

Eph 6:18 Prayer 02
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Prayer 02

We are in Ephesians chapter 6 dealing with prayer. Last week I shared a little of my own history with prayer - some of my misunderstandings, assumptions, and then a few things that I believe I have come to see with a little more clarity over the last few years. The discussion on prayer was triggered from a statement that Paul made in Ephesians chapter 6 where he makes this statement

(Eph 6:18) praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Allow me to just say a few things by way of reminder about what we talked about last week, and then I want to continue where we left off. I mentioned last week how sooner or later the cross demands your understanding of prayer. The cross comes knocking on the door of your blind, unrenewed mind and demands that you surrender your ideas about prayer. And it is not just prayer. The cross demands the surrender of your ideas about everything. In fact, the cross demands the complete surrender of your life... together with all of your ideas.

There are some areas where we are more willing to answer that knock than others. What I mean is that we are more quick to allow the cross to cut away the places where we have condemnation or confusion or questions. But wherever we think we know something, or have something, we do not allow Him to speak to us with the "Sword of His mouth." That is the language of Revelation 2:16. Jesus is talking to His church about needing to visit them with the "sword of His mouth". I love the language. That is what it is always like. His Word comes like a sword that cuts away all that is not Christ. Another place in Revelation, Jesus is pictured as riding on a horse with a sword literally coming out of his mouth. The truth of His Word, His view, is what cuts away everything else.

And so I'm saying that we must allow His cut. We must give him a place in our soul to cut away everything - including our concept of prayer. Why? Well, Paul tells us in Romans chapter 8. He tells us that we do not know how to pray. And that is not because we do not know the right terminology. That is NOT because we need to be instructed in methods of prayer or even in things to pray for. The problem is much more serious than this. We do not know how to pray because 1) we do not even know what prayer is, 2) we do not know the name and life and nature of God in which we must learn to pray, and 3) by nature we live and think and pray in our own name.

This is what I was trying to describe last week. I was NOT saying all of this so that we would stop praying. I was saying all of this so that we would let the Spirit of God deal with our hearts about the nature and reality of prayer. We all desperately need this. Here is a fact: unless you and I allow the cross of Christ to progressively destroy our name, our nature, our life, our thought, then we will never realize the greatness of praying in His

name. **His name is not something that mixes with ours.** It is an entirely distinct and perfect name. It is a name that He will share with you, he will write on you. It is a name in which He will allow you to pray. But it is not your name by nature. In fact, your natural name is enmity with Him.

So experiencing the inward working of the cross is not an option if we are going to learn to pray in His name. Christianity, as you all have heard me say many times, is Life. And that Life is the Life of the Son of God living in you. That life has a nature and character and will and mind associated with it. In other words, that Life comes with a name. **The name is what God understands that life to be. The name is how God recognizes His Son. And when we pray in that name, we pray according to the mind and nature and life of Christ. When we pray in His name, we pray as those who have no other name.**

You see, this is what it means to pray in faith. James talks about the prayer of faith, and how it is effective. Jesus also talks about praying in faith. In our Bibles, sometimes the Greek word for faith is translated belief - which unfortunately conjures up a different image for many of us. When we think of praying and believing, we think of trying really hard to imagine that we are going to get the thing we are asking for. We think of trying hard not to doubt. But the prayer of faith doesn't work that way. It is prayer in a different name, from a different source, in a different mind. Your doubt is excluded, because YOU are excluded. And this is why the prayer of faith is effectual.

Praying in faith is not trying to force yourself to expect a certain outcome. It is very different than that. It has to do with living in and seeing and expecting the provision that God has given you in and as His Son. I will talk more about that in a moment. But I just want to make sure that we understand the necessity of releasing our ideas about prayer, releasing our name, giving it to the cross, so that prayer can be defined in us by another name.

For most of my life, prayer served two functions. I told you about this last week. The first function was to try to move God's hand in a way that benefited me as an individual. Prayer was a Christian version of a genie in a lamp. That's an ugly way to say it, but it really wasn't much different than that. The other function of prayer, which was probably even more important to me, was the way that it made me feel about myself whether or not my prayers were answered. I wanted to be a "man of prayer". Well, actually....I wanted to be known AS a man of prayer. Even if God never answered a single prayer, for much of my life I am ashamed to say that I would have been quite content simply to be known as a "man of prayer".

Pathetic...I know. Embarrassing, but true. But that is how we are. I'm admitting my motives so that you will realize your own! I'm uncovering myself so that you won't be ashamed to uncover your heart along with me. Lets just face it together. We've prayed in our own name. We've prayed for our own life, and purpose, and will, and gain. We have used an imaginary version of prayer to better ourselves, rather than use the gift of prayer to participate in the eternal purpose of God. I'm ok saying that about myself. I don't have higher expectations of myself these days. This isn't just what I do. This is what I am.

