

Prayers for the Church
2 Corinthians 13:9
August 7, 2011

Read: 2 Corinthians 13:9

In the New Testament, the word perfect can mean to have “a right ordering and arrangement.” It can mean to “be on the path of progress.” It can indicate “the close relationship between character and destiny.” (Vine’s N.T. Dictionary, p.175) Paul prayed for the church to be perfect because he knew the church had the most vital and urgent purpose in the world.

Loss of cabin pressure

A pastor by the name of Ron Forseth tells of a recent time when he was on a passenger flight. He was getting ready to sit back to enjoy the ride and read a sports magazine when the stewardess interrupted everyone. She had to give vital instructions of what to do if the plane lost cabin pressure. A loss of cabin pressure meant a loss of oxygen for passengers to breathe. No oxygen and everyone would die. Her instructions were that in the event of a loss of cabin pressure, oxygen masks will drop. First you must put on your own mask, then look around and see who you can help put on their mask.

His story was a great way at looking at our lives as Christians and the ministry of our church. He said “Earth has lost its cabin pressure! The solution is urgent! Everyone must wear the “oxygen mask” of the gospel, or they will soon be lost forever. We must be as vigilant as the flight attendants in giving people careful instructions for saving themselves. Without a careful explanation, they simply won’t understand it: Part of what we must explain are truths such as:

1) Yes, you are wonderfully loved by God!

The Bible teaches in Romans 5:8 **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for**

us.”

2) However, scripture also teaches, “**we have all sinned and fallen short of the God’s perfection. Romans 3:23.** Our sin is in conflict with God’s holiness and purity. Sin is to God like a computer virus is to our laptops and desktop computers the two do not work together!

3) **Jesus himself said, “Unless we are born from above we cannot enter the kingdom of God. John 3:3.** Born from above means we surrender to the power of God over our self-will. We surrender to God daily not just when there is a funeral, wedding or sickness.

4) Jesus Christ lived and died to save us from our sinfulness. Romans 10:13 says, **Anyone who calls upon the Lord will be saved!” (Romans 10:13)** God will not force his love on us; we must ask for the life from above that only God can give.

Those are the emergency air mask instructions every Christian needs to know. Those instructions contain the number one mission of the church. Everything we do should be judged by whether it is helping us put on the oxygen mask of God’s grace and be saved from sin and offer that grace to others.

Prayers for the church

This is why we find in scripture Jesus and leaders like the Apostle Paul and others offering prayers on behalf of the believers or the church. There is a list of scriptures in the bulletin instead of my sermon points this week. I ask that you read these scriptures for yourself and use them as a guide to pray for the ministry of our church. Use these scriptures to decide what does God want you need to do to be a part of answered prayers.

Pray for laborers:

Matthew 9:38 Jesus tells his disciples to pray for laborers because the fields are white to harvest. He used the imagery of fields with

crops ready to be picked, but he knew the question is will there be enough people to pick the crop.

We need to pray for our church that we have the people who are willing to serve. The truth about our church is that yes there are ministries we don't have that other churches do have. But the great opportunity is that our church can design our ministries however we really need to in order to share Christ. But there must be laborers who will serve as leaders over various areas of ministry. There must be people who serve with and support our leaders. Prayer for laborers. We need laborers who will leads groups among adults and all ages of youth as our Wednesday evening ministries begin on September 14th. Pray that we use that time well to serve others. Our nominations team will soon start to seek people to serve, pray people will answer yes when asked because Jesus said the fields are white to harvest.

John 17 sanctification, unity/one so that the world believes

The 17th chapter of the Gospel of John is just about one long prayer by Jesus.

Verse 17 Jesus prayed his believers would be sanctified in God's truth and word. That means, he prayed that his followers would continue to want their lives more and more immersed in God's will. Jesus had a reason to pray like this. I was reading a survey from barna.org a Christian research group the other day and the percentage of people who identify themselves as Christians but believe the Bible is God's inspired word is declining. You may believe that way this morning, I hope not; but you might. It said the percentage of people who identify themselves as Christians but are mixing in the religious practices of other religious faiths and popular beliefs is on the increase.

Here is the concern for telling people believe whatever you want. If we believe whatever we want there are going be right answers and wrong answers. Just because we believe something is true; doesn't make it real or make it right. All the differing answers

about life and God cannot be right. For instance, some say God doesn't exist, but we say God does exist. Both views cannot be right. **If there are right answers then there are also wrong answers.** When we die, we're all going to find out for sure one day who was right and who was wrong. Some say Christians can live any way they want. But others, like me, say we are to conform our lives to teaching of scripture because Jesus prayed we would be sanctified or live exclusively by God's truth. Jesus said he didn't come to destroy the teachings of the law which means the Old Testament; but to fulfill it. No wonder Jesus prayed that his followers would be strong in his truth and truth about him that is contained in the first hand witnesses of him which we find in the New Testament.

Jesus prayed in verse 21 that his believers would be one or unified. No wonder because Christians are not above being divided. The largest way congregations today are growing is by transfer growth. Transfer growth means people leave one church to attend another and too often people change churches out of unresolved disagreements. Instead of fulfilling the desire of Jesus to be one, sticking together and sticking it out to work out the differences, believers are accepting division. It's the exact opposite response for which Jesus prayed to see in his followers. The unity is important because Jesus goes on to pray **"so that the world might believe you have sent me." v.21**

But if we as Christians are believing anything we want, if we are not willing to live by scriptural principals, if our unity goes no deeper than the commitment found in clubs, if our lives are tangled up in the sins that the Bible condemns and non-Christians commit, then why should unbelievers be impressed with us? When we say hey you need the oxygen mask of the gospel, follow Jesus come to church why would they listen?

