

1/28/2 1 Col. 4:2-6 Watchfulness

First, I need to mention that when I was studying this section of Colossians, some things opened up that I feel are very important to get out, but it made the message longer than I anticipated.

In the last few verses of this chapter Paul gives a listing of those who labored with him and he singles out a couple of people who had a strong love for the saints at Colossae. It's encouraging to read through this benediction and especially to see the heart for the Lord, and for the Colossians, that men like Epaphras had.

But for sake of time, I'll leave that to you.

So, let's begin by reading through the section we're going to be looking at tonight;

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

Paul begins this section of Colossians in 4:2 with an exhortation to prayer and watchfulness;

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful with thanksgiving.”

It is impossible to be “watchful” and “grateful” apart from steadfast prayer. This is from Howard Tillman Kuist's work, “Zest for Prayer”;

“The most important practice to perpetuate in relation to God is prayer. That is so because in prayer we call on God to work, and we express our faith in Him. Throughout this epistle Paul's emphasis has been on the believer's union with Christ and the complete adequacy that that union produces. The Christian who does not pray is demonstrating independence from God. Consequently, Paul urged his readers to devote themselves to prayer, to give it constant attention and priority. . . express gratitude always in view of God's goodness and grace to them.”

And from Charles Spurgeon;

“Heaven’s gate is not to be stormed by one weapon but by many. Spare no arrows, Christian. Watch and see that none of the arms in thy armory are rusty. Besiege the throne of God with a hundred hands, and look at the promise with a hundred eyes. You have a great work on hand, for you have to move the arm that moves the world; watch, then, for every means of moving that arm. See to it that you embrace every promise; that you use every argument; that you wrestle with all might.”

I’ve heard others say that studying the Bible is equally important. But in my experience, if my study is not founded on almost desperate prayer, acknowledging my total inability to understand anything of value without direct supernatural intervention, then any study time I have, even if I gain academic knowledge, is completely empty of spiritual value.

In addition, just as Paul mentions watchfulness in prayer, the same is true in all of life. Any watchfulness I bring to prayer results in a *mindset* of watchfulness in all areas of my life; which is vital for spiritual survival (which we’ll look at in more detail in a few minutes). F.F. Bruce adds this:

“Men and women of persistent prayer are those who are constantly on the alert, alive to the will of God and the need of the world, and ready to give an account of themselves and their stewardship.”

There is a direct association between watchfulness in prayer and watchfulness in spiritual discernment in all areas of our experience, as well as in helping us to discern the needs of the Church and the world.

In James Dunn’s book on St. Paul, he wrote;

“The accompanying exhortation to ‘keep awake, be on the alert’ is drawn from the imagery of guard duty (Neh. 7:3; Mark 14:34, 37).”

Here are some other verses that communicate this meaning:

(Neh. 7:3) “And I said to them, “Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house.”

(Mark 14: 34, 37) “Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch. . . “Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you know watch one hour?”

The Bible is full of exhortations to be awake, alert and aware of what’s happening in us by the leading of the Spirit, and of what’s happening around us in both the visible and invisible realms.

This is our protection against deception, against failure in temptation, and against inability to give others what they really need.

There is a perfect balance of watchfulness that we must strive for if we’re going to honor the Lord and be vessels fit for the Master’s use in serving others. Here’s what I mean.

I know people who are obsessed with politics, cultural and societal happenings and movements, but only mildly concerned about spiritual and eternal matters. And vice versa; there are people who are very theologically driven, but unconcerned about the temporal conditions and movements in our nation and world.

One group may be knowledgeable about what God wants but impotent when it comes to applying it. The other will be awake and prepared for world conditions, but ignorant when it comes to seeing how these things line up with eschatology and spiritual realities.

Those spiritual realities are constantly in motion in the invisible world to implement the plans of the principalities and powers into visible expression on earth.

Being able to see by the Spirit that which can’t be seen by our eyes, and act according to that spiritual sight, is essential to our survival in all realms of life, both temporal and eternal.

Maybe Chris Anderson says it best:

“Noting the words of Peter, “It is time for judgment to begin at the house of God.” In what we have witnessed since the COVID outbreak, I must believe that God’s first priority is not judging the world, but purging His own people. He has allowed COVID to test the church—closing lifeless churches

(“removing fruitless candlesticks”) while proving the mettle of those that remain. He has allowed the devil to do this. In the end, it will not matter how any of these earthly affairs play out. All that will matter is that God will sovereignly oversee the temporal, political, cultural “wins” and the “losses,” the “victories” and humiliating “defeats” —whichever way He needs it to go to get what He is after in a pure idol-free Bride that will be ready to be intercepted by Him in order to share in His complete replacement of this world’s corrupt systems with His crushingly benevolent immortal rule.”

