

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Many people who sincerely seek the face of God continually will eventually become intercessors. We seek the face of God because of spiritual thirst. In seeking the face of God, we pray often to become more like Jesus, and to become more useful in the kingdom of God. God's answer to these prayers is to fill us with His love, and a burden to pray for others. We become intercessors because of that burden and love.

An intercessor is a person who prays on behalf of another person or group--who stands in the gap between God and men.

GOD WANTS ALL MEN TO BE SAVED

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men . . . For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:1, 3-4).

It is the will of God for all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth. Your family members, your friends, your neighbors, the people you work with, and the people you meet on the street-- it makes no difference how far from God they may be, God wants to save them. Jesus Christ loves everybody, and He died for the sins of the whole human race:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. Yet, because of His holy nature, He cannot have fellowship with sinful mankind:

"Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (I John 1:5-6).

Jesus came into the world to save us from that which separates us from God--our sins!

". . . and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus was introduced by John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Bible declares that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), and "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

However, Jesus paid the price for us. He died in our stead. His death was in itself an act of intercession. But it has always been God's will for His people to be actively involved in intercessory prayer on behalf of others. In the same way, the Bible is filled with promises. Jesus paid the price so that we can claim them freely. But how do we claim them? Through prayer -- in Jesus name!

OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

1. Moses:

The history of the children of Israel under the

leadership of Moses is a history of a leader standing in the gap again and again, and saving the nation of Israel from the judgment hand of God through intercessory prayer. For example, after the children of Israel had sinned by making and worshipping the golden calf, God was ready to destroy them, and raise up a nation from the seed of Moses. But Moses went up into the mountain, and prayed:



"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exodus 32:31-32).

The true spirit of intercession is the result of a love for others, and the desire for their spiritual good. Moses had the opportunity to have a nation named after him, but he was more concerned for the welfare of Israel than for his own advancement. This is prayer in its highest form!

2. Abraham:

Abraham interceded for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, especially because of his nephew Lot and his family who lived there. Although God destroyed the cities, "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt" (Genesis 19:29).

3. The Priesthood:

God gave Moses everything on Mt. Sinai Israel needed to become a strong nation: the Law, the Tabernacle (church), and the Priesthood (Ministry). The duties of the priest were to perform intercessory acts. For instance, the sin offerings were substitutionary sacrifices offered by the priests as an atonement for the sins of the people. Here are two examples of intercessory acts by the priests that saved their nation from the judgment of God.

a. Aaron:

The children of Israel complained to Moses after God send judgment against Korah and his men, and the two hundred fifty men that offered incense, "Ye have killed the people of the Lord."

God was so angry that he spoke to Moses, "Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment." Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before God. God sent a plague among the people that killed twenty thousand of them. Then Moses commanded Aaron to make an atonement for the people.

"And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed" (Numbers 16:48).

This is an excellent example of what the intercessor does. He stands between the dead and the living. Through his intercessory prayers, he stays the judgment hand of God, and God's wrath is changed to mercy.

b. Phinehas:

Once again, the children of Israel had horribly sinned, this time by worshipping Baalpeor, the gods of the Moabites, and the anger of the Lord was against them. Only by the intercessory acts of Phinehas was a plague stayed that had already killed twenty-four thousand people. God is pleased when people care enough for others that they are zealous to intercede on behalf of others:

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he

was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.

Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel" (Numbers 25:10-13).

Although God loves the sinner, He hates sin. There is no "in-between" with God. We are either for Him, or against Him. We are either His children, or His enemies--because "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). James also warned, "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). Because God is just, He must punish the wicked. Only the intercessory prayers of God's people can stop His hand of judgment.

QUEEN ESTHER

Through the treachery of Haman, a commandment had been given that on a certain day, all of the Jews in all of the king's provinces should be killed (Esther 3:8-15). Mordecai pleaded with Esther to intercede before the king, as she was the queen. However, in those days, not even the queen had the right to approach the king unless she was called. When a person approached the throne without being called, unless the king stretched out his sceptre toward the person, showing mercy, they would be killed.

