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Prayer

Lord, please help me stir up my desire to make significant changes in my life. I am so sorry for the times I've allowed complacency to keep me stuck in the same ol' place for such a long time. I want to change. I want to grow. I want to be different. I am asking You to supernaturally fill me with so much desire that no power on earth and no force in hell can stop me from becoming everything You want me to be, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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1 ONE DAY Jonathan son of Saul said to his armor-bearer, Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side. But he did not tell his father. 2 Saul was remaining in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron; and with him were about 600 men, 3 And Ahijah son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the Lord's priest in Shiloh, was wearing the ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan was gone. 4 Between the passes by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side; one was named Bozez, and the other Seneh. 5 The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba. 6 And Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, Come, and let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For there is nothing to prevent the Lord from saving by many or by few. 7 And his armor-bearer said to him, Do all that is in your mind; I am with you in whatever you think [best]. 8 Jonathan said, We will pass over to these men and we will let them see us. 9 If they say to us, Wait until we come to you, then we will stand still in our place and will not go up to them. 10 But if they say, Come up to us, we will go up, for the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this will be our sign. 11 So both of them let the Philistine garrison see them. And the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves. 12 The garrison men said to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, Come up to us and we will show you a thing. Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into Israel's hand. 13 Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, his armor-bearer after him; and the enemy fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. 14 And that first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made was about twenty men within about a half acre of land [which a yoke of oxen might plow]. 15 And there was trembling and panic in the [Philistine] camp, in the field, and among all the men; the garrison, and even the raiders trembled; the earth quaked, and it became a terror from God. 16 Saul's watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude melted away and went hither and thither. 17 Then Saul said to the men with him, Number and see who is gone from us. When they numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were missing. 18 Saul said to Ahijah, Bring here the ark of God—for at that time the ark of God was with the children of Israel. 19 While Saul talked to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp kept increasing. Then Saul said to the priest, Withdraw your hand. 20 Then Saul and all the people with him rallied and went into the battle, and behold, every [Philistine's] sword was against his fellow in wild confusion. 21 Moreover, the Hebrews who were with the Philistines before that time, who went up with them into the camp from the country round about, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. 22 Likewise, all the men of Israel who had hid themselves in the hill country of Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, they also went after them in hot pursuit in the battle. 23 So the Lord delivered Israel that day, and the battle passed beyond Beth-aven. 24 But the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had caused them to take an oath, saying, Cursed be the man who eats any food before evening and until I have taken vengeance on my enemies. So none of the men tasted any food. 25 And all the people of the land came to a wood, and there was honey on the ground. 26 When the men entered the wood, behold, the honey was dripping, but no man tasted it, for the men feared the oath. 27 But Jonathan had not heard when his father charged the people with the oath. So he dipped the end of the rod in his hand into a honeycomb and put it to his mouth, and his [weary] eyes brightened. 28 Then one of the men told him, Your father strictly charged the men with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man who eats any food today. And the people were exhausted and faint. 29 Then Jonathan said, My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. 30 How much better if the men had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter of the Philistines has not been great. 31 They smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint. 32 [When night came and the oath expired] the men flew upon the spoil. They took sheep, oxen, and calves, slew them on the ground, and ate them [raw] with the blood. 33 Then Saul was told, Behold, the men are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood. And he said, You have transgressed; roll a great stone to me here. 34 Saul said, Disperse yourselves among the people and tell them, Bring me every man his ox or his sheep, and butcher them here and eat; and sin not against the Lord by eating the blood. So all the men brought each one his ox that night and butchered it there. 35 And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar he built to the Lord. 36 Then Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night and seize and plunder them until daylight, and let us not leave a man of them. They said, Do whatever seems good to you. Then the priest said, Let us draw near here to God. 37 And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel? But He did not answer him that day. 38 Then Saul said, Draw near, all the chiefs of the people, and let us see how this sin [causing God's silence] arose today. 39 For as the Lord lives, Who delivers Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But not a man among all the people answered him. 40 Then he said to all Israel, You be on one side; and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. The people said to Saul, Do what seems good to you. 41 Therefore Saul said to the Lord, the God of Israel, Give a perfect lot and show the right. And Saul and Jonathan were taken [by lot], but the other men went free. 42 Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken. 43 Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what you have done. And Jonathan said, I tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. And behold, I must die. 44 Saul answered, May God do so, and more also, for you shall surely die, Jonathan. 45 But the people said to Saul, Shall Jonathan, who has wrought this great deliverance to Israel, die? God forbid! As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head perish, for he has wrought this great deliverance with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die. 46 Then Saul ceased pursuing the Philistines, and they went to their own place. 47 When Saul took over the kingdom of Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he made it worse for them. 48 He did valiantly and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. 49 Now Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua; and the names of his two daughters were, of the firstborn, Merab; and of the younger, Michal. 50 The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The commander of his army was Abner son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51 Kish the father of Saul and Ner the father of Abner were sons of Abiel. 52 There was severe war against the Philistines all the days of Saul, and whenever Saul saw any mighty or [outstandingly] courageous man, he attached him to himself.

