

C. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD AND PRAYER

1. Introduction.

It is common to hear well-intentioned Christians expressing their belief that what we need today is more prayer, in quality and quantity. And who for a moment would deny that this is a sadly neglected biblical imperative that our Savior upheld when He exhorted His disciples, by means of the Parable of the Importunate Widow, “that at all times they ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). To press home His point, especially that of dogged persistence, He concludes, “will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?” (Luke 18:7). Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones further argues this point quite emphatically:

Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when, upon his knees, he comes face to face with God. . . . When a man is [authentically] speaking to God he is at his very acme. It is the highest activity of the human soul, and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man’s true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer. . . . Prayer is undoubtedly the ultimate test, because a man can speak to others with greater ease than he can speak to God. Ultimately, therefore, a man discovers the real condition of his spiritual life when he examines himself in prayer, when he is alone with God. [Prayer] is not only the highest activity of the human soul, it is the ultimate test of our true spiritual condition. Another way of putting that is this. You will find that the outstanding characteristic of all the most saintly people the world has ever known has been that they have not only spent much time in private prayer, but have also delighted in it.²⁷

Consider also the similar emphasis of D. A. Carson who stresses the particular importance of biblical direction in our praying, that is God’s speaking to us in such a manner that we respond in prayer.

One of the foundational steps in knowing God, and one of the basic demonstrations that we do know God, is prayer—spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer. Writing a century and a half ago, Robert Murray M’Cheyne declared, ‘What a man is alone on his knees before God, that he is, and no more.’ But we have ignored this truism. We have learned to organize, build institutions, publish books, insert ourselves into the media, develop evangelistic strategies, and administer discipleship programs, but we have forgotten how to pray.²⁸

²⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, II, pp. 45-47. Yet surely caution is needed here lest we prioritize subjective mysticism. For is it better *in private* to talk to God or listen to Him speak to us? It is better to acknowledge that both prayer to God and listening to Him in His Word are together of supreme importance. Surely God does not primarily desire that a man should speak to Him and secondarily then listen to Him.

²⁸ D. A. Carson, *A Call To Spiritual Reformation*, p. 16.

Further consider J. C. Ryle in his book *Practical Religion*, in particular a chapter titled "Prayer," in which it is strongly asserted that, "prayer is the most important subject in practical religion." Seven reasons in support of this proposal are listed as follows:²⁹

- a. Prayer is absolutely needful to a man's salvation. This is reflected in the prayer, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner" (Luke 18:13).
 - b. A habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian. So this is true for "His elect who cry to Him day and night" (Luke 18:7).
 - c. There is no duty in religion so neglected as private prayer. For many, prayer is merely a matter of repetitious form; for others, a low priority in a busy life.
 - d. Prayer is that act of religion to which there is the greatest encouragement. There is the urging of the Holy Spirit, as well as Jesus' example and encouragement.
 - e. Diligence in prayer is the secret of eminent holiness. In the battles of life, confessed weakness and inability leads to calling upon God for grace.
 - f. Neglect of prayer is one great cause of backsliding. Increasing occupation with the world, and waning reliance upon God, inevitably leads to neglect of prayer.
 - g. Prayer is one of the best recipes for happiness and contentment. "Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you" (Ps. 55:22).
2. The God who is addressed.

However, all of the preceding being acknowledged as vitally true, yet there is an additional matter that must be considered which, unless acknowledged, will invariably result in a shallowness in prayer that can only be remedied by means of clearer focus concerning the nature of God to whom we pray. Consider the problem that arises when "faith" is so objectified and elevated to a place of prominence that it tends to obscure the glory of faith's saving object, who is God Himself. In reality faith is non-meritorious linkage to He who actually does the saving and sanctifying. In itself, faith does not save, though for the Christian its object certainly does. Therefore true saving faith does not look to itself but He who saves, that is Jesus Christ who through faith is beheld. Similarly with prayer, we must be careful about so objectifying it that we obscure the vision of He to whom we pray. In the world there will often be glib talk about the need to pray in a very abstract sense; specificity concerning who we pray to is usually pushed aside as being a concern that will unnecessarily inject dissension. Even Christians often speak of prayer in a similar

²⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion*, pp. 46-59.

mechanistic manner. Praying is declared to be all important; particular, definitive God-centeredness in content is a neglected concern. But surely Christians who pray to God should know the God to whom they pray, especially when they boast in access to Him through Jesus “as a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh” (Heb. 10:19-20).

So when we come to the Bible and consider the nature of numerous prayers that are recorded there, we find a repeated emphasis that is decidedly God-centered and definitive. To begin with, it seems customary that there be no immediate presentation of human need and predicament to God, even in situations involving great urgency. Rather, He, the great Jehovah, is first addressed with reverence that is specific and comprehensive. It becomes immediately obvious that those in the Bible who pray know He to whom they pray with both experiential breadth and depth; there are indications of intimate union and communion that presuppose a profound appreciation of the character of God. Even in the Old Testament, while the saints there lived during centuries of promise and shadow preceding New Testament revelation, nevertheless it would be foolish to suggest that this faith relationship was primitive and shallow. It is nothing short of astounding to see how such children of God addressed Him in a manner that would shame many a New Testament Christian. The reason for this would seem to be due to the fact that while, for them, the coming of the Messiah was prospective, yet a faith alone relationship looked to a glorious God whose perfections were well comprehended, such as was the case with Abraham who, “in hope against hope believed . . . in what God had promised” (Rom. 4:1-9, 13-25). The object of this prayerful believing (cf. Gen. 20:17) was in no abstract deity, but “God Almighty” (Gen. 17:1), the definitively revealed, covenant keeping God of Israel.

3. The Old Testament pattern of prayer.

While, in unproven innocence, Adam and Eve freely communed with God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8-9), following the Fall we find the birth of Seth to the first parents, in place of Abel, ushering in a godly lineage. Thus, “To Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen. 4:26). Certainly an ongoing indication of this godly line was that of commitment to earnest prayer, as the following examples indicate.

a. Jacob (Gen. 32:9-12, 24-32).

Fear of vengeance from pursuing, aggrieved Esau, causes his fearful brother Jacob to offer material appeasement while distancing himself and his family from the seeming threat of retribution. Although receiving angelic guidance, yet alarmed Jacob is constrained to pray to God, “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children,” v. 11.

However this prayer is based upon a preceding invocation and confession. "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD," v. 9. Even in such a short prayer, the distinctive character of God is clearly defined. Living in a world presently saturated with idolatry, Jacob is careful to identify the sole and specific God he is addressing. He intends to give exclusive honor to this God and no other. There is also a desire for proper access to God, which hearing cannot be presumed upon, except the approach be made according to God's terms. The appeal then is to the God of the Abrahamic Covenant, the God who has revealed himself and spoken, the God of covenanted reliability, v. 12.

Here, as with all of the prayers of the Bible, there is no mere vague sentiment, no abstract meandering, no sentimental form. Rather, those who pray in Scripture are grounded upon the knowledge of God revealed in that same Word. Thus Jacob's apprehension of his God is clearly defined.

- (1) Jacob's God is "Elohim," the God of all power, v. 9a.
- (2) Jacob's God is "Jehovah," the eternal God of loyal covenant love, v. 9b.
- (3) Jacob's God is unchanging, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, vs. 9, 12.
- (4) Jacob's God is living, for He has spoken, vs. 9, 12.
- (5) Jacob's God is self-revealing, for He has spoken, vs. 9, 12.
- (6) Jacob's God is merciful, abundant in lovingkindness, v. 10.
- (7) Jacob's God is faithful in His covenant keeping, v. 10.

How ready God proves to be in answering Jacob's prayer and coming to him, for that very night, "a man [even God the Son] wrestled with him [Jacob] until daybreak," v. 24. As a result Jacob prayed yet again, but with a greater earnestness than ever before. "I will not let you go unless you bless me," v. 26; "Please tell me your name," v. 29. The result was greater blessing than ever before. The Lord Jesus said to him, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed," v. 28. Here is no primitive encounter with God, but profound prayerful intimacy.

- b. Hannah (I Sam. 1:9-18; 2:1-10).

In the midst of Israel's descent into unprecedented decadence during the reign of the Judges, yet a faithful remnant existed that included Elkanah the Ephraimite and his two wives, loved and favored barren Hannah, and fruitful

Peninnah. Being tormented by the rival Peninnah, in distress Hannah prayed for a son at the temple of the Lord before Eli the priest.

Upon the eventual birth of a son, who she named Samuel, and his being weaned, Hannah brought an offering to Eli at the house of the Lord at Shiloh. When the sacrifice was completed, Hannah presented Samuel to Eli and dedicated him to the LORD. Then she prayed in exaltation of this same LORD who had so blessed she and her husband.

- (1) Hannah's prayer of petition for a son (I Sam. 1:9-18).
 - (a) Being at a point of extremity in her need, barren Hannah turns, not indifferently, to the true and living God of Israel. She is in deadly earnest, vowing to consecrate a prospective son to the LORD'S service, vs. 10-11.
 - (b) She addresses God on the basis of His proper covenant name, Jehovah or Yahweh, which title occurs fifteen times in these prayer passages (cf. Ex. 3:10-15; 6:2-8). God's real name was, to Hannah, her ground of access, just as the name of Jesus Christ is the ground of access for the Christian (John 14:13-14, 26; 15:16; 16:23-26). Her prayer is based upon a redemptive covenantal relationship, not ritual or sterile religion, v. 11. In praying to the "LORD" and making a vow, Hannah specifies to whom she is praying.
 - (c) She addresses God on the basis of His power and sovereignty over the "hosts," first mentioned here in the Old Testament, that is all armies, angels, and luminaries, v. 11.
- (2) Hannah's prayer of exaltation at the gift of a son (I Sam. 2:1-10).
 - (a) Consider v. 1. "Then Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD, my mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.'" Notice the similarity with the Magnificat. "⁴⁶ And Mary said: 'My soul exalts the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.'" (Luke 1:46-47). Most likely Mary's declaration of praise was stimulated by Hannah's example with regard to the birth of a son coming as a blessing from God. Here is a perfect illustration of learning to pray according to the pattern of Scripture.
 - (b) Consider how Hannah is preoccupied with the person of God, not creature benefits, personal stimulation, or self-gratification. True, her prayerful request for a son has been answered. But it is the glory of God that possesses her soul, it is spontaneous overflowing praise that

includes the justification of His person. Hannah's vindication, even Peninnah's humiliation, is for the honor of God.

- 1) "My heart exults in the LORD," again indicates Hannah's address to the only true God of Israel, the God of covenant faithfulness who will maintain His promises to His people. Because of this, He is readily approachable on His revealed terms, v. 1.
 - 2) "My horn is exalted in the LORD," draws upon the posture of strength of an ox that, with head down, is capable of repulsing the charge of an enemy (Deut. 33:17, v. 1. So Hannah repulsed the cruel taunting of Peninnah.
 - 3) "My mouth speaks boldly [is enlarged, KJV] against my enemies," that is Hannah has received boldness from God in the face of much opposition (I Thess. 2:2). This confidence is grounded in "Your salvation," v. 1.
- (c) Notice how many attributes or perfections or attributes of God are mentioned as the basis of Hannah's exultant emphasis in vs. 2-10. This is an exceedingly God-centered prayer that is so representative of subsequent prayers in the Old Testament.
- 1) *God is holy*. Notice that in the LORD being utterly set apart, He is incomparable with regard to other gods, v. 2a.
 - 2) *God is solitary*, without equal, unique, since there is "no one [holy] besides You," v. 2b.
 - 3) *God is immutable*, unchanging, so that He may be relied upon even as a solid rock (Ps. 62:2, 6-7), v. 2c.
 - 4) *God is omniscient*, all-knowing, and therefore not ignorant of our problems such as Hannah's, v. 3.
 - 5) *God is omnipotent*, all-powerful, such as against enemies with their arrogant boasting, vs. 4-5.
 - 6) *God is benevolent*, bountiful in His supply to the hungry; however those who brag about being full become famished, v. 5.
 - 7) *God is sovereign*, that is in total, unflustered control of mankind, and orders all things according to the good pleasure of His just

and perfect will (Eph. 1:11). Only a sovereign God is worth praying to, vs. 6-8.

- 8) *God is gracious*, that is He upholds those who confess their weakness and need of His sustaining power, v. 9.
- 9) *God is just*, that is history will vindicate His righteousness. Satan and his hosts will be crushed at God's feet and eternally punished. At the same time His Messiah will reign as King, v. 10.

(3) Hence the greater our knowledge of God, the greater will be our capacity to pray to God. When we pray to God according to such knowledge, at the same time we will intercede for a broader and more intimate knowledge of His being that will inevitably be communicated through His Spirit, Word, and ordained experiences.

c. Hezekiah (II Kings 19:15-19).

