

## Praying with Paul: A Model of Praying for One Another (part 1: Motivation)

Do you pray for one another? And when you do, what does this look like? How do you pray for the church, particularly those sitting in this room? My experience with praying for one another through the years is most filled with experiences at home groups where we pretty much just pray for physical needs. I think you will find this is true. And even in our times of prayer here on Sunday mornings, we often do the same thing. But, when we examine the prayers of Paul we see something almost completely different. Of the 28 general prayers of Paul, ONLY three times does Paul remotely get close to praying for “physical” needs. Once he prays that God would give him safety as goes to see the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:9-13). On another occasion he prays that he will be delivered from wicked and evil men (2 Thess. 3:2-5; See also Rom. 15:30-33). That’s it! He does pray for himself that God would heal him from his infirmity. He also performs miracles of healing. But, as far as I can tell, we don’t see the emphasis on the normal prayers for sickness with Paul. So, why do we pray so differently, especially if we desire to pray according to the will of God. Well, maybe we’ve never been taught, never seen Paul’s prayers modeled. Well, today, I hope to change this with us as I preach two sermons on the prayers of Paul. Today we will focus on Paul’s motivation for prayer. And then, after a sermon on the Lord’s Supper, I will preach another sermon on the content of Paul’s prayers. So . . .

Why do we pray? The obvious reason is because prayer is our way of speaking and hearing from God, the creator of the universe. Now, the world also prays, in a sense. And this is usually when they are in big trouble. But, as Christians, one of the fruits and proof of being a child of God is that we pray to our Father; and He answers. In John 15 Jesus says “**If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**” And when Jesus teaches his disciples and us how to pray, he says, “*When you pray*” (Matt. 6:7) So, prayer for the Christian is like breathing; it is who we are and what we do! There is no such thing as a non-praying Christian! What two-year-old child ignores his parents? It is impossible!

Beyond the obvious, what can we learn from Paul as to why we pray? What are his motivations behind his prayers? I have two this morning: 1) Praise for Salvation in Christ; and 2) Sovereignty of God.

1. We pray from A Heart of Praise for Salvation in Christ. Turn with me to Eph. 1. In vv. 15-23 we find one of Paul’s prayers for the Ephesians. And he says, “**For this reason . . .**” What is the reason? The reason is found in vv. 3-14. As far as I know, this is the longest sentence in our Greek NT. It is as if Paul cannot stop praising God for his grace in Christ Jesus to save him. Listen to his words: “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for the adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight, 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things**

in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

And then in v. 15 he says, “**For this reason . . . I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.**” Brothers and sisters, this is why we pray! Our prayers flow from a heart of praise for what God has done in Christ to save us.

If you are not a Christian, you will not have this kind of motivation to pray. There is nothing you can do to generate such a desire in your heart. Why? Because you can't give away what you don't have! Prayer is like a natural spring. It just comes out. Prayer is like a never-ending fountain, it just keeps overflowing. As Jesus says, “**Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**” Prayer is not something we can conjure up in our hearts. It comes from the hidden power of God displayed in a heart of praise. Now, if you are like me you may be distracted, or you may be lazy, because it takes time to pray. But, if you are a Christian, you desire to pray because of what God has done for you in Christ.

2) We Pray Because God is Sovereign. What is sovereignty? Sovereignty means that God does what He wants. He does what He desires. He controls all things. And though mysterious, even our responsibility comes under the authority and sovereign will of God. And because of this we pray! There are those who reason that if God is control of all things there is no need to pray. But, the opposite is true. We see this in vv. 3-14. Paul prays because God is sovereign. In v. 4 God is the one who chooses us. In v. 5 he predestines us for adoption to himself. And also in v. 5, this is according to the “**purpose of his will.**” And in v. 6, this is to the “**praise of his grace.**” In v. 9, He makes known to us the “**mystery of his will, according to his purpose.**” In v. 10, in Christ, God is uniting “**all things in heaven and things on earth.**” Again in v. 11, we are “**predestined according to the purpose of him who works ALL things according to the counsel of his will . . .**” So, what does this mean for us.

In his book, *Praying with Paul*, D.A. Carson gives three explanations which I will share today:

1) Because God is sovereign, Paul offers thanksgiving for God's intervening, sovereign grace in the lives of his readers. As Paul sees the faith and the love of the Ephesians, he knows this is because of God's sovereign, powerful, work in their lives. Look at v. 15: “**For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease give thanks for you.**” In other words, Paul does not stop thanking God and praying for them . . . BECAUSE it is God alone who sovereignly and graciously continues his good work in their lives. As one of your elders here at Grace, nothing prompts us to pray prayers of thanksgiving more than when we see your growth as a Christian. And we do this BECAUSE GOD is the one who is working in you. When you become more godly in your marital relationship after long periods of struggling, I/WE rejoice with prayer for the sovereign work of God in your lives. Children, when we see you go to high-school amidst all the temptations and

trials and pressures and you live in godliness, I/WE rejoice with prayer to God of God's work in your life. When someone gets saved, we do the same. So, in application, notice the growth in godliness in your brothers and sisters at Grace, particularly in your homegroups. And .when you do, pray for them more as you give thanks for God's sovereign work in their lives.

2) Because God is sovereign, Paul offers intercession that God's sovereign, holy purposes in the salvation of his people may be accomplished. Look at vv. 17-19. He prays, **“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.** In other words, he prays that what God has begun in salvation, He will carry this on until it is completed. Example: In the OT Daniel prayed for the end of the exile. Why? Because He knew that God had promised it. In the same way, Paul prays that Christians may grow in their knowledge of God. Why? Because God has declared his intention to expose his people to the glories of his grace, both now and for eternity. I think this is why Christians can pray, “Even so, Come Lord Jesus” because God has promised to do.

In the same way we pray for God to continue his glorious power in the salvation of our brothers and sisters. So, what does this look like as regards to God's sovereignty? Well, God has **“chosen”** us (v. 4), He has ***predestined us to be adopted*** (vv. 4-5). He has **“lavished on us the riches of his grace”** (vv. 7-8). As we read in v. 15: **“For this reason, I keep on praying.”** I will get more into the specifics of these requests in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of this sermon. But, in summary, Paul prays that they will know God more. And when he prays, he knows God will answer because what God begins in his people, he will finish. Have you thought about this when you pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Father, Mothers, do you pray for your spouse like this? Do you pray for your children like this? Do you pray for those in your home groups like this?

3) Because God is sovereign, Paul offers a review of God's most dramatic displays of power in Christ. Look at vv. 19-23: He prays that the Ephesians may know **“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”**

This truth is really an extension of what I've just said. Paul knows God is sovereign. He knows God is the one who must do the work. And this work is GREAT! But, of all God's great power, Paul emphasizes the resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and rule of Christ. In other words, of all the powerful things God has done in this world, none compare to what He has done in Christ. And because of this, we pray for the same power in God's people.

When you think of God's power, what do you think about? I think about creation. Out of nothing, God creates the world by his words. This is power! And everything in creation, God has designed. There are an infinite number of examples. Carson says, **"I think of God calculating the mathematics of quarks, with half-lives in billionths of a second. I think of God designing each star and upholding the universe by his powerful word. I think of the pleasure he take in the woodpecker, with its specially designed tail feathers that enable it to peck with such force. I marvel at a God who creates emus and cheetahs and the duck-billed platypus."** There are so many things in this universe that display the power of God. Yet, when Paul prays for the power of God to work in his people, he doesn't mention these things. He describes the resurrection as the "firstfruits" of the mighty resurrection that will mock the death of death and inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth.

He describes God's power in the exaltation of Christ. There are so many levels of authority in this world, but none compare to the authority given to Christ at the right hand of God. Then, Paul describes the power exercised by Christ over everything—for the church. This means ALL God's sovereignty is mediated through Christ and all this sovereign power is for the good of the church. When we think about the great work of God in Christ, OH, what gratitude must come to our hearts and our minds! And this kind of understanding is what must motivate our prayers for God's people! Brothers and sisters, the greater our understanding of God is, the greater our motivation for prayer.

This means that my/your understanding of the greatness of God in the work of Christ lies beneath everything you do. This is why Paul prays the way he does. He is motivated because he knows what God has done for him . . . in Christ (vv. 3-14). And because he knows God is sovereign, He prays for the most glorious working of power among the church.

Are these the things that motivate you and me in our prayers. Does the sovereignty of God motivate you to prayer? Do you desire God to work in others as he has worked in your life? I must confess, most of my prayers are out of duty, and often without such motivations, at least not very deeply. But, I do want to pray more effectively. I do want to pray according to the will of God. I think if we were to study the prayers of Paul (and others in the Bible), particularly their motives, I think we will grow in our understanding of God. And, our motive for prayer will become more in line with biblical prayer. I think if we begin to pray more like Paul many great things will begin to happen. We will love God more. We will love people more. Our understanding of the Gospel will grow. We will be more bold in our witness. Our families will be more godly. Our church will grow in health. Etc. At the end of the day, we must grow in our motives for prayer if we will then change the content of our prayers (part 2 coming).

FYI – Going forward, I will consider what I have preached today and put this into practice in my own quiet times, in my times of prayer with the elders, in my hg, and in our monthly prayer meetings. And, as I put this together with the content of Paul's prayers, I believe God will do great things among us!