

Paul a Pattern of Prayer

by J. Wilbur Chapman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of prayer and faith in knowing and doing God's will, and provides examples from the Bible of how to pray for various blessings, including spiritual perception, purity, power, perseverance, and perfectness.

Scripture: Mark 11:24, John 14:14, Ephesians 1:15, Ephesians 3:17, Philippians 1:9, Colossians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 13:20, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J. Wilbur Chapman preaches on the power of prayer, emphasizing Jesus' assurance that anything asked in His name will be done. Chapman highlights the importance of belief in Christ, faith in His promises, confession and forsaking of sins, and the exercise of faith in prayer. He draws inspiration from Paul's prayers for spiritual blessings such as Pentecost, perception, purity, power, perseverance, perfectness, and peace, guiding believers on how to pray effectively and align their will with God's.

Transcript

TEXT: "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it."--John 14:14.

Jesus testified in no uncertain way concerning prayer, for not alone in this chapter does he speak but in all his messages to his disciples he is seeking to lead them into the place where they may know how to pray.

In this fourteenth chapter of John, where he is coming into the shadow of the cross and is speaking to his disciples concerning those things which ought to have the greatest weight with them, the heart of his message seems to be prayer. What an encouragement it is to his disciples to pray when they remember that he said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:12-13).

Jesus was himself a pattern of prayer. He had prayed under all circumstances; with him the day was born in prayer, went along in meditation and closed in most intimate fellowship and communion with his Father. Under all circumstances, whether it be the raising of Lazarus from the dead, or the breathing in of the very spirit of God so essential to him in his earthly ministry, he prayed; and because he was a man of prayer himself, he could speak to his disciples with authority concerning this subject.

If we ourselves would know how to pray there are certain great principles which must be remembered when we come to him.

First: We must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. If one has hazy or mystical ideas of Christ then from the very nature of the case prayer is impossible.

Second: We must believe his word. Mr. Spurgeon's statement that when he went to God he always went pleading a promise is the secret of his great success as a man of prayer. Earthly parents are not insensible to the pledges they make to their children and surely God cannot be.

Third: We must confess and forsake our sins. To confess sin is to arraign before us those sins of which we know ourselves to be guilty, and when they appear before us in solemn and awful procession we must heartily renounce them. If we do not we cannot pray. In another place in God's word we read, "Ye ask and receive not, because, . . ." and while in the verse the rest of the sentence is "Ye ask amiss," we might finish by saying, "We ask and receive not, because our lives are not right in God's sight."

Fourth: We must exercise our faith. The little child who prayed for rain and then wanted to carry an umbrella with her when the sun was shining is an oft repeated illustration, but such faith as this is what every child of God must practice.

The text is exceedingly broad. "If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it." It is broad enough to include temporal blessing and spiritual power, comprehensive enough to lead us to believe that God will direct our lives if we ask him and will bear our burdens even though they be almost insignificant in their weight. Thank God for the "anything" in the text!

It may be stated truly that God's promises to Israel are especially concerning temporal blessing and that his promises to the church have particular reference to spiritual possessions; and they both, the history of Israel and the history of the church, prove that God will give to us temporally as well as spiritually. These blessings are included in the "anything."

I have been greatly impressed with Paul as a pattern in prayer, and for the outline of this message as well as for many of the suggestions I am indebted to an English clergyman, the Rev. E. W. Moore, who has written, "The Christ Controlled Life," and "Christ in Possession," and has recently sent out a little book entitled, "The Pattern Prayer Book."

I have noticed in studying Paul that the burden of his prayer was for spiritual blessing rather than for temporal power, and throughout the Epistles at least seven illustrations are to be found concerning this subject.

I

Prayer for Pentecost. Ephesians 3:17-19, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Just what is the burden of this prayer of Paul's?

First: He is not asking for that indwelling which is ours at conversion; for this he would not need to pray, for at the moment of regeneration Christ is ours and eternal life (which is only another way of saying, "the life of the eternal") is our never failing possession.

Second: He is not asking for the bodily presence of Christ, as some have suggested, for in this scripture he states that it is by faith that Christ is to dwell with us.

Third: It is by no means a figurative expression, for if this were true there would be no comfort in it to God's children. Yet, as a matter of fact, this prayer of Paul's has been an inspiration to God's people everywhere. It is rather a special Pentecostal privilege for God's children concerning which Paul is praying. In Galatians 4:19 we read, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

And this is his petition. Let it be noticed that the tense of the verb in this connection denotes singleness of action, so that Paul's prayer may be answered not gradually but immediately. If this be true then let it be answered now for you and for me.

There are three blessings which would flow out of this answer to prayer.

First: Constancy of experience. "That Christ may dwell," pleads the Apostle. It does not mean that he is to come in a fitful experience, but the language of the hymn is true,

"Abide with me; fast falls the even tide, The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide; When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me."