Chapter 14

Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man that bear his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison on the other side. But he did not tell his father. And Saul tarried in the uttermost parts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men; And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas (1Sa 14:1-3),

And so forth, it gives these guys in background. You don't remember them anyhow, let me just tell you the story.

Jonathan the son of Saul woke up early one morning. He got to thinking, no one else was awake yet. He got to thinking "You know, there's a whole army of the Philistines over there. Maybe God wants to give Israel the victory over that army of the Philistines today. Now if the Lord wants to give the victory to Israel over those Philistines, He doesn't need a whole army. He can give the victory to one man as well as six hundred or to two. It really doesn't make any difference to God whether we have a huge army, or whether we just have a few if God wants to give the victory to Israel."

He was just lying there thinking about these kinds of wild thoughts. "After all God is great, and the greatness and the power of God, He doesn't need a whole army, He can give the victory to just two men."

So he woke up his armourbearer. He said, "I've been thinking about something really weird and wild, I want to pass it by you. I've been thinking if God wants to give the victory to Israel today over the Philistines, He doesn't need the whole army. He can give the victory to just a couple guys. Why don't we go over there and see if God wants to give the victory to Israel today." Talk about a venture in faith. I love 'em.

So he and the armourbearer dressed quietly and they slipped out of camp while everybody else was still sleeping. Jonathan on the way towards the Philistines said, "Now we want to make sure God's in this thing."

"So when we get near the garrison of the Philistines, when the centurions spot us, if they say, 'Hey you fellas come up here we'll show you a thing or two.' Then we'll know that God wants to give the victory to Israel, and we'll go at them. But if they say, 'Wait you guys, we're gonna come down and show you a thing or two.' Then we'll know that God doesn't want to give the victory to Israel and we'll get out of here as fast as we can."

So as they got over near the garrison of the Philistines, and the centurion spotted these two guys coming, they said, "Look at those stupid fools coming right up here to the camp. Hey you guys come up here, we'll show you a thing or two."

John said, "All right man let's go."

It said, "They started climbing with their hands and feet," really just scrambling up that hill to get into the camp of the Philistines. Man, they jumped right in the middle of the garrison. Jonathan started knocking the guys over, and his armourbearer was running them through. About a half acre of ground, they wiped out twenty of the Philistines and the rest of the guys began waking up, they were all discomfited. They began to swing at each other. They began to run and flee, and over on the other side of the valley old Saul finally woke up, and he rubbed his eyes, and he looked across, and he saw the Philistines all running. He saw the battles going on. He saw two guys in the middle just really wiping them out.

He said, "Number off quick who's missing?" They numbered off, and they said, "It's Jonathan and his armourbearer."

Now Saul at this point makes a foolish statement. Saul said, "Let the man be cursed who eats anything today before God has avenged Saul of all of his enemies." Now the man, who was so humble to begin with, is now beginning to manifest some real pride. "Saul of all of his enemies, God curse any man who eats anything today before Saul is avenged of all of his enemies." A foolish curse and vow.