This good king of the southern kingdom of Judah reigned 29 years during 715-690 BC. His revival of true worship, following the bad reign of King Ahaz, brought many changes, including the cleansing of the temple (II Chron. 29:3-31:21), the reinstatement of the Passover (II Chron. 30:21-22), the destruction of the brazen serpent (Num. 21:4-9; II Kings 18:4), but preeminently an example of personal faith and godliness in the face of religious declension (II Kings 18:4-6; 31:20-21). Having inherited subservience to the king of Assyria from his father Ahaz, Hezekiah's religious and social reforms fostered increasing independence. Foolishly he boasted of his wealth to a Babylonian emissary, at which Isaiah rebuked him (Isa. 39:1-8). Then in 701 BC, the Assyrian emperor launched a campaign to bring Palestine into line. As a result Jerusalem was besieged by Assyrian hordes under Tartan, Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh. Reassured by Isaiah of eventual deliverance by God, Hezekiah takes a mocking letter of ultimatum from Rabshakeh, spreads it before the LORD and prays. However, notwithstanding a perilous situation, Hezekiah is immediately and continually definitive in his humble address to God.

- (1) This LORD, mentioned nine times in this short prayer, is Yahweh/Jehovah, Israel's covenant keeping God. Here is Hezekiah's ground of access, v. 15a.
- (2) This LORD is Israel's holy God, sovereign over His creation, who dwells between the cherubim above the mercy seat and ark of the covenant, v. 15b.
- (3) This LORD is the unique God, sovereign over all kingdoms, including Assyria. There is only one true God; all others are invalid, v. 15c, 19b.

- (4) This LORD is the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth. He alone has eternal existence; everything else is derived from Him, v. 15d.
- (5) This LORD is a personal, infinite God capable of entering the realm of the finite, even “hearing” and “seeing” the concerns of frail flesh, v. 16a.
- (6) This LORD is the only living God, who is able to deliver, in contrast with the numerous combustible gods that the Assyrians have destroyed, vs. 16b-18.
- (7) This LORD is the only God able to save. Hence He alone is worthy of vindication and glorification, v. 19a.

d. Nehemiah (9:6-37).

Following the return of Jewish exiles from Babylon under Zerubbabel in 537 BC and Ezra in 457 BC, a third small group returned under Nehemiah in 445 BC. Upon the completion of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem according to Nehemiah’s direction, Ezra led the Jews in the renewal of their covenant before God. Immediately before the actual renewal vow, a solemn, prayerful confession of sin was made under Ezra’s direction, which is recorded in Nehemiah 9:6-37. This prayer includes repeated emphases upon the character of God, especially for the purpose of distinguishing Jehovah’s uniqueness, His solitariness, in the midst of a pagan world. Probably these verses reflect the similar emphasis of Psalms 105-107.³⁰

- (1) The priority of the character of the LORD God, v. 6.

It becomes increasingly obvious that, as here, biblical prayers frequently focus on the attributes of God at their commencement. More broadly speaking, it is also evident here just how important the distinctive character of God was in the history of Israel.

- (a) He is Yahweh/Jehovah, the particular God of Israel.
- (b) He is the solitary, only true God.
- (c) He is the creator God of the heaven of heavens.
- (d) He is the living God, the source of all life.
- (e) He is alone worthy of worship, submission.

³⁰ C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, pp. 237-8.

(2) The priority of the character of the LORD God in Hebrew history, vs. 7-31.

(a) Review, the founding of Israel through Abraham, vs. 7-8.

- 1) The salvation of Abraham was specifically of the LORD God, who, according to electing grace through faith, led him away from pagan Ur of the Chaldees, v. 7.
- 2) This LORD'S salvation, of righteousness and integrity, was by a unilateral covenant with Abraham that promised the land of Canaan to his descendants, v. 8.

(b) Review, the redemption of Israel through Moses, vs. 9-25.

- 1) There was saving grace, from Egypt to Mt. Sinai; water from a rock, bread from heaven, guidance to the Jordan. Especially evident is God's compassion, v. 9, power, vs. 10-11, justice, vs. 13-14, benevolence, faithfulness, vs. 12, 15.
- 2) There was sin, that is rebellion, idolatry, blasphemy, such as when Israel worshiped the molten calf. Yet at the same time God remained patient, abounding in lovingkindness, mercy, and compassion, vs. 16-18.
- 3) There was sustaining grace; a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, continuing manna and water, possession of the land, victory over the Canaanites, great spoil, "hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, and were filled and grew fat, and reveled in Your great goodness," v. 25. Here God's unfailing benevolence and patience was so evident, vs. 19-25.

(c) Review, the establishment of Israel in the land, vs. 26-31.

Here is a description of a repetitive, cyclic pattern in the history of Israel of sin, discipline, and grace. But the larger picture is that of God's covenant faithfulness through all of this, likened unto a father who patiently awaits for the return of his prodigal son. In all of this, especially evident is God's justice, compassion, patience, grace.

- 1) There is sin followed by discipline (oppressors) and grace (deliverance from oppressors), vs. 26-27.

- 2) There is sin followed by discipline (abandonment to enemies) and grace (rescue with compassion), v. 28.
 - 3) There is sin followed by patience, discipline (foreign captivity) and grace (the return of a remnant under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah), vs. 29-31.
- (3) The priority of the character of the LORD God in confession, vs. 32-37.

Here the children of God are heartbroken over their history of sinning. Hence, "Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You," v. 32, since "we have acted wickedly," v. 33.

- (a) Here is confession before "the great, the mighty, and the awesome God" of Israel who also shows "covenant loyalty and loving-kindness," even toward His sinning children, v. 32.
 - (b) Here is confession before this same God who is always "just" and "faithful," even toward His sinning children. So God remains ready to welcome genuine repentance, v. 33.
 - (c) Here is confession before God's "law, commandments and admonitions," His Word. The result is a people under discipline, slavery, subjection to pagan oppression, in spite of the present restoration of Jerusalem, vs. 34-37.
 - (d) Even for the child of God, sin has consequences. Ask Abraham concerning the birth of Ishmael; ask Moses concerning his exclusion from the land of promise; ask David concerning family strife, etc. But true confession results in reconciliation, for God abides faithful to His covenant. And such prayerful confession will inevitably make reference to the glorious character of God.
- e. Daniel (9:1-27).

Having been a resident in Babylon as a Jewish exile for about 67 years, aged Daniel has never ceased to be concerned about the continued desolation of Jerusalem, due to judgment, as well as the consequent dishonor it has brought to God's name. Regarding the context here, in spite of gloom that the preceding prophecies have stimulated, with Daniel becoming sick in mind and body, 7:19-21, 28; 8:23-24, 27, yet he retains hope. As a student of prophecy he now derives confidence from God's promise that Israel would be captive for no more than seventy years, and the fact that this period appears to have nearly expired (Isa. 44:28; Jer. 25:11-12; 29:4-10). In the midst of affliction and difficulty, Bible

prophecy is always a comfort for the believer (I Thess. 4:18; 5:11), and, as we shall also see, a stimulant to prayer.

(1) Daniel's manner of prayer, v. 3.

It was governed by dedicated meditation on the Word of God, the Book of Jeremiah in particular. This is not to say that God will not hear the unlearned, stammering, feeble cry of a believer in desperate need. However, the God of the Word ought to be the focal point of prayer and not vague intimations of some ill-defined "God." Hence it is the specific revelation of God in Scripture that gives us a focus which is identical with that of Daniel. Here was disciplined prayer, humble prayer, probably three times daily (6:10-11), yet no less sincere on this account. Discipline need not be legalism; it is simply our responsible subjection of all things in our lives, and especially our allocation of time, to the will of God (I Cor. 9:24-27; II Cor. 10:5).

(2) Daniel's basis of prayer, the character of God, v. 4.

"I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, 'Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments.' There is intense devotion in this introductory verse. It is one of the clearest, most comprehensive, and yet concise patterns for our commencement in prayer in all of the Bible. Notice how the three primary names of God, "LORD" or Yahweh/Jehovah, "God" or Elohim, and "Lord" or Adonai, are used.

(a) Expressed in the three primary names of God.

- 1) He is LORD or Jehovah/Yahweh, hvhy meaning "I am that I am," and "the eternally self-existing one" (Exod. 3:14-15), as "the one who causes to be for His own people" (Exod. 6:2-8). This is God's own personal name used of no one else; it speaks of His unchanging covenant relationship with His people. It is appropriately used here since Daniel is pleading on the basis of God's covenant faithfulness, that is with regard to His steadfast unchanging promises that were given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and still apply to the true seed of Abraham today. As the Christian today prays to the Father on the basis of Christ's name and hence His mediatorial work, so the Old Testament saint prayed in the name of Jehovah which, in a similar way, spoke of a covenantal, redemptive relationship.

- 2) He is God or Elohim, אֱלֹהִים, meaning “the strong, mighty one,” appropriately used in Genesis 1:1. It is a generic term and not personal. Hence in Exodus 23:24 it also refers to heathen gods.
- 3) He is Lord or Adonai, אֲדֹנָי, meaning “master,” and “the one as sovereign owner,” requiring obedience and subjection as a servant to his lord. Again this is a generic term that can also refer to human lords who command servants (Gen. 24:9), and even be used as a term of polite address (Gen. 18:12).

(b) Expressed in the attributes of God.

- 1) His transcendent holiness, justice, and omnipotence, His being “great and awesome” (Ps. 68:3; 99:3; 145:6), as is especially revealed in His name (Ps. 111:9). Here is described the moral splendor of God’s righteous reign, even in the punishment of Israel’s wickedness.
- 2) His steadfast, compassionate, covenant love (Jer. 30:18, 22), to true Israelites, that is those who respond with love and obedience. “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart!” (Ps. 73:1).

(c) Expressed in all prayer worthy of being biblical.

Our approach to God is not initially to be personal needs or problems, but God’s glorious person. The foundation of our salvation and sanctification is the very essence and nature of God, and so it is to be in the realm of prayer. The evident shallowness of so much prayer today is man-centeredness, morbid introspection, and self-preoccupation. Our great need is not so much a proper self-image as an exalted God-image. The believer is changed by looking to Christ (II Cor. 3:18), not himself. Likewise, the believer is to first focus his attention on the One to whom he is praying in true worship, and so ratify his confidence in Him concerning whatever matters may later be declared.

(3) Daniel’s prayer of confession, vs. 5-15.

(a) The catalog of Israel’s sins.

Note Daniel’s personal identification with Israel’s sinning when he repeatedly uses the inclusive “we,” vs. 5-6.

- 1) Israel has rebelled against the Word of God and earned divine curses for such disobedience (Deut. 27:15-26), vs. 5, 11.
 - 2) Israel has rejected the testimony of God's spokesmen, His "servants the prophets," vs. 6, 10.
 - 3) Israel has not sought the Lord in prayer, truth and repentance. They have become lazy and indifferent regarding the Word and prayer; they demean serious and substantial preaching; they refuse to subject themselves to the leaders of God's people and in poverty of soul are ignorant of profound and holy communion with God, v. 13.
- (b) The consequences of Israel's sins.
- 1) Any nation with a godly heritage that acts in a manner similar to Israel will also be put to shame or else God will be obliged to apologize to His ancient people.
 - 2) Visible shame, at all levels of Hebrew society, being severe and humiliating punishment, vs. 7-8.
 - 3) Dispersal to Gentile captivity in many countries, so that they are far removed from Jerusalem, v. 7.
 - 4) Cursing according to the law of Moses because true repentance is absent (Deut. 27:15-26; 30:17-19), v. 11, 13.
 - 5) Desolation at Jerusalem, including destruction of the temple and its ritual, v. 12.
 - 6) Calamity on account of disobedience, including the lack of the blessing of Jehovah upon His people, v. 14.
 - 7) Bondage for the redeemed. Delivered from captivity in Egypt, now the Jews are captive in Babylon, v. 15.
- (4) Daniel's prayer for pardon, vs. 16-19.
- (a) It is based on God's righteousness, vs. 7, 16.
- 1) In v. 7 it is the righteousness of God which condemns. His holy demands find unholy Israel utterly lacking. Daniel does not flinch from making a full confession.

- 2) Yet in v. 16 Daniel pleads for God's pardoning righteousness, or more accurately "righteousnesses." In other words, God's many saving acts of righteousness, manifested towards Israel in the past, are now once again claimed. This saving reputation of God is based upon His covenant faithfulness, His promise to keep Abraham's seed.
- 3) This reminds us of God's saving righteousness displayed in the gospel, especially as described in Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-26. Though a believer may sin, yet his hope is forever based upon Christ's blood-covenant faithfulness (I John 1:9).
 - (b) It is based upon God's reputation, that is "Your sake," His glory, v. 17, cf. v. 15. Moses similarly pleaded for Israel on the ground of God's honor (Num. 14:11-21). To know the character of God in an intimate way, especially His holiness, sovereignty, grace, and veracity, is to possess great boldness in the light of His promises.
 - (c) It is based upon God's great mercies that are appealed to on account of Israel's agony in captivity and desire for relief, v. 18. Human righteousness is totally excluded. Though again, God's reputation is related to the maintenance of His people.
 - (d) It is based upon the upholding of the essential significance of God's particular name revealed exclusively to His people, v. 19. Both Israel and Jerusalem are inextricably bound up with "Jehovah," who has covenanted to save, keep, and prosper His people. Therefore Daniel may have had in mind the declaration of his contemporary Ezekiel (Ezek. 36:21-25).
- (5) Daniel's answer to his prayer, vs. 20-27.
 - (a) He receives a swift answer, apparently because he is "highly esteemed." "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (Jas. 5:16), vs. 20-23.
 - (b) He receives a glorious saving answer concerning the coming of "Messiah the Prince," the Lord Jesus, who will be "cut off," and eventually "make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness," vs. 24-26.
 - (c) In conclusion, this magnificent prayer should humble us when we consider the poverty of contemporary Christians in speaking to God.

