

Series on The Prayers of the Apostle Paul
Romans 15:13
Sermon #17
September 24, 1995

CALLING UPON THE GOD OF HOPE L. Dwight Custis

I have said repeatedly one of my purposes, and I trust this is the Lord's purpose too, in dealing with Paul's prayers in his epistles, is to convict us of our need to pray. Next week, the Lord willing, we will be looking at the prayer at the end of chapter 15 in Romans where you will notice that Paul really encourages the people to pray with him, to pray what he has been praying. So that is further evidence that these prayers that are recorded for us in the New Testament are not just to show us how the apostles prayed, but to encourage us to pray in the same way, and to recognize what a great need we have to pray.

This prayer, as you can see, in verse 13 of Romans 15, is set in a section where the Apostle Paul is teaching. In fact, if you were just looking through the Book of Romans looking for Paul's prayers, it would be easy to miss this one because it only occupies one verse and is set here among other verses.

When we suddenly come upon a prayer like this in the Bible, we ought to ask ourselves what prompted Paul at this point to pray such a prayer? The only way that we can answer that question is by turning to the context.

Most of you know that when we speak of the context we mean the verses that lead up to it and the verses that follow from it, because that is what will help us to answer this question.

We want to see, and this is the reason I read the verses that I did, what Paul was talking about before he got to this prayer and what he was talking about after he got to the prayer.

If we look at the verses that precede--and I tried to point this out to you as I read--beginning with verse 9 and going down through verse 12 we see that he quotes from various Old Testament passages. If you have marginal references in your Bible, you will see that the verse in verse 9 where he says, "As it is written," it is written in Psalm 18:49, "For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." Then, in verse 10 he says, "Again he saith (speaking of God, God working, of course, through these Old Testament writers)..." Here he quotes from Deuteronomy 2:43 when he says, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his peoples (the people of Israel)." In verse 11 your margin will tell you that this is the first verse of that short 117th Psalm where it says, "Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him all ye people." Then, in verse 12 we have two quotations from Isaiah 11. One is found in verse 1 and the second part of it is in verse 10 where we read, "There shall be a root of Jesse (which is a prophecy of the Messiah), and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust."

If you look at these verses from Deuteronomy and the Psalms and Isaiah, you will recognize, of

course, and you can see if you look back at Psalm 18, for example, which is the quotation in verse 9, that David wrote that. Then, the quotation from Deuteronomy, of course, is from the writing of Moses. Psalm 117, we do not really know who wrote that Psalm. It could have been David, it could have been somebody else, but one of the writers of the Psalms anyway. Then, of course, the quotation that we have in verse 12 is from Isaiah the prophet.

We see that the Spirit of God led Moses and David and Isaiah and possibly another psalmist to predict the same thing: That is, that it was not just God's plan to save the Jews, save people from Israel, but also to save Gentiles.

We could add to these verses some verses which those of us who are reading our Bibles through will read tomorrow in Galatians chapter 3 where Paul said this: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen (this is one way of speaking of the Gentiles) through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations (that is, all Gentile nations) be blessed (be blessed with salvation)." Paul, as most of you would know, is quoting from the Book of Genesis chapter 12. This promise, of course, was renewed to the patriarchs. Abraham knew that salvation was not just for his descendants, not just for his family, but that the Gentiles were also included in the plan of God to save sinners. Of course, we can be very, very thankful that that is the case.

Jonah, an Old Testament prophet, knew this too, but he did not want to believe it. You remember the story of Jonah how, after experiencing the judgment of God and then being cast upon the mercy of God, because God miraculously spared his life, he went to the wicked Gentile city of Ninevah, preached the Gospel, and saw the whole city turned to the Lord.

When you take the Old Testament, it was never a secret that God intended to save Gentiles, and we have instances in the Old Testament of Gentiles who were saved.

But it was very hard for the Jewish believers in the early church to accept this. They felt that if a Gentile were to be saved, he surely should be required to submit to certain parts of the Law, and the council in Jerusalem that we read about in Acts 15 was to deal with this matter.

Apparently all of this uproar, this discussion that was going on, was very unsettling to Gentile believers.

You can imagine what it would be. Here were Gentiles coming out of heathen religions, putting their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, believing that God had saved them. Then, having the people of God, the Jewish people, whose prophets had given the Word of God to the world, having many of these, outstanding among the Jews, especially would have caused consternation to the Gentiles. You can see how unsettling this would have been for the Gentiles. Are we right in believing the Gospel? Is the Gospel really for us? Are we actually putting our hope in something that is not for us?

We can see from this that one of the reasons Paul wrote to the Roman church, which certainly was predominantly Gentile. There may have been some Jews among them, but there were

obviously more Gentiles than there were Jews. Paul was writing this epistle in which he gives us the fullest account of the Gospel. One of the purposes that he had in this was to encourage Gentile believers to believe that the Gospel was for them, that it was not a false hope, and that God was going to be faithful to His Word. That is the main reason for chapter 9, 10 and 11 where he is dealing with the Gentiles. It was certainly in Paul's mind when he started the Book of Romans, because, you remember, in the sixteenth verse he said, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (or, also to the Gentile)."

Notice that what Paul said in verse 8 and running into verse 9 about the ministry of the Lord Jesus when he said, "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision..." That is, He came to the Jews, He came to His own. He was born a Jew, born in the land of Israel. "...for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy..." Here the Apostle Paul is bringing in the fact that even the Lord Jesus Christ, in His coming, while He came primarily to minister to the people of Israel to confirm the promises of salvation that had been given to Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob. And then, as we see these other writers of the Old Testament picking up this wonderful theme, to indicate that God's purpose in sending His Son was not just to save Jews, but to save Gentiles as well. That is the reason that you have these passages of Scripture. Paul is quoting from Psalms and from Deuteronomy and from the prophecy of Isaiah to show that these men, directed by God in what they were writing, predicted the salvation of the Gentiles. Paul did not want the Gentile believers to be troubled with doubts which might have been raised by the Jewish believers, and also by various Judaizing teachers, so he prayed this prayer: "Now the God of hope fill you (he has to be thinking here especially of the Gentile believers) with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

The believers in the church at Rome needed hope. They not only needed hope, but they needed to abound in hope. That was the burden of Paul's prayer, so I want us to examine this in the time that we have this morning, and I trust that it will be encouragement to every Gentile believer who is here.

First of all, let's think about the word hope. I have mentioned this many times before, but some have not been with us, so let me just review this for all of us.

In Scripture, the word hope has a special meaning, in most instances. Sometimes it is used like we would use it: We say that we hope something is going to happen this afternoon, or hope that something will not happen this afternoon. That is, we are talking about something future, but we do not really have any control over it so we express it as a hope. But in Scripture, hope is a word which looks to the future, but it speaks of something that is absolutely certain, something that is guaranteed. It speaks of the goal of our salvation. It speaks of the fulfillment of God's purpose in salvation. Hope is very important because, if we can be assured of the end, then we can be at peace about the present and about all that lies ahead in the future days of our lives. If I know that the goal of my salvation is guaranteed, if I know that God's purpose in saving me is absolutely certain, then I do not really need to worry about what might happen to change it today or tomorrow or any day in the future because nothing can change it. It is absolutely certain. Hope

is actually a very important word in this epistle. You will find that Paul used it a number of times.

Let's look at these. Let's take these, and if you will turn back to the fourth chapter of the Book of Romans, let me read these passages here.

Romans 4:17 and 18. Again, we have a quotation from the Old Testament: "(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,)" He is speaking of Abraham. "...before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." You remember that God had promised Abraham a son, and through this son all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, because that son that he spoke of ultimately the son was to be the redeemer. But in order for him to have some descendant who was going to be the Redeemer, Who was actually was the Lord Jesus Christ, he had to have a son given to him. So Paul says here in verse 18, after Abraham had been in the land of Israel for twenty five years and still did not have a son, Paul says this: "Who against hope [that is, when it seemed like everything was against the fulfillment of that promise, he] believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." You remember that God fulfilled His promise. Abraham and Sarah had a son, and ultimately, through their descendants, the Lord Jesus Christ came.

Look at Romans 5. Let me read verse 1 with verse 2, because verse 2 is where we have the word hope.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is give unto us" (Romans 5:1-5).

We rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and we know from the Book of Romans that this means that we rejoice in the prospect, in the certain prospect, that we are going to share the glory of God. It is God's purpose in saving us to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul says that "hope maketh not ashamed." That is, it is not going to be disappointed. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is a certain prospect that is going to be fulfilled, in everybody who knows the Lord Jesus Christ. Our certainty is that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts and God's love for His people never vacillates in any way. It always remains the same. It is impossible that a time would come when He would cease to love us.

Look at the eighth chapter of Romans, and let me read verse 20. "For the creation..." The King James says creature, but probably a better translation is: "For the creation was made subject to vanity..." That is, all of creation felt the effect of sin. "...not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Then, I could read these next verses, but let me read verse 24.

"For we are saved by hope..." Paul is not saying, "I hope I am saved." He is saying, "We are

saved with this promise that God's purpose in saving us is going to be fulfilled. "...But hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" That is, we are not yet experiencing the fullness of our salvation, so we hope for it. It is a prospect ahead. "But is we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Romans 8:24-25).

Do you see, the certainty, the encouragement, the blessing that there was for the Gentiles here. That prospect was still future, and it is still future for us this morning. We still have not seen God's work of salvation completed in us, when we are made like the Lord Jesus Christ. But because this is the promise of God it is a certain hope. Therefore, we are waiting for it with patience.

Look at chapter 12 of Romans for just a very brief reference to hope. Romans 12:1. "Rejoicing in hope." Rejoicing in this prospect. Rejoicing in the direction that we are headed. Rejoicing in the fact that God has promised that someday we are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, Romans 15:4.

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

So, you see, the reason that Paul went on from this to quote from the Old Testament Scriptures is because the basis of our hope is what we find in the Word of God.

The hope of our salvation, I have been referring to what it is, was perfectly described by the Apostle John in 1 John 3:1-2. You do not need to turn to this--I think most of you know these references--but let me read them for you again. He begins that chapter by saying, "Behold, WHAT manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons (children) of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." He is talking about the Lord Jesus. He is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. When He appears, then this transformation that started when we received the Lord Jesus Christ is suddenly going to be completed and we will be made like the Lord. John says this: "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

When we realize why God has saved us, and what the prospect is, then we purify ourselves in the sense that we want to avoid those things that are sinful in the sight of God, and we want to do those things that are pleasing to Him. And in the process, God is working in our heart so that day by day, by His grace, we become more like the Lord Jesus. So, our hope, my hope, your hope, if you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, is that God is now making you, transforming you into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Himself, and someday that work is going to be completed. That is the goal of our salvation. Not just to get us to heaven, but to make us like the Lord Jesus. That goal will finally be reached when the Lord Jesus comes to receive us for Himself.

I trust that you see and have a clear understanding of this biblical word hope.

Even though our salvation is certain, not every believer has that assurance. So now we need to ask, How can we be assured of our salvation, not only that we have it, but that we can never lose it? and, How can I know that once I am saved, I am saved forever, I truly belong to the Lord Jesus.

Paul, in writing the Epistle to the church at Rome, said this, as far as those who were receiving the letter. It is important for us to remember because he is not talking to people generally in the world. He addressed himself "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints..." (Romans 1:7) He was addressing himself to those who knew the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and only to those who knew the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Paul had no doubt but that there was a group of true believers in Rome.

If you look now at Romans 15:14, just following the prayer, he says, "I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." This is his way of saying, "I am certain in my own heart that there is a true church in Rome. I am certain in my heart that God has done a work of salvation in many of your hearts. Your Jewish brethren might have caused you to doubt whether you have any reason to believe that you have been saved, but I am convinced that you are saved, and I am writing to encourage you.

With this in mind, How do we get Hope? How do we get the assurance that we need and that we want?

I want to give you four answers to that question in the time that remains.

The first answer is that get our hope from God.

You will notice that Paul in his prayer, and I want now to focus on the prayer, calls God the God of hope. That is, He is the source of our hope. Our hope, if we have it, comes from Him, and, if we do not have it--we do not really have the assurance in our hearts that we need concerning our salvation, we must seek it from Him. That is what he was praying about here. You will notice that Paul did not say, "Now you need to remember the time and the place and the circumstances, the experience that you had when you first trusted in Christ. He does not turn their thoughts to themselves. He does not turn their thoughts to their experience, because, you know, some people have a very transforming experience when they come to know the Lord, and with others it is not that at all. But he does not turn them in that direction, he turns them to God. Let's not consider for the moment how God does this, but just simply the truth that if we are to have hope, it must come from God. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Paul believed that the lives of believers should be God-centered, not man-centered, not experience-centered, but God-centered. Look to Him for you hope because He is the God of hope. To turn anywhere else but to God will only make our doubts increase.

But you say, How do I turn to God?

That is what you should ask, and that leads me to the second point which we have had beautifully illustrated here in this passage this morning, and that is: We turn to the Scriptures. The Scriptures describe salvation. The Scriptures tell us what is necessary. The Scriptures tell us, and Paul had mentioned this to the believers there in Rome, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

I quoted for you a moment ago Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth..." You believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son. You believe that Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice for sinners. You recognize that you are a sinner. You acknowledge your sin before God. You abandon your own works and your own merit that you think you might have, and you put your trust in Him. The promise is that this is salvation.

But, thinking of the problem that these Gentiles were going through, and the doubts that had been raised in their minds by their Jewish brethren, he takes them to the Word of God. Regardless of what people may have been saying, Paul says here that the Spirit of God told David that the Gentiles were going to be saved. The Spirit of God told Moses that the Gentiles were going to be saved. The Spirit of God told Isaiah that the Gentiles were going to be saved. I added to that Abraham, and I added to that Jonah, and I could make other additions, but, you see, the Scriptures prove what salvation is, and the Scriptures tell us that it was God's purpose not only to save Jews, but also to save Gentiles. The Gentiles seem to have been worried about whether or not they had the right to believe that they were saved. So how could this be settled? By taking them to the Word of God, taking them to the Scriptures. This is one way that we turn to God. We turn to His Book. It is by the Word that God gives us the faith to believe as we read His Word. The Old Testament Scriptures make it perfectly clear that God intended from the beginning to save Gentiles as well as Jews, and that settles it for the child of God.

You know, that saying that someone coined long ago, "If God said it, I believe, and that settles it." If God said it, I believe it, and that settles it. That is the way it ought to be.

It is important for every Gentile to understand that when God spoke of the salvation of the Gentiles, He was not speaking of a different kind of salvation from that of the Jews, nor was he talking about a different Saviour. There is only one salvation and there is only one Saviour. It makes no difference whether a person be a Jew or a Gentile. The only way that we can come to God is through Christ, and, if you do not come to Christ, you cannot come to God at all. The Scriptures are that clear.

If you want to know what salvation is, if you want to know how to deal with your sins, if you want to know how God forgives sins, read the Bible. If you do not know what the Bible say, you will be able to judge the rightness or the wrongness of what other people may tell you about salvation. The Apostle John, who was used to give us a very important part of the Word of God, said of his first epistle, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may KNOW that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the

Son of God" (1 John 5:13). The more we read our Bibles, the more we absorb the truth of the Word of God, the greater is going to be the assurance of our hope. That is what Paul was praying about.

So we turn to God and we turn to His Word; but, in the third place, we turn to the Holy Spirit.

