

Mark 14:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

Analysis

Jesus exhorts sleeping disciples