So Jesus prayed, those who go by the name of Christian would be sanctified = live by God's truth, would stick together and be his

witness.

Colossians 1:10 Prayer to live with integrity

In Colossians 1:10 the Apostle Paul prayed for the church to **“live a life worthy of the gospel.”** The gospel is the good news that God can take anyone’s life and turn it around for the good. Some one sent me an email that said **“falling down is a part of life, but getting back up is living.”** God’s power can help anyone get back up from a failure and find out real living includes Jesus Christ. But again there can be those who want to be Christian but not worship God with other Christians, not serve God in any way, not live by biblical standards that is any different than those who do dishonest things on their jobs, those who defy biblical sexual standards, those who look at someone in a condemning way because they are not in the same class, class of race, class of money, class of culture or class at school.

Paul prayed that we live daily a life worthy of the gospel, the Message Bible says it like this, **“we pray you live a life that God can be proud of...”** It takes a truly surrendered heart to live as a Christian and together as a church to challenge one another so God can say I’m proud they speak the truth in love to each other rather than gossip, I’m proud they forgive one another; rather than hold grudges, I’m proud they teach my word instead of saying believe anything you want.

Susan Engle is the district lay resource leader of the Paducah Methodist churches. She spoke with our Charting the Course team this past Thursday, and she told us about a minister who went to visit people who were guest at his small church. The woman said they enjoyed worship but wouldn’t be back because their son was handicap and the physical arrangements where they worshipped wouldn’t accommodate his needs. That pastor went back to challenge his church to figured out a way to accommodate her son,

and they did. That family continued to attend. That church is now a 25,000 member church meeting in four locations around Kansas City that started out meeting in a funeral home. God blessed their ministry because efforts like that are worthy of the gospel.

We want you take a look at this woman. This picture is before a man attacked her and threw liquid acid on her face. Now in just a second we'll show her face after the acid attack. But I'll warn you before we show the picture if you don't want to look and you can close your eyes for just a moment. There is a reason why I want to show this picture and I'll explain it in a moment. Here is what she looks like after her attack. (Picture taken down) This past week the story broke that her attacker was facing punishment and his punishment was to have acid thrown in his face just as he had done to her. It was the old law of an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. It would have been fair punishment for him to be treated just as he treated her. However, she requested he be spared the horror that he inflicted upon her. That's loving your enemy. That tells me something about the real value and worth of how she is living life and what rules her heart. If she can do what she did, how much more should we as Christians be able to live a life that can make God proud of us and others see Christ through our examples.

Philemon 1:6 Prayer for Effectiveness

It's reason Paul wrote to a Christian named Philemon and other believers, and prayed they as a church would become effective when they perceived all the **“good they could do for the Lord.”** **The word effective in the Greek means powerful in action, powerful enough to achieve results.** Paul prayed churches could be powerful enough to make a difference in peoples lives in and communities. One of the classic questions every church should answer is this question, **“If our church closed tomorrow would our community miss it?”** According to many studies about worship and Sunday school attendance on the decline the answer would be, NO! Many churches could close their doors and the

their communities would not notice.

Part of the reason that worship and Sunday school attendance has been declining in America is because some congregations will not obey these words of scripture and show the effort in being effective in being powerful enough to achieve results. Lack of effort is seen in Sunday school lessons that are studied for the first time on Sunday morning. Preparation for a sermon doesn't begin until Friday or Saturday night. Someone sings a special or choirs sing with little rehearsal. Members are bored and visitors aren't impressed and don't return. This is why I and other leaders have tried to stress in all things we raise the level of quality of what we do for God.

- Our worship team has been meeting weekly for over 2 years preparing for Sunday worship services.
- I advised both previous choir directors to expect choir members to have consistent attendance at practice and if not then shouldn't sing on Sunday morning. Practice helps bring our best to the Lord and minister to others.
- The reason I offer to study with any Sunday school teacher or small group leader on topics they teach is so they can be as prepared as possible to share the most sacred message on earth, the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Recently John Bryant our chair of the trustees instituted a new policy for use of church credit cards. Its about being effective in watching what we are spending so our financial resources for ministry are used well.
- Later this month flat screens and sound system will be installed in the fellowship hall so we can use that room in greater ways to minister.
- We intentionally had people register for our church festival so we could follow up with them and seek to share Christ any way we can. We have at least 30 names of people who aren't connected to our church. We did this to be effective in reaching

out.

Nobody says hey lets go to that restaurant in town because the food is bland; but we just want to make the owners feel good for trying. Paul prayed the church be effective - powerful enough to change and drawl lives to Jesus Christ. We have a choice how we'll answer his prayer so we can be used to change lives.

Jude 1:20 Pray in the Holy Spirit

The final prayer comes from the book of Jude for the church “**to pray in the Holy Spirit.**” We pray in the Holy Spirit because that way everything we do and everything we say has the greatest hope of living God's will. We pray in the leading of the Holy spirit, not just the will of the pastor, or leadings figures or groups in the church; but the leading of the Holy Spirit that is the true source of our power.

All of these prayers are vital because human sin zaps the life out of everyone. The only way to survive is putting on the oxygen mask of the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ will have those who accept him not to just worry about themselves; but look around and see who needs the oxygen mask of God's love and presence.