

Come Up Higher

CHAPTER ONE

Why Pray Generational Prayers?

PAUL L. COX

I must admit that I have frequently asked myself, “What is so important about praying written generational prayers?” After all, at the point of placing our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are saved. *What more needs to be done?* I am not the only one who asks this question. Over the years, many have suggested that we should not have to pray written prayers, even that praying them is unbiblical.

Others have also questioned whether we should repent for generational issues. I have been told, sometimes in hateful ways, that this also is unbiblical and certainly not necessary. Many would say that “the work was finished at the cross of Christ and nothing else needs to be done. The matter is settled. We already have all we need. No more praying about generational issues is necessary.”

Now, here is the crux of the issue. For twenty years, I have ministered to hundreds of people. Through generational praying and leading others to pray written prayers, I have seen believers transformed by the power of the Lord. This transformation has led to a deeper level of intimacy with Jesus Christ and new levels of freedom. So, how do I reconcile this apparent contradiction between the finished work of the Cross and what I have seen in ministry over the past twenty years? The Bible is our ultimate authority, not our experience. At any point where experience and the Bible disagree, the Bible wins. I believe that and I practice that. *So, what does the Bible say?*

Here are the fundamentals. We are saved by grace.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Our works, in our Christian life, verify that we really are saved.

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:17–20)

Having established that we are saved by grace and our works verify our salvation, what part do we play in this process? Some argue that we have no part. It is true that salvation is the work of Christ alone. Even our coming to faith is made possible by the drawing of the Holy

Spirit. The book of Romans clearly indicates that sanctification is a process; it is accomplished through the working of Christ in us, transforming us through the power of the Holy Spirit. So the question must be asked again, “Do we have any responsibility in our transformation from glory to ever-increasing glory?”¹

I believe the answer is yes. We do have a responsibility in our transformation from glory to ever-increasing glory. Look at Philippians 2:12–13:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

The key phrase to examine is “work out your own salvation.” What does this mean? It certainly does not mean work for your salvation. Scripture is clear that salvation comes through faith and not through works. We must understand what this “[working] out your own salvation” means.

This issue is foundational to what I do in ministry, the reasoning behind publishing a book on prayers. If there is no scriptural mandate for this kind of ministry, then pursuing it is error. With this in mind I would like to give an extended quote from the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. I am aware that it is a little tedious and will take some concentration on the part of the reader! However, if the importance of a believer’s part in maturing, in “[working] out your own salvation” cannot be settled, then this book is meaningless! With this in mind, here is a section from the theological discussion of Philippians 2:12–13.

But, the Biblical concept of salvation is not thus restricted to justification; more commonly what is in view includes God’s redemptive work in its totality. Thus, while in a very important sense, we have already been saved (Ephesians 2:5, 8; Titus 3:5), in another sense, we are yet to be saved (Romans 5:9–10; 1 Corinthians 3:15, 5:5; 2 Timothy 4:18). Calvin rightly claims “that salvation is taken to mean the entire course of our calling, and that this term includes all things by which God accomplishes that perfection, to which He has determined us by His free election.” Because salvation in its entire scope necessarily includes the manifestation of righteousness in our lives, it follows that our activity is integral to the process of salvation; we can never afford to forget the juxtaposition between verse 9 (“not of works”) and verse 10 (“for good works”) in Ephesians 2. In the particular context of Philippians 2, the out workings of the believer’s personal salvation take the form of corporate obligations within the Christian community: the duty of seeking the good of others.

For those who admit the soteriological² thrust of the passage, the tendency is to define verse 12 by means of verse 13 (or verse 13 by means of verse 12), that is, to tone down human activity by appealing to divine grace (or vice versa). One may, for example, so emphasize the truth that God does not force us to act against our will, that as a result, grace is restricted to little more than spiritual aid: “God will help us along, but it’s really up to us.” Conversely, fear of legalism may lead us to a more or less passive understanding of sanctification: “Our responsibility is simply to rest in God’s grace, to let Him work in us.” The text itself, by its very juxtaposition of those two emphases, cries out loudly against any such attempts at resolution. And the point here is not merely that both the human and the divine are stressed, but that in one and the same passage, we have what is perhaps the strongest Biblical expression of each element.

Note first Paul's concern with human activity. Although several New Testament verses place considerable emphasis on the role of human responsibility in salvation (cf. esp. 2 Peter 1:10 [NASB], "for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble"), none puts it so bluntly as Philippians 2:12. The very choice of the verb *katēgazomai* is notable. Chrysostom explained this compound form as indicating "with great effort, with great care"; though the evidence speaks against seeing such a nuance in the verb itself, we should not completely overlook the fact that this ancient Greek speaker perceived the term as emphatic. Bauer's "achieve, accomplish" brings us closer to the distinctive nuance of the verb; he rightly places Philippians 2:12 under the second heading, "bring about, produce, create." It is impossible to tone down the force with which Paul here points to our conscious activity in sanctification. The thought should give us pause: our salvation, which we confess to be God's from beginning to end, is here described as something that we must bring about.

