

**Paul's Prayer Requests**  
**Romans 15:30-33**  
**ABC 9/3/17**

Whenever I speak about prayer, I want you to know I speak as a fellow-struggler. I've never found prayer to be easy. Also, too many messages & books on prayer lay a guilt trip on us for not praying enough. They tell about how Martin Luther was so busy he had to spend 4 hours every morning in prayer. Somehow that's supposed to motivate me to get up at 3 a.m. to pray, but it doesn't. So I don't want this message to imply that I've got it together when it comes to prayer or to increase your guilt level. But I do want us to be encouraged to pray & be motivated to pray more by Paul's requests. If we want God to use us individually & as a church we need to be people who depend on Him more & more in prayer. John Piper writes:

*Not only has God made the accomplishment of His purposes hang on the preaching of the Word, but He has also made the success of that preaching hang on prayer. God's goal to be glorified will not succeed without the powerful proclamation of the gospel. & that gospel will not be proclaimed in power to all the nations without the prevailing, earnest, faith-filled prayers of God's people.<sup>1</sup>*

I have a hunch most of us would admit our prayers usually focus on our needs or the needs of our immediate family. & of course, we should take these things to the Lord in prayer. But in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-13), Jesus teaches us to pray that God's name would be treated as holy, that His kingdom would come, & His will be done. Then He teaches us to pray for our own needs. So to pray rightly, the Lord's glory (**hallowed be Your name**) & the Lord's work (**Your kingdom come, Your will be done**) should always be in our prayers. As we come to our text this morning (30-33), Paul is asking the Roman Christians (whom he had not yet met) to pray for him. As we read these vs notice how personal Paul is. 6x he uses the words **I, me, & my**. **30-33** PRAY

**1. We have great needs & a greater God. 30**

This vs teaches us 4 things about praying:

**A. Urgency** Urge is the same word that Paul used in 12:1, **Therefore, I urge you, brethren ... to present your bodies a living & holy sacrifice...** The ESV translates it, **I appeal to you**. The Holman Version reads, **I implore you**. Paul knew he faced some difficulties by going to Jerusalem. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Let the Nations be Glad*, p 66

Holy Spirit had warned him that bonds & afflictions awaited him at the hands of the Jews (Acts 20:23; 21:4, 11). He knew that even among the believers in Jerusalem, many were prejudiced against his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 21:20-21). They might not accept the gift of financial help he was bringing from the Gentile churches. & so he urges the Roman believers to pray for 2 things in vs 31: that he would be rescued from the disobedient in Judea & that his service for Jerusalem (the gift) would prove acceptable to the saints.

Paul asked for prayer often in his letters because he was deeply aware of his desperate need for God to work if his efforts for the gospel were to amount to anything. He asked the Thessalonians, **Brethren, pray for us**, but specifically he asked them to pray that **the word of the Lord** would **spread rapidly & be glorified** & that he'd be rescued from evil men (2 Thes 3:1-2). He asked the Philippians to pray he'd be delivered from prison, but that whatever the outcome, that Christ would be exalted through him (Phil 1:19-20). He asked the Ephesians (6:19-20) & the Colossians (4:3-4) to pray he'd have opportunities to preach the gospel & that he'd do so with boldness & clarity. These repeated requests for prayer are all the more significant when you remember Paul was one of the most gifted & godly men who ever lived. If there was ever anyone who seemed to have it all together, it was Paul! Sometimes such people come across as if they don't have any needs. They exude self-confidence. But Paul freely & repeatedly let the churches know he desperately needed their prayers. He doesn't just ask for prayer, he urges & implores & begs for it. Why? In his book, *A Praying Life*, Paul Miller observes, *You don't need self-discipline to pray continuously; you just need to be poor in spirit.*<sup>2</sup> In other words, to be motivated to pray, don't focus on more discipline; focus rather on how needy you & those you pray for really are. Unless God works, nothing will happen of any lasting spiritual significance. Paul knew he was needy & wanted others to pray for & with him.

