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Kingdom Prayer, Part 2

There is no question that the Bible describes the life of the child of God as a life of prayer. In fact, Paul exhorted the brethren in Thessalonica, Philippi, and Ephesus to battle spiritually this way:

1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

Philippians 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

Ephesians 6:18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

And yet, Paul came by these exhortations honestly. Notice what we read of Christ:

Luke 18:1, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

This is why Paul exhorts the believer to "continue in prayer" (Colossians 4:2). And yet, how ought we to pray?

This is a valid question in light of the fact that when the disciples saw that John the Baptist hosted a seminar on praying for his disciples, they approached Christ and said, "Lord, teach us to pray as John

also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).

And so the concern that we pray correctly, in light of the exhortation in Scripture that we pray at all times, is of great importance. So again, how do we do it?

Christ laid down a pattern for praying in Matthew 6.¹ We commonly call this example *The Lord’s Prayer*.² In this prayer Christ gives us six different themes around which to pray. And yet as *The Lord’s Prayer* is but a pattern for prayer, it obviously is up to us to flesh the pattern out. Or is it?

Throughout Scripture we have examples of men, women and of Christ praying. As it is unthinkable that God would leave us on our own in this important topic (after exhorting us to pray so frequently and fervently), we take the many examples recorded in Scripture as the fleshing out NOT of the *entire Lord’s Prayer* BUT of each of the six petitions. For example, for the first petition — Hallowed Be Thy Name — we need only look to the Psalter where we see multiple Psalms of praise and adoration to God. Read and pray through these psalms and you’ll know how to “hallow God’s name.”

In the third petition — Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven — we need only look to Christ’s last prayer in the garden in Matthew 26:36-44 when He struggled as a man with regard to the will of God and the sufferings that awaited Him on the cross. If you want a fleshing out of this petition, then study Christ’s words in the garden.

For the fourth petition — Give us this day our daily bread — we need only look at the prayer that Paul prayed in Philippians 4:10-14 when he found himself in want and in prison OR John’s prayer in 3 John 2 on behalf of Gaius’ needs.

For the fifth petition — Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors — we need only look to Daniel 9 and the great confession which he prayed on behalf of the people of God OR the publican’s prayer in Luke 18:13.

For the sixth petition — Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil — we need only look to Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 6:19-20 following his treatment of the Christian’s Armor in light of our warfare.

However, you say, “*But what about the second petition: Thy Kingdom come? You skipped it.*”

That brothers and sisters is represented in such prayers as the ones recorded in Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 1:9-11 OR our text. Indeed Philemon was a co-laborer with Paul who at the writing of this epistle was confronted with Kingdom Issues; specifically his calling, ministry, and responsibility to Onesimus. What makes this epistle so profound is that Onesimus was a runaway slave, Philemon’s runaway slave, whom Paul sent back to Philemon with this epistle in his hand.

So when it came to this Kingdom Principle, the receiving of Onesimus, how ought Paul to pray for Philemon? What was the issue at hand?

As we began considering this question, we saw that which out to prompt us to pray are people. The catalyst that should bring us to our knees with regard to these people is their love for the brethren

¹ Compare also Luke 11

² Compare Matthew 6:9-13

and their faith toward God.

The Content of Kingdom Prayer

With that, notice thirdly this morning, the CONTENT of Kingdom of Praying. So how ought we to pray for another when it comes to the Kingdom of God?

Philemon 1:6, “[and I pray] that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”

When it comes to this verse, opinions are vast and varied as to what Paul means here. The Greek is rather ambiguous leaving a variety of options open as to what Paul actually was praying when it came to Philemon. And the latter part of the verse is much easier to understand than the first part, so we will begin with it.

When it comes to the content of Kingdom Prayer, notice first that it revolves around individuals. Paul says that he prays that their faith will become effective by the “acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”

Now, regardless of the Bible translation, I believe that the New American Standard Bible (NASB) most accurately reflects the Greek. Whatever Paul is praying for in the first part of the verse, it only will be realized as Philemon “grows in his knowledge of every good thing which was in him.”

What does this mean?

There are two key phrases here the first is *the acknowledging or the knowledge*. This phrase comes from two Greek words: *gnosis* which is translated as “knowledge” and *epi* which intensifies the root.

Now we have considered the concept of “knowing” on a variety of occasions such that you will recall that far from referencing a head or mere intellectual knowledge of a subject matter it denotes an intimate, love relationship. For example we read of this knowing in Genesis 4.

