

Lesson 16

Devoted to Prayer

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, so that I may make it known as I should, Colossians 4.2-4.

Introduction

Thankfulness is a foundational theme in Colossians. Why does Paul concentrate on it so much in this epistle? First, it serves as a guard against the attacks of Satan. Also, when we focus on how good God is, it reinforces our resolve to stay true. Finally, it elevates our focus off ourselves and on to what God is doing. Thankfulness helps us see:

- How He is leading us.
- How He is sustaining us.
- How He is teaching us.
- How we are growing and becoming more like Him.

Thankfulness and prayer go hand in hand. In fact, the more prayerful we are the more thankful we'll be. Our spiritual life should be characterized by both. As Paul begins to wrap up his writing to the churches around Colossae, he focuses on the importance of prayer. It is a vital component of our spiritual walk with God. Verse 2 reveals three parts to our prayer life:

- **Constancy:** We should be constant in all forms of prayer.
- **Watching:** *being watchful in it, ...* We need to be perceptive and open to see how God is working to accomplish His purposes according to what is prayed.
- **Thanksgiving:** *with thanksgiving.* No matter how God answers, we move with a spirit of gratitude and thankfulness.

Devotion to Prayer

Prayerful habits and attitudes of anticipation and gratefulness should characterize every Christian. The way the first part of verse 2 is constructed is missed in many English translations. When examining the original text, “prayer” is placed at the beginning of the sentence. Today we would translate it like this: “Prayer – devote yourselves to it.”⁵⁷ This shows its ultimate importance as the Christian life is to be

⁵⁷ Thompson, Marianne Meye. *Colossians and Philemon*. The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005, p. 97. See also Young's Literal Translation which handles Colossians 4.2 thusly: “In the prayer continue ye, watching in it in thanksgiving;”

saturated with it. One Greek Lexicon explains it as to: “persist obstinately in.”⁵⁸ The call for perseverance in prayer goes all the way back to Jesus⁵⁹ with directives like:

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

– Matthew 7.7-8

Prayer is not a detachable thing for the Christian. Rather, it is absolutely crucial in every aspect of our personal and local church life. It carries the idea of steadfastness and constancy. In fact, it’s written with a spirit of intensity. *Hang in there with constant prayer.* Prayer is to become a way of life . . . having our heart open to God with earnest, persistent, and strong prayer. We include all of life’s thoughts; deeds; circumstances. Everything becomes a cause or point of communication with God. Life is a constant exercise of prayer.

Verse 2 is the core exhortation, and verse 3 comes alongside as an extension. Verses 2-3 are not primarily about prayer for Paul: they are more about the general posture of prayer the Colossians should maintain, and he adds an aside to pray for him also.

Watchfulness

With the concept of perseverance and persistence also comes the idea of *patience*, whereby we demonstrate our personal dependence, trust, and reliance on God. MacArthur writes, “There is a tension between boldness and waiting on God’s will. That tension is resolved by being persistent yet accepting God’s answer when it finally comes.”⁶⁰ A good example of this is found in the actions of David as his child is dying, 1 Samuel 12.15-23.

The power of congregational prayer

Collective prayer is also vital for the life of a local congregation. A congregation that regularly prays together will be growing and thriving spiritually while they wait on the Lord. Acts 1.14; 6.4; and Romans 12.12 go right along with the idea found in Colossians 4.2, which urges Christians to move in conjunction with one another in “decisive or unflinching perseverance” . . . exhibiting ‘tenaciousness . . . praying collectively oriented toward specific goals.’⁶¹

These prayers are *unceasing* in nature, much like what was said in other Pauline writings in Romans 1.9-10; 1 Thessalonians 5.17; and Ephesians 6.18. When Paul says be *watchful*, he is conveying the idea of imminent expectation. The idea is that we need to be looking for answers to the specific things we are praying.

⁵⁸ Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 1515.

⁵⁹ Other references for Jesus’ teaching on persistence in prayer can be found in Luke 11.5-8; 18.1-8.

⁶⁰ MacArthur, p. 182.

⁶¹ Balz, Horst Robert, and Gerhard Schneider. *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–, vol. 3., p. 172.

How *specific* are you in your prayers? If we are going to follow Paul's directive by being devoted in prayer, we need to verbalize specific needs and desires as we conversate with our Father.

With Thanksgiving

All prayer is to be offered in a spirit of *thanksgiving*. When God answers, however He answers, we do so with a spirit of thankfulness and gratitude. God is with us, provides for us, forgives us, promises us an inheritance; and works things out for us as we move forward on our spiritual journey.

For Thought and Reflection

1. What are Paul's specific instructions regarding prayer in Colossians 4.2-4?
2. What is the difference between praying and being *devoted to prayer*?
3. What does it mean to be watchful? What is the difference between being watchful and worrying?
4. What are some things for which you need to be watchful?
5. What is at the forefront of Paul's mind, as indicated by 4.3-4? What does it say to you that he didn't mention the need for prayer for him as he endured his present circumstances?
6. As you think about the prayers you have prayed, how has God answered them? What are you thankful for?