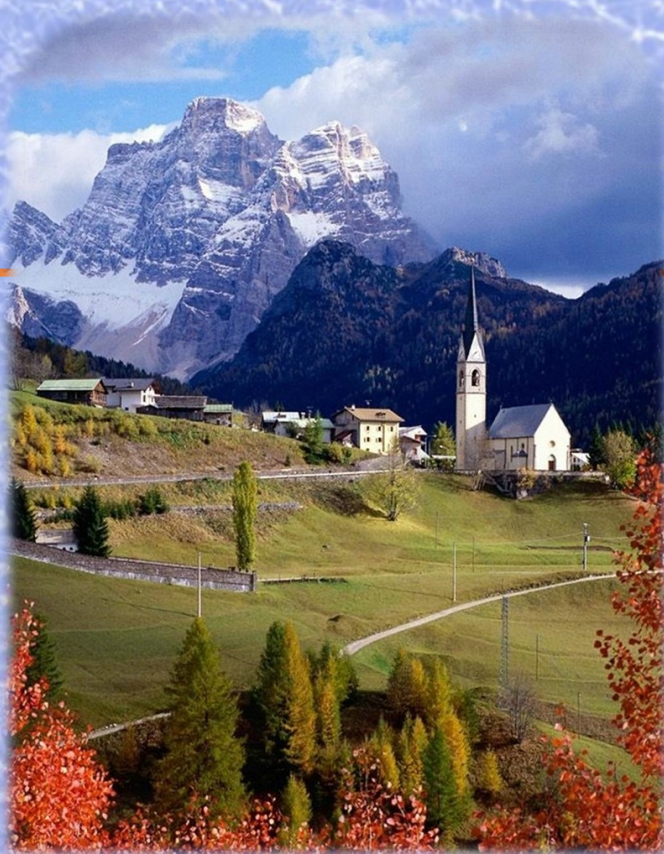


The Prayers of the Apostles

**Booklet One
Introduction**



A. W. Pink



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A. W. Pink wrote a series of articles which were entitled “The Prayers of the Apostles” in his magazine “Studies in the Scriptures” which included all Pauls’ epistles and up to Revelation. The Banner of Truth have published all Pauls’ prayers in his epistles up to but not including Hebrews under the title “Gleanings from Paul,” which leaves six of the apostles prayers unpublished by them. They are from Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, Jude and Revelation all of which are included in this series of 7 booklets.

1. Introduction

Much has been written upon what is usually called “The Lord’s Prayer” but which we prefer to term “The Family Prayer,” and much upon the High Priestly prayer of Christ in John 17, but very little upon the prayers of the apostles. Personally we know of no book devoted to the same, and except for a booklet on the two prayers of Ephesians 1 and 3 have seen scarcely anything thereon. It is not easy to explain this omission, for one had thought the apostolic prayers had such importance and value for us that they had attracted the attention of those who wrote on devotional subjects. While we very much deprecate the efforts of those who would have us believe the prayers of the Old Testament are obsolete and unfitted to the saints of this dispensation, yet that there is a peculiar suitability unto Christians of the prayers recorded in *the epistles* seems evident. Excepting only the prayers of the Redeemer, in them alone are the praises and petitions

specifically addressed unto “the Father,” in them alone are they offered in the name of the Mediator, and in them alone do we find the full breathings of the Spirit of adoption.

How blessed it is to hear some aged saint, who has long walked with God and enjoyed intimate communion with Him, pouring out his heart before Him in adoration and supplication. But how much more blessed should we esteem it could we have listened to the utterances of those who had companied with Christ in person during the days when He tabernacled in this scene. And if one of the apostles was still here upon earth what a high privilege we should deem it to hear him engage in prayer! Such a high one, that methinks most of us would be quite willing to go to considerable inconvenience and travel a long distance in order to be thus favoured. And if our desire was granted how closely we would listen to his words, how diligently we should seek to treasure them up in our memories. Well, no such inconvenience, no such journey is required: it has pleased the Holy Spirit to record quite a number of the apostolic prayers for our instruction and satisfaction. Do we evidence our appreciation of such a boon? Have we ever made a list of them and meditated upon their import?

In our preliminary task of surveying and tabulating the recorded prayers of the apostles two things impressed us: one, which at first seems quite surprising, the other which was to be expected. That which is apt to strike us as strange—to some of our readers it may be almost startling—is the book of Acts, which supplies us with most of the information we possess about the apostles, has not a single prayer of theirs in its twenty-eight chapters. Yet a little reflection should show us that this omission is in full accord

with the special character of that book, for the Acts is much more historical than devotional, consisting far more of a chronicle of what the Spirit wrought through the apostles than in them. It is the public deeds of Christ's ambassadors which is there made prominent, rather than their private exercises. True, they are shown to be men of prayer, as is seen by: "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4), and again and again we behold them engaged in this holy exercise (9:40; 10:9; 20:36; 21:5; 28:8), yet we are not told what they *said*, the nearest approach being 8:15, yet their words are not recorded—we regard the prayer of 1:24 as that of the hundred and twenty, and that of 4:24-30 as that of "their own company."

The second feature which impressed us while contemplating the field which is to be before us, was that the great majority of the recorded prayers of the apostles issued from the heart of *Paul*; and this, as we have said, was really to be expected. If it be asked, why so, several reasons may be returned. He was, preeminently, the apostle unto the Gentiles. Peter, James, and John ministered principally to Jewish believers (Gal. 2:9), and, even in their unconverted days *they* had been accustomed to bow the knee before the Lord. But the Gentiles had come out of heathenism and it was fitting that their spiritual father should also be their devotional exemplar. Moreover, he wrote twice as many epistles as all the other apostles added together, nevertheless there are eight times as many prayers in his epistles as in all of theirs. But chiefly, we call to mind the first thing said of Paul after his conversion; "Behold, he *prayeth*" (Acts 9:11): it is as though that struck the keynote of his subsequent life, that he would be, to an especial degree, marked as a man of

prayer.

It is not that the other apostles were devoid of this spirit, for God does not employ prayerless ministers, as He has no dumb children. To “cry day and night unto Him” is given by Christ as one of the distinguishing marks of His elect (Luke 18:7). Yet certain of His servants and some of His saints are permitted to enjoy closer and more constant fellowship with the Lord than others, and such was obviously the case (excepting John) with the man who on one occasion was even caught up into Paradise. A special measure of “grace and supplications” (Zech. 12:10) was vouchsafed him, so that he appears to have been favoured with a spirit of prayer above even his fellows, which dwelt in him to a remarkable degree. Such was the fervour of his love for Christ and the members of His mystical Body, such was his intense solicitude for their spiritual wellbeing and growth, that there continually gushed from his soul a flow of prayer to God for them, and of thanksgiving on their behalf. If we are permitted to proceed with these expository meditations, many illustrations of what has just been said will come before us, examples of where ebullitions [emotional outbursts] of devotion broke forth in the midst of his doctrinal and practical instructions.

Ere proceeding further it should be pointed out that in this series of articles I do not propose to confine myself to the petitionary prayers of the apostles, but rather to take in a wider range. In Scripture “Prayer” includes much more than making known our requests unto God, and this is something which His people now need reminding of—some of them instructing, in these days of superficiality and ignorance. The very verse that presents to us the privilege of spreading our

needs before the Lord emphasises this very thing: “in everything by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6) unless gratitude be expressed for mercies already received and thanks be given for granting us the continued favour of petitioning our Father, how can we expect to obtain His ear and to receive answers of peace. Yet prayer, in its highest and fullest sense, rises above thanksgiving for gifts vouchsafed: the heart is drawn out in contemplating the Giver Himself so that the soul is prostrated before Him in worship and adoration.

In the above paragraph our pen travelled faster than it should have done. Though we ought not to digress from our immediate theme and enter into the subject of prayer in general, yet it should be pointed out that there is yet another aspect which needs to take precedence of those referred to above, namely self abhorrence and confession of our own unworthiness and sinfulness. The soul must solemnly remind itself of *Who it is* that is to be approached, even the Most High, before whom the very seraphim “veil their faces” (Isa. 6:2). Though Divine grace has made the Christian a “son,” nevertheless he is still a *creature*, and as such at an infinite and inconceivable distance below the Creator and therefore it is fitting he should both deeply feel and acknowledge this by taking his place before Him in the dust. Moreover, we need to remember *what we are*, namely, not only creatures, but (considered in ourselves) *sinful* creatures and thus there needs to be both a sense and an owning of this as we bow before the Holy One. Only thus can we, with any meaning and reality, plead the mediation and merits of Christ as the ground of our approach.

Thus, broadly speaking, “prayer” takes in or includes confession of sin, petitions for the supply of our needs, and the homage of our hearts unto the Giver Himself. Or, we may say its principal branches are humiliation, supplication and adoration. Hence we hope to embrace within the scope of this series not only passages like Ephesians 1:16-19 and 3:14-21, but also single verses such as 2 Corinthians 1:3 and Ephesians 1:3. That “blessed be God,” is itself a form of prayer is clear from Psalm 100:4, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, bless His name”—other references might be given, but let this suffice. The “incense” which was offered in the tabernacle and temple consisted of various spices compounded together (Exod. 30:34, 35), and it was the blending of one with another that made the perfume so fragrant and refreshing. The incense was a type of the intercession of our great High Priest (Rev. 8:3, 4) and of the prayers of saints (Mal. 1:11). In like manner there should be a proportioned mingling of humiliation, supplication, and adoration in our approaches to the throne of grace, not one to the exclusion of the others but a blending of them together.

The fact that so many prayers are found in the New Testament epistles calls attention to an important aspect of *ministerial duty*. The preacher’s obligations are not fully discharged when he leaves the pulpit, for he needs to water the Seed which he has sown. As this magazine is now being sent to quite a number of young preachers we will enlarge a little upon this point. It has already been seen that the apostles devoted themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” and therein have they left an excellent example to be observed by all who follow them in the sacred

vocation. Observe the order, and not only observe but heed and practice the same. The most laborious and carefully-prepared sermon is likely to fall unctionless on the hearers unless it has been born out of travail of soul before God. Unless the sermon be the product of earnest prayer we must not expect it to waken the spirit of prayer in those who hear it. As we have pointed out, Paul mingled supplications with his instructions. It is our privilege and duty to retire to the secret place after we leave the pulpit and beg God to write His Word on the hearts of those who have listened to us, to prevent the Enemy snatching away the Seed, to so bless our efforts that they may bear fruit to His eternal praise.

Martin Luther was wont to say “There are three things that go to the making of a successful preacher: supplication, meditation, and tribulation.” This was taken down by one of his students from his “Table talks.” We know not what elaboration the great Reformer made, but suppose he meant that, prayer is necessary to bring the preacher into a suitable frame to handle Divine things and to endue him with power; that meditation on the Word is essential in order to supply him with material for his message; and that tribulation is required as ballast for his vessel, for the minister of the Gospel needs trials to keep him humble, as the apostle was given a thorn in the flesh that he might not be unduly exalted by the abundance of the revelations granted to him. Prayer is the appointed medium of receiving spiritual communications for the instruction of our people. We must be much with God before we can be fitted to go forth and speak in His name. The Colossians were reminded that their master was “always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Could your

church be truthfully told that of *you*?

But let it not be thought that this marked characteristic of the epistles points a lesson for preachers only. Far from it. These epistles are addressed to God's children at large, and everything in them is both needed by and suited to their Christian lives. Believers too should pray much not only for themselves but for *all* their brethren and sisters in Christ, and especially according to these apostolic models, petitioning for the particular blessings they specify. We have long been convinced there is no better way—no more practical, valuable, and effective way—of expressing solicitude and affection for our fellow saints than by bearing them up before God in the arms of our faith and love. It is by studying these prayers in the epistles and pondering them clause by clause that we may learn more clearly what blessings we should desire for ourselves and others—what spiritual gifts and graces we most need to ask for. The very fact that these prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, have been placed on permanent record in the Sacred Volume intimates that the particular favours are to be sought and obtained from God.

We will conclude these preliminary and general observations by calling attention to a few of the more definite features of the apostolic prayers. Observe then, *to Whom* these prayers are addressed. While there is not uniformity of expression but rather appropriate variety in this matter, yet the most frequent manner in which the Deity is addressed therein is as: “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3); “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3); “the Father of glory” (Eph. 1:17); “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:14). In this we may see of how the holy apostles had heeded the injunction of their Master, for when

they requested of Him saying, “Lord, teach us to pray,” He responded thus: “When ye pray, say, our *Father* which art in heaven” (Luke 11:1, 2) an example of which He also set before them in John 17:1, 5, 11. This too has been recorded for our learning. We are not unmindful of how many have unlawfully and lightly addressed God as “Father,” yet their abuse does not warrant our non-use of owning this blessed relationship. Nothing is more calculated to warm the heart and give liberty of utterance as a realisation that we are approaching our “Father.” If we have received “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:15) let us not quench the same.

Next, we note their *brevity*. The prayers of the apostles are short ones: not some, or even most, but all of them are exceedingly brief, most of them comprised in but one or two verses, and the longest in only seven verses. How this rebukes the lengthy, lifeless and wearisome prayers of many a pulpit. Wordy prayers are usually windy ones. I quote again from Martin Luther, this time from his comments on the Lord’s prayer to simple laymen: “When thou prayest let thy words be few, but thy thoughts and affections many, and above all let them be profound. The less thou speakest the better thou prayest...External and bodily prayer is that buzzing of the lips, that outside babble that is gone through without any attention, and which strikes the ears of men; but prayer in spirit and in truth is the inward desire, the motions, the sighs, which issue from the depths of the heart. The former is the prayer of hypocrites and of all who trust in themselves: the latter is the prayer of the children of God, who walk in His fear.”

Observe too their *definiteness*. Though exceedingly brief yet their prayers are very explicit. There were no vague

ramblings or mere generalisations, but specific requests for definite things. How much failure there is at this point. How many prayers have we heard that were so incoherent and aimless, so lacking in point and unity, that when the Amen was reached we could scarcely remember one thing for which thanks had been given or request had been made, only a blurred impression remaining on the mind and a feeling that the supplicant had engaged more in a form of indirect preaching than direct praying. But examine any of the prayers of the apostles and it will be seen at a glance that theirs are like those of their Master's in Matthew 6:9-13 and John 17—made up of definitive adorations and sharply-defined petitions. There is no moralising and uttering of pious platitudes, but a spreading before God of certain needs and a simple asking for the supply of them.

Consider also *the burden of them*. In the apostolic prayers there is no supplicating God for the supply of temporal needs and (with a single exception) no asking Him to interpose on their behalf in a providential way. Instead, the things asked for are wholly of a spiritual and gracious nature. That the Father may give unto us the spirit of understanding and revelation in the knowledge of Himself, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened so that we may know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power to usward (Eph. 1:17-19). That He would grant us according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that we might know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19). That our love may abound more and

more, that we might be sincere and without offence, and be filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:9-11), walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing (Col. 1:10), that we might be sanctified wholly (1 Thess. 5:23).

Note also the *catholicity* of them. Not that it is either wrong or unspiritual to pray for ourselves individually, any more than it is to supplicate for temporal and providential mercies; rather are we directing attention to where the apostles placed all their emphasis. In one only do we find Paul praying for himself, and rarely for particular individuals. His general custom was to pray for the whole Household of Faith. In this he adheres closely to the pattern prayer given us by Christ, and which we like to think of as the *Family* prayer. All its pronouns are in the plural number: “give us” (not only “me”), “forgive us” etc. Accordingly we find the apostle exhorting us to be making “supplication for *all* saints” (Eph. 6:18), and in his prayers he sets us an example of this very thing. He asked that the Ephesian church might “be able to comprehend with *all* saints what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (3:18). What a corrective for self-centeredness! If I am praying for “all saints” I include myself!

Finally, let us point out a striking *omission*. If all the apostolic prayers be read attentively it will be found that in none of them is any place given to that which occupies such prominence in those of Arminians. Not once do we find God asked to save the world or to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. The apostles did not so much as pray for the conversion of the city in which a particular Christian church was located. In this they conformed again to the example set for them by

Christ: “I pray not for the world,” said He, “but for them which Thou hast given Me” (John 17:9). Should it be objected that the Lord Jesus was there praying only for His immediate apostles or disciples, the answer is that when He extended His prayer beyond them it was not for the world, but only for His believing people unto the end of time: see verses 20, 21. It is true the apostle exhorts that prayers, “be made for all [classes of] men: for kings and all that are in authority” (1 Tim. 2:1)—in which duty many are woefully remiss—yet it is not for their salvation, but “that *we* may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (verse 2). There is much to be learned from the prayers of the apostles.

The first of seven booklets.

