

The Prayers of the Apostle Paul  
Acts 9:1-20

Sermon #1  
May 14, 1995

## PAUL, A MAN OF PRAYER

L. Dwight Custis

I am starting a new series today, a series on *the Prayers of the Apostle Paul* which we find in his epistles. Anyone who has read Paul's epistles cannot help but notice the many times that he referred to prayer in the letters that he wrote. There is no doubt that he lived what we could call *a life of prayer*. Prayer had a major part in his life as a Christian from the time that he first came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as His Savior. And we can be very thankful that the Spirit of God led him to include many of the prayers which he prayed during the very fruitful ministry which he had.

I know of only one book written on the prayers of Paul. It was written by Arthur Pink a good many years ago. He published a magazine and wrote many articles on different Biblical subjects. Eventually those messages were combined into books, and his articles on prayer were combined in a book called, *Gleanings from Paul, Studies in the Prayers of the Apostle*. There may be other books dealing with this subject of Paul's prayers that I do not know about. If you know of any, I would be glad to hear from you.

There are, of course, hundreds of commentaries on the epistles of Paul in the New Testament where we can find excellent expositions of his prayers. I think it would be hard to find any part of Scripture that could surpass the prayers of Paul in the instruction that they give to us as far as our own prayers are concerned. This is undoubtedly one reason that the Holy Spirit, Who guided Paul in writing his epistles, would have led him to record so many of his prayers.

In Mr. Pink's book, which I referred to a moment ago, he took up the prayers of Paul in the order in which they are found in the New Testament. That is, he began with Romans, and then went to 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and on to the rest of Paul's epistles. As you know, the Pauline Epistles are grouped together in our Bibles.

However, there is a different way in which we can consider the prayers of the Apostle Paul. I am going to take up his prayers in their chronological order, that is, the order in which they were written. We cannot be positively sure as to the date when each one of his epistles was written, but many Biblical scholars have done some very reliable work on the chronological order in which the books of the Bible were written. I will follow the generally accepted dates because we do have a fairly good idea as to what they are. As we begin this series, I would like to give you the chronological order that I will be following in this series.

I do not often ask you to turn to the table of contents in your Bibles, but I am going to ask you to do that

today. Please look at the table of contents of the books of the New Testament. You will see that after you get past the fifth book, the Book of Acts, you come to Romans, and then to 1 and 2 Corinthians. Let your eye run down the list until you come to Philemon. We are sure that all of those epistles, from Romans to Philemon were written by the Apostle Paul. There are thirteen of them. Some Biblical scholars also include the Book of Hebrews which follows the Book of Philemon. I personally am inclined to believe that the Apostle Paul wrote the Book of Hebrews, so I intend to include it in this series on the prayers of the Apostle Paul.

Thinking of the chronological order, there is general agreement that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written first. (If you have some way of keeping a list of the epistles as I am going to give them to you now, it will help you to know how I will be progressing through Paul's epistles.) After 1 and 2 Thessalonians, we will go to Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. Next we will take up the prayers which Paul wrote in Rome during his first imprisonment. This includes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and also Philemon. Philemon was a man who lived in Colosse. At the time Paul wrote the Colossian epistle, he also wrote to Philemon. The last three epistles which Paul wrote are 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. The order in which they were written was probably 1 Timothy, Titus, and then 2 Timothy. I won't include Hebrews in the chronological order, but will consider the prayers in that epistle after the prayers in 2 Timothy. Now let me mention the epistles again in the order I will be considering them:

- 1) 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
- 2) Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians.
- 3) Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.
- 4) 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus.
- 5) Hebrews.

This morning I want to give an introductory message on *Paul himself as a man of prayer*. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will begin looking at Paul's prayers in 1 Thessalonians. I would like for you to be reading that epistle and noting in particular, as you read, the passages where Paul's prayers are recorded.

Today as we consider Paul as a man of prayer, I will ask you to turn, if you will, to the book of Acts, chapter 9.

The book of Acts gives us the early history of the church, and Acts 9 gives us the account of the time when the Apostle Paul was brought to a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. I want to take the time to read this, but I am going to be concentrating on that little statement at the end of verse 11, "Behold, he prayeth."

Remember, the Apostle Paul was originally known as Saul of Tarsus (the city from which he came). He had an intense hatred for Jesus Christ and for everybody who knew and loved the Lord Jesus. He seems to have spent most of his time in those days persecuting the church, and yet after he was saved he never ceased to marvel how God had extended special mercy to him. I have expressed the opinion, and this is no more than my opinion, that if the Lord's people prayed for Saul of Tarsus, it was simply a prayer that the Lord would protect the people of the church from the vicious things that Saul was doing in those days. But I doubt seriously if anybody really believed that a man like Saul of Tarsus could ever be saved. I doubt if there were those who were praying that he might be saved. When I get to heaven I might find out that I am wrong on that, but it seems that this was possibly the reason why the Lord Jesus intervened personally and changed

Saul's life on the road to Damascus.

With that in mind, let me read the first twenty verses of Acts 9.

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound [in chains] unto Jerusalem.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from haven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire of the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

The words that I want us to think about this morning are the words,

### I. "BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH" (Acts 9:11).

These are the words which were spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to Ananias about Saul of Tarsus. They

were words obviously designed to quiet the fears which Ananias had about going to find Saul. But they were also to convince Ananias that Saul of Tarsus was not the same man when he got to Damascus that he had been when he left Jerusalem. A marvelous change had taken place in Saul's heart. He had been saved.

It seems rather strange, at least to me, that the Lord Jesus would say, "Behold, he prayeth," as He spoke to Ananias. But of all the things that Saul had been doing during those three days that he had been blind, this was the main thing that he had been doing. He had been praying. "Behold" is a word, whether we find it in the Old Testament or the New Testament, which was used to call attention to something that was very important. Saul, as a Jewish rabbi, had been very ambitious. He was seeking to climb the ladder of Judaism, so to speak, to the top. There are many who believe that if Paul had not been saved, he could possibly have become the greatest rabbi in Jewish history. He had been a very devout person, and was therefore acquainted with prayers. On many occasions as a Pharisee he had said prayers. However, the Lord Jesus was pointing out to Ananias that Paul was really praying, not just saying prayers, not just repeating things that he had been told to pray. He was really praying. And for the Lord Jesus to say this about Saul of Tarsus meant that it was really true. He was not just saying prayers, but he was really praying.

J. A. Alexander, in his commentary on Acts, said that this word *behold* "introduces something strange and unexpected" (p. 363). Ananias would never have expected that Saul of Tarsus was actually praying, talking to God. But for the Lord to say that he was praying, meant, as I have said, that he was really praying, and not just saying prayers as so many people do in a ritualistic way, reading a prayer that somebody else has written. And there is no evidence that anyone told him that this was what he ought to be doing.

Saul was a fairly young man at the time, probably in his early thirties, and had apparently enjoyed good health. Suddenly he lost his sight. You can imagine what this would mean to any of us. So it seems that for the bulk of those three days he had been praying, crying out to God, and perhaps it was that he might have his sight restored. We can see this, for example, in verse 12 where the Lord said to Ananias that Paul "hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight." Then, we see that when Ananias found Saul, he was in the house of a man named Judas. As far as I know, this Judas is never mentioned any place else in the New Testament. Ananias said to Saul, "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight" (v. 17). This seems to tell us that this probably was the burden of Saul's prayer.

When the Lord said to Ananias, "Behold, he prayeth," he meant that he was praying at that very moment when the Lord was speaking to Ananias. The suggestion here is that he had spent these three days in prayer. Thus we have an example of importunate prayer at the very beginning of Paul's experience as a Christian. It was the same Spirit Who motivated Jacob to pray at Peniel, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26), which led Paul to pray as he did at the house of Judas. Saul of Tarsus was receiving his first lesson in that which was to occupy so much of his time from those days on to the end of his life. We can see from his epistles what a major part prayer had throughout the rest of his days.

As far as we can tell, nobody taught him how to pray. He was crying out to God from his heart because he realized, as he had never realized before, that God was the only One Who could help him. Saul, who seems to have been very self-confident and determined and ambitious in the things that he was doing, was left for three days to learn how helpless he was, and how utterly dependent he was upon God. I am using God in

distinction to the Lord because we do not know just what Saul understood at this point. However, there is no doubt but that during those three days he realized his dependence upon God more than he had ever realized it before.

This is one of the first evidences that we can expect to see in the life of any person when he has really been saved. "Behold, he prayeth." Paul was to learn a great deal more about prayer, and hopefully we are going to learn some of the things that the Lord had taught him. But this is where it all got started. That is the reason I am starting here in this series. Unknown to Saul at this time, God had sent forth the Spirit of His Son into the heart of Saul of Tarsus, and we are told that he was praying. Saul did not know the full extent of what had happened to him. He was like anybody else in their first days of salvation. He was standing on the threshold of a lot of wonderful things to be learned, and was experiencing the first effects of God's work of salvation in his heart. That is why he was praying.