At first, Esther hesitated. But Mordecai pleaded ". . . if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther then instructed all of the Jews in Shushan palace to fast for three days, ". . . and so will I go in unto the king . . . and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

Christian brothers and sisters, do you have relatives and friends that do not know Jesus Christ? Are there people that you really care about who have not surrendered their lives to Jesus? Perhaps God has brought you into His kingdom for such a time as this. Now is the time to go before the king's throne and intercede for the lost!

NEW TESTAMENT INTERCESSORS

Prayer was the chief activity of the early church. They were praying when they were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:1-4). Peter and John were on their way to pray when they met and healed the lame man at the gate called "Beautiful" (Acts 3:1-8). The early church prayed and received a renewing of the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:24-31). They prayed over the seven deacons that they had chosen (Acts 6:6). They interceded for Peter, until God sent an angel and miraculously delivered Peter from prison (Acts 12:5). The church at Antioch prayed and fasted before sending Paul and Barnabas out to become missionaries to the Gentile nations (Acts 13:1-4). Throughout the book of Acts, the pattern is the same.

PAUL, THE INTERCESSOR

When we think of Paul, we think of him as one of the first missionaries, or one of the greatest of the apostles. We rarely think of Paul as an intercessor. Yet it is evident that the reason his ministry was so successful is that he was indeed an intercessor.

Paul was an intercessor because of his love for his people. He had a burden that only the Holy Spirit could have given him. (If you really want to become an intercessor, you must pray and fast until God gives you a tremendous love and burden for others--not only the sinners, but the saints, also). Paul wrote concerning his burden, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Romans 10:1).

Paul was probably the greatest missionary that ever lived, and also one of the

greatest apostles. But that was not his heart's desire--to be great. Nor was his heart's desire to be popular and prosperous. It was that his people might come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. God hears the same kind of intercessory prayers. If we pray for the lost because we are building a little kingdom of our own, because we want a big congregation so that we can receive the praises of others, or for any other selfish reason, our prayers are wasted! Paul certainly had no selfish motives connected with his burden for his people:

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1, 2).

"Let me die accursed and separated from Jesus Christ, if it will result in the salvation of my family!" How many of us could pray a prayer like that? Neither could Paul--except for the burden and love he carried for his nation. Yes, not just his immediate family. His whole nation.

God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel of the need for intercessors to pray for the nation:

"And I sought for a man among them, that they should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30).

Paul's life was literally a life of unceasing prayer, especially praying for others. To the church at Rome he wrote:

". . . without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Romans 1:9).

To the church at Galatia:

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19).

To the church at Ephesus:

"(I) cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:16).

To the church at Phillipi:

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy" (Philippians 1:3).

To the church at Colosse:

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Colossians 1:2).

To the church at Thessalonica:

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers:" (I Thessalonians 1:2).

"Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith" (I Thessalonians 3:10).

"Wherefore also we pray always for you . . ." (II Thessalonians 1:11).

To Timothy, Paul's son in the gospel:

"I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day" (II Timothy 1:3).

To Philemon, one of Paul's fellow-workers:

"I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers" (Philemon, verse 4).

We have only given a small portion of each passage. The person who desires to be a fruitful intercessor should look up each verse, in order to learn what should be included in our prayer for others.

Paul also requested the churches to pray for him:

Romans 15:30-32; I Thessalonians 5:25; II Thessalonians 3:1-2; Philemon, verse 22; Philippians 1:19; Colossians 4:3.

EPAPHRAS

How many of us, if we were asked who Epaphras was, could give a correct answer? No, he is not among the most well-known characters of the Bible--but when the day arrives when rewards will be given, he will be right there with the best of the group. He had no preaching ministry that we know of. He is not known as a gospel singer or musician. But he was an intercessor!

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you" (Colossians 4:12, 13).

It is the will of God for all men to be saved, but they will not be saved unless somebody carries a burden for them:

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5, 6).

THE SPIRIT OF INTERCESSION

The greatest intercessor of all time is Jesus Christ, "Who in the days of His flesh . . . offered up prayers and supplication with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death" (Hebrews 5:7). When you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Jesus, the Intercessor dwells within you.

We should faithfully intercede for all people, regardless of whether we feel any special anointing or not, but the deepest and most powerful intercession is when the Spirit of God prays through us. We should all pray for this experience:

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities (weaknesses): 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.

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" (Romans 8:26-27).

The need of the hour is for intercessors. Are you willing to become a person like Epaphras? *ds*