

Persistent Prayer –Part II

18c and to this end keeping alert with all persistence and petition for all the saints.” 19 and pray in my behalf, that speech may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

So, keeping with the purpose of keeping the armor of God on in order to be ready for the attacks of the evil one, “to this end” or “for this purpose,” keep watch”, be vigilant, on the alert! and in particular in the present text “to watch” for a possible threat and thus “to be alert, vigilant. This means keeping our focus on God and His ways, actively watching over our thoughts and actions. Being watchful helps us stay away from temptation and sin. When we are alert, we can detect danger and make wiser choices. Jesus had instructed his disciples to watch or to be alert saying in Luke 6: 36 **But stay alert at all times, praying that you will have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.** Jesus modeled prayer and spiritual discipline in to have success against the enemy when He was tempted by Satan. And, as we saw 2 weeks ago in the Garden of Gethsemane, staying alert and in prayer is strongly tied to spiritual success in the battle Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 26:41 **“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**, staying alert and in prayer is strongly tied to spiritual success in the battle against the enemy and his minions. Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 26:41 **“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”** Putting on the armor of God is necessary for victory in these battles. And, this comes by staying connected in prayer to our God, the Lord of Hosts (Amies), in prayer, and maintaining our alertness; not falling asleep. Look at what harm was done because of sleepiness and lethargy on behalf of the church. This is why staying prayerful and alert is so important. Colossians 4:2 **“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”**

Prayer is a vital tool in our pursuit of vigilance. When we engage in prayer, we invite God into our struggles, allowing Him to guide and fortify us against temptation. Through praying, we communicate our dependence on God, seeking His strength to overcome challenges. By combining our watchfulness with prayer, we stand firm against adversities and remain attentive to God’s guiding voice. It also helps us develop a spiritual connection that equips us with awareness from the Holy Spirit. We are encouraged to “continue to pray with intense effort, ... ‘to devote ourselves to, to keep on, to persist in.’ ” prayer. The point of this is that prayer is for the purpose of maintaining alertness. Prayer causes alertness and alertness keeps believers in prayer. If we are not alert, we don’t see the dangers and thus see no need to pray. With the enemy making his assaults, we believers are to be strengthened, edified by prayer so we continue to be alert with all persistence and petition.

for all the saints,

Paul reminds us of our responsibility to pray for all other Christians that have needs that God puts in our paths. Our praying for each other means that we’re all involved together and concerned with aiding in the struggle against Satan and his minions. Earlier in this epistle, Paul encouraged the Ephesians by noting the strength of their church, saying **15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.** So, Paul commended them on their faith in Jesus, and their love for all of the brothers and sisters in Christ. He knew about it, because they showed it toward one another by serving each other and by praying for each other. Paul prays again in Eph 3:16-19 **16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and 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 height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.** So, again Paul links intercessory prayer with the revelation of God to believers, both as a group, and individually. The

fulness of God is experienced when we're praying for each other and serving God, and each other. An army may be made up of individuals, but here Paul emphasizes that we must fight this spiritual battle together. Paul lets us know that we're all fighting the same spiritual battles against the enemy, and we accomplish victory in and through Christ together, battling against the enemy together. This means that there must be mutual concern for one another, demonstrated by prayer, service and love for one another. Paul reminds us to constantly pray and remain alert, ready to don the helmet of salvation and grasp the sword of the Spirit in order to do battle at a moment's notice. Neither of these pieces of armor, nor all other pieces, are available as the result of human endeavor, but the power of the Spirit.

V. 20 Paul asks for prayer

Paul reminds the Ephesians that while they are praying for all of the other saints, don't forget to pray for Him. He says "particularly, especially. pray "in behalf of me," or "for me." On other occasions, Paul has requested prayer for himself and his fellow workers (2 Cor 1:11; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1-2) There is a very similar passage in Colossians 4:3-4 **3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;** Paul requests prayer for himself and his fellow workers, whereas in Ephesians he requests prayer for himself only—probably, when he was writing Ephesians, his fellow workers in the gospel were no longer with him, which would make sense if he were in prison, which is where he was when he wrote the epistle

For the Gospel

Paul asks specifically that they pray that God gives him the words that he needs to preach the Gospel. And anyone who's ever preached or taught the Word of God understands this need. Literally, he asks for prayer "that God will give him utterance when he opens his mouth." A great phrase for saying that they should pray that God inspires His words at the moment that they are needed. We see a similar idea in Mark 13:10-11 **10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 And when they [g]arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you at that time; for you are not the ones speaking, but it is the Holy Spirit.**

Similarly here, the idea is not that I might open my mouth, but 'that God may open my mouth'. We see this also throughout the old testament, as the prophets were to speak as God opened their mouths (e.g., Isa 59:21 **21 "As for Me, this is My covenant with them," says the Lord: "My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the Lord, "from now and forever."** Or Ezekiel 3:27 **27 But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says:' The one who hears, let him hear; and the one who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house.** Paul asks that he be given boldness to reveal, preach, make known the gospel. He's asking for the freedom to speak with no restraints, freely, boldly, since often he was hindered or sidelined by enemies of the gospel.

the mystery of the gospel

Paul asks that he be given the words to proclaim boldly, "the mystery, namely, the gospel") Paul asks believers to pray that he would be given utterance when he opens his mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. He needs help when he is attacked by those who are serving the enemy, whether by design or unwittingly, and when the minions of Satan come to attack him. More specifically it may well refer to his trial before Caesar (Nero) in Rome (when and if the Jewish accusers would make charges against him). The Roman government looked on the Christians as a sect of the Jews and the Jews considered them a heretical group. In his trial before Caesar, Paul needed to make clear that Christians are neither a Jewish sect per se' since the Jews had mostly rejected their Messiah, nor a heretical group but an entirely new entity, the church, the body of Christ, composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers.