

## **PRAYING FOR ALL THE SAINTS**

Ephesians 6:18-20

...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (6:18-20)

### **Review:**

#### **AT ALL TIMES**

So the 1<sup>st</sup> century church, it says, devoted themselves to prayer. And my question would be, "Has the 21<sup>st</sup> century church done the same?" And I will be presumptuous enough to suggest that the answer, at least for the American church, is no, we have not. We have not devoted ourselves to prayer, given ourselves to the task of prayer as if our very lives and the lives of others depended upon our prayers.

Be constant in prayer. Romans 12:12

Pray without ceasing...for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:17

#### **ALL PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION**

Paul uses two different words in referring to prayer in this passage:

Prayer (proseuche) – prayer in general; general requests

Supplication/petition (deesis) – specific requests

The implication from this, as well as both the teaching and examples that we find in the whole of scripture, makes it very clear that there are all kinds of prayers and all kinds of postures for prayer. Many examples are given, but none is prescribed or elevated over others. We looked last week at the many different kinds of prayer. There's private prayer and public prayer. We can pray inaudibly, with quiet whispers, or with loud, heart-wrenching cries. Some prayer is deliberate and planned, while other prayers are spontaneous, unprompted, spur-of-the-moment. In scripture you'll find people praying when they're sitting, standing, kneeling, or prostrate before the Lord with their face to the ground. You can even pray when you're swimming – just ask Jonah. You can pray with your hands folded, or your hands raised, with eyes open or eyes closed, with your head bowed or with it lifted toward heaven. There is no place or position or posture more sacred than another when it comes to prayer. In fact, it would seem to be prayer that can take something or someplace and make it sacred. Prayer can make a hospital waiting room a very sacred place. Prayer can make a college dorm room or a school classroom a very sacred place, where God is communing and meeting with one of His children. The heartfelt cry of a man or a woman pleading for God's help from a bar or a brothel can, at that moment, turn it into a very sacred place, where angels gather and attend to the one who is desperate for God.

#### **ALL PERSEVERANCE**

"To that end, keep alert with all perseverance"

Warfare imagery. The whole mentality is so different in peacetime than in wartime. Would you be praying differently today if you were one of the thousands of believers who live in South Korea or China, wondering what Kim Jung Il and the North Koreans were planning on doing? Or what if you were one of the Zande tribes people living in the Congo? The Zandes are the descendants of powerful warriors who were largely unreached by the Gospel until the early 1900s. Today there are hundreds of thousands of Christians among the Zandes. And a terrorist cult calling themselves the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has crossed into the Congo from the Sudan, is kidnapping Zande children and turning them into soldiers or selling them as slaves, raping the young girls and women, torturing the men, burning villages, and killing indiscriminately, even slaughtering entire congregations of believers when they have gathered to worship. If you were a member of the Zandes and had been forced to flee from your farm and were now trying to

just survive while crowded into an isolated town, with a sheet of plastic covering you at night, and in need of food just to live, would you pray differently than you do today?

### **MAKING SUPPLICATION FOR ALL THE SAINTS**

To that end keep alert with *all* perseverance, making supplication for *all* the saints,

So here the exhortation is specifically calling for prayer for the saints, fellow believers, Christians. In other places in scripture, we're told to pray for unbelievers, for kings and all who are in high positions of influence, for the sick, and for others. But here, in a section which has been telling us about our spiritual warfare, he calls upon the Ephesians to pray for fellow soldiers, brothers and sisters who are in the battle. And actually, if you do a study of Paul's prayers and his exhortations concerning prayer, the vast majority of those have to do with praying for fellow believers, even more than praying for yourself. High on your list of prayers – actually it would appear to me that it should be at the top of your list when it comes to praying for others - it ought to be the saints, believers, God's people.

Examples:

Eph. 1

Php. 1:3ff

Col. 1:3ff

*While a leader must be careful about talking about his prayer life lest he appear to be "lengthening his tassels and broadening his phylacteries" (i.e., parading spirituality), there is one aspect I'd like to mention I hoed some of you will join in it.*

*Every Saturday night I pray through a list of pastors – thanking God for them, for their ministry, for their personal friendship. I then intercede that, on this eve of another Lord's Day, the Spirit of Christ will give them a good night's rest and anoint them with wisdom, power, and joy for the coming day. On Sunday morning I go through the list again, interceding as they step to their pulpits, that their proclamation of the whole counsel of God will be simple, clear, tender where it should be gentle, bold where it should be courageous – that it will be straight and true to the minds and hearts of their listeners...I pray that the Lord will bind Satan from attacking pastor and laymen (especially through loveless criticism) and that Christ will touch the congregation to hear, see, understand and obey God's proclaimed truth. I invite you to join me in this Saturday night and Sunday morning discipline of intercession. (Dr. John Alexander, former president of IVCF)*

I had someone come up to me last week and remind me that she prays for me every day – every day! Praying for the saints. Praying for the folks in your life group. Praying for family members who love the Lord. Praying for pastors, missionaries, Bible teachers, church workers. And praying spiritual prayers. It's not wrong to pray for physical things in people's lives, but scripture would teach us that spiritual prayers, prayers for a person's heart and mind and spirit and soul, prayers for the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, prayers for them to abide in Christ, to put away sin, to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, prayers for them to bear much fruit, for them to have a bold witness. That's the way Paul prayed, and that's how he requested for others to pray for him –

making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Where does passionate and persevering prayer come from, where we're praying at all times, with all kinds of prayers and supplications, keeping alert with all perseverance and praying for all the saints?

