

Prayer - Revelation 1:5, 6, Part 1

by A.W. Pink

The sermon explores the nature of prayer, the doxologies of Scripture, and the wondrous works of God in the realm of grace, particularly the love of Christ that purges our sins.

Scripture: Exodus 3:13-17, Psalm 139:14, Isaiah 11:1-2, John 15:13, Romans 1:19-21, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 1:21, Philippians 2:10, Hebrews 1:3, Revelation 1:5-6

Topics: "Prayer", "Doxology"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of prayer in the context of Revelation 1:5-6, illustrating how it encapsulates the grace and peace from the triune God. He highlights the distinct roles of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ, focusing on Christ's titles as the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Pink elaborates on the doxology that arises from recognizing Christ's love and sacrifice, urging believers to reflect on the divine attributes and the necessity of glorifying God. He stresses that true doxology is directed solely to God, acknowledging His grace and the redemptive work of Christ. The sermon calls for a deeper appreciation of Christ's love, which is impartial, sacrificial, and eternal, culminating in the cleansing of believers from sin through His blood.

Transcript

The prayer now before us really forms the closing part of the salutation and benediction of verses 4 and 5 of Revelation 1, in which "grace and peace" are sought from the triune God in His distinct persons: (1) "from him which is, and which was, and which is to come," that is, from Jehovah as the self-existing and immutable One--He is addressed by the equivalent of His memorial name (Ex. 3:13-17) by which His eternal being and covenant-keeping faithfulness were to be remembered (Ex. 6:2-5; "the LORD" equals "Jehovah" throughout the Old Testament); (2) "from the seven Spirits which are before his throne," that is, from the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His power and diversity of His operations (Isa. 11:1, 2); and (3) "from Jesus Christ," who is mentioned last as the connecting Link between God and His people. A threefold appellation is here accorded the Savior: (1) "the faithful witness," which contemplates and covers the whole of His virtuous life from the manger to the cross; (2) "the first begotten [better, "Firstborn"] of the dead," (brackets mine) which celebrates His victory over the tomb--this is a title of dignity (Gen. 49:3), and signifies priority of rank rather than time; and (3) "and the prince of the kings of the earth," which announces His regal majesty and dominion. This third title views the Conqueror as exalted "Far above all principality, and power" (Eph. 1:21), as the One upon whose shoulder the government of the universe has been laid (Isa. 9:6), who is even now "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3), and before

whom every knee shall yet bow (Phil. 2:10).

An Analytical Synopsis of the Prayer

The preceding recital of the Redeemer's perfections and dignities evoked from the mouth of the Apostle John this adoring exclamation: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Thus the nature of our prayer is again a doxology. Its Object is the Son of God incarnate in His mediatorial character and office. Its adorers are those of "us" who are the beneficiaries of His mediation. Its inciting reasons are our apprehensions of His unfathomable love, the cleansing efficacy of His precious blood, and the wondrous dignities that He has conferred upon His redeemed. Its ascription is "to him be glory and dominion," not merely for a thousand years, but "for ever and ever," which closes with the assuring affirmation, "Amen"--it shall be so. For the benefit of young preachers I shall add a few more remarks on doxologies in general.

The Doxologies Are Needed to Enlarge Our Conceptions of the Persons of the Godhead

The doxologies of Scripture reveal our need to form more exalted conceptions of the Divine Persons. In order to do so, we must engage in more frequent and devout meditations on their ineffable attributes. How little do our thoughts dwell upon the display of them in the material creation. Divinity is "clearly seen" in the things that God has made, and even the heathen are charged with inexcusable guilt because of their failure to glorify God for His handiwork (Rom. 1:19-21). Not only should our senses be regaled by the lovely colors of the trees and perfumes of the flowers, but our minds ought to dwell upon the motions and instincts of animals, admiring the Divine hand that so equipped them. How little do we reflect on the marvels of our own bodies, the structure, convenience, and perfect adaptedness of each member. How few unite with the Psalmist in exclaiming, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps. 139:14). How much more wonderful are the faculties of our inner man, raising us high above all irrational creatures. How better can our reason be employed than in extolling the One who has so richly endowed us? Yet how little grateful acknowledgment is made to the beneficent Fashioner and Donor of our beings.

