

Session 73: Prayer Summation

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 10, Session 73).

Last week we looked at the sufferings of Christ. Today, we will finish this up with some general information on sufferings and prayer as it relates to those sufferings.

In the time past of Israel's program, God was displaying his power through circumstances such as changing the weather, healing sicknesses, providing victory over Israel's enemies, etc. Today in this dispensation of Gentile grace, God is putting his power on display in the midst of circumstances.

When we trusted Jesus Christ as our Savior, God was not interested in saving us just for the sake of saving us. He saved us for the purpose of utilizing us in what he has planned for his creation. The ultimate purpose in all of this is the glorification of his Son.

As part of our establishment as sons, Paul tells us that, given what God is doing today in this dispensation of Gentile grace, we do not know what we should pray for as we ought. Especially when it comes to sufferings and their role in our sanctified life.

But, if we respond properly to the ministry of the Spirit, he will rectify our lack of knowledge. By means of God's word, the Spirit will teach us what we ought to know. Then, our prayers will begin to match God's word. Our prayers for "deliverance" will be in alignment with what God intends to do through those sufferings we endure in this dispensation of Gentile grace.

Not only that, but the church, functioning in its various helping ministries both spiritually and physically, will be appropriately involved in our prayer-answering deliverance. This means we will sometimes need some help with the outer man and other times with the inner man, depending on the situation.

The outer man issues fall into our hands as we get the privilege of laboring with our Father to the benefit of our fellow saints. We will look at the details of this shortly.

The inner man issues which we need are part of the Spirit's supply as he dwells in us. The Spirit supplies our need according to the will of God.

Suffering and prayer are meant to go together. Often, what people *want*, when it comes to suffering, is something different from what the Spirit says we *need*. It is important for us to identify our true need. That is the only way we access the supply of the Spirit. Our need is not deliverance from our circumstances but help in the midst of them.

What we need is to be more than conquerors *in* all things – not *from* all things. Our need has not to do with our outer man but our inner man. We need strength, patience, and endurance, so we will not faint. And if those are the things we need, then obviously, we will not be delivered from the sufferings. (Think about that for a minute.)

These inner man virtues are what provide our salvation from the effects of the various categories of sufferings. Therefore, those are the kinds of things the Spirit wants to supply.

Philippians 1:19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

I hope we all understand by now that the Philippian's prayers for Paul were not for the cessation of bad circumstances but for the working of the doctrine to deliver him from the effects of the circumstances. We will have opportunity to look at this in greater depth shortly.

In order to pray properly in the midst of sufferings, it is important to know God's will and purpose for this dispensation of Gentile grace. We must also understand the bearing those have on our circumstances and how those circumstances are actually working for us.

If we are being led by the Spirit, then the Spirit will communicate to us what God is and is not doing with us. That knowledge will inform our prayers so we know what to pray for and what not to pray for. This is one of the ways the Spirit "also helpeth our infirmities."

Let us talk about the suffering itself. We are told that the sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us.

While at times we may suffer some of the same things the world suffers, the things which we know can make the experience of our suffering different from the world's. We suffer differently because of some things we know. So, what do we know?

Space for personal reflection and notes

Session 74: Prayer Summation, Continued

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First, we know the sufferings are meant to work in us and to what end? The sufferings are supposed to work in us for our ultimate spiritual good. Before we define what that spiritual work is, let us establish in our minds that sufferings, while not given to us by God, are meant to produce “good” for us.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

Sufferings are the opportunities for “glory” to be produced in us.

Romans 8:18 *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

Sufferings are part of the process whereby we are conformed to the image of God’s Son.

Romans 8:29 *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

Being “conformed” to Christ’s image is the goal of our life as adopted sons. Being conformed is the purpose of the Spirit dwelling in us. The process that produces conformity to Christ is called edification.

Edification takes place by the effectual working of the word. The word effectually works in us as we understand, believe, and live out of it in our daily lives.

Being conformed begins in God’s word, those words then move to our minds, then to our hearts and finally to our feet.

The “good” that can be worked in us by the various sufferings is our conformity to God’s Son.

Knowing what the sufferings are designed to do and what can be produced in us through the sufferings, causes us to experience the sufferings differently, and to think about them differently. We are supposed to ‘gain’ certain things by the experience of sufferings; those things being patience, endurance, longsuffering, etc. We gain conformity to Christ. We gain the ability to deal with adversity in a godly fashion that glorifies our Father.

Therefore, we do not go around constantly griping about our circumstances. All of this is not to say that we should not try to change bad circumstances – of course we should. If we want to change our circumstances, we have to engage them intelligently as sons and labor accordingly.

We accept that we live in a fallen world and that we will have sufferings of various kinds in this life. It does not mean that everything that happens is ordained by God to happen. But there are laws that are in effect that govern everything: life and death for instance. But even those unavoidable laws have the ability to work together for our good. Our salvation is *in* the sufferings – not from them.

As Paul said, these are ‘light afflictions’ which are “but for a moment.” If we respond to them properly, they work something in us.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

Sufferings come to every life in general and to our sonship life in particular. Prayer involves taking what we have learned and making life decisions out of it. For example...

1 Thessalonians 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Notice it is “in every thing” not ‘for every thing.’ This has implications for our prayer life since “all things” have the potential to “work together for good.” We need to be mindful of this truth every time we are faced with a difficult circumstance. No matter what we are facing, God’s grace is sufficient to keep us from being overwhelmed.

Now that we have covered some of the general issue of suffering and prayer, let us turn our attention to the final subject of this review on prayer: praying for others.

