

## How Paul Prayed

### Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to invite the Apostle Paul be our mentor in the School of Prayer. The reasons for choosing Paul are that he was, himself, effective in prayer, and that in his writings and in the biographical material contained in the Acts of the Apostles we have sufficient information to construct a reasonably complete image of his prayer life and the convictions that produced it. Our study is further motivated by the convictions that prayer is the central reality of the spiritual life, and that we learn to pray. Or stated in another way nothing is more important than learning to pray. In addition we may remind ourselves that bad prayer is possible (Matt. 6: 1-8; James 4:1-3). This being true we need a mentor who can correct our misconceptions and lead us into a practice of prayer that is both pleasing to God and useful in His Kingdom.

The goals of this study beyond the obvious goal of learning to pray more effectively are first, that we might become expectant in our prayers and second, that we might come to a fuller understanding of our life in Christ. Regarding the first we may simply state that where there is no expectancy there will be little effort. As Meister Eckart has written: "When a man is looking for something, and he sees no sign of what he is looking for there where he is looking. He will perhaps continue, but without enthusiasm. If, however, he begins to find traces of what he is looking for, he will begin to seriously look for it." Diligence in prayer is the fruit of expectation. If Paul prayed "without ceasing" it was because he was constantly seeing the fruit of his prayers. The second goal, coming to a fuller understanding of our life in Christ, may at first seem unrelated to the subject. However, once we begin to examine the actual prayers of Paul it will become obvious. Paul's prayers on behalf of others are almost totally occupied with his desire that they become all that they can be in Christ. The two principle objectives of his prayers are that individuals would come to know Christ and that Christ would be "formed in them". Thus a detailed study of his prayers will yield a clear portrait of our life in Christ.

## **Basis of Study:**

If we express our subject as a question: “How did Paul pray?” the answer to that question will be found first of all in statements made in the Acts of the Apostles concerning Paul and prayer, and secondly from statements about prayer and actual prayers recorded in his Epistles. Unlike other subjects such as salvation, the resurrection, and family life there is no text in any of Paul’s Epistles where we find something like a systematic exposition of the subject of prayer. His teaching about prayer must be garnered from three primary sources in his Epistles:

- Statements concerning prayer. These are of two sorts:
  - Explanations of prayer
  - Exhortations to prayer
- The actual prayers of Paul. These are of three sorts:
  - Prayers of thanksgiving. These are an integral part of his letters and are found in 10 of Paul’s 13 Epistles. They show concern for those to whom he is writing and often introduce the themes that he will develop in the letter.
  - Paul’s “prayer reports” of his intercessions for those to whom he is writing. In these passages Paul does not record his actual prayers but “reports” to the recipients of his letters on the subjects of his prayers on their behalf.
  - Benedictions. There is some sort benediction at the end of each of his letters some are longer and some are very short.
- Finally, there are passages where Paul either
  - Reports on his own prayers for himself and his ministry,
  - or
  - Requests prayer from others.

It is from these passages that we will attempt to paint the portrait of Paul at prayer as we seek to let him teach us how to pray.

## **The Place of Prayer in Paul's Life and Ministry:**

Paul's life in Christ began in Prayer (Acts 9: 10-11), and according to tradition, ended in prayer as he was martyred. His whole ministry was grounded and developed from prayer. For Paul, the Christian experience was essentially (and unceasingly) an act of prayer. Those redeemed and hence overwhelmed by the sovereign grace of the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," intentionally and purposefully pour out their lives as a perpetual act of Thanksgiving, ever conscious of dependence omnipresent and omnipotent God, as they are motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Apart from prayer, life as a redeemed bondservant of Christ was both inconceivable and impossible.<sup>1</sup>

### **Paul the Jew:**

Paul by his own testimony was a Jew of the strictest order, a Pharisee, before his conversion. As such, he considered himself "blameless" in regards to his observance of the law (Phil. 3:6). This blameless observance of the law would have included set prayers of praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition and intercession. These prayers would have been offered at special occasions such as feasts and weddings, but he would have also offered set daily prayers including the "Shema" (Deut 6: 9) repeated at the sixth and ninth hour (Ezra 9:5; Dan. 9:21) with various attached benedictions. He would also have repeated the Tephillah, or Eighteen Benedictions three times a day (see Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10; cf. Acts 10:9).<sup>2</sup> In addition to this he knew and sang and prayed the Psalms.

"We may be certain, however, that prayer was extremely important to Pharisees like Saul: according to Rabbinic tradition, without a systematic, disciplined and structured prayer life one could not achieve personal righteousness."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.B. Hunter, "Prayer", Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, p. 725

<sup>2</sup> The rules regarding the saying of daily prayers are discussed in the first Tractate of the Mishna "Berakoth" (blessings)

<sup>3</sup> Hunter, op.cit, p. 725

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How do you think Paul's understanding of prayer changed after his conversion?
2. Do you think he derived any benefit from his Jewish experience of prayer once he had become a believer?

**Paul at Prayer:****A. Prayer as Dialogue with Christ**

Unfortunately neither Paul nor one of his contemporaries has left us a written description of Paul's prayer habits. What we know of his practice of prayer must be deduced things said in the book of Acts and his Epistles and from what we know otherwise of his life. We may state generally that prayer was central to all that Paul was and did. He would never have initiated any action outside of prayer. In the Book of Acts his conversion, commission, baptism and missionary work are all linked to prayer. His first recorded prayer is at the moment of his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. It takes the form of a dialogue with Christ. In Acts 9:4 he hears the voice of Christ saying: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Not knowing immediately who is speaking to him, he replies in verse 5: "Who art thou, Lord?" Since the word "lord" (Greek *kurios*) may be both a reference to God, *Adonai* of the Old Testament, and simply a polite address to a person, Paul's reaction here may be similar to that of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16 when, hearing that all the prisoners are present after the earthquake, says to Paul and Silas: "Sirs, (Greek *kurioi*) what must I do to be saved?" As F. F. Bruce writes: "Who are you, my Lord?" may be a better rendering of his response than 'Who are you, sir?' But he was not prepared for the reply to his question: the one who spoke to him was Jesus, once crucified, but now the heavenly Lord—the one whom he was zealously persecuting in the person of his followers."<sup>4</sup> Having understood that it was Jesus speaking to him he replies: "Lord what do you want me to do?"

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<sup>4</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 183

That Paul had other prayer conversations with Jesus during his life and ministry are implied in the following passages. In Acts 21 Paul is arrested in the Temple at Jerusalem because of a false rumor spread by some Jews from the province of Asia that he had brought a Gentile into the sacred area of the Temple. Following his arrest by the Roman guard, the Centurion allows Paul to address the crowd. In making his defense before the crowd he tells again the story of his conversion, and again recounts the words that Ananais spoke to him from the Lord when he came to restore his sight and told him: “The God of our Fathers hath chosen you, that you should know his will, and see that Just One, and should hear the voice of his mouth, for you shall be his witness unto all men of what you have seen and heard.”<sup>5</sup> As he continues his defense he gives another example of Christ speaking to him. He says in verses 17-18 that when he came to Jerusalem after his conversion, he was praying in the temple and as he was praying he says: I was in a trance; and saw him (Christ) saying to me, make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.”

Acts 23 continues the story of Paul’s arrest and defense. In this chapter he is to defend himself before the Sanhedrin. The defense never actually takes place because Paul, knowing the debate between the Pharisees and the Sadducees concerning the resurrection, puts them in an uproar by crying out: “Men and brothers, I am a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee: of the hope of the resurrection of the dead I am called in question.”<sup>6</sup> The turmoil was so great that the chief captain, fearing that Paul would be harmed by the crowd, had him returned to the fortress of Antonia. While sleeping in his cell that night, we are told that “the Lord stood by him, and said, be of good cheer, Paul: for as you have testified of me in Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome.”

One last incident from the Acts occurs in Acts 27. Paul, who has made appeal to Caesar, is being transported to Rome by ship. Because of poor winds the ship had not made the progress expected. They docked at Fair Havens on the south side of the Island of Crete where Paul admonished them to remain until the dangers of winter sailing were past. But since the port was not commodious the ship owner convinced the military officer in charge of the prisoners to continue. The results proved to be disastrous, and the

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<sup>5</sup> Acts 22:14-15

<sup>6</sup> Acts 23:6

ship, being caught by a wind called Euroclydon, was storm-driven for many days. At the moment when hope of survival seemed lost, Paul once again spoke to them and said: “I exhort you be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of the Lord, whose I am and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul: thou must be brought before Caesar: and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.”<sup>7</sup>

We may add to this one last experience of the Apostle, which he records in II Corinthians 12. In this chapter he is continuing the defense of his apostleship, begun in chapter 10. He is telling that he has had visions and revelations so marvelous that he cannot reveal their contents, but the Lord, in order to keep him humble, had given him what he calls “a thorn in his flesh.” He then says that he asked the Lord to remove this thorn three times. To this triple request the Lord replies: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”<sup>8</sup>

From these passages we may conclude that for Paul prayer was, in part, an ongoing dialogue with the risen Christ that was at least extraordinary and perhaps even unique. It was most likely due to his call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, and gave to his life and ministry a profound sense of reality.

### Questions:

1. Should we consider the type of experiences that Paul had in prayer to be extraordinary or common?
2. Should we expect or seek the same type of experience?

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 27: 22-24

<sup>8</sup> II Cor. 12:9

## ***B. Prayer “in the Holy Spirit”***

In Ephesians chapter six Paul instructs us to “put on the whole armor of God”. He then enumerates the various parts of that armor. His final instruction is, that as we put on the armor and take up the “sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God”, we should be “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”<sup>9</sup> The particular point from this exhortation that interests us for the present discussion is that our prayer should be “in the Spirit”. “Spirit” is rightly capitalized in the translation because it is a reference to the Holy Spirit. The question, which arises from this admonition, is: what does it mean to pray “in the Spirit”?