**B. Our Lord Jesus Christ** Paul urges them to pray **by our Lord Jesus Christ**, which is an appeal to Christ's authority. When Jesus gave the Great Commission before He ascended into heaven, He said, **All authority has been given to Me in heaven & on earth** (Mt 28:18). That doesn't leave any

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<sup>2</sup> p 65

place where Jesus doesn't have authority (Eph 1:21-22)! So we can pray to God in the name of **our Lord Jesus Christ** with the confidence that He has the power & authority to answer our prayers that are in accord with His will. If you've ever had to work through a bureaucracy, you know going through a low level bureaucrat, your chances of getting what you're after are slim. But if you know someone in a position of authority & you can do directly to them, you have a much better chance of success. As Christians, we can go directly to the God of the universe through the authority of His Son, who has all authority in heaven & on earth!

**C. The Love the Holy Spirit** Paul also urges them to pray **by the love of the Spirit**. While this could refer to the Spirit's love for us or to our love for the Spirit, I believe it refers to the love that the Holy Spirit produces in all who walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 22). Paul is saying, *If the Holy Spirit has produced His fruit of love in you, show that love by striving together with me in your prayers to God for me*. The truth is, if you love people, you'll pray for them. You pray for your kids because you love them (even if they frustrate you at times). If you care about someone's eternal destiny, you'll pray for their salvation. If you care about a couple who are struggling in their marriage, you'll pray for them. While Paul knew some of the believers in Rome (16:1-16), there were many he didn't. But by reading this letter to them, they could sense Paul's love for them. Even though they hadn't seen Paul, the love that the Spirit put in their hearts for all who love Jesus should prompt them to pray for him. So when we hear of fellow believers who are in great need, the love of the Spirit should motivate us to pray for them.

**D. To God** Did you notice that Paul mentions all 3 members of the trinity in this vs? We pray by our Lord Jesus Christ & by the love of the Spirit to God, who of course is the heavenly Father. Jesus taught us to pray, **Our Father who is in heaven** (Mt 6:9). What a great privilege that we can come to the God who spoke the universe into existence by His great power & address Him as Father! When we come to His throne through our great high Priest, we can draw near with confidence, knowing it's a throne of grace where we receive mercy & find grace to help in our time of need (Heb 4:14-16). Yes, we have great needs. But we have an even greater triune God who answers prayer.

Our finite minds can't reconcile the power of prayer with God's absolute sovereignty. As with the Trinity, & many other clearly revealed but humanly unfathomable teachings of Scripture, we simply acknowledge their absolute truth. Any seeming inconsistencies are due to the limits of our human comprehension. We know from His own Word that God is sovereign & immutable. Yet we also know from that same Word that **the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much** (Jas 5:16). We have our sovereign Lord's promise that **everyone who asks, receives; & he who seeks, finds; & to him who knocks, it shall be opened** (Lk 11:10). Any theology that belittles the power of prayer or intensity in prayer is heresy.

**2. Prayer is warfare.** Paul urges the Roman Christians to **strive together with me in your prayers to God for me** (30). This is the only time this compound verb (**strive together**) is used in the NT, but Paul uses the root verb with reference to prayer in Col 4:12,

**Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect & fully assured in all the will of God.**

We get our word *agonize* from the Greek verb. It was used of athletic contests like wrestling. Paul uses the noun in reference to his own prayers, **For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf ...** (Col 2:1). Paul describes his ministry in Col 1:29 like this: **For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.** He sums up his entire ministry by using both the noun & the verb in 2 Tim 4:7, **I have fought the good fight.** Although he doesn't use the same word, the same idea lies behind Paul's description of spiritual warfare in Eph 6:12,

**For our struggle is not against flesh & blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.**

When Paul says **strive together with me** he's asking them to join him in agony. Prayer is hard work. It's agony of the soul. Paul struggled & strived & wrestled & fought in prayer. This means if you don't find prayer to be easy, welcome to the Christian life! Prayer is work. It requires striving & wrestling against the forces of darkness & against the desires of the flesh. If you have the mindset that prayer is easy & effortless, you won't do much praying. You won't strive in prayer if you only pray when you feel like it. We are visual people & we live by sight & it's not natural to

close our eyes & pray & live by faith. Faithful praying won't just happen & it won't be easy. Prayer requires striving & we're to do it **together**. Paul was already striving in prayer for his upcoming trip to Jerusalem, but he urges them to join him in the battle. It wasn't that Paul couldn't pray alone for these things but he wanted to share the encouragement of God's answers. Paul wasn't too good to ask for prayer or too proud to ask others for help. No. He knew God hears the prayers of His people & He uses prayer to unify His people.

Sometimes we seem to think the more people who are praying, the more likely God is to answer. But that's not why we should **strive together** with others in our prayers. After all, **the effective prayers of a righteous man** (singular) can accomplish much (Js 5:16). Rather, we're to pray together & share requests so God gets more glory when He answers. & when more people pray & God answers, it strengthens the faith of all those who prayed. & it lightens the load of the person who's praying if others come along & help carry the burden. It helps to know others care enough to pray for your need. Since prayer is warfare, it's better to go into battle with as many troops as you can, rather than by yourself. John Piper has often said our prayers are often ineffective because we wrongly view them as calling for the butler to bring us another glass of iced tea, rather than viewing it as a walkie-talkie to call in more supplies & ammunition to the front lines of the battle. In other words, our prayers shouldn't be focused only on trivial things to make us more comfortable, but rather on crucial things to advance the cause of Christ against the enemy. & prayer builds unity because it joins hearts together in the cause of Jesus & His kingdom.

**3. Paul's Requests** weren't merely about his comfort or safety or about him being popular or well-liked. The main goal was unity in the church. Paul asks for 2 specific things: to be delivered from **the disobedient in Judea** (unbelievers); & that his **service** (gift) to the saints would prove acceptable. Paul assumes that in response to his & the Romans' prayers, God can restrain the Christ-rejecting Jews from killing him & that God can work in the hearts of the prejudiced Christians clinging to the law in Jerusalem so they'll accept the gift from the Gentiles. The fact that the Romans were over a 1,000 miles away from Jerusalem & didn't know either the

disobedient Jews or the prejudiced saints made no difference. God was in both places & He's powerful to restrain sinners & change the hearts of believers.

### A. Safety 31

Paul was enemy #1 of the Jewish people. The Jews in Jerusalem had already killed Stephen. The blood of Christians had already stained the soil in & around the city. Paul, the former prosecutor of Christianity, is now its most famous preacher. The Jews are infuriated at his conversion to Christ & his belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Paul fully understood he was headed for trouble. Paul says, *Agonize with me that I might be rescued from the unbelieving Jews.* The word translated **rescue** or **deliver** is a word that means to be preserved. Jesus used this word as He taught us to pray, **deliver us from evil** (Mt 6:13). It's also used to describe the redemption of believers who are **rescued from the domain of darkness**, & transferred **to the kingdom of His beloved Son** (Col 1:13). Paul knew he was a wanted man & that unless the Lord protected him, he would die in Jerusalem. The evidence of the Jews hatred for Paul was seen in the events that occurred soon after Paul arrived in Jerusalem. According to Acts 21, Paul is recognized by some Jews as he goes to the temple. His enemies see him & stir up the masses of the people, shouting,

***Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people & the Law & this place; & besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple & has defiled this holy place. ...& all the city was provoked, & the people rushed together, & taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple ...& were seeking to kill him*** (Acts 21:28-32).

Can you imagine this riot that breaks out? Paul will be beaten by this mob who want to pay him back for betraying Judaism & for openly declaring Jesus was the Messiah. They would have killed him had the Roman soldiers not rescued him. So Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> prayer request for safety was answered, although not exactly the way he expected. & probably not the way the Roman believers had prayed either. We'd expect God to answer our prayers for safety in a way that doesn't involve getting nearly beaten to death. Safety usually does not involve near-death experiences at the hand of a bloodthirsty mob! However, God did have Paul's protection in mind, protection by Roman soldiers, who will safely store him behind bars. Without his being in chains, I don't think he'd have had the opportunity to write his letters & guide the church with his inspired doctrine. The 1<sup>st</sup> prayer request was answered, not as expected, but it was answered.

## **B. Service 31**

Remember that the relationship between Jews & Gentiles were not real amicable. Throughout the ministry of Paul, there were always Jews who argued with Paul & didn't believe his insistence that Gentiles didn't have to become Jews to enter the church. So Paul had unbelieving Jews who wanted to kill him & believing Jews who didn't think much of him. Paul was hoping the offering he was delivering to the church in Jerusalem would help heal the rift & encourage the unity of love in the Spirit. Would the Jews be offended? Would they think the Gentiles were being superior in their gifts? Would they think the Gentiles were trying to buy their affections? All of these were possibilities. In accepting the gift from Paul, Jewish Christian leaders would be seen to endorse Paul's gospel & his seeming disregard of Jewish law & traditions. Yet if his offering were to be rejected, this could cause the rift between Jewish & Gentile Christians to widen. So Paul longs that Jewish & Gentile relationships in the body of Christ may be strengthened by the Jewish Christians' acceptance of this gift. That's why he asks the Romans to pray both that the believers will accept the gift & that unbelievers won't be able to prevent either the giving or the receiving of it.<sup>3</sup> & it appears this request was answered exactly as Paul had hoped! Luke records the event in Acts 21. **After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly ... After Paul had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles.** Luke reports the Jewish believer's response, **& when they heard it they began glorifying God** (Acts 21:20). Paul's service to the saints was acceptable.

Were Paul's prayers answered? Yes, but not exactly the way he probably was thinking when he asked for prayer. He was rescued from the disobedient in Judea, but only by becoming a Roman prisoner for the next 4 years. His service to Jerusalem seems to have been accepted (Acts 21:17), but the account is also clear that many of the Jerusalem Christians had a Jewish view of Christianity that wouldn't have been enthusiastic about uncircumcised Gentiles being on equal footing with them in the church (Acts 21:20-21). They may have thought that by accepting the gift, they would be giving an endorsement of Paul's work among the Gentiles. Or, they might

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<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *Romans*, p 389

have viewed it as a bribe to try to get them to endorse his ministry among the Gentiles. Or some may have been too prejudiced to accept any help from the Gentiles. But overall, his gift & service we appreciated.

Vs 32 expresses not a 3<sup>rd</sup> request, but the desired result if the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 requests were answered. & don't pass over the little phrase *so that* in vs **32**.

Paul wanted to **come to** the Roman Christians **in joy by the will of God & find refreshing rest** in their **company**. Even though the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 requests weren't answered exactly as Paul probably envisioned, & he arrived in Rome as a prisoner via a shipwreck, he did come to them in joy. How do we know this? Philippians, which is full of joy in the Lord, was written during his Roman imprisonment. He also experienced encouragement in the Lord because of the warm welcome he received (Acts 28:15). Paul refers to the Roman church as a safe harbor he can't wait to sail into.

One author said,

*Paul desperately wanted to drop anchor in the quiet haven of the assembly in Rome & rest. He had left Ephesus in an uproar; he had conflicted with Corinth over their immaturity & sin; he had written sharp words to the Galatian churches ... he just wanted to rest – to spend time refreshing his spirit & recharge his batteries with joy ... that was the longing of his soul.<sup>4</sup>*

Look back at that little phrase, **so that**. Many times our prayers are good but somewhat aimless. We ask God to bless someone or to strengthen someone, but we have no particular end in view. When you add **so that** to your prayers, it forces you to ask yourself, *What do I really want God to do in this person's life?* Sometimes we don't know how to pray & are grateful that the Holy Spirit helps us. As we saw in 8:26, **In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words**. But I find the **so that** principle very challenging & encouraging because it focuses my wandering mind & causes me to think about what the end result of my prayer is. Finally,

**4. The God of peace be with you all.** Vs 33 is Paul's benediction for the Roman saints. It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> benediction of this chapter. Paul has prayed that the God of perseverance & encouragement would grant them to be of the same mind with one another in vs 5. He prayed that the God of hope would fill them with all joy & peace in believing in vs 13. & now he prays that the God of

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<sup>4</sup> RCH Lenski, *Romans*, p 896



peace will be with them. In 16:20 he assures them that the God of peace will crush Satan under their feet. Here Paul wants them to experience God's presence as the God of peace. Because of the cross, we have peace with God (Rom 5:1). We also should experience peace with other believers, especially with those who are different than we are (Rom 14:1-15:6; Eph 2:14). & we should know God's peace in the midst of anxious circumstances as we bring our requests to Him in thankful prayer (Phil 4:6-7).

