

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PAUL AND PREVAILING PRAYER

“I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (I Timothy 2:8)

The bent posture of a humble suppliant is the symbol of spiritual greatness, for success in the field is contingent upon frequency at the Throne. He who looks to God for wisdom works more wisely and wins the greater battles, for those who wait upon the Lord not only renew their strength, but mount up on wings as eagles. It is incumbent upon a Christian to walk and not faint. It is optional to run and not be weary; but if soaring is a possibility, nothing less could suffice for that eager, energetic, spirit-filled Apostle of old.

The Pauline principle of ministerial procedure coincided identically with that of his blessed Lord. Jesus went out to pray, then came forth to preach. **“Arising up a great while before day, Jesus went out and departed into a solitary place and there prayed.”**

This made prayer precious to Paul—precious because He Who is the believer’s preciousness elevated it to an unimpeachable eminence in that solitary but sacred spot long centuries ago. Few people underwrite their evaluation of prayer with such pronounced action. Few will corroborate their claim to its importance by such inconvenience. Ere you left your room this morning did you think to pray? What we need most of all in these critical days of increasing unrest is a better acquaintanceship with our lovely Lord in a simple, satisfying manner. Too much do we find ourselves in the throes of a technical determinism with our faith and practice reduced to certain fixed formulae, so foreign to the Word of Life.

Paul was noticeably like his Lord in many admirable ways. Nor was prayer an exception. He did not pen the largest amount of New Testament truth, but he wrote more about prayer than all the others.

To the Ephesians, he testified, **“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father.”** Paul did not boast about a life of prayer; he simply prayed. The results of his life were proof enough that he tarried often and long where the human soul comes into contact with the divine Presence, there to be endued with wisdom and imbued with strength sufficient for every need.

He could well have said, “I sought Him early Whom my soul loveth and I found Him.” It is hardly accurate to claim that prayer is the secret of a spiritually useful life. There is no secret to it.

He who prays proves its power by producing results. Any one may pray who will, and he who would emulate his Lord, does. Paul was one such individual.

The possibilities through prayer have never been completely assayed.

- Prayer prepares us for progress.
- Prayer presents us with privileges.
- Prayer provides us with power.
- Prayer promotes us in holiness.

All the greatest needs both of the Church collectively and of its members individually may be grouped under one heading —the need for a higher standard of godliness. And the all-embracing cause of a truly godly character is close and constant contact with the unseen God. Such a contact is learned and practiced, as nowhere else, through supplication and intercession— where the human spirit waits upon the infinite Presence, learns to recognize Him Who is spirit, and cultivates His acquaintance and fellowship.

Paul's prayer for abounding love.

Down in a dull prison, closely guarded by alert servants of the state, cut off from the world without, Paul penned a letter to the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi. The sweet winsomeness of his godly spirit permeated the epistle which bore his kindest remembrances to them. Affections cannot be chained nor can prayer be hindered by a standing guard. In spite of all the points of contact in the Apostle's many travels, he assured the Philippians that they had a place in his every prayer. He deemed it a joy to make requests of his heavenly Father on their behalf. Thus, in the midst of his own afflictions, he became greatly solicitous of their welfare.

The Apostle was neither superfluous nor superficial. Purpose always predominated his actions. Even in this epistle, written as it was under extreme difficulty, he stressed a needful factor vital to the growth and well-being of any assembly of believers.

“And this I pray,” wrote their beloved friend, **“that your love may abound yet more and more”** (Philippians 1:9).

He believed this prayer would be answered. At least, he knew that God was able to make such a spiritual condition possible if the people would meet the requirements. Paul explained in the Roman epistle that the love of God is shed abroad in the hearts of believers by the Holy Ghost, making them possessors of such love. But, they were not to be possessors only but promoters also.

The figure commonly used for the word **“abound”** and its several derivatives was that of a vessel under a hydrant with the water rising to the brim, there to overflow or abound. The overflowing love would inspire fellowship and promote fruitfulness. Abounding love can drown grievances, hurdle obstacles, overcome difficulties and inundate selfishness.

He prayed that these believers might be **“sincere and without offence until the day of Christ.”** This required abounding love. With such holy petitions being placed before the Throne of Grace, he brightened the dull hours of prison life.

Paul's prayer for overcoming power.

With all of the exceptional spiritual traits which made his life so rich and beneficial, the Apostle was human enough to long for letters from his friends. When the news was unfavorable, it seemed that his whole heart went forth in counsel and concern. When the news was pleasant, he readily displayed the greatest delight, often giving himself at once to prayer in gratitude to God for the triumphs of the saints. Word from Ephesus, conveying a report of their faith and love, caused Paul to pray with thanksgiving: **"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers"** (Ephesians 1:15, 16).

He asked the Lord to grant them exceptional wisdom, an enlightened understanding and an appreciation of their hope and inheritance, but the practical need of the moment was for added enablement to press on. Their current spiritual status was good, indeed very pleasing to the Apostle; but they must not become complacent. Life cannot be stagnant and retreat would be reprehensible. Love and faith were in evidence, but both of these qualities permit enlargement.

Paul knew that it was the little farther that would cost them something; but cost what it may, good must not be allowed to preclude the best. Down on his knees went the Apostle and humbly besought the God of all grace to grant them the experiential knowledge of **"what is the exceeding greatness of His power"** (Ephesians 1:19).

Herein was boldness before the Throne. He was petitioning for them the selfsame power which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus and placed Him high above all principality and power and might and dominion. He went to the proper source. He had a legitimate reason. These Ephesian believers were God's own dear children; and while they wanted to glorify God, they were impotent in themselves. Paul could encourage but he could not empower. He could not be with them due to his incarceration in Rome, but he could pray. This he did with eminent concern that they might be strengthened by divine might to grow in the things of the Spirit and to overcome the factors which were so actively militating against their progress.

Paul's prayer for deeper knowledge.

One particular posture is not prerequisite to power in prayer. Jesus both stood and knelt. Paul prayed under all kinds of conditions, even when his hands were chained to the prison guards; but when praying for deeper knowledge for the Ephesians, he specifically refers to his posture. **"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

No reason is given; but the subject at hand was so marvellous and so overwhelming that it is possible he was greatly humbled by the vastness of that which he sought. He proceeded in prayer with the same meticulous exactness and manifest wisdom which characterized his other endeavors.

He besought for them increased strength for the inner man by the Spirit, the consciousness by faith of Christ's indwelling presence, and establishment in love. This was but a preface to the main supplication. Then, as a towering giant in the art of prayer, he graciously requested for them a dimensional comprehension which is infinitely boundless.

“That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height . . .”

How awed his own heart must have been to lay such a weighty petition at heaven’s door! How awed we too have been, as, through the years, we have sought something to which we might apply these dimensions. Was it love? Seemingly not, for love is treated separately in the following verse. Was it power? Knowledge? Wisdom? Grace? Perhaps Paul had reached too lofty a plane for most of us to follow. Let us say that he was coveting for the Ephesian Christians a clearer appreciation of that vast sphere of privilege into which Christ had brought them by His **“so great”** salvation—fathomless and limitless as it is.

Then, he went on to the subject of love.

“And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” he prayed, **“that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”**

That this is distinct from the preceding verse is proved by the conjunction which does not unite the clauses coordinately. The break is too decided. The climax of this famous petition is the suggested condition of being filled with the fulness of God. Space does not permit of an extensive treatment of this point, but an experiential acquaintanceship with the greatness of God’s attributes and bestowments in the foregoing verses pave the way to this holy estate. This is why Paul prayed for deeper knowledge.

Paul’s prayer for greater fruitfulness.

Of all the hymns in Paul’s repertoire, he never sang, *“Must I go and empty handed, must I meet the Saviour so?”* Many will thus go, and they need the challenge of this lovely hymn, but not so with this tireless labourer. Nor did he want others to be fruitless. **“We do not cease to pray for you,”** he once wrote, **“that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work”** (Colossians 1:9, 10).

To the Thessalonians, Paul sent a message in which he advised,

“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power” (II Thessalonians 1:11).

Once again, it is evident that the walk and the work of the Christian determine his worthiness of such a high and holy calling. The only kind of fruitfulness of which the Apostle had knowledge was the work of faith through the power which God vouchsafes to men. Then, too, God must determine the worthiness, not according to our imperfect measurements, but according to His own perfect standard.

Even in a model church such as the one at Thessalonica, prayer was greatly needed to attain unto such a lofty ideal as pleasing the Lord in their daily conduct.

The 15th chapter of John lists three categories of productiveness; namely, fruit, more fruit and much fruit. Nothing short of the highest category could satisfy this great man of God, and to this end he prayed both for himself and others.

Paul's prayer for blameless preservation.

In first Thessalonians, chapter five, Paul gave a formula for Christian ethics. It consisted of:

- Constant rejoicing (v. 16),
- Unceasing prayer (v. 17),
- Wholehearted gratitude (v. 18),
- Obedience to the Spirit (v. 19),
- Attention to prophecies (v. 20),
- Proving the best by Scripture test (v. 21)
- Abstinence from evil (v. 22).

This was not only applicable, but was urged by the Apostle, eliciting the following prayer from his lips: **"I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"** (v. 23).

This is a most profound utterance. It suggests the possibility of abuse to the spirit, the body and the soul for which, at the coming of the Lord, the believer will be held accountable. If this prayer of Paul's is answered with regard to Christians in this now-age, they will exercise much greater care in their several relationships toward God, toward others and toward their own bodies, which form the temple of the Holy Ghost.

The prayer also suggests the possibility of being preserved blameless in each of these three respects, kept by the power of grace from sinning against God, against others and against our own bodies. Only recently a doctor was heard to make the astounding comment that "people, for the most part, are not dying today. Their bodies are rotting away." The implications need not be laboured. Even though the statement may have been hyperbolic, the suggestion is grievous. Misconduct and bodily abuse are serious matters before the Lord, and this prayer for preservation should be studied with the utmost care.

The Apostle Peter adds a very helpful comment on this subject. It, too, was written in the light of the coming of Christ. **"Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless"** (II Peter 3:14).

"In peace" means *to remain calm*

Conditions preceding the second advent will be disturbing beyond all description, but while **"men's hearts are failing them for looking after those things that are coming to pass,"** the Christian is to have confidence, knowing the day of his redemption draweth nigh.

"Without spot" is a warning to be unaffected by infectious error which will characterize the last days.

"Blameless" signifies the lack of complicity in the propagation of error, freedom from personal practices inconsistent with the standard of holiness.

Christ will see to it that we are faultless when He comes (Jude 24); we are to make sure we are blameless.

Paul's prayer for his countrymen.

After his wonderful conversion, Paul never gave any evidence of being nationalistic. Indeed, because of this fact, he was maltreated by the Jews on his visit to Jerusalem at the termination of his third missionary journey. His chief concern was their salvation and promotion in grace. One of his most frequently quoted allusions to prayer is found in Romans 10:1. **"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."**

This was more a state of prayer than it was a stated prayer. As we follow him in his travels from one point to another, we find him invariably searching out the synagogue, there to plead with heartfelt sincerity for the Jews to accept Christ. It is said that one cannot talk to men for God until one has talked to God for men. This was probably the principle that Paul practiced, which meant that he was continually pouring out his heart in prayer for the light to dawn upon the darkened hearts of Israel's wayward sons. Nor did their indifference and opposition to his message deter him in his praying on their behalf, for the praying was motivated by a strong desire. He knew the emptiness of Judaism. They had no king after rejecting Christ, no Passover lamb, no country which they could claim as their own. The vain ritual in which they indulged brought no comfort and offered no hope. How could he have been sincere and yet not have desired them to find the joy and assurance which filled his own soul. He prayed that they might be saved as, of course, many were through his earnestness.

Paul's prayer for his friends.

While Paul was almost beaten to death at Lystra by unbelieving Jews from Antioch in Pisidia and from Iconium, he returned to these places expressly to hold prayer meetings with those who had confessed Christ. **"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed, they commended them to the Lord"** (Acts 14:23).

A prayer meeting was to Paul a time of soul refreshment and bodily relaxation. It was an atmosphere in which a spiritual mind delights. His pastoral prayers, commending these young believers to the Lord and His protecting grace, must have been long remembered after his departure.

One of the most soul-stirring times he experienced in prayer with friends is found in the last three verses of Acts, chapter twenty.

Paul had sent for the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus.

He gave them wise counsel on pastoral theology, telling them how to serve the Lord with humility of mind, to be faithful, to visit from door to door and to testify both to the Jews and Greeks, giving each the same message of repentance and faith. He told them he had not neglected to preach the whole counsel of God, and was, therefore, free from the blood of all men. He urged them to take heed to feed the flock over whom the Holy Ghost had made them the overseers. How solemn were those moments when he said, **"And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace."**

Then, he kneeled down and invoked God's blessing upon them with the utmost tenderness.

We could well wish the Holy Spirit might have revealed that prayer, but it is recorded in glory. Tears flowed freely for this was to be his last visit to them. Slowly they accompanied him to the ship. Although it was his last time with them on earth, his prayers continued in their behalf. They were his friends in the gospel. They were his friends in Christ.

Paul's prayer for his enemies.

In Paul's last letter he revealed how Alexander the coppersmith "**did me much evil.**" At that time, he wrote about being "**delivered out of the mouth of the lion.**" His adversaries were truculent and caused him to be greatly inconvenienced and inhumanly treated; but, as did his Lord, so did he: "**I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge**" (II Timothy 4:16).

Of all the unfairness visited upon him he never sought revenge. Under the lash of the whip and the bruising impact of the rod, under the pelting of stones and in the prison stocks, he prayed that his persecutors might be saved. "**Bless them that curse you . . . pray for them which despitefully use you.**"

Who had greater opportunity than Paul to practice the hard things of Christ's holy commands? He stood near enough to dear old Stephen while the martyrdom was being accomplished to hear him say, "**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**" He carried those words in his mind. Hardened as he was at that time, this unusual statement from the lips of a dying man, free of bitterness, full of forgiveness, impressed him much. Then, when his enlightened heart learned that the dying martyr, to whose death he consented, was emulating his Lord that made the matter doubly impressive.

He had many opportunities to test his own forgiving soul, for he had many enemies. He stood this test with the same unswerving genuineness that characterized his Christian life in other respects. No matter how hostile or irate his persecutors became in the infliction of evil punishment upon him, he could look into the face of the One Who met him on the Damascus road and saved his poor soul. Then it was easy, easy by transcendent grace, to pray, "**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**"

We may find, as did Paul, that prayer can subdue our tempers and dispositions and introduce to us the more gentle and generous frames of mind, giving a definite conformity to the unseen divine Presence. Prevailing prayer is the result of frequent and faithful soul excursions over the living way which Jesus Christ has dedicated to us, bearing His dear name to the Father Who honors the name of His Son in the granting of our petitions.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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