We must not underestimate the importance of understanding what Paul means by prayer in the Spirit. Nothing seems to be more essential to Paul’s praying and his understanding of Prayer than his conviction that prayer is intimately related to the work of the Holy Spirit in us and for us. Oscar Cullmann begins his discussion of Paul’s understanding of prayer with what he calls the “indissoluble link which exists for him between prayer and the Holy Spirit”. He says: “Every aspect of prayer has its foundation here; the need to persist in prayer, union with the will of God, the subject of prayer, being heard.”<sup>10</sup>

What Paul means by “praying in the Spirit” he best explains in Romans 8:12-27. It is in Romans chapter eight that Paul develops at length what is sometimes referred to as the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. In this chapter he shows that it is the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer who is the source of spiritual victory, hope, and relationship with God. In the course of this discussion he speaks of the Holy Spirit as the one who enables us to address God as “Abba, Father” (v. 15), who is the guarantee of our future and the greatest joy of our present (vs. 23-24), and who enables us to intercede according to the will of God (vss. 26, 27). Each of these things is essential to our understanding of what it means to “pray in the Spirit”. We will consider them in the stated order.

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<sup>9</sup> Eph. 6: 18

<sup>10</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Prayer in the New Testament*, p. 72

## 1. The Spirit of Adoption

What Paul says in verses 15 and 16 is very closely paralleled in Galatians 4: 5-7. In both passages the Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of Adoption”, and in both cases we are told that His presence has three distinct effects. First he enables us to address God as father in intimate and confident terms using the intimate name *Abba*. Previous to the coming of the Spirit only Jesus addressed God in this way (Mark 14: 36). It is this confidence that makes prayer possible. To again quote Cullmann: “Being children and praying to our Father belong very closely together in Rom. 8:12ff., and should not be separated. For all prayer has a meaning only if we pray as children to the Father. We pray because we are children of God and, conversely, we are children of God because we pray to God as our Father.”<sup>11</sup> Secondly It is this witness of the Spirit that assures us of our filial relationship to God, and takes away the spirit of bondage that causes us to fear (v. 15). True prayer demands confidence that God has accepted us. Fear and prayer cannot long co-exist, and prayer motivated by fear of God will never get us into the presence of the Father. Since, in ourselves, we have only reason to fear, only the Spirit can liberate us from that fear and embolden us to come into the presence of God expecting to be heard. Finally, it is to be noted in both passages that the Spirit of Adoption assures us, not only, that we are children of God, but also that we are heirs of God. This teaches us that our present praying is in light of our future hope. This leads us to the second major fact about praying “in the Spirit”.

## 2. The Spirit as Guarantee of our Future and Source of our Joy

In verse 23 Paul calls the Spirit the “first fruits” of our ultimate hope. This is parallel to what he says in II Corinthians 5:5 where he speaks of the Spirit as the “earnest” of our future hope. What is meant by this is that the present work of the Spirit in our lives gives us a foretaste and a guarantee of our ultimate glorification; what is called here the “redemption of our bodies”, and what is called in II Corinthians 5 being clothed with our new body. It is the life of prayer in the Spirit that brings us the closest to our ultimate destiny. It is only a pledge, (something like smelling Christmas dinner cooking as you approach the front door, as opposed to actually eating it) not

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 74

in anyway comparable to our final state, but it is enough of a foretaste of our future glory to give us a firm assurance that glory is our ultimate destination. As such prayer in the Spirit is “the highest pinnacle attainable to human beings, though this is still only a stammering that indicates remoteness from the goal of glorification.”<sup>12</sup> It is to prayer in this sense that John Bunyan was referring when he wrote: “A man that truly prays one prayer shall after that never be able to express with his mouth or pen the unutterable desires, sense, affection, and longing that went into that prayer.”<sup>13</sup>

### 3. The Intercession of the Spirit

In Romans 8: 25-26 Paul affirms first of all that we do not know how to pray. This does not mean that we lack knowledge about prayer or the mechanics of prayer. It means that when we do pray we do not know what we should ask. Even when we earnestly desire the will of God, it is no guarantee that we know the will of God. It is at this point that the Holy Spirit comes to our aid. He literally takes over and prays in us, and when he prays “he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (v. 27). It is interesting that this passage is immediately followed by the familiar words: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.” We often quote these words, but seldom in the context of prayer. We come to understand the goodness of God’s purposes as the Spirit intercedes in us and for us.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. If true prayer is prayer “in the Spirit”, is there anything that we can do to either hinder or aid the work of the Spirit of God in us?
2. When are we most likely to pray in the Spirit?

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 76

<sup>13</sup> Cited by D.M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, p. 21

### **C. Love, Prayer, and the Holy Spirit**

Having considered the relationship between the Holy Spirit and prayer, we may now move a step further and see how Paul sees love as the essential action of the Christian life and, how that love is, on the one hand a gift of the Holy Spirit, and on the other an answer to prayer. It is in the relationship of these three things that we begin to see why prayer was so central to Paul's life and work, and why it must be to ours. We have already established from Romans 8 that it is the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer that makes the entire Christian life possible. Our next step is to show that, for Paul, our life in Christ is primarily a life of active love, and that it is prayer that unleashes the "love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:8) in order that we might perform concrete acts of service. Leonhard Goppelt writes the following concerning the relationship between love and the Holy Spirit:

"According to Paul the individual believer experienced the Spirit primarily in prayer when he could call upon God in the words of the Lord's Prayer: 'Abba Father' (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:16). This immediacy of devotion to God did not come forth from innate human capacity but from the Spirit. The Spirit brought to light an awareness in the depth dimension out of which prayer sprang forth that man has been accepted through the love of God. When the Spirit reached out, the love of God reached out: 'because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.'"<sup>14</sup>

Not only does the presence of the Spirit make us aware of God's love reaching out to us, it also opens our eyes to see others as objects of God's love and care and causes us to reach out to them in concrete acts of love. One need only read with attention I Corinthians 12-13 to understand how Paul places active love at the center of the spiritual life. He begins his discussion of the manifestation of the Spirit in chapter 12 with a discussion of the gifts of the Spirit given to individuals in order that they might serve

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<sup>14</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. II, p. 121

the entire body. At the end of chapter 12 he tells them that he wants to show them “a more excellent way”. He then moves to his great discussion of love in chapter 13, where he establishes: (1) that no spiritual activity performed without love has value, (2) that love seeks the good of others, and (3) that love is the most enduring of all things. He then begins chapter fourteen with an exhortation to “follow after love”. From this exhortation he takes up in detail the subject that was dividing them the gift of tongues. In taking this approach, he makes it clear that there is no real discussion of spiritual life and activity outside of the context of divine love. All that does not flow from the love of God poured into our hearts by the life-giving Spirit of God is but “wood, hay, and stubble”. It is as “a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” “It profits nothing” and is hence not even worth discussing.

Having established the priority of love, and the divine origin of love we may now look at how Paul sees prayer as the catalyst that unleashes the love of God in us. We may begin with a passage that could be easily overlooked in a study of Paul and prayer, Romans 12: 9-21. Romans 12 marks the beginning of what is often referred to as the practical section of the Epistle to the Romans. After having carefully developed in chapters 1-11 how the Gospel demonstrates both the “justice” and the “power” of God (1:17) by providing a salvation that is “outside of the works of law” (3:20), and “through faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all that believe”, He now takes up the practical implications of that free salvation. He begins with a general exhortation to all who have experienced the mercy of God in salvation to present their bodies as “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God”. From this he moves to a paragraph parallel to I Corinthians 12 where he explains the purpose and function of spiritual gifts. Finally he arrives at the paragraph that interests us for the present discussion. It is a long paragraph filled with short and pithy commands relative to the Christian life. Many of them come directly from Jesus. All of them are specifics of how to live out a life of love in the reality of life in the church and in the world. We quote the entire passage:

*“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep*

with them that weep. *Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

In the midst of these instructions Paul commands us to continue “instant in prayer”. It would be easy to pass over this command to pray constantly, and to lose it in the crowd of commands, but that would be a mistake. In this passage “prayer is mentioned in the midst of a group of demands that constitute the Christian life. It is an integral of this life. It would not have the same meaning if it were not mentioned in relationship to all the other things. Prayer cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the Christian life.”<sup>15</sup> It is prayer that enables us to perform the other actions. Not just any prayer, but prayer “in the Spirit” that, on one hand helps us discern the work of God, and on the other connects us to the love of God made available through the indwelling Spirit to act in love.

We may now summarize what we have thus far established:

1. The Christian life is a life “in the Spirit”.
2. The Spirit pours out the love of God into our hearts.
3. Life in the Spirit is a life of active love towards our fellow believers, unbelievers, and even our enemies
4. Prayer “in the Spirit” enables us to discern who and how to love and enables us to love.

This being the case it is not difficult to grasp why love is such a central theme in Paul’s intercessory prayers. When he prays for the Philippians, he prays that their love “might abound more and more in knowledge and all judgment” (Phil. 1:9). For the Ephesians he prays that they might be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that you being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what

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<sup>15</sup> Louis Monloubou, *St. Paul et la Priere*, p. 29

is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth all knowledge” (Eph. 4:16-19). To the Thessalonians he says that he is praying that the Lord would make them “increase and abound in love toward one another and toward all men, even as we do toward you” (I Thess. 3:12).