Our mundane, sterile, grocery list, materialistic, stereotyped prayers undoubtedly reflect the poverty of our relationship with God, our shallow desire for holy fellowship with Him, and fundamentally our ignorance of Him.

Hence we should greatly delight ourselves in the person of God, not simply because of obligation, but rather because we genuinely delight to do no other. It was no chore for Daniel so spend time with God, whether in prayer or with His Word, even though he was not exempt from "extreme weariness," v. 21. To know God in both truth and experience is to desire to know even more about Him. To have little interest in prayer or God's Word is simply to indicate at best, our impoverished spiritual condition, and at worst, our unconverted state.

5. The New Testament pattern in prayer.

While God remains eternally the same, yet His determination to progressively reveal His character to mankind over centuries of time is especially evident when we consider the transition from the era of the Old Covenant to that of the New Covenant. However, this enhanced revelation is supremely portrayed in the person of the Son of God. "1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, 2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Heb. 1:1-2). Thus when Jesus Christ prays, we should not only anticipate the ultimate pattern of address toward the throne of God, but also expect a comprehension of His Father that far exceeds any intercession of a mere mortal child of God. In both the didactic prayer commonly called "The Lord's prayer," (Matt. 6:9-18; Luke 11:1-4) and "Jesus Christ's glorification prayer" (John 17:1-26) we are not disappointed.

Even with the prayers of the Apostle Paul there is a New Covenant comprehension concerning the exalted editorial office of Christ, seated "at His [God's] right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:20) that far exceeds any Old Covenant comprehension. The same advance in understanding concerns the triune content with regard to the Apostle's prayer to "the Father, . . . that He would grant you . . . to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. 3:14-21).

6. Jesus Christ's didactic prayers.

a. The pattern prayer for Jesus Christ's disciples (Matt. 6:9-18).

Consider the preceding context in which the hypocrite's motive and method in prayer is described, v. 5. Here is a religious charade in which there is inward lusting for the applause of man and self-glorification by means of the pretense of

outward piety. Here is insincerity toward the true God. In contrast is the pagan or Gentile's prayer in v. 7, who, with some sincerity and considerable energy, yet prays to a false god. By way of contrast, Christ exhorts His disciples concerning their distinctive praying to an "all-seeing and rewarding Father," v. 6, and an "all-knowing and benevolent Father," v. 8. Concerning the addressees of this prayer, Charles Simeon writes:

Highly as the Lord's Prayer is esteemed amongst us [in the Church of England], and frequently as it is used, there is scarcely any part of Scripture less considered: we are contented with repeating the words, without ever attending to its true report. The fact is, that though it is written for the use of all, none can use it aright but the true Christian: it is the Christian only, whose heart can embrace the subjects contained in it.³¹

Concerning the structure of this prayer, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes:

This prayer is undoubtedly a pattern prayer. . . . There is a sense in which you can never add to the Lord's Prayer; nothing is left out. . . . To say that this prayer is all-inclusive, and is a perfect summary, simply means, therefore, that it really does contain all the principles. We might say that what we have in the Lord's Prayer is a kind of skeleton.³²

(1) The injunction or command, v. 9a.

"Pray, then, in this way [after this manner]," not "with these words," suggests a general guide, not mandatory recitation. The pattern here is not so much concerning words as doctrinal structure, order, priorities, content. As John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray, not with any known verbal pattern (Luke 11:1), so Jesus Christ provides an orderly truth model that establishes universal principles.

(2) The invocation or call to God, v. 9b.

"Father" here does not infer the Fatherhood of God, hence the brotherhood of all mankind (John 8:44; Rom. 8:8-9, 14-17). To the Jew this term indicated a distinctive covenant relationship (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 64:8-9), yet it was to be obtained on the basis of faith (Rom. 4:13; Gal. 3:7-9). To Jesus, in His conversation and prayer directed toward heaven, the operative title was "Father," πατήρ, patēr; the Son does not directly refer to Him as Jehovah (cf. John 8:58; 17:6, 11-12, 25-26). To the Christian this term indicates an adopted relationship established through faith (John 1:12; I John 3:1-2), so that as a result he partakes of the blessings of Abraham (Gal. 3:9, 26). This privilege of access as a son to the Father does not confer the right of casual

³¹ Charles Simeon, *Works*, XI, p. 185.

³² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, II, pp. 48-49.

and nonchalant address. Consider Mark 14:36; John 17:11, 25, where Jesus addresses His Father with reverence.

“Our” Father suggests communal prayer in contrast with the individual recommendation of v. 6. However, surely we can also pray “my” Father as John 8:19; 14:7 suggest. Here Jesus stresses the difference between a fact and a relationship. It is one thing to address God as “Father,” but quite another to genuinely know Him on the basis of personal faith in Christ, and so address Him as “my” Father. In the latter instance there is worship of He who has personally begotten me, and thus unfailingly sustains me on the basis of my irrevocable new birth and adoption.

“Who is in heaven,” or more literally, “Who is in the heavens,” speaks of God’s abode where He dwells in unclouded glory, as transcendent in majesty, yet also imminent, calling forth awe and respect (II Chron. 6:18-19; Ps. 8:1; 113:4). Remember that Jesus has come from that place of glory of which He speaks, with desire to return (John 1:18; 3:31-32; 6:33; 17:5).

(3) The petitions concerning the affairs of God (theocentric), vs. 9c-10.

In the prayers of the Old Testament we have easily recognized a repeated emphasis on the priority of the character of God. Even in the face of great and fearful danger, the child of God has not neglected to first address God with comprehensive and reverent adoration, and especially with regard to addressing Him as Jehovah, the name of Israel’s covenant Head. In the same manner the Son of God instructs His disciples to pray according to this order. In simple terms, whenever we pray, it is God’s glory and business that should take precedence over man’s status and business.

(a) “Let Your name be hallowed/revered as holy [ἁγιαζῶ, *hagiazō*],” v. 9c.

