

“Strive With Me in Prayer”
Romans 15:30-33
(Preached at Trinity, January 29, 2012)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to the last paragraph of **Chapter 15** Paul turns his attention to the subject of prayer. All of the great saints of history have been great in prayer. This also describes Paul. It was a driving force in his ministry. He knew that it was essential that he pray and he understood the great value in the prayers of others—and he was not ashamed to ask for it. Everywhere he urged the brethren to pray for him.
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:25 NAU** - "Brethren, pray for us."
 - Ephesians 6:19-20 NAU** - "*pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."
 - Philippians 1:19 NAU** - "for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,"
 - Colossians 4:2-4 NAU** - "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*; ³ praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU** - "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."
2. Paul understood clearly the danger of going to Jerusalem. He was well hated by the Jews. But he also understood the power of prayer.
3. Notice first Paul's theological precision
 1. He describes the Trinitarian economy of prayer
 2. Prayer is always offered up to the Father.
 - a. This was always Paul's pattern
Ephesians 3:14 KJV - "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"
 - b. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven."
 - c. Often Scripture refers to the Father simply as "God"
Eph. 5:20 KJV - " Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;"
 - d. This is Paul's exhortation here: "strive together with me in your prayers to God"

3. But prayer is always properly offered up “through” Christ
 "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ"
 - a. From the preposition διὰ
 The NASB translates it “by”
 CSV translates it “through”
 - b. The word is also in **Verse 28**
 "I will go on by way of you to Spain."
 - c. We pray by way of the Son – it stresses His mediatorial office
 4. Then he adds, "and by the love of the Spirit,"
 - a. The Holy Spirit stirs our heart to pray. He fills us with the fruit of righteousness the chief of which is “love”
Romans 5:5 NAU - ". . . the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."
 - b. Love serves as the great catalyst for prayer
 4. Few of us understand the importance of prayer and the power of prayer. Few of us understand all that God has ordained through prayer. What would happen if we truly committed our way to Him? What would happen if we truly trusted in His sovereign dominion and if we prayed knowing He hears us effectually.
 5. This morning I want to allow Paul to teach us some things about prayer. Pray that God might instruct us on this important subject.
 We'll look at it under four heads:
 - I. Prayer is Expected
 - II. Prayer is Essential
 - III. Prayer is Exhausting
 - IV. Prayer is Effective
- I. Prayer is Expected – **Verse 30**
- A. But Paul begins the verse with the words, "Now I urge you, brethren"
 1. He addresses this to the “Brethren.” Paul recognizes that prayer is the limited domain of Christians. None others can pray effectually.
 - a. A word about our children: we teach them to pray, we encourage them to pray. We recognize the importance of encouraging them in their tender and submissive hearts to go to the bosom of Christ. It directs them to His mercy and goodness. But we also press upon them their need of a Savior.
 - b. The Bible gives us encouragement that God is merciful in hearing the prayers of children. Christ did not turn away the little children.
 - c. But we should give no comfort to 10-12 year olds and older who will not submit their stubborn hearts to Christ.
 3. Prayer is expected of all the saints
 4. Paul frequently gave charges for us to pray speaking in the imperative
Colossians 4:2 – “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving;”
NAS **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – “pray without ceasing;”

5. Jesus had much to say on the subject of prayer.
 - a. He always spoke of prayer with the expectation that we *will* pray
In fact the “Lord’s prayer is given in the imperative”
Matthew 6:9 NAS - “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.’”
 - b. He taught with the assumption that His disciples would pray – that prayer was expected of them.
Matthew 6:5 – “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites”
Matthew 6:6 – “when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret”
Matthew 6:7 – “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition”
Matthew 6:9 – “Pray, then, in this way” (in the imperative)
 4. There is the expectation that every Christian will pray. It is the language of our communion with God.
- B. Some teach that the preposition διὰ here can be translated “because”
1. “Because of Jesus” or “for the sake of Jesus.” This is implied in the KJV.
 2. This translation is not likely because of the grammatical limitations of this preposition attached to the genitive.
But it is none the less true.
We pray “because” of Christ. Since our life must be Christ centered there is an expectation that we will pray for those things that work for His glory. It is good to pray for the salvation of sinners. It is good to pray for the increase of His work.
 3. The same is true of the second occurrence in this verse
“Because” of the love of the Spirit.
 - a. One of the chief characteristics of a Christian is love
We express love for Christ and love for one another.
 - b. There is a presumption that we love one another and an expectation that we will pray for one another. It is good to pray for our church and for one another.
 - c. Is your heart filled with love? Is your love a praying love? It is expected that your love for Christ and the brethren will cause you to pray.

II. Prayer is Essential

- A. The Gospel depends on prayer
 1. The Gospel demands prayer for laborers
Matthew 9:38 NAU - “Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”
 2. The Gospel demands prayer for opportunities
Colossians 4:2-3 NAU - “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of* thanksgiving; ³ praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word”

3. The Gospel demands prayer since there is a natural hatred of it by the men of this world.
2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 NAU - "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; ² and that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."
 4. Every great revival has been preceded by much prayer
- B. Preaching depends on prayer
1. Vocational pastors must devote themselves primarily to two things:
Prayer and the ministry of the Word
 2. Preaching rests upon the pillar of prayer. Listen to Paul
Ephesians 6:19-20 NAU - "*pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."
Colossians 4:3-4 NAU - "praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak."
 3. Preaching is a supernatural activity. An old Scotch pastor described it:
 "There is somewhat in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to matter or expression, and cannot be described what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence it pierceth into the heart and affections and comes immediately from the Lord."
 4. This unction must come from God. We must plead with Him for it.
 5. Churches must pray for the preaching of their church – for the preacher, for themselves, for each other.
 E.M. Bounds: "Salvation never finds its way to a prayerless heart. The Holy Spirit never abides in a prayerless spirit. Preaching never edifies a prayerless soul. Christ knows nothing of prayerless Christians. The gospel cannot be projected by a prayerless preacher."
- C. Everything we do as Christians depends on prayer.
 Paul is urging these Christians to pray, pray, pray.
 He focuses on his two greatest needs:
1. That God would bless his labors
 That the wickedness of the hearts of men not hinder the Gospel.
 That his labor in the Gospel might prove beneficial and acceptable to the saints – one of our greatest hindrances is the resistance of the saints
 2. That God would protect him from discouragement. That he might labor in joy
- III. Prayer is Exhausting
- A. The word for "strive with" is from *συναγωνίζομαι* – compound word:
 "Agonize together"
1. Paul recognizes the great struggle we have in prayer. Prayer is wrestling. Prayer is combat.

2. Our flesh is irked by it and our weakness makes it difficult
Satan's worst attacks often come during prayer
 3. Prayer is one of the most difficult things we do. There are great hindrances. The enemies are strong. Prayer is spiritual battleground. Prayer warriors must be strong, valiant.
 4. Sometimes our prayers must be accompanied with fasting.
- B. Striving implies passion.
1. To strive after something you have to throw yourself into it.
 2. Passionate prayer is the only type we can expect to be heard.

IV. Prayer is Effective

- A. Prayer is ordained by God as a means of accomplishing His purposes on earth
1. Prayer isn't the only means. God is free to work above and beyond prayer, yet God has determined that prayer would be effective on the earth.
 - a. This doesn't mean that in prayer we seek to conform God to our will.
Romans 15:32 NAU - "so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find *refreshing* rest in your company."
 - b. It does mean that God has ordained that our prayers are not without effect. God has appointed the end of all things, but He is also sovereign over the means to the end.
 2. The Bible is filled with examples:
 - a. Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still
Joshua 10:12-13 NAU - "Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon." ¹³ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped"
 - b. Hannah prayed and God opened her womb
 - c. Elijah prayed that it would not rain
James 5:17-18 NAU - "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit."
 - d. Elisha prayed for victory over the Arameans:
2 Kings 6:18 NAU - "Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha."
 - e. The Assyrians were defeated as the result of prayer
2 Chronicles 32:20-21 NAU - "But King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed about this and cried out to heaven. ²¹ And the LORD sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria. "

3. Listen to James:

James 5:14-16 NAU - "Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."
- B. God's people must recognize the effectual nature of prayer
 1. We are in a great spiritual conflict. Prayer is one of our great weapons Paul includes it in his description of our spiritual armor

Eph. 6:14-18 KJV - "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵ And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;"
 2. E.M. Bounds: "The holier a man is, the more does he esteem prayer; the clearer does he see that God gives himself to the praying ones, and that the measure of God's revelation to the souls is the measure of the soul's longing, importunate prayer for God."

Conclusion:

1. Why do people neglect prayer? Because they don't really believe that God answers prayer. They don't believe in the importance of prayer. They don't understand all that is lost by their prayerlessness.
2. Do you see the importance of prayer?
Do you understand the power in prayer?
3. Do you come before God with great faith knowing that your prayers are not without effect?
4. May each of us commit to joining together in contending prayer – agonizing in prayer.