Genesis 4:1, “And Adam knew [had relations with] Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.”

Clearly to know someone speaks of an intimacy and a deep, abiding communion.

John 17:3, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

We’ve seen that salvation speaks of a love relationship with God in which the believer enjoys deep, abiding fellowship with the Lord. This is how we will spend the rest of eternity; investing in and growing in our love relationship with Christ.

And this is the word used in this context. However here it is intensified (with the prefix *epi*) such that the knowledge that Paul is praying for when it came to Philemon; the content of Kingdom Praying, speaks of a deep, rich, full, experiential knowledge of every good thing.

“Every good thing” is a reference to any and every heavenly benefit given to the believer by grace in

Christ. We could call it the fruit of grace. For example we read about it here:

James 1:16-17, "Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

The "good things" referenced in this verse clearly are the gifts which flow from

- God.
- Above.
- Grace.

It is as Paul put it in Ephesians 1.

Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

When a person comes to Christ, they receive every spiritual blessing they could ever need, want, or desire. That is what is in mind in our text when Paul talks about "every good thing which is in you." He is referencing spiritual blessings which relate to the inner man such as those referenced in Galatians 5:22:

- Love.
- Joy.
- Peace.
- Patience.
- Kindness.
- Goodness.
- Faithfulness.
- Gentleness.
- Self control.

And yet it should be noted that these "spiritual blessings" are enjoyed as a direct result of knowing Christ via His word.

2 Peter 1:3, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."

This completes the picture. "Every good thing" granted "within" comes from a deeper, fuller, and more intimate walk with Christ.

With this let's put together the phrases and I think you'll see what Paul is getting at here. When it came to Philemon, what was Paul's longing when it came to the Kingdom of God?

Paul prayed that Philemon would come to a deeper, richer, fuller understanding of the good things/spiritual benefits which flow from Christ **and so he prayed that** Philemon's walk with Christ would be deeper. That Philemon would come to know and so enjoy more intimately "the good things"/the spiritual benefits which result from a love relationship with the Lord. And that those things

pertaining to life and godliness would become abundantly evident within his life.

In essence he prayed that Philemon would live in light of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ such that he would come to know the riches of Christ Jesus in the inner man. And that is what we are after when it comes to the Kingdom of God being lived out in our lives... our spouse's life... our children's life... a disciple's life. We are not satisfied that each other simply knows Christ. We long for each and every child of God to

- Abide in Him.
- Know the riches of His grace.
- Fellowship with Him and so His sufferings.
- Come to an understanding of His sufficiency.
- Embody the fruit of the Spirit.

Ironically this is what is behind the doctrine of "the perseverance of the saints." I've referenced this before, but the doctrine says far more than simply, "Once saved, always saved." That is too gloomy. Perseverance of the saints involves this, but it goes beyond it such that we confess that it is God's will

- Not only for the child of God NOT to be lost.
- But that in and through all thing
 - He will grow in his love-relationship with the Lord.
 - He will come to know the good things which flow from grace.

This is what is taught in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

Philippians 1:6, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

This verse implies that God's work in our lives simply is NOT getting us to heaven. Rather it is perfecting/maturing us as the day draws near! Paul, referencing the severe persecution awaiting many in Christ:

Romans 8:37, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Again it is NOT simply that we are going to make it by the "hair of our chinny chin chin." Rather, it is God's will that each and every child of God prove to be "more than conquerors."

So God wants us wealthy and healthy?

After all this is what might be implied in some people's minds by "more than conquerors."

In fact, Paul goes on to explain what he means by "more than conquerors."

Romans 8:38-39, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Behold the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. It is facing trial and difficulty and yet soaring in our faith. It is knowing want, hardship, persecution, suffering; and yet far from shrinking back, the child of God knows "the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension" unto the glory of God!

Family of God, this is God's will for each and every one of us in Christ. This is the embodying of what Christ commanded when He taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come!"

So how ought I to pray when it comes to the Kingdom of God?

First, pray that, each of us might come to know the riches of His grace. And that the "good things" which God works in His children (peace, patience, kindness, goodness, love, joy, etc.) would grace us daily.

Thirdly, pray that we would grow up in all ways unto Christ.

Living Unto Grace

Now would you notice in our text that as Philemon came to "a deeper knowledge of every good thing which was in him" this would have an impact on his living, which constitutes the second element of Kingdom Praying: Living unto grace.

Philemon 1:6, "[And I pray] that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."

