Ephesians 6:18-20

Prayer Partners

Paul has already directed the body to be standing together, to be resting in faith in what God has accomplished and to be constantly surrounding themselves with these truths. This spiritual relationship comes with an expectation from Paul that’s related to an awareness of one another, a care for one another, a love for one another in light of our walk with Christ through prayer and petition for one another.

# Prayer and Petition

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

*What is prayer?*

We use the word prayer a lot as Christians. However, it may be worth seeking a biblical definition of prayer. The principle of prayer is simple: it is speaking to God to intercede on behalf of ourselves or others. While this is a simple concept, there are things that the Bible calls out for us to recognize as foundational truths.

* Prayer for anything but salvation by faith by those who do not believe is not a heard prayer [c.f. Genesis 20:7,17; Psalm 34:15]
* The Holy Spirit prays on our behalf [c.f. Romans 8:26]
* Our motives matter [I Timothy 2:8; James 4:3, 5:16; Psalm 66:18; 1 Peter 3:7]
* We are to be praying all the time as part of our walk with the Lord [1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18]
* We can pray from just our mind (but arguably should not) [1 Corinthians 14:15]
* We are to be praying for one another [c.f. James 5:16; Ephesians 6:18; ]

Often believers pray for circumstances to change – which is not bad in and of itself – but as we look at prayer throughout the scriptures, we see there is another fundamental element that is a result of an active prayer life: prayer changes those who pray.

This change in the one who prays is a result of the believer boldly before His throne (c.f. Hebrews 4:16) which is a place of rest (c.f. 4:11); our minds are changed about the circumstances because we see things within God’s will (c.f. 1 John 5:14); We can trust that the Holy Spirit is interceding for us even if we don’t understand how to pray about circumstances (c.f. Romans 8:26-27); We see that the way things unfold is in alignment with God’s eternal plan of perfection and glory (c.f. Romans 8:26-28).

*What is petitioning as a type of prayer?*

More specific than a prayer for blessing, or a general voicing of concern, a petition is a specific request for an outcome to the Lord.

*If we get enough people to pray will God have to answer us?*

There is a common thought amongst believers that if we get more than a few people together to pray we’ll force God’s hand. This is certainly not taught in the Bible and while God loves it when we pray together, His will is determined and He is not required to do what we ask. For example, if we pray together for the rapture to happen today that will not impact the date and time that the rapture is to take place; God knows the timing [c.f. Acts 1:7].

*Why at all times?*

It is important for us to consider the work of the Lord in time. If we are to be abiding and walking in the direction of the Holy Spirit we should anticipate the power and work of the Holy Spirit to be an expression of our new life in Christ twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week until He returns. That relationship is established by identification and position, but the condition of our walk should reflect that through constant fellowship and intimacy with our Lord.

*What is praying in the Spirit?*

Contrary to charismatic ideas, praying in the Spirit is not a prayer language or speaking in tongues. The idea Paul is presenting here is that we be abiding, mindful of the things that God has taught us through His Holy Spirit, and as He directs us, we be praying in light of those things. The Holy Spirit may prompt us to be praying for someone, for example, and so we pray in the Spirit for that person.

*Why should we be on the alert?*

After already saying we’re to be standing (in verses 10:11,13, and 14), we’re to consider that the deceptions of the devil are looking for a place in our minds (c.f. Ephesians 4:27). If we’re not careful we can let false teachers, error, or worldly reasoning have a place in our mind and follow along in the wrong path. The whole reason why Galatians 6:1 is a concern is that believers have found themselves snookered into a place of carnality, and those who are spiritual have to come help pull them out of the ditch.

*Why should we be praying for all of the saints?*

Paul has been about the business of establishing the church in the known world. He has been seeking to make sure that they’re not just temporarily there around his missionary journeys’ routes, but that they are there until the Lord returns. The consequence of a myopic or inward focused ministry is a carnally minded church with no concern for the family of God. Praying for all of the saints means being concerned with God’s concerns for His people, the church. Persecution, carnality, and culture were all commonly attacking the church then, and continue to be a problem for the church today. We should be praying for all the saints today, just as they were praying for the whole body two thousand years ago.

Prayer for the whole body requires consideration of intimacy with one another. If we don’t know one another we cannot be praying anything but the most superficial of prayers. If we don’t love or care about one another we will not be praying because we are infantile in our thinking. Further establishing the church would involve praying for missionary work, outreach from the body, and seeking the Lord’s wisdom for how we can share the gospel with those the Lord has brought into our lives. As we see sanctification working in our own lives, we need to be praying for the Lord’s work through us and into the lives of other, younger believers so that we may be used as part of the Lord’s legacy of believers in love with Him, His word, and serving and loving one another until the hope of Christ’s return is fulfilled.

# Praying for Paul

and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

*Do we pray for Paul now?*

Up front we should state that we’re not to be praying for Paul today. The past is not something we’re praying for, and Paul is with the Lord already, having run the good race. However, the readers of this letter most certainly should have been (and probably were).

