

THE DIVINE WISDOM & STRATEGY OF APOSTOLIC PRAYERS – COREY STARK

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The LORD has given us an invaluable gift in the New Testament, called, “apostolic prayers.” They are simply the recorded prayers of the N.T. apostles, including Jesus, our chief apostle (Heb. 3:1). Each one gives us insight into God’s heart, desires, and are reflective of His highest purposes.

B. There are approximately 30+ apostolic prayers in the New Testament, all of which are beneficial for *unifying, sustaining* and *governing* corporate prayer meetings.

II. APOSTOLIC PRAYERS ARE GOD’S PRAYERS AND HIGHEST DESIRES

A. The apostolic prayers are the actual prayers that burn in God’s heart for the Church. He never changes, so be assured that they still burn in His heart today. They give us the language of God’s heart for His church.

B. *Premise*: Whatever is set forth (highlighted) to be contended for in the place of prayer in the New Testament is of highest priority to the heart of God. We can conclude that the prayers set forth by Jesus and the apostles are reflective of His highest desires.

III. APOSTOLIC PRAYERS ARE GOD’S VISION OF FULLNESS

A. One of the primary reasons we want to intercede much using the apostolic prayers is because it keeps us personally grappling with the high vision that God has for our individual lives and what He is postured to give us if we persevere.

Eph. 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

B. Since the church is made up of individuals, they also reflect His vision of fullness for the church!

Eph. 4:13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

C. Additionally, these prayers not only contain individual “facets” of blessing (love, power, gifts, etc.) to be contended for in our individual lives. They also keep us dynamically connected to the “storyline” or the “big picture” in God’s heart. In Stephen Covey’s bestselling book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, he said that to be effective, *we must begin with the end in mind*. In the same way, Jesus, Paul, and the apostles lived and prayed with God’s end goals in view.

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IV. APOSTOLIC PRAYERS ARE GUARANTEED

A. These prayers are guaranteed! Scripture is clear that if we ask anything in agreement with God's will it receives a positive answer (1 Jn. 5:14-15). Therefore, since all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16) and in agreement with His perfect will, including the actual text of the apostolic prayers themselves; it stands to reason that every one of them is guaranteed to be answered!

1 Jn. 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us [i.e. He receives our prayers]. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him [i.e. He answers them].

B. Simply speaking God's Word back to Him in prayer is like cosigning a two-signature check on earth that the Lord has already endorsed in heaven.

V. APOSTOLIC PRAYERS ARE GOD-CENTERED

A. All the prayers in the New Testament are God-centered prayers; meaning that each one is addressed directly to God. Not one apostolic prayer is ever addressed to the devil.

B. God-centered prayer, including spiritual warfare prayer, is the only model set forth in the New Testament. It is the model that the early church used in resisting and dislodging demonic forces and cultural strongholds (Eph. 6:12; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). Even in a time of escalating persecution against the church, the apostles never addressed the devil, but rather appealed to the Father for strength and boldness to stand strong and proclaim His Word with signs and wonders (Acts 4:24-31).

Acts 4:24 They raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them... 29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was [physically] shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

C. All of Jesus' prayers recorded in the Bible were directed to the Father (Jn. 14:16; 17:5, 11, 15, 25). Jesus taught His disciples to direct their prayers to the Father (Mt. 18:19; Lk. 11:2, 13). The apostles' prayers also teach us to address the Father when we pray. In the "warfare epistle" Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he addressed all his prayers to the Father (Eph. 1:16-17; 3:14, 16, 20).

Mt. 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

VI. APOSTOLIC PRAYERS ARE POSITIVE, ENHANCING LOVE AND UNITY

A. The apostolic prayers are positive prayers asking God for the impartation of positive virtues instead of the removal of negative ones. For example:

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1. Paul prayed for love to abound instead of asking for the removal of hatred (Phil. 1:9).
2. He prayed for the impartation of unity instead of praying against division (Rom. 15:5).
3. He asked for peace to increase instead of fear to be removed (Rom. 15:13).
4. He did not pray against sin, but for an increase of holiness, purity, and love (1 Thes. 3:12-13).
5. Even Paul's requests to be delivered from evil men are positive by focusing on the deliverance of God's people rather than exposing or eliminating the evil men persecuting them (2 Thes. 3:2).

