

ROCK GROUP BIBLE STUDY

September 19, 2003

Stand Firm! [Part 2] "The Believer's Prayer"

Ephesians 6:18-24

18 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, 19 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. 21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 And I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. 23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with {a love} incorruptible.

Remember that Paul has made a transition in Ephesians 6:10 with the use of the term *finally*. He has moved on to the conclusion of his letter to the church in Ephesus and is providing his final instructions to them.

Remember as we observed last week Paul concludes by emphasizing their need to stand firm in the midst of spiritual battle by putting on the full armor of God.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan tells of Christian's weapon called prayer. When everything else had failed, prayer would enable him to defeat the enemy in the valley of the shadow.

In the closing verses of this letter, Paul gives believers some general instruction about prayer. All the while that we are fighting with the full armor of God, we are to be in prayer. Ephesians begins by lifting us up to the heavenly places, but ends by pulling us down on our knees in prayer.

PAUL'S ADMONITION [6:18]

Paul begins his instruction here by emphasizing a need to be in prayer, "*With all prayer and petition pray at all times!*"

· As Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers to pray, what aspects of prayer does he emphasize in verse 18?

1) The term *prayer* [PROSEUCHEI] refers to requests in general. It probably emphasizes a variety of prayer (i.e. *with all kinds of prayer*). So it could refer to various aspects of prayer such as adoration, confession, thanksgiving, personal petitions, or intercession on the behalf of others. John MacArthur believes that it might be taken as every form of prayer and could refer various types of prayers such as public or private; or various positions in prayer such as sitting or standing; or it could refer to the characteristics of prayer such as loud crying or soft whispers [cf. MacArthur, *Ephesians*, p. 379]. Although I recognize the emphasis on the variety of prayer, I would see it narrowed primarily to the types of prayer with an emphasis on the aspects of prayer.

2) The term petition [DEESIS] refers to prayers that are more specific and focuses in on specific prayer requests. This would be similar to what we do in small groups when we go around the circle and share specific prayer requests.

· *How often or with what frequency were they to pray?*

AT ALL TIMES! This does not mean that they were to pray in formal and noticeable ways every waking moment of their lives. This does not mean that they were to devote themselves to ritualistic patterns and forms of prayer (i.e. from a prayer book or while counting beads). It means to have a continual mind set on prayer. It means to live in a continual God consciousness, where everything we see and experience becomes a kind of prayer. It is to have a prayerful mindset. It means to have a continual pattern of prayer in your life!

· *How do the following verses support this continual mindset on prayer?*

Luke 21:36 Jesus exhorted the disciples to keep alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength...

Acts 2:42 The early apostles were continually devoting themselves to prayer for the direction of the church. It became a way of life to pray.

Colossians 4:2 Paul exhorts the Colossian believers to be devoted to prayer! It is a strong commitment and way of life.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 We should be praying without ceasing. It is a continual way of life to be constantly in a prayer mindset.

· *In whose power were they to pray?*

They were to pray in the Spirit. To be in the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit (cf. Ephesians 5:18). So it is not walking according to the flesh, or according to the ways of the world, but according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If we are in sin or controlled by other things such as alcohol or desires of the flesh etc... then we are not allowing ourselves to be controlled by the Spirit and our prayers will not be in the Spirit. So the emphasis is on allowing ourselves to be controlled by the Spirit of God so that when we do go before God in prayer then our prayers will be in the Spirit. Read **Romans 8:26-27**. We need the Spirit to intercede for us.

· *In what manner were they to pray?*

1) They were to be on the alert! Jesus often told His disciples to watch and pray! It gives forth the idea of being on guard, staying awake and looking for His coming! We are to have a continual watchfulness in prayer, keeping our mind on things above and looking forward to Christ's return.

2) They were to pray with all perseverance! This gives the idea that our prayers should be persistent. It harkens back to Jesus' parables of the persistent neighbor and the importunate widow (cf. Luke 11:5-8 & Luke 18:1-5). Both of these parables emphasize our need to be persistent in prayer.

3) They were to pray with all petition! This is the same term above and emphasizes a need to make our prayers specific rather than general. We should pray in much detail about the things we bring before the Lord. Make specific requests!

· *Who were they to pray for according to verse 18?*

Although in other places, Paul calls on us to pray for unbelievers, government leaders and others, but the focus here in Ephesians is that they pray for all the saints. We need to be actively lifting up requests on behalf of other believers so that they might be strengthened in the spiritual battle. The emphasis here is on intercession for others. The emphasis here is probably on the spiritual rather than the physical. The context here is in the midst of a struggle, a spiritual battle. We need to be actively praying for one another, that we may grow in Christ, that we might continue to strive for holiness in our lives, that we might persevere through our struggles etc... The focus is on others rather than on self. How often do you actually pray for other believers in this way?

PAUL'S REQUEST [6:19-20]

After exhorting the Ephesian believers to pray and specifically to pray for all the saints, the apostle Paul offers up suggestions on how they might pray for him.

· ***What are Paul's prayer requests that he shares with the church in Ephesus here in verses 19 and 20?***

Ultimately Paul's request is for the proclamation of the gospel and that he would not keep quiet about it, but would indeed be bold about it. Although, Paul was imprisoned under house arrest and chained to a Roman soldier, he still had the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. Paul sought to do so with boldness. He would be chained to a large number of soldiers over a period of time and really had a great opportunity to make a difference for Christ. We find out from his letter to the Philippians, which would have been written the following year after his letter to the Ephesians, that he was actually quite successful in communicating the Gospel. According to Philippians 1:13-14 his cause was known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and according to Philippians 4:22 even members of Caesar's household had come to faith in Christ. Paul sought prayer here for clear communication and a bold proclamation of the gospel.

PAUL'S MESSENGER [6:21-22]

· ***Who was Paul's messenger and why was he sent to Ephesus?***

Paul's messenger was Tychicus. He was a beloved brother in Christ and a faithful minister in the Lord. He was the one who carried this letter from Rome to the Church in Ephesus. According to Colossians 4:7, Tychicus also carried the letter to the church in Colossae (Colossians 4:7) and he was accompanied by Onesimus (Colossians 4:9), who carried the letter to Philemon.

1) Paul sent the letter by Tychicus so that Tychicus could share Paul's personal circumstances with the church and let them know precisely how he was doing. In fact this is the exact reason that Paul sent Tychicus so that they may know about Paul and his companions in Rome. 2) Paul also sent Tychicus so that he could comfort the hearts of the Ephesian believers as well. Tychicus would have been an appropriate choice as he was from Asia Minor and his appearance would have brought much encouragement to the church in Ephesus.

PAUL'S BLESSING [6:23-24]

Paul closes out the letter to the church in Ephesus as per his custom by offering up a theologically rich blessing.

· ***What themes does Paul focus on in this closing blessing?***

Paul focuses on four distinct themes that have recurred throughout this rich epistle:

1) Peace! [1:2; 2:14-15, 17; 4:3; 6:15]

2) Love! [1:15; 4:2; 4:15-16; 5:25, 28, 33]

3) Faith! [1:15; 2:8; 3:12; 3:17; 4:5; 4:13; 6:16]

4) As he began his letter (1:2) so he ends his letter. Paul's final prayer was for God's grace upon his readers and also a recurrent theme. [1:2; 1:6; 2:5; 2:7-8; 3:2; 3:7-8; 4:7] God's grace can only be upon those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

SMALL GROUPS

· *Have you devoted yourself to the practice of prayer in your life?*

· *How are you doing at having a continual mindset on prayer?*

· *How are you doing in persisting in prayer?*

· *What specific requests can we pray for?*