

Prayer

Bless us with Your presence, Lord God, in our daily lives;
Give us courage, Lord God, in the face of difficult situations;
Fill our hearts with great joy, Lord God, as we do Your will;
Inspire us to use all of the gifts You have given to us;
Lead us on, Lord God, with glory in our hearts;
AMEN, Lord God, and ALLELUIA!

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Ask the Holy Spirit to come upon you in wind and fire; ask Him to empower you with His gifts

On-going prayers

- **Pray for pioneering scientists.** *Pray for the integrity of science, that political and financial pressures will not compromise the quest for truth.*
- *Pray about the increasing political concern over nuclear fuel in Iran*
- *Give thanks for the work of coast guards and sea rescue services*

Meditation

Lord, I learn about You through opening my heart
To appreciate all that is happening around me.

Through smiling, and seeing other people smile too;
through silence in the face of deep suffering.

Through watching a child learn to walk;
through steadying the hand of an elderly person.

Through eating a meal with friends and family
through sharing what I have with those who have less.

Through listening to the song of birds;
through enjoying the rhythm of a popular song.

Through finding faith and hope and love;
through resting in peace because I know my Lord.

Bible passage – Ephesians 6:18-24

¹⁸With every form of prayer and request, pray at all times in the spirit; keeping alert to do this with all perseverance and praying for all the saints. ¹⁹Do this also for me, so that when I open my mouth in public, I may be given words to make known the mystery of the Gospel, ²⁰for which I am a representative in chains, that I may speak about it freely, as I should.

²¹Tychicus will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing: he is a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord. ²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are, and he may encourage your hearts.

²³Peace be to the whole church, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all whose love for our Lord Jesus Christ is undying.

Thought for the Day

Text

Ephesians 6:18

¹⁸ *With every form of prayer and request, pray at all times in the spirit; keeping alert to do this with all perseverance and praying for all the saints.*

Thought

After the famous description of our spiritual armoury, Paul immediately turns to the subject of prayer. He urges God's people to pray about everything and in every way, always doing it '*in the Spirit*'. This means allowing the Spirit to direct your prayers.

You may find it hard to pray, or prayer may come naturally to you, but when you pray, let the Holy Spirit focus what you say on the Lord and not yourself. By doing this, you will find God's purpose for your prayers, and in this you will find peace.

Bible Study

Review

With these few words, Paul concludes his letter to the Ephesians. Typically, Paul concludes his letters with an encouragement to pray (6:18-20), before commending the one who would convey the letter (Tychicus, 6:21,22) and offering a blessing (6:23,24). Each section of this passage in Ephesians is self-contained, and although the last two are relatively straightforward, the three verses on prayer at the beginning of this reading are of considerable significance, and much of our study today will focus on this.

To begin with, Paul offers some advice about prayer, which is entirely consistent with what is said elsewhere in the New Testament and in his other letters. To begin with, Paul calls God's people to '*every form of prayer and request*'. Prayer is our conversation with God, and it will therefore include every form of praise as well as our requests for others (intercession) and our requests for self (petition). There are many other ways to define prayer, and a study of the Psalms will help us with this, but whatever prayers we pray, Paul says that we must always pray '*in the Spirit*' (6:18). To say this does not restrict what prayer might be. To pray '*In the Spirit*' means to enjoy a unique and spiritual connection between our own spirit and the Spirit of God, which is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. Such communication is open and honest, for we seek His will, not ours, and we also give our Lord full permission to search our hearts.

Having explained prayer in this way, Paul urges God's people to '*keep alert*', to pray with '*perseverance*', and pray firstly '*for all the saints*' (6:18). This reflects Paul's own habit of praying for the churches he knew (see Phil 1:4f. and Col 1:3f.), but he quickly moves on to ask for prayers for himself. We must remember that as he wrote these words, Paul was in prison, and it was therefore natural that he should ask for prayers not merely that he be released from prison, but rather what lay behind his desire for release. Paul was concerned to preach in public and to do so freely (6:19,20 – for an explanation of this translation, see the notes below). This was his call and it gave meaning to the whole of his life.