Praying for Others

As we think about praying for others, those prayers generally fall into two categories. We are praying about something they need spiritually or physically.

But, just as we have been talking about before, we have to stop thinking about prayer as how to get God to go do something as though it is all up to him. Prayer is about moving us to action. Prayer is about focusing us and then laboring in light of that focus. (This is the kind of prayer Paul was referring to in Philippians 1:9, when he asked for their prayers.)

As Paul prays certain things for the saints in various churches, he is not just informing God as to what he would like to see done in these folks. The fact that he is relaying these prayers to them has a purpose which is rooted in prayer.

Since prayer is not about informing God about things, for surely he already knows, then what is it for? Remember, we are talking about praying for others here – not ourselves. Praying for others is a sword with two edges (so to speak).

First, our prayer to God on the behalf of someone else is the means whereby we decide what actions we should take on their behalf. We are talking to our Father, out of the wisdom that we possess, to determine the real need of the ones for whom we are praying. Our prayers may contain information about the particular circumstance but that is not for the purpose of informing God as much as it is about organizing our own thoughts.

Beware: Prayer Brings Responsibility!

Our prayer to God is not about asking God to go do something and expecting that God will fix the situation for them merely because we asked him. The answer to our prayer is going to necessitate our involvement. In other words, the way God is going to get involved is through us.

Let us say that someone is hungry. Leaving aside the issue of why they are hungry, if our intention is to see them fed, then the only proper conversation we would be having with God would involve us, at some level, getting involved in getting them some food. We would not just pray, dear God, we sure hope these people get some food. Could you please feed them if it is your will? Amen. And then off we go as though we have done our part.

Part of our responsibility is to know the will of God, not to ask God to go do it if it is his will. Part of our responsibility is to discern what is needed in a particular situation and then labor to meet that need.

No, the answer is not to ask God to go do it; the answer is for us to go do it. But here is the difference between what we are doing and other charitable acts; we are supposed to be motivated by the doctrine. (This is how we live out of grace.)

Grace living requires not only knowing the doctrine, but understanding that by living out of the doctrine, we are being conformed to the image of God's Son; the life of Jesus Christ is being made manifest in our mortal body. Life is the practice field for eternity, so get out on the practice field and practice!

To remedy the *hungry person* situation, we may decide to just buy them some food. But as we do that, stop and think: here is an opportunity for Christ to live his life in us.

While human charitable acts may be good, they are not godly. We are not unsaved humanitarians who are trying to make a difference. We are adopted sons and daughters who, out of our renewed minds, are attempting to live out of the doctrine to the glory of our Father. We want to do the same things our Father would do, and we need to do them for the same reasons he would. That is the important part. (This is not simply – what would Jesus do?)

Maybe, depending on the logistics of the situation, we get others involved in feeding these people instead of doing it ourselves. Either way, the bottom line is this: if we are not willing to get involved, then our prayers are “much ado about nothing,” for they are only about trying to make ourselves feel better. If I can adapt a line out of the book of James, “*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **prayer** without works is dead?*” Prayer to God for someone else without an intended action on our part is no prayer at all.

Let us take the example I used several weeks ago when I told you of the 2004 tsunami that killed over a quarter of a million people in 14 countries. Many people and churches prayed for God to ‘bless those people’ who suffered such devastation. As well intentioned as those prayers were, the truth of the matter is that God did not externally ‘move on people’ to go do things to help those people. That is a misunderstanding of how God is working today. Neither did he drop clean water and medicine from the sky on his own.

Many went over to help, out of a charitable, or because they work for some relief organization. Others who wanted to help, but did not go there, gave money to facilitate the help that was there.

But adopted sons should be motivated by the things in the doctrine that have taken root in their hearts. The doctrine may or may not produce the same type of benefit (building houses, giving money, etc.) but it will be motivated by the effectual working of the doctrine within us.

Whether we get involved or not is a sonship decision which should be made between us and our Father in prayer. (We cannot get involved in everything; there is too much of it. That is not an excuse but a reality.)

A son, who is properly functioning, is not making decisions to help because he feels charitable. He makes decisions out of the doctrine which is working in him and he labors in accordance with that.

So, the first kind of prayer for others is when we talk to God about what we perceive their real need is and how we can “labor with our Father” to provide it. Again, there are physical needs and spiritual needs. Both of them are valid, and the proper function of an assembly provides for both to the degree that it can. In this sense, prayer is about bringing things to our own attention and deciding what we should or should not do about them. It may require a meditation of the heart, as we examine the doctrine and get direction, but always remember that prayer for others is our call to action.

Making our Prayers Known

But there is another aspect of praying for others which concerns making our prayers for others known to them. We see that Paul did this constantly. Why would Paul include in his letters to the various churches the fact that he was praying for them? Paul did not just say, I am praying for

you, but he even told them what he was praying. Did you ever wonder why? Was Paul just trying to let them know he was thinking of them? I think not. Paul made his prayers known for a different reason than we do.

For example, let us say our friend is going through a difficult situation (perhaps the loss of a loved one) and we know they are hurting. People often say, I have been praying for you which is a way of recognizing they are hurting and that we are sorry for their pain. Normally, when people pray, they ask God to intervene in some way so that our friend will find some peace or comfort in their distress.

There is some measure of comfort in knowing that our friends recognize when we are hurting and that they care for us. But comparatively, that comfort is minimal to the comfort our Father wants to give us.

When we (as sons) pray, we realize that real comfort comes from the doctrine working in us. In view of that, we need to talk about our prayers for those who are educated sons versus our prayers for those who are not.

Space for personal reflection and notes