

St. Paul's First Prayer the Keynote of His Life.

by Daniel Steele

St. Paul's prayers are a model for believers, characterized by praise, practicality, and the role of faith in achieving joy and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Mark 9:24, John 14:1, Acts 22:10, Romans 15:13, 2 Corinthians 13:7, Philippians 1:25

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about the exemplary life and prayers of the apostle Paul, emphasizing the importance of studying the prayers of those who were close to God to imbibe their spirit and climb the ladder of faith. Steele highlights how Paul's prayers were practical, filled with praises, and focused on attainable blessings through the power of the Holy Ghost. He stresses the significance of self-surrender to God and perfect self-sacrifice for the salvation of others, as well as the joy and peace that come through believing in Jesus.

Transcript

Stand near the closet door ajar of this eminent saint, and you will learn the secret of that heroic courage, that inexhaustible patience, and that wonderful career of toil, peril, and self-sacrifice, which have made him the greatest human factor in the establishment of the Christian Church.

"When one that holds communion with the skies

Has filled his urn where these pure waters rise,

And once more mingles with us meaner things,

It is as though an angel shook his wings;

Celestial fragrance fills the circuit wide,

That tells us whence these odors are supplied."

It is a means of grace to study the prayers of those who -- to use the phrase of Father Taylor -- "were on speaking terms with God." We imbibe their spirit. We begin to climb this ladder from the top of which they have stepped to a throne alongside the archangels.

If the epistles of Paul are glorious, the prayers which abound in them are more glorious. All these recorded spiritual inspirations are pervaded by praises. They begin and end with thanksgiving. Praise paves the way for prayer, and prayer casts up a highway for praise. In some churches they have praise meetings on one day and prayer meetings on another. Better mix them as did Paul. Praise will light up somber prayer, and prayer will tone down jubilant praise.

In all of Paul's prayers, there is no impracticable petition. He did not chase after unattainable ideals. When he prayed for the entire sanctification and perfection of the regenerate, he asked for blessings which believers might realize, through the power of the Holy Ghost, long before they reached their dying hour.

Paul's first recorded prayer, Acts 22:10, "What shall I do, Lord?" is the keynote of his whole Christian life-activity and not a selfish quietism. It indicates that he did not have that conception of the new birth in which the sinner is passive or rather, passive in fulfilling its conditions. That form of piety in which the Christian devotes himself exclusively to coddling himself, to constant morbid introspections of frames and feelings, will not be found in the writings of St. Paul. We are not so much inclined to this error as were many medieval Christians, who were taught that a soul which desires supreme good must remove, not only all sensual pleasures, but also all material things, silence every impulse of its mind and will, and be concentrated and absorbed in God; and that the monastery was most favorable for this result. Self-surrender to God is requisite to the stature of the fullness of Christ;" but it must always be accompanied by perfect self-sacrifice for the salvation of our fellow-men. Love must be made perfect in both its Godward and manward aspects. It is a good omen when people are converted with the idea that salvation means vigorous, ceaseless work for others, and joining the church is enlisting in an army in front of an appalling rebellion.

It has not pleased the Holy Spirit to record the prayers of Saul during his three days of blindness in Damascus, alluded to in Acts 9:11, "Behold, he prayeth." They were doubtless entreaties for forgiveness.

That he found pardon, and the joy that attends it, may be seen by reading Rom. 15:13: "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." It occurred to Paul to use the phrase "God of hope," because the word "hope" (R. V.) as the privilege of the Gentiles, had just been written at the end of verse 12. God is thus called because he is the object of all hope. He who is without God is without hope in the world. His future is a dark cloud in which no rainbow is set. The prayer is for fullness of joy and peace through believing. There are no happy doubters, no jubilant unbelievers. The highest joy grows on the topmost bough of faith. The seed of joylessness is unbelief.

Paul speaks of the "joy of faith" (Phil. 1:25) as its natural and necessary sequent. Hence, the antidote for a lack of joy, "that fruit of the Spirit," is "a little more faith in Jesus," in the words of that seraph in ebony, Amanda Smith. Faith is the only doorway for God to enter the soul, leading the blessed procession of beatitudes -- love, joy, and peace. How many try to admit them through the door of reason and fail. While his truth enters in through this door, he himself can enter only through the door of faith. He is too large for our logic, but not for our faith. So there is a good chance to experience "unspeakable joy" in the case of the countless multitudes who know nothing of the structure of a syllogism. "All joy and peace in believing" is for the ploughboy just spelling out the meaning of his New Testament, and for his sable mother who cannot even read at all, slavery having robbed her of the alphabet; for the Hindu peasant toiling for seven cents a day; and for the naked Congo African crushed by centuries of the darkest paganism. All they need to do is to hear the joyful sound of Jesus' name and believe. All the rest will follow in due season -- the

spelling book, the printing press, clothing, the steam engine, the post office, the church, the college, and the hospital. Paul cannot speak of the blessedness of salvation by faith without the cumulation of phrases. The believer is to be filled with all joy and peace, and then to abound or overflow in hope, capping the climax with the introduction of the almighty power of the Holy Ghost as pledged to secure these blissful results of "believing."

"Now I pray God that ye do no evil." -- 2 Cor. 13:7-9.

Paul does not pray for things impracticable and impossible. Hence, against the dictum of the Westminster Catechism, he expects this prayer to be answered, "that ye do no evil." The pardoned are saved from sinning. In verse 9 he goes a step farther: "This also we pray for even your perfecting." (R. V.) What does the much debated word "perfecting" mean in this text? "Your complete furnishing, perfection in Christian morality." -- Meyer. "Complete symmetry of Christian character. " -- Whedon. "Perfection generally in all good things." -- Alford. "In the faith that worketh by love." -- Wesley.

Either the prayer is for the merely ideal and unattainable, and is thus an aggravation of the deepest spiritual needs of the Corinthians, or it was possible for divine grace, through their faith, to achieve this desirable result in their characters.

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