

New-Covenant Praying (Hebrews 13:18, 19)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (4/15/2018)

Introduction

“A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more” –John Owen

1. The text before us is closely connected to the verse preceding.
 - a. The very weighty responsibility of those who are called to oversee Christ’s churches calls for sympathetic and prayerful support for those whose souls are under their watchful care.
 - b. Verse 17 is a plea for compassionate submission (1 Peter 5:1–5).
 - 1) The plea: Obey and submit. These verbs call for the reader to listen to and be persuaded to trust the leadership, yielding to spiritual authority. Jesus has given under-shepherds to guide the flock in following Jesus, the Good and Chief Shepherd.
 - 2) The basis of the plea: The responsibility of leaders in keeping watch over the spiritual condition of the flock through feeding and guarding
 - 3) The accountability: The shepherds must account for the flock to the Chief Shepherd (James 3:1).
 - 4) The appeal: *“Let them do this with joy and not with groaning.”*
2. The connection with verses 18 and 19 appeals to the sheep to *pray* for their leaders.
 - a. Here the apostle speaks in the first person, linking himself with the plea of verse 17.
 - b. The situation is not fully explained; it is very likely that the apostle was separated from this church for some unknown reason. He now pleads for them to pray that resolution of the problem may make it possible for him to be restored to them.
3. There is a very important and powerful purpose that prayer plays in the work of the kingdom, as illustrated in the text. Two important considerations present themselves:
 - a. The request: *“Pray for us.”*
 - b. The basis: *“We have a clear conscience.”*

I. The Need for Intercession

1. The request is made by none other than Paul, who often pled for intercession.
 - a. Paul raised this appeal in no less than seven times in his letters (Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Philemon 22; and Hebrews 13:18).
 - b. Paul serves as an example and represents the need for all who honestly serve Christ.
 - 1) Jesus, through the Spirit, ministers to His body through called and qualified men.
 - 2) These servants are spiritual fathers (1 Corinthians 4:15), spiritual nurses (1 Thessalonians 5:13), guides, and counsellors.
 - 3) Paul urges that these leaders be properly esteemed (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

2. A real and urgent need

a. The weakness of men, especially men of God

- 1) In the face of many disappointments and discouragements, pastors on the frontlines are liable to become weary in well-doing.
- 2) These men of God need daily supplies of grace to be delivered from temptations in order to be kept faithful, steadfast, and devoted.
- 3) The illustration of Moses in the battle with the Amalekites (Exodus 17:12)

b. The importance of the church's mission

- 1) The church is in enemy territory as an army of God to storm the gates of hell (Matthew 16:18).
- 2) The army of God has been given all the equipment and supply to accomplish this mission but especially the means of communication with "headquarters" (Ephesians 6:10–20).
- 3) Only God can provide what the church needs to accomplish His purpose in the earth, and He has required prayer as the means whereby His army is supplied and enabled to be successful in this spiritual war.

II. The Qualification of Intercessors

1. A practical benefit to the welfare of the church is for its members to band often in earnest and sincere prayers for its leaders and for each other.

- a. A powerful deterrent to the widespread and destructive evil of the tongue
- b. "A spirit of faultfinding stifles prayer, but a breath of intercession curbs complaining and gossip" (A. W. Pink).

2. The importance of the conscience

a. Every servant of Christ must be motivated and qualified by a strong desire "*to act honorably in all things*" (v. 18; 2 Corinthians 1:12).

b. The conscience is that aspect of our spirit that God uses to witness within us for good or evil (1 Timothy 1:19; Romans 2:15).

- 1) The conscience is like an inner policeman for self-judgment by which we either approve or condemn our thoughts and actions (Acts 24:16). A clear conscience gives us a sense of freedom and joy toward life situations, even when they are negative (1 Peter 3:16).
- 2) We must be careful, for the flesh seeks to defile (Titus 1:15), wound (1 Corinthians 8:12), and deaden (1 Corinthians 4:2) the conscience.
- 3) The fear of the Lord is a work of the conscience sensitive to doing things that will please God (Hebrews 9:14).

c. Effectual praying demands a clear conscience (2 Timothy 1:3).