



Paul Speaks of Faith, Prayer and Power Romans 1:8-17

TO: THE CAPITOL COMMUNITY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Paul was anticipating a visit to Rome, the capitol city of the world and was preparing his way with this epistle. His reputation was less than stellar, in that, he had been known as one that killed Christians in his former life as a Pharisee, and even had the reputation, as a believer, of causing a riot in Ephesus, and had narrowly escaped arrest in Thessalonica. If such a man is coming to visit, the way must be prepared¹. After his greeting, which we looked at last time, he begins his epistle by reflecting on the reputation of the Roman church, and telling them that he has been praying for them.

II. A CONSPICUOUS REPUTATION (ROMANS 1:8)

^{NKJ} Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

The believers in Rome had a reputation worth having; they were known for their faith!

Query: How would you describe faith? (Hebrews 11)

FAITH IS A VERY SIMPLE THING. IT IS BELIEVING GOD'S WORD
AND ACTING UPON IT.²

Faith that is built upon the written Word will ever center upon the living Word. Faith will center upon Christ, and Christ will produce the true life of faith. Doubt will look at the obstacles, faith will look at Christ. Doubt will look within our hearts or around at others, but faith will center on Christ. Doubt will call attention to our sins, faith will look at the Savior and the cleansing stream that flows from Him. And as we walk with Him, feasting upon Him, our faith is built up. Our strength becomes stronger. Our last works are more than our first. We know that He who hath begun a good work in us will keep on perfecting it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6)

Let me suggest some basic principles of the Roman believers' faith:

- It was a genuine faith
- It was a God given faith, and not something brought about by human achievement.
- It was a contagious faith.
- It was a faith that encouraged others.

III. OF ANSWERED & UNANSWERED PRAYER

^{NKJ} Romans 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,¹⁰ making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.¹¹ For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established --¹² that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.¹³ Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.¹⁵ So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

Query: How do we react to answered and unanswered prayer? How do we perceive each?

A. THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER FOR THE BELIEVER has been a great one, and it has exercised the souls of many true believers. In the Scripture before us, we see one of the greatest believers of all time praying for a specific thing

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and the prayer was not answered as he would have expected. The example of Paul's unanswered prayer gives us a superb example of the problem of unanswered prayer. Why? Consider the following:

- It is a prayer by an apostle.
- Paul's prayer was a proper prayer in that it is *to the Father* on the basis of *the atoning work of Jesus Christ*.
- It was a prayer for the right things. Paul was praying that he might come to Rome in order that (1) he might "impart some spiritual gift to the end that (2) the believers in Rome might be made strong (v. 11)³

Undoubtedly Paul could have given us some insight as to why his prayers went unanswered, but he does not. Even so, we can reflect on why prayers like this—including the best of our own prayers—go unanswered. Consider:

- Unanswered prayer may be God's way of teaching that we are not as necessary to the work we are praying for as we think we are.
- God may have other work for us to do.
- There may be a spiritual warfare of which you and I are unaware.
- Prayer changes **things and people!** One important reason for God not answering prayer is deficiency in us. And so, prayer needs to change us *before* it changes circumstances.

Query: What might be some of our deficiencies in prayer? What needs changing in us?

1. Unconfessed sin. (Isa 59:1-2)
2. Wrong motives (James 4:3)
3. Laziness (James 5:17)
4. Idols in the heart (Ezekiel 14:3)
5. Stinginess in our giving (Proverbs 21:13)
6. Unbelief (James 1:6-7)
7. Husband & Wife relationships (1Peter3:7)

Query: What are we to do with unanswered prayer? Are we to keep on battering the doors of heaven with ineffectual petitions? Or should we accept God's rejection?

The answer is in Jesus' parable of the importunate widow, which, Luke tells us, teaches that we "should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1 ff.)

Prayer may change us. It may change history. But whatever the case, we must keep praying!⁴

B. THE PROBLEM OF UNANSWERED PRAYER AND PROMISES FOR THE UNBELIEVER.

The Bible teaching about the subject of prayer has been sadly misunderstood. One of the most common errors in Christendom is to think that everything in the Bible is addressed to everybody. Many people are shocked to learn that there are more promises in the Bible where God has definitely said that He will not answer prayer, than there are promises where He said that He will answer prayer.

Query: Does God hear and answer the prayers of an unbeliever?

What does God hear? What does God know? There is nothing that God does not know. There is no prayer that any man or woman has ever offered that God does not know about. God is sovereign and can choose to answer any prayer He sees fit. But Scripture clearly indicates that God does not listen to or answer every prayer. In fact, Scripture gives at least numerous reasons for unanswered prayer. So, does God answer the prayers of unbelievers? A strict yes or no answer is difficult without qualifying the answer in various ways. However, it is noteworthy that the above mentioned principles represent some of the key characteristics of an unbeliever. Thus we can safely say that, in general, God does not answer the prayers of an unbeliever⁵.

Query: A second question must be asked. Are the promises of the Bible for the unbelieving?

Donald Gray Barnhouse, in his commentary of Romans 1 makes the following observation:

"There is not even one promise in the Bible for a Mohammedan or for a pagan in the jungles along the Amazon, or for a pagan church member in America.

- There is an offer: a free offer of salvation that is as wide as humanity.



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- There is a command: a command to repent that is as universal as mankind.
- But there is no word of comfort in time of bereavement, no word of consolation in time of sorrow, no word of strength in time of weakness for the person who has not been born again through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. And there is, of course, no prayer promise made to the non-christian.

The words, "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find," were spoken to believers and not to unbelievers. Even the prayer commonly called the Lord's Prayer was prefaced by the qualifying clause, "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father which art in Heaven⁶.'"

IV. UNASHAMED! (ROMANS 1:16-17)

^{NKJ} **Romans 1:16** *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."*

We now come to what is perhaps the most important sentences in all of literature. These verses form the theme of this epistle and the essence of Christianity. **They are the heart of biblical religion.** We will deal with these verses in much more detail in our next study. But for the moment I would like to spend a little time looking at this idea of "being ashamed."

Query: It is an extraordinary thing that Paul should say that he is "not ashamed of the Gospel." Why should any body be ashamed of the gospel? Why should the apostle think that something so grand might be shameful?⁷

It has been said that the worst thing about good people is that they are often such cowards. When opposition comes, we are often intimidated because of an

atmosphere of strife. In doing so, we are yielding to the press of the world and its opposition to the Gospel and the Word of God. We, as believers, are far more attuned to the world than we imagine. The gospel was despised in Paul's day, and it is despised in our day. We need to understand that!

V. CONCLUSION

Was Paul tempted to shame, as we are? Probably. We know that Timothy was, since Paul wrote him to tell him not to be (2 Tim. 1:8). Remember Peter? He too was ashamed as he denied the Lord 3 times. (Jn. 18:15-17; 24-27) However, in our text Paul writes that basically he was "*not* ashamed of the gospel," and the reason is that "it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written "The righteous will live by faith⁸."

It is a thing of wonder that we would be ashamed of the gospel. Isn't this an issue of being ashamed of any position that demands a show of boldness? Are we not afraid of what some people are going to think? Are not our spirits timid? May every timorous soul look at the transformation of Peter from shame and cowardice to pride in His Lord and boldness unto death in the proclamation of His gospel. Oh that we, as believers, would only leave the circle of our fears, and surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit for our strength and very being, and with Paul be able to say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation."

¹ Barnhouse, Donald Grey, *Man's Ruin* (Eerdmans Publishing, Grand rapids, 1952) p104

² Ibid p108

³ Boice, James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Volume 1*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, c1991) p86,87

⁴ Ibid, p86-92

⁵ MacArthur, John, *Pulpit Magazine* www.sf pulpit.com/2008/08/29

⁶ Barnhouse, p119

⁷ Ibid p111

⁸ Ibid p112