So the men with Saul began to pursue the Philistines. All day long the Philistines were in disarray and retreating. As they were running through the woods, there was a honeycomb, and it was dripping honey down to the ground. Old Jonathan running through took his spear and put out the end of it and began to eat the honey, and he was revived, he was refreshed. Actually he'd been chasing Philistines all day and he was just about shot physically, and honey is such a quick energy source. Just it zings right into your system. He was refreshed, and took off again chasing the Philistines. God gave a great victory to Israel that day over the Philistines.

But I like the philosophy of Jonathan. I like the daring. I like the venture in faith. "Who knows what God wants to do today. If God wants to do something, He doesn't need a whole army. He can do it with one as well as a thousand. Let's see what God wants to do. Let's venture out and find out what God might want to do today." I love those kinds of days when you just sort of venture out to see what God might want to do.

Now as the troops gathered together, and sort of surveying the victory. Saul said, "Let's chase them tonight. We've got them on the run, let's go after them tonight and wipe them out completely." So they called the priests there and they said, "Inquire of the Lord shall we chase them". There was no answers from God.

So Saul said, "All right who ate today?" Figured that someone had broken his vow because God wasn't answering by the priests. So none of the men would say anything. He said, "If it is even Jonathan my son, surely he shall be put to death."

So he said, "You guys all stand over there. Jonathan and I will stand here. And God give us a perfect lot." They cast lots, and it fell on Jonathan and Saul. So they cast lots again and it fell on Jonathan.

Saul said, "What did you do?"

He said, "Well, dad I really didn't know that you had made that curse and I was running through the woods, and I saw this honeycomb dripping honey. I was famished and I was about wiped out, so I took and ate some of the honey."

He said, "My soul was revived."

He said, "Dad, it wasn't very smart for you not to let these guys eat. Had you let them eat of the spoils today, they would've had enough strength, we would've continued to pursue and totally wiped out the Philistines. Wasn't so smart, dad, the thing that you said."

Saul said, "Put him to death."

At this point the men stepped in and said, "Oh no way. For he has wrought, or fought with God today. No man's gonna touch him, no man will lay his hand upon him." I like the statement, "For he hath wrought with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan and he wasn't killed by his father.

So we see now there's a bit of madness beginning to enter this man. Started out such a beautiful way. Started out with such tremendous potential and possibilities. But pride entered in. We see now the pride developing. This man again who had such a marvelous potential is gradually deteriorating before our very eyes, as he begins to exalt himself and turn from God.

(Through The Bible; C2000 series; Chuck Smith; Bible Commentaries; 1979-1986)

XI. FAITH OF SINNERS IN PRAYER

"A certain preacher whose sermons converted many souls received a revelation from God that it was not his sermons or works by all means but the prayers of an illiterate lay brother who sat on the pulpit steps pleading for the success of the sermon. It may be in the all-revealing day so with us. We may believe after laboring long and wearily that all honor belongs to another builder whose prayers were gold, silver, and precious stones, while our sermonizings being apart from prayer are but hay and stubble."—Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.

One of the peculiar features of prayer as we study the Old Testament on this subject is the faith of unrighteous and backslidden men in prayer, and the great confidence they had in the prayers of praying men of that day. They knew certain men as men of prayer, who believed in God, who were favored of God and who prayed unto God. They recognized these men as having influence with God in averting wrath and in giving deliverance from evil.

Frequently when in trouble, when God's wrath was threatened and even when there were visitations of evil upon them for their iniquities, they showed their faith in prayer by appealing to the men who prayed, to beg God to avert His displeasure and turn aside His wrath against them. Recognizing the value of prayer as a divine agency to save men, they made application to the men who prayed, to intercede with God for them.

It is one of the strange paradoxes of those early days that while people departed from God, and went into grievous sin, they did not become either atheists nor unbelievers when it came to the question of the existence of a prayer-answering God. Wicked men held fast to a belief in God's existence, and to faith in the power of prayer to secure pardon for sin and to deliver them from God's wrath. It is worth something as showing the influence of the Church on sinners, when the latter believe in prayer and beg Christian people to pray for them. It is an item of interest and an event of importance when a sinner on a dying bed calls for a praying man to come to his bedside to pray for him. It means something when penitent sinners, under a sense of their guilt, feeling the displeasure of God, approach a church altar and say, "Pray for me, ye praying men and women." Little does the Church understand its full import, and still less does the Church appreciate and take in the full import of praying, especially for the unsaved men and women who ask them to pray for their immortal souls. If the Church was fully alive to God and awake to the real peril of the unconverted all about it, and was in a thriving state, more sinners would be found seeking the altars of the Church and crying out to praying people, "Pray for my soul."