Second: Strength will be our possession, for the Apostle tells us that we are to be "rooted and grounded in him." As the roots of the tree take hold upon the ground and the giant oak withstands the storms of the Northern coasts, so we may withstand temptation and trial and be more than conquerors if this prayer is answered.

Third: There will be cleansing, for we are told that "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he." We are told also that we must keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life. It is easy enough to understand how our lives would be pure if Christ were only in possession.

II

Prayer for Perception. Colossians 1:9-10, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." The need of this prayer was not that the Colossians were weak, or that they had been conspicuous in the failure of their Christian experience, for in the third and fourth verses of the first chapter of Colossians, Paul says concerning them, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints"; and then in the face of this statement he prayed earnestly for them. The subject of his prayer was not that he desired anything, humanly speaking, very great for them; he did not ask honor, nor did he desire that wealth should be theirs, but merely states in the ninth verse that they might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. I have been told that literally, this means that they might have full knowledge, not simply a passing opinion concerning him and his work.

If we study this particular scripture in which Paul is praying for the Colossians we will learn how this prayer is to be answered.

First: We must meditate upon God's word. He makes himself especially known to his people in his word. There are certain great principles which we must remember if we would know God's will.

(1) We must present our bodies to him. Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

(2) We must be delivered from this present evil age. Galatians 1:4, "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."

(3) We must separate ourselves from the world. 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication."

(4) We must be thankful. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

(5) We must continue patiently to serve and follow him. 1 Peter 2:15, "For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

All of these things are God's will for us. If we but practice them the results can be only beneficial. As a result of such a study of God's word the general knowledge of God and his will shall be ours.

Second: The spiritual perception spoken of in this particular scripture may be ours, as we listen to the Spirit of God, for he will speak to us God's message and make known to us God's will. The purpose of this prayer of Paul's for the Colossians was that they might walk worthy to all pleasing. What a joy it is to know that we may please God! For this we should be grateful.

III

Prayer for Purity. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

This prayer is also remarkable if we notice the spiritual condition of the Thessalonians, for of them we read that they had received the word of God with joy, and had turned from idols to serve the living God, and yet the Apostle prays for their sanctification. By this he does not mean sinlessness, and a careful study of his position would lead us to know that he does not teach that sanctification may be ever apart from growth. We must day by day come more and more into the likeness of Christ. There are three words which it would be well for us to remember in our study of this subject.

First: Position. If we would grow unto his likeness we must be where he can let shine upon us the light of his countenance. Frances Ridley Havergal had an aeolian harp sent to her which she tried to play with her fingers, and failed. At last a friend suggested that she place it in the window, and the music as the wind touched the strings was entrancing. We must be where he can use us.

Second: Purification. Sanctification is necessary because God uses only that which is clean, never an unclean life.

Third: Possession. It is really Christ filling us, and he will fill us if we give him the opportunity. The extent of this work is made plain in Paul's prayer:

(1) The spirit is touched, and the spirit is that part of our nature which is capable of fellowship with God.

(2) The soul is filled, and the soul is the seat of all our intellectual faculties.

(3) The body is possessed, and since the body is just the servant of the higher powers of man, we can easily understand how necessary the work is. It is needful,

(a) For our peace, for the God of peace is to sanctify us.

(b) For our prayers. For Paul is talking about prayer when he praises.

(c) For our praise, for we are told that we must rejoice evermore.

IV

Prayer for Power. Ephesians 1:15-20, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power; which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."

The Church at Ephesus was in every way remarkable, but to this people Paul wrote his most spiritual epistle, which in itself is a compliment to them, for as in another instance it was not necessary for him to write unto them as if they were carnal. With this people for the space of two or three years he labored, as we find recorded in Acts the nineteenth chapter and the tenth verse, "And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Acts 20:31, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

There were no divisions in this church as at Corinth; there were no heresies as at Galatia, and no dissensions as at Philippi; and yet, for all that, he prays most earnestly. The natural question for us to ask is, just what is it for which he prays, and the question is easily answered.

First: For advancement in knowledge; he asks God that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened. Under this general petition there are three special requests.

(1) That they might know the hope of their calling. We have but to study Paul's Epistles to realize that this calling involved:

A perfect vision, for one day it is Christ's promise and teaching that they shall see him as he is. The hope of this would keep them faithful.

It involved, in the next place, a perfect likeness, for, seeing him as he is, they would become like him, and the hope of this would keep them clean.

It involved, in the third place, a perfect union, for when this hope of their calling is fulfilled there is no possibility of anything coming between the believer and Christ; so the fellowship must be perfect.

(2) Paul also requests that they may know the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. That is very wonderful. He does not say the riches of the saints in him--that could be easily understood; but what an inspiration it is to know that he has glory in us, and that the mere possession of poor, frail creatures like ourselves is to him a perfect delight! We sometimes say that we could not get along without Christ, but how inspiring it is to know that he could not and he would not get along without us!

