

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/12/93 PM
Romans 1:8-10 "Learning to Pray More Biblically"

Intro:

Vince Lombardi, the former all star coach of the Packers, was a fanatic about fundamentals. Once after losing to an inferior team, Lombardi called the Packers together for a team meeting. Gritting his teeth and staring holes through one athlete after another, Lombardi began, "Ok, we go back to the basics this morning..." He held a football high enough for all to see, and then he yelled, "Gentlemen, THIS is a football!" (Swindoll, Seasons of Life, 373)

You can never overemphasize the importance of fundamentals. Winning teams have a firm grasp on the fundamentals. So do winning churches.

Q: What are the fundamentals essential for a successful church?

A: Look at Acts 2:42.

The early church had 4 major priorities. In fact, we must devote ourselves to these 4 essentials if we are to please God as a church.

1. The Apostles' Doctrine = Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of Bread = Communion/Worship
4. Prayers

Notice the early believers continued steadfastly in all 4 of these.

Q: How are we doing as a church in these areas?

A: I've been reflecting on that question. Obviously, there's always room for improvement in each area. But it seems that Teaching receives great emphasis in our church (SS, AM, PM, Wed PM, home Bible study groups). And so it should. Strong churches are well-taught churches. And God has blessed us with wonderful Fellowship. I thank Him for the wonderful spirit of unity we enjoy. And worship is an area we're growing in. Last year we spent a couple of months discovering the nature of biblical worship in a Sunday morning series.

Then there's the fourth ingredient. Prayer.

Quote: E. M. Bounds (19th century pastor), "What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Spirit can use--men of prayer, men mighty in prayer." (Power Through Prayer, 10)

That hits me.

Q: How's your prayer life?

Various Responses:

#1 "Lousy! I don't spend enough time praying, and when I do, I feel barren..."

#2 "Compared to what? Compared to most people I have a pretty decent prayer life?"

Quote: William Penn said this of George Fox, "But above all, he excelled in prayer...The most awful, living, reverence frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his prayer. And truly it was a testimony. He knew and lived nearer to the Lord than other men, for they that know Him most will see the most reason to approach Him with reverence and fear."

Tonight we want to embark on a journey. The ground on which we will tread is not necessarily new ground. And I must admit, I feel very unqualified to be the navigator on this trip. The topic we want to study is prayer. I've entitled our series, "Learning to Pray More Biblically."

Q: Why do we need to engage in a study about prayer? 3 reasons...

1. Prayer is a fundamental, a basic for Christian living.

You will never prosper as a Christian without a vibrant prayer life. This church will be stifled in its effectiveness for Christ without prayer.

2. We have a tendency to go "flat" in our prayer lives.

That's why I've entitled our study, "Learning to Pray More Biblically." Some here tonight have walked and talked with God for decades. Some are spiritual infants. But we're all learning. We never arrive, this side of glory.

Listen. We can all learn to pray more biblically. If we're honest there's a great difference between the way we pray and the way Paul prayed, and Daniel prayed, and Nehemiah prayed.

3. The Bible has much to say about prayer.

The Bible commands us to pray (I Th 5:17 "Pray without ceasing."). The Bible is full of instruction about how to pray (eg--Mt 6:9-13; The Psalms).

And the Bible is full of examples of actual prayers (eg--3 years ago we did a Wed PM series on the Prayers of OT Saints--Abraham prayed in Gen 20:17; Moses prayed in Dt 9:26; Hannah prayed in I Sam 1; God's Word records Samuel's prayer, and David's, and Solomon's, and Elijah's, and Elisha's, and Hezekiah's, and of course Daniel's, just to mention a few).

Some of you were with us back in November of 1987, when in a Wednesday evening series, we investigated the prayers of Paul. Tonight we want to build on that foundation.

Our Aim is simply this: To learn to pray more biblically.

We're going to explore a sampling of NT prayers. Tonight, to introduce the series, we'll look at one such prayer--Romans 1.

Warning: This study may make us uncomfortable. Do you know why? When we look at the way men like Paul prayed, do you know what we will discover? Our prayers are very different. And perhaps even unbiblical.

I hope to whet your appetite for learning to pray more biblically.

Proposition: Let's notice how Paul prayed. We'll see 2 elements included in his brief prayer in Romans 1:8-10.