Much so-called praying for sinners there may be, but it is cold, formal, official praying, which goes nowhere, never reaches God, and accomplishes nothing. Revivals begin when sinners seek the prayers of praying people.

Several things stand out in bold relief as we look at those Old Testament days:

First, the disposition of sinners against God to almost involuntarily turn to praying men for help and refuge when trouble draws near, and to invoke their prayers for relief and deliverance. "Pray for us" was their cry.

Second, the readiness with which those praying men responded to these appeals and prayed to God for those who desired this thing. Moreover, we are impressed with the fact that these praying men were always in the spirit of prayer and ready at any time to inquire of God. They were always keyed up on prayer. Third, we note the wonderful influence these men of prayer had with God whenever they made their appeal to Him. God nearly always quickly responded and heard their praying for others. So intercessory prayer predominated in those early days of the Church.

It is a question worthy of earnest consideration, how far the present-day Church is responsible for the unbelief of sinners of these modern times in the value of prayer as an agency in averting God's wrath, in sparing barren lives and in giving deliverance. How far is the Church responsible for the precious few mourners in Zion in these times, who ignore your altar calls and treat with indifference your appeals to come and be prayed for?

The first illustration we notice as showing the faith of wicked men in prayer and their appeal for a man of God to intercede for them is the case of the fiery serpents sent upon the Israelites. They were journeying from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea, seeking to compass the land of Edom, when they spoke against God and Moses, after this fashion:

"Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread."

The thing so sorely displeased God that He sent fiery serpents among the people, and many of the people of Israel died.

"Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned because we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us." And Moses prayed for the people.

As far as these people had departed from God, and as great as was their sin in complaining against God's dealings with them, they had not lost faith in prayer, neither did they forget that there was a leader in Israel who had influence with God in prayer, and who could by that means avert disaster and bring deliverance to them.

Jeroboam, first King of the ten tribes when the kingdom was divided, was another case in point. This was a most noted case because of the notoriety of his departure from God, which was often referred to in the after history of Israel, as "the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat," and shows that despite his great wickedness in the sight of God, he did not lose his faith in the efficacy of prayer. This king on one occasion presumed to take the place of the high priest, and stood by the altar to burn incense. A man of God came out of Judah and cried against the altar and proclaimed, "Behold the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out." This angered Jeroboam, who saw that it was intended as a public rebuke for him, who had undertaken contrary to the Levitical law to assume the office of God's priest, and the king put forth his hand with the apparent purpose of arresting or doing violence to the man of God, saying, at the same time to those about him, "Lay hold upon him."

Immediately God smote the king with leprosy, so that he could not pull his hand back again, and at the same time the altar was rent. Astonished beyond measure at this sudden retribution for his sin, coming like lightning from heaven, and very much afraid, he cried out to the man of God, "Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God for me, that my hand may be restored again." And it is recorded that "the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before."

Let us keep in mind that we are not now considering the praying habits of the man of God nor the possibilities of prayer, though both face us here. But rather we are finding just here that a ruler in Israel, guilty of a grievous sin, and departing from God, when God's wrath falls upon him, he immediately calls upon a praying man to intercede with God in his behalf. It is but another case where a sinner against God showed his faith in the virtue of the prayers of a man of God. Sad is the day in a Christian land, not only where there is the decay of prayer in the Church, []but where sinners are so unaffected by the religion of the Church that they have no faith in prayer and care little about the prayers of praying men.

Another illustration follows this case very quickly. The son of King Jeroboam fell sick, and was about to die. And this wicked, indifferent king, posted his wife off to Ahijah, the prophet of God, to ask him to say what would be the result of the illness of the child. She attempted to practice a deception upon the old prophet who was nearly blind, intending not to make herself known to him. But he had the vision of a prophet even though dim in sight, and immediately revealed to her that she was known to him. After telling her many things of vast importance concerning the kingdom and charging her husband that he had not kept God's commandments, but had gone into idolatry, he said to her: "Arise, therefore, and get thee down to thy house; and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die."