As the good things of God grew in Philemon, this would impact how he lived in order that the fellowship of his faith would become more effective.

What does this mean?

Unfortunately when it comes to this question, the translator faces a problem on account of the ambiguity of the Greek. There are at least six ways that the Greek can be taken. Paul here could be praying one of these ways:

1. Philemon would *share* his resources with others in a spirit of liberality *springing from faith* in Christ.
2. Philemon would *share* his *faith* to others.
3. The *fellowship* that Philemon enjoyed with others *on account of faith* might grow.
4. The *fellowship* that Philemon enjoyed with Christ *on account of faith* might grow.
5. Philemon would *share* in *the faith* and so the Kingdom more richly.
6. Philemon would open up and allow others to *share in his fellowship* on account of their mutual *faith*.

While some of these might be implied by each other, nevertheless we have before us a difficulty in understanding what exactly Paul had in mind here. From the outset it is rather sad since this verse is key to understanding how to pray on behalf of the Kingdom of God. And yet, much of the ambiguity is resolved when we remember the context of this verse as it rests in this epistle.

Recall that this letter was written to a Christian slave owner in which Paul made the appeal for Philemon to forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had become a Christian. On account of the slave revolts of the first century BC, Rome had harsh penalties for rebellious slaves. In this case, Philemon could have Onesimus executed on the spot for his rebellion. And so it was with fear and trembling no doubt that Onesimus approached Philemon AND with shaking hands gave this epistle to his master.

Now because Onesimus' forgiveness was not a done deal, from the very beginning of this epistle all the way through Paul writes in such a way as to stress the need for Philemon to forgive Onesimus. We see it in the verses we've already considered.

Philemon 1, "**Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ**, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer."

Recall that this is the only time Paul refers to himself as a prisoner in the opening words of an epistle. To a man who might be bound by public opinion and his fellow slave owners, Philemon needed to know that first and foremost, he like Paul was a prisoner of Christ! Do you see how Paul's word choice revolved around the issue of Onesimus?

Philemon 1, "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, **unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer.**"

Before Philemon acted with regard to Onesimus, he first was reminded of the fact that he once was alienated from God and so doomed to death, but now he was the beloved of God! He not only had received grace from God when he didn't deserve it, but now he was a called and chosen servant of Christ whose life now revolved around building up the body of Christ. Ought not Philemon to extend this same grace to Onesimus? Again, notice the word choice and its bearing on the bigger issue.

Philemon 2, "And to our beloved Apphia, **and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house.**"

indeed, before Philemon was to act regarding Onesimus, this epistle was to be read to the church which met in his house. This is shocking in light of the fact that this is a private letter from Paul to Philemon. Yet, Philemon was to know that his private decision regarding Onesimus was now a public decision.

The issue regarding Philemon's forgiveness of Onesimus takes center stage in this epistle. Everything written here was for that specific end. In fact, we'll see this again and again as we progress in our study.

Accordingly, when we come to the rather ambiguous statement of v. 6a and so the content of Paul's prayer, if we understand that ultimately Paul had Onesimus' restoration in mind here, the options as to how we interpret the verse comes down to one very obvious approach. To show you this let's walk our way through the verse bearing in mind the context.

Philemon 1:6, "**[I pray] that the communication of thy faith³** may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus."

In context it is obvious what Paul has in mind here. Truly, Philemon was known among the early church as one who not only provided for the church's physical needs, but also for their spiritual needs as well. We've already seen the incredible statements regarding this man's fellowship in this epistle.

Philemon 2, "And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house."

³ I take "of your faith" as a genitive of origin

Paul wrote this epistle to the church in Philemon's home. Philemon was a wealthy land owner who opened his living room that the church in Colossae might worship. Now as Christianity was not a sanctioned religion in Rome, this was taking a great risk. But that didn't matter to Philemon. He knew that God had given him wealth that he might use it to advance the corporate fellowship of God's people. When it came to Philemon's spiritual maturation and heart for ministry, again we saw that Paul wrote:

Philemon 7, **"For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother."**

Truly Philemon was known for more than his generosity in promoting the corporate fellowship of God's people. He himself also lived so as to bring the refreshing breath of Christ to those in Colossae. This he understood was his purpose and the purpose of every Christian; building up and blessing the body of Christ.

Indeed, Philemon was a man of grace who extended this grace to the body of Christ. It clearly is this that Paul had in mind when he referenced the "fellowship"⁴ which came from Philemon's faith."

In light of this it is clear that Paul has in mind in this verse the fellowship of Philemon which resulted in the giving of himself both to God and the body of Christ unto the building up of our Lord's Kingdom. What then is Paul praying for here?

Paul is praying that the fellowship of Philemon's faith may become effective⁵. The word rendered effective is the same word from which we get the word energy, and is one of many words for "power" in the Greek.

What's the only possible reference for this "effective fellowship?"

As we have seen, Onesimus! Truly Paul's prayer here is that the fellowship of Philemon, which already had blessed so many in the Kingdom of God, might be empowered such that it might be extended to Onesimus as well, one unworthy of such love, grace, affection, and forgiveness.

And so do you see it? Do you see what constitutes the second element of Kingdom Praying?

Not only ought we to pray for each other to know the grace of God and so live in light of it, but we also must pray for one another to extend this grace to all in their path. Hendriksen put it this way:

"Undoubtedly [Philemon] had made many valuable contributions, both material and spiritual, to the welfare of the little community. Let him then demonstrate this same attitude of liberality, and at the same time the genuine character of his faith, in still another respect, namely, by showing mercy to Onesimus."⁶

⁴ κοινωνία koinonia is a word that is difficult to render precisely in English. It usually is translated as "communication or fellowship," but it means much more than merely enjoying each other's company. It refers to a mutual sharing of life, and could be translated as "belonging." Truly believers *belong* both to Christ and one another. We are family and so have an interest both in Christ and each other. N. T. Wright, speaking of fellowship, put it this way, "The idea we need to grasp- the theme that dominates the letter- is that, in Christ, Christians not only belong to one another but actually become mutually identified, truly rejoicing with the happy and genuinely weeping with the sad" (*Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, p. 177).

⁵ ενεργης energeis

⁶ *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*, NTC, p. 213.

That is the idea behind Paul's prayer here. Paul is longing for Philemon to live out the grace of God which was operative in his life, and so bless Onesimus! And this only makes sense if the Kingdom of God involves the reign and rule of Christ in the hearts of man. If we are to embody what Christ taught His disciples when it comes to prayer, specifically the second petition which is, "Thy Kingdom come!" Then it only naturally follows that a large part of Kingdom Prayer, a large part of God's Kingdom coming to this earth, revolves around not only the child of God living in light of the grace of Christ, but their extending this grace to others unworthy of it.

That's what we are looking for when it comes to

- The child of God growing as Kingdom citizens.
- Our children growing up in Christ.
- Our families.
- This church!

Now brothers and sisters, let me state the obvious. I'm sure you've all heard of the proverbial saying, if you pray for patience watch out, for the only way God answers this prayer is to put the child of God in circumstances that will stretch his patience and so build it. In other words, a prayer for patience is a prayer for trial and difficulty.

Likewise if we make it our practice to pray in light of the Kingdom of God, to pray not only for the Christian to come to know the grace of God and so embody its effects in their lives in the form of love, grace, peace, patience, etc. but also for the Christian to extend these benefits to ones unworthy of it, men and women like Onesimus, then how practically ought we to expect God to answer this prayer in our life? What will an answer to this prayer look like?

For the child of God to know peace in a dark world of sin, patience in hardship, and love for a God who ordains bitter providence; the bitterness and hardship of this life will not be removed from the child of God. Rather the child of God will come to know it in deeper and more poignant ways, that they might know the grace of God in a deeper and more poignant way.

For the child of God to know

- Forgiveness when it comes to someone unworthy of it.
- Compassion for an enemy.
- What it is like to extend grace to someone unlovely.

Then it only follows that we necessarily will be confronted by an enemy, a difficult person, one who is hard to forgive that God's grace might abound through us! Indeed, Kingdom Praying, growth as it relates to the Kingdom of God in our lives, can only end with the Christian being faced with

- Difficult and harsh circumstances.
- Difficult and harsh people.

Yet rather than shrinking back, they come to know the grace of God more richly and so extend this grace to the unloving. So when it comes to this family, let us pray "Thy Kingdom Come" *AND* prepare to extend God's grace to the difficult people God brings in our paths.

In the words of Amy Carmichael:

Lord crucified, O mark Thy holy cross
On motive, preference, all fond desires,
On that which self in any form inspires,
Set thou that sign of loss.
And when the touch of death is here and there,
Laid on a thing most precious in our eyes,
Let us not wonder, let us recognize,
The answer to this prayer.

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VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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