So, like everything that acts as a determinate of genuine spiritual life, there must be an inward reality, an inward hunger and watchfulness, before there can be an outward expression.

Awareness is an aggressive state of mind, not just a placid gathering of information.

It’s a passionate desire to achieve what the military calls “situational awareness “; which means it has no partiality in its focus and would never be satisfied to be aware of temporal conditions and events, but unaware, or indifferent to, spiritual and eternal realities.

I see these things play out consistently in the videos of Christian activists and in the message of pastors and YouTubers. It’s usually an imbalance. They’re either experts on the national dangers we face, or they’re experts on theological commentary – but it’s rare to find both.

And with others, the opposite is true. You can gain from their exposition of the scriptures, but they seem oblivious to how close we are to the Lord’s return, and they teach the Bible as if we have a lifetime left before Christ comes back.

They talk about how to ensure that our grandchildren grow up to be great men and women of God and how we should all prepare for the challenges of growing old and the need to pass a spiritual legacy onto the next generation.

If their focus is exclusively on the temporal, they will be spiritually deadened by their lack of pursuit of the mind of Christ. If they are focused only on the academics and not the spiritual implications of God’s Word, they will be unable to discern what’s happening around them, and fail to make preparation for themselves and their families regarding warnings in the temporal realm.

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A huge part of what God is doing now is accelerating the spiritual process of conforming us to Christ. In other words, since forming Christ in us can only happen through suffering, and since God's goal is *full* conformity, not just superficial, moral advancement, our suffering is also accelerating, and will continue to do so until everything within us that not fully under the authority of Christ has been removed.

Here are some passages that show us this process:

(2 Cor. 4:17-18) "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

If all we see is the temporal, then the suffering becomes (in our mind), unfair, confusing and unbearable. With a temporal mindset, there's no way we can see intense pressure, like Paul was going through, as "light afflictions".

That viewpoint can only happen when we see and believe the connection between our suffering and its eternal outcome. Then whatever we go through is seen through a completely different grid – as Paul shows us in Rom. 8:18;

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Satan has taken the Church to a place where we are almost fully occupied with things seen, not things unseen; with things on the earth, not things above.

In our last study I gave you a brief picture of the incredible conditions that will exist in the Millennial kingdom. And in other studies, we've talked about the various positions of authority and honor some in the Church will have in that Kingdom because of their faithfulness in enduring suffering in this life.

(2 Tim. 2:12) "If we endure, we shall reign with Him."

(Rom. 8:17) "if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

Like Psalm 92 tells us, this life is only 70-80 years; and the Millennial Kingdom is 1000 years, and that's still only a sliver of time compared to eternity.

Since Paul realized these things, he could honestly say that, to him, what we go through here, are "light afflictions" when compared to the glory that awaits us forever in the Kingdom of God.

These exhortations by Paul to live above rather than below; to focus on the joy that is set before us, rather than the cross we endure here, are not simply good ideas; they are absolutely essential and we need to take them very seriously, daily, if we want to see their intended results in time and eternity.

So, as to the principle of "watchfulness" that Paul talks about in our passage in Colossians, we can't be watchful with a heavenly perspective if we allow earth to distract us, which would include being focused on our suffering to the exclusion of being focused on the purpose of God in eternity.

As Evan Hopkins puts it,

"The great hinderance to the manifestation of the Christ-life is the presence and activity of the self-life. This needs to be set aside. Conformity to the death of Christ means a separation in heart and mind from the old life, the old self-directed mentality. . . All spiritual privileges are conditional on becoming a partaker of the mind of Him who died to self. This is a spiritual condition to be ever maintained and become more and more deepened."

This doesn't mean we are oblivious to what we are going through. Paul's dissertations in 2 Cor. 4 & 11, show us that suffering is extremely painful on many levels and can always overwhelm us if we let it.

But he also knows that unless we fight through to a heavenly perspective of the value and outcome of our pain, that pain *will* overwhelm us to the point where it's *all* we think about.

