
Did Paul Pray for the Impossible?

A reprint from *The ENJOY THE BIBLE QUARTERLY* — 1997, 4th Quarter

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Prayer involves the issue of intelligent communion with God. Intelligent especially in the sense that it operates not on superstition, ritual, feelings, or some mysterious key to getting God's attention, but on a clear understanding of what God is doing in His plan and purpose, and a clear recognition of how He says He operates with His people. In accordance with this, when God's program with Israel entered its climactic stages with the kingdom of heaven being preached to be "at hand," the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray.

And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

(Luke 11:1)

The disciples knew from "the gospel of the kingdom" and from the Lord's doctrine that things were coming to a head in Israel's program. They also knew that the Lord had spoken about some very special operations of God that would be in effect at that time, from which they would need to benefit. Hence, in view of this, they desired to pray intelligently in full accordance with knowing both what was going on in God's program and how He said He would deal with them. To this the Lord responded with a description of intelligent prayer for them at that time.

What constituted intelligent prayer for them, however, is not intelligent prayer for us today. God suspended the outworking of His program with Israel when He raised up Paul as a brand new apostle, and we today live in the

dispensation of God's grace to the Gentiles. In this dispensation God's program is vastly different from His program with Israel, and the way in which He deals with us is dramatically different from how He dealt with Israel. Therefore, intelligent prayer for us in this dispensation will be strikingly different from that of the remnant of Israel.

It is through the example of the Apostle Paul that we are taught to pray intelligently in this dispensation. As the one to whom the revelation of "the mystery of Christ" was committed, along with the issue of living "under grace," Paul's prayers reflect and demonstrate intelligent communion with God for us today. For this reason numerous prayers of Paul are contained in his epistles to us, from which we learn to appreciate similar intelligent communion with God as we grow in our edification.

Of particular interest in this area is Paul's prayer for the Ephesian saints set forth in Ephesians 3:14-21. In this prayer Paul sets forth in no uncertain terms the special sphere in which the power of God operates today in the lives of His people. But not only this, this prayer also sets forth the fact that the special sphere in which God's power operates today also provides for the greatest working of His power.

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

21 Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:14-21)

As Paul makes clear in verse 20, God's power today "worketh in us." This is done through the effectual working of His word and the Spirit of God in us. Hence, all the issues in this prayer are inner man issues. This, once again, is the sphere of the operation of God's power in this dispensation. And this stands in marked contrast to Israel's program in which God covenanted to do marvels among them so that they would "see the work of the Lord" in their midst as He worked in the outward circumstances of their lives.

In addition to this, however, Paul also makes it clear in this prayer that the power of God's word at work within us today is the most excellent display of God's power. The exceeding great power that belongs to God's word is able to be put on display today in an unprecedented and impressive manner. This is because not only is God's word working within us able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" regarding the condition of our inner man, it is also able to do exceeding abundantly above

all that Satan thinks he can do, as he works to show the capacity he still has to influence us in our inner man. That Satan desires to show that he is still able to affect our inner man, is something Paul makes clear throughout our epistles. However, it is the soul-stabilizing excellency of the power of God's word operating within us, (even when we are pressed out of measure), that we have the privilege to put on display today. And this we are privileged to do both to the glory of God and His word, and to the chagrin of the devil.

It is in view of the fact that Satan's policy of evil was adversely affecting the inner man of the Ephesians with terrifying fear, anxiety, and great distress, hoping to make them "faint," that Paul prayed for what would seem to be impossible to their fearful souls. But God's word operating within them not only had the power to strengthen them with might, but also fill them with all the fulness of God.

Did Paul pray for the impossible? No, for he knew all about the excellency of the power of God's word operating within us today with its capacity to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." The real question, however, is this: Do you know what he knew? — *Keith R. Blades*