

Prayer and the Body

Romans 12:12

The main focus of Romans 12 is to introduce us to the concept of the Body of Christ. As members of this Body, we are to watch out for the needs of every other member, and then take action steps to help each member as needed. When one part of the body hurts, every member should feel that hurt and should seek ways of helping the hurting member. We are to use whatever God-given talents and abilities we have for the edification of the Body, through the enablement of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Believers who are not living a proper life, who are not walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 24) will be less able to take steps to care for, nourish and build up the Body of Christ. This is because the gifts given to us by God can only be used properly when the Holy Spirit is the driving force behind their use. When we are walking in the world, we will not be focusing on the edification of the Body. We need to transform our thinking so that we are no longer conforming ourselves to the world. Transformed thinking means thinking spiritually, thinking godly thoughts, having the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:15–16).

In the midst of Paul's admonitions and instructions about the care we are to show toward one another, he mentions prayer. This is a very important topic that needs to be expanded upon.

Prayer: another God-given tool

Even though God is no longer giving us new information through the office of prophet in this Dispensation of Grace, He did not leave us helpless and on our own without the resources to live a life pleasing to Him. At the point of salvation we are given the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit, who enables us to live a God-pleasing life. The Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual wisdom that makes it possible for us to make proper and godly decisions (1 Corinthians 2:11–14).

We not only have the Holy Spirit, but God has also given us His word, the Bible. We need to study Scripture, rightly divided, to know what God wants us to do. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we can be filled with the knowledge of God's will (Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 1:9). This is why Scripture is foolishness to the world but wisdom to the believer (1 Corinthians 2:10–14).

Along with the Holy Spirit and Scripture, we have been given a third tool that is necessary for a believer to stand firm in the faith: prayer. We are able to understand what God wants us to do through Scripture and the wisdom given to us by the Holy Spirit. Prayer also works in conjunction with the Holy Spirit to mold and change us and conform us to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). Most people somehow think prayer is all about us telling God what he needs to do for us. Although many think prayer's purpose is to change God, it actually works just the opposite. When we pray, our hearts are moved toward Him. We find ourselves conforming to what He wants, not Him conforming to what we want.

Prayer really works in conjunction with Scripture and the Holy Spirit. If we didn't have Scripture, we would not know about prayer. If we don't rightly divide Scripture, we run the risk of praying in the wrong manner. For instance, prayers to bind Satan or continually repeating the so-called Lord's Prayer are unscriptural, and prayers seeking God's will through a sign are dispensationally incorrect.

Paul's prayers

The Apostle Paul always prays for other believers, or for help in him reaching the lost. His most frequent prayer was for believers to live godly lives. For instance, he prayed that the members of the Corinthian church would live proper lives (2 Corinthians 13:7–9). In Philippians 1:9–11, Paul prays for them to have the ability to discern (distinguish, prove) those things that are excellent (that differ from God's previous administration of Law) (Romans 2:18). To the Colossians he wrote that he was praying that they

would be filled with the knowledge of His will so that they could walk in a manner that would please Him (Colossians 1:9–10). Out of approximately 37 recorded prayers of Paul, 33 are made with his desire that believers grow in their faith and come to a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ.

This is significant, and gives us a perfect example of how we should pray. Instead of praying only for our own needs, we need to raise our sights to include other believers. Doing so forces us to look beyond our little world and look at the needs of others. This is the whole focus of Romans 12 and why Paul mentions prayer as being one of the important elements in our quest of meeting the needs of others. When we pray for others it forces us to think about what they need and ultimately will cause a change in our thinking.

Instant in prayer

Paul says that we are to be continuing instant in prayer. The Greek word behind the translation of continuing instant is *proskartereō* (G4342). It is in the present tense, which indicates devoting yourself to an activity continually. This does not mean we are always on our knees in prayer, but that we are ready at every moment to speak to the Lord. For instance, Acts 6:4 speaks of the Disciples giving themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Obviously they couldn't physically always pray and always preach. They were, however, always ready and completely devoted to praying and to preaching.

We need to have this same attitude about prayer. Prayer should not be the last thing on our list when we are in a state of desperation. We should always have an attitude of prayer, as if we are walking side by side with the Lord at every moment. We are to always be in communication with Him.

We see this idea of praying without ceasing in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. This is how Paul prayed for the Romans (Romans 1:9) and for the Colossians (Colossians 1:3, 9) and for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:16). Since it would be impossible to literally pray unceasingly for the Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians simultaneously, Paul meant he devoted himself to pray for them. We are to be ready (to be instant) to pray and devoted to praying. Like a servant who continually and faithfully serves his master, we are to be alert to other believers' needs and be ready to spring into action instantly (Colossians 4:2; Ephesians 6:18).

Improper praying

In order to pray properly, we need to have the mind of Christ. We can have the mind of Christ when we study Scripture and get to know Him and what He desires. Many people emphasize prayer as being all-important. Even worse, they make prayer into a mystical experience that “works” best when following what turns out to be pagan practices. For instance, there is currently a popular book that extols the virtues of prayer circles (*The Circle Maker* by Mark Patterson). He instructs us to draw a figurative circle of prayer around our biggest dreams so that they will come to fruition. The author equates this to Joshua circling Jericho. The book ends by encouraging us to draw a circle around ourselves because every great movement of God begins with self.

This concept is completely foreign to Paul's teaching. His prayer life revolved around other people, not himself. Other godless teachings of prayer come from Phyllis Stickle (Fixed-hour Prayer), Doug Pagitt (Body Prayer), Dee Duke (Prayer Quest) and a host of other writers and teachers who disseminate mystical formulas and techniques to manipulate God into doing what we want Him to do. They miss the whole point of why God gave us prayer, which is to change our hearts in conformity to His. Watch out for anyone who says we can be materially enriched through praying, or that there are certain positions or expressions we should use to release the power of God.

Prayer keeps us centered on Christ while guarding our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:6–7). This allows us to be used most effectively by God.

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