Notice that in the prayer here Paul said, "...That ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are brought to the place where we abound in hope. That is just the opposite from doubting our salvation, or questioning whether or not we have a right to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit Who gives us joy and peace in believing what He caused men to write in His Word, because what David wrote in the Psalms the Holy Spirit directed him to write, what Moses wrote in the Books of the Law--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy--the Holy Spirit directed him to write, what Isaiah predicted seven or eight hundred years before the Lord Jesus came, the Holy Spirit directed him to write. These men did not have wisdom apart from the way God was dealing with them, what God's purpose was as far as the Gentiles were concerned. He is the author of all of the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation. He used different writers, but He is the author. The Holy Spirit is also the One Who teaches us the Word. He guides us into the truth. Everything that I have learned, everything that you have learned about the Word of God the Holy Spirit has taught us. He may have taught us through our own reading of the Bible. He may have taught us as I hope He is teaching us this morning as we hear the Word of God explained, or it may be that in reading some good book about the Scriptures the Spirit of God has used the writer to help us to understand the truth. But remember that it is always the Holy Spirit Who is behind, and powerfully behind, the ministry of the Word of God to our hearts. If the Holy Spirit is not using me this morning to help you, I would be spending my time in a better way just to sit down and be quiet. I am utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit to use me. We all need to look to Him, but in these days we are inclined to make so much of Bible study methods. We are in great danger of forgetting the importance of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps our attachment to methods is one reason that we have such a diversity of teaching from Scripture. We know so little of what it means to be taught by the Spirit. If what the Lord has enabled me to say today about the Holy Spirit would make even one of you more concerned about looking to Him for your understanding of the truth, our time together will be well spent. The Holy Spirit is extremely important. It is the Holy Spirit Who works in our hearts. Peace and joy are the fruit of the Spirit. So Paul was giving us some great instruction here, as well as telling us how he was praying: "The God of hope fill you," but He does it through the Holy Spirit, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We come to God, we look into His Word, our dependence is upon the Holy Spirit, but I must mention one other thing as I close. That is prayer.

It is so obvious here, isn't it, that we are in danger of overlooking it. What was Paul doing for the believers in Rome? He was praying for them. Even with the great teaching which he had given them in this epistle, the most complete explanation of salvation that you find anyplace in the Bible, he knew that the Holy Spirit was the only One Who could make them understand what he

was saying, Who could make them believe what he was saying and thus enter into the enjoyment of their salvation and, in order to make certain under the blessing of God that this happened, this was the burden of his prayer. It is like he says, here are all these references that tell us that God's purpose was to save the Gentiles, but he almost digresses here and says, "After I have pointed this out, the God of hope take this and fill you with all joy and peace in believing so you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit." I wonder how many of us prayed before we came today that God by His Spirit would help us to understand what we here and would cause us to believe it that our hearts might be changed as a result. That is what Paul was doing. He was interceding for others. If more Christians were filled with all joy and peace in believing, there would be less casualties among us because there would be more who would know what it is to be abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let me say very emphatically this morning: God's ways do not change. He is the One Who is in charge of His work. He does not need the showmanship and all of the entertainment that you find so often when you go to church these days, and all of the specialized workshops. All we need is the Lord and His Word which points us to Christ and the Holy Spirit to teach us. It is Prayer as a means of our fellowship with God so that together we can learn what it means to walk abounding in hope.

The word abounding is a word which is linked with our word affluent. That is a word that we use often in these days. We speak of people who are affluent. The words mean to have, really, more than enough. Paul was talking about being affluent Christians, not because of the material things that we possess, but because he was concerned that every Christian know how rich he is, how spiritually rich he is, and yet so many who have this wonderful hope, who have truly been saved, are really living like spiritual paupers. They live with doubts and fears. They know little of the joy and peace in believing which Paul spoke about in prayer. We not only need to have this assurance, but we need to abound in the hope that God has given us through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not because we are such exceptional people, nor because we feel that we will always be faithful to the Word of God and always be faithful to the Lord. We know that we have failed Him many times, but we can abound in hope because we have a God of hope, a great God of hope, Who has given us His Word, Who not only saves us, but keeps us. And we are assured in His Word that someday the Lord Jesus Christ is going to come and this wonderful work of salvation will be finished and it will never again be possible for us to do anything that is displeasing to the Lord. We will be like the Lord Jesus for we shall see Him as He is. You see, Christians are not self-made people; Christians are God-made people. Only God can save us. Only God can perfect us. He does it through His Word. He does it through the Lord Jesus Christ. He does it by the Holy Spirit. And, amazingly, He lets us have a part in the blessing that comes to each other where we in simple faith pray a prayer like the Apostle Paul prayed, not a long prayer, but right to the point and needed by every one of us.

I will close by reading it to you for the last time this morning.

"Now the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Shall we pray.

Father,

We pray that You will take Your Word this morning and use it in all of our lives. You know the needs of our hearts. We pray that You will meet our needs through the Lord Jesus Christ as only You are able to do. We commit the ministry of this hour into Your hands for Your blessing. In Jesus' dear Name, Amen.