Again, we know from Paul's own experience and writings that feeling, and even sharing publicly, what we are going through, is a real and natural outlet for our suffering. There's nothing wrong with that and it's often needed, if for no other reason than seeking prayer for ourselves, as Paul did numerous times.

But we want to be careful to resist the work of the enemy who is constantly pressing on us to move into a place of self-absorption to the exclusion of even trying to see the eternal value of what we are experiencing.

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Let me come at this from a different angle to see if that will help.

(Lk. 24:44-45) “Jesus said to them, ‘These are the words I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.’”

(Acts 13:27) “Those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, failed to recognize Jesus or understand the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath . . . “

They not only knew the Scriptures, they heard them every Sabbath throughout their lives. But because of the condition of their hearts, God did not ‘open their minds to understand.’

Whether we are dealing with Christians as in Lk. 24 or with non-believers in Acts 13, a person can be theologically accurate and saturated with Biblical information, but still be spiritually dead.

With unbelievers, life begins when God opens their hearts to the truth of the gospel.

For us, spiritual life only advances when the Lord opens our minds to understand the ‘*voices*’ of the prophets’. There is an academic understanding, but there is also a spiritual understanding. And as important as the academic is, because it keeps us from being deceived by embracing false doctrine, without moving from the academic to the spiritual, there can be no advance in knowing and living the true Christian life as it is in Christ.

Just as the unbeliever has absolutely no problem believing the gospel for salvation once their eyes are opened to its meaning, Christians have no problem trusting in the Lord in suffering once they are able to see its true purpose.

All of this is meant to show us something about faith. We know we need a deeper faith if we are to endure suffering with patience and stability. But the mistake Christians make is thinking that faith comes by knowing the Bible better; and they partially quote Rom. 10:17, by saying, “faith comes by the word of God.” But what the verse *actually* says is “Faith comes by hearing, and *hearing* by the word of God.”

Faith is the result of “hearing”, not just learning.

As we saw in Luke 24, “hearing” or “understanding” in a spiritual sense, beyond just knowing the writings of Moses and the prophets, only happens when the Holy Spirit “opens our minds to understand the Scriptures.

When we focus prayers on getting more faith, we miss the point entirely of how faith comes to us. Faith is the result of hearing, not the result of striving to believe.

Paul’s prayers for those he wrote his epistles to were not for their faith to increase, but for them to obtain a “spirit of revelation and knowledge of Christ.” Paul knew that if they were able to hear the ‘voices’, the spiritual content, of the Scriptures, faith would be the natural outcome.

When we apply this to knowing what we can gain from suffering, these principles we’ve looked at show us that our real problem in being able to endure and even be thankful under pressure is not as much a problem of faith as it is of having a lack of deep, spiritual understanding of the purpose and eternal value of trials and tribulations.

My purpose in sharing these things is to make sure we realize what our real need is, how vital that is now, and what our prayers and study should *really* be focused on.

In times of overwhelming pressure, we have to hold on to what the Bible tells us the Lord is seeking to accomplish through our trials; and we have to study and pray that He will ‘*open our understanding*’, supernaturally, and show us what we need to see.

And then hopefully we will realize that all of this is His grace and love in action conforming us to Christ, purifying us from sin and preparing us for glory and honor in His kingdom.



(1 Pet. 1:6-8) “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

The goal is “praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ”.

The means is “grieved by various trials”.

And the result is “joy inexpressible and full of glory”

And that comes from ‘hearing’ and then believing what the Lord shows us.

Even Jesus, in spiritual development as Son of Man, “learned obedience through suffering” and as a consequence “God highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

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I want to shift back now to Paul’s instruction on ‘watchfulness’. You can see that this has *many* applications. It applies to the development in our lives of effectual prayer; and it applies to our awareness of the circumstances in our lives, both spiritual and temporal.

On the spiritual side of things, being aware and intelligent about the movements of the Lord in the Church and in the world requires a great deal of prayer and study, along with an openness to know the truth and to know reality, even if that truth counters what we want to hear.

On the temporal side, things are more confusing because we don’t have an absolute standard in the Word of God to anchor our beliefs in. We need discernment and a great deal of personal, Berean style, research to come to any valid conclusions.

We’ve learned the hard way, over the last several months, that much of what we were being told was totally off base.

I guess the only caution I would advise with this is that if you develop a skeptical mindset around any warning of what may be coming in this country because people who warned in the past about certain things were wrong, then when you're receiving *accurate* information, you might ignore it and miss what may be vital to understand and be aware of.

