

# For What Did St. Paul Ask Prayers for Himself?

by Daniel Steele

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*Paul's requests for prayer reveal that he enjoyed the grace of Christian perfection and had a clear knowledge of his sonship to God.*

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 1:11

**Topics:** "Christian Perfection", "Effective Prayer"

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## Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the inscrutable inner life of individuals, emphasizing how the requests for prayer can reveal one's spiritual condition. He contrasts the common requests for overcoming sin with the Apostle Paul's requests for external needs and success in preaching, showing Paul's confidence in his salvation and lack of internal struggles. Steele highlights that Paul's prayers focus on preaching effectiveness and protection, without seeking forgiveness or spiritual cleansing, indicating his experience of Christian perfection and clear knowledge of his sonship to God.

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## Transcript

The inner life of every person is inscrutable. We do not see the real self of our most intimate friend. But there are orifices through which the hidden man gleams forth. The mouth is one of these. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." The requests for prayer for themselves which Christians make, reveal their spiritual condition. In our social meetings the usual requests indicate the reverse of evangelical perfection. These are fair specimens: "Pray that I may overcome the evil of my heart"; "Pray that my besetting sin may not conquer me, and that I may be faithful and reach heaven at last"; "Pray that I may be victorious over inbred sin"; "Pray that I may be willing to do or to suffer God's will"; "I sin every day; pray that I may be kept from sinning, and that I may be sanctified wholly." These requests are proof positive that the blood of Jesus Christ has not cleansed them from all sin -- actual and original. They indicate that the regenerate life has not reached the point where the last touch of the new creation has purged away sin, and brought out completely the lost moral image of God.

Let us now see what the Apostle to the Gentiles invariably wishes the churches should ask for him, for he goes forward for prayers in every epistle. Turn to Rom. 15:30-32, "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit [the love inspired by the Spirit -- Rom. 5:5], that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered [not from inward foes lurking in my heart] from them which do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints, and that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God.' He prays, as one on a

perilous mission to persons hostile to him would pray, for deliverance from the hands that had only a few years before nailed his Master to the cross. We cannot infer from these words any imperfection in Paul's spiritual life.

In 2 Cor. 1:11 he again hints his desire for the prayers of believers in Corinth, "Ye also helping together by prayer for us that... thanks may be given by many on our behalf." Here the context shows that deliverance from persecutors is the burden of his desire, and when delivered, that all who had prayed for him might be blessed in offering thanksgivings to God.

Eph. 6: 18, 19, 'Praying always with all prayer for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel." He 'wishes for persuasive utterance to enable him to fasten saving truth upon the hearts of wicked men. The burden of his desire is not for himself but for others. He has what every preacher should have, a heart at leisure from itself through full salvation, and only anxious for the success of the word preached.

Col. 4:3, "Withal praying for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ." Through all his epistles up to the day of his death, this cry of Paul's heart sounds out, not 'who shall deliver me from this dead body of carnality,' but "utterance, effectual utterance, that I may save some of the multitudes who are thronging the downward road."

2 Thess. 3:1, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified." In the next verse he prays for deliverance, not from the plague of an unsanctified heart, but "from unreasonable and wicked men" -- fanatical Jews, who thought they would be doing acceptable service to the God of Abraham, if they should kill Paul, the supposed enemy of the religion of his own nation.

In Philemon 22 he invites Philemon to pray for providential protection in his journey to him, "For I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." Much the same style of request occurs in Heb. 13:18, 19, "Pray for us . . . that I may be restored unto you the sooner." So Pauline is this request and the prayer, "The God of peace . . . make you perfect," that I have no doubt of its authorship.

Phil. 1:19, "My salvation through your prayer." It is declared by some that spiritual salvation is here spoken of, a deliverance from the love of sin, if not from the guilt of sin. But what say the great scholars and exegetes? "Deliverance from present custody," say Chrysostom and Theodoret, "sustenance in life and bodily health," says Ecumenius; while Michaelis insists that it is "victory over foes," and Grotius suggests "the salvation of others," and Alford, "his own fruitfulness for Christ and glorification of him, whether by life or death, and so eventually his own salvation, in degree of blessedness, not in relation to the absolute fact." No one of these suggests entire sanctification from indwelling sin. If, as a school of expositors assert, Paul's spiritual life is mirrored in Rom. 7, ending with the despairing cry, "O wretched man," we should expect to find him frequently begging the churches to pray for his spiritual emancipation from this distressing bondage, called by Delitzsch "The unabolished antinomy." But the Christian world is saddened by no such doleful wail from him who said, "I am crucified with Christ; it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."

We conclude this half-hour with Paul with the following general remarks on all of Paul's requests for prayer:

1. They are for things external and not internal; for providential protection, not for spiritual perfection. There is not the first hint of an inward warfare between the flesh and the Spirit.
2. They are for greater impressiveness and success in preaching, and for the removal of obstacles to the advance of the gospel.
3. There is no intimation of doubts respecting his present and full salvation; no confession of daily sins, nor of the root of sin existing in him.
4. He never entreats the churches to intercede for his forgiveness and spiritual cleansing.
5. He evinces no uncertainty about his present and future salvation.
6. He shows that he is a man of like passions with ourselves, in his fear that evil men may obstruct the message by wounding, imprisoning, or killing the messenger. Hence we infer --
  1. That Paul enjoyed the grace of Christian perfection, being delivered both from sinning and from sin -- having been saved from the first by regeneration and from the second by entire sanctification.
  2. That he had a clear, satisfactory, and joyful knowledge of his sonship to God, through faith in Christ, by the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit.
  3. That the self-condemning and self-loathing type of piety is not the highest style. St. Paul says nothing depreciative of the self on which the image of Christ is clearly enstamped. He is a stranger to a spiritual crucifixion in which he is forever dying on the cross and never dead.

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