But it was not so with Paul. I concluded last week by sharing some thoughts about what I think prayer was like for the Apostle Paul...and really for any man or woman that comes to know and abide in the name of the Lord. I believe prayer for Paul was something similar to breathing. Spiritual breathing. I believe that the weight and reality of God's finished work in Christ pressed in upon Paul's soul. That man was constrained by the truth. He was crushed under the weight of the truth. And prayer was the result.

In a world full of adamic death and blindness, in a world that is choking with the smog of our fallenness and hostility towards God... prayer is how Paul breathed. He breathed in the truth as it is in Christ. He breathed out the mind of the Lord, the provision of the Lord for the heavenly church. Prayer was Paul's constant lifeline of faith, a constant process of union and communion with Reality, with Life, with Purpose. Prayer was not just something that Paul did. Prayer was something that Christ became IN Paul. Paul lived prayer, because prayer was Paul's connection to the life and purpose of God.

Don't misunderstand me. Don't force a religious definition of prayer into the things that I am trying to describe. I don't mean that Paul was a mighty man of spiritual discipline. No, there is no discipline involved in this kind of prayer. **This prayer is a prayer of faith, a prayer of true seeing, a praying that is constrained by the eyes of God.**

If you had a child or a loved one that was suddenly in a life threatening situation - perhaps a little toddler that wanders out of sight and is all of the sudden seen by a neighbor to be standing in the middle of a busy road - your desire and will and prayer for that child is not a matter of discipline. You don't need to force yourself to sit down and pray for 15 minutes. The desires and burdens and purposes that work in your heart are given to you by the awareness of the situation. Reality constrains your will. Reality defines your desire. Do you see? This is a natural example, but the natural realm bears this shadow. A shadow where we can see that reality, truth, perspective creates in us burden, will, and prayer.

So prayer comes from God. We are accustomed to thinking of God as the recipient of prayer. But He is the true author as well. He is the source, the means, the recipient, and the provision. God is all things of prayer. We think that we are the source, our words are the means, God is the recipient, and THINGS are the provision. We have 1 out of 4 of those correct! But God is all four.

And, of utmost importance to our topic right now, Christ is the source and life of all prayer. Friends, it is this way with everything of Christianity. Christ is your life. And therefore everything that we do as Christians must be some sort of functional expression of the indwelling Christ. That is true of the mind that works in us, the nature, the will, the ministry, and the prayer. Nothing spiritual is from you. I know that sounds so incredibly simple. But it is overlooked and completely ignored by almost everybody. You are the source of nothing spiritual, and therefore nothing spiritually real or valuable. Can you handle that? It's true whether you can or not. Christ is made unto you and I all things of spiritual relevance.

I can do many things as a natural man in a natural planet. Some things I can actually do quite well. But I can do absolutely nothing spiritual whatsoever - nothing well, and nothing poorly. I can do nothing. Apart from Him I can do nothing. Nothing good. Nothing relevant. Nothing important. Nothing meaningful. Nothing that has purpose at all. Apart from Him, I am complete and utter vanity. Everything under the sun points to something meaningful. Everything under the sun, that is to say everything created, points to something that is real and meaningful and eternal. But nothing under the sun has meaning or significance or capability or purpose in itself. It is perfectly useless. Everything under the sun is vanity. Solomon saw this, and wrote about it. But Solomon also eventually turned his heart back to the vanity that he saw.

I'm trying to say something about prayer. But it is bigger than prayer. I'm talking about the vanity of you and I. Can you accept that everything under the sun is vanity? That you and your world are perfectly irrelevant to all things spiritual unless and until Christ Himself is the source and life and function and reality and purpose of all things? Let me tell you,

prayer doesn't really begin until you can accept this. Until we see and accept this, prayer will always be something in your name and for your world.

But we have been given the gift of prayer. The gift of prayer is part of our relationship with God in Christ. We may not know how to avail ourselves of it. But it is not something separate from Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ, who is our LIFE, operating in us according to His will and His name. And there is nothing that is prayed in Christ's name that is not granted, because Christ perfectly represents the will of the Father. That is why Jesus says this in John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you". Elsewhere in this same discourse Jesus says several times, "whatever you ask in My name, that will I do." This is what I believe Paul is referring to in Ephesians 6:18 when he speaks of praying in the Spirit. Jude mentions the same terminology. James calls it "praying in the will of God".

