

Intro:

Last week I spent our time on one phrase in Romans, dwelling on the kind of world-view we should have of the Christian life:

- The Christian life should be a life of worshipful service from the depths of our being [or, with our whole heart] in promoting and expanding the gospel of God's Son.
 1. It is not that we simply should be busy with doing 'Christian things'.
 2. It is not that we should be busy doing 'things around the church'.
 3. Rather, it is that we should be oriented to in some way, and in every way, from our hearts desiring to promote and prosper the gospel witness through every effort of our lives.

That was last week's message.

This week I want to look at two whole verses! Romans 1.9-10. We are going to focus on one particular aspect of our Christian service, and that is our prayers for gospel ministry and our participation in the fulfillment of those prayers.

I will explain what I mean by that as we go along. But first, a couple of considerations:

1. Our text is Paul's personal testimony and it is from his perspective that we are looking at this subject first of all.
2. We are going to make an application from Paul's apostolic point of view to a personal point of view for you.

In other words, the text is saying one thing about Paul's ministry that I want to turn around to us and apply it to you and me and our ministry today.

Let's get our context again.

1. Paul is writing from where? Corinth
2. Paul is writing to who? the Romans
3. Paul is planning to travel where? to Rome by way of Jerusalem
4. So: Romans is written in anticipation and preparation for an expected missionary journey *through* Rome. Most of Paul's letters were written *back* to places he had been. This one is written *ahead* to a place he has not yet been.

I think these considerations will help us to understand the importance of our message today.

Read Rm 1.9-10

Our subject is Prayer. Our title is:

Making Mention of You

Proposition: Prayer should involve active effort to bring one’s own prayers to pass.

I. The testimony of constant intercessory prayer

A. The kind of prayer under discussion: intercessory prayer

“I make mention of you”

1. Intercessory

a. Intercede = “to intervene between parties with a view to reconciling differences”¹

b. Intercession

1) “the act of interceding

2) “prayer, petition, or entreaty in favor of another”²

2. Prayer for someone else: placed in the emphatic position

a. Lit.: “as incessantly mention of you I am making”

b. The ‘mention of you’ comes before the main verb, giving emphasis

It is important for this message for you to keep this simple point in mind. The prayers Paul mentions here are prayers for someone else, not prayers for himself.

B. The constancy of these intercessory prayers

1. Paul uses two words for ‘always’

a. “Without ceasing” KJV = incessantly: “*without intermission, incessantly, assiduously*” [Thayer]

b. “Always” = “*at all times, always, ever:*” [Thayer]

¹ *intercede*: Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 10th ed. Springfield, Mass., U.S.A.: Merriam-Webster, 1996, c1993.

² *intercession*: *Ibid.*

2. The intercessory prayers were
 - a. Offered at every time and every place
 - b. Offered without let up – unceasing

We will talk about the specific request Paul is praying for in a moment, but let's pause to consider this matter of persistence in prayer.

- Isn't persistence one of the Lord's first lessons on prayer? Consider Luke 11. 'Teach us to pray' is followed by a form and two parables intended to encourage us to ask and keep on asking.
- "You may have been praying for something for years. There may have been times when you felt at last that it was about to be granted, then it did not come. Were you grieved? Were you irritated? Did you begin to feel that God was against you? Did you say, 'There is no point in going on praying'? Oh, let us look at this mighty servant of God, and see that though he had been hindered, though he had been held back, he still went on making his request known unto God, expressing his heart's desire."³

Constancy in prayer is a mark of the depth of your faith in God.

II. The subject of this intercessory prayer

- A. The request is intense and earnest
 1. The first phrase we are confronted with is difficult
 - a. KJV: "if by any means now at length"
 - b. NAS: "if perhaps now at last"
 - c. ESV: "somehow"
 2. The phrase involves four Greek words
 - a. My literal rendering: "if how already when" or "if somehow already at some time or other"
 - b. The words convey a strong desire extended over a lengthy period of time that almost seems to come to an end.

³ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Gospel of God*, p. 201.

The idea is *intensity* and *earnestness*.

B. The request is for a prosperous meeting

Lit. 'that I might be prospered to come to you'

1. The root meaning of 'prosper'

- a. Includes the word (path, way)
- b. Weymouth translation: 'that the way may by some means be made clear for me to come to you'
- c. Word 'that the way may be made clear' came to mean simply 'to prosper, to succeed'
- d. But, "it does not, however, follow that because a metaphor is often dropped, it may not be recalled where it is directly suggested by the context."⁴

Wycliffe: "I have a spedi wey."

2. Prosperity in meeting – in coming together with these for whom Paul has long prayed

- a. Paul is ever *pastoral* in his apostolic calling
 - 1) Apostle = authoritative position
 - 2) Apostle = foundational ministry
 - 3) But an apostle as a pastor = a man in whom God has mightily worked

Consider Saul the persecutor. What words would you use to describe someone who went around beating and imprisoning people who simply disagreed with his point of view?

- Proud
- Imperious
- Arrogant
- Human Rights Commission [Ok, that isn't very funny!]

⁴ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Romans*, p. 20.

But here is an Apostle, the foundation of the church, earnestly desiring success in fellowship with other saints.

b. Paul is aware of the constant possibility of hindrances

1) Many hindrances heretofore (see v. 13)

- a) Ministry through Asia Minor and Greece
- b) Very successful ministry in Ephesus [third missionary journey]
- c) Conflict with church in Corinth [1 Cor, 2 Cor, several meetings and two missing letters]

2) Possible hindrances to come

- a) Perilous journey to Jerusalem
- b) Perils in Jerusalem
- c) Perilous journey to Rome
- d) Not to mention possibility of sickness and disease in a time without modern medicine

So we have an earnest, intense, prayer for future fellowship with unknown saints, and...

C. The request is in submission to the will of God

“His long cherished and often disappointed hope had taught Paul to say, ‘if the Lord will’ (Jas 4.15).”⁵

“There is no doubt at all that by nature he was a very strong-willed person. He was an imperious kind of man, I imagine, a man who had a great mind and a strong will, and who, when he wanted to do something, would proceed to do it: a strong character. So that as we observe his complete and entire submission to the will of God, we do indeed see what a miracle of grace was worked when the persecuting, blaspheming Saul of Tarsus was met by the risen Lord on the road to Damascus and was turned into the humble Apostle Paul.”⁶

⁵ James Denney, “St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., p. 588.

⁶ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The Gospel of God*, pp. 193-194.

1. Paul's request was a long standing desire (Ac 19.21, before 2 Cor written, in midst of Cor controversy, before Romans written)
2. Paul had not yet had confirmation from God that this request would be answered
3. God had repeatedly frustrated this desire in the past
4. Paul still did not cease to make the request, believing it to be in keeping with his apostolic calling and God's will so far revealed
5. Nevertheless, Paul is in total submission to God's disposition of his request

“Paul never told God how he wished to accomplish his ministry. Everything Paul did was in submission to God's will (Ac 18.21).”⁷

One more thing we must learn concerning our prayers: they are prayers, not demands.

We pray in submission to God.

III. The witness of these intercessory prayers

A. Paul calls God as a witness to his testimony of persistent prayers

1. Paul uses an oath formula to begin v. 9

Why an oath?

2. Harrison in the *Expositors Bible Commentary* gives two reasons why Paul must call God as his witness to the fact that he has been praying repeatedly for them:
 - a. Since Paul does not know these people, it might seem astonishing for him to claim that he is constantly praying for them;
 - b. He is about to travel to Jerusalem, the opposite direction to Rome. It may seem that his actions belie his words.⁸

Paul wants the Romans to know that he is not merely making an empty boast. He really is praying for them and he really does pray that he will be prospered to come to them.

⁷ Stewart Custer, *The Righteousness of God*, p. 14.

⁸ Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in *Expositor's*, vol. 10, p. 17.

So here is Paul's testimony: "I am constantly praying and making mention of you in my prayers if by any means God might grant me success in coming to you."

But what about this constant praying? What is constant prayer? What kind of life was Paul leading?

- B. Paul actually laboured to bring about the fulfillment of these intercessory prayers
1. Preaching and teaching in Ephesus and the surrounding cities
 2. Writing, exhorting, traveling, disciplining, writing some more, sending Timothy and Titus, worrying, traveling and dealing with Corinth
 3. Traveling to Corinth and writing Romans
 4. Traveling to Jerusalem with an offering for the Jews from the Gentiles [major project]
 5. And then planning to travel to Rome if God wills

Paul will be in jail in Jerusalem before God directly reveals to him that he will go to Rome:

Acts 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

And all the while, up to that point, Paul was constantly without ceasing praying that the Lord would bring about this request so that he could meet the Romans. How was he doing that?

"Paul was constantly serving God in a spirit of prayer, even when he was not actively doing something outwardly for God. Believers need to cultivate the spirit of prayer, praying for people, churches, and special requests while they are going about their daily tasks. The old saints used to call that *practicing the Presence of God*. Every time Paul thought about the Roman believers he prayed that he might have the opportunity to minister to them."⁹

⁹ Stewart Custer, *The Righteousness of God*, pp. 13-14.

Proposition: Prayer should involve active effort to bring one's own prayers to pass.

In his work, Paul was doing what he could to remove the hindrances and barriers to getting his prayer answered.

In his prayers, Paul kept on praying.

Conclusion:

Proposition: Prayer should involve active effort to bring one's own prayers to pass.

Do your prayers have a spiritual, ministry oriented, others oriented focus? Or do you only pray for yourself?

Do you serve God in your spirit to bring about the answers to your prayers? Or do you just expect God to do some magic because you prayed?

Listen, God can and does do wonderful miraculous things in response to prayer. But we are talking about your whole life, a life characterized by prayer and service for God.

Do you live as if you believe God hears your prayers?