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What do you think Paul might tell you if you told him that you felt no love for your obnoxious neighbor?
2. Does prayer create love or release love?

### ***D. Joy, Prayer, and the Holy Spirit***

If the first fruit of the Spirit is love, the second is joy (Gal. 5: 22). As Paul commands Christians to love because “the love of God has been shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to you” (Rom. 5:8), So he commands us to “rejoice” for the same reason. We are to “rejoice in the Lord” (Phil. 3:1; 4:4), and we are to do so constantly (I Thess. 5: 16). As with loving, for Paul, our rejoicing is not the fruit of our own favorable circumstances, but of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who assures us of God’s favor, and of our favorable standing with Him. This is demonstrated in what he writes to the Thessalonians, when describing their conversion he writes: “And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (I Thess. 1:6). To the Romans he writes that, “The kingdom of heaven is not food and drink, but peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:7). He prays for the Roman Christians that, the “God of hope” might fill them with all joy and peace in believing,” that they “might abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15: 13).

It is in light of these facts that we must consider Paul’s insistence on joy in the Epistle to the Philippians, where it is a constantly recurring theme. “Paul and the Philippians had ample reason for anxiety since the one was in prison and the others were threatened with persecution.”<sup>16</sup> Paul, himself, says that

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<sup>16</sup> Gerald A. Hawthorne, Word Biblical Commentary, Philippians, p. 183

he can rejoice even in the face of impending death (Phil. 2:18). His joy is completely unrelated to his circumstances. It is a gift, a fruit of God's Spirit, who dwells in him making it possible for him to rejoice in all circumstances. Thus, when he tells the Thessalonians to "Rejoice evermore" (I Thess. 5:16), he means exactly that.

It may appear strange to us that Paul commands us to rejoice. We tend to think of joy as a reaction more than as an action. For Paul there was nothing strange about it. It came from two sources. The first, we have already noted, the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the giver of true joy. The second is to be found in Paul's knowledge of the Old Testament and his participation in the religion of Israel. The foundation of Jewish piety was rejoicing in the Lord, prayer, and thanksgiving. This is reflected throughout the Old Testament and especially in the Psalter where "the righteous rejoice in the Lord (Ps. 64: 10; 97: 12) as they 'come before Him with thanksgiving' (Ps. 95:2; 100:4) to pray in his sanctuary (Ps. 61:1-4; 84: 1-8). For Paul these are the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and especially in the life of the believing congregation. They are expressed as imperatives because, in keeping with the Old Testament, devotion and ethics are inseparable responses to grace. The truly godly person both longs for God's presence, where one pours out one's heart to God in joy, prayer and thanksgiving, and lives in God's presence by 'doing' the righteousness of God. Otherwise piety is merely religion, not devotion."<sup>17</sup>

Paul maintains these three basic actions of devotion both in Philippians 4 and I Thessalonians 5 when He exhorts:

"Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand<sup>18</sup>. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4: 4-7).

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<sup>17</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, pp. 172-173

<sup>18</sup> "The Lord is at hand" or near is ambiguous. It may be either a reference to God's proximity as in Psa. 46: 1 "God is our refuge and strength a very present help in time of trouble", or a reference to the nearness of the second coming and of our giving account. Most commentators are of the opinion that this is a rare case of double entendre in Paul's Epistles.

“Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (I Thess. 5: 16-18).

Both in the Old Testament and in the New God demands of his people to rejoice in his presence, to make their needs known to him, and to give Him thanks. These are the three primary acts of prayer. They are also essential to our corporate worship.

We must now take prayer as rejoicing before the Lord a step further and consider Paul’s understanding of the place of singing in the life of the Christian and the life of the church. Normally, we do not associate singing with prayer, but we should. In its deepest sense, Christian singing, since it is addressed to God, is a form of prayer and should be engaged in as such. It is the Holy Spirit who puts the song in our heart, and the singing of the song is our prayer of rejoicing. The psalmist says:

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise unto our God: many shall see *it*, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed *is* that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies” (Psa. 40: 1-4).

It is for this reason that Paul writes in Ephesians 5:18 –20:

“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The singing of which Paul speaks here flows from the Spirit who is to fill and control the believer in a way not dissimilar to that of the control of strong drink on an inebriated person. The song is not sung for ourselves or to others, but to the Lord. It is a song of joy and thanksgiving to the God of all grace for his grace shown to us.

One of the best ways to fulfill the command to rejoice is simply to join with the church in singing; to sing reflectively to the Lord. Our singing should be looked upon as prayer, as an expression of our Spirit given joy to the God of our salvation. This may be the easiest way to fulfill the command to rejoice.

Paul provides us an excellent example of this from his own experience in Acts 16. Imprisoned unfairly, he and Silas, at midnight, are praying and singing praises to God in their prison cell, when an earthquake shakes the prison and releases the prisoners. This was not, most likely, an unusual way for the Apostle to pass an evening. The fact that he was in prison is an insignificant detail for someone that has learned to be content in whatever state that he is in (Phil. 4: 11). Praise flowed as naturally from Paul's lips in the Philippian jail as it would have in the Philippian church, because the Spirit of joy was as much present in one as He was in the other.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you ever consider your singing as prayer?
2. What can we do to fulfill the command to rejoice in the Lord?

### ***E. Peace, Prayer, and the Holy Spirit***

Peace is the third quality of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Much of what Paul has to say about peace parallels what he has to say about joy, and several passages that have already been cited in speaking of joy will be repeated regarding peace. We may begin with three key passages already mentioned in regards to joy. In describing the true nature of God's kingdom in Romans 14:7 Paul writes: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost". In the pronouncement of his benediction on the Roman Christians in Romans 15:13 he prays: "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost". In both passages joy and peace are seen as positive benefits given by the Holy Spirit. Finally in Philippians 4:7 after exhorting the Christians of Philippi to rejoice always and to turn their anxiety into prayer, he tells them that the result of such prayer will be that: "the peace of God, which

passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”.

The peace of which Paul speaks is a key concept of the Old and New Testaments, which goes beyond our normal idea of peace as an absence of hostility. The Old Testament word *shalom* is one of the most meaningful words of the Bible. It is the fruit of God’s blessing. God gave Moses a specific blessing that Aaron, the High Priest, was to pronounce upon Israel in Numbers 6: 24-26 which states: “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.” Peace, *shalom* was the greatest thing that Israel could achieve in this world. According to Charles H. H. Scobie:

“Life in its fullness is characterized by ‘peace’ or *shalom*, a word that is extremely difficult to translate into English. The root meaning is ‘completeness’ or ‘wholeness’ (verb *shalem*= ‘be complete, be sound’), and *shalom* can mean health, security, well-being, and salvation as well as peace. ‘The fundamental idea is totality. . . .Anything that contributes to this wholeness makes for *shalom*. Anything that stands in its way disrupts *shalom*’ (D. J. Harris 1970: 14).”<sup>19</sup>

It is this idea of peace that is in Paul’s mind when he uses the word. For Paul, God is the “God of peace” (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; I Thess 5:23). In Paul’s understanding of peace, it is paradoxically both a gift that only God can bestow and a task to which people are called.<sup>20</sup> As a gift it is the result of God’s justification or salvation, which puts the believer in a position of being at peace with God. In Romans 5:1 Paul states: “Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”. This means that God’s wrath has been appeased by the death of Christ, which God has accepted as a just payment for the penalty of our sins. The sinner, saved by grace and justified by faith, has nothing to fear from God, but now “rejoices in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:3). The Spirit of Adoption teaches him that God is no longer his adversary, but his *Abba*, Father to whom he now has free access in prayer (Rom. 5:2).

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<sup>19</sup> Charles H. H. Scobie. *The Ways of Our God*, p. 881

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 883

Not only is peace with God a fruit of salvation and a free gift of God, but God also gives us the gift of peace with one another. One of the great external evidences of grace is that those who were previously enemies are now, not only reconciled to God, but also reconciled to one another. Paul writes of this horizontal reconciliation in Ephesians 2:13-17:

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”

This is the reason why, for Paul, human distinctions have ceased to matter. In Christ there is only one category of person, the justified sinner. To make other distinctions is to seek justification outside of the grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, he writes to the Galatians that whoever has been baptized into Christ has put on Christ, and in Him “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

In these two ways peace is a gift that only God can give, but, as previously stated, both in the Bible in general and in Paul’s writings specifically, peace is also a task to which we are called. Although we *are* at peace with God, we may not always experience that peace. It is at those moments that we must follow the admonition of Philippians 4:6 and turn our anxiety into peace by committing all things to God in prayer with a thankful heart.

It is especially in regards to the gift of peace with one another that Paul exhorts us to pursue peace. In Romans 14:19 he exhorts us to “follow after” or more literally “to pursue the things which make for peace”. In Ephesians, after explaining in the passages previously quoted that God has broken down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile and made peace between the two, he exhorts us in 4:1-3 “to walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in

the bond of peace.” The unity is not our creation, it is a gift of the Spirit, but we must make every effort to maintain it. It will require both prayer and effort to keep the enemy from destroying it. In I Thessalonians 5:13 Paul exhorts us simply to “be at peace among ourselves”. And in II Timothy 2:22 in giving us first a list of things to flee and then a list of things to pursue, he places peace among those things to be pursued.

The key to living in peace is found in Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 4:2 to walk with “all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing (i.e. putting up with) one another in love.” All dissention is in the end a form of auto-justification. But in Christ the only justification is divine justification. Before the cross of Christ we are all equally sinners, and we are all equally justified by the free grace of God extended through the sacrifice of Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains this reality beautifully in his book *Life Together* when he writes:

“A Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Among men there is strife. ‘He is our peace,’ says Paul of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:14). Without Christ there is discord between God and man and between man and man. Christ became the Mediator and made peace with God and among men. Without Christ we should not know God, we could not call upon Him, nor come to Him. But without Christ we also would not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened the way to God and to our brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one. But they can continue to do so only by the way of Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ are we one, only through him are we bound together. To eternity he remains the one Mediator.”<sup>21</sup>

### Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the “things that make for peace” in Romans 14:19?
2. How does prayer enable know the peace of God, and to be at peace with others?

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<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 24

## F. Persistence in Prayer

It has often been noted that Paul wants people to pray more than most people feel is possible. I Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing”, is the passage most often quoted to make this point. Ways are often sought to show that this three-word sentence means something less than what it appears to say. Before trying to explain it in a way more suitable to us, however, we should first look at all the other passages where Paul seems to be saying something similar, and then try to understand what is in Paul’s mind when he makes such statements.

Paul associates three words or expressions with prayer that indicate that he considered it a continuous action. The first expression is “day and night”. In I Thessalonians 3:10 he writes that “Night and day”, he is “praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith.” In II Timothy 1:3 he writes to Timothy: “I thank God, whom I serve from *my* forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.” Here he combines “night and day” with “without ceasing”, the second of the three expressions to emphasize, even more, his unceasing prayer. Finally, he exhorts in I Timothy 5:5 that widows who are placed on the widow’s list should, among other qualifications, be the kind of person that “continue in supplications and prayers night and day.” That Paul means by this expression about the same thing that we do, that is, “constantly” or “without interruption”, may be established from two other occasions where he employs the same expression, not in reference to prayer, but in speaking of his laboring while he was in Thessalonica. In I Thessalonians 2:9 he reminds the Thessalonians: “For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.” Again in II Thessalonians 3:8 while exhorting the Thessalonians that they should not be idle, but industrious, he uses himself as an example and reminds them: “Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you.” Since Paul uses the identical expression to describe both his praying and his working in writing to the same people, we may assume that it has equal extension in both cases. Since we would easily assume from the expression that he worked more or less continuously while he was in Thessalonica, we must assume that he was also praying more or less continuously. It also

seems logical that since he was doing both “night and day”, he must have been working and praying simultaneously.

“Without ceasing” is the second expression Paul used to indicate that Prayer should be ongoing. We have already noted the most well-known occurrence of this expression in regards to prayer in I Thessalonians 5:17. If Paul exhorts others to “pray without ceasing”, he is not asking them to do more than him. At least four times in his letters he informs those to whom he is writing that his prayer for them is “unceasing” (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; I Thess. 1:2-3; I Thess 2:13).

The final expression is “always”. Two passages suffice as examples. In Colossians 1:3 he tells the Colossians: “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” In this case he means the same thing as when he says that he prays “without ceasing” in the previously stated cases. We may add to this Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 6: 18: “ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

We have discussed this text in speaking of prayer as being in the Spirit. It is to this idea that we must now return. To understand what Paul means by unceasing prayer, we must understand his conception of life in the Spirit. For Paul the believer is to live in the realm of the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:16-25). As we walk in or by the Spirit we are open to the voice of the Spirit. For Paul prayer is dialogue. It is hearing what God is saying as much as it is speaking to God. To give a modern illustration, it is always having our receiver tuned to the Holy Spirit’s wavelength in order that he might interrupt us at any moment, and so that we may constantly seek his counsel and guidance. To not be tuned in is to take great risks. A life lived for God is only possible in this way. As Oscar Cullmann writes: “More than anyone else Paul shows that prayer does not exclude action, but makes it fruitful in a unique way. In all his concerns Paul’s bond with God does not break off for a moment. Because he is convinced that the Spirit speaks in prayer, he seeks to be continually inspired by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Prayer in the New Testament*, p. 81

## G. Prayer and the Advance of God's Kingdom

Paul not only persisted in prayer because he wanted to be constantly walking in the Spirit, but also because he was a soldier on a mission to establish the church of Jesus Christ in enemy territory. He was fully aware of the spiritual nature of his mission, and the spiritual nature of the weapons required for its successful completion (Ephesians 6:10-20; II Corinthians 10:16). For Paul, prayer was a powerful weapon for breaking down the strongholds of Satan so that the light of the Gospel could penetrate into and transform the hearts of his pagan audience. If he was constantly praying for others it was because he wanted to see them come to the knowledge of “the glorious gospel of Christ” (II Corinthians 4:4), and to “grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:13), in order that he might one day present them “as a chaste virgin to Christ” (II Corinthians 11:2). Paul saw prayer as a means of accomplishing his mission of bringing people to faith in Christ, preserving them from evil, and seeing them transformed into mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

If prayer functioned as effectively as it did for Paul, it was because he understood its proper place, and used it for its intended purpose. John Piper has written of that purpose in his book, *Let the Nations be Glad*:

“Life is war. That’s not all it is. But it is always that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer gives us the significance of front-line forces, and gives God the glory of a limitless Provider. The one who gives the power gets the glory. Thus prayer safeguards the supremacy of God in missions while linking us with endless grace for every need.”<sup>23</sup>

Paul understood that he was in a spiritual conflict. He further understood that prayer kept him in contact with “the Lord of the harvest”, and brought the power of God to bear upon the lives of people. It was for these two

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<sup>23</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad*, p. 41

reasons that he “continued instant in prayer” (Romans 12:12). He wanted “the power of Christ to rest upon him” (II Corinthians 12:9) in order that he might announce the Gospel with boldness (Ephesians 6:19) breaking down the spiritual strongholds that kept sinners captive (II Corinthians 10: 4-5), and make them captives of Jesus Christ. Thus when Paul asked others to pray for him it was always that he might preach with this kind of boldness (Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 4:3-4; II Thessalonians 3:1).

Not only did Paul pray that individuals would come to Christ, he persisted in praying for them once they had. He did so because he saw the Christian life as a life of growth and transformation, and he considered prayer a powerful means of effecting this transformation. It is for this reason, that when Paul reports to others on the contents of his prayers on their behalf, the things for which he is praying are inevitably linked to their spiritual growth and transformation. We will examine these prayer reports in detail at a later time, but for the present the following examples will suffice to illustrate the point. For the Ephesians he prays that the eyes of their heart might be enlightened so that they might understand what is the hope of their calling, the riches of their inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of God’s Power (Ephesians 1:18-19). He further prays for them that they might be strengthened by his Spirit in the inner man and that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith (Ephesians 4: 16-17). For the Philippians he says that he is praying that they might abound more and more in knowledge and judgment and that they might be able to choose the right thing (Philippians 1:-11). For the Colossians he says that he does not cease to pray that they might be filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding in order to walk in a way that pleases the Lord (Colossians 9:9-10). One looks in vain for any subject in Paul’s reported intercessory prayers that does not relate directly to the spiritual growth and victory of those for whom he intercedes.

Paul prays this way because he understands precisely the goal of his mission. This goal is mentioned in his prayer reports when he prays that the Philippians might be “sincere and without offence until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:11), and for the Thessalonians that the Lord would establish their hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (I Thessalonians 3:13). Paul did not see his goal accomplished with the conversion of the sinner, but with the presentation of the saint to his Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore he prayed constantly the he might know the will of Christ, and that the work of Christ would be fully effective in the lives of believers.

## H. Prayer for Spiritual Enlightenment

Paul was firmly convinced that the minds of the lost are blind to the truth of God. He teaches that Satan uses their world-views to hold them captive, and that only the power of the Gospel can set them free. Thus, he writes in II Corinthians 4:3-4: “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” For Paul this spiritual blindness is universal. It extends to both Jew and Gentile. He sees the Jews as blinded to the truth of their own Scriptures by their religious tradition. It is of this that he is writing in II Corinthians 3: 14-15: “But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.” Of the Gentiles he writes that they walk “in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Ephesians 4:17b-18).

In both cases the remedy is the same. Only the Spirit of God empowering the Word of God can cut away the scales from the eyes of the heart allowing the truth of God in Christ to fill the soul and convert the sinner to Christ. Once the light of Christ has enlightened the mind of the sinner, he must allow the light to transform him, and cease walking in the moral darkness of his previous condition. Thus Paul exhorts the Romans: “And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*” (Romans 13:11-14). Likewise, he exhorts the Ephesians to “stop walking in the vanity (or futility) of their own mind.” Paul would say to us that mere human reason is not governed by love, but by self-interest, so it must be put under the rule of the mind of Christ. This is why he tells the Romans that it is only as we are transformed from the inside out by the renewing of our minds that we will be able to grasp what is “that good and perfect and acceptable will of God” (Romans 12:2).

This inner transformation of the believer that changes him from a self-centered individual into one motivated by the love of Christ is Paul's primary objective in both his teaching and praying. Since this transformation is the result of spiritual enlightenment, one of Paul's persistent prayers was that believers might be continually growing in their knowledge of God and of Christ. Before presenting a series of texts to demonstrate this fact, it is worth noting that it is indeed for a knowledge of God and of Christ that Paul prays and not knowledge about God and about Christ. The word that Paul employs for knowledge in each of the texts that will be cited is a word that implies knowing a person as opposed to mere intellectualism.

When we examine Paul's prayer reports we find that spiritual understanding is one of his preoccupying concerns. He prays for the Ephesians 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 us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Ephesians 1:17-19). For the Philippians his prayer is: "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" (Philippians 1:9-10). One must pay special attention in this prayer to the relation between knowledge and love. Since God is Love, to grow in the knowledge of God is, inevitably, to grow in love. Finally, to the Colossians he writes: "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" (Colossians 1:9).