- I. Paul's Prayer included Thankfulness (8).
- II. Paul's Prayer included Requests (9-10).
 - A. For the Christians in Rome (9)
 - B. For Himself (10)

I. Paul's Prayer included Thankfulness (8).

V 8 "First, I thank my God..."

Let's review the setting. Paul had never been to Rome. Yet he had a great love for the Christians in Rome.

Notice the word "first." Thankfulness was an integral part of Paul's prayer life.

I Cor 1:4 "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Christ Jesus."

Ph 1:3 "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy."

Col 1:3 "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith...and love..."

I Th 1:2 "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers..."

Notice something. Paul does not say he was thankful. He says he expressed thanks: "I thank." "We give thanks." There's a difference between being thankful and expressing that thanks in prayer.

Let's probe v 8 with a few questions...

Q: To whom did Paul express his thanks? "my God through Jesus Christ"

Q: What word in v 8 indicates that prayer for Paul was a personal matter, and not a matter of ritual or rote memory or mere formality? "MY God"

Q: What right do we have as feeble human beings to address the Almighty God? There's a phrase in v 8 that answers that--"through Jesus Christ"

Q: For what was Paul thankful? 2 items...

1. For specific people--"for you all"
2. For the testimony of the Romans--"that your faith is spoken of..."
 - "that" could better be translated "because"
 - "spoken of" = to proclaim, report publically

Here's why Paul was thankful. He was elated that a solid church existed in the imperial capitol of the Roman Empire. Do you know why? Because his own heart bled for the world. Paul wanted to see God's program accomplished in the world. That's why he traveled hundreds of miles to places like Ephesus, Philippi, and Thessalonica. That's why he bubbled over with joy when he thought of the Romans. Here was a church with a dynamic testimony for Christ.

Key: Paul didn't take that vibrant testimony for granted. He thanked God.

Listen. Successful churches don't just happen. They are the evidence of God's blessing. So thank God for them.

We need to thank God for Waf and the church in Angor, Papua New Guinea. And for other churches all over the world.

Illust:

Tran: There's the first element of Paul's prayer--Thankfulness.

II. Paul's Prayer included Requests (9-10).

You say, "That's not surprising. Our prayers include requests too."

Well hold on. I want you to notice the kinds of things Paul requested, and compare those with the kinds of things that take the forefront in our petitions to God. Sadly, I think you'll see a great difference.

A. For the Christians in Rome (9)

V 9 "...I make mention of you always in my prayers."

Notice Paul prayed "without ceasing." That's pretty amazing considering he was praying for people he really didn't know. Yet prayer was a priority for Paul.

We must view prayer as a valuable part of ministry. We dare not overlook it, nor minimize its power.

Q: What do you think he prayed for them? What requests did he make?

He doesn't tell us here. But we get a sense by reading elsewhere...

eg--he prayed for the Colossians (1:9-11)

eg--he prayed for the Ephesians (1:15ff; 3:14ff)

Paul did. He prayed for the Christians in Rome.

Listen. If we're to be effective in ministry, we must pray. S.S. teachers, pray for your students. Teach the Word, yes. But don't forget to pray the Word into their lives. Awana workers, pray for your young people. Youth leaders, pray. Deacons, pray. Parents, pray.

Illust:

B. For Himself (10)

V 10 "Making request..."

We studied this text a couple of months ago in a series on "Decision Making." Paul wanted to go to Rome. He prayed and asked God to allow him to make the trip to Rome. Why?

v 11 "that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift"

v 11 "to the end that you may be established"

v 12 "that I may be comforted together with you"

Isn't it amazing that the "mighty" Paul said he could benefit from the Christians in Rome? Not really. Paul had needs too. He was vulnerable. He felt that seeing the Romans would strengthen him. So he prayed.

Jean Calvin made this observation about Paul, "Note how modestly he expresses what he feels by not refusing to seek strengthening from inexperienced beginners. He means what he says, too, for there is none so void of gifts in the Church of Christ who cannot in some measure contribute to our spiritual progress. Ill will and pride, however, prevent our deriving such benefit from one another."

Q: What condition did Paul have in mind in this request to go to Rome?

A: V 10 "by the will of God"

When we pray, we must always seek to bring our will in line with God's will. Remember what Jesus said? We are to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Illust:

Conclusion:

May God help us to learn to pray more biblically.

To do:

1. Try to follow this pattern in your prayer life this week.
2. Let's pray right now.