For all that, our dependence on divine activity for sanctification is nowhere made as explicit as here. To begin with, God's work is viewed as having a causal relation to our working (*gajr*, gar, for); our activity is possible only because of divine grace. Second, the syntax is emphatic: Paul says not merely "God works" (*ho theos energei*) but "the One Who works, the working is God" (*theos ... estin ho energon ... to energein*). Third, the divine influence is said to extend not only to our activity but to our very wills—a unique statement, though the idea is implied in other passages (e.g., John 1:13; Romans 9:16). Calvin comments: "There are, in any action, two principal parts, the will, and the effective power. Both of these [Paul] ascribes to God; what more remains to us to glory in?" Fourth, the apostle reinforces our dependence on God's sovereignty with a concluding reference to "his good pleasure," a distinctly theological term used to describe *divine grace*.

The point is that, while sanctification requires conscious effort and concentration, our activity takes place not in a legalistic spirit, with a view to gaining God's favor, but rather in a spirit of humility and thanksgiving, recognizing that without Christ we can do nothing (cf. John 15:5), and so He alone deserves the glory.

God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of cooperation as if God did His part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works and we also work. But the relation is that because God works, we work. All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God's working in us.... We have here not only the explanation of all acceptable activity on our part, but we also have the incentive to our willing and working.... The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God.³

Let me summarize this excerpt. First, it is Christ who works in us both in salvation and in transforming us after salvation. Second, we have a part in bringing our salvation to completion. Third, our part is in the context of the church, the redeemed body of Christ.

What is stated in logical form in Philippians is illustrated in story form in the book of Joshua. The Lord clearly states that the land of Israel has been given to the children of Israel.

Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. (Joshua 1:2–3)

Verse three delineates an important condition for receiving this gift. The land which has been totally given to them must be possessed by them. Joshua 1:3 says, “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.” The children of Israel have a part in possessing the land. They cannot simply cross over the river Jordan, set up camp, and wait for the coming of the Lord. They must possess their possessions. How do they do this? They must “walk” out their responsibility. “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you!”

In other words, they must come against the strongholds in the land, take them down, and possess the land. This is a picture of the Christian life. We come into the Promised Land, that is, the Kingdom of God, through the blood of Christ. The word Jordan actually means “to spread judgment.” As we walk through the River Jordan, judgment does not touch us because it has been held back by the power of the Lord. We enter into the land and begin to take down, through the power of God, the strongholds in our lives. God does his part and we do our part. Our part includes the use of spiritual disciplines as well as being intentional about getting all the deliverance from the old nature that we can. That is where generational prayers come in.

I understand from personal experience that those who do not believe in generational deliverance or in praying written generational prayers will not be satisfied by any reasoning or evidence. After I had been ministering deliverance for several months as a Baptist pastor, several of the deacons came to me to express their concerns. Some of our discussions became very intense! Finally, one deacon said to me, “Well, if this is really true, then where is the fruit?” The point was well taken. To show him the fruit, I scheduled a Sunday evening service where several people who had been significantly helped by prayers for generational deliverance gave testimonies of what the Lord had done. The evening was very powerful. For over two hours, person after person came to the microphone and shared how the Lord had touched their lives. The testimonies were particularly meaningful because I had ministered to some of these people for nine years before I started praying for deliverance. Clearly it was the ministry of deliverance that had made a difference!

After the service, that same deacon came to me and said, “I do not care what all those people say, I do not believe in this ministry.” At the following deacon’s meeting, the debate continued. Finally, in frustration, I said to the board, “If you do not want me to help these people, then you help them!” I was shocked by their responses. They all raised their hands and said, “We can’t.” Here was the real heart of the issue. Those who do not believe in this ministry not only do not believe in it, but they also have no answers or alternative solutions to offer believers who continue to be in pain. Their only answer is their own personal biblical and theological response to the concept of praying for people.

All of this should not be a surprise to anyone who knows the Bible. Jesus also encountered religious people who came against his healing and deliverance ministry. One of the most shocking Scriptures in the Bible is the account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go." Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.(John 11:43–53)

What is so shocking? Here is Jesus raising someone from the dead. Think of the joy of Lazarus and the joy of those who loved him; but the religious people do not see this. They can only see their own agendas and beliefs. Truth is not the issue! Their only response to the raising of Lazarus from the dead was to plot Jesus' death.

The deacon's meetings at my Baptist church finally culminated in congregational meetings. The debate seemed endless! Finally, I decided I had to leave the church. I can remember a conversation right after the meeting. I turned to a friend and said, "All I have ever wanted to do in ministry is to help others. Now that I am finally able to really help people, the deacons won't let me." I walked away crushed. But the Lord was not finished with me or with the ministry of deliverance. His heart is to see his people set free. In obedience, I have followed his calling on my life. Years later, the fruit is evident. The Lord has been faithful. Yes, there is resistance, but lives are being changed.

This book is really a reporting of the journey of ever-unfolding revelation of the tactics of the enemy to destroy the lives of individuals. However, the emphasis is not on what the enemy has done and is doing, but on the freedom that is possible through taking back of the land of our inheritance. Victory has been secured at the cross of Jesus Christ. It is time now for you to possess your possessions. Receive it. Walk in it. Establish it.

Notes:

1. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

2. Study of salvation.

3. Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2005). Used by permission.