Alright... but I also want to say a few things about how God answers prayer. In my heart, I started to see Christ as the *source* of prayer before I started to comprehend Christ as the *answer* to all prayer. But He is both. **He is the fountain of all prayers that are offered in His name. And his is the supply by which all prayers have their answer.** A year or two ago I was reading an article by James Fowler and he said something that the Lord really illuminated in my heart. James Fowler writes the following things:

"The answer to our prayers will be but the manner in which God wants to apply the life of Jesus Christ to a particular circumstance...The complete provision of god for man is in Jesus Christ. God has nothing more to give than what He has given in Jesus Christ."

And then he quotes the famous theologian Karl Barth,

"What does the Christian not have, what can he possibly lack, when he can have Him? What can disturb or hinder or confuse or devastate him in life as a Christian when he can live with Him, in communion with Him? What need is not already met in Him, what difficulty is not already removed in Him, what help is not already present in Him, what word of comfort that he needs is not already spoken in Him, what direction that he awaits is not already given in Him? In Him, the Christian has already attained, he is already at the goal, and he can look back and down upon all his distress as already alleviated. ...(but the) Christian has not yet realized in what fullness the divine gift and answer is already present and near to hand, and with what joy he can avail himself of it, and in what thankfulness he can acknowledge the fact." (*Church Dogmatics pg. 273*)

What both of these men are saying is that, quite simply, **when God answers your prayer He is showing you a greater view of His Son. Our needs, our TRUE needs, are born out from our blindness and deadness as to what God has supplied us in Christ. Our answer, a TRUE answer, is found in the hearts apprehension and the soul's experience of what God has supplied for us in His Son.** There is nothing outside of Christ that God has to give you. With a clear view, there is nothing outside of Christ that you would ever think to ask for.

We think we want good things, but whenever we see clearly...what we really want is to experience the one to whom all good things point. We think we want to be accepted in our flesh, but in a clear view that disappears and we only want to be found and accepted in

Him. We think we want to have a purpose for our lives, but the Light will show us something far greater than an individual, earthly purpose. We think we are having a problem, but a true view of Him does something better than fix a problem. It removes us from it.

I am not suggesting to you that God does not also tend to our natural needs, and, at times, assist in our natural circumstances. But even with these things, what God is giving us is something over the overflow of what Christ is. If a body is healed, it is healed by the life of Christ overflowing into the earth. If a circumstance is changed, it is changed by bringing Christ into a situation. Christ's perspective, or provision, or power. Listen to how Paul describes prayer for his deliverance.

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, (Php 1:19)

Here is what I am saying - God has given you all things in His Son. There is nothing else that you have need of. Let me take just a moment to look at a verse that is often misquoted, mistranslated, or misunderstood. It is Romans 8:32. In most translations it reads like this:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:32)

We often do a couple sad things with this verse. First of all, we translate or interpret the word "will" as a future event instead of a present emphatic statement. Any Greek grammar book will give you countless examples of this kind of syntax in the New Testament. It is like you looking at your child who just got out of bed for the 10th time and saying "you WILL go to bed right now". When I say that to my son, he doesn't think that I mean some day in the future. He knows I mean RIGHT NOW. Or if I say "if you just bought a new computer, you WILL have windows Vista installed on it.". Is that something that will happen in the future? No, it is simply an emphatic NOW statement. In English, Greek, and Spanish... a person often uses futuristic forms to show emphasis.

And that is Paul's point here. He is saying something like, "look, if you have a brand new pc, how will you not also have all of the software that comes with it!" Look, if God has not spared His only Son, but has in fact GIVEN you that Son, how will he not also with Him graciously give you all things!". Do you see what he is saying?

It is more clear in the Greek. Listen to how it reads in a literal translation,

"Surely, He who spares not His own Son, but gives Him up for us all, how shall he not, united with Him, also be gracing us all things"

And so what we usually do is either make the "all things" some sort of future experience, or we make the "all things" something separate than Christ. Like, we say, God will give us Christ...but He'll also give you a brand new car! "Look, if He gave you Christ, why would he withhold from you that iPhone?"

But that is silly. And the reason that I am making a big deal about this verse is because it has everything to do with prayer. God has given us all things in Christ. In Christ, and AS

Christ. Christ is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Every promise is yes and amen in Him. Every blessing is ours in Him. God did NOT give you Christ, so that THROUGH Christ, you can ask for something else! God gave you Christ because, provided IN CHRIST, and AS CHRIST, is every single thing that God can and did give to the human soul.

