

THE PRAYERS OF PAUL FOR THE CHRISTIAN CONVERTS

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

**THE PRAYERS OF PAUL FOR THE CHRISTIAN CONVERTS.
HIS LABOR TO PROMOTE THE STABILITY OF BELIEVERS.
THE LOVE OF CHRIST HIS GOVERNING PRINCIPLE.
HIS BENEVOLENT EXERTIONS FOR THE POOR SAINTS IN JUDEA.**

The heart of Paul glowed with holy love, and was ever sending forth its fervent aspirations to a throne of grace, in behalf of the objects of his affection. He knew the value of prayer. To thanksgivings for the spiritual blessings imparted to the Gentile Christians, he added earnest supplications, that they might grow in grace and hold fast the beginning of their confidence, firm unto the end. What a beautiful example of ministerial faithfulness is thus afforded by this tender-hearted shepherd, to all succeeding pastors in the Christian Church. How sublime and energetic, how full of life and unction, are the prayers which he poured out in behalf of those newly converted believers, to whom he wrote his Epistles.

He has left us a most precious specimen of that fervent prayer which avails much. May all who read these holy breathings of the Apostle, experience the fullness of the blessings which he so ardently implored for all the churches.

Being filled with the spirit of grace and supplication, he thus expressed the inward feelings of his heart, "I have never stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people."

"When I think of the wisdom and scope of God's plan, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

"I pray that your love for each other will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in your knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until Christ returns. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—those good things that are produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God."

"So we have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and you will continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better. We also pray that you will be strengthened with his glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God's holy people, who live in the light. For he has rescued us from the one who rules in the kingdom of darkness, and he has brought us into the Kingdom of his dear Son. God has purchased our freedom with his blood and has forgiven all our sins."

"And may the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else, just as our love overflows toward you. As a result, Christ will make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our Father on that day when our Lord Jesus comes with all those who belong to him."

"Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this."

"And so we keep on praying for you, that our God will make you worthy of the life to which he called you. And we pray that God, by his power, will fulfill all your good intentions and faithful deeds. Then everyone will give honor to the name of our Lord Jesus because of you, and you will be honored along with him. This is all made

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possible because of the undeserved favor of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ."

"May our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father, who loved us and in his special favor gave us everlasting comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and give you strength in every good thing you do and say."

"May the Lord bring you into an ever deeper understanding of the love of God and the endurance that comes from Christ." "May the Lord of peace himself always give you his peace no matter what happens. The Lord be with you all." Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." "The God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen." "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." "Grace be to you, and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end." "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, Amen."

The glorious subject of these petitions cannot be too much studied; the blessings which they contain, cannot be too earnestly implored. These prayers of the Apostle lead us, as it were, into the inner chamber of his heart. We see what were his inmost desires for the spiritual welfare of his children in the faith. Here, nothing is cold or formal; all is fervent, energetic, affectionate. That which the world derides, and the formalist censures, is the very thing he so ardently supplicated for the churches of Christ; even the religion of the heart, manifesting itself by a supreme delight in Jesus, by a bold renunciation of fleshly lusts, and by an uniform obedience to the Will of God.

The Apostle not only rejoiced over those who were made the subjects of divine grace, and prayed for their continuance in well-doing; but he also labored with incessant toil for their establishment in the faith. This truly apostolic spirit is beautifully displayed in his address to the elders of Ephesus, "You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now I have done the Lord's work humbly—yes, and with tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. Yet I never shrank from telling you the truth, either publicly or in your homes. I have had one message for Jews and Gentiles alike—the necessity of turning from sin and turning to God, and of faith in our Lord Jesus. And now I am going to Jerusalem, drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit, not knowing what awaits me, except that the Holy Spirit has told me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead. But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love. And now I know that none of you to whom I have preached the Kingdom will ever see me again. Let me say plainly that I have been faithful. No one's damnation can be blamed on me, for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants for you. And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you. And now I entrust you to God and the word of his grace—his message that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself."

Not having been at Rome when he wrote his Epistle to the Christians of that city, he expressed his desire with peculiar delicacy, that he might be permitted to visit them, for their furtherance in the faith of the Gospel. "God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request, if by any means, now at length I might have a prosperous journey, by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me."

As the heart of Paul was filled with love and gentleness, so he was equally undaunted in the hour of danger. His Christian heroism was strikingly displayed at Lystra. Having, as we have seen, been stoned by the people, he miraculously rose up, and came into the city; and the next day, he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. Afterwards he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. Then he came once more to Derbe and Lystra; so the churches were established in

the faith, and increased in number daily.