This is an imperative of desire, as is the case with the other five imperatives that follow. To “hallow” the name of God is to set it apart from defiling influences and tendencies; it is to treat it as holy, sacred, revered, in a manner that differs from common worldly regard. In other words, God’s reputation is preserved from soiling and displayed only as totally pure (John 17:11). What then is God’s name here? Our previous study of the primary names of God should help us at this point. Surely it is not “Elohim,” or “Adonai,” but “Jehovah/Yahweh,” God’s own distinctive, personal, covenantal name revealed to His redeemed children. This same name has also been attributed to the Son of God (Phil. 2:9-11), so that for the Christian, it is the “Lord Jesus” who has become his ground of access to the Father (John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24, 26; Eph. 5:20). God’s name is holy, not because of

the expression of certain sounds in pronunciation, but because of its distinctive meaning. Having a fullness of meaning, it was considered of particular importance to Christ (John 17:6, 11-12, 26). Hence it is not to be used thoughtlessly, lightly, but with deep respect. Even more, the name of God has a priority here that ought to profoundly impress the Christian. This is particularly so if the expression in v. 10, "on earth as it is in heaven," is applicable to all of the first three imperatives. The heavenly accolade of Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 is appropriate here on earth, even if generally absent.

(b) "Let Your kingdom come, v. 10a.

Again we have an imperative of desire in which true children of God pray for that which, in the main, is future. It is implicit that God alone establishes His kingdom and not man. Here is the true Christian's hope in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, not some conservative political agenda (Tit. 2:11-13; II Pet. 3:13).

- 1) It is the kingdom *promised* (Dan. 2:44; 7:27; Mic. 4:1-8; Zech. 14:9-11), prior to the first coming of the King of the kingdom.
- 2) It is the kingdom *inaugurated* (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; Mark 9:1-2; Luke 11:20; 17:20-21), at the first coming of the King of the kingdom.
- 3) It is the kingdom *developed* (Matt. 13:31-33, 47-50; Luke 16:16; Col. 1:13-14), during the inter-advent period when the King of the kingdom has gone to "a distant country" (Luke 19:11-15).
- 4) It is the kingdom *anticipated* (Matt. 25:31-34; Luke 19:11-27; 21:25-31; 22:14-18; Acts 14:22), prior to the second coming of the King of the kingdom.
- 5) It is the kingdom *consummated* (Acts 3:19-21; I Thess. 2:12; II Tim. 4:1, 18; II Pet. 1:10-11), at the second coming of the King of the kingdom.

(c) "Let Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," v. 10b.

There is obviously a very close connection between the second and third imperatives of desire. Again Lloyd-Jones comments.

The result of the coming of the kingdom of God amongst men will be that the will of God will be done amongst men. In heaven the will of

God is always done perfectly. . . . What is characteristic of heaven is that everyone and everything is waiting upon God and anxious to glorify and magnify His name. The angels as it were, are on the wing all ready and waiting to do His bidding. The supreme desire of all in heaven is to do the will of God, and thereby to praise and worship Him. And it should be the desire of every true Christian, says our Lord here, that all on earth should be the same. Here, again, we are looking forward to the coming of the kingdom, because this petition will never be fulfilled and granted until the kingdom of God shall indeed be established here on earth amongst men. Then the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven.³³

Of course men ought not to pray for God to change His will; rather they pray, as part of the will of God, to acknowledge the will of God (Luke 22:42). Such prayer is best offered when a comprehensive and profound knowledge of God is at the foundation of such supplication.

(4) The petitions concerning the affairs of man (anthropocentric), vs. 11-13a.

As man's first duty is to God and then second to man (Matt. 22:35-40), so this order is to be reflected in the prayer life of true disciples of Jesus Christ. However, Thomas Manton explains:

In those [first three] petitions, the benefit is not God's, but ours. When his name is sanctified, his kingdom cometh, and his will is done; these things do not only concern the glory of God, but also our benefit. It is our advantage when God is honored by the coming of Christ's kingdom and the subjection of our hearts unto himself. But these latter petitions do more immediately concern us.³⁴

From another perspective, with regard to the petitions that follow dealing with more man-centered concerns, there is yet necessary and underlying God-centeredness that ought not to be neglected.

(a) "Give us our necessary bread each day," v. 11.

Such a concern presupposes the benevolence and generosity of God, otherwise such a prayer is vain. Here dependence upon God for basic food is expressed.

³³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount*, II, pp. 64-65.

³⁴ Thomas Manton, *Works*, I, p. 149.

- (b) “Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven others,” v. 12.

Such a concern presupposes the holiness of God, that reveals our transgressions, and the grace of God that pardons them, otherwise such a prayer is vain.

- (c) “Deliver us from the evil [one], and his temptations, v. 13a.

Such a concern presupposes the holiness of God, that is offended by evil, and the sovereignty of God that conquers evil, otherwise such a prayer is in vain.

- (5) The doxology or glorification of God, v. 13b.

There is serious question as to whether this declaration was uttered by the Son of God at the time this prayer was taught. This has been a matter of doubt since the days of the early church fathers. It is impossible to be dogmatic, though everyone seems to agree that the truth expressed here is most appropriate. Many believe it was a suitable liturgical conclusion, having many variations, that was added to complement more formal worship. However, it does seem likely that the truths of this fitting declaration may have been derived from I Chronicles 29:10-13 where David offers a similar doxology as he anticipates the building of the temple. Here it offers praise to God on account of His incarnate Temple.

Reverting to the thrust of concern for God’s business in vs. 9c-10, here is a parallel three-fold declaration of God’s transcendent glory.

- 1) To the Father belongs the eternal kingdom, the blessed messianic kingdom of His Son.
- 2) To the Father belongs the sovereign kingdom, in which the dominion of His Son is over all.
- 3) To the Father belongs the radiant glory, which is wonderfully reflected in the person of His Son.

7. Jesus Christ’s glorification prayer (John 17:1-26).

While the earlier study of this prayer focused on the glory of God as its essential motif, pp. 404-408, yet a more brief consideration draws attention to the closely related God-centeredness of Jesus Christ’s address to His Father.

a. The direct address of “Father.”

