

Among other things our writer is concerned that the leaders and the people should be praying for each other.

1. The leaders of God's work need the prayers of the people

(i) Dependence

(ii) Boldness

(iii) Personal closeness

1. The leaders of God's work need the prayers of the people.

He says: ¹⁸*Pray for us. For we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things.* Here is a great challenge to all Christian preachers and leaders. (i) He knows he needs prayer and he has the kind of relationship with the people such that he can ask for their prayers. It is not a mere formality. He knows his dependence on them. Every true pastor feels the same way. (ii) He is able to be bold in asking for prayer because he knows he is a man of sincerity and honesty. There is no deceit in his life, no manipulation for money, no exploiting of the people for his own advantage. (iii) He loves to have a personal closeness to them. He says: ¹⁹*I urge you all the more to do this, in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.* He is obviously busy in God's work wherever he is. He is not in prison (as verse 23 makes clear), but something is delaying his coming to see them. Yet he values personal contact even more than he values the writing of this letter. However, **we** are grateful he had to write it!

2. The people in God's kingdom need the prayers of their leaders

• The writer describes God

• He reminds us of what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ

• He reminds us of the character and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ

• He reminds us of how Jesus presents his blood in the heavenly sanctuary

2. The people in God's kingdom need the prayers of their leaders.

Not only does he want them to pray for him. He tells them of his prayer for them. ²⁰*And may the God of peace, who with the blood of the everlasting covenant brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹restore you in every good thing, in order that you may do his will – working in you that which is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen!*

He **describes God**. He is the God of peace – the one who wants us to be reconciled to him and to find peace of heart amidst the same kind of pressures that were faced by these early Hebrew Christians.

He **reminds us of what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ**. It is taken for granted that Jesus has died for us. The Father has taken the one who was our sin-bearer and has raised him up to be a living Saviour for each believer. God's blessings of salvation come to us only through Christ, only through what has happened in his death and resurrection.

He **reminds us of the character and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ**. Our Saviour is 'the great Shepherd of the sheep'. We his people have sheep-like characteristics: foolishness, a tendency to wander, weakness. He has the characteristic of a Shepherd: concern, watchful care, willing to attend to the individual wanderer, the ability to rescue the wanderer.

He **reminds us of how Jesus presents his blood in the heavenly sanctuary**. Translators debate whether the words here should be 'by the blood...' or 'with the blood...'. The second is most likely because it has been a major theme of Hebrews. Jesus rose from the dead but kept on rising and presented his blood in the heavenly sanctuary. We have seen what is brought to pass by the

blood of Christ. It brings eternal redemption, daily cleansing of the conscience and enables us to proceed to obtain the promises of God.

• *The covenant relationship with God is everlasting*

The covenant relationship with God is everlasting. It cannot be broken. Its greatest blessing is the point where God takes an oath and says, 'I shall indeed bless you'. But even before the oath, the relationship is secure. Nothing makes him forgo his vow to be our God for ever. He says to us what he said to David, 'I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips'¹. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary protects us for ever.

¹ Psalm 89:34

The content of the prayer

• *Restoration and provision*

Verse 21 tells us of the content of the prayer. It is a prayer that God will restore these Hebrew Christians. The word here means both 'restore' and 'provide'. They need some restoration since they have become greatly discouraged. But God is ready to restore them and provide for them. He is thinking mainly of spiritual blessings. They need to know God's mercy, God's grace, God's enablings. They need such a sense of the presence of God that they will be able to fulfil the various callings that God has put upon them.

• *Mercy and grace*

• *God is ready to give us what we need to fulfil the calling he has put upon us*

God does not leave us to our own devices in serving him. He works into our lives that which we need, that which pleases him. This is why it is so vital to be always coming to the throne of grace to find mercy and help. This is the appointed way for us to live. The pastor prays for his people – along the lines of the prayer that we have here – and his praying is also the model of what we are all to pray for ourselves. God is ready to give us what we need to fulfil the calling he has put upon us. He will work into our lives that which God is commanding. 'Command what you will and give what you command' was the prayer of Augustine of Hippo. This is how we live – knowing the will of God and then going to the throne of grace to get the mercy and the grace which we need. It is all through the Lord Jesus Christ and he receives the praise and the glory for it – for ever!

• *We live, knowing the will of God and then going to the throne of grace to get the mercy and the grace which we need*



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