

Prayer and Temptation: Our Weakness (Mat.6.13; Rom. 15.30-33)

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Introduction

When we pray according to the Lord's family prayer and say, "Father lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil," we clearly acknowledge our weakness and therefore our need of His enabling grace. Furthermore, by saying "us" (do not lead *us*...but deliver *us*), we expand on the family aspect of the Lord's Prayer (we expand on the "our" of the preface to the prayer, Mat. 6.9a). In other words, what we have here is anticipation in the teaching of Jesus of the "one anothering" passages given by the apostle Paul. We have the initial form of the mustard seed that became a great tree "so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" (Mat. 13.32).

Therefore, today we will fill out our understanding of the sixth petition of the Lord's family prayer by looking at Paul's request for prayer in Romans 15.30-33 (I come to this study making request for prayer on behalf of my wife *and our joint labors in the gospel, her with me and both of us with you*).

I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³ May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

The book of Romans has a specific history. We have to admit that I am not Paul and you are not the Romans. They lived in apostolic times and we live in post-apostolic times. Hence there are things in the book of Romans as in the NT as a whole that pertain in a distinct and unique way to the context in which they occurred.

Nevertheless, we identify with the Romans in the sense that we both live "in the time between" (that is, between the comings of Christ). Thus, we live in the time for which Jesus made preparation and for which He laid the foundation in His ministry, the Sermon, and the Lord's Prayer.

We must conclude that Paul's letter to the Romans *is largely a letter to us* because it is a letter to the people of people of God living in the time between the coming of Christ in humiliation and His coming in exaltation. There are discontinuous elements of the foundation forming time but most of the NT has continuous elements that derive from the foundation.

Therefore, this request that the Romans struggle with Paul in prayer is a guide for us in our place in the history of redemption (living on the foundation that Jesus began Himself and completed through His apostles). It is a full plant form of the sixth petition. As we consider the passage, we learn about "Struggling in Prayer with One Another." This is a "one-anothering" passage. This one deals with asking for prayer in a way typical of Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 1:11, you help us by your prayers; Phil. 1:19; Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1).

There are three things to cover about struggling with one another in prayer: it is a mild imperative, it aims at appropriate particulars, and it expresses true humility.

1A. Struggling in prayer is a mild imperative

The appeal comes in very forceful language. "I appeal to you" (ESV) is literally, "I strongly urge you."

Additionally, Paul wants the Romans to "strive together" with him. This term covers a range of things that center on the idea of some kind of intense conflict (cf. Moo 909). On one hand, the conflict may be literal as in warfare (cf. Jn. 18:36) or in athletics (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25). On the other hand, the conflict may be spiritual (fighting the good fight of faith, 1 Tim. 6:12; laboring diligently in the ministry, 1 Tim. 4:10; and laboring-*struggling*-working hard in prayer, Col. 4:12). Some have concluded that Paul is alluding to Jacob's wrestling with the Lord in prayer. Without leaving that aspect of our praying out of view totally, we have to emphasize the fact that Paul urges a struggling (wrestling, fighting in battle, working hard) *with him* by prayer.

This "one anothering" means that we enter *into the struggles of others*; the battles they are facing, the concerns they have, their hopes and aspirations, and their fears. We get into their shoes to some degree and struggle with them with the Lord. You and I bring all of these things before the Lord as we consider what fellow believers are going through in their struggles. As we hear about the "ins" and "outs" of each other's experience, this urges us to take one another to the Lord in prayer along those lines. Prayer is very heartfelt, responsive, and sympathetic. It is an aspect of family love, Christian family love.

Paul prompts us further by appeal to the authority of Christ and the love of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is such a strong appeal that it becomes a soft imperative. This is a duty we have as believers to share in the struggles of one another in the ministry of the word of God. It is a duty we have to the Lord Jesus Christ (**appeal to you, brothers, *by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers***). It is in His name and in terms of the office that He has that Paul presses the duty of prayer for one another. Jesus is his plea (Murray).

The reference to the Holy Spirit also reinforces the point: "by the love of the Spirit" (v. 30). This coordinates with what Christ is on our behalf in all of His offices. Thus, "As God's love inspires and validates hope (5:5), so the Spirit's love should incite to prayer" (Murray 221). Therefore, if being loved by the Spirit sinks into our souls, then it will move us to earnest-struggling prayer with one another in our mutual struggles.

Authority and love are not opposed to each other. In one way, it simply says that we do our *duty out of a sense of love*. We serve in love because the Holy Spirit loves us. Paul places an accent on the love that is at work in the application of our salvation by the Spirit. In a rough and ready way, we can summarize our salvation in three words: plan, secure, and apply. The Father planned redemption (He chose us in Christ with electing love, Eph. 1.4; Rom. 8.30). The Son secured redemption (He loves the sheep given to Him and laid down His life for them, Jn. 10.15, 27; 17.1-2). The Holy Spirit applies redemption (as an act of love He gave the word of redemption in Scripture and it is the love of the Spirit that brings us out of darkness and keeps us on the path of light, 2 Tim. 3.16; 1 Thess. 1.5, 2 Thess. 2.13-14).

Therefore, this request for prayer is so deeply rooted in the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of the Spirit that it edges over the line from a powerful request to a soft imperative.

2A. Struggling in prayer aims at appropriate particulars

We should note what he seeks prayer for at this juncture. He seeks rescue from unbelievers (31a), acceptance by believers (31b), and refreshment with the Romans (32). Paul faced many physical hardships at the hands of unbelievers (stoned, beaten, and imprisoned), but he also faced many spiritual hardships in the hands of believers. This is biblical realism and it cuts across the Christian church as a family that is supposed to manifest a unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace (deliver~~us~~ from temptation aims in this direction also).

Paul had goals in relation to believers and unbelievers. The things petitioned have to do with plans for the future. He struggles about the future not knowing what will transpire. His plans and aspirations for the future are gospel related. It is "part and parcel" of advancing the gospel from Jerusalem to not only Macedonia and Achaia but also to Rome and beyond with plans regarding Spain.

We ought to plan and commit our plans to the Lord by specific petitions. When I join with you in prayer and when you join with me in prayer—each in the struggles of the other—we ought to pray about specifics, about specific plans, concerns, and hopes of future accomplishments. There are personal concerns here but the final shape of such praying has to come from the gospel as a reference point. For example, I ask for your prayers on behalf of my wife and our joint labors in the gospel for the glory of God (and we are back to the 1st petition of the Lord's family prayer unpacked by the 2^d and 3rd).

3A. Struggling in prayer expresses true humility

Paul makes His plans with prayer in submission to the Lord's will (15:32, "by God's will" is ultimately tied to all the particulars that are steps in route to Rome). This, of course, refers to God's will in the sense of plan and not to God's will in the sense of precept. We know God's will of precept by His word and commandments. We know His plan of history in broad outline in biblical prophecy. However, regarding His plan for our personal histories, we know *that* as it unfolds.

Prayer is the pouring out of the soul to God (Bunyan). It is a privilege of fellowship and communion with the living God. What does it accomplish? Why pray? Obviously, we do not simply pray to accomplish things or to get something we desire. It is an entering into the inner sanctuary behind the curtain where Jesus has entered on our behalf (Heb. 6:19-20). In prayer, we have fellowship with our living Lord.

Furthermore, there is a "you have not because you ask not" principle in relation to prayer (James 4:2), which involves faith (James 1:5, ask God for wisdom and ask in faith). Prayer is a means through which the Lord brings about the realization of His will. In His time and as it serves His good purposes, there are things that He will give us if we ask for them. His promise is to persistence (the promise is to those who persist) and it is oriented to the Lord's family prayer as a framework (Lk. 11:1-13 with Mat. 6:9-13, Luke connects some heart warming things to the Lord's Prayer, especially see 11.8 and 11.11-13).

Yet bottom line we must make our plans and ask for God's blessing with submission to His will (cf. therd petition, Mat. 6.10b). We are to pray and pray earnestly, sharing in one another's struggles. In addition, we do so humbly before the Lord recognizing the secret things that belong to Him in the unfolding of His sovereign purposes.

Did God answer Paul's prayers?

Yes, and consider how the answers came. He was rescued from unbelievers at Jerusalem and the offering was accepted there (Acts 21:17-20, mostly at least). Moreover, his rescue was from religious unbelievers (the Jews) by non-religious unbelievers (the Romans). His rescue involved spending two years in prison under Roman

protection awaiting trial as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25; 24:27). He also eventually got to Rome and found mutual refreshment with the Roman Christians but he did so in chains (Phi. 1:12-14, 18b). The answer is interesting to say the least!

Furthermore, at Rome he labors in the gospel as a prisoner seeking prayer for deliverance (Phi. 1:19), but he does not know how, whether by life or by death (1:20). If he lives, he expects fruitful labor (1:22) working relentlessly for the goal of "your progress and joy in the faith" (1:25). "Progress" is a general word but a great concept. It contrasts with stagnation like that of a pond that lacks fresh flowing water. Progress means making headway, advancing in the right direction by study, fellowship, and hard work (cf. the feeding of the Lord's sheep as a priority of love). Thus, we humbly acknowledge God's will in all our hopes and plans.

May the God of peace be with us in our struggles that we not become stagnant and cut off from the living water but may we overflow and gush forth with progress.

What are the lessons for us here today?

- 1) We have an obligation/privilege to struggle together in prayer. There is a summons here by the Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit.
- 2) We ought to struggle together aiming at specifics in our requests. We should aim at the plans, concerns, fears, and challenges we know others are facing. We are to be specific. We need to talk to one another about our desires, struggles, and needs. We need both sides of the equation: revealing ourselves (which is humbling), and listening (which may, usually does, demand a self-sacrificing spirit, true love and unselfishness).
- 3) Our aspirations for the future center on the gospel of Christ to the glory of God (cf. the progress sought for the Philippians in relation to seeking to present a people as an offering to the Lord). A specific in this regard is the spread of message of communion through the monograph on preaching communion remembrances; this is a joint missionary effort (a "greateommissionary" effort). I am so thankful we can aim in this direction to honor Christ our exalted Sabbath king.
- 4) We therefore should struggle in prayer with one another in mutual gospel oriented struggles (and all our struggles are ultimately of this sort) with a sense of promise and in submission to the will of God.