

Prayer Power Tower

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Preparation

Focus. It's a critical element of our lives, and a powerful force in the material world. Exhibit A: the laser. The precise workings of those modern wonders defy simplistic explanation. But suffice to say that focus plays a key role in one key distinction between a laser and ordinary forms of light. A flashlight, for example, releases light in many directions, and that light is, as a result, relatively weak and diffuse. By contrast, a laser emits light in a very tight beam, intensely concentrated. As a result, lasers can do amazing things – from performing delicate eye surgery to burning through steel plate. Don't attempt either with your handy-dandy flashlight! It's all a matter of focus. So too in the spiritual realm, focus is vital. It must have been maddening for the Apostle Paul to deal, across great distances and in an era long before today's virtually instant communications, with his critics and opponents in the churches he had labored to birth. Little wonder that in his letters he employs such strong language! Here he writes to the church in Corinth: "*The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...*" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 ESV). Every thought captive. It was an image that no doubt encouraged Paul, as he drew strength from the Spirit's assurance to him that he was doing the very work of Christ. But that image serves us well also, in preparation for a sacred appointment with our holy God. Prior to your meeting with Him, ask the same Spirit who empowered the apostle long ago to help *you* to take every thought captive to obey Christ, so that neither doubt nor distraction, weariness nor wavering would stand in the way of a life-changing encounter with your Creator God.

Scripture

What is it that, more than anything else, gives visible expression to your faith in Christ? The cross? A favorite Bible? Your church? For the Jews of Paul's day, it may well have been the covenant of circumcision. But the apostle here (Romans 2:25-29) challenges a wrong view of even that which is in itself good and holy. Ask God to speak clearly to you now through His word.

- Paul begins (2:25) by setting up a contrast between *two* things cherished by every faithful Jew of his day: circumcision and the

law of Moses. He challenges those Jews who would see circumcision as the assurance of their privileged status with God, countering that this is only true for a Jew who obeys the law perfectly. Paul concludes that the Jew who fails to do so (and he has already hinted that that would include *all* Jews, and will demonstrate that charge conclusively in chapter 3) is no better off than an uncircumcised Gentile. Baptism is for us what circumcision was for the Jews: the sign and seal of our entrance into the covenant community. How might you grow into a more Christ-centered appreciation for your own baptism?

- As upsetting as this might be to many of Paul's Jewish Christian readers, he goes on (2:26-27) to say something almost sure to be even more offensive to them: the uncircumcised Gentile who obeys the basic moral requirements of the law will not only be counted by God as, in effect, circumcised, but will even stand at the final judgment to condemn the Jew who fails to obey the law. (Paul may mean this literally, or he may merely mean that such a Gentile's righteous deeds will condemn the unfaithful Jew.) Might we – might *you* – take an unholy comfort in the belief that we are 'good religious people,' better than those beyond the walls of the church? Ask God to help you to apply Paul's stern words of warning to your own life.

Adoration

In the context of a heartfelt appeal for divine guidance and blessing for his nation, the poet of this hymn acknowledges the greatness and glory of his God. Join him now in a prayer of petition for our land, but especially also in one of humble adoration of the Sovereign who is abundantly able to deliver His people.

Judge Eternal, Throned in Splendor

Henry S. Holland, 1847–1918

*Judge eternal, throned in splendor,
Lord of lords and King of kings,
With Thy loving fire of judgment
Purge this land of bitter things;
Solace all its wide dominion
With the healing of Thy wings.*

*Crown, O God, Thine own endeavor;
Cleave our darkness with Thy sword;
Feed Thy faint and hungry peoples
With the richness of Thy Word;
Cleanse the body of this nation
Through the glory of the Lord.*

Confession

“The LORD doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7 NLT). It’s a theme repeated often in Scripture – including in Paul’s letter to the Romans, where the apostle points out that, in God’s sight, being truly Jewish is a matter of the orientation of the heart, more than physical circumcision or even circumstances of birth (2:28-29). The truth that God knows and holds us accountable for even our unspoken thoughts and attitudes can give us great comfort, when we fear that our good intentions have been misunderstood by others. But that sure truth can – and *should* – also give us grave concern, in view of the fact that sins we’re all adept at hiding from one another are starkly transparent to God! Paul’s overarching point is not to crush his readers in despair, but rather to convince them of their great need for a savior. So too, *your* Savior wants to use your prayers of confession now not to defeat you, but rather to lead you to greater victory in Him. Rejoicing in that truth, enter now into a time of humble confession before your all-knowing, extravagantly loving God.

