

# St. Paul's Prayer and God's Fatherhood.

by Daniel Steele

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*St. Paul's prayers are a model for believers, demonstrating the power of faith and the exceeding greatness of God's power.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 23:37, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 3:20, Revelation 3:21

**Topics:** "Gods Love", "Prayer Life"

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## Description

Daniel Steele preaches on St. Paul's exalted and ecstatic mood when writing to the Ephesians, expressing the vastness of God's love and the depth of his prayers. Through Paul's prayers, we see a continent of grace flowing with wisdom and revelation, leading to a full knowledge and assurance of God. The hope of believers lies in the glory of heaven and the exceeding greatness of God's power, demonstrated in the resurrection of Christ and available to transform willing souls.

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## Transcript

If there were fluctuations in the emotional experiences of St. Paul, so that he was more joyful at one time than at another, it is natural for us to expect to find traces of them in his Epistles. When he wrote to the Ephesians he must have been in a very exalted and ecstatic mood. He sees how broad and boundless is the ocean of God's love, as Faber sees it --

"Angelic spirits, countless souls,

Of Thee have drunk their fill;

And to eternity will drink

Thy joy and glory still."

St. Paul's prayers are the outpourings of a full soul. The vast volume of water in the mouth of the Orinoco River led its discoverer, Columbus, to infer that it must be the outflow of a continent, not of a small island. So these prayers, so deep and broad, must flow from a continent of grace.

Let us dip our goblet into one of these rivers, (Eph. 1 16-19). The terms in which God is spoken of as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory," are helps to our faith; they help us to conceive of him by removing the vagueness and unthinkableness of an infinite spirit. When a little boy, the writer recalls the prayer of a young circuit rider for the conversion of seekers at the altar. His address to God did not

help their faith to lay hold of him, "O thou whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere, save these penitent sinners." How different were the great apostle's ascriptions. When God is spoken of as the Father of Jesus Christ, he is brought near, so that we may touch him with the hand of faith. "The Father" to whom the "glory" belongs is the Father of all regenerate souls. Thus St. Paul, our prayer-leader, gives us a good fulcrum for the lever of supplication. Let us now look at the thing for which he prays: "The Spirit of wisdom and revelation," that is, the Spirit who works wisdom and reveals spiritual realities, especially giving saving efficacy to divine truths. This is not merely a momentary glimpse at the time of the new birth, but a continued bestowal of the same spiritual intuition for the ever-increasing enlightenment of Christians. "In the full knowledge of him" is Alford's rendering of the strengthened word for knowledge. Our knowledge of God cannot be full in the sense of exhaustive, but it can be full in the sense of assurance and certainty. We cannot comprehend God, but we may apprehend him. "We cannot," says Gladstone, "embrace the mountain with our arms, but we can touch it with our hands." This is his common-sense answer to the agnostics who insist that God is unknown and unknowable, because we are finite and he is infinite. There is nothing of which we have exhaustive knowledge. There are questions about the smallest sand-grain which the wisest philosophers cannot answer.

The knowledge here spoken of is not philosophical, but experimental and intuitive; "penetrating and exact." -- Meyer. Hence it is satisfactory. Eph. 1:18, "The eyes of your heart [R. V.] being enlightened," is a phrase of the same import with "full knowledge." This is the effect of the incoming and abiding of the Comforter in pentecostal fullness. This kind of spiritual eyesight, this knowledge far superior to all other, may be possessed by the most obscure and illiterate chattel slave (chapter 6:5) in Ephesus. For St. Paul does not show respect of persons when he bows before the impartial God in supplication for the brethren. "That ye may know what," or rather, how great "is the hope of his calling;" i.e., what a great and glorious hope is given to the believer. Hope always grasps future good.

The citizenship of Christians is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), whither all their thoughts and desires flow as the impetuous torrents seek the sea, to use a figure from Madam Guyon. The object of hope is also expressed by the word "glory," the essential characteristic of gospel salvation, the foregleams of which in scattered rays fall on us here, while the full-orbed splendor is reserved for us when we shall see King Jesus in his majesty descending from heaven in his personal second coming.

But what is meant by "his inheritance in the saints"? Christ is to receive from the Father the riches or transcendent excellence of glory among the saints; i.e., the community of believers will be the subjects of this bliss, and they will be the sphere outside of which the riches of glory will not be found, not even among the angels.

The last clause of the prayer is, "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe." Here is a Pauline accumulation of terms, magnifying power. It is not only greatness, but exceeding greatness of his power for which Paul prays that the believer may have an experimental knowledge. The power of God over matter has no limit but his wisdom. But the power of God in the realm of spiritual intelligences endowed with freedom is limited by the perverse use of that freedom. The grace of God which would transfigure willing souls from all sinfulness to the beauty of all holiness, stands powerless before the stubborn will. Says Jesus to the city over which he wept (Matt. 23:37), "I would, but ye would not." No sinner can be saved without the concurrence of two wills. It is the same with the different degrees of salvation. Each uplift is by a faith which carries the will into deeper and deeper subjection to the divine will. Then there will be greater and greater revelations of the transforming power of God, from grace to grace here, and from glory to glory hereafter.

Paul does not conclude his prayer without indicating the measure of that power by citing a historical instance of its exercise in that greatest event in the annals of time -- the resurrection of Christ. The same power that lifted Christ from the tomb, and set him at the right hand of his Father as the sharer of his throne, is now available to lift every willing soul from the grave of sin, and to enthrone him with the archangels, yea, even to seat him by the side of Jesus Christ on his throne, if he will, by the use of grace divine, overcome, as the Son of God overcame (Rev. 3:21.) What an encouragement to faith is found in this recorded prayer.

Reader, if you wish to learn the art of believing, study this prayer on your knees. A Quaker woman of my acquaintance, seeking God's full salvation, once said to that eminent Christian lady [Mrs. Inskip], "I wish thou wouldst believe out loud so that I, kneeling by thy side, may hear thee, and imitate thee, and learn to believe." Such a favor could not be given. But it is the office of the Holy Spirit to help us by revealing Christ to the interior eye, and guiding the hand stretched out to touch the hem of his garment. This is better than hearing another believe.

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