How natural for a father in trouble to appeal to a praying prophet for relief? And as in the first mentioned case, his sin did not blind his eyes to the value of having a man of God intercede for him. It availed nothing as was proved, but it did prove our contention that in Old Testament times sinners, while they were not themselves praying men, believed strongly in the prayers of praying men.

Take the instance of Johanan, just as the Children of Israel began their life of captivity in Babylon. Johanan and Jeremiah, with a small company, had been left in their native land, and Ishmael had conspired against Gedaliah, the appointed governor of the country, and had slain him. Johanan came to the rescue and delivered the people from Ishmael who was taking them away from their land. But Johanan wanted to flee down into Egypt, which was contrary to the Divine plan. At this particular juncture of affairs, he assembled all the people, and they went to Jeremiah with the earnest appeal:

"We beseech thee, let our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the Lord thy God, that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do."

Like all other appeals to good men for prayer, Jeremiah interceded for these inquirers after the right way, and after ten days the answer came, and they were informed by Jeremiah what God would have them do. This was to the effect that they should not go down to Egypt, but remain in and about Jerusalem, but the people and Johanan played Jeremiah false, and refused to do as God had told them in answer to prayer. But it did not disprove the fact that they had faith in prayer and in praying men.

Another case may be noticed as showing the truth of our proposition that sinners had faith in prayer in the Old Testament dispensation, thus indirectly proving the preeminence of prayer in those days, for certainly prayer must have had a prominent place and its necessity must have received general recognition, when even sinners by their actions give endorsement to its virtue and necessity. Surely if sinners bore testimony to its worth, and at that time displayed their need of prayer, even by the prayers of some one else, Church people of this day ought to have a deep sense of its need, and should have strong faith in prayer and its virtue. And certainly if the men of Old Testament times were such men of prayer, and had such a reputation as praying men, then in this favored day, Christian men should be so given to prayer that they also would have a wide reputation as praying men.

Zedekiah was king of Judah just as the captivity of God's people began. He was in charge of the kingdom when Jerusalem was besieged by the King of Babylon. And it was just about this time that Zedekiah sent two chosen men unto Jeremiah saying: "Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us; for Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, maketh war against us; if so be that the Lord will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us."

And God told Jeremiah in answer to this inquiry what to do, and what would occur, but as in another case, that of Johanan, Zedekiah proved false, and would not do as God instructed Jeremiah to tell him. At the same time it proved conclusively that Zedekiah had not lost his faith in prayer as a means of finding out the mind of God, nor did it affect him in his belief in the virtue of the prayers of a praying man.

Verily, prayer must have had a preeminent place in all Old Testament history when not only the men of God were noted for their praying habits, but even men who departed from God and proved false bore testimony to its virtue by appealing to the men of prayer to make intercessions for them. This is so notorious in Old Testament history that no careful reader of these old scriptures can fail to discover and notice it.

XII. PAUL, THE TEACHER OF PRAYER

"Fletcher of Madeley, a great teacher of a century and a half ago, used to lecture to the young theological students. He was one of the fellow-workers with Wesley and a man of most saintly character. When he had lectured on one of the great topics of the Word of God, such as the Fullness of God's Holy Spirit or on the power and blessing that He meant His people to have, he would close the lecture and say, 'That is the theory; now will those who want the practice come along up to my room!' And again and again they closed their books and went away to his room, where the hour's theory would be followed by one or two hours of prayer."—Rev. Hubert Brooke.

How instant, strenuous, persistent, and pathetic was Paul's urgency of prayer upon those to whom he wrote and spoke! "I exhort," says he, writing to Timothy, "first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men." This he meant was to be the prime deposit and truth for the Church. First of all, before all things, to the front of all things, the Church of Christ was to be a praying Church, was to pray for men, was to pray for all men. He charged the Philippians to this effect: "Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." The Church must be anxious about nothing. In everything prayer must be made. Nothing was too small about which to pray. Nothing was too great for God to overcome.