The first word of address is the title *πατήρ*, *patēr*, which occurs six times in this prayer. It is the most frequently used term of address by Jesus to His Father while at no time does He employ the more common name of “Lord.” In this instance, surely there is a depth of meaning here that cannot be plumbed by any man. Consider the use of this name in Matthew 6:9 where Jesus’ disciples are encouraged to use this title, and here where Jesus Himself employs this mode of address. Certainly “Father” here declares that eternal triune relationship between God the Father and God the Son. As Thomas Manton states:

It is good to observe that Christ doth not say, ‘Our Father,’ as involving our interest with his, because it is of a distinct kind. Christ would observe the distinction between us and himself: he is a son that is equal with the Father, co-eternal with his Father; but we are adopted sons made so.³⁵

In terms of prayer structure, it is obvious that the Son’s concern for His Father is preeminent, but particularly that plan of redemption which was committed to the Son’s execution. Thus in the next words, “the hour has come; glorify the Son, that the Son may [by means of His perfect obedience] glorify You,” v. 1, is Jesus’ singular focus because of His great love for the Father. The immediate way ahead concerns a trial of unimaginable proportions. Nevertheless, the Father’s will is Jesus’ dominant concern (John 4:34). His love for the individual sinners given to Him by the Father is undiminished, yet He especially loves them just because they are that legacy received from His Father. In other words, the Father is everything to the Son, and His prayer reflects this passionate devotion.

b. The direct address by means of explicit attributes.

It is necessary to appreciate that Jesus’ address of His Father as both “holy” and “righteous” reflects His intense love of these character-istics. Unlike the sons of Adam, there is no tremor or hint of shortfall in Jesus’ tone since the Son has perfect and essential moral correlation with His Father. Thus the Son desires that His disciples should have the same prayerful priority.

(1) Holy Father, v. 11.

There is a remarkable wedding here of moral transcendence and filial imminence. The request is, “Holy Father, [in view of my immediate departure] keep them [the eleven disciples remaining in the world] in Your name.” In other words, let them know of that holiness incorporated in Your name, that apartness from the world that Jesus has embodied, cf. vs. 15-17, 19.

³⁵ Thomas Manton, *Works*, X, p. 115.

(2) Righteous Father, v. 25.

There is a remarkable wedding here of moral purity and filial imminence. Here the Son proclaims His loyalty to the character of His Father since He presently abides in an unrighteous world that “has not known You.” Thus, as the hour of death fast approaches, in conclusion Jesus declares that His commitment to the righteous will of His Father, and His disciples, is undiminished (Ps. 22:3).

c. The indirect address by means of implicit attributes.

(1) The Father has authority over all flesh, v. 2.

Here is acknowledgment of the sovereignty, the absolute authority of God that has been imparted to His Son (Matt. 28:18). This in turn results in those, given to the Son, receiving eternal life.

(2) The Father has eternal glory, v. 5.

Here is acknowledgment of the majestic glory of God, that fullness of radiance that the totality of His attributes comprises. More particularly it is the glory of God’s gospel soon to be completed.

(3) The Father has the name, vs. 6, 11, 12, 26.

There are four references to “Your name,” which, in the light of Matthew 6:9, undoubtedly refers to the Tetragrammaton, hvhy, that is Jehovah/Yahweh, as the listening Hebrew disciples would comprehend.

8. The Apostle Paul’s pastoral prayers.

The emphasis of Paul concerning prayer is indicated not only by his confession, “we have not ceased to pray for you” (Col. 1:9; cf. 1:3; Phil. 1:4), but also his exhortation, “pray at all times in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18; cf. I Thess. 5:17). This manner of praying, as an ongoing attitude, is more frequent with the Apostle in the New Testament than any other person (Acts 10:2). However, particularly outstanding in Paul’s two main recorded prayers, is his passion that his addressees should increase in their knowledge of God the Father through the mediatorial revelation of God the Son.

a. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians’ greater knowledge of God (Eph. 1:15-23).

Overall, this prayer continues the biblical pattern of God-centeredness; the focus of Paul is outward, that is directed toward “the Father of the glory” and the exaltation of His Son from death to “His right hand in the heavenly places.” He

is not so much concerned with a grocery list of individual physical needs. He knows that should his prayer be answered and the Ephesian saints obtain the comprehension he desires, then temporal and material concerns will lose their place of importance.

(1) His manner of prayer, vs. 15-16.

“For this reason,” v. 15, connects us with Paul’s preceding passionate eulogy, vs. 3-14, directed toward God the Father concerning the believers’ blessed standing in sovereign grace through Christ. This comprehension stimulates the Apostle to pray repeatedly with thankfulness for the Ephesian believers while at the same time making mention of a specific and future hope.

(2) His petition summarized, v. 17.

The address is to God the Father, specified as “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” He who is accessible only through the merit of His Son (1:5). Further, He is “the Father of the glory,” He who dwells in transcendent heavenly glory and is lauded by the cry of the seraphim around His throne, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:1-3). The dominant assumption at the commencement of this prayer is that it is God alone who grants spiritual understanding that is about to be described in detail. It is certainly not latent in the natural man, and not even in moderate bloom in many believers (Jas. 1:5).

- (a) Paul’s dominant desire for the Ephesian saints is “the knowledge of Him [the Father].” More specifically, this is an accumulating, maturing spiritual knowledge that has a depth of quality about it. “Knowledge” here is ἐπίγνωσις, epignōsis, being an intensified form of γνῶσις, gnōsis, meaning “a deeper, fuller, more intimate, experiential knowledge.” Trench explains: “It is bringing me a better acquaintance with a thing I knew before; a more exact viewing of an object that I saw before afar off. That little portion of knowledge which we had here shall be much improved, our eye shall be raised to see the same things more strongly and clearly.”³⁶ Note in I Corinthians 13:12 how gnōsis and epignōsis are contrasted (cf. Rom. 3:20; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9-10; II Tim. 3:7; II Pet. 1:2-3, 8).

The resultant effect of this knowledge is “a Spirit [not spirit] of wisdom and revelation” (cf. John 6:44-45; I Cor, 2:6-13). Lloyd-Jones explains.

³⁶ R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 285.

The Apostle prays for the Ephesian believers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give them 'the Spirit of wisdom' (Testimonium Spiritus Externus) and 'the Spirit of revelation', the ability to see it and to receive it and revel in it and to enjoy it (Testamonium Spiritus Internus). What a perfect provision for damned, blind, helpless, wretched sinners! All the truth I need to know and the ability to receive it and to apprehend it!³⁷

(3) His petition elaborated, vs. 18-23.

Note the progressive descent that follows into the deeper realms of glorious biblical truth, the epignōsis of God, particularly concerning what He has accomplished through Christ. So Paul details three areas of knowledge which he considers to be of particular importance.

(a) The "hope of His calling," v. 18a.

Here greater assurance is sought, through enhanced enlightenment of the soul, concerning God's particular, elective call. Again, there is to be advance from gnōsis to epignōsis. Thus Hendriksen makes a significant comment: "Paul knows that the best way to drive away old sinful tendencies is no longer to concentrate on them but rather on the blessings of salvation."³⁸

(b) The "riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints," v. 18b.

This "inheritance" is more likely that which the Ephesian believers have in store than that which they are (cf. 1:11, 14; 2:7; 3:8, 16).³⁹ However, that which He bestows with such abundance is surely a reflection of His gracious Bring. Again, there is to be advance from gnōsis to epignōsis in the appreciation of this spiritual wealth, especially at an experiential level.

(c) The "surpassing greatness of His power," vs. 19-23.

While the Christian believes in the "power" [δύναμις, *dunamis*] of God, employing "work" and "strength" and "might." Paul's prayer is that it be outpoured upon the Ephesians in a "surpassing" measure, with greater excess [ὑπερβάλλω, *huperballō*], than had been experienced to date, and so with advance from gnōsis to epignōsis.

³⁷ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose*, pp. 362-363.

³⁸ W. Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, p. 99.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

- 1) This power defined, v. 19.

More specifically, this “greatness of His power” is to be comprehended as “the working [ἐνέργεια, *energeia*] of the strength [κράτος, *kratos*] of His might [ἰσχύς, *ischus*].” Yet once again we have a desired progress from *gnōsis* to *epignōsis*.

- 2) This power demonstrated, vs. 20-23.

- a) By Christ’s resurrection from the dead, through His vindicating Father, v. 20a.

- b) By Christ’s session with the Father, seated at His right hand, vs. 20b-21.

- c) By Christ’s dominion over all things, they being placed under His feet, v. 22a.

- d) By Christ’s headship over the church, which body fills all in all, vs. 22b-23.

- (4) By way of summary, in this intensely doctrinal, theocentric section of Paul’s epistle, yet doctrine is an integral part of the Apostle’s understanding of prayer. Further it is doctrine that gives substance and purpose to prayer. In particular, Paul is trinitarian in his approach to prayer. He prays to the Father, v. 17, through the gospel power of the Son, vs. 20-23, while being reliant upon “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation,” v. 17. Paul’s prayerful pastoral concern is clearly seen. Souls saved is not the end of his ministry, but souls reaching full maturity through an expanding knowledge of the Father (I Thess. 2:19; 3:12-13). Thus prayer is not so much a formal recitation as a progressive descent into the heart of God. Witness how Paul plunges deeper and deeper into the doctrine of the Father and the Son, both here and in 3:14-21. So we are to progress in our prayer life from *gnōsis* to *epignōsis*, from earth closer and closer to heaven.

- b. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians’ greater love of Christ (Eph. 3:14-21).

The context of this prayer is indicated in v. 14 by the expression, “for this reason,” which is also found at the commencement of v. 1. Hence, what intervenes is commonly considered to be a parenthetical explanation, a Pauline “*anacoluthon*,” a literary detour. Thus the primary context is in fact 2:11-22, while 3:1-13 is a secondary, though related, aside. In 2:11-22 the fabrication of the church is in mind, particularly in vs. 19-22. The spiritual construction described here contrasts with the material construction of the then existing

temple in Jerusalem. It is a distinctive fellowship of both Jew and Gentile, v. 19. It has a distinctive foundation, Christ and the apostles, v. 20. It has a distinctive framework, believer-priests forming a holy temple, v. 21. It has a distinctive function as a more permanent dwelling-place of God the Holy Spirit, v. 22. Hence the church of Jesus Christ, the wonder of its composition and constituency, is a stimulus to prayer for Paul. Specifically, this involves his concern for members growing spiritually in Christ from gnōsis to epignōsis (1:17; 4:13).

- (1) His prayer for greater knowledge of Christ's transcendent love, vs. 14-19.
 - (a) He addresses the Father, vs. 14-15.
 - (b) As with 1:17, this is a reference that distinguishes from God the Holy Spirit, v. 16, and God the Son (cf. 2:18), v. 17.
 - (c) He entreats the Father, vs. 16-19.

- 1) For the strengthening of the Holy Spirit, v. 16.

This blessing of "His Spirit" is sourced in "the riches of His glory" (cf. 1:18; 3:8), which terms collectively portray much of the wondrous character of God, especially His generous spiritual providence.

- 2) For the indwelling of the love of Christ, v. 17.

Paul's desire is that the Spirit's indwelling ministry might have larger bloom, again from gnōsis to epignōsis, concerning the love of Christ. The Ephesians are like a plant, rooted in Christ, yet they must be "rooted" more firmly, with greater stability, in the love of Christ. They are like a building, founded upon Christ (Col. 1:23), yet they need to be better informed or "grounded" in the love of Christ (Col. 2:7).

- 3) For a greater understanding of the love of Christ, vs. 18-19.

Paul desires that the Ephesians receive a greater, multidimensional, "comprehension/grasp," καταλαμβάνω, katalambanō, of the love of Christ

- a) The dimensions of Christ's love, its breadth, length, depth, height (cf. Rom. 11:33-36), v. 18.

- b) The transcendence of Christ's love, that is a finite understanding of the infinite, v. 19a.
 - c) The fulfillment of knowing God, that is being wholly lost in God's immensity, the vortex of His being, v. 19b.
- (2) His prayer that God may be glorified through the love of Christ, vs. 20-21.

Paul's prayer turns from petition to praise. The dynamic of this intercession is the indwelling life and power of God that grants more abundantly than we could ever hope to think or ask about.

- (a) The ground of God's glory in the church is His life in its living members, that is "living stones" (I Pet. 2:5; cf. Eph. 2:19-22). At the same time it is the life of God that stimulates prayer in the church toward God, so that the members are found "praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20), v. 20.
- (b) The ultimate goal of the church in prayer ought to be the glory of God, that which is refunded back to He who is glorious and reflects glory. Thus, while the character of God is fittingly addressed at the commencement of prayer, so it is equally suitable to conclude a prayer with this same perspective, v. 21.

9. Thus John Bunyan warns us:

It doth not always follow, that they that pray do know God, or love Him or trust in Him. This conclusion is evident by the Pharisee in the text [Luke 18:10-13]; he prayed, but he knew not God, he loved not God, he trusted not in God; that is, he knew Him not in His Son, nor so loved, not trusted in Him. He was, though a praying man, far off from this. . . . It is the sensible sinner, the self-bemoaning sinner, the self-judging sinner, the self-abhorring sinner, and the self-condemning sinner, whose prayers prevail with God for mercy. Hence I infer, that one reason why men make so many prayers, and prevail no more with God, is because their prayers are rather floatings of pharisaical fancies, than the fruits of sound sense of sin, and sincere desire of enjoying God in mercy, and in the fruits of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, II, pp. 276-277.