How little do we consider the wisdom and power of God as manifested in the government of the world. Let us take, for example, the balance preserved between the sexes in the relative number of births and deaths, so that the population of the earth is maintained from generation to generation without any human contriving. Or let us take into account the various temperaments and talents given to men, so that some are wise for counsel, administration and management, some are better qualified for hard manual labor, and others to serve in clerical functions. Or consider how His government curbs the baser passions of men, so that such a measure of law and order obtains generally in society that the weak are not destroyed by the strong nor the good unable to live in a world that wholly "lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). Or think how God sets bounds to the success of rapacious dictators, so that when it appears they are on the very point of carrying all before them, they are suddenly stopped by the One who has decreed that they shall go "no farther." Or ponder how, in His application of the law of retribution, individuals and nations are made to reap what they sow, whether it be good or evil. It is because we pay so little attention to these and a hundred other similar phenomena that we are so rarely moved to cry, "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth" (Rev. 19:6).

Doxologies Are Wholly Devoted to the Praises of Deity, Particularly to the Works of Divine Grace

But it is the wondrous works of God in the realm of grace, rather than in creation and providence, that are most calculated to draw out the hearts of God's people in adoring homage. More particularly, those works wherein the Darling of His own heart was and is engaged on our behalf draw forth our admiration and praise. Thus it is in the verses we are now pondering. No sooner was the peerless Person and perfections of the eternal Lover of his soul set before the mind and heart of the Apostle John than that he cried exultantly, "To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." And thus it is with all of God's true saints. Such a cry is the spontaneous response and outgoing of their souls to Him. That leads me to point out the one thing that is common to all doxologies: in them praise is always offered exclusively to Deity, and never to any mere human agency or accomplishment. Self-occupation and self-gratulation have no place whatever in them. Different far is that from the low level of spirituality generally prevailing in the churches today. This writer was once present at a service where a hymn was sung, the chorus of which ran, "Oh, how I love Jesus." But I could not conscientiously join in singing it. None in heaven are guilty of lauding themselves or magnifying their graces, nor should any Christians do so here upon earth.

The Particular Object of this Doxology

The Object of this adoration and thanksgiving is that Blessed One who undertook, with the Father and the Spirit, to save His people from all their sins and miseries by the price of His blood and the arm of His power. In His essential Person, God the Son is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Spirit "who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 9:5). He is the uncreated Sun of righteousness (Ps. 84:11; Mal. 4:2). In Him all the glory of the Godhead shines forth, and by Him all the perfections of Deity have been manifested. In response to this very homage, He declares, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). Before the worlds were made He entered into covenant engagement to become incarnate, to be made in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3) to serve as the Surety of His people, to be the Bridegroom of His Church--its complete and all-sufficient Savior. As such He is the Man of God's right hand, the Fellow of the Lord of hosts, the King of glory. His work is honorable, His fullness infinite, His power omnipotent. His throne is for ever and ever. His name is above every name. His glory is above the heavens. It is impossible to extol Him too highly, for His glorious name "is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Neh. 9:5, ital. mine).

In the immediate context this adorable One is viewed in His theanthropic person, as incarnate, as the God-man Mediator. He is set forth in His threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and Potentate. His prophetic office is clearly denoted in the title "the faithful Witness," for in Old Testament prophecy the Father announced, "I have given him for a witness to the people" (Isa. 55:4). Christ Himself declared to Pilate, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (John 18:37). As such He proclaimed the Gospel to the poor and confirmed it by mighty miracles. His sacerdotal office is necessarily implied in the expression "first begotten of the dead," for in death He offered Himself as a sacrifice to God to make satisfaction for the transgressions of His people. He then rose again that He might continue to exercise His priesthood by His constant intercession for them. His regal office appears plainly in the designation "prince of the kings of the earth," for He has absolute dominion over them. By Him they reign (Prov. 8:15), and to Him they are commanded to render allegiance (Ps. 2:10-12). To Him we are to hearken, in Him we are to believe, and to Him we are to be subject. Singly and collectively these titles announce that He is to be greatly respected and revered.

Angels Are Filled with Wonder over the Redeeming Love of Christ for His Church

While an exile on the isle of Patmos, John was engaged in contemplating Immanuel in the excellencies of His Person, offices, and work. As he did so his heart was enraptured, and he exclaimed, "Unto him that loved us." The love of Christ is here expressed by the Apostle John in the past tense, not because it is inoperative in the present but to focus our attention upon its earlier exercises. The love of Christ is the grandest fact and mystery revealed in Holy Writ. That love originated in His heart and was in operation for all eternity, for before the mountains were formed His "delights were with the sons of men" (Prov. 8:31). That wonderful love was put forth by Christ in connection with the everlasting covenant, wherein He agreed to serve as the Sponsor of His people and to discharge all their obligations. That He should take complacency in creatures of the dust is the marvel of heaven (Eph. 3:8-10; 1 Peter 1:12). That He should set His heart upon them while viewed in their fallen estate is incomprehensible. That love was expressed openly in His incarnation, humiliation, obedience, sufferings, and death.

Holy Scripture declares that "the love of Christ... passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). It is entirely beyond finite computation or comprehension. That the Son of God should ever deign to notice finite creatures was an act of great condescension on His part (Ps. 13:6). That he should go so far as to pity them is yet more wonderful. That He should love us in our pollution entirely transcends our understanding. That the outgoings of His heart toward the Church moved Him to lay aside the glory that He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5), to take upon Him the form of a servant, and to become "obedient unto death" for their sakes, "even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7, 8), surmounts all thought and is beyond all praise. That the Holy One should be willing to be made sin for His people (2 Cor. 5:2 1) and to endure the curse that endless blessing should be their portion (Gal. 3:13, 14) is altogether inconceivable. As S. E. Pierce so ably expressed it,

His love is one perfect and continued act from everlasting to everlasting. It knows no abatement or decay. It is eternal and immutable love. It exceeds all conception and surpasses all expression. To give the utmost proof of it, "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). In His life He fully displayed His love. In His sufferings and death He stamped it with an everlasting emphasis.

Christ's Love Is Completely Impartial, Not Evoked by Any Merit in Its Objects

The love of Christ was an entirely disinterested love, for it was uninfluenced by anything in its objects or any other considerations external to Himself. There was nothing whatever in His people, either actual or foreseen, to call His love into exercise: nothing actual, for they had rebelled against God and had deliberately chosen as their exemplar and master one who was a liar and murderer from the beginning; nothing foreseen, for no excellence could they bear but that which His own gracious hand wrought in them. The love of Christ infinitely excelled in purity, in intensity, in its disinterestedness, any that ever moved in a human breast. It was altogether free and spontaneous. He loved us when we were loveless and unlovely. We were entirely unable to render Him any proper compensation or return. His own essential blessedness and glory could neither be diminished by our damnation nor increased by our salvation. His love was uninvited, unattracted, altogether self-caused and self-motivated. It was His love that stirred every other attribute--His wisdom, power, holiness, and so forth--to activity. The words of David, "he delivered me, because he delighted in me" (Ps. 18:19, ital. mine), provide the Divine explanation of my redemption.

The love of Christ was a discriminating one. "The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). He is benevolent toward all His creatures, making His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sending rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:45). "He is kind unto the unthankful

and to the evil" (Luke 6:35, ital. mine). But Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it with a love such as He does not bear toward all mankind. The Church is the one special and peculiar object of His affections. For her He reserves and entertains a unique love and devotion that makes her shine among all the created works of His hands with the unmistakable radiance of a favorite. Husbands are bidden to love their wives "even as Christ also loved the church" (Eph. 5:25). The love of a husband toward his wife is a special and exclusive one; so Christ cherishes for His Church a particular affection. It is set upon His Bride rather than upon the human race at large. She is His peculiar treasure. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1, ital. mine). Instead of caviling at this truth, let us enjoy its preciousness. Christ's love is also a constant and durable one, exercised upon its objects "unto the end"; and, as we shall now see, it is a sacrificial and enriching love.

Christ's Love Addressed Itself to Our Greatest Need: The Purging of Our Sins

The manifestations of Christ's love correspond to our woe and want, its operations being suited to the condition and circumstances of its objects. Our direst need was the putting away of our sins, and that need has been fully met by Him. His love alone could not remove our transgressions "as far as the east is from the west." The claims of God had to be met; the penalty of the Law had to be endured. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22), and Christ so loved the Church as to shed His precious blood for her. Hence the Apostle John is here heard exclaiming, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in [or "by"] his own blood." This is the second inspiring reason or motive behind this benediction. This reference to the blood of Christ necessarily underscores His Deity as well as His humanity. None but a creature can shed blood and die, but none but God can forgive sins. It is likewise a witness to the vicarious or substitutionary nature and efficacy of His sacrifice. How otherwise could it wash us from our sins? Moreover, it celebrates the supreme proof of His care for His people. "Love is strong as death; ... Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the flood drown it" (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7) demonstrated at the cross, where all the waves and billows of God's wrath (Ps. 42:7) went over the Sinbearer.

The surpassing love of Christ was evidenced by His espousing the persons of God's elect, undertaking their cause, assuming their nature, obeying and suffering in their room and stead. The Apostle Paul brought this blessed truth home with application to believers when he said,

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour (Eph. 5:1, 2).

The Lord Jesus knew what was necessary for our deliverance, and His love prompted Him to the accomplishment of the same. And the apostles Paul and John understood and taught concerning the heavy debt of love and gratitude that is laid upon all the happy beneficiaries of Christ's saving work. To "wash us from our sins" was of the very essence of those things that are necessary for our salvation, and for that His blood must be shed. What stupendous proof was that of His love! Herein is love, that the Just should voluntarily and gladly suffer for the unjust, "that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Amazing tidings, that Christ Jesus made full atonement for those who were at that very moment His enemies (Rom. 5:10)! He chose to lay down His life for those who were by nature and by practice rebels against God, rather than that they should be a sacrifice to the wrath of God forever. The guilty transgress, but the innocent One is condemned. The ungodly offend, but the Holy One endures the penalty. The servant commits the crime, but the Lord of glory blots it out. What reason have we to adore Him!

Christ's Love Is Infinite and Immutable

How can Christ ever manifest His love for His people in a way that exceeds that which He has already done? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Yet this was the God-man, and by so doing He showed that His love was infinite and eternal--incapable of amplification! He shone forth in the full meridian power and splendor of His love in Gethsemane and on Calvary. There he sustained in His soul the whole of the awful curse that was due and payable to the sins of His people. Then it was that it pleased the Father to bruise Him and put His soul to grief (Isa. 53:10). His anguish was inconceivable. He cried out under it, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" It was thus that He loved us, and it was thereby that He provided the fountain to cleanse us from our iniquities. Through the shedding of His precious blood He has purged His people entirely from the guilt and defilement of sin. Let us join in the exultant praise of S. E. Pierce:

Blessings, eternal blessings on the Lamb who bore our sins and carried our sorrows! His bloody sweat is our everlasting health and cure. His soul-travail is our everlasting deliverance from the curse of the Law and the wrath to come. His bearing our sins in His own body on the Tree is our everlasting discharge from them. His most precious bloodshedding is our everlasting purification.

"And washed us from our sins in his own blood." Sin alike stains our record before God, pollutes the soul, and defiles the conscience; and naught can remove it but the atoning and cleansing blood of Christ. Sin is the only thing that the Lord Jesus hates. It is essential to His holiness that He should do so. He hates it immutably, and can as soon cease to love God as love it. Nevertheless His love to His people is even greater than His hatred of sin. Through their fall in Adam they are sinners; their fallen natures are totally depraved. By thought, word, and deed they are sinners. They are guilty of literally countless transgressions, for their sins are more in number than the hairs of their heads (Ps. 40:12). Yet Christ loved them! He did so before they sinned in Adam, and His forethoughts of them in their fallen estate produced no change in His love for them; rather, they afforded greater opportunity for Him to display that love. Therefore He became incarnate, that He might blot out their sins. Nothing was more loathsome to the Holy One of God. Yet He was willing to be an alien to His mother's children, despised and rejected of men, mocked and scourged by them, yea, abandoned by God for a season, that His people might be cleansed.

Christ's Once-for-All Washing of His People

I fully agree with John Gill's comments on the words "washed us from our sins":

This is not to be understood of the sanctification of their natures, which is the work of the Spirit, but of atonement for their sins and justification from them.

In other words, it is the purchase of redemption, and not its application, that is here in view. The latter, of course, follows at regeneration, for all whom He washed judicially from the guilt and penalty of sin (once for all at Golgotha) are in due time cleansed and released from the love and dominion of sin. That which is signified in the clause before us is guilt cancelled, condemnation removed, the curse of the Law taken away, and the sentence of acquittal pronounced. This is the portion of all believers: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). We must distinguish between the justification of our persons once for all (Acts 13:39) and the pardon of those sins that we commit as Christians (1 John 1:9). The latter must be penitentially confessed, and then we are forgiven and cleansed on the ground of Christ's blood. It is the former that is in view in Revelation 1:5, where the Apostle John is rejoicing in the love of Him whose blood has once and for all washed the persons of the saints. The

ongoing cleansing from sin that is needed day by day is acknowledged in Revelation 7:13, 14, where we behold the saints in brilliant white robes, previously travel-stained garments that they had cleansed day by day (cf. John 13:3-17).

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