Paul lays it down as a vital, all-essential injunction in writing to the Church at Thessalonica, "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks. For this is the will of God concerning you." The Church must give itself to unceasing prayer. Never was prayer to cease in the Church. This was the will of God concerning His Church on earth.

Paul was not only given to prayer himself, but he continually and earnestly urged it in a way that showed its vital importance. He was not only insistent in urging prayer upon the Church in his day, but he urged persistent praying. "Continue in prayer and watch in the same," was the keynote of all his exhortations on prayer. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication," was the way he pressed this important matter upon the people. "I will, therefore," I exhort, this is my desire, my mind upon this question, "that men pray everywhere, without wrath and doubting." As he prayed after this fashion himself, he could afford to press it upon those to whom he ministered.

Paul was a leader by appointment and by universal recognition and acceptance. He had many mighty forces in this ministry. His conversion, so conspicuous and radical, was a great force, a perfect magazine of aggressive and defensive warfare. His call to the apostleship was clear, luminous and convincing. But these forces were not the divinest energies which brought forth the largest results to his ministry. Paul's course was more distinctly shaped and his career rendered more powerfully successful by prayer than by any other force.

It is no surprise then that he should give such prominence to prayer in his preaching and writing. We could not expect it to be otherwise. As prayer was the highest exercise in his personal life, so also prayer assumed the same high place in his teaching. His example of prayer added force to his teaching on prayer. His practice and his teaching ran in parallel lines. There was no inconsistency in the two things.

Paul was the chiefest of the apostles as he was chief in prayer. If he was the first of the apostles, prayer conspired to that end. Hence he was all the better qualified to be a teacher on prayer. His praying fitted him to teach others what prayer was and what prayer could do. And for this reason he was competent to urge upon the people that they must not neglect prayer. Too much depended upon it. He was first in prayer for this cause. For the reason that on him centered more saintly praying than on any one else, he became the first in apostleship. The crown of martyrdom was the highest crown in the royalty of heaven, but prayer put this crown of martyrdom on his head. He who would teach the people to pray must first himself be given to prayer. He who urges prayer on others must first tread the path of prayer himself. And just in proportion as preachers pray, will they be disposed to urge prayer upon those to whom they preach. Moreover, just in proportion as preachers pray, will they be fitted to preach on prayer. If that course of reasoning be true, would it be legitimate to draw the conclusion that the reason why there is so little preaching on prayer in these modern times is because preachers are not praying men?

We might stake the whole question of the absolute necessity and the possibilities of prayer in this dispensation on Paul's attitude toward prayer. If personal force, if the energy of a strong will, if profound convictions, if personal culture and talents, and if the Divine call and the Divine empowerment,—if any one of these, or all of them united, could direct the Church of God without prayer, then logically prayer would be unnecessary. If profound piety and unswerving consecration to a high purpose, if impassioned loyalty to Jesus Christ, if any or all of these could exist without devoted prayer, or lift a Church leader above the necessity of prayer, then Paul was above its use. But if the great and gifted, the favored and devoted Paul felt the necessity of unceasing prayer, and realized that it was urgent and pressing in regard to its claims and necessity, and if he felt that it was clamorous and insistent that the Church should pray without ceasing, then he and his brethren in the apostolate should be aided by universal and mighty praying.

Paul's praying and his commands and the urgency with which he pressed upon the Church to pray, is the most convincing proof of the absolute necessity of prayer as a great moral force in the world, an indispensable and inalienable factor in the progress and spread of the Gospel, and in the development of personal piety. In Paul's view, there was no Church success without prayer, and no piety without prayer, in fact without much prayer. A Church out of whose life streams prayer as the incense flames went out of the censer, and a leadership out of whose character, life and habits flames prayer as imposing, conspicuous and spontaneous as the fragrant incense flamed, this was the leadership for God.

To pray everywhere, to pray in everything, to continue instant in prayer, and to pray without ceasing, thus Paul spoke as a commentator on the Divine uses and the nature of prayer.