Paul's connection with Tychicus is well documented in the New Testament (Acts 20:4, Col 4:7, 2 Tim 4:7 and Titus 3:12). In each Biblical reference, Tychicus is a companion of Paul who appears also to be his emissary, taking his letters from one place to another. He would indeed be a loyal servant if he was now with Paul in Rome, where we think he wrote the letter, and he would therefore be able to tell others about the conditions in which Paul was held. Our general picture of Paul in Rome is that he was held under benign house arrest (see Acts 28:30). However, as we will see when we study Acts, Paul's captivity may have been portrayed in a positive light for political reasons. As Paul suggests, if people really wanted to know how he was, then all they had to do was ask Tychicus. Is Paul guarded about his circumstances so as not to rock the boat and make things worse?

The last paragraph contains further encouragement typical of Paul; peace, love, faith and grace. The phrase, '*Peace ... and love with faith*' combines three of Paul's favourite words, and each one is close to the heart of the Gospel. '*Peace*' does not mean earthly peace, but '*peace with God*', which Paul explains as being the purpose of the '*faith*' we have in Christ Jesus (Romans 5:1). In addition, he speaks about '*love with faith*', a phrase that defines the character of Christian discipleship as love, the essential companion to faith in Christ Jesus. God's blessing, His '*grace*' is shown towards all who love Him, and Paul calls for God's people to demonstrate that their love will not be compromised; it is '*undying*', just like His grace in Christ Jesus.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- What does Paul mean by '*keeping alert*' in prayer (6:18)?

- What does Paul mean by *perseverance* in prayer (6:18)?
- What does Paul mean by asking to be given words to preach (6:19,20)?
- What can we learn from Paul's reference to Tychicus in verse 21 (6:21)?

Notes on the text and translation

V18 **'keeping alert to do this with all perseverance'**

Other translations:

'With this in mind, be alert and always keep on ... (NIV)

'To that end keep alert and always persevere' (NRSV)

Again, there is considerable disagreement about how this phrase is to be translated and how it fits with the rest of the verse. The Greek reads; 'and being alert in this in all perseverance ...' The end result depends on the translators view of what the word 'this' refers to, and whether this phrase is joined to the last one in the sentence, or is separate from it. I suggest that this phrase offers advice about watchfulness and persistence in prayer during spiritual warfare.

V19 **'so that when I open my mouth in public, I may be given words to make known the mystery of the Gospel.'**

Other translations:

'that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel' (NIV)

'so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel' (Authorised Version)

The issue here is the Greek word 'parresia' which is often translated as 'fearlessly' (NIV) or 'boldness' (NRSV). Elsewhere in the N.T., the word refers to making something public (see John 7:4 and Col. 2:15), so the translation 'in public' fits the text perfectly. A related Greek word appears in the next verse, which I have translated 'freely', to match this verse.

V20 **'representative'**

Most Bible versions translate this word 'ambassador'. However, the Greek word is closely related to 'elder', so the sentence could be translated 'for which I am an elder in chains'. However, the word is not generally used like this in the N.T., and Paul never claims the title 'elder'. I prefer the term 'representative' because the term 'ambassador' tends to give a rather unnecessarily exalted view of Paul and of preaching in this passage.

V24 **'Grace be with all whose love for our Lord Jesus Christ is undying.'**

Other translations:

'Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love' (NIV)

'Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen' (Authorised Version)

The Greek sentence reads; 'grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in imperishability', and each Bible version changes this a little in order to get a reasonable English sentence. The word 'undying' best fits the meaning of the Greek here, instead of adding the word 'love' for a second time (as in the NIV) or by assuming that the word 'imperishable' refers to a moral quality rather than eternity (as in the Authorised Version).

At the end of Ephesians, the A.V. adds the word 'Amen', because this is found in the 'Textus Receptus', which was used 400 years ago for its translation. Other ancient manuscripts also added words, for example, one ninth century copy has '*written to the Ephesians by Paul, through Tychicus*'. If we could be certain that this was correct, it would confirm the authorship of Paul. Unfortunately, this is not found in the most ancient manuscripts, and is probably a reflection of early belief, and even if it is correct, it cannot be proved.

