

"Persisting in Prayer Until They Are Saved"

Colossians 4:2-4:6

I Thess. 5:17

INTRODUCTION:

At the time Paul wrote these words he was in prison in Rome.

You would think that this would have been a down time for him as far as seeing people come to Christ.

I mean can you imagine being in prison and the emotions of being incarcerated – what a downer in your emotions this would be.

Paul, however, was able to continue his work not only during the best of times but also in the most unfavorable circumstances in which he found himself.

He had a real desire to get the good news out to people because of what the Lord had done in his own life.

He had a genuine experience.

His life was different now.

How could he not tell people wherever he went about how God's grace had come to him and the tremendous change that happened to him and Paul want them to have this change too.

I think that's part of our problem today.

For many of us – our changed life has diminished in our memory.

We have forgotten what it was like – possibly it has been too long.

Paul had learned how to operate in all kinds of circumstances as he shared his faith, and God honored that commitment as he continued to speak boldly.

Today's scripture has much to say to us about persisting in prayer until people come to know Christ, but there is much more included in these few verses than we see at first glance .

Let's see what we can get out of today's scripture that will help us share our faith more effectively in the week ahead.

1. The Importance of Prayer:

The importance of prayer in seeing people come to Christ is often minimized today in our fast-paced society.

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That is probably why people are not moved by the message.

Their hearts have not been prepared first by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to see their need.

They have come to believe they don't need to go to church,

They have come to believe they don't need the Lord.

They have come to believe that they can handle it by themselves.

STORY:

A group of businessmen were flying in an aircraft when there was a sudden decompression.

The oxygen masks fell from the ceiling, and the plane began to scream towards the ground.

One of the men lifted the mask from his face for a moment, and shouted across the aisle, "Hey! Jerry! You used to go to Sunday School when you were a boy! Say a prayer for us! Please!"

"Don't be stupid!" shouted Jerry. "The last time I prayed was twenty years ago!"

But his business companions insisted that Jerry should pray. "All right," said Jerry. "O Lord, I

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haven't bothered You for the last twenty years. And if You get us out of this fix, I promise You, Lord, I won't bother You for the NEXT twenty years!"

Paul didn't think he had any need of the gospel either until he was confronted on the Damascus Road that day.

His heart had been prepared to receive.

Prayer is necessary if we are to see people's hearts prepared to receive the truth because up until that point they are blinded.

II Corinthians 4:3,4 says, ***"if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine into them."***

Paul therefore says, ***"Devote yourselves to prayer"***

**Be earnest in
Be persistent in
Be active in
Be unwearied
Be intent on**

Do not let prayer slide by in your day.

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Matthew Henry says, “**Keep up your constant time of prayer without being diverted from it by other business.**”

And if all of us would have judgment day honesty – we do allow other things to divert us from being in the Word of God and being in constant Prayer. Amen??

STORY:

A woman came to a missionary at Bangalore, India, asking him to interfere and prevent a certain native Christian from praying for her any more.

When asked how she knew that the Christian was praying for her, she replied, "I used to perform my worship to the idols quite comfortably, but for some time past I have not been able to do so.

Besides, he told me at the time that he was praying for my family, and now my son and two daughters have become Christians.

If he goes on praying, he may make me, too, become a Christian.

He is always bringing things to pass with his prayers.

Somebody must make him stop." -- SELECTED

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The Thessalonians scripture says ***to pray continually or pray without ceasing.***

This does not mean non-stop praying but rather recurring prayer throughout the day--lifting our hearts to God while we are going about our daily routine.

What am I talking about?

What I am saying is – you can pray while your driving down the road.

You can pray when you get out of bed in the early morning to go to the bathroom.

You can pray whenever and whatever you're doing, you can shoot arrow prayers to God.

You don't have to have your eyes closed or be kneeling in prayer every time you pray.

I'm not telling anyone here this morning that you have to close your eyes when your driving. You can't do that!

I had a older lady in my last church who was so distraught because her knees got to the place where she couldn't kneel and pray.

And Mabel, bless her heart, you would have thought that she backslid from God.

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In her thoughts there was no way she could pray unless she got on her knees.

Now – mind you – I do feel that some of us need to get on our knees more often than what we do.

Jesus gives us the greatest example of humility in prayer – when He went to the Father in prayer – it says in the Word of God, ***“When He knelt in prayer ...”***

So you can pray when you are driving your car--and you better not have your eyes closed!

The point is that prayer should be a spontaneous part of your everyday life--it should be important enough to you that you would be earnest, persistent, active

Matthew Henry said ***“Prayer will punctuate one’s daily schedule.”***

Continue to pray and thank the Lord for answers.

