

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY- EIGHT)

“PRAY FOR ME ALSO”

EPHESIANS 6:18-20

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

In verse **18**, Paul begins to address the matter of **Prayer** as it relates to **spiritual warfare**. He writes, *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”*

In his commentary on **Ephesians**, **John Phillips** wrote the following, relative to verse **18**:

“The Greek word translated “prayer” here is **proseuché**. This word is restricted in the New Testament to mean prayer to God, and it takes cognizance of God's power and sufficiency. **Proseuché** also gives prominence to the devotional side of prayer. No wonder Satan feels threatened whenever a believer prays. It is not the weak and

stammering believer he fears, nor the wondering and inadequate prayer he makes. The fact that a child of God is appealing to the almighty Father is what causes Satan to fear.

Satan does not fear eloquence in prayer either. He does not fear perseverance. (Quite often prayer is the most spasmodic and disjointed of our activities.) He does not fear our understanding of how prayer works. No, he fears the simple fact that a needy child of God is at the mighty throne of God. Satan harnesses all his minions to bar the way to the throne of God. But no demon, no angel-prince, no fallen angel can face the Spirit's flaming sword. The Word of God clears the way to the throne of God for the child of God."

There is a very strong and powerful relationship between putting on the whole armour of God and praying. The two belong together; in fact, one grows out of the other. It is not enough to put on the whole armour of God; we must also pray. It is not enough to pray; we must also put on the whole armour of God. It is impossible to divide the two.

Paul exhorts the believers in Ephesus to, pray "*always,*" or "*at all times.*" The Christian soldier is to be prayerful in every season, at every opportunity.

Believers are urged to pray "*in the Spirit.*" To pray in the Spirit is to pray consistent with God's nature and God's will. It is to pray in harmony with the Holy Spirit, by aligning our minds and our desires with the mind and desires of the Spirit. We do so by ensuring that we are "*filled by the Spirit*" (**Ephesians 5:18**).

Paul says our prayer should be accompanied by, "*watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.*" The phrase "*watching thereunto,*" is the translation of a Greek word which means, "To be sleepless, to keep awake, to watch; to be circumspect, attentive, ready." Paul is exhorting believers to be continually alert in prayer. We must keep our spiritual eyes open, because the enemy may launch an

attack against us at any time. We must guard against forgetfulness, neglect, formality, distraction, frustration and discouragement.

We are to be alert, “*with all perseverance.*” The idea of the Greek word translated “*perseverance*” is to continue to do something with intense effort, despite any attendant difficulties. It describes a steadfast, single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action. It pictures one’s devotion to a certain task, persisting in it and being earnest towards it. In the context of **Ephesians 6:18**, the word describes an intense devotion, an obstinate persistence, a continuing effort, a “never-say-die” attitude in respect of prayer.

Our perseverance in prayer is to be on behalf of all believers. Paul says, “*With all perseverance and supplications for all saints.*” Every believer is charged with the responsibility and privilege of praying intensely and persistently for the needs of all genuine believers, regardless of where they attend church, or to which organization or denomination they belong.

In verse **19** Paul speaks about prayer in a very personal manner. He writes, “*And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.*”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*Pray for me also, that I may be given the right words when I begin to speak—that I may confidently make known the mystery of the gospel.*”

Brothers and sisters, the great apostle Paul was not too proud to ask for prayer. And he did so over and over again. In at least 7 of his letters he requests prayer for himself. We will read his pleas for prayer as they are rendered in the **New English Translation**:

Romans 15:30-32

30 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to join fervently with me in prayer to God on my behalf.

31 Pray that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea and that my ministry in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,

32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, regarding the affliction that happened to us in the province of Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of living.

9 Indeed we felt as if the sentence of death had been passed against us, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

10 He delivered us from so great a risk of death, and he will deliver us. We have set our hope on him that he will deliver us yet again,

11 as you also join in helping us by prayer, so that many people may give thanks to God on our behalf for the gracious gift given to us through the help of many.

Philippians 1:12-20

12 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that my situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel:

13 The whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that I am in prison for the sake of Christ,

14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak the word fearlessly.

15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

16 *The latter do so from love because they know that I am placed here for the defense of the gospel.*

17 *The former proclaim Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, because they think they can cause trouble for me in my imprisonment.*

18 *What is the result? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed, and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,*

19 *for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance **through your prayers** and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

20 *My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die.*

Colossians 4:2-4

2 *Be devoted to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.*

3 *At the same time **pray for us too**, that God may open a door for the message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.*

4 *Pray that I may make it known as I should.*

1Thessalonians 5:23-25

23 *Now may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

24 *He who calls you is trustworthy, and he will in fact do this.*

25 *Brothers and sisters, **pray for us too.***

2Thessalonians 3:1-2

*1 Finally, **pray for us**, brothers and sisters, that the Lord's message may spread quickly and be honored as in fact it was among you,*

2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil people. For not all have faith.

Philemon 1:21-22

21 Since I was confident that you would obey, I wrote to you, because I knew that you would do even more than what I am asking you to do.

*22 At the same time also, prepare a place for me to stay, for I hope that **through your prayers** I will be given back to you.*

In 1887, **C.H. Spurgeon** preached a sermon entitled "**Pleading for Prayer.**" The text was **Romans 15:30-33**. In his sermon Spurgeon made the following comments:

"What did Paul do when his spirit was greatly oppressed? He wrote to his brethren to pray for him. He asked the good friends at Rome that they would lift up their hearts earnestly and unitedly to God, that he might be preserved from the double evil which threatened him. In the last chapter of this epistle we have the names of a great many of those private individuals at Rome to whom the apostle appealed. We do not know any of them, except for Priscilla and Aquila, of whom we have heard elsewhere; but this great man, this inspired apostle of God, who was not a whit behind the very chief of Christ's servants, makes his appeal to these unknown and humble individuals, that they would strive together with him in their prayers. I delight in this; it shows the lowly spirit of the apostle Paul, and it reveals to us his high value for the prayers of obscure men and women. He feels that he needs what the prayers of these people can bring to him; he is sure that without those prayers he will be in danger of failure, but that with them he will be strong for his great enterprise. He sees what prayer can do, and he would stir it up into powerful action."

It is worthy of note that Paul's requests for prayer had very little to do with his own personal needs. For example in **Ephesians 6:18** he does not ask for the believers in Ephesus to pray that he be set free from his imprisonment, but that, "*I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.*" Paul did not ask them to pray for his deliverance, comfort or safety, but for the effectiveness of his witness and ministry.

Brothers and sisters, there is nothing that reveals the state of a person's heart as fully as their prayers! As it relates to this point, let us consider **1 Kings 3:5-13**:

5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

6 And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

8 And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

*10 And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked **this thing**.*

*11 And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked **this thing**, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor*

hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

13 And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

(King James Version)

Solomon's prayer, like Paul's, is indicative of a heart that is wholly devoted to God. It is characteristic of persons for whom "*Living is Christ and dying is gain*" (**Philippians 1:21**). Persons who pray like this have grasped the import of Paul's exhortation in **Colossians 3:1-3**:

1 Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth,

3 for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 When Christ (who is your life) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him.

(New English Translation)

My beloved brothers and sisters, what would the content of your prayers and mine reveal about the state of our hearts? Are we deliberately and consistently praying a "this thing" kind of prayer?

In **Ephesians 6:18** Paul writes, "*Pray for me also*" (**New English Translation**). The Greek word translated "*for*" is **huper: (hoop-er)**, which, in the context of this verse, means, "on behalf of, for the sake of, concerning." Paul is here asking for intercessory prayer. Brothers and sisters, are we underestimating our continual need for the prayers of the

saints? May God Almighty give us the humility of Paul to ask others to pray for us, not merely for our physical needs, as is so often the case, but more importantly for our spiritual needs. If the Apostle Paul needed the prayers of the saints, how much more do you and I need them! We need to appreciate that if our prayers help another believer to overcome, then their victory is our victory too.

Paul's Prayer request is specific. *"That utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel."* The idea behind the Greek word translated "*utterance*" is clear speaking. Paul asks for prayer that he might proclaim the gospel both clearly and with a fearless power.

He says, *"That utterance may be **given** unto me."* It is instructive that even though he had preached the Gospel on so many occasions, in so many places and to so many people, Paul understood that every single instance of spiritually effective utterance is a gift from God. It is always the result of the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

Paul desired for utterance to be given to him so that he would be able to *"make known the mystery of the gospel."* The word "*mystery*" is a translation of the Greek word **mustérion**: (**moos-tay'-ree-on**). In classical Greek, the word meant "a hidden thing, a secret, a mystery." In the New Testament, it means "the secret purposes and counsels which God intends to carry into effect in His kingdom." The term "*mystery*," as it is used in the New Testament, does **not** refer to something that can **never** be understood. Rather, it refers to something that **can** be understood but only with divine assistance. It is a mystery in the sense that the human mind can never understand it as a result of its own efforts. But when it is revealed by God it is understood. In **Ephesians** the revealed mystery is that Jews and Gentiles alike, have been constituted one new people, one body, in their life in union with Christ. This is the truth that is revealed in the proclamation of the gospel.

John Phillips has a helpful note: "There are inherent difficulties in communicating the "mystery" of the gospel. Paul wanted to proclaim

this mystery, and man's dullness of hearing and his inability to comprehend had to be overcome. That Paul knew, was the work of the Holy Spirit, but before the Spirit of God could do His work, the human messenger needed to be flooded with divine light and his tongue touched with God's eloquence. Paul also need hearers whose ears and hearts had been made receptive. These needs could be met through prayer."

Earlier in our Lesson we quoted from **Spurgeon's** sermon entitled "*Pleading for Prayer.*" We will conclude our Lesson with another quotation from the same:

"I shall call your attention to this text with the longing in my own heart that I may more abundantly myself live in your prayers. I have to rejoice in the prayers of thousands of holy men and women who love me in the Lord. I am deeply grateful for the affectionate supplications of multitudes whom I have not seen in the flesh...I am a debtor, not only to the beloved people around me, but to a larger company all over the world. These are my comfort, my riches, my strength. To such I speak at this time. Beloved, I need your prayers more than ever. I am more and more conscious of their value; do not restrain them. Just now there is to me a special need of grace on many accounts, and I hope that some of those who have long borne me up will give me a special portion of aid at this hour..."

Beloved friends, if you are with me in the great battle for God and truth, and if you consider me worthy to bear the brunt of this war, I beseech you for Christ's sake support me by your persistent wrestlings at the throne of grace. Pray for all ministers and workers, but pray also for me. I am of all men the most miserable if you deny me this."