- It comes from an intensified view of the glory and the majesty of God as you immerse yourself in His Word.
- It comes from a heightened awareness of the war that rages all around us.

- It comes from a clearer understanding of the fact that God has sovereignly chosen to work in answer to our prayers.
- It comes from a clarity of thought concerning how desperately weak we truly are, of how utterly incapable we are of changing anything, and at the same time, from a deepening and ever-abiding conviction that with God all things are possible and that He is able to accomplish all of those things of which we are completely impotent, provided they be according to His will and for His glory.

Here's the reality:

- I can preach *from* my heart, but I can't *change* someone's heart.
- I can talk about being *born again*, but I can't *give new birth*.
- You can *shine the light* to your family and friends and acquaintances, but you *can't make any of them see*.
- I can try and convince someone that if they stay on their present course, they're going to destroy their life or their marriage or their family or their character or their future; I can attempt to do all the convincing in the world until I am proverbially blue in the face, but I can't make them change their course.
- You can *share what you believe* with a non-Christian and give a strong defense for the hope which is yours in Christ, but you can't reach into their mind and their heart and *wipe out their unbelief*.
- You can *live righteously* (and you should), but you can't *convict someone of their unrighteousness*.
- Preachers can preach, teachers can teach, evangelists can evangelize, debaters can debate, arguers can argue, but no one can preach, teach, evangelize, debate or argue someone into the kingdom of heaven. It is God who delivers people, both to heaven and to hell.  
*that you ask for things which are for the glory of God.* (George Mueller)

So whenever I pray for any of these things that I've just mentioned, or others like them I am acknowledging several very important things.

First, that there are things that are important to God and that need prayer, and I need to know what they are. And if I am to know what is important to God, if I am to know those things that are on God's heart, I must be in His Word. My prayers must become Word-saturated prayers, lest I pray ignorantly of God's will.

Second, I am acknowledging that God has chosen and ordained prayer as the primary means by which He accomplishes His will during the present age. God has ordained for you to pray as a vital part of the accomplishment of His will, in your own life and in the lives of others. This is God's chosen method, His game plan, His strategy, so for me to pray for the things that the Holy Spirit instructs and motivates me to pray about is my humbled and amazed acknowledgement that this is God's way, He has called me to participate in it, and I want to be a part of it.

Third, I am fully acknowledging that I do not possess any power at all, in and of myself, to bring about any of those things for which I am praying, that those things are reserved for God to do, that unless He does them they aren't going to happen, and when He does them, He receives the glory. If someone's heart is going to be changed, God is going to have to change it. If someone who is spiritually dead is to be made spiritually alive, God is going to have to make it happen. If someone who is spiritually blind is ever going to see the glory of God in the face of Christ, God is going to have to grant them sight. If someone is going to be translated from a state of unbelief to a state of belief, it must be God who brings it to pass. When I pray for those things, I am acknowledging that these things need to happen and that only God can make them happen, that I can talk, I can argue, I can defend, I can persuade, I can seek to convince, I can build an ironclad case. As Piper says, it is "prayer that calls in for fire power to blast open a way for the Word of God." It is prayer that calls on God for courage and wisdom, and for supplies for the forces and for needed reinforcements.

Prayer shows God, in his sovereign freedom, accomplishing that which he has set out to accomplish, and using the chosen prayers of his chosen people to get the job done. And in so doing, we put all the focus on him for being both good and strong.

In his classic book *Desiring God*, Piper gives a vivid illustration of this:

Suppose you are totally paralyzed and can do nothing for yourself but talk. And suppose a strong and reliable friend promised to live with you and do whatever you needed done. How could you glorify your friend if a stranger came to see you? Would you glorify his generosity and strength by trying to get out of bed and carry him?

No! You would say, "Friend, please come lift me up, and would you put a pillow behind me so I can look at my guest. And would you please put my glasses on me for?" And so your visitor would learn from your requests that you are helpless and that your friend is strong and kind. You glorify your friend by needing him and asking him for help and counting on him...

So how do we glorify God? We pray! We ask God to do for us through Christ what we cannot do for ourselves. Prayer is the open confession that without Christ we can do nothing. (John Piper, *Desiring God*, 132)

It's agreeing with what Jesus said in John 15 –

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

So when I pray for God to do things that will result in fruit – changed hearts, changed lives, changed homes, the success of the gospel as it's preached, the advancement of the gospel in other parts of the world – I am acting as the one who is completely paralyzed, wanting for others to see both the strength and the goodness of the One to whom I bring my needs and my requests.

And while God is being glorified in and through my prayers, I at the same time am coming to realize that my own fullness, my own satisfaction and joy in life comes, not from the things of this world, but from the intimacy and communion and purposefulness and abiding and oneness of mind and heart and spirit that I am increasingly experiencing.

Conclusion: