

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S REQUEST FOR PRAYER

Ephesians 6:19-20

Intro: In approaching these last three verses which completed Paul's message to the church at Ephesus in this epistle, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "The ultimate test of the Christian life is the amount of time we give to prayer." I believe that the Apostle Paul would have agreed with him. Christians are people who pray. And I am speaking about real Christians and true prayer. In our Sunday School lesson this morning we learned that not everyone who claims to be a Christian. In bygone days a lot of people thought that if you were an American, you were a Christian. Many Americans are Christians, but it is not being an American that makes you a Christian. Many people think that if you are a member of some church, any church, that that makes you a Christian. A true Christian will want to be a part of a church where the Word of God is taught, but there are many church members who give no evidence that they have been born of God. A Christian is a person who is trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her Savior, who consequently loves to learn about God and Christ and all of the great teachings that are in the Bible. A Christian is a person who is motivated in life with a strong desire to live a life that is pleasing to God, and he has learned that that kind of a life is described in the Bible. But a true Christian soon learns that he cannot please God in his own strength, and that is usually what motivates him to pray. The best book that has ever been written on prayer is the Bible. So if we want to learn how to pray, read the Bible. Read the prayers of men and women in the Bible who walked with God and who knew how to pray. Prayer is a Christian's way of having fellowship with God, and fellowship with God should not be just now and then, but it ought to be the way we live.

Paul is a tremendous example of one who lived a life of prayer. We have many of his prayers in the NT, and they will teach us a lot about how we should approach God, and what we should pray for. Last Sunday we considered together the eighteenth verse of chapter 6. Look at it with me for just a moment again. You will notice that it is not a complete sentence in itself, but it was a continuation of what Paul had written about our armor as Christians, the armor of God because it is given to us by God. Verse 18 indicates how we are to wear this armor. This is what Paul said:

Praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all

saints.

We are to be continually praying, with all kinds of prayer, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and then watching with all supplication for all saints. That is a big order, isn't it? But it is possible to do with the help of the Holy Spirit, or Paul would not have told us that this is what we are supposed to do. And Paul is saying here that if we are not continuously praying, our armor is not going to give us the help that we need in our conflict with the Devil and all of his satanic forces.

This verse teaches us that we are to pray for ourselves. You don't need a pastor or a priest to do your praying for you. In another wonderful verse on prayer we read this,

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

But secondly, Ephesians 6:18 teaches that we are to pray for each other. In the latter part of that verse Paul wrote, "And watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Do you know who the saints are? "Saints" are our fellow-Christians. It is really more Biblical for us to speak of each other as saints than it is to call ourselves Christians. In fact, this is the ninth time in Ephesians that Paul has used the word saints. See **1: 1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3;** and then here in **6:18**. We are saints because God has set us apart from the people of the world to be holy. We are holy ones, not because we are sinless, but because of what we are in God's sight, sanctified, growing in holiness, and destined to be perfectly holy some day when we are with the Lord.

But for now saints need to be prayed for. Saints can sin, and so we need to be praying for each other so that we all will "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10). We need to be "on watch" for each other. That is what soldiers do. They look out for themselves, and they look out for their fellow-soldiers. And we are to persevere in this by praying for each other even when we are not aware of any special need. There ought to be a lot of prayer going on when we meet together as we are this morning. After you have greeted someone, offer a prayer to the Lord for him, or her, and hope that the saint you have just met is praying for you. The atmosphere should be saturated with prayer. As you are sitting, waiting for the service to start, pray for those who are sitting around you. When you read your Tableau, pray for those that you find mentioned there. Pray for the people you notice are not at church this morning. Saints are the primary targets of the Devil. That is one big

reason why we need to be praying for each other. When we pray like this, we are doing what the Lord wants us to do.

But this morning as we come to verse 19, we come to a statement which probably should surprise us if we are really thinking about that we are reading.

Paul had just written about prayer for all of the saints, and as he continued, he added, “And for me . . .” We think of the Apostle Paul as one who prayed for others. He prayed for whole churches. His life was a life of praying for the people of God, the saints of God, all over the Roman Empire. He was writing to the saints in Ephesus, encouraging them to pray for themselves, and for each other. But then he adds, “And for me.” What a call this is for prayer! If the Apostle Paul needed and wanted the people of God to pray for him, then we should know that there is not a single person among the saints of God in any generation, but what he or she is in need of having others pray for them.

What does this tell us about the Apostle Paul? It tells us a lot of things, but let me mention just a few.

First and foremost, it speaks of his humility. Paul had been a saint for many years when he wrote to the Ephesian church, but he expressed as he made this request that he was just as needy as any other child of God. The mark of a true man of God is not that he is beyond the need that others should pray for him, but, if anything, he is more aware of his need to have others praying for him the older he gets. And he did not hesitate to ask the Lord’s people to pray for him. He honored them by praying for them, but he felt in his heart that it was a special honor for him if they prayed for them.

I have on my desk the picture of a couple that some of you may have on a desk or table in your home. Below the picture are printed the words, “Thanks for Praying,” followed by their names, “Jerry and Jane Bridges.” Several times in the past years I have gotten a call from Jerry just to ask me to pray for him about some phase of his ministry. He probably calls others for the same reason, and this is surely one major reason for the Lord’s blessing upon his ministry, not that I am praying for him, which I do, but that he calls upon others to pray for him.

