

“Unanswered Prayer”  
Romans 1:8-13  
(Preached at Trinity, January 14, 2007)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We’ve been looking at **Verses 8-15**. After the salutation Paul pauses for a moment to speak a few words that focus on their mutual encouragement and edification.  
**Romans 1:12** – “. . . that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”
2. **Verse 8** begins with Paul expressing his gratitude to God for their reputation, their consistent testimony to the world. They were living their faith.  
**Romans 1:8** – “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”
3. We’ve also noted in this section that Paul is a man of prayer.  
**Romans 1:9** – “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;”
4. You can imagine the great faith and confidence as Paul lifted up his voice in prayer. As an apostle of Christ he must have seen God do many miracles. But what about the times when God did not answer his prayers?
5. In **Verses 10-11** Paul expressed his prayer to God:  
**Romans 1:10-11** – “Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;”
  - A. Paul’s great desire and his prayer was that he might be allowed to make a visit to Rome that he might teach and strengthen them.
  - B. It was a sincere prayer. It was a spiritual prayer. It was to a high purpose. But this prayer was not answered.
6. Unanswered prayers have always been a matter of confusion for Christians. Some take a fatalistic position. In other words they console themselves, “It just wasn’t the will of God.” It is easy to take this position because it doesn’t demand anything from us. It doesn’t require us to think. The truth is it doesn’t really get to the heart of the issue.
7. We are in a relationship with God. The New Covenant promises God’s particular care of His people.  
**2 Corinthians 6:17-18** – “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, <sup>18</sup> And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”  
God is active in our lives. He is growing us, teaching us, conforming us more and more to Christ. His works in our lives are not without purpose. Adversity is by design. Blessings are by design. All to His glory. He teaches us when He answers prayers and when prayers go unanswered.
8. This morning I want us to look at the difficult subject of unanswered prayer. I want to divide the subject into three categories:

- First, we need to examine prayers offered up by the lost – always unanswered
- Prayer problems when Christians pray improperly
- When prayers still go unanswered

## I. Prayers offered up by the lost

### A. Lost people often pray

1. Depravity doesn't mean that the lost man doesn't believe in the existence of God, especially where the Gospel has been freely preached
2. We live in a very religious nation
  - a. People often say, "You're in our prayers"
  - b. Each year we have a national day of prayer
  - c. Even the sessions of congress open in prayer
3. People often pray when they get into trouble or have a need

### B. The lost are incapable of true prayer

1. Although God knows and hears all things the prayers of the lost are not received by God.
2. 3. Sin has caused an infinite separation between God and man.
  - a. The lost man is separated from God in this life. When Adam sinned he died spiritually and became alienated from God.
  - b. All of lost humanity will be forever separated in eternity
3. The only way to close the gulf of separation is through Christ  
**John 14:6** – "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."
4. The lost person cannot understand the glorious work of Christ as Mediator

## II. Prayer problems when Christians pray improperly

### A. When we do not pray – obviously we cannot expect answered prayer when we do not pray

1. We sometimes allow our busy schedule to rob us of prayer  
As we've seen, Paul's life was filled with continual activity as he labored in the Gospel, yet he was a man of prayer
2. Some Christians simply have an undisciplined life  
If we are too busy to pray we are saying the things we are doing are more important than prayer. The same is true with Bible reading or worship.
3. Where there is no prayer we should not expect to receive of God  
**James 4:2** – "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not."

### B. When there is something amiss or wanting in our prayers – that is, your motives are impure.

**James 4:3** - "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

1. This would include praying in selfishness or to fulfill sinful lusts  
We pray for success, a new job, larger house
2. If we are not praying for His glory our motives are impure
3. Even prayers for good things can have wrong motives
  - a. A woman prays for the conversion of her lost husband, not out of a burden for his soul but that her life might be better.

- b. We can desire church our church to grow for our own interests more than the conversion of souls or the glory of God.
    - 4. How much of our prayer life is dedicated to selfish ends?
  - C. When we fail to deal with blatant sin it causes God to put all our prayers on hold?
 