Harry Greenwood always said, **“Believe you’ve got it before you get it.”**

Story:

One day a missionary man answered a knock on his door.

And he went to the door and answered it and there before him stood a young boy with a big fish he had caught.

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And the boy said to the missionary man, “You have taught us to tithe, so I brought this fish to you as my tithe.”

And the missionary man said, “Well, where are your other nine fish?”

And the little boy said, “There still in the river, I’m going back to catch them now.”

Greenwood said, **“Believe you’ve got it before you get it.”**

That little boy had a lot of faith to give his tithe and he knew the fish were there for his catching.

Amen

Thank the Lord in advance.

Pray on rainy days as well as sunny days.

Pray on bad days when everything is going wrong for you as well on days when everything is flowing smoothly.

STORY:

Mary came to her mother, and said, "Mommy, I suppose, up in Heaven, they think I am dead."

Her mother replied, "Why, Mary, why do you suppose they think you are dead?"

"Well," said the little girl, "because I have not said my prayers for a week."

I ask you this morning, could it be possible for you that you haven't prayed that long?

2. Open Opportunities:

Paul prayed that God would open doors of opportunity for him to speak to others about Christ.

In I Corinthians 16:9 he said, ***“a great door and effectual is opened to me.”***

A great door for EFFECTIVE work has opened to me.

Have you ever prayed that simple prayer, “Lord, open up a door for me to speak to someone today about you?”

Lord, give me a chance to reach somebody today for you.

Help me Lord to be sensitive to speak when that opportunity comes.

Prayer is what makes it **EFFECTIVE** so that people will not only listen but **UNDERSTAND** what is being said.

Folks, that's what the Holy Spirit is about. The Holy Spirit is the **ONE** who goes before us and prepares the way for them to understand.

He asked people to pray for him that doors of opportunity would open up for him and that he would make the message understandable.

“Pray that every time I open my mouth I'll be able to make Christ as PLAIN AS DAY to them,”

An open door would be useless if people don't understand what you are talking about.

Paul seemed to have a real concern that people would understand what he was saying.

He said, ***“I want to proclaim the message as clearly as I should.”***

He wanted to make the mystery of redemption clear to people in a worthy manner--to present it in a way that was not going to bring reproach on the name of Christ.

Is this your concern today?

Do you have a prayer partner who prays for you that opportunities will open up to speak?

Last Wednesday night, Pastor Lonnie taught us again the importance of getting a prayer partner so that we can pray together for those who are unsaved.

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Some of you do not have the Spiritual Gift of Evangelism, but all of us can Pray.

All of us can tell our friends about Jesus.

Do you pray for someone that they will have opportunities open up for them?

Would you join us in praying that way?

How do we live up to the opportunities once they open up for us?

Paul is saying, ***“Don’t waste your opportunities. Pick up on them.” “Make the most of every opportunity because the days are evil”*** (Ephesians 5:15).

Folks, we live in the most wicked and evil days this earth has ever seen.

Why do I believe that?

Because I am convinced the Man of Sin is alive today and he is cranking up all manner of evil against the Church and those who are godly.

That’s why we must as People of God recognize the Spiritual Warfare that is going on presently in His Church.

The enemy is doing all that he can to discourage people and bring them down.

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To discourage people with their local church.

To discourage people with the economy.

And to try to put people in fear.

Make the most of every opportunity to share your faith.

This goes along with being ***alert to--being diligent--be awake.***

Opportunities come and go.

Don’t let them slip through your fingers and be wasted.

You might be the only person that someone will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we pray for people to receive Christ two other things are included in these verses that we may not have noticed.

SPEECH & CONDUCT:

How to speak and how to act toward people who are not yet Christians.

You see – as Pastors we are doing everything we can to help you learn how to do this.

Our responsibility is to equip you for reaching the unsaved with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And yet – it amazes me to be perfectly honest – that there are some in the church who won't accept this.

It amazes me that some in the church – don't want to be bothered with this kind of outreach to people who are lost.

Let me ask you a very serious question, "How would you feel if when you came to me as your Pastor and requested prayer for your son and or your daughter to be saved, and I responded to you, "You know, I appreciate and love you, but you know – it's not all that important for them to be saved."

How would you respond to me?

You would be rid of me – and yet – I hear people say – we don't want the church to get any larger.

Folks, this comes against the Great Commission that Jesus Christ gave to us.