As the chapter starts out, it seems like Luke, in writing this chapter, was trying to picture to us a man who previously could not wait to get to Damascus. He had the authority that he wanted. He fully intended to bring many Christians back to Jerusalem to put them in prison. But the Lord did something here that Saul did not ask for. Ananias said, "He hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). As far as we know, Paul had not asked to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He probably did not even know that such was a possibility.

Immediately after he received his sight, and immediately after he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was baptized. This meant that he was identifying himself, not only with the crucified, buried, risen Savior, but he was identifying himself with the people who loved Jesus Christ. That is not why he came to Damascus, but that was the Lord's purpose in his visit.

This is not all that he did. Verse 20 tells us this: "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (vv. 19-20). And we read in verse 22 that "Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." So Paul not only became a man who prayed, but he also became a preacher. And his preaching from the very first was Christ-centered.

Here was a man who had devoted his life in his unregenerate state to the study of the Old Testament Scriptures. Before he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, his eyes had not been opened to recognize that there was any connection between those Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, on the one hand, and Jesus of Nazareth, on the other hand. But at this time when he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God brought these together, and he saw in an unmistakable way that the Messiah Who is spoken of in the Old Testament was Jesus of Nazareth, the very One Whom the prophets had said would come. You see, God had been pouring all of this truth into Paul's heart even before he was saved, truth which he did not fully understand, but when his eyes were opened, all of that Old Testament knowledge suddenly came to life. He saw and understood things that he had never understood before. Therefore, right in Damascus, we find Saul doing the two things that he was to spend his life doing: praying and preaching. And in his preaching he proclaimed from the Word of God that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.

It is really an amazing thing that God had done in his heart. So don't forget those words, "Behold, he prayeth." May those words also be descriptive of the way we live, too.

We will see in our study of the prayers of Paul that there were three things that became characteristic of Paul's life. I am speaking now in particular about what we learn from his prayers. I want to call your attention to what those three things were.

## **II. THREE WAYS IN WHICH PRAYER AFFECTED THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.**

### **A. Paul as an example of what it means to be a man of prayer.**

One is that what started in Paul's life that day never, never came to an end. While Paul was a great Bible teacher, a great theologian, used by the Spirit of God to give us at least thirteen, and possibly fourteen, books of the Bible, yet he never got away from the lesson that he was learning in those first hours after the Lord Jesus Christ came into his life. We find as we examine his epistles and his prayers that he not only was praying at the beginning of his life as a Christian, but he continued to pray. As long as he lived he recognized how dependent he was upon the Lord, and expressed that dependence in prayer. And as such he became an example which all of us would do well to follow. Prayer is not just a necessity for preachers, but it is essential for all of the people of God. And the Apostle Paul is a good example for us all to follow.

Two men in Scripture who are remembered for their prayers, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New Testament, are King David of Israel, and the Apostle Paul. Both of these men were very, very busy men—David, the king of Israel, with all of the responsibilities that he had, and the Apostle Paul, traveling as he did from place to place, preaching the Gospel, and establishing churches. They were, I would say, busier than any of us who are here today. So we are not talking about men who had nothing else to do but pray, but men who, in spite of their “busy-ness,” gave the highest priority to the time that they spent with the Lord in prayer. Many times this was when they were alone, but they also knew how to redeem time for prayer by taking advantage of spare moments during the day, or, like Nehemiah, they knew how to lift their hearts to God in prayer as they faced the many decisions which they had to make every day. I have mentioned to you more than once that Spurgeon used to meet his people on the street, and would say to them, “Do I meet you praying?” You can sit at your desk and pray, if you work in an office. Or mothers, as you go about your work at home, you can be praying. Whatever our responsibilities might be, we can all find time to pray. You young people who are in school, how wonderful it is that wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, you can be in immediate and constant fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, talking to Him, pouring out your hearts to Him. This is what the Apostle Paul sought for all believers. He wanted them to have the joy that he had found in personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **B. Paul was one who taught believers to pray.**

Paul not only is an example to us by the place he gave to prayer in his life, but in his epistles we can see that he felt responsible to teach the believers of that day how to pray. We still profit today from his prayers recorded in Scripture. If you want to know how to pray from the Scriptures, there are a lot of ways. The Chinese, as I have mentioned to you before, used to say, “If you want to know how to pray, read the Psalms.” That is an excellent bit of advice. We are going to find, too, that if you want to know how to pray, read Paul's prayers. Study them carefully. See what he prayed for. See the burden that was upon his heart. As we walk with him, so to speak, throughout the pages of his epistles, it is bound to have a transforming effect upon our praying.