Because Paul understands the depth of spiritual ignorance he prays as he does not to strive with God and "bend his will to personal desires and the needs of others." He sees prayer rather as a "part of the believer's struggle to discern, affirm and participate in doing God's will against the pervasive influence of evil."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> W.B. Hunter, "Prayer", *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, p. 732

## I. Persistent and Punctual Prayers

Paul's prayers may be divided into two broad categories, persistent and punctual. By persistent we refer to those prayers which may be repeated more or less constantly, and by punctual those prayers that seek the intervention of God in a specific situation. While Paul gives us examples of punctual prayers, the emphasis in his epistles is on persistent prayers. Paul is, himself, always praying in two ways. He is constantly giving thanks to God in all situations, and he is constantly praying for spiritual growth and victory.

Paul begins the majority of his letters with a prayer of thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter. While this was customary in Hellenistic letter writing, the doing of it goes beyond mere formality in Paul's letters. Paul not only offers prayers of thanksgiving for the recipients of his letters, he frequently indicates that his thanksgiving for the grace of God, at work among them, is continual. To the Corinthians he writes: "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 1:4). To the Philippians he writes: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (Philippians 1:4), and to the Thessalonians he says: "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father" (I Thessalonians 1:2-3, cf. II Thessalonians 1:3-4).

Not only does Paul imply his own continual giving of thanks, he is constantly exhorting Christians to be thankful to God. Nothing is, perhaps, more important in Paul's understanding of life with God than the thankful heart. For Paul, "a quiet disposition and a heart giving thanks at any given moment is the real test of the extent to which we love God at that moment."<sup>25</sup> Paul does not cease to remind Christians of the necessity of giving thanks to God at all times and in all situations. This arises in part from his belief that sin and revolt against God begins with an ungrateful heart. In Romans 1:21, at the beginning of his universal indictment of humanity, after establishing that God has made himself known in such a way that logically humans should seek after him and worship him, he states:

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<sup>25</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, p. 8

“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Refusal to give thanks is the seed of revolt. It is a breaking of both the tenth commandment, “thou shalt not covet”, and the great commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; . . . and shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22: 37-39). Francis Schaeffer gives two tests for determining when we are breaking these commandments. He writes: “First, in regard to God: I am to love God enough to be contented, because otherwise even our natural and proper desires bring us into revolt against God, second, I am to love men enough not to envy.”<sup>26</sup>

Listen to what Paul has to say about giving thanks. To the Ephesians he writes: “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:3-4). It is thanksgiving that he gives them as an antidote for all of the horrors of their pagan past. In Ephesians 5:20 he is perhaps even more emphatic when he exhorts them to “give thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The extent of the “all things” in this passage has frequently been the subject of debate. The most likely explanation is to simply say that the “all things” of Ephesians 5:20 is as extensive as the “all things” of Romans 8:28. If indeed “all things” do “work together for good to them that love God”, then there is nothing within that circle for which we cannot give thanks. We have previously referred to Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”, but we must include it here to remind ourselves that without a thankful heart our requests will be skewed, and our prayer will not produce the “peace of God that passeth all understanding”. To understand how important a thankful heart is in Paul’s understanding of the Christian life we may add his exhortation to the Colossians: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6-7). He further exhorts the Colossians: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Colossians 3:15). We may conclude with

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 9

this brief exhortation to the Thessalonians: “In everything give thanks to God: for this is the will of God concerning you” (I Thessalonians 5:18).

Paul does not consider the persistent giving of thanks to be an option. Failure to express our thanks to God will soon lead to a lack of contentment with God, and envy of others. This will banish the peace of God, and the joy of the Holy Spirit. It will put us into a downward spiral where we are useless in God’s service and prone to temptation and sin. This being the case, we must be deliberate and persistent in our giving of thanks. Paul would say that a thankful attitude is not sufficient. Our thanks must be verbalized. One of the reasons most Christians have adopted the habit of praying before eating is that we might pause, at least that often, to reflect on the goodness of God and verbalize our thanks to him. This is also the reason why so much of Christian worship is preoccupied with remembering the goodness of God and voicing our thanks to him in prayer and in song.

We may conclude this section on persistent thanksgiving with a practical word about the relation between memory and giving of thanks. One need only reflect upon his past condition outside of the grace of God, and the difference that grace has made, to open, in his soul, a fountain of thanksgiving to God. Being the Jew that he was, Paul understood from his participation in Jewish worship and the praying of the Psalms, this pattern of remembrance, thanksgiving, and new orientation. He would have been familiar, for example, with Psalm 77 which is very helpful as a model of remembering that leads to praise that in turn leads to a new orientation. The beginning is difficult. The Psalmist remembers God and is troubled (v. 3), so troubled that he could not speak (v. 4). God’s mercies seem distant, and at one point he demands of God: “Is his mercy clean gone forever” (v. 8), and “hath he, in anger, shut up his tender mercies?” (v. 9), but he persists and says: “And I said, This *is* my infirmity: *but I will remember* the years of the right hand of the most High. I will **remember** the works of the LORD: surely I will **remember** thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings” (Psalm 77:10-12). This remembering leads to an outbreak of praise in the last verses of the Psalm. He would have also know Psalm 105 that begins with a call to thanks, and links this call with a call to remembrance: “O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD, and his strength:

seek his face evermore. **Remember** his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth” (Psalm 105:1-5).

It is this kind of remembering that leads to thanksgiving, praise, and new orientation that motivates Paul to write to the Ephesians: “Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:11-13).

“The Passover in Israel was celebrated on the eve of a great deliverance, which was thenceforth a ‘night to be much observed unto the Lord.’ Let us frequently commemorate our redemption from a bondage more bitter than that of Egypt. John Bunyan conveys this wholesome counsel to his ‘dear children.’ ‘Call to mind the former days and years of ancient times; remember also your songs in the night, and commune with your own hearts. Yea, look diligently, and leave no corner therein unsearched, for that treasure of your first and second experience of the grace of God towards you; remember, I say, the word that first laid hold upon you; remember your terrors of conscience and fear of death and hell; remember also your tears and prayers to God—yea how you sighed under every hedge for mercy! Have you never a hill *Mizar* to remember? Have you forgot the close, the milk-house, the stable, the barn, and the like where God did visit your souls? Remember also the word—the word, I say, upon which God first caused you to hope.”<sup>27</sup>

We now turn to Paul’s persistent intercessory prayers. When we do, we find that the one thing that predominates in his prayers is spiritual growth and development. As W.B. Hunter has written: “. . . It is striking that in the reports which constitute our major window into Paul’s patterns of prayer, we see virtually no petition for many practical things such as daily bread, health or healing, improved economic conditions, etc.”<sup>28</sup> This of course distinguishes Paul’s prayer from much contemporary prayer. The following observation by Jacques Ellul illustrates this point:

<sup>27</sup> D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, pp. 55-56

<sup>28</sup> W. B. Hunter, “Prayer”, *Dictionary of Paul and his Epistles*, p. 733

“There is a strange custom in France which consists of inscribing prayers on the votive plaques erected in churches. These graffiti, occasionally in large numbers, according to the importance of the saint or the veneration accorded to the Virgin of that region, are surely a most direct expression of popular prayer. They are often moving, sometimes funny or astonishing. There are requests by the thousands for success in school examinations, requests to be loved by “X”, or to be healed. Those are the three most frequent themes, but there are some which are quite personal and unusual. ‘Arrange it so that he is the first to get mad,’ asks one woman who wants a divorce but does not want to be the one to take the initiative. ‘Let me find work before tomorrow so that I can feed my little daughter.’ ‘Give me the courage to jump by parachute.’ These inscriptions reveal the true content of popular prayer, always quite simple, very concrete, very immediate. Not once have I seen a request for the Holy Spirit. We can only be persuaded that such is indeed the content of the prayers of millions of Christians.”<sup>29</sup>

Herein lies one of the significant differences between Paul’s prayers and popular prayer. While Paul is primarily preoccupied in his praying with our spiritual condition and progress, popular prayer is focused on the immediate needs of life. This may be explained by what he says in II Corinthians 4:17-18: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.” What moves Paul to pray for others is more than human sympathy, it is his conviction that humans are the objects of God’s creation and redemption, and the potential possessors of eternal glory. Thus his persistent prayer is that we might come to a full understanding of the riches that are ours in Jesus Christ, that we might come into full possession of them, and that they might enable us to live in such a way that we will be without embarrassment on the day when we give an account to our redeemer. We will, thus, benefit greatly from a careful consideration of each of Paul’s prayer reports.

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<sup>29</sup> Jacque Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*, pp. 11-12

While Paul speaks less in his Epistles of his punctual prayers than of his persistent prayers, there is sufficient evidence of his punctual prayers to draw some clear conclusions about their nature. A first insight comes from the nature of his life and ministry. One need only reflect for a moment on the events of his life, or read the proofs of his apostleship in II Corinthians 11:21-33 to understand that he led a life of danger and deliverance. Such a life required constant answers to prayer. There is nothing figurative in his request to the Christians of Rome when he asks them to strive with him in prayer that he “may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea (Romans 15:31). In II Corinthians 1 after thanking God for delivering him from a situation of almost certain death, he anticipates future situations in which the same type of deliverance will be required when he writes: “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us*; Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift *bestowed* upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf” (II Corinthians 1:10-11). The role of prayer in the advance of the Gospel and the protection of God’s servant is nowhere better demonstrated than in Paul’s career.