Going Deeper

What does Paul mean by 'keeping alert' in prayer (6:18)?

Some versions of the Bible indicate a possible connection between verse 18 and the previous section of the letter about '*the complete armour of God*' (6:14-17), and because of this, some like to think of prayer as the

'seventh' item in the Christian's armoury. The flow of the letter does not support this, and prayer is not likened to any specific item of armour, and so we would be ill advised to place too much weight on this. However, there is nothing wrong with our saying that prayer is an essential part of the spiritual armoury of a Christian; indeed, the thought may not have been far from Paul's mind. Certainly, his description of the 'complete armoury of God' (6:13) led him directly to ask his readers to pray.

It is entirely natural that Paul should ask God's people to be alert in prayer. The experience of the disciples in Gethsemane did not of course include Paul, but the event must have made a deep impression on the early disciples. This and other texts hint that 'watchfulness in prayer' quickly became a motto for those who would follow the Lord. Paul mentions it elsewhere (1 Thess 5:6) as does Peter (1 Peter 5:8), and in these texts, there is also a strong connection with Jesus' instruction to the disciples to be ready for the coming 'day of the Lord' when He would return (see also Mark 13:13).

In addition, this concern for watchfulness is not to be the work of a few within the church. All God's people should remember that they are in a spiritual battle for the heart and soul of the world, and the enemy will seek every means to divert the church from its task. Prayer about this is vital.

What does Paul mean by perseverance in prayer (6:18)?

We may hear other Christians speak about persistence or perseverance in prayer. If we look up the word perseverance in the Bible however, we will find that in all except here, perseverance is always described as a matter of getting things done, for example,

let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, (Hebrews 12:1-2 – see also Romans 5:3,4, James 1:33,4,12)

Even if the word perseverance is only used to describe prayer here, the theme is found elsewhere but with the word 'persistence', which amounts to the same thing. When teaching His disciples that '*they should always pray and not give up*' (Luke 18:1), Jesus tells them about the doggedness of a widow. His parable describes an unjust judge who gives a persistent widow her rights despite having no regard for her case. The point made is that if an unjust judge grants justice, how much more will God do the same, who listens to those '*who cry out to Him day and night*' (Luke 18:7). This is a major Biblical theme, of course, and it stems from Abraham's famous persistent prayer on behalf of Sodom (Genesis 18:20), which was motivated by his desire to save his nephew Lot. Moses also prayed persistently for Israel when she sinned, so that the Lord would continue to show His glory through saving her (Num 21:7, Deuteronomy 3:23 etc.).

Constant and persistent prayer is a characteristic of Paul's letters (Phil 1:4f. Col 1:3f. 2 Thess 1:11 etc.), but it would be wrong of us to think of prayer as something different from perseverance in doing the will of God. Of course, the two go hand in hand.

What does Paul mean by asking to be given words to preach (6:19,20)?

Although Paul was in chains while this letter was written, his mind was clearly on the opportunities to preach the Gospel that awaited him if he could be freed of his chains; he speaks about the hope that he may be able to 'speak about it freely, as I should' (6:20). In this context, he speaks about being given the words to preach (6:19), though if you feel unfamiliar with my translation because it is a little different from most Bible versions, then I ask you to read the 'translation notes' above.

One of the popular approaches to preaching in our own day suggests that the preacher should not prepare except by praying and seeking the Spirit. In this way, when the time comes, it is suggested that the Spirit will give the preacher the right words to say. Two Scriptures are used to back this up. Firstly, this passage here, and secondly, Jesus' comment about how Christians will deal with persecution and being dragged before the authorities:

'do not worry about what you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour' (Matthew 10:19)

I doubt that this is the right approach to preaching, because Jesus' comment was obviously concerning unforeseen circumstances and not the regular preaching of the Gospel in church today (and we can find a great deal about this elsewhere). Secondly, in this passage, Paul speaks about the wondrous work of the Spirit in using the preacher to declare the Gospel in pioneering missionary circumstances. Paul could preach the Gospel using all the wealth of his experience, and there is plenty of evidence of his spending substantial time in 'preparation', yet he needed the Holy Spirit's power to create and use the words he spoke. In other words, Paul did not know everything about God, but the Spirit did.