Timothy was very dear to Paul, and the attachment was mutual and intensified by all their affinities. Paul found in Timothy those elements which fitted him to be his spiritual successor, at least the depository and the leader of the great spiritual principles and forces which were essential to the establishment and prosperity of the Church. These primary and vital truths he would enforce on and radicate in Timothy. Paul regarded Timothy as one to whom fundamental and vital truths might be committed, who would preserve them truly, and who would commit them inviolate to the future. So he gives to Timothy this deposit of prayer for all ages as found in 1 Tim. 2:1.

Let it be noted before we go any further that Paul wrote directly under the superintendency of the Holy Spirit, who guarded Paul against error, and who suggested the truths which Paul taught. We hold definitely without compromise in the least to the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, and as Paul's writings are part and parcel of those Sacred Writings, then Paul's Epistles are portions of the Scriptures or the Word of God. This being true, the doctrine of prayer which Paul affirmed is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. His Epistles are of the Word of God, inspired, authentic and of Divine authority. So that prayer as taught by Paul is the doctrine which Almighty God would have His Church accept, believe, and practice.

These words to Timothy, therefore, were divinely inspired words. This section of Holy Writ is much more than merely suggestive, and is far more than a broad, bare outline on prayer. It is so instructive about prayer, about how men ought to pray, how business men should pray, and so forceful about the reasons why men ought to pray, that it needs to be strongly and insistently pressed.

Here are Paul's words to Timothy on prayer:

"I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

"For kings and all that are in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Saviour;

"Who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

"For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

"Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

In this prayer section we have set forth by Paul the inheritance and practice of every Christian in all ages. It is a vade mecum in the great business of praying. it gives us a view of the energy and many-sidedness of prayer. First in point of time in all excellence of all duties is prayer. It must be first in all occupations. So exacting and imperative in its import and power is prayer that it stands first among spiritual values. He that prays not, is not at all. He is naught, less than naught. He is below zero, so far as Christ and God and heaven are concerned. Not simply among the first things does prayer stand on a level with other things, but first of the first, to the very forefront, does Paul put prayer with all his heart. "I exhort that first of all."

His teaching is that praying is the most important of all things on earth. All else must be restrained, retired, to give it primacy. Put it first, and keep its primacy. The conflict is about the primacy of prayer. Defeat and victory lie in this one thing. To make prayer secondary is to discrown it. It is to fetter and destroy prayer. If prayer is put first, then God is put first, and victory is assured. Prayer must either reign in the life or must abdicate. Which shall it be?

According to Paul, "supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks" all these elements of prayer and forms of prayer are to be offered for men. Prayer is offered for things, for all things, for all temporal good, and for all spiritual good and grace, but in these

directions Paul rises to the highest results and purposes of prayer. Men are to be affected by prayer. Their good, their character, conduct and destiny are all involved in prayer. In this regard prayer moves along the highest way, and pursues its loftiest end. We are cognizant and consonant with things, with blessings, and bestowments, with matters and things which touch men, but men themselves are here set forth as the objects of prayer. This broadens and ennobles prayer. Men, through the whole sweep and range of their conditions, are to be held in the mighty grasp of prayer.

Paul's teaching is to the effect that prayer is essentially a thing of the inner nature. The spirit within us prays. So note Paul's directions: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, without wrath." "Wrath" is a term which denotes the natural, internal motion of plants and fruits, swelling with juice. The natural juices are warmed into life, and rise by the warmth of Spring. Man has in him natural juices which rise as does the sap. Warmth, heat, all stages of passions and desires, every degree of feeling, these spontaneously rise under provocation. Guard against and suppress them. Man cannot pray with these natural feelings rising in him, cultivated, cherished and continued there. Prayer is to be without these. "Without wrath." Higher, better, nobler inspiration are to lift prayer upward. "Wrath" depresses prayer, hinders it, suppresses it.

The word "without" means making no use of, having no association with, apart from, aloof from The natural, unrenewed heart has no part in praying. Its heat and all its nature juices poison and destroy praying. The nature of prayer is deeper than nature. We cannot pray by nature, even by the kindest and the best nature.

("Prayer and Praying Men" ; EM Bounds; Chapter 11-12 ; Edward McKendree Bounds (August 15, 1835 – August 24, 1913) was a clergyman of the Methodist Episcopal Church South and author of eleven books, nine of which focused on the subject of prayer. Public Domain)

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