

PRAYER IN THE AGE OF GRACE

There is a teaching abroad that in this age of grace we are to pray only for spiritual needs -- that God leaves it up to us to handle all other needs we may have. Is this restriction on our access to God scriptural? Does God minister only to our spiritual needs today?

First of all prayer has an important place in the life of the believer under grace. In the K.J.V. The word "pray" or "prayer" occurs over 40 times in Paul's epistles, and ten times in Acts chapters 9 through 28 prayer is mentioned in connection with Paul and his ministry. We are exhorted to pray always (Eph. 6:18), everywhere (1Tim. 2:8), without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:18), for all men (1 Tim. 2:1), in everything (Phil. 4:6), and specifically for all saints "watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication" (Eph. 6:18).

For what should we pray?

We should pray for the unsaved, that they might come to know Christ. We have the example of Paul in Rom. 10:1 "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." This is very strongly implied also in 1 Timothy 2:1 - 4. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for 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 Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

We should pray for the message of grace to be effectively sent forth. "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds" (Col. 4:3). "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you" (2 Thess 3:1).

Paul not only taught that we should pray for the spiritual needs of the saints, but he set an example by praying "without ceasing" for those needs. This is the great emphasis in Paul's teaching on prayer and his example as he prayed.

But does this mean we are to pray only for spiritual needs? Why the great emphasis on spiritual needs if other needs also are legitimate topics for our requests? First of all, our greatest needs are spiritual, though we may not fully realize this. Secondly, our physical needs are so tangible, and often pressing, that it requires little or no exhortation to remember them before the Lord. Let me illustrate. When a child starts out for school on a hot and sunny day the mother may need to remind him to put on his hat. There is no need for her to tell him to put on his pants however. Why not? Because he should not put them on? No, because he will do that without being told!

What indication do we have in Pauline scripture that we may bring physical and material needs to His attention when we pray?

In light of Rom. 8:23, where the redemption of our bodies is the topic, it seems the infirmities causing us to groan, and for which the Holy Spirit prays (Rom. 8:26), include physical

infirmities.

In Rom. 15:30 Paul writes, "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." But what are they to pray about? The context gives the answer. They are to pray that in his coming trip into Spain (v. 28) he will come "in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" (v. 29); that he may be "delivered [surely physically] from them that do not believe in Judaea;" and that his "service ... for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints" (v. 31).

Paul prayed "night and day ... exceedingly" that he might see the face of the Thessalonians so he could minister to them (1 Thess. 3:10) and adds [which is a prayer], "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you" (v. 11). Thus he is praying, and asking them to pray, for a trip to Thessalonica. Whether or not God gave him what he asked for is beside the point. He did ask for it. Likewise Paul trusted that through Philemon's prayers he would be able to visit him. "But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you"

In First Timothy Paul links both prayer and thanksgiving with the physical food we eat. "-- meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." (1 Tim. 4:3 - 5).

One verse says it all: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). Later in the same epistle he assures them that, since they have met his needs, and the needs of others, out of their poverty (2 Cor 8:1 - 4) God would now meet their needs out of His riches in glory (Phil. 4:19). To limit these "needs" to spiritual needs does not satisfy the context. Praise the Lord we are not orphans -- our Lord cares about all our needs and delights to have them made known to Him -- trusting His wisdom in answering our requests.

Are we to limit our discussion to only Paul's prison epistles? This is asking us to believe the Acts 28 theory -- which I have answered at length in my book "Help in Hard Places." There is no indication in Paul's epistles that our relationship to God in prayer has undergone a change at Acts 28:28. Also the most definite verse of all is taken from a prison epistle (Phil. 4:6).

When we, or our families, face illness, hunger, dangers, persecution, or death, it is a heavenly comfort to be able to talk to the Lord about it and know that He knows and cares. While it is true that many times He, in His wisdom, does not grant our requests, what a joy it is to be able to bring them to Him and rest our burdened hearts on His love and grace.

Bible Study # 81 --- William P Heath

<My Documents\Bible Studies\prayer-1> -- Microsoft Word

(< amipro\docs\bibstudy\prayer-1.sam >)