In this chapter, Paul has already spoken of **the God who gives perseverance & encouragement** (5) & **the God of hope** (13). Now he asks that the **God of peace be with you all**, that is, all the believers in Rome. God is the source of all true peace, the peace **which surpasses all comprehension** (Phil 4:7). In fact, **He himself is our peace, who made both groups, Jews & Gentiles, into one** (Eph 2:14). On the human level, Paul's life as an apostle was far from peaceful. As far as outward circumstances were concerned, he lived in uncertainty & turmoil. He was under almost continual threat against his physical safety & life. But he knew intimately the God of peace, & he lived himself in the peace & tranquility that God gives to those who faithfully abide in His will. Paul wants these Roman Christians to experience the peace of God that would be able to blend Jew & Gentile into one harmonious & united body.

Let me suggest a few ways we can be praying for our church.

- Pray for conversions, both through the witness of each one of us & through the Word preached.
- Pray for our missionaries so that their ministries bring glory to God.
- Pray through the church directory. As you do, pray for harmonious marriages & pray for the conversion, growth in grace, & protection of our children.
- Pray for healthy, spiritually nourishing relationships to flourish in our church & Growth Groups.
- Pray for God to put on the hearts of some to devote their lives to reaching the unreached.
- Pray for our SS teachers so that they might teach in the power of the Spirit.
- Pray that our worship services would be marked by sincere, wholehearted worship in spirit & in truth.

The power of the church doesn't lie in money, plans, buildings, programs, or preachers. Our only true power is the power of prayer. When we pray, God moves from heaven. When we pray, things happen that would not otherwise happen. By prayer all things are possible. If we want to see the church move forward & the kingdom of darkness vanquished, we must pray & pray & pray. Prayer is our opportunity to stand tall in the power of God & fight battles against enemies

that we cannot see. It's our opportunity to win battles we can't fight with our hands. May we never neglect or downplay the enormous potential of prayer!

As with everything in the Christian life, the place to start for energizing prayer is with the gospel. Our ability even to pray is rooted in a right relationship of peace with God through Jesus Christ. So if you don't have that, I urge you to start there. Ask God to forgive you for your sins as you turn from them to follow Jesus & trust Him as your Lord & Savior. Then with that forgiveness, you can have peace with God that leads us into prayer that's heard & answered by God's grace. If you have that relationship, why would you ever neglect time alone with our gracious God in prayer? Give yourself to a renewal & deepening of your prayer life. You can start today by confessing your lack of prayer & coming to the cross to be freshly motivated by Christ's work. & that's what we close with as we celebrate communion together taking the elements of the Lord's Table as Jesus did at His last supper. Jesus said to remember His body & blood given for us in His death for us until He comes again & that's what we do now. & if you don't know Jesus yet, we'd love to talk with you further & we urge you to seek Him now. But He would warn you not to take of the bread & the cup unless you are His follower by faith. So bow your head & take a minute to prepare to remember Him rightly with confession & thanksgiving & committing to changes His Spirit has challenged to make from His Word.

Men come PRAY

Communion

As I watch all the different news stories that are occurring in our city, state, country, & world, I cannot help but wonder, how much influence does Satan have in the world today? The unfortunate answer to that question is an enormous amount of influence! Jesus called him the **prince of this world** in Jn 12:31, & Paul called him the **god of this age** in 2 Cor 4:4. Rev 12:9 says that Satan leads the whole world astray. He remains disguised behind all the idolatries & false religions of the world. In the end, according to Rev 20:7-10, Satan will orchestrate a vast, worldwide rebellion against Christ & the church, but he will be defeated & suffer eternal punishment. At the root of all Satan's efforts on earth is his desire to take away God's glory.

Satan is jealous of God. Created as a mighty & good angel, he fell due to his arrogant desire to take the place of God according to Isaiah 14:12-15 & Ezekiel 28:11-19. Satan works in this world primarily through deceit. He is skillful beyond our imagination at tempting people to sin. He is also willing to spare no one in his pursuit of glory.

However, Satan is no match for Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. We as Christians will always face attacks & temptations as he tempts & test our faith. But as Christians we can always take refuge in Jesus, who is far greater than Satan. Let me read from 1 Pt 5:8-11,

**Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen & establish you. To Him be dominion forever & ever. Amen.**

This is why we gather around the communion table, to remember that Christ has overcome our sins. He has paid the ultimate price by dying on the cross for each of our sins.