What can we learn from Paul's reference to Tychicus in verse 21 (6:21)?

Paul said that whatever the Ephesians wished to know about him and his condition could be found out from the man carrying the letter, whose name was Tychicus (6:21); and we can find out about Tychicus from the

Acts of the Apostles! Tychicus appears in a number of places within the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul, and he seems to have been one of those who left the region of Ephesus after the riot there as recorded in Acts 19 (see Acts 20:4). It is likely that he became one of Paul's travelling companions, and was later used by Paul for delivering letters.

Paul used him as a messenger to the Colossian church (Col 4:7) and as a messenger again in Titus (3:12). Also, the second letter of Timothy mentions that he is the bearer of a letter to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12), which appears to confirm the truth about his being with Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians. He was one of the faithful early Christians whose life was given over to the needs of God's people and the proclamation of the Gospel, but in a position of service rather than as a speaker or evangelist such as Paul.

Application

The end of a great letter of Paul is always fascinating. Despite the various contentious issues found within the letter (for example, Paul's advice to husbands and wives – 5:21f.), the words 'peace, love, faith and grace' genuinely capture the feel of this letter. It begins with one of the most amazing descriptions of the complete work of God through Jesus Christ found in Scripture (Ephesians 1 and 2) and continues with a thorough description of the unity of God's people and the means of its governance and growth (Ephesians 4). The letter then explains the Gospel by means of a dramatic contrast between the 'darkness of the world' and the 'light' of God's grace (Ephesians 4:117f.), and goes on to illustrate the manner of life of God's people not as a church but as individuals (5:21f.). The final advice to stand firm in the battles of life and pray (6:20-20) is essential to true Christian spirituality.

The overall effect of all this is highly positive, and we gain the feeling that Paul was truly attempting to encourage the believers in Ephesus to stand firm in faith. However, the Christian does not have to stand firm whilst constantly afraid of the enemy and fearful of the battle ahead. Rather, the Christian, protected by the complete armour of God may be at peace, and live the life of practical love and faith despite the pressures of the darkened world all around; such is the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

In our passage today there are a number of concluding pieces of advice that are particularly valuable. Amongst these, his advice about prayer stands out, along with his comments about the importance of preaching the Gospel. We cannot read what Paul has to say and avoid the conclusion that he suggests the use of all forms of prayer to God at all times, and likewise, the preaching of the Gospel to others in all ways and at all times. We do well to live according to these priorities.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group how you can best maintain prayer for the work of the Gospel in the life of the church.
2. In what ways can people be a faithful servant of the Gospel in the tradition of one such as Tychicus?
3. What do the words 'peace', 'love', 'faith' and 'grace' mean to people outside the church, and how may they be helped to understand what they mean?

Topics covered by this text

- *Prayer, perseverance and alertness*
- *Preaching the Gospel*
- *Blessing; peace, love, faith and grace.*

Personal comments by author

It is slightly sad to reach the end of a series of studies on a letter of Paul, because however much we study these great works, there is always so much more for us to discover of God's Word. As we move on, it is worth trying to make a note of what we have learned and what questions have been raised in our minds. I find it helpful to make notes about subjects worth preaching upon, because for every study I do, I find more wonderful texts, and I know I will forget them if I do not make a note of them!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think about the words 'peace', 'love', 'faith' and 'grace'. How are they understood today, and is this different from what the Bible says about them? Make sure you know what you mean by these words, and do not be satisfied until you know them well.*
 - *Write out a list of those things which have stood out in your study of Ephesians in recent weeks, and find a way of keeping your own personal record of important scriptural or spiritual truths.*
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Final Prayer

Bring me to the end of this day in peace and contentment, Lord Jesus. In peace because I have dealt with my sin before Your glorious throne and accepted Your forgiveness; and in contentment because I have heard Your word and responded to it. So may my worship be complete this day; AMEN