The Apostle, regardless of his personal safety, watched over the interests of the infant churches. When persecution was spreading its fires on every side, he trembled for the souls of his spiritual children, lest Satan should get an advantage over them; for he was not ignorant of Satan's devices. Also, he had a deep insight into the human heart, being well acquainted with his own. And knowing that, "as in water, face answers to face, so the heart of man to man," he was enabled to speak a word in season, and to give such cautions as were needful to guard believers against those snares which were laid for their feet.

His love for the souls of men, led him to endure the greatest privations for their salvation and growth in grace. Impelled by this principle, he traversed various regions, that he might plant churches, and water those churches which were already planted. No force of opposition could deter him from the performance of this duty, nor cause him to desert his beloved converts in the hour of danger. When he could not see them, through providential hindrances, he wrote invaluable Epistles to confirm and strengthen them; and when enabled to travel, we find how fearlessly he revisited those places which were noted by his trials; being willing rather to risk the loss of life, than that one soul should perish through his neglect or from fear of suffering.

In all this the Apostle sought not his own glory, but the glory of God; not his own interest, but the interest of perishing sinners. Hence he could say, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." With the angels of God, he could rejoice over one sinner that repents; and praise the Lord for every brand which was plucked out of the fire. Having been caught up into paradise, his soul was full of heavenly love, and all his prayer, and desire, and labor was, that heaven might be let down into the hearts of men, through a believing reception of Jesus Christ.

What a model is here presented to Christian teachers in every age. There was nothing luke-warm, nothing timid, nothing selfish, in the character of this preacher of righteousness. The love of Christ was the governing principle of his actions; to promote the glory of Christ was the constant desire of his heart. He could truly say, "To me to live is Christ." A heavenly light irradiated his mind. He saw, by faith, the realities of eternity, and his affections yearned over dying sinners. Beholding them suspended by the thread of life over the gulf of hell, in danger every moment of dropping into its everlasting fire, he labored to rescue them from ruin. With unwearied solicitude, he directed them to Jesus, the only Savior and Friend of sinners, whose blood cleanses from all sin, and who can and will save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him.

Thus he felt for the unconverted Jews, when writing to the Church of Rome, "In the presence of Christ, I speak with utter truthfulness—I do not lie—and my conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm that what I am saying is true. My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them."

He also expressed his great solicitude for their salvation, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved; for I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." In them he saw the image of his former self. He could therefore pity them, and pray for them, and labor to do them good. But he trembled for their state of unbelief. With a prophetic eye, he foresaw the miseries which were coming upon them as a people, who, to use his own words, "who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them to the uttermost."

The present degraded state of the Jews is an awful commentary upon these words; while their existence as a people, affords an undeniable and perpetual evidence to the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. "My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him; and they shall be wanderers among the nations." "Fear not, O Jacob my servant, says the Lord; for I am with you; for I will make a full end of all nations where I have driven you; but I will not make a full end of you." "You shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all nations where the Lord shall lead you." "And it shall come to pass, that as you were a curse among the heathen, O House of Judah and House of Israel, so I will save you, and you shall be a blessing." What uninspired men could have uttered these words with the certainty of their fulfillment? It is most evident, therefore, that the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The Jews have been scattered and persecuted; they are to this day, wanderers, and a by-word among the

nations. Those kingdoms which once oppressed them are now no more; while the Jews still preserve their national character, customs, and religion, though dispersed throughout the earth, without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice. What but Almighty Power could have effected, and what but Infinite Omniscience could have foreseen, events, which ought to shame the infidel out of his unbelief!

The Apostle who foretold their miseries, has also, in his Epistle to the Romans, foretold their restoration, and conversion to the faith of Christ. This glorious event will be to the world, as life from the dead, when "Israel shall return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and when they shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." In the same compassionate spirit, Paul grieved over the benighted heathen, who, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, walked in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness of their heart. With these affections of compassion and earnest longings for the salvation of sinners, he told the Romans, that, "from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ."

The Lord, whom he so faithfully served in the Gospel of his Son, sustained him amid all his labors, so that he could say, "I am filled with comfort; I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." This experience of his Savior's loving-kindness, made him even "exult in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us." Thus he was strengthened to glorify God in the fires; and to spread abroad the savor of his name.

With the love of God, the love of our neighbor is inseparably connected; for, "If any man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God, must love his brother also." Under the influence of this Christian love, the Apostle cheerfully expended his strength, in promoting the temporal, as well as the spiritual welfare of his brethren. His religion was of a practical nature; it did not consist in high professions and swelling words; in many promises, and few performances; but in self-denying labors.

When writing to Timothy, he gave him this command, "Tell those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of eternal life."

To the exercise of the same practical piety, he exhorted the Galatian converts, "Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." The second time when Paul went up to Jerusalem, he saw James, and Peter, and John, who gave to him and Barnabas the right-hand of fellowship. It was then agreed that he and Barnabas should go unto the Heathen, while the other Apostles would go unto the Jews, "Only they wanted," writes Paul to the Galatians, "that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was forward to do."

The prophet Agabus had foretold by the Spirit, that there would be a great famine throughout the world, which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. This period of affliction called into active exercise that grace of love, which, when genuine, evidences itself by feelings of compassion and acts of unselfish liberality. The early Christians were happily united in heart; they formed but one holy family; their interests, their joys, their sorrows, were so blended together, that if one member suffered, all the members suffered with it. Thus it was at this calamitous season; for the historian informs us, that the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did; and sent it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

The Apostle was indeed most forward to remember the poor suffering saints. He used all his influence with the Gentile churches to furnish them with the means of subsistence, and spared no pains to impress the hearts of believers with the exalted duty of Christian beneficence. "I have," said he to the elders of the Ephesian Church, "showed you all things, how you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said; It is more blessed to give, than to receive." Though very anxious to visit Rome, in order to benefit the Christians there by his counsel and ministry; yet he had a work of love to perform, which he felt desirous first to accomplish. He therefore writes, "I am planning to go to Spain, and when I do, I will stop off in Rome. And after I have enjoyed your fellowship for a little while, you can send me on my way again. But before I come, I

must go down to Jerusalem to take a gift to the Christians there. For you see, the believers in Greece have eagerly taken up an offering for the Christians in Jerusalem, who are going through such hard times. They were very glad to do this because they feel they owe a real debt to them. Since the Gentiles received the wonderful spiritual blessings of the Good News from the Jewish Christians, they feel the least they can do in return is help them financially. As soon as I have delivered this money and completed this good deed of theirs, I will come to see you on my way to Spain. And I am sure that when I come, Christ will give me a great blessing for you."

The charitable Apostle was delighted with the liberality of the Macedonian Christians towards the suffering churches of Judea. To the Corinthians he held them forth as a beautiful model for imitation, "Now I want to tell you, dear friends, what God in his kindness has done for the churches in Macedonia. Though they have been going through much trouble and hard times, their wonderful joy and deep poverty have overflowed in rich generosity. For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem." He then bestows a commendation upon the Corinthians themselves, "I really don't need to write to you about this gift for the Christians in Jerusalem. For I know how eager you are to help, and I have been boasting to our friends in Macedonia that you Christians in Greece were ready to send an offering a year ago. In fact, it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many of them to begin helping." "This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

With Apostolic authority, he might have enforced their obedience; but wishing rather to win them over to the exercise of Christian beneficence, he says, "Since you excel in so many ways—you have so much faith, such gifted speakers, such knowledge, such enthusiasm, and such love for us—now I want you to excel also in this gracious ministry of giving. I am not saying you must do it, even though the other churches are eager to do it. This is one way to prove your love is real. You know how full of love and kindness our Lord Jesus Christ was. Though he was very rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich." "And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others; being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causes through us thanksgiving to God."

How indefatigable was this servant of Christ. Who can view his character, and not glorify God in him. May the contemplation of it, stir us up to an increased desire after that grace which produced in him such holy fruits. As by a participation in the sorrows of others, we lessen their poignancy; so, by an endeavor to increase the happiness of others, we augment our own. Let us then embrace every opportunity of doing good to the souls and bodies of men; for opportunity is the flower of time, while the right improvement of it is the fruit. "To a Christian, it must be regarded as an axiom, that an opportunity of doing good, is tantamount to a command to undertake the service. Let us remember, that we have here no option. Our faculties are given to us, not as a property, but as a trust; and we are bound at our peril to forbear availing ourselves of the opportunities which Providence may place within our reach, of doing justice, and showing mercy, of lessening the miseries, and augmenting the happiness, of our species."

How sweetly constraining is the Christian motive to brotherly love; "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God, for God is love. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

"One there is above all other;
O how he loves!
His is love beyond a brother's,
O how he loves!
Earthly friends may fail and leave us,
This day kind- the next bereave us,
But this Friend will never deceive us,
O how he loves!
Blessed Jesus!- Would you know him,
Give yourself entirely to him;
Is it sin that pains and grieves you?
Unbelief and trials tease you?"

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**Jesus can from all release you;
O how he loves!
Love this Friend- who longs to save you.
Do you love? he will not leave you
Think no more then of tomorrow,
Take his easy yoke and follow,
Jesus carries all your sorrow,
O how he loves!
All your sins shall be forgiven,
Backward shall your foes be driven;
Best of blessings he'll provide you,
Nothing but good shall e'er betide you,
Safe to glory he will guide you,
O how he loves!**