## Paul’s Words

*Why did it matter which words Paul used?*

Paul was asking for prayer for the words that he would be using within the time of his ministry (in and out of chains). His choice of words and thinking through how to speak to various audiences is evidenced in Acts. This is the second part of this passage that leads us to a principle that needs to be articulated: Paul knew that while he needed to be walking in the Spirit, he also needed to be mentally focused and growing and thinking about the words that he used. The believer needs to be aligning their will with the direction of the Holy Spirit. Abiding is not simply becoming a mindless vessel, but a mindful vessel. In the Old Testament the saints were to be walking out the will of God *without* the perpetual filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit [c.f. 1 Samuel 10 where Saul’s being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking with the prophets was exceptional]. They were simply to obey as an act of fellowship. In the New Testament we are to be walking out the will of God *with* the perpetual filling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s thinking (his mind), was being renewed in the process of sanctification, so he was compelled to be seeking prayer that the Holy Spirit would be teaching and growing him so that his words would land with his audience. Looking at Colossians 4:6 Paul’s concern for words extends to the body where we are to be, “Let[ting] your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”

## The Mystery of the Gospel

As presented earlier in Ephesians (vs. 3:3,4,9) Paul was made a steward of the mystery of the gospel to the gentiles. In dealing with pagan mythology and stoicism he needed to be able to carefully present the gospel with replacing the erroneous worldviews with a biblical worldview. This often turned into confrontation (see: much of the book of Acts starting in chapter 9), but also required Paul to be observant so that as he presented the gospel it was heard, understood, and (by the will of God) responded to.

The Jews, having been stewards of the Law, often needed to understand that the mystery of the gospel was to be shared outside of Judaism. They needed to understand not only that the Messiah had come, but that Jesus had died for the whole world [c.f. John 3:16; Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 1:8, 5:8, 12, 11:12; 1 Corinthians 1:21, etc.].

## Paul’s Chains

*Why was Paul in chains? How did that impact him?*

Paul was imprisoned in Rome under twenty-four-hour watch of centurions because of his obedience to the Holy Spirit [Acts 20:23-24, 22:29]. It was prophesied that he would be going to Rome in chains [c.f. Acts 20:22]. While this offered a steady stream of new people to share the gospel with, which Paul used to his advantage [c.f. Philippians 4:22], it was also something that Paul wrote about as being the prisoner of Christ rather than Rome in Ephesians 3:1 and Philemon 1:1,9. He was an ambassador in chains, but an ambassador nonetheless. Paul’s chains were a point of contention within the larger church [c.f. Philippians 1:12-21; 2 Timothy 1:16] and while it was not because Paul sinned, many believers had chosen to see his chains as a reason to distance themselves from him despite his being an apostle.

## Speaking Boldly

*Why did Paul need to speak boldly?*

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel [c.f. Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 1:12], but he also had to be careful what he said, and how he said it as a prisoner. If his words were right and his audience was listening he would have had the largest impact. This is part of why he is asking for prayer: that the God of the universe would move in him with clarity and he would be listening to reach the most people with the gospel to establish the church in Rome where he was in chains.

# Evangelism for Non-Apostles

While not all are called to be evangelists [c.f. Ephesians 4:11], all are to be prepared to share the gospel [c.f. Philippians 1:27; 1 Peter 3:15]. Paul and Peter both expected that as believers we would be confronted with those who didn’t believe, but had been wooed by the Holy Spirit. By not being prepared to share the gospel [as presented in: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4] we reflect that we don’t know what we believed when we were saved, immaturity in our own walk, or who Christ was as savior. This is not mentioned for guilt, but as a testimony of where I was as a believer until my late teens. I had believed as a child, but not prepared to present the gospel. Many believers walk around in ignorance of the gospel, how to share it, or in extreme discomfort or shame due to secular thinking.

Like Paul, we should be aware of the worldviews around us. There are commonly a few:

* Humanism – that man is the measure of truth
* Relativism – that all truth is relative
* Postmodernism – That there is no truth and no one can know truth and no one should assert that they know truth
* Buddhism – Not a true religion, but treated as though peace through non-suffering is the goal of everyone who understands.
* Hinduism – Brahman is the uncaused cause; the unchanging force that causes all change. A decentralized religion there are variations that are monotheistic, polytheistic, and any number of variations on these ideas.
* Judaism – The God of the Old Testament has revealed Himself, but the Messiah’s first coming is awaited. The Law of Moses is still the ruling principle.
* Atheism – Science as we understand it (though it is adapting) and best humanistic guesses towards the explanation of the universe as we know it (though that is adapting, too) are truth (little ‘t’). There is no God.
* Islam – The God of the Old Testament and New Testament are distorted by the followers of Judaism and Christianity. The promised blessing of Abraham were through Ishmael

We need to know what these worldviews believe and be prepared to explain the Christian worldview and be able to express the ideas around specific, revealed, singular truth. Paul did this in Acts 17. His approach was to observe the worldview of the Athenians, and then engage them in a compelling way that revealed truth from God in contrast to confusion from their polytheistic uncertainty.

# Conclusion

Paul wraps up this letter (theologically) with a very mirror-like reflection on the opening of his letter: that he was in chains for Christ, but that he had a ministry that was for the believer and those within Ephesus. He prayed for the church in Chapters 1:16-21 [and 3:14-21] and closes with asking the church to pray for himself. As believers we have been challenged to consider things in light of God’s revelation about Himself, His character, and His provision for us as His church, the bride of His Son. A powerful message indeed, most likely one worth sharing.