When you have finished your prayers of confession, worship God with these inspired words of the prophet:

“Praise the LORD! He was angry with me, but now He comforts me. See, God has come to save me. I will trust in Him and not be afraid. The LORD GOD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation.” (Isaiah 12:1-2 NLT)

Rejoice in the Good News: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Thanksgiving

To have a heart that is circumcised – impossible through the illusion of perfect obedience to the letter of the law, Paul says, but guaranteed to those who trust in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit – is to receive praise from God Himself (Romans 2:29).

- Thank God for any words of praise that you received from parents and other family members when you were young.
- Thank Him for commendations you have received in your work, for a job well done.
- Give thanks for words of praise that God has given *you* the grace to offer to others – especially ones of whom you may have been jealous.
- Thank God for the joy of singing His praises in worship, either alone or with sisters and brothers in Christ.
- Thank Him for the ability to appreciate skill in any field.
- Give thanks for the sheer delight of being able, with the psalmist, to “*shout joyfully to the LORD,*” to “*break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises*” (Psalm 98:4 NKJV).

Supplication

The Bible assures us that “*The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results*” (James 5:16b NLT). Intimidated by the “righteous” part? Be encouraged by the truth that God gives to all believers the very righteousness of Christ, and pray confidently, even boldly – especially for those who stand shoulder to shoulder with you in this great ministry of prayer.

Daniel Adams, Kristen Agnew, Audrey and Bill Allen, Corinne Baker, Jon Baker, Cyndy Beech, Joyce Bett, Ed and Goldie Black, Betty Bowser, Barbara and David ‘Skip’ Byers, Jan Carr, Lisa Cook, Ray and Jane Cornelius, Jennifer and John Culp, Ed Daggitt, Gina Brenda Dolan, Jane Dunmire, Ruth Dykstra Entwistle, Mickey Edmiston, Becky Elliott, Janice Good, Dorothy Gooden, Kathleen Graham, Dorothy Henderson, John and Marilyn Hicks, Joy Holland, Suzanne Howat, Gail Jablonovsky, Alberta Keener, Louise Keough, Joann Kettler, Dana Krepps, Michelle Kurtz, Donna Lewis, Jean Longnecker, Linda Longwell, Rich Madsen, Don McAninch, Myrna Jane McCamey, Greg McElroy, Colleen McGaffic, Bob and Joanne Miller, Sandy Minor, Shirley Minshull, Jane and John Moser, Alan and Terry Northcott, Sean O’Brien, Edna Orange, Phyllis Osborne, Hazel Palmer, Joan Pashley, Jeannette Patterson, Nancy Rankin, Joanne Raymer, Andrea and Tod Reiser, Rachael Renick, Megan (Illsley) Sateia, Erin Scott, John Snow, Mary Jane Surrena, Charles Timmons, Beth Utsch, Betty Walters, Toni Walters, Alice Winger, Tami Witzke and Chris Yeakle.

- Please ask God to do great things in and through this week’s New Wilmington Mission Conference.
- Please pray for the members of our Worship and Music Committee, asking God to guide their leadership of this key area of our life together as the church.
- Please pray for our organist Lisa Stratton (and her husband Keith) as she helps lead us in worship.
- Please pray that in worship we will each draw closer to God as we respond to the Gospel by offering not only our money, but our whole selves to Him.
- Please pray for Michael and Rachel Weller in their work for Christ’s mission to Ethiopia and Sudan.
- As we move ahead following our July 25 congregational meeting, please ask God to lead us all to work together to be Christ’s church.
- Please pray specifically that Jesus will continue to help us each to grow as His *Daring Disciples*.
- Please pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit on us and on our whole community.