

Adult School of Ministry

Lesson for Sunday, July 18, 2021

Paul's Prayers for the Churches: Christians should pray for one another to know God, show love, and live exemplary lives.

Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:9-14.

The Lesson Overview: In Jerusalem, in the late spring of AD 58, the Apostle Paul was taken into the protective custody of the Roman Government, and remained so until the summer of AD 63. From AD 61 to 63, Paul lived in his own rented house in Rome, still in the custody of the Roman government (Acts 28:16, 30-31). We have in the New Testament, four of Paul's letters written during this time: to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon (summer, AD 62), and to the Philippians (spring, AD 63). In this lesson, we examine Paul's prayers for the churches in Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae, found in the letters he wrote to these churches during his detention at Rome.

Historical Background: The Apostle Paul ministered three years in Ephesus, AD 54-57 (Acts 19:1; 20:31). When Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians from Rome, in AD 62, except for a brief visit with their pastors at Melitus in the spring of AD 58 (Acts 20:16-17), he had been absent from the Ephesians for more than five years. Paul and Silas established the church in Philippi in the summer of AD 50 (Acts 15:40; 16:8-13), and Paul returned there to minister on his way to Jerusalem, spring AD 58 (Acts 20:6). Paul never ministered personally in Colossae (Colossians 2:1), but he had friends there, and the church there was likely established during Paul's ministry in Ephesus (AD 54-57).

Lesson Outline:

1. To Know God In Fullness: Ephesians 3:14-21.
 - A. Prayer for Inner Strength, vv. 14-19.
 - B. Doxology: Praise to God, vv. 20-21.
2. To Abound In Love: Philippians 1:3-11.
 - A. Thanks to God for Fellow Christians, vv. 3-8.
 - B. Prayer for Mature Christian Love, vv. 9-11.
3. To Live Worthy Of The Lord: Colossians 1:9-14.
 - A. Prayer for a Worthy Manner of Life, vv. 9-12.
 - B. The Reason for Thanksgiving, vv. 13-14.

Discussing the Lesson:

1. To Know God In Fullness: Ephesians 3:14-21.

A. Prayer for Inner Strength: Eph. 3:14-19.

- 1) Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 is one sentence, eight verses long, reflecting that it is one long sentence in the Greek New Testament. While the whole prayer hangs together in unity, it is helpful to break it into portions for the purpose of study and understanding.
- 2) Paul began by identifying God the Father as the one to whom he addressed his prayer, and signified his posture as kneeling, in reverent acknowledgment of God as the sovereign ruler of the whole creation, v. 14.
- 3) Paul also identified God as the one after whom the whole family of God in heaven and on earth is named, v. 15. It is significant that God's family in heaven and on earth are one.
- 4) The church "on earth hath union with God the Three in One, And mystic sweet communion With those whose rest in won", (The Church's One Foundation").
- 5) The main purpose of Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers was, "That He [God the Father] would grant you...to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man", v. 16.
- 6) Then, verses 17-19 tell of the expected results of the Spirit-empowered strengthening of the Christian. The strengthening power of the Holy Spirit for the Christian is "according to the riches of His [God's] glory", v. 16.
- 7) God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, is able to give to His children all the spiritual might (power of the Holy Spirit) we will ever need for Christian living and ministry.
- 8) By means of the Holy Spirit, Christ dwells in us by faith, so that we become rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, v. 17. Being rooted and grounded signifies spiritual and moral strength, and also stability in faithfulness to Christ.
- 9) In addition to, and as a result of, being strengthened by the Spirit, we are made able as much as is possible (because if "passeth knowledge"), to comprehend the greatness of the love of Christ for us, vv. 17-19.
- 10) The ultimate blessing of being strengthened by the Spirit is so we "might be filled with all the fullness of God", v. 19. This is something only God can do for us by His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is dwelling in us, and filling us, to make us complete in likeness to Christ.

B. Doxology: Praise to God, Eph. 3:20-21.

- 1) In these verses, Paul's prayer concludes with a doxology; that is, with words of praise to God. The doxology is evoked by the recognition that God is able "to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask of thing",

v. 20. This is a double superlative (“exceeding abundantly”), signifying there is nothing we may need which is beyond God’s ability to provide. In fact, God is well able to do for us beyond anything we have the ability to ask or think.

- 2) What is perhaps even more striking, is Paul’s acknowledgment that God answers our prayers, “according to the power that worketh in us”, v. 20. The power of God working in us as believers in Christ, is the power of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) Let us always be mindful that the Holy Spirit in us is also the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of God. By His Spirit in us, God is well able to accomplish His good will for us, in us, and through us for His glory.
- 4) Therefore, “Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, [in a] world without end, Amen”, v. 21. This present world is passing away, but they who do the will of God will abide forever in a world without end, 1 John 2:17.
- 5) Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians indicates there ought not be any spiritually and morally powerless Christians. The God who spoke the universe into existence, and resurrected Christ from the dead, is the same God who dwells in believers in Christ by the Holy Spirit.
- 6) Let us live by the power of the Holy Spirit in us, confident that God is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond anything we can ask or think. Have you experienced this in your life in Christ?