For example, he wrote to the Thessalonian believers, “Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:17-18). In Ephesians 6:18 we read:

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

And another good example of Paul’s teaching on prayer is to be seen in Phil. 4:6-7:

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So he was not only very faithful himself in prayer, but he encouraged other believers to pray, and gave good instruction as to how they were to pray. We have seen that Paul prayed constantly; these passages show that he wanted all believers to do the same thing. He wanted them to enter into the same kind of fellowship which he was enjoying with the Lord.

But there is still one more way in which we see the importance that the Apostle Paul attached to prayer. It is in:

### **C. The times he asked others to pray for him.**

One of the most touching things that I find about the epistles of Paul is that he was continually asking others to pray for him. You might expect that a man like he was, with the spiritual strength that he had, would certainly be praying for others. But it may be hard for us to understand why he would feel the need to have others pray for him. However, Paul learned early in his experience as a Christian that the longer we walk with the Lord, the more conscious we become of our own needs. Instead of outgrowing the need to have others pray for us, the more conscious we become of our need to have others praying for us. We see this very clearly in his epistles. One good example is found in Romans 15:30-32:

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.

It is not unusual to find in Paul’s letters a request similar to that which is in 1 Thessalonians 5:25, "Brethren, pray for us." The “us” shows that he was not just requesting prayer for himself, but for those who were working with him.

We all need others to pray for us. While I do not profess to know all that the Lord had in mind when He took Peter and James and John into the Garden of Gethsemane, asking them to watch and pray, but there is the possibility that even He, as He approached the Cross, asked His disciples to pray for Him – and to watch with Him.

And when we think of the need that we have for others to pray for us, let us not forget that the Lord Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father where “he ever liveth to make intercession” for us (Heb. 7:25). See also Romans 8:34. Along the same line we are told this in Romans 8:26-27:

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for

as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

I think that we can say from this that the more prayer becomes a part of the life of any Christian, the more he will seek to follow the example of the Apostle Paul who lived a life of prayer. And it will also follow that increasingly he is going to sense his own need for the prayers of other believers. One of the most wonderful things that you can tell anybody is, "I have been praying for you." It does not mean that you think that he or she is in some special need. Maybe he is. But whether he is or not, it will be a blessing to that person to know that you are remembering him, or her, in prayer. In addition, it will bring blessing to you when you pray for others, especially for those who are the Lord's people. It would be hard to find anything that is more pleasing to the Lord. In the case of the Apostle Paul, or anyone else in the Lord's work, to pray or to have prayed for them, is to be a participant in their ministries.

You see, Paul believed what I have told you many times: Blessing goes two ways. He wanted to be a blessing to them, but he felt a need in his own heart for them to be a blessing to him. And, for their part, these goals could best be accomplished, he believed, if they would faithfully uphold him and his work in prayer.

As we look at these statements in Paul's epistles, we see how firmly he believed that if he were to see the blessing of God so that the lost would be saved and believers established in the faith, then he needed their faithful intercession. It was absolutely necessary that the people of God get under the load of the work and pour out their hearts faithfully in prayer unto God for His servants and for His blessing upon the work which the Lord had called them to do.

### **Conclusion**

Now how do these things that we have been learning about the Apostle Paul apply to our lives? It is one thing for us to see that Paul was a man of prayer, but it is another thing to make sure that, by the grace of God, this is true of us also. But, you know, I would be remiss this morning if I could close this message without saying that I trust that all of you will be faithful in remembering me in prayer, and that I, in return, will be just as faithful in seeking God's blessing upon each one of you.

I doubt if the Apostle Paul would have liked the title which I have given to my message for today: "Paul, A Man of Prayer." It might sound too boastful to him. And he, too, would probably tell us that he wished that he had prayed even more than he did. We certainly can see from Paul's epistles that the time that he gave to prayer did not make him set himself above the rest of the people of God. Instead, it humbled him to know that God would hear his prayers and bless him as He did. May his example be used by the Lord to make us realize how great our needs are so that we will humble ourselves and more fervently seek to follow in the steps of the Apostle Paul.