

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

October 1, 2006

Now that we have studied the Model Prayer as taught by Jesus Christ Himself, we want to move on to some of the Pauline prayers

- We have more prayers from the apostle Paul than any other person in the Scriptures

We will look at 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

- But we need to understand a little of the background of this short epistle

Acts 17 records this fantastic encounter between Paul and the city of Thessalonica

- Turn to Acts 17

- Paul has just come from Philippi where the jailer and his family came to faith in Christ and were baptized

“And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ’” (17:2-3)

- It was Paul's custom to go to the Jews first
- And we see that here in Acts 17
- He proclaimed to the Jews that Christ was the Messiah who had suffered, died, and rose from the dead

What was the result of this preaching?

- Some believed (17:4)
- But some Jews became so upset that they caused the city to be in an uproar (17:5-9)
- So Paul experienced both reception and rejection

Some of the believers in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas to Berea – at night!

- These Christians feared for the lives of Paul and Silas

But the Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul and Silas were in Berea

- So they went down to Berea and chased them all the way down to Athens (17:13-14)

After a short time in Athens, Paul went to Corinth

So within a very short amount of time, Paul went from Thessalonica to Berea to Athens to Corinth

- He didn't spend a lot of time in either place

We believe that Paul wrote the book of 1 Thessalonians from Corinth

- Acts 18:5 tells us, “**But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.**”

Where had Timothy and Silas been?

- They met Paul in Athens for a brief time
- But then Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how these young believers were doing

Let's turn to 1 Thessalonians 3

- Someone read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-8

As you can tell, Paul is very concerned about the spiritual status of these young believers

- Notice especially verse 5, “**For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain**”

Let’s keep in mind that Paul was most likely with these young believers no more than 3 months

- That is a very short amount of time

But then something encouraging happens

- Timothy returns from Thessalonica with some very good news
- We read about that in 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8

Paul hears of their firm faith in the Lord

- They are remaining faithful to what Paul had taught them!

Paul’s next five verses are spoken in a spirit of prayer and praise

- This will be our focus this morning

We will notice two aspects of this prayer

- Prologue to prayer – thanksgiving (3:9-10)
- Petitions of prayer – faith, love, and hope (3:11-13)

In this prayer we will see Paul’s passion for people that drives him to pray for them and their continued spiritual growth

I. Prologue to prayer (3:9-10)

⁹ For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account.

Paul has been separated from these believers for quite some time

- He had proclaimed the Gospel and seen immediate fruit
- But then he was physically removed from those believers

This isn’t a loneliness that Paul is expressing

- He isn’t on a pity party about missing these people for his own purposes
- This isn’t self-fulfillment

Paul expresses “**joy**” for the reality of their faith

- But he can’t seem to find the words that are adequate to express his gratitude

But we notice that this gratitude is not addressed to the Thessalonians

- Rather, it is addressed to God Himself
 - o *Why do you think Paul did this?*

I believe that Paul is allowing the Thessalonians to “peek” inside his prayer life

- He is informing these precious believers that he praises God for them on a regular basis

Once again, this isn’t the “I will appreciate you if you appreciate me” syndrome

- This is Paul’s heartfelt response to what God has done in the lives of these young believers

What an encouragement this must have been for the Thessalonian believers to hear that Paul praises God for them!

- This would be very humbling as well

Of course, the praise goes to God for His work

- But the believers are encouraged that their spiritual growth is being manifested
- Paul has already told them back in chapter 1, “For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.” (1:8)

Also notice that this praise takes place “before our God”

- Paul reveals what he praises God for when he is praying

If you look back at 1 Thessalonians 2:20, hear the heart of Paul toward these believers, “For you are our glory and joy”

- Their spiritual growth was cause for Paul’s glory and joy

How well do you match up with this?

- Do you thank God for the work that He is doing in the lives of others?
- Are you excited about the spiritual growth that you see in others?

Are you telling others what it is that you are praising God for?

- This would be such an encouragement

I can tell you this

- If you are not praising God for the work that He is doing in the lives of others, most likely you are not telling others how thankful you are for them!

We oftentimes want others to thank us for our service

- But we fail to honor those who serve faithfully

¹⁰ as we night and day keep praying most earnestly

Paul’s thanksgiving isn’t just a haphazard, occasional thing

- He says, “as we night and day keep praying most earnestly”

This underscores the frequency and intensity of Paul’s prayers

- Frequency – “night and day”
- Intensity – “most earnestly”

Every single part of this prayer highlights Paul’s passion and excitement for these believers

Are you regularly thanking God for His work in the lives of others?

- If not, why not?

that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

Paul had been snatched away from these believers

- In chapter two, Paul describes himself, “we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children” (2:7)

Imagine the horror of a nursing mother having her newborn snatched away from her

- She could no longer see that baby
- She could no longer give that baby what it needed most

That is ***exactly*** how Paul is feeling at this point

- He was the human instrument through which these believers had come to know Christ
- Now he has been physically removed from their presence

He states that he wants to “complete what is lacking” in their faith

- He knows that as young believers, the Thessalonians needed instruction and discipleship
- Paul was willing to do the work

“For Paul, prayer is not a substitute for Christian service; it is a part of it”¹

- Paul is not trying to excuse himself from serving because he prays
- *Rather, he prays so that he can be involved!*

This word for “complete” comes from the same word for “equip” in Ephesians 4

- Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers have been given to the Church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service” (4:12)

This word has a number of meanings based on context

- It can refer to a mending of a fishing net
- It can refer to the healing of a broken bone

The reason why Paul has such a concern for these believers is because he is imitating the perfect Model – Jesus Christ

- Love, unselfishness, compassion, protection, gratitude, and intercession²

Paul wanted to bring these believers to maturity in Christ

- It is very similar to what Paul stated in Colossians 1:28-29, “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.”²⁹ And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me”

II. Petitions of prayer (3:11-13)

Paul frames his three petitions around the trilogy of faith, love, and hope

- We look back at chapter one to see these repeated again, “We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; ³ constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, ⁴ knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you” (1:2-4)

¹ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 90.

