

Pray it Again, Saul

The Recorded Prayers of the Apostle Paul

Text

First Thessalonians 3:12-13

Introduction

I like that game where you're given a word and asked to say the first word that pops into your head.

Let's do that now - only you don't need to say it out loud.

Ready? The word is, "Paul."

Although there are no wrong answers, we *are* at church, so if you thought, "McCartney," you're way-off track. Likewise if you thought "Blart," or "Ru."

I meant the apostle Paul, author of a good portion of the New Testament.

Trivia: Who wrote most of the New Testament? Hint - it wasn't Paul.

Paul wrote the most books - twelve; but Luke exceeded him in number of words with his Gospel and the Book of Acts.

Looking at the entire Bible, both Testaments, Paul is number five on the list, after Moses, Ezra, Luke, and Jeremiah.

Back to our first-word-that-popped-into-your-head. If you *were* thinking the apostle Paul, I'll bet you didn't think "prayer."

Maybe we should. After his dramatic conversion on the Damascus road, Jesus appeared to Ananias, and told him to go minister to Paul (then still called Saul). One of the things Jesus said to Ananias was, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is **praying**" (Acts 9:11).

That statement ought to encourage us to think of Paul in the context of prayer. But there's something more. Paul is set forth to be an example to us, and for us, of how to live the Christian life. We read in First Timothy 1:16,

1Ti 1:16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a **pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.**

Of course, Jesus is our primary and greatest example. But there are times we think that Jesus, being the sinless Son of God, fully human and fully God, is somehow too high a standard.

Whenever that is the case, we have Paul - a man of like passions as we are, born dead in trespasses and sins, yet wonderfully saved by the grace of God.

Paul himself said, without boasting, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (First Corinthians 11:1).

If Paul could be so closely associated with prayer, so should we.

One way to "follow" Paul is to read, and study, his actual prayers, as recorded in the letters he wrote.

We don't want to study Paul's prayers in order to pray them. We want to study them in order to pray like him.

If we do it chronologically, following Paul from his conversion to his final imprisonment and beheading, we start in the first letter he wrote, which scholars say was First Thessalonians.

His first prayer in that first letter was this:

1Th 3:12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,
1Th 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Don't you find it significant that his first recorded prayer, in his first letter, was grounded in "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints"?

We always need to try to determine which "coming" of Jesus a writer is referring to. There are different words for "coming." The Greek word used here is *parousia*. It literally means "presence" or "being alongside." It is commonly translated "coming," but it actually means "presence."

We use coming in that same way today. You might introduce a guest to an audience by saying, "We are thankful for the coming of Mr. So-and-so." The person wasn't coming; he was already there, present among you.

"At the coming of our Lord Jesus" refers to the fact that believers are going to be present with the Lord Jesus at the very moment that we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. He will take us home to glory, to the place that He has prepared for us.

This "coming" does not refer to the return of the Lord with His saints to establish His Kingdom, but to our coming to Heaven into the presence of the Father, at the resurrection and rapture of the church.

Future things fueled Paul's prayers because they remind us there is an urgency about the Christian life. I may not have a tomorrow. The Lord may come, for me personally, in death; or for us, corporately, with the blast of the trumpet, and the voice of the archangel.

Continuing to work backwards, we see what the Lord has promised to do for us. He will "establish our hearts blameless in holiness before our God an Father."

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the same thing this way:

Eph 5:26 that He might sanctify and cleanse [you] with the washing of water by the word,

Eph 5:27 that He might present [you] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

This is the end Jesus promises you: You will be finished; you will be perfect.

In Philippians Paul put it this way:

Php 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Your salvation is a three-part process:

1. First, you are saved. You encounter the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ, and you are saved.
2. Second, you are being saved. That sounds weird, I know; like you're being tested to see if you are really saved. What "being saved" means is that you are day-by-day becoming more like Jesus as His Spirit lives in you, and as you yield to Him. The Bible word for it is "sanctification."
3. Third, you will be saved, and by that I mean what Paul is talking about in the verses we were quoting. We will be with Jesus, in resurrected or resurrection bodies, finished... Blameless... Holy. It's sometimes referred to as glorification.

All that is the doctrine that undergirded Paul's prayer request for them:

1Th 3:12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,

In this epistle, love is seen only in action. For example he earlier mentions their "labor of love." It is not affection, but an active seeking of the welfare of another.

He calls upon Jesus to make them "increase and abound in love to one another." Love was something they already displayed. It was a characteristic of their fellowship.

Think (to yourself) about other churches, either locally or wherever. What word or words would characterize each church?

Churches can indeed have a good reputation for Christian virtues and values; and some seem to emphasize something more than others.

"Love" is the very best thing a church can be characterized by, since God is love. Love shines a light on every other ministry - giving everything we do a sense of the presence of the Lord.

Paul wasn't simply commending them for their reputation. He was praying that it would increase and abound more-and-more.

Love is one thing we can't overdo. It out to be "abounding," which means "overflowing."

There is no Christian retirement. The longer you've been walking with Jesus, the more you ought to be doing as you respond in love to His love.

"And to all," Paul prayed. Again, they were already doing this. Early in the letter he commended them for the fact the Gospel was going out to many places thanks to them.

Sharing Christ is the highest form of love you can show to others, as it takes into consideration their eternal destination.

Then Paul said, "just as we do to you." He and his traveling companions kept on growing in love for the saints they left behind in Thessalonica.

If Paul could increase and abound in love, so could they.

And so can we! Only you can determine what that means for you, tonight, at this point in your sanctification.

But determine it you ought, waiting upon the Lord, in prayer, with the aid of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

We saw that Jesus began a good work in us, and will bring it to perfection. We ought to cooperate with His work in us.

Love is our part, because if we love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love others as ourselves, we will discover the good works Jesus has set before us, that encourage holiness in our walk now, to be rewarded later

One thing I will say: As you pray for others, I believe your love for them, and everyone, **will** increase and abound.