

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

As we conclude the tenth chapter of Romans, let us pause before proceeding to again note Paul's opening heart-felt concern for the Jewish people and how this in turn drove him to prayer. Paul's thoughts on prayer are found in all of his epistles but it is in his letter to the Ephesians that his theology of prayer shines clearest. As the Apostle draws this glorious epistle to a close, it is only fitting that he do so with an emphasis on prayer. One of my former professors used to say of Ephesians, "It starts with 'in the heavens (1:3) and ends on our knees.'" Paul has already revealed his heart to us in chapters 1:15-23 and 3:14-21, two of the most glorious prayers recorded in the epistles. Furthermore, Paul has declared the all-glorious blessed work of the Triune God towards believers; we have been loved, chosen, predestined, redeemed, adopted, given wisdom and understanding, sealed with the Holy Spirit and given an inheritance (1:3-14). Paul has declared the operation of grace in our salvation, that of "resurrection" from the dead when we were children of wrath (2:1-10), so that we are now members of God's family and indwelt by the very Spirit of God (2:19-22). But that is not all. We are called to walk worthy of our calling (4:1ff), which involves walking in love, light and wisdom. We are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit; that is, to have our minds controlled by the Spirit through the Word of God, and to be made strong in the knowledge of our God (5:18-6:10), and to be armed so that we can stand - *because* we have an adversary who seeks our demise (6:12). We *must* struggle, therefore we *must* pray - and that is Paul's topic as he concludes this epistle. Notice, as we examine this text, the four *alls*. "The word 'all' is repeated no fewer than four times in the Greek text. In each case it expresses a manifold universal concern: (a) for man's whole lifetime, in all its years, days, hours and minutes; (b) for the whole range and all forms of public and private prayer, including the desperate cry *help!*; (c) for the whole mental, emotional, and physical range of personal existence, and the energies present or to be received and used in the heart, head, and the limbs; (d) for the whole community of the church particularly its weakest members."¹

I. ALL KINDS OF PRAYER: THE VARIETY OF PRAYER

This expression occurs first in the Greek text. DIA (by means of) PAS \square S (all) PROSEUCH \square S (prayer, the general word) KAI (and) DE \square SE \square S (request, reference to a specific prayer). "The expression *all* prayer, means all kinds of prayer, oral and mental, ejaculatory and formal. The prayers which Paul would have the Christian warrior use, are not merely those of the closet and of stated reasons, but also those habitual and occasional aspirations, and outgoing of the heart after God, which a constant sense of his nearness and a constant sense of our necessity must produce."² Comp. Phil. 4:6; I Tim. 2:1; 5:5.

II. PRAYER AT ALL TIMES: THE FREQUENCY OF PRAYER (CF. ACTS 6:4)

PROSEUCHOMENOI (present middle participle of pray) EN (preposition, trans. "at")

PANTI (every or all) KAIR□ (time, occasion, or opportunity). This expression corresponds to “prayer without ceasing” in I Thess. 5:17; comp. also Luke 21:36; Prov. 3:6. H. C. G. Moule points out that the word KAIR□ has a definite character, that is, “at each, emerging crisis of need and trial, from greatest to least.”³ Although the word may refer to set times of prayer, it particularly points to specific occasions that occur during CHRONOS (time in sequence; chronology comes from this word). Regardless of the situation, any need at that *time*, should be made an opportunity for prayer. NOTE: “praying at all times *in the spirit*” - what meaneth this? Fortunately we are not left to wonder, because the expression EN PNEUMATI occurs in 5:18. It does *not* refer to praying in “tongues” or the like - a subject the Apostle nowhere mentions in this epistle - or elsewhere with the EN PNEUMATI. What often passes for speaking in *tongues* today has no parallel in Scripture. In fact speaking gibberish is condemned. In Matt 6:7 Jesus refers to the *babbling* of the gentiles (something not to be initiated. He uses the word BATTALOGES□ which refers to what we would call onomatopoeic speech – sounds that are non-words (i.e. bzzz, whooz, ahchu!). As in 5:18, it is in the *sphere* of the Spirit. We are to pray not only under the influence of the Spirit, but in the sphere of the Spirit, which has, as in 5:18 (also Col. 3:16) a direct reference to the Word of God. In other words, it is in the sphere of the Spirit *in Scripture* that we pray. We are to be directed by Scripture as the Spirit illuminates our understanding, cf. Jude 21.

III. PRAYER WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE: THE MANNER OF PRAYER

“...with this is mind, be alert and always keep on praying...” The expression “be alert” is AGRUPNOUNTES (present active participle) **lit.** to stay awake, to lie sleepless, to pass a sleepless night. Thus the word came to mean watchful, vigilant, alert to danger; “...and always keep on,” PROSKARTER□□SIS, **lit.** perseverance, constancy. The word means to hold out, to endure, to maintain diligence. This is the only occurrence of this word in the N.T., although other forms of this word are found in Acts 1:14; 6:4; Rom. 12:12; and Col. 4:2 which reads, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” The context is much the same. (cf. Luke 18:1)

IV. PRAYER FOR ALL THE SAINTS: THE SUBJECTS OF PRAYER

This is related directly to the preceding exhortation for perseverance. **Lit.** it is prayer *concerning* all the saints. The relationship that the saints sustain to one another and to the Lord Jesus (related so by the work of the Spirit) forms the basis for this concern. It is the communion of the saints that underlies their concern for one another - the Apostle has underscored this elsewhere by his metaphor of the body (cf. I Cor. 12:14-26). Paul specifically points to himself as in need of prayer. He is the illustration (v. 19). He likewise defines the area in which he requests prayer, “in order that” (HINA purpose clause - used twice, vv. 19, 20) the Apostle might preach faithfully and fearlessly - NOTE the expression “as I should.” He was requesting prayer for that which he knew was the will of God. The mention of his circumstances is important. “The Apostle's earnest wish was, that he might expound his message in a manner that became him and his high commission, that his imprisonment might have no dispiriting effect upon him, and that he might not in his addresses compromise the name and dignity of an ambassador for Christ.”⁴ Paul puts on praying for others. Finally, note how he asks for prayer in order that (1.) he might have *courage* in his preaching, and (2.) that the *content* of his preaching would not be diminished (cf. Acts 4:13).

CONCLUSION: It is very *important* for us to realize that we are not engaged in a “private war.” We may well have our individual battles, but the war is common to all saints. Therefore, the Apostle, having concluded with the believers’ adversary and armor, exhorts them to a

commitment to pray at all times, with all kinds of prayer, with all perseverance, for all the saints. And he specifically mentions himself as standing in need of their prayers, because of the nature of the intense opposition that he experienced, not only outwardly and physically, but spiritually. We are no different, and unless we see the *reality* of the spiritual warfare and the *needs* of all the saints, we will undoubtedly become self centered and introspective in our spiritual lives, which may well be a satanic scheme designed to focus our attention on our flesh. Finally, you'll notice that Paul's request for prayer does not revolve around physical needs or the like, but centers upon the need for spiritual boldness in contending *for* the truth of the gospel. Paul knew the urgency for contending for the truth of the gospel. "Why should we contend for the truth? Because it is the only thing that can save men! Let us therefore look beyond men to their lost souls, and let us be concerned about nothing but the glory of God and the salvation of men and women. So the Apostle exhorts us to pray with all perseverance and supplication in the Spirit for all saints, for all preachers of the Gospel whatever their circumstances and conditions, that they may speak the mystery of Christ boldly, as they ought to speak."⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ M. Barth, *Ephesians: The Anchor Bible II* (Doubleday, 1960), p. 778.

² C. Hodge, *Commentary On the Epistle to the Ephesians* (rpt. Revell, 1975), p. 371.

³ H.C.G. Moule, *Ephesians Studies* (Hodde & Stoughton, 1900), p. 212.

⁴ J. Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (T & T Clark, 1883), p. 231.

⁵ M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20* (Baker, 1977), p. 359.