² John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 83.

As Christians, we have these three as a permanent possession from God

- Faith
 - o The spiritual belief and trust in God that allows us to accept God's Word as true
 - o This is a gift from God

- Love
 - o This is a hallmark of the believer
 - o It is by our love that others will know that we belong to Christ
 - o Because Christ has loved us, we can love others

- Hope
 - o This is the eager anticipation of what God will do in the future
 - o Hope is grounded in the faithfulness of God and His Word

A. A perfecting faith (3:11)

¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;

Paul realizes that God has prevented him from returning to this young church

- But that doesn't stop him from praying that God would change this

He has written back in 2:18, "**For we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, more than once – and yet Satan thwarted us**"

- He knows that God has allowed this to take place
- Now he is asking God allow him to go back and be with these spiritual newborns

Paul is pleading with God to allow him to go back to this young church

- He knows that they have need of further spiritual growth

As D.A. Carson writes, "**Here is a Christian so committed to the well-being of other Christians, especially new Christians, that he is simply burning up inside to be with them, to help them, to nurture them, to feed them, to stabilize them, to establish an adequate foundation for them**"³

- Is it any wonder that he prays so passionately that God would provide a way for him to minister to this group of believers?

Paul believed that God could provide a way for him to minister to this young church

- He just didn't know if God would

It wasn't a matter of God's ability or power

- It was whether God would allow this or not

In the second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul confessed, "**We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; ⁴ therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure**" (1:3-4)

³ Carson, 81.

B. A prospering love (3:12)

¹² and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another.

Paul prays that the love of these believers would “**increase**” and “**abound**”

- These are similar terms indicating a love that grows, blossoms, and matures

In 4:9, Paul tells the young church, “**Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another**”

- Love – agape love – is something that every believer has built in to his spiritual motherboard
- It is not an accessory that is optional

Paul is not praying that God will cause these believers to love

- He is praying that their love will “**increase**” and “**abound**”

Christ taught His disciples, “**by this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another**” (John 13:35)

- It would be through this selfless, sacrificial demonstration of love that others would know that they belonged to Him

The apostle John wrote, “**But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes**” (1 John 2:11)

- Also, “**we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him**” (3:14-15)

Throughout the NT, there are “**one another**” passages that help us to see how we should treat fellow believers

- It would be a helpful undertaking to consider these passages as it relates to true, Biblical, agape love

and for all men.

But Paul doesn't pray that these believers would only grow in love for other believers

- He prays that they would “**increase and abound**” in their love “**for all men**”

This includes unbelievers

- Some of which were the human reason why Paul and his team were chased away

Jesus Himself taught His disciples, “**love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you**” (Mt 5:44)

- It could potentially be difficult for some of these young believers to love those who drove Paul, Silas, and Timothy away from them
- But they were to love them nonetheless

So instead of hatred and revenge, this young church was to practice agape love

- Selfless, sacrificial giving toward others who don't deserve such attention and affection

just as we also do for you;

Paul then offers himself and his team as an example of this agape love

- He is saying, in essence, “Love the brotherhood and even unbelievers, just as you saw us loving others”

Remember, Paul, Silas, and Timothy came blazing into town one day without knowing any of these people

- They were unbelievers who heard the Gospel spoken through Paul

As a result of their agape love, some of these Thessalonians had come to faith in Christ

C. A purifying hope (3:13)

¹³ so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father

Not only did Paul pray for their faith and love

- He prayed for their hope

The idea of hope is what gives us motivation to live the Christian life

- It gives us an incentive to obey when it is costly

Paul knew that the future day of accountability was coming for all those who have been born again

- Each will stand before the Lord and give an account for how he/she has lived his/her life

Paul’s desire was that the hearts of these young believers would be “**unblamable in holiness before our God and Father**”

- He didn’t want them to feel ashamed over their actions
- He wanted them to anticipate this time with the Lord

at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

The Lord Jesus Christ will return for His Church

- Paul taught that in chapters four and five of 1 Thessalonians
- He also addressed this subject in 2 Thessalonians

The apostle John tells his audience, “**Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure**” (1 John 3:2-3)

- Having a right perspective of the future hope will promote holiness in our lives

The more that we anticipate the Lord’s return, the more it should change our lives and outlook on life

- Knowing that the Lord will return and require an accounting from us should cause us to pursue a more dedicated, devoted life

Paul has been passionate in his prayer for this young church

- Faithfully, frequently, and fervently interceding for them

The apostle has demonstrated how to treat those who are young and immature in the faith

- We are to pray that discipleship can take place
- We are to pray that young believers can be strengthened
- We are to pray that believers will exhibit faith, love, and hope

How does your prayer life align with 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13?

- What is your greatest area of need as it relates to prayer?

Are you excited about what the Lord is doing here at CBC?

- Do you thank Him for what you see Him doing?
- Do you make the time and effort to let others know why you are thankful?

This is a challenging lesson as it relates to our prayer life

- Where we see that we need change, we need to do so
- Otherwise, we deceive ourselves

May God cause us to be passionate about seeing believers grow in their spiritual lives