2. To Abound In Love: Philippians 1:3-11.

A. Thanks to God for Fellow Christians, Phil. 1:3-8.

- 1) Paul’s prayer for the Christians at Philippi began with a generous thanksgiving to God for every remembrance he had of them, v. 3.
- 2) Paul’s gratitude for the Philippian church was proven by the fact that, always, in every prayer for them, he prayed for them “with joy”, v. 4, because of the continuing “fellowship [partnership]” he had with them in the Gospel, “from the first day until now”, v. 5.
- 3) For Paul and the Philippians, this partnership had now endured for 13 years (AD 50-63). Paul was thankful to God for the Philippian believers growth in the Gospel and with this proof of their faithfulness to Christ, Paul was confident God would continue His good work in them “until the day of Jesus Christ”, v. 6.
- 4) Therefore, Paul held the Philippians close in his heart, v. 7, and God was his witness of His Christian love for them, v. 8.
- 5) Finally, Paul was thankful to God for the Philippian church because they shared in suffering for the gospel of Jesus Christ, v. 7; and see 3:10.
- 6) Paul was writing this letter near the end of his five years of detention by the Roman government (AD 58-63), because his life had been threatened by the Jews for his preaching the Gospel (see Acts 23:12-30).

- 7) The Philippians were aware of Paul's suffering for the Gospel, and they were enduring their own sufferings for the Gospel in the Roman colony city of Philippi, see 1:28-30.

B. Prayer for Mature Christian Love, Phil. 1:9-11.

- 1) After thanksgivings to God for the Philippian church, Paul offered his petitions to God on their behalf. Paul prayed "that [their] love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment", v. 9.
- 2) Paul spoke of love as abounding "in knowledge and in all judgment [understanding]", v. 9. Love can be an emotion, but Christian love is more.
- 3) It is an attitude of Christlike good will proceeding from an experiential knowledge of the love of God, and an understanding of all things based on the truth of God's Word, 1 John 4:10-11, 19; 5::20.
- 4) Praying for the Philippian believers' love to grow, Paul had in mind three goals for them:
 - a) First, "that [they] may approve things that are excellent", v. 10. Approving requires determining and following the best course of action. In this case, what is being determined is the best way to live – that which God has graciously disclosed to His people in His Word.
 - b) Second, Paul desired "that [they] may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ", v. 10. The idea here is that of a Christian's standing justified before God (in right relationship with God by faith in Christ), either at the believer's death or at the second coming of Christ.
 - c) Third, the final goal was for them to be "filled with the fruits [virtues and good works] of righteousness...unto the glory and praise of God", v. 11.
- 5) When it comes to our growing in the holiness of a Christlike life, and in the assurance of God completing His good work in us, God has a part and we have a part in this process. We cannot do it without God, and God will not do it without our cooperation.
- 6) The Apostle Paul's command to us is, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure", Philippians 2:12-13.
- 7) God will not fail to do His part, and we must not be careless about our part. We work with God, because God is working in us, to will and do His good pleasure.

3. To Live Worthy Of The Lord: Colossians 1:9-14.

A. Prayer for a Worthy Manner of Life, Col. 1:9-12.

- 1) Because God had been working in the lives of the Colossians, Paul prayed with confidence regarding what God would do in them and for them. Paul

prayed “that [they] might be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”, v. 9.

- 2) Knowledge of God’s will for faithful Christian living is given to His people through the scriptures. A right “knowledge” of God’s Word requires Holy Spirit-enabled “wisdom” and “understanding.”
- 3) For this reason we continue in the prayerful reading and study of the Bible. The goal of this is to live “worthy of the Lord”, v. 10, by following His example.
- 4) Such a life is “pleasing” to God, “fruitful in every good work,” and “increasing in the knowledge of God”, v. 10; “strengthened with all might”, v. 11, and “giving thanks unto the Father”, v. 12.

B. The Reason for Thanksgiving, Col. 1:13-14.

- 1) Here, Paul moved to the conclusion of his prayer by telling the reason for the Christian’s gratitude to God. Paul knew a life worthy of the Lord Jesus, vv. 9-12, is not possible without receiving God’s life-transforming power by means of faith in Jesus Christ.
- 2) The initiating event in every Christian’s life that enables him or her to live a Christ-exalting life is the conversion experience, by which a person is born again, becomes a child of God, and becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. This is what Paul describes in these verses.
- 3) Before the Colossians were converted and became believers in Christ, they were subjected to and under “the power of darkness”, v. 13. This is the case with all people, before we become believers in Christ.
- 4) But when we put our trust in Christ for salvation from sin, we are delivered from the power of darkness (evil, Satan), because our sins are forgiven, and we are redeemed from bondage to sin by Jesus Christ, v. 14.
- 5) The result of this is that we are “translated [conveyed, transferred]” into the kingdom of [God’s] dear Son”, v. 13. We have a new life as citizens of God’s kingdom, and we live by the power of this new life, which is the power of God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ) dwelling in us (Romans 8:1-2, 9). For this, we will thank God forever, in this life and in our everlasting life to come.
- 6) Thinking we can live a life pleasing to Christ and to God’s glory, without knowing, believing, and obeying God’s Word is like thinking we can remain physically strong and healthy by never eating anything.
- 7) Our soul, our spiritual life, thrives on the Word of God. We exemplify Christian character by living by God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Call to Discipleship: Being a disciple of Jesus Christ, must, of necessity, be a life of prayerfulness toward God. The believer in Christ hold perpetual conversation with God in his or her thoughts. We are always asking, “What is God’s will?” “What would God have

me do?” And in thought we ask God to save others, heal others, bless others. Thus it is that we pray daily, continually, without ceasing.

Ministry in Action: Like as Paul prayed for local churches, minister to your church by praying specifically for your local church, using Paul’s prayers as models to follow.