

Lesson Three – Peace, Love, and Prayer

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul and Prayer

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Paul's faith, preaching, missionary work, and many letters are anchored in prayer. Regardless of his personal circumstances or location, the apostle was constantly calling on the name of the Lord and encouraging others to follow his example.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- **Philippians 4:4-7** ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
- **Colossians 4:2** Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
- **Romans 8:26** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Prayer in Ephesians

Paul inserts three pivotal prayers in Ephesians. They are to be modeled and prayed in the life of the church.

- **1:16-19** I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.
- **3:14-21** For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God...
- **6:18-20** And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Discussion:

- Considering the passages above, why is prayer so central to Christian life?

Peace formed in Prayer, Rooted in Love

Ephesians 3:16-19 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Take time to dwell in Paul's prayer. Consider how he prays for the church to be formed into Christ. As Christ dwells in our hearts, we are won over by the overwhelming tide of *agape* love. The more we are filled with Christ's love, the more we will be compelled to seek peace, unity, and reconciliation as a primary calling of life. Love cannot exist in a vacuum. It must be shared in relationship. The more the church comes to know Christ and believe in such love as this, the more it will seek wholeness and healing and share the peace and love of Christ with one another.

Discussion:

- How might meditating on the immense vastness of the love of God fuel the church's practice of Christ's peace?

Prayer and Practicing the Peace of Christ

Of all the things that will move us to peacemaking and reconciliation, no one thing is greater than our call to prayer. Jesus, who is our peace, called his disciples to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). If we are to follow Christ, we must learn and help one another do what Jesus said, "bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:28). Practicing the peace of Christ is an impossible task apart from prayer. Yet, when the church is faithful in prayer nothing is impossible. The power of God is greater than all the powers of darkness that bring division, hatred, and harm.

Discussion:

- What are the things that keep us from prayer?
- How are we to pray/bless those who have harmed us?

Prayer and Praise as Training in Peace

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

In the end, all prayers flow into the unending praise and doxology of heaven to the living God. Petition leads to praise and adoration of God whose power and glory is more wondrous than anything. As we set the eyes of our heart to God we are transformed. Paul is very aware that those who follow Jesus in pursuit of peace are sure to face opposition from the devil and the powers of darkness (Eph. 2:2; 4:27; 6:11-16). To counter this temptation to evil and hatred, we must continually be filled with the Holy Spirit. How? By "speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:19). Songs are something we are quite familiar with, and they serve the church as an invaluable resource of faith. However, the psalms are one of the most neglected resources of the contemporary church. They teach us how to pray, especially how to pray beyond our own narrow focus. Eugene Peterson describes:

“Israel and Church put the Psalms in into our hands and say, ‘Here, this is our text.

Practice these prayers so that you will learn the full range and the vast depth of your lives in response to God” (Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 104).

Praying (or reciting) the Psalms on a continual basis sets our attention fixed on God. They stretch us and open us to seek the peace of God. They call us to confess our sin and learn to follow God.

A Few Practices for the Journey Ahead

Practicing the peace of Christ is not an easy climb. God’s plan of peace, unity, and reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth is no small task. We will need much support and encouragement if we are going to keep our commitment. Consider the following:

- 1) **Start Praying the Psalms.** Make a commitment to pray 5 psalms a day. Praying 5 psalms a day allows you to recite all 150 psalms in 30 days. Read them aloud offering them from your heart to God. Over time, they will find their way in your heart and you can recite them from memory (If 5 psalms a day is overwhelming, start with 1 psalm a day).
- 2) **Get a Hymn stuck in your head.** Songs are often easier to remember than other things. Music reaches down into our soul. Consider some of the old hymns that have touched your life. Pick one to memorize and sing when practicing peace may feel out of reach. Share with someone a hymn/song that has blessed your walk with God. When songs of God are stuck in our head there is less room for bitterness, anger, and fear. God’s music has given the church peace for 2,000 years.
- 3) **Get a Prayer Partner.** One of the best ways to enrich your prayer life is by making a commitment to pray regularly with another Christian. There is strength and power in taking our prayers to God together with a spiritual confidant and friend. The church is to be a people who are devoted to praying with and for one another. We must put this into practice if we are going to pursue the peace of Christ.
- 4) **Pray Scripture.** Paul gave 3 prayers in Ephesians (1:16-19; 3:14-21; 6:18-20). The Bible is filled with prayers for us to pray that will help us grow in faith. Consider memorizing passages that you can meditate on and pray to God.
- 5) **Prayer Grazing.** Rather than eating a couple of big meals each day, it can often be more beneficial to eat (or graze) many small portions all day long. Jesus taught his disciples that prayers do not have to be long and wordy to be heard (Matt. 5:7). Short prayers can travel a long way. Try pausing several times throughout the day to set your heart toward God in prayer. The Psalmist writes, “Seven times a day I praise you...” (Psalm 119:164).

Discussion and Prayer:

Anger, bitterness, and hatred often keep us from praying for others. How might the practices above move us to prayer when we may be tempted to avoid it?

Ask God to let our movement toward the peace of Christ begin and end in committed prayer.