A second insight into Paul’s punctual prayers comes from a reflection on the relationship between his persistent prayers and his punctual prayers. The two are intimately related. As we have already established Paul’s overall goal in prayer was the spread of the Gospel and the completion of the work of Christ in his own life, in the lives of all believers and in the world. When we examine his punctual prayers we find that their goal is no different. Paul is a single-minded man. He is driven by his obedience to Jesus Christ. It is not his own life or death, comfort or discomfort that motivates him in life and in prayer, but his desire to see God’s kingdom come and God’s will be done. Nowhere is this fact better demonstrated than in the example of Paul’s best-known punctual prayer in II Corinthians 12: 7-10.

In this passage he finds himself in the uncomfortable position of having to defend his apostleship against false teachers that have invaded the Corinthian Church during Paul’s absence. Paul refers to them despairingly as “super apostles”. They have attempted to make the case in the church that Paul is not really an Apostle. Some have believed them and his authority has been undermined. One of his objectives in writing the letter is to reestablish his authority. His detractors have presented a series of proofs of the inferiority of Paul’s apostleship, so in chapters 10-12 Paul responds to these charges. The specific charge, which prompts the paragraph under

consideration, is that the super-apostles had been the recipients of visions and revelations. Evidently they had based at least a part of their teaching on these revelations, and they had implied that since Paul had not shared his visions and revelations with them, he had not received any. As we have already seen earlier, the book of Acts recounts several incidents where the living Christ appeared to Paul, most notably, on the Road to Damascus at the moment of his conversion. In this passage, however, Paul refers to an experience that had happened to him 14 year previously that cannot be positively linked to any other experience in either the Acts or his Epistles. He says that: “he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter” (II Corinthians 12:4).

What interests us presently is not the vision, but what occurred after the vision. Here is Paul’s account: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (II Corinthians 12:7-10).

Much of the discussion of this passage has been preoccupied with identifying Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”. The present conclusion of New Testament Scholars is that we cannot positively identify it.<sup>30</sup> What we do know is why it was given; to keep Paul from becoming conceited. It was evidently extremely painful to Paul. He asked the Lord three times to remove it. However, when the Lord’s purpose became clear to Paul he accepted it. This prayer was to Paul what the prayer or renunciation in Gethsemane was to Jesus. And just as Jesus’ punctual prayer in Gethsemane was the outworking of his persistent prayer expressed in the Lord’s prayer, so Paul’s punctual prayer of renunciation is the outworking of his persistent prayer and his singular desire that he might know Christ.

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<sup>30</sup> Ralph Martin, *Word Biblical Commentary, II Corinthians*, p. 411

## The Church at Prayer

Having discussed at length Paul at prayer, we will now consider the role of prayer in the missionary churches founded by the Apostle. Here we have much less to go on, as Paul gives little instruction concerning Christian worship in his letters. We will begin<sup>31</sup> with a brief discussion of early Christian worship and then consider Paul's specific teaching concerning prayer as a part of public worship. Oscar Cullmann is correct when he writes: "Our sources for the investigation of the early Christian service of worship do not yield a perfectly clear picture of the outward development of the gathering for worship; they do disclose, however, a fairly clear tendency in worship." Indeed one will search in vain in the New Testament for a description of a church service. We have hints here and there, but not once is a full description given. In fact, the first extant description of a Christian worship service comes from the First Apology of Justin Martyr (c.a. 150). It is worth quoting a major part of it as a starting point:

“. . . . And on the day called Sunday<sup>32</sup>, all who live in the cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability, and the people assent saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word, takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the

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<sup>31</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, p. 1

<sup>32</sup> This is the first use of "Sunday" by a Christian. In the New Testament it is first referred to as "the first day of the week" (I Corinthians 16:2; Acts 20:7), and later "The Lord's Day" That is the day of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 1:10), which is still reflected in the Latin *dies dominica*, and the French *Dimanche*. English followed the German *Sontag* and the Roman imperial pagan dedication of the first day of the week to the Sun.

darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. . . .”<sup>33</sup>

When we compare Justin’s description with Acts 2:42: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”; we find that he gives as the four normal activities of Christian worship the same four activities that are given in Acts as the habitual practices of the first Christians in Jerusalem. We may thus assume that these four things were early established as central to the gathering of the early Christians. The description of Justin fills out for us what was understood by each of the four terms in Acts 2:42.

The first activity is described in Acts as the apostles’ doctrine or teaching. Jesus had instructed his apostles that they were to make disciples and teach them everything he had taught them (Matthew 28:19-20). Examples of this apostolic instruction may be found in the New Testament Epistles. It is rooted in the Old Testament, centered in Jesus Christ and aims at the transformation of the lives of the Christian disciples. It was, no doubt, modeled on the synagogue practice of reading from the Scriptures and then giving an exhortation based on the reading. By the time of Justin the Apostles were dead but their writings were beginning to be collected and read on equal footing with the Old Testament.

The second activity is described as the “breaking of bread”. This is what later came to be called the “Eucharist” (from the Greek verb *eucharisto* “to give thanks”) because of the special prayers of thanksgiving associated with it as indicated in Justin. It is what we normally refer to as the Lord’s Supper.

The third activity given in Acts, “fellowship” is what Justin describes last, namely the sharing of material wealth to meet the needs of whomever among them was in want. Finally there is “prayers”. The question, now before us, is “What sort of prayers did the early Christians pray when they met together?” and, more specifically, “What sort of prayer did Paul encourage in the young churches of the gentile mission?”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, ch. LXVII

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### A. A One-Word Prayer

In the previous section we established that prayer was one of the primary components of Christian worship in the early church, generally, and in the churches founded by Paul particularly. We now propose to examine the Pauline Epistles with the goal of discovering all that we can relative to the nature of the prayer of these early Christian communities. Our goal in this study is to find a model to guide our own corporate prayer, to be instructed by the Apostle Paul as he instructs these churches. We begin with what is most likely the shortest prayer in the New Testament. In our English translations it is one word. We find that one word prayer at the end of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians where he writes: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema. Maranatha" (I Cor. 16:22).

Some of the early English translations of the Bible made the mistake of combining the last two words of this verse into a single word turning it into something like an excommunication curse. For example the Geneva Bible translates them: "let him be had in execration, yea excommunicate to death."<sup>35</sup> The KJV translates accurately when it makes *Maranatha* a separate sentence. The word is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic expression *maran atha*, which means "come Lord". It belongs to that group of words in the New Testament that derive from either Hebrew or Aramaic, and that were so much a part of the language of the first Aramaic speaking Christians that they were transposed into Greek and from there into the various languages into which the Bible has been translated. Other examples are: *amen, hallelujah, hosanna, and abba*. Before discussing how it functioned as a prayer in the early church it is worth pointing out that, since in the Old Testament it would have only been used of God, its use in the Pauline Churches indicates that the Palestinian Christians from the earliest times must have considered the resurrected Christ to be God and worshipped him as such.

We find this prayer in two other places in early Christian literature. The first is at the end of the book of Revelation where John writes: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus. In this case the prayer has been translated into Greek, clearly identifying the object of the prayer as the Lord Jesus. It also makes it clear that it is to be taken as a prayer and not a simple statement; "the Lord has

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<sup>35</sup> For more information see Robertson and Plummer, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 400-401

come”. The final example comes from the *Didache* (c.a. 125 A.D.). In the section of the document dealing with the order of Christian worship the author first gives the prayer of thanksgiving to be offered before the Lord’s Supper (ch. 9), and then give a prayer of thanksgiving to be offered at the end (ch. 10). This second prayer ends in the following fashion: “If any man is holy let him come; If any man is not let him repent. Maran Atha. Amen.”<sup>36</sup>

This prayer was most likely associated with the Lord’s Supper. It was linked to the assurance of the Early Christians that Christ had come to them, that he was with them when they gathered in his name, and that he was coming for them. This triple coming of Christ is anticipated in Jesus’ farewell address in John Gospel where he promises his followers first that he will appear to them after his resurrection and assure them that he is alive (John 16: 16-25), secondly that he will come and make his abode with them after his ascension into heaven by asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18), and finally that he will come for them at the end to take them to the place he has prepared for them (John 14:1-3). It is also interesting that, as Oscar Cullmann points out, each of these three comings was associated with a meal.<sup>37</sup> Christ’s post-resurrection appearances were associated with his revealing himself to his disciples as he broke bread with them on Easter eve at Emmaus (Luke 24:36), and cooked fish for them on the shores of Galilee (John 21:12ff). His second coming is associated with the marriage supper of the Lamb, and his present abiding with his church is celebrated in the Lord’s Supper.

The prayer “Maranatha”, then as it was employed by early Christians, was a reminder that Christ had come for them in the past, that he would come for them in the future, and that they needed his constant presence with them in the present. It underscores the most basic reality of the Gospel that Jesus is *Immanuel*, God with us, and that without him we can do nothing (John 15:5), and that with him we can “do all things” (Phil. 4:3). Thus as the first Christians we too should pray, “*Maranatha*, Even so come, Lord, Jesus.”

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted from the translation of J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 127

<sup>37</sup> *Worship*, pp. 14-20

## B. I Corinthians 14

The one chapter where Paul gives a somewhat detailed description of a worship service in one of his missionary churches is I Corinthians 14. The problem with using this chapter as a model is that he is not writing to describe what the worship of the church should be, but to correct the errors of the Corinthians. These errors were, in general, related to their misunderstanding of spiritual gifts, and, more specifically, to their abuse of *glossalalia*, or speaking in tongues. Since our goal in this study is to understand the place of prayer in Paul's churches, it will not be necessary for us to study all the details of this controversial chapter, but only to see what it has to say about prayer and its place in Christian worship.