There are definitely people I no longer trust in the world of alternative media, but that doesn't mean I don't trust anyone, or that I'm not open to examining what comes my way.

I'm not going to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Confusion and disillusionment have always been tactics of the enemy to keep us from knowing the truth.

And it works great; why should he change?

So, now we're faced with a new conglomerate of narratives being thrust at us from all sides. For sake of time, I'll just give one example:

With the vaccine, since none of us are medical or pharmaceutical professionals, we have to decide who's telling us the truth and who isn't. On the "it's totally safe and effective" side we have Dr. Fauci, Joe Biden, Bill Gates, the World Health Organization and, unfortunately, Amir Tsarfait.

On the other side there are doctors, immunologists and virologists around the world who have been studying this vaccine and its effects on those who receive it, and who are trying to get the truth out in spite of ongoing pressure by governments and big Pharma to silence them.

It all comes down to who we believe, based on what we know about each group of people giving us their narratives.

We'll have to make some difficult decisions around this, and who we trust will determine what decision we make.

But please keep in mind that what's taking place in this country, and in this world, has been an ingeniously implemented plan by Satan to bring about the global persecution of Christians.

This warfare is spiritual, not political.

It's not just a matter of what's not safe about the vaccine; it's knowing the source and ultimate purpose of the vaccine; to track, trace, mark and identify every person on the planet and then eliminate all who don't have those identifiers.

The global spread of the virus, followed by a global vaccination effort, are the perfect tools for this. This is all Satan's pre-conditioning of this world to prepare for the rule of the Antichrist – so that humanity will move smoothly into taking the mark of the beast.

That's what 2020 and 2021 are really all about; not stolen elections and making American great again. Whatever is happening in that realm is only a visible manifestation and outworking of a global invisible agenda being played out in front of our eyes.

It all ties into a much bigger picture than we normally consider, and it's that 'big-picture' viewpoint that the Lord would want us *not* to lose.

If we do lose it, we're in danger of not seeing the spiritual forest for the temporal trees.

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I want to mention a passage we've looked at before, but I want us to see it in the context of what we've been studying today – I'll amplify this to bring out its meaning:

(1 Chron. 12:32) "And (within a remnant) of the children of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, (with the resultant knowledge) of what Israel should do."

Without watchfulness, which always, only a remnant fully possesses, it is impossible to know what the people of God should do at their time in history beyond simply having a general knowledge of what all believers should do in every age.

Those that are asleep (and as a result are deceived) with no idea of *“what (the Church) should do”* in our generation, rather than receiving “praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” will, as John puts in in 1 John 2:28, *“shrink back in shame at His appearing”*.

At this time in history, “watchfulness” is a solid indicator of the presence (or absence) of genuine spiritual life.

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Finally, in vs. 3-6 Paul asks for prayer for the opportunity to bring the truth of the “mystery of Christ” to others.

And as Peter writes in 1 Pet. 3:15; we are to “know how to answer every man.”

But we can’t give them what we don’t have. Do we know the real content of what Paul calls, “the mystery of Christ” and is that what we are faithfully communicating to others?”

Or are we just giving out general principles of basic Biblical applications that we’ve known since we were spiritual infants?

In other words, is what we do and say truly spiritually impacting others?

There is an increasing demarcation line being drawn between the overcoming remnant and those in rebellion or deception. It’s becoming clearer as we near the end of this age, who is standing in the purpose of God for His people and who is simply doing the Christian religion in a Laodicean spirituality.

We need to determine, very soon, where we are in relation to this and through prayer, study and watchfulness, make sure we are standing fully in the purpose of God for our time.

In 2021 we will see the acceleration of God’s judgment of America and of Laodicea. We will also see His preparation of His remnant bride to meet her Bridegroom and we will see the final ingathering of gentiles into the Body of Christ.

As many Christian authors and teachers are who understand the times are saying;

“Brace yourselves, the games are over, Christianity as a hobby, as a religion has ended. Now, our true spiritual state will be tested to reveal the reality of who we are, as we approach the end of the age and return of our Savior.”

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Because of the pressures we will experience this year, there are several verses that I'm going to send to you in the notes of this study, that we will need to spend a great deal of personal time reviewing in our minds until they are ours.

This first one I'll read will give you an idea of what each of the verses I'll send out are telling us, and why I feel it's so important that we anchor them in our souls.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.” (Isa. 41:10)

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