of us tend to be far too private in our churches, unwilling to make ourselves and our personal business known and certainly do not make the matters of our hearts known for others to be praying for.
- e. This is to our detriment, spiritually as well as to the whole of our church. There is no way to fulfil to the command to love one another as we are supposed to if we will not even make ourselves known.
- f. Is it possible that some of the reason our requested desires of the Lord are not being answered is because we are unwilling to bare our hearts to one another and pray with one another.
- g. Paul had no qualms about making needs known and asking others to be praying for him (see Ephesians 6:19-20, Colossians 4:3-4, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2, Philemon 22, Hebrews 13:18-19).

2. Paul needed them to strive in prayer.

- a. When beseeching the Roman believers to be praying for him, Paul used the term “strive” together with me in your prayers.
- b. This word strive is akin to struggling, wrestling, exerting much energy, laboring much (Judges 11:25, Psalm 35:1, Romans 15:20, Colossians 1:29).
- c. Paul asked them to strive in their prayers to God indicating the manner in which they were to pray.



- d. He needed them to labour and exert much energy in their prayers for him as he also was striving in prayer.
- e. Scriptural prayer for ourselves and others should, at times, be laborious and expend our energies.

IV. A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND MAKING SPIRITUAL REQUESTS

A. The context of the prayer

1. Paul opened this epistle to the saints at Ephesus by declaring many of the spiritual benefits given to those who are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).
2. Those in Christ are “holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4), “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6), redeemed through his blood and have their sins forgiven (Ephesians 1:7), given an inheritance (Ephesians 1:11), and are “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13).
3. Paul detailed all of that to explain why after he heard of their “faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints” (Ephesians 1:15), that he gave thanks and prayed for them.

B. The components of the prayer recorded

Eph 1:16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

19 And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

C. The lessons from the prayer

1. Paul rejoiced and thanked God for working the lives of others.
 - a. It is easy to give God sincere thanks when he helps ourselves to grow spiritually but it is much more difficult to be truly impacted by spiritual growth in others to the point of giving God sincere thanks.
 - b. Paul said that he had simply “heard” of their faith in the Lord Jesus and this caused him to give thanks unto God.
 - c. But this was not a one-time offering of thanks to God for what he did in the hearts of these people at Ephesus. He said that he ceased not to give thanks for them.



- d. As time went on, Paul was still stirred in his heart for salvation of others and their spiritual growth and he continually thanked the Lord for the work he had done in them.
 - e. We need to get to a point spiritually where we rejoice when we hear of or see someone grow spiritually and are then able to sincerely rejoice and thank God.
2. Paul made request of God for these believers' spiritual growth.
 - a. After thanking the Lord for their salvation and love of all the saints, Paul made request of God for them.
 - b. His request was not for the church's financial well-being, health of the body, or any other physical need, although he may have desired those things, but his request was for their greatest need: spiritual growth.
 - c. We get too focused on our physical needs and wants in life and lose sight of what is truly the most important.
 - d. What good is it if we spend all our time in praying making request for our physical man while our spiritual man is suffering need and declining.
 - e. Our greatest needs are not physical but spiritual just like Paul viewed the church at Ephesus.

V. A PRAYER FOR A SPIRITUAL NEED WITH THANKSGIVING WHEN ANSWERED

A. The context of the prayer

1. Paul had sent Timotheus to Thessalonica to establish and comfort them as well to know their faith (1 Thessalonians 3:2 and 3:5).
2. Timotheus had returned to Paul and brought good tidings of their faith and charity which was comforting unto them (1 Thessalonians 3:6-7).

B. The components of the prayer recorded

1. The request made known

1Th 3:10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all *men*, even as we *do* toward you:



13 To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

2. The request answered and praise given

2Th 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

C. The lessons from the prayer

1. Paul fervently sought the Lord for others.

- a. It was stated that they prayed “night and day” and “exceedingly” (1 Thessalonians 3:10).
- b. The spiritual condition and growth of other Christians was so important to them that one or two quick little prayers were not enough. They loved these brethren so much that they went to the Lord night and day and exceedingly much and because they so desired them to grow spiritually.
- c. Paul’s love is clearly exemplified by his fervency in prayer for them. The question is, do we have such care of the brethren that we would pray night and day and exceedingly for the spiritual growth of others.

2. Paul gave credit and thanks to God for answering his prayer.

- a. By the time that Paul wrote his second epistle to the Thessalonians, they had increased in faith and their charity toward one another abounded.
- b. This was exactly what Paul prayed fervently for the Lord to do for them. The Lord was faithful and answered his prayer.
- c. We must always give the Lord thanks and praise for his working in our lives.

3. Paul rejoiced over the spiritual growth of others.

- a. It is easiest for us to truly rejoice over the things that the Lord does in our own lives or our families lives but it is less common for us to rejoice as easily over God’s working in other’s lives.
- b. It is important to recognize that Paul said “We are bound to thank God **always** for you” (2 Thessalonians 1:3), because this means that Paul would continue thanking the Lord for having helped their faith and charity to grow. So, even if in the future the Thessalonians lose their faith and charity, Paul will still thank God for the work he had done in them previously. We should never allow future failures to cause us to give thanks for past successes in others.