We begin by situating the chapter within its context in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. In this epistle, the Apostle addresses more than a dozen specific problems that had arisen in the Corinthian church during his absence. Chapter 14 is a part of a unit that includes chapters 12 – 14. The overall question taken up in these three chapters is the purpose of spiritual gifts. Paul introduces this section by saying: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (I Corinthians 14:1). He closes it by stating: "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14: 38-40). Specifically, it appears that the Corinthians: (1) Had not failed to distance themselves sufficiently from the disorder of their pagan religion, and had confused the work of the Holy Spirit with the demonic influences they had previously experienced (cf. I Corinthians 10:20 – 22; 12:2 –3; 14: 23). (2) Had understood the gifts of the Spirit in terms of their own selfish interests, rather than understanding them as Paul did, as a means of edifying the church, the one body of Christ (cf. I Corinthians 12:7, 25: 14:4, 5, 17). (3) Had failed to comprehend the essential motive of all Christian activity, love (I Corinthians 12:31 cf. 14:1; chapter 13). (4) Had, by failing to discern the spirits and the motives of the participants, and by failing to exercise discipline in their services, allowed their services to become a chaotic pandemonium in which the true purpose of worship was no longer possible.

In spite of the disorder that reigned in Corinth, it does seem possible to deduce from what Paul writes here what he considered to be the primary purpose of their assemblies, a general pattern of worship activities, and some principles of healthy worship.

We should remind ourselves at this point, that in chapter 14 we are observing the assembled church. This is obvious first of all, from the fact that what is being done is being observed by both other members of the congregation, and unbelieving visitors (I Corinthians 14:9, 16, 23-25). Secondly, it is evident from Paul's frequent use of the word church, and especially the expression, "in the church" (I Corinthians 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 33, 34, 35). In the chapter, Paul, on at least two occasions, makes a clear distinction between what is done in the privacy of the home, and what is done "in the church" (I Corinthians 14:18-19; 34-35).

If the subject of the chapter is the assembled church, can we determine with certainty what the Apostle considers to be the primary reason for their assemblies? The answer is a clear "yes", and it is found in Paul's insistent repetition of the words "to edify" (*oikodomeo*) and "edification" (*oikodomé*). These are favorite words of Paul throughout the epistle, but it is in this chapter that we find seven of the ten times they are employed (I Corinthians 3:9; 8:1, 10; 14: 3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26). As Ralph P. Martin has written: "Excellent gifts, according to Paul, carry this hallmark: they build up the church (v.12). Whatever contributions are brought to the service, their value stands under this banner: 'all of these must be done for the strengthening (*oikodomé*) of the church' (v. 26)."<sup>38</sup>

While it is not Paul's purpose to set forth the general pattern of the worship service, we can detect in the passage three elements which appear to have been essential in the worship of the synagogue, and were adopted by the early churches. To again quote Martin: "As far as we can piece together the format of synagogue worship, three elements stand out: the Praise of God, and the reading and exposition of Scripture, both enclosed within a framework of united prayer."<sup>39</sup> Paul calls attention to these three activities in the chapter. In verses 1-12 the focus is on proclaiming or prophesying; in verses 12-15 it is on praying, and in 16-18 it is on praising. In each case the background is the abuse of *glossalailia*. In the case of prophecy, he insists that it is superior to tongues in as much as it edifies the church and not the person practicing it. In the case of prayer, he insists that prayer must be both by the Spirit and the understanding, and in regards to praise, he insists that others cannot give their accord to what they cannot understand.

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<sup>38</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation, Studies in I Corinthians 12-15*, p. 62

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60

To summarize what Paul teaches us about public prayer in I Corinthians 14 we will first consider three general principles he establishes concerning public worship. Since prayer is a major part of public worship, these principles apply to prayer. Next we will look at verses 15-18 where he speaks specifically about prayer.

## 1. Principles for Worship

The first principle that Paul lays down for all those participating in public worship is that all that is done must be done out of love. Already in 8:1, as he begins to address the problem of meats sacrificed to idols, he has stated in clear terms that “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (NIV). Then in chapter 12, as he explains the nature and function of the gifts of the Spirit, he proposes to show them “a more excellent way” (12:31). He does this in his exposition of Christian love or charity in chapter 13, where he establishes that all that is not done out of love is vain (vv. 1-3), paints a vivid portrait of the love of which he is speaking (vv. 4-7), and demonstrates that love is the one thing that we currently possess that will endure, not only in time, but also in eternity. Finally, he begins his exhortation concerning public worship in chapter 14 with the imperative: “follow after love” (14:1).

The second principle is that all that is done must be done to build up the church. As previously noted the words “to edify” and “edification occur seven times in chapter 14. Already in 8:1, as previously mentioned, he has established the link between love and edification. That which flows from true charity edifies, that which is motivated by anything else cannot edify. Public worship does not exist for personal gratification. One need only look at all the passages in Paul’s letters where he employs the expression “one another” to grasp how important this truth was to his understanding of the church. For Paul the Christian exists for others. God works through those in whom he has implanted his love to communicate his love to others and thus build up his church.

The final principle is that all must be done “decently and in order” (v. 40). This is because God, himself, “is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (v. 33). The word “decency” implies “propriety”. Paul uses it on two other occasions. In both cases the KJV translates it as “honest”. In Romans

13:13, by putting it in contrast with a series of things that are against propriety, Paul gives us a clear image of what the word means: “Let us walk honestly (decently), as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.”

It should be added that Paul’s desire for order is in no way a desire to squelch the spontaneity of the Spirit. In his understanding, spontaneity and order are not exclusive, but complementary. He does not ask them to stop doing what they are doing, but to do it in an orderly fashion. When he says in verse 32 that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”, he is reminding them that even if the Holy Spirit is prompting them to say something they can wait their turn.

Paul is most likely thinking of gatherings of the church for worship in I Thessalonians 5: 16 –22, which has parallels to I Corinthians 14. In this passage he gives a series of seven short commands:

“Rejoice evermore.  
Pray without ceasing.  
In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.  
Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings.  
Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.  
Abstain from all appearance of evil.”

Notice that he exhorts them to the three activities we have already mentioned as making up the worship service, prophecy, prayer, and praise. He also wants them to conduct themselves in such a way that the free work of the Holy Spirit will in no way be hindered. Finally as in I Corinthians 14 all things are to be evaluated, and anything that even has an appearance of evil is to be avoided.

Since these three principles apply to worship in general, and prayer is a part of worship, they apply to public prayer. For us it is a starting point for evaluating our public prayers. We should ask ourselves: “Do our prayers originate in our love for God, and for our fellow believers?” “Do they edify the church?” And, “do they respect propriety and order?”

## 2. Prayer in Worship

We now turn to verses 15-18, where Paul speaks specifically about prayer. In these verses, as in the rest of the chapter, his main concern is to discourage the use of un-interpreted tongues. His reason for doing this is that such prayer is not understood; hence, others cannot give their agreement to the prayer or praise that is offered, and they cannot be edified by it.

There are at least three things to be considered in these verses. First we must determine what Paul means when he says in verse 15: “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also”. Secondly, we need to consider the use of “Amen”, and, finally, It is worth calling attention to the close association between prayer and singing in verse 15.

In verse 14 Paul states: “For if I pray with my spirit, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful”. This statement presents a problem of interpretation, as it is not easily determined what he means by “my spirit”. It is important to know, if possible, because this will determine what he means by, “I will pray with the spirit”, in the following verse. The problem arises from the personal possessive pronoun, “my”. Since Paul has already indicated that when one speaks in tongues, it is not the person speaking, but the Holy Spirit speaking through him, we would have expected him to say something on the order of “When I pray in the Spirit, it is the Spirit that is praying in me.” However, as C.K. Barrett points out: “To describe the Holy Spirit in any sense as *mine* is intolerable, and certainly not Pauline.”<sup>40</sup>

What then does Paul mean by, “my spirit prays”? What is clear is that it is a non-rational prayer. When he says, “my understanding (mind) is unfruitful”, he means that it produces nothing. “It is evident that the mind is the rational element in man’s being, prized by many of Paul’s contemporaries as the highest and intrinsically good part of human nature. Paul did not rate rationality so high; the *mind* is not sinless, but needs to be renewed (Rom. 12:2)”.<sup>41</sup> Beyond this, it is probably best to understand the expression, “my spirit”, as Gordon Fee does in translating it awkwardly, but, most likely, correctly, “my S/spirit prays”. He explains his translation thus: “Paul means his own spirit is speaking as the Holy Spirit gives him utterance. Hence, my S/spirit prays.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 320

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319

<sup>42</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 670

This sort of non-rational, incomprehensible, prayer may be useful to the individual, but Paul forbids it within the context of public worship. What he desires is a kind of prayer that is “*both ‘in the Spirit’ and ‘with the mind’—a description that exactly fits the prophetic ministry that speaks . . . intelligible [lit. ‘with my mind’] words (v. 19)*”.<sup>43</sup>

In verse 16, Paul asks the question: “Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit (i.e. in an unknown tongue), how shall he that occupieth the room (place) of the unlearned (uninitiated) say Amen at the giving of thanks?” Here we have moved to prayer as thanksgiving or praise. Again Paul’s argument is that if the prayer is not comprehensible, then the others present cannot give their accord by saying “Amen”. Those occupying the “place of the uninitiated (Greek *idiotes*)” normally, would have been inquirers or new converts, but in this case it, most likely, applies to all who are present. All are uninitiated, because none understand.

