

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-20; 3:14-19

"Life-Changing Prayer: The Prayers of the Apostle. Paul" (part 2)

PAUL'S PRAYERS

Prayer is at the core of the Christian life. It is how we engage and communicate in our relationship with Almighty God. Jesus gave us two prayers to serve as blueprints for our prayer life – the Lord's Prayer in Mt. 6 and Lk. 11, and His final prayer after the Last Supper in John 17. The Lord's Prayer is about - seeing God's Kingdom and God's will fulfilled in our lives. And as we seek these things we pray for provision, pardon, and protection. In our Lord's final prayer, He emphasizes that we grow in loving relationship with our Father and with one another, that there would be unity of purpose and mind and that the world would see both in our lives as a community of faith, that we would be grounded in God's truth – i.e. His Word, and kept in His name – remain faithful to God; that in all of the above God would be glorified and that again we would be protected from the evil one.

But then we began to look at the prayers of the Apostle Paul. There are four main prayers of the Apostle Paul – two in Ephesians, one in Philippians and one in Colossians. We have looked at the latter two - **Philippians 1:3-11** and **Colossians 1:3-12**. Recall Paul begins by thanking God for the good work that He is doing in and through the believers in both places. But then he prays for some specific spiritual realities. For review let's look at them again. ***9And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.***

Now let's go back to our second lesson today, to **Colossians 1:3-12**: ***9For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.***

Do you remember the four? spiritual knowledge and discernment or spiritual wisdom (both 1:9). He prayed for godly character (1:10a). He prayed for godly conduct (1:10b). Finally, (in the Colossians prayer) he prayed for spiritual power. In other words, we need the strength and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to see the first three accomplished in our lives.

PAUL'S PRAYERS IN EPHESIANS

Now let's look at the prayers of Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. We will see the same emphasis. ***"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my***

prayers; 17that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20which He brought about in Christ...”

Notice the similar themes of this first prayer in Ephesians with the other two from Philippians and Colossians. Paul again first gives thanks. He refers to the realities of “faith, hope, and love” like he did in the Philippian prayer. He prays for a spirit of wisdom to not only discern God’s will but to understand the hope of His calling, the riches of His glory that are found in our inheritance in eternity, and the surpassing *greatness of His power all in accordance with the strength of His might*. The same Greek words used for power and might in Colossians 1:11 are used here again. *Dunamis* (from which we get our word *dynamite*) means “inherent power”; and *kratos* means “manifested power,” power that is put forth in action. The first, *dunamis*, - refers to God’s power inside of us, the second refers to God’s power being demonstrated outwardly – both through miracles of healings and deliverance, but also the miracle of a transformed heart. As I noted in the audio portion of the last sermon, which is really more powerful and important? – the healing of Malchus’s ear by Jesus after Peter takes his sword and cut’s off the servant’s ear as the soldiers came to arrest Jesus or the spiritual transformation of the Apostle Peter from an angry vindictive impulsive and fearful man to one who is a loving, forgiving, and bold follower of Christ. So the emphasis is spiritual wisdom and power.

And now the second prayer – **Ephesians 3:14-19:** *“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”*

Again the same two themes – spiritual wisdom – to know the love of Christ, to be rooted and grounded in that love. And then spiritual power. The power to live the Christian life. Why is there no emphasis on Paul’s prayers concerning character and conduct? Certainly, they are just as important. But there is a reason why Paul doesn’t emphasize them here. He is highlighting the truth that in order to have godly character and to engage in righteous behavior the way we do it is growing in our understanding of God’s will and truth but also in His love – recognizing the love the God has for you and maturing in that love, and recognizing that only by relying on the Holy Spirit’s power will we truly be able to follow God the way He wants us to follow Him and be transformed into His likeness, the likeness of Christ.

And so how do we go about gaining and growing in spiritual wisdom and love and moving in the power of the Spirit? Paul gives us the clues right in his four prayers! We will see how next week.