And, in a very real sense, prayer becomes our accessing of what God has given us in Christ. This is a bit new to my heart, and is therefore difficult to describe. **But I've come to see prayer as sort-of the way by which we take what God offers.** God is offering the person and provision and position of Christ. God offers us, as a constant, permanent extension from Himself to our soul...He offers us all that Christ is and has. You know I am not talking about us becoming Christ, or becoming divine. You know I'm not talking about God making us into Christ. I am talking about God first of all bringing us into the Son Himself, and then permanently extending to us an ongoing, and ever-increasing experience of Jesus Christ.

Prayer accepts this offer. Not "praying". When you hear me use the word "prayer" here, please do not insert your old understanding of prayer. Again, we're talking about a living union and communion with God that is by His Spirit and according to His mind. We're talking about our hearts turning and seeing and receiving and petitioning God for the full experience of what He has given in Christ.

I see faith as part of prayer. We're accustomed here to talking about faith as that which accesses the grace in which we stand. **This is certainly true. Prayer to me is that activity where we turn to faith, and hold on to it. In fact, if I were going to try to describe prayer in four words, those four words would be TURNING, SEEING, WATCHING, OBEYING.**

God has given us all things in Christ. And so we turn the heart. We turn to see Him. We hold onto that view, we WATCH, not looking away. We cling to what faith sees, and we obey what faith sees. Not an outward obedience to words and commands. We are not in the Old Covenant. Our obedience is the inward aligning of the soul. A submission to truth, a yielding of our soul to the indwelling Spirit of Truth, a deep succumbing to His reality. Prayer connects there. It turns there, connects there, and sees there, and lives there.

Prayer is like turning on a hose. It connects us by faith to His fountain. Without a hose or a pipe we cannot drink of His provision. It is like a hose out of His realm and into ours. A hose out of heaven and into earth. I know this sounds strange. I'm trying to describe a view of prayer that I think is more real than anything I've seen before. **God has given. Prayer is our receiving.** God has given Life in His Son. Prayer involves our turning on the hose. Watching is how we keep it on.

You'll notice in Scripture that, very often, we are told to be watchful in prayer. Keep watch, alert, sober. Even in the verse that we are considering today, Paul tells us to be watchful in prayer. I think that it is because we don't really know what prayer is, that we do not understand this word "watchful". We wonder "what am I watching for?". "Is something about to happen?". Paul tells people to be watchful in prayer and the church today assumes that he is talking about a physical, natural, event that is coming around the corner. **KEEP WATCH!!** What does that mean to us? Look out your window? How am I supposed to look out my window when I'm praying? What is this talking about?

If Paul is talking about a watchfulness for the end of the world, for eschatological events, then what about the last 2000 years of Christians? I guess there was nothing for them to

watch! We are the only generation that is supposed to watch for these physical things! Hopefully, this understanding seems very silly to you.

But if there is a true prayer - a prayer of turning and seeing - then WATCHING suddenly makes a great deal of sense. Watching involves remaining in that view. Holding tightly to the Light. Turning, seeing, and STAYING. We need to be in prayer always, Paul says.

Pray without ceasing. Indeed, but also, be alert. Be watchful because you know that the world, the flesh, and the devil are like gravity to your natural mind. They pull your attention, your view, your awareness back to the earth. They effect the heart - turning it from praying in His name back to a much more familiar name. Our name.

I'm out of time for this week. I was planning on saying some things about the Lord's prayer since Jimmy brought that up last week after the message. Maybe we can talk about that this week in groups, or perhaps the next Sunday I share.

Let me just say, very briefly for the record, that the Lord's prayer was given to Old Covenant Israel. It was taught to the disciples before the cross, before the New Covenant.

In saying that, I am not saying it is obsolete. I am simply saying that it has been fulfilled.

It is given in the language of type and shadow, natural provision and covenant. It is fulfilled, as all things are, in the spirit and truth. Jesus teaches them to pray according to their need and according to God's provision and desire. But now, in the new covenant, God's desire has been fulfilled. And our need is greater. And God's provision is greater.

What I mean is simply this. In the Old Covenant, they were relating to God according to a natural kingdom in the earth, an old heaven and earth, the daily bread and provision for national Israel, the forgiveness that was established in the types and shadows of sacrifice and offering. These are the elements of the 'Lord's Prayer'. But now, in Christ, all of these aspects of this prayer have become far greater provisions of God. In other words, He has established the kingdom that is made without hands. His kingdom is His reign, and that kingdom is within you. He has made a new heaven and earth in Christ, and that is where you have come to dwell with Him. He is the bread of your life, and the provision for your covenant. In His blood, and not the blood of goats, do you have both forgiveness from God and for one another. Etc, etc.

My point is that the Lord's Prayer is still a wonderful prayer. But it is wonderful not simply as a pattern for our words. It is wonderful because it points us to a variety of ways that we need Christ to be God's provision for our soul. Amen.