**1 Peter 3:7** – “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”

    - 1. Sin always draws us away from God  
He ceases to be our chief desire, our highest interest
    - 2. Look at Christ as our highest example of dedication to the Father
      - a. The Father was His chief pursuit  
**John 4:34** – “Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.”
      - b. Even at the age of twelve seeking God was His chief pursuit  
**Luke 2:49** – “And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?”
    - 3. Sin is poison to our prayer life. It crushes our confidence. It acts like water on the fires of our fervency. And it separates us from fellowship with God.  
**Isaiah 59:1-2** – “Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: <sup>2</sup> But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.”
    - 4. If God is not answering your prayer you should ask yourself whether you are harboring some beloved sin.
  - D. A failure to persevere in prayer – Jesus told a parable **Luke 18:1-8**  
**Luke 18:1-8** – “And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; <sup>2</sup> Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. <sup>4</sup> And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; <sup>5</sup> Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. <sup>7</sup> And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”
  - E. Idolatry  
**Ezekiel 14:3** – “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?”
    - 1. What have you set up as more important than your relationship with God?  
Your job, your family, a boyfriend or girlfriend, TV, computer
    - 2. Don't expect to have an effectual prayer life with idolatry in your heart
    - 3. Do you love God alone, seek Him alone. Do you trust Him alone.
  - F. When we close our hearts towards those in need
    - 1. Many would say, “What does that have to do with my prayer life?”
    - 2. God says He shuts His ear against those who turn away from the poor.

**Proverbs 21:13** – “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.”

G. Unbelief

1. Prayer has always been linked to faith  
**James 1:6-8** – “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. <sup>7</sup> For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. <sup>8</sup> A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.”  
**Matthew 17:20** – “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”
2. The very essence of the Christian life is trusting Christ – we must trust Him for all things.

III. What about when there is nothing amiss in our prayers yet our prayers still go unanswered.

A. Paul had done everything properly

1. It was not a selfish prayer
  - a. His goal and motive was only the benefit of the Christians in Rome. He wanted to help them in their spiritual growth. This was Paul’s request before God in Prayer  
**Romans 1:10-11** – “Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;”
  - b. In other words, this was a spiritual prayer
2. It was not hindered by sin
3. It was a prayer to the Father through the atoning work of Christ  
**Romans 1:8** – “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all”

B. What are some possible reasons for the unanswered prayer?

1. God’s Kingdom is greater than any one man
  - a. Paul was praying that God send *him* to strengthen Rome
  - b. They were obviously flourishing without him – in **Verse 8** Paul thanks God that their faith is being talked about throughout the whole world.
  - c. Sometimes Christians pray about a particular ministry where they see a great need and then are disappointed when it doesn’t work out.
  - d. It is commendable to have such a heart. There are many professing Christians that are never have such a burden for kingdom work.
  - e. We must always remember that God’s work is greater than us or our church. Paul’s prayer for the strengthening of the Church of Rome was not dependent upon him.

2. God's plan may be different for you
  - a. Paul was praying to go to Rome  
**Romans 1:10-11** – “Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you . . .”  
 God's plan, however, was for Paul to take the Gospel to other Gentile cities to bring the Gospel to them.
  - b. Someone may be sick and prays for healing but God may purpose to send him as a witness to someone at the hospital
  - c. Someone may pray for a new job, yet God may leave him at the old job because He has a work for him to do there.
  - d. Do you see why it is insufficient to simply say, “It must not be God's will.” Instead we should see our lives as being filled with the purpose of God.
3. And we need to understand that God's ways are greater than our ways, His wisdom is mightier than our wisdom.  
 Paul prayed three times for his thorn in the flesh to be removed but God knew it was better for Paul for it to remain

#### Conclusion:

1. We must remember that God's actions in our life are all carefully designed by infinite wisdom for our very best good.
  - A. **Romans 8** will help to clarify this for us.  
**Romans 8:26-28** – “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. <sup>27</sup> And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. <sup>28</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his purpose*.”
  - B. With this in mind, for the Christian is there really any such thing as an unanswered prayer?
  - C. God's will is our best good and His best glory.
    - When we pray with this as our motive God always answers our prayers and gives us the desire of our heart.
    - When we pray to satisfy our own lusts we will often be disappointed.
2. Press on in prayer. Pray that God might give you a pure heart with pure motives. May His glory be your highest desire.  
 When you pray for His glory your prayer life will be transformed and you will find blessings you never knew.