(3) The Apostle also prays that the church at Ephesus might know what is the exceeding greatness of Christ's power towards us. It is not simply a great power that is described but an exceedingly great power. There is absolutely no limit to what he can accomplish in and through us if we but yield ourselves unreservedly to him.

Second: Another question, may naturally come to us. Why have we not this power of his? The answer is simply because the eyes of our understanding have not been enlightened. We have been too much self-centered and too closely wedded to the world. We need a stronger vision. There are stars in the heavens to-day that have never yet been seen, not because they do not exist but because there has been no glass invented strong enough to take them in. Each new day brings a vision of new heavenly bodies. We also need stronger faith, for if we have become persuaded of the fact that he can do all things the victory is won when we take this position.

V

Prayer for Perseverance. Philippians 1:9-11, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Paul has a tender affection for this Philippian Church. Naturally he would wish for them only the best things, and the burden of this prayer of his is,

First: That they might be able to persevere to the end, or rather to the day of Christ. Let it not be forgotten that he who said, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God," at the same time prays that those who are the object of this love may be faithful in their perseverance until time shall be no more. It is God's privilege to preserve us, it is our privilege to persevere; and if we study the words "preserve" and "persevere" we shall find that they are composed of almost the same letters with only a slightly different arrangement. We must be exceedingly careful in our walk and we must rely perfectly upon Christ.

Second: Paul prays for the purity of these Philippians when he asks that they may be sincere and without offence. I have been told that the word "sincere" sometimes means sunlight; which leads me to say that our conduct as Christians should be such as to bear the clearest light of investigation. Possibly the use of this word grew out of the custom of the people who stored away their goods in the darkest corners of the bazaar where their defects could not be seen plainly. When the purchase had been consummated they were brought out into the sunlight. The word also means "wax." It is said that in the days of imperial Rome when a sculptor came to a flaw in the marble he filled it with wax to hide the defect, but when the hot days came and the wax was melted the defect was seen plainly. Paul is desiring for these Philippians that there may be none of this, but that their lives should commend themselves both to God and to men.

Third: He desires that they may be filled with the fruits of righteousness, not simply that they may produce fruit of one sort or another. It is not enough simply to bear fruit. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." This is the overflow experience of the Christian and must be realized by us all.

VI

Prayer for Perfectness. Hebrews 13:20-21, "Now 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 wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." The burden of this prayer of the Apostle is that his people may do the will of God. This is required in all times and for various reasons.

First: The glory of God demands it, and unless we are doing his will we are robbing him of his glory. Revelation 4-11, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Second: Our own happiness depends upon it. Let it not be thought for a moment that we are simply to do God's will when some sort of trial is upon us, but rather let us remember the scriptural expression, "I delight to do thy will, O God." What if God's will should be done for but one year in all things in any of our cities; would the result be anything else than perfect joy?

Third: Our safety depends upon it. We must lean hard upon God's will. In Switzerland at one of the most dangerous passes, where men used to travel with their faces white with fear, to-day any ordinary traveler can pass in safety because along the edge of the cliff there is an iron rail against which you may lean and have almost no danger beside you. This iron rail corresponds to the will of God for Christians. Paul also asks in this prayer that God's people may be made perfect to do his will. We need not be afraid of this word perfect, nor of Paul's prayer, for as Dr. Moore has said, it is not a perfection of doing but a perfection to do, not a finality but a fitting. The same Greek word is used elsewhere, as for example,

"Fitted." Romans 9:22, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

"Prepared." Hebrews 10:5, "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me."

"Framed." Hebrews 11:3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

"Restored." Galatians 6:1, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

"Mend." Mark 1:19, "And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets."

The illustration has been used of a man with his leg out of joint. He cannot walk except with great pain, but when he puts himself without reserve into the hands of the doctor and the leg is set he can then rise and walk. He is not a perfect walker, but he is made perfect to walk. And the idea of all the verses above quoted is that we may be set with right relations to Christ that he may have his way with us, that we may stand where he willed we should stand; and as a result we shall be well pleasing in his sight.

VII

Prayer for Peace. 2 Thessalonians 3:16, "Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all." Peace is most difficult to define. It is the opposite of unrest, confusion and strife; and this peace for which the Apostle prays is, first, not the peace of indifference. Let this never be forgotten. Second: It is not the peace of prosperous surroundings. Some people frequently fail at this point but it is the very peace of God himself. The peace here prayed for looks in three directions.

First: Godward. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God." His pardoning voice we hear and he is reconciled.

Second: Inward. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; let not your heart be troubled."

Third: Outward. With such a possession we may meet trial and bear burdens and never be moved. How may we secure such a possession?

(1) By having confidence in Christ's work, for when he met his disciples and showed them his hands and his side, he said, "Peace be unto you."

(2) By submission to Christ's rule. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace," or, as the literal translation is, "Thou wilt keep him in peace, peace, who trusteth in thee because his mind is set on thee." This is our possession, and for that Paul prays.

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