The saying of “Amen” is a practice carried over from the Old Testament (Deut. 27: 14-26; Psalm 105:48). It was the congregation’s way of expressing its assent to what was spoken to them as the Word of God. It points to a crucial point of Christian worship. Nothing that is prayed, preached, taught, or sung should be a private opinion. The word that is addressed to the worshipping church is the Word of God. When the church says “Amen”, it is giving its assent to the word that it has received. It is saying that the word, that it has heard, is harmonious with the Word that it has received, thus worthy to be received and acted upon. This ‘Amen’ falls within the church’s duty to “prove all things, hold fast to that which is good, abstain from the very appearance of evil” (I Thessalonians 5:21-22).

Finally, it is worth noting that Paul links prayer and singing in verse 15 by stating that both should be done in the Spirit, and with the understanding. So whether we preach, or pray, or sing it should be done by the leading of the Spirit in an intelligible way for the glory of God and the edification of the congregation within the limits of revealed and accepted truth so the entire church may say with one voice “Amen”.

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<sup>43</sup> Martin, op. cit. p. 69

### C. I Timothy 2:1-8

A second passage where Paul give instructions for public worship and prayer is I Timothy 2:1-8. This letter was written eight to ten years after I Corinthians, and reflects a more developed and organized approach to church life and worship.

I Timothy is the first of a group of the Pauline letters that, since the eighteenth century, have been referred to as the “Pastoral Epistles”. The title reflects the fact that instead of being written to churches, they are written to individuals, Timothy and Titus, who are fellow workers of Paul that he has placed in positions of responsibility. They are believed to be written as a result of Paul being released from his first Roman imprisonment in 62 A.D. and making a fourth missionary journey to Spain (Rom. 15:24; 28 and I Clement 5:7). On the return he could have visited Crete, where he left Titus (Titus 1:15), and revisited former cities where he had planted churches. It was most likely during this time that he left Timothy at Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3).

When Paul writes I Timothy he is hoping to come to Ephesus soon, but not knowing when he will be able to come, he writes to Timothy in order that he might know: “how you should behave yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15).

This is the context of the passage under consideration, where Paul exhorts Timothy that in their church meetings: “That, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (I Timothy 2:1-2).

The first thing to be noticed in this text is the preeminent place that is given to prayer in worship. The expression that is translated “first of all” occurs only in the passage in the New Testament. “It does not merely refer to the

order of time, but the order of dignity.”<sup>44</sup> This would indicate that for Paul the most important act of public worship is prayer.

The second thing to be noticed in this text is the four separate words that Paul uses for prayer, “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings”. This passage is sometimes used as a basis for discussing four different kinds of prayer, but as J. H. Bernard points out this is somewhat of an exaggeration as the four words “are not to be sharply distinguished in as much as they point to different moods of the suppliant rather than to different forms into which public prayer may be cast”.<sup>45</sup>

There is enough difference between them, however, to make it worthwhile to notice each one. The second in order, but most universal in use, and the one most often used in Scripture in general, and by Paul in particular is “prayers”. While the other three may be use of words addressed to other humans, this word is employed exclusively for words addressed to God. It does not focus on any particular aspect of prayer, but speaks of all human speech addressed to God. Between the noun and the verbal form, Paul uses this word about 30 times and means by it what we generally mean by prayer. It covers most everything that we have covered in this series of studies and the three other words are but aspects of it.

The word “supplications” expresses necessity. It comes from the verb that is translated by “it is necessary”, or “must”. It expresses need. To supplicate is to implore. The third word translated “intercessions” is only found here as a noun, but Paul frequently uses its verbal form. It means “to entreat”. It is broader than intercession as intercession is to entreat on behalf of another, and it is not limited to just intercession on behalf of another. However, in the places where it is used of prayer in the New Testament, it is properly translated “to intercede” (Romans 8:27, 34; Hebrews 7:25). The final word, “thanksgivings” needs no particular discussion here as we have already covered the importance of thanksgiving in Paul’s prayer and teaching.

The object of these prayers that are to be offered when the church assembles is, first of all, “all men” and, secondly, “kings” and all “that are in authority”. The church’s prayers are to be as extensive as God’s love. The present passage is one of the most eloquent statements of God’s universal

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<sup>44</sup> J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 37

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39

love in all of Scripture. The word “all” is repeated four times in the passage. Prayer is to be offered for “all men”, and for “all that are in authority”, because God desires that “all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth”, and Christ gave his life “a ransom for all”. It is a mark of true Christianity that no one is excluded from its prayers. Recognizing the universality of God’s love and God’s intentions in redemption the true church excludes no one from her prayers, as she prays in the spirit of her Lord who taught us to “love our enemies”, and to “pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44).

If we are to pray for “all men”, it is because Christ is the sole “mediator between God and man”, the unique savior, the only way of salvation. Our prayers should reflect the heart of God “who will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth”. This prayer is evangelistic in nature. Its goal is the salvation of the lost. In this respect, prayer is an offensive arm in the church’s spiritual warfare (II Corinthians 10: 3-6; Ephesians 6: 18-20). It is through prayer that we open hearts to receive the good news of Jesus Christ.

The passage teaches us that prayer is an essential part of witness. This is the significance of the last phrase of verse 6 “to be testified in due time”. The best way to translate this phrase is debated. There are two possibilities. The first is that the death of Christ bears witness to the eternal plan of God. In this case the appropriate time is the historic moment at which Christ came into the world to die and offer himself as the ransom price for sinful humanity. The second possibility is that expressed by the *Twentieth Century New Testament* that paraphrases it thus: “This must be our testimony, as opportunities present themselves”. In this case the idea of the passage as a whole could be summarized as follows: We must pray for all men and for leaders that peace might rule and we might live without persecution and be free to preach the Gospel to all because; (1) It is God’s desire that all men be saved, (2) He has made salvation available to all through the mediator, Jesus Christ, who has given his life a ransom for all, (3) This salvation becomes a reality to individuals of all nations as witness is borne to them at the appropriate time.

What seems to indicate that the second option is right is what follows immediately after, when Paul states: “whereunto I am ordained a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity”. Paul sees himself as being the one who is

bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel at the divinely appointed time in order that the Gentiles might receive the benefits of the redeeming death of Christ, the only way of salvation.

We must now return to the beginning of the passage and consider the second object of the church's prayers, namely "kings and all that are in authority". A first observation is that by putting "kings" in the plural he makes this a universal rule. It is not just for the particular king of that time but, for all political rulers of all time. The reason for this prayer is not that the rulers are good and worthy. The Roman Emperor, when Paul wrote this letter, was Nero, the emperor who would sign his death sentence. We are to pray for them "that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty". Faith can flourish even when the powers of the world are ungodly and unfriendly to the faith. God is sovereign. He will not allow his purposes will to be thwarted by ungodly men, even when they wield great power.

Our prayers are to be motivated by the desire of God for the salvation of the nations. We are to pray for peaceful times, not in order that we might simply live in peace and prosperity, but in order that we might use that fitting opportunity that God gives us to live holy and honest lives and to proclaim the Gospel to those who have not heard it.

## **Conclusion:**

We began this study with the goal of letting the Apostle Paul teach us to pray. We have attempted to consider everything he had to say of importance by his words and by his example. We have sought to carefully interpret the key passages of his epistles that speak of prayer. There is, no doubt, much more that could be said. We could study his prayers with greater detail, and pass through the epistles with a finer toothed comb hoping to catch a yet unobserved allusion that would enable us to refine even more our understanding of the place of prayer in the Apostle's life and teaching. But the time has come to draw the study to a conclusion. So, in order to conclude, let us attempt to summarize some of the more important lessons Paul has taught us.

### **A. Prayer is a first action, not a last resort**

The first overall conclusion that we can draw from all that Paul teaches us about prayer is that everything begins with prayer. It would be difficult to imagine the Apostle engaging in any activity that was not born out of prayer. He begins his and ends his letters with prayer. He tells Christians to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6). When he gives instructions for public worship, he says that what should be done first and foremost is prayer.

This priority of prayer was born of the convictions that God answers prayer, and that we are involved in God's work. If we are to do God's work, we must be directed from above. A study of Paul's life and letters leaves one with the distinct impression that Paul did nothing without the conviction that it was of God, thus he questioned nothing that happened to him as being outside the will of God.

### **B. God's work is accomplished by God's power, not by human ingenuity**

Having come to know Christ in the way that he did, Paul understood the necessity of divine action in the conversion of the sinner and in the transformation of the believer. He knew that God's work was never

accomplished by human means. He had no confidence in the power of human persuasion, but announced the Gospel with simplicity in order that it might be “in demonstration of the Spirit’s power”, so that faith would not rest “in the wisdom of men, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (I Corinthians 2:1-4).

Paul had no confidence in the flesh. He knew that the power that breaks down strongholds and brings individuals into the liberating captivity of Jesus Christ does not reside in human ingenuity, but in God (II Corinthians 10: 3-5). Therefore, we must put on God’s armor, and having put it on we must “pray continually with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Ephesians 6:18).

### **C. The goal of prayer is the transformation of people, not the alteration of circumstances**

When we examined Paul’s intercessory prayer reports we found that without exception the concern of his prayers for others was their inner spiritual transformation. We never find him praying that God would make life easier, but that he would make us stronger. This holds equally true when Paul asks others to pray for him. Even when he is in prison he does not ask that they pray for his release, but that he be effective in the ministry that God has given him in prison.

### **D. He focuses on the last day, not on today**

Because Paul believed that we will all give an account to Christ (Romans 14:10), his great concern is that we use every opportunity in this life to become all that we were intended to be in Christ. Thus that day of reckoning is never far from Paul’s thoughts when he prays. This is best summarized, perhaps, in his prayer that “you might approve the best things, in order to be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:10).