B. I believe that one reason God established "positive prayers" as the *norm* in the New Testament is to enhance unity, and build faith, hope and love in the church. Some pray "negative prayers" that focus on sin in the church or its' leadership; often such prayers feel judgmental and angry. Others may not agree with the view or tone that was expressed in the negative prayer, so the prayer results in creating an unnecessary division among some of the people at that prayer meeting.

C. The Lord knew that praying for the impartation of positive virtues, instead of focusing on removing negative characteristics, would unify intercessors and heal some of the negative emotions against the church in the very people praying for the Church. In fact, we often fall in love with those for whom we pray often, because we begin to see them as God sees them. This includes the church.

D. On some occasions, especially heightened seasons of prayer, strategic prayer initiatives or sacred assemblies the LORD often direct leaders to facilitate times of corporate repentance for national sin, God's intervention is national crisis (natural disaster, social unrest) and release of speedy justice.

VII. APOSTOLIC PRAYERS BUILD GREATER FAITH IN A VICTORIOUS CHURCH

A. The positive focus that comes from using the apostolic prayers can also help us to operate in greater faith. The apostolic prayers provide us with good theology for a victorious church. Why do I believe the church will be victorious? Just look at the prayers of Jesus and the apostles for the church. My theology on a victorious church and revival has been significantly formed by praying the New Testament prayers.

B. Since the apostolic prayers were given by the Holy Spirit and are God's perfect will, we know that they will be *fully* answered. The church will walk in unprecedented unity, purity and power *before* Jesus returns (Jn. 14:12; 17; Eph. 4:13; 5:27; Rev. 19:7).

Jn. 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me [before Jesus returns]. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me [before Jesus returns], and have loved them as You have loved Me.

C. Positive apostolic prayers facilitate unity, impact our emotions, and build our faith. The Father is the "Great Psychologist." He designed these prayers to help human hearts flow well with the Holy Spirit and work together with others in unity with a spirit of encouragement and faith.

VIII. APOSTOLIC PRAYERS ARE FOR THE CHURCH

A. The vast majority of the apostolic prayers are focused on strengthening the church not on the Lost or the transformation of society. This does not mean that God is ambivalent about the Lost or society or that we are not to pray for these things. The only prayer in the New Testament that is focused on the salvation of the Lost is Romans 10:1 where Paul prays for the nation of Israel.

B. Why are the vast majority of the apostolic prayers for the strengthening the church? Because God's *primary plan* to reach the Lost and impact a city is by anointing His church with power and love. When we pray for the whole church in a city to be revived in God's love and walk in the power of the Spirit, the answer to these prayers will have an immense impact on the transformation of society and salvation of the Lost, as the church in that city experiences more of God's fullness.

C. We see this principle at work in the city of Ephesus. The preaching of the Word of God was so powerfully anointed that its' influence "grew mightily and prevailed" across Ephesus (Acts 19:20). God's strategy was to raise up a large, anointed church with congregations across the whole city that would win a great harvest in all Asia. What happened in Ephesus was so powerful that everyone who lived in Asia "heard the word of the Lord" from Paul and others in this church.

Acts 19:10 So that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus... 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

IX. THE FOCUS OF OUR INTERCESSION

A. Two of the primary requests Jesus exhorted us to make of the Father when we intercede are for the release of a greater measure of the Holy Spirit and the release of a greater measure of justice.

Lk. 11:13 How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Lk. 18:7 Shall not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night...?

B. As believers, we received the indwelling Spirit at our new birth (Jn. 3:3-5; Rom. 8:9-11). Thus, we do not pray for the Lord to "give us" the Holy Spirit in the sense of the indwelling Spirit; rather, we ask Him to release a *greater measure* of the ministry of the Holy Spirit *in us and through us*.