Next - He says, ***"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders. Let outsiders see that your decision to follow Christ is a wise one--that it has made a difference in your life. He is saying, "Don't walk in their customs. You will never***

win someone to Christ by living in the same old worldly, sinful lifestyle as they do. It doesn't work for them so why should you join in? A Christian never gains anything by living as sinful as those whose eyes have not been opened."

Ephesians 5:8 says ***"for you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light...have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness..."***

Don't give people an occasion to call you a hypocrite or occasion to say,

"Well if they call themselves a Christian, I don't want to be one."

Or **"if they get to heaven, then I KNOW I will."**

Do we have to change some things – some attitudes – some actions in our lives that will convince those outside of the Grace of God that we are Christians?

Story:

Some of you have heard this story before, but it fits here.

I had a couple in my church who told us this story. They had neighbors who had an apple tree where the limbs hung over the fence into their yard.

When the apples fell into their yard, they complained to their neighbors about apples falling into their yard.

Boy, I wish I had a neighbor whose apples fell into my yard.

I told them – why didn't you go pick up the apples and use them?

Why I would have baked an apple pie and taken it to them and showed them the Love of Jesus.

Do we get this? **Do we have to change so that our prayers and our witnessing will take effect?**

Paul says, *“walk in wisdom. Do not increase their prejudices against religion and give them an occasion for dislike. Do them all the good you can and in the proper season recommend your faith to them. Let how you live be becoming to a Christian.*

Paul's words imply that believers are to avoid needlessly antagonizing or alienating people.

I personally know of a business man who spoke negative and critical about his own church to others in the community.

How do I know that? Because leaders in this community told me what he was saying.

What did he do by speaking this way about his church?

He alienated people from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conduct yourself in a way that will attract, impress, and convict non-Christians and give the community a favorable impression of the gospel of Jesus.

And then he says when you open your mouth and speak **be GRACIOUS in your speech--**

Don't put people down

Don't be rude

Don't act like you are superior to people

Be pleasant

Let your speech be seasoned with salt.

That means--it gives flavor and it preserves.

Both are valuable assets for Christians in order to commend their message to those who are unsaved and lost.

Part of the right flavoring consists of suiting your conversation to the hearers.

Being able to choose the best means of answering questions about your faith is important to understanding.

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I Peter 3:15 says, ***“Be ready to always give an answer to every man who asks you a reason.”***

What is appropriate for one person may not be for another.

How do you answer questions and objections to the faith?

Are you able to give the reasons for your faith?

Titus 2:8 says ***“In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”***

3. Putting it into Practice:

How do we apply this scripture to our individual lives?

What principles do you want to build into your life as you relate to the unsaved?

How do you start to pray more effectively for those who don't yet know Christ?

How do we do our part to see people saved?

STORY:

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There is a story told about a faithful old deacon whose often repeated prayer expression was, "O Lord, touch the unsaved with Thy finger."

One prayer meeting night he was leading in prayer when he abruptly stopped praying.

Supposing he had been taken suddenly ill, someone went to him and asked if there was anything wrong, if he were ill.

"No," he replied, "I'm not ill. But something seemed to say to me, 'Thou art the finger'." --Selected

In order to pray for people in a proper way you should keep a LIST of who you are specifically praying for.

Always keep this list in front of you.

You might even want to expand the list of 10 to more.

How do you decide who to add to this list?

You can't pray effectively for a lot of people at once.

It is too general.

1. Ask:

Allow God to put the names of those He wishes to save in your heart.

When these names are in your heart you will have more of a concern to pray for them.

There used to be a song we use to sing quite often that said, **“Lord lay some soul upon my heart and love that soul through me, and may I ever do my part to win that soul to thee.”**

Ask God specifically for a few names again this week.

Out of all your family members, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, a few names will spontaneously come to your mind.

You will have a feeling for them and you will want them to be saved first.

2. Write them down. (if you haven't already)

Add the date and the name.

Leave a space for they date they come to the Lord.

Once you have a name in your record book don't give up praying for that person until you see something happen.

It is not certain when a person will come to Christ.

Some don't take long. Others may take years.

3. Ask the Lord to open doors. to show you what to say and what not to say.

Ask the Lord to deal with that person in the exact way they can understand the message.

Conclusion:

1. Prayer is vitally important to prepare people for receiving Christ. Make it a priority.
2. The Lord will open doors of opportunity. We must open our eyes for them and don't waste them.
3. We must be a Christian in our conduct and speech toward others.
4. We need to ask the Lord for specific people to pray consistently for.

Prayer: “Lord, out of all the people I know, place those on my heart that I should pray for. I am encouraged by Your Word and thank You for answering my prayers concerning my friends and family. Draw many to Yourself because I have been faithful to persist in prayer until they are saved.” Amen