Secondly, for the Apostle Paul or Jerry and Jane Bridges to ask for prayer, shows how very important prayer is. I hope you remember that I said last

Sunday, and I quoted others who have said, that it won't work to go to warfare against the Devil even with the armor of God on, if we aren't praying, and if others are not praying for us. The greatest thing that we can do for ourselves as well as for others, is to pray. I am afraid that in the church today prayer does not have the place in our lives, or in the church, that it has had in the lives of the Lord's people in days gone by.

But this emphasis on prayer is not something that Paul came to later in his ministry. It was evident that prayer was a mighty force in his life and ministry right from the beginning. In what we think was the first of Paul's epistles, 1 Thessalonians, as he was finishing his writing, he wrote, and we find his words in 1 Thessalonians 5:25, "Brethren, pray for us." And just a little before this he had told them, "Pray without ceasing."

In 2 Thessalonians, again toward the close, Paul repeated the words he had given them in his first epistle. This is what he said:

- 1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:
- 2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

Paul commended the church at Corinth in his second epistle to them with these words: "Ye also helping together by prayer for us . . ."

When he wrote to the church at Rome, even though he had never been with them, he said this in Romans 15:30-33:

- 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.

To the church at Philippi Paul wrote about how the things that had happened to him had resulted in the spread of the Gospel. And then he added these words in Philippians 1:18-20:

- 18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and

will rejoice.

19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,
20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

To Philemon who lived in Colosse, and was a dear friend of the Apostle Paul, Paul wrote these words: “But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust through your prayers I shall be given unto you” (v. 22).

Paul’s comment on prayer in Colossians was very similar to his words in Ephesians. This is what he wrote to the church at Colosse:

2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;
3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:
4 That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak (Col. 4:2-4).

So it is very apparent that Paul not only spent a great deal of time in prayer, praying for churches and individuals he knew in many places, but he depended greatly on their prayers for him.

But in all of these verses which I have read to you, what was the main burden upon his heart, which he sought to lay upon the hearts of the saints in the many places to which he wrote. Was it his health? No. Was it the material needs that he had? No. Was it that he might be released from prison (because that is where he wrote to the Ephesians, as he did to the Philippians, and as he did to the Colossians and Philemon? No. It would not have been wrong for him to have mentioned any of these needs. We can come to the Lord about any and all needs that we have. But this servant of the Lord, confined in Rome, probably with both health and financial needs, was asking prayer for the ministry. And most amazingly of all he was asking prayer for what he had done probably hundreds of times. Let me read verses 19 and 20 again so it will be fresh in our minds. **(Read Eph. 6:19-20.)**

Paul was not a novice. He had preached before kings. He had faced the opposition of the Jewish leaders who sought more than once to kill him. He had seen lives transformed in many places through the preaching of

the Gospel. But he wrote to the Ephesian church with the same kind of an attitude that he undoubtedly had when he first began to preach the Gospel. His audience was primarily made up of Roman soldiers to whom he was chained routinely for twenty-four hours a day. But he was asking the church at Ephesus to pray about the situation in far off Rome, that the Lord would give him lit. *word* (λόγος), “utterance” is a good translation, to speak the truth of salvation in a manner that was becoming to the Gospel. The Apostle Paul in simple faith felt his dependence upon God to exercise boldness in presenting the Gospel. As one writer has said (quoted by Geoffrey Wilson, p. 137), “His prayer was not for success, nor for deliverance from danger or from suffering, but for boldness in proclaiming the Gospel that was entrusted to him.” His request for prayer showed how dependent he was upon the Lord to be faithful and true in the presentation of the Gospel. It was just as risky to preach the Gospel in Paul’s day to pagan worshipers of false gods, as it is today to declare that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. Paul did not want any fear, or uncertainty, to be noticeable in his voice. He wanted to be strong and confident in declaring even to armed soldiers that Jesus Christ is the only way to God.

Paul never lost sight of the fact that our job is to proclaim the Gospel in all of its truth, and with boldness. How the message would be used, was, and still is, in the hands of the Lord. There would be much more witnessing today if we had the same dependence upon the Lord which characterized the Apostle Paul, very experienced, but never self-confident.

Concl: Years ago I heard Dr. Harry Ironside speaking to a group of ministerial students as well as other students who were not preparing for the ministry. His text was Acts 14:1 where it is recorded about Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey did this:

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

Dr. Ironside took this text to show that if Paul and Barnabas spoke so that a great multitude believed, it would have been possible to have spoken so that no one would have believed. And he went on to show how important it is for us to present the Gospel, not trusting in our ability to speak, but to serve the Lord in the ability that He gives us. This must be true in every occasion that is given to us. And this was the request that Paul had placed before the Ephesian believers. To this the Apostle Peter heartily agreed as he wrote in 1 Peter 4:11:

11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

If Paul felt the need for prayer when it came to preaching the Gospel, how much more should we today serve the Lord with the greatest humility and in complete dependence upon the Lord. May that be our prayer.