C. Scripture refers to a greater measure of the Spirit on the church as a "greater measure of grace." In Scripture this increase is referred to as "a greater grace" (Jas. 4:6); "great grace" (Acts 4:33); "grace . . . abundant" (1 Tim. 1:14); "full of grace" (Acts 6:8, NAS); "growing in grace" (2 Pet. 3:18); and "grace . . . multiplied" (2 Pet. 1:2).

Jas. 4:6 But He gives a greater grace. (NAS)

Acts 4:33 With great power the apostles gave witness... and great grace was upon them all.

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D. We pray for the release of a greater measure of justice. Justice can be defined as “God making the wrong things right.” There are two sides to justice: salvation and judgment. We see the salvation side of justice when God’s people are healed and delivered. We see the judgment side of justice when the wicked – those who rebel against God’s righteous ways – are hindered, stopped, removed, and even punished.

X. THREE PRAYER THEMES – WISDOM, FRUIT AND GIFTS

A. There are *three general prayer themes*, regardless of what type of prayer we are offering to God (devotion, supplication, intercession). The three general prayer themes are for the release of the Holy Spirit’s wisdom, fruit and gifts. The vast majority of the prayers and promises in the Bible fit into one of these three general prayer themes.

B. *Wisdom of the Spirit*: When we pray for a greater release of the wisdom of the Spirit, we are asking for an increase of understanding and insight into God’s Word, will, ways and plans for others. Paul prayed much for spiritual wisdom and understanding for others (Col. 1:9-10).

Col. 1:9 We... do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

C. Our prayer for wisdom includes asking for dreams and visions that give insight into God’s will for our lives, as well as insight into His plans for a city, nation, business, church, etc. (Acts 2:17-19).

Acts 2:17 It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.

D. *Fruit of the Spirit*: Praying for a greater release of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) refers to asking for God’s character to be formed in us and in the lives of others. We ask that the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit (i.e. God’s love, joy, peace, patience, etc.) be established in those we pray for.

Gal. 5:22 The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.

E. One of the ways to pray for a person to have more fruit in their character and to be more godly is to ask the Lord to release a *spirit of conviction* and a *spirit of wisdom and revelation of God* to them. Being convicted of sin and understanding the truth of who God is will result in an increase of the fear of the Lord and fascination with Jesus and thus the formation of godly character in that person.

Jn. 16:8 He [the Spirit] will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment

Eph. 1:17 the Father... may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

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F. *Gifts of the Spirit*: Praying for a greater release of the gifts of the Spirit (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11), involves praying for the release of God’s power, including His supernatural provision, protection, direction and favor. We ask for a greater measure of God’s power to be manifest in our lives and in the people or places we pray for.

Rom. 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Cor. 12:4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit... 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: 8 for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

XI. KEY APOSTOLIC PRAYERS

1. *John 17* The longest & greatest intercessory prayer by Jesus Himself. This prayer is the anchor and “table of contents” of all the other apostolic prayers.
2. *Eph. 1:17-19* For revelation of Jesus' beauty and the Bride's destiny unto transforming our heart.
3. *Eph. 3:16-19* For release of supernatural strength in the heart to experience God's emotions.
4. *Phil. 1:9-11* For God's love to abound in our heart resulting in discernment and righteousness.
5. *Col. 1:9-12* To know God's will, to be fruitful in ministry and strengthened by intimacy with Him.
6. *Rom. 15:5-7* For unity within the church across a city.
7. *Rom. 15:13* To be filled with supernatural joy, peace and hope.
8. *1 Cor. 1:4-8* To be enriched with the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit leading to righteousness.
9. *1 Thes. 3:9-13* - For the release of apostolic ministry and to abound in love and holiness.
10. *2 Thes. 1:11-12* To be equipped to receive the fullness of God’s destiny for the church.
11. *2 Thes. 3:1-5* For the increase of God’s Word by the release of Holy Spirit’s power.
12. *Acts 4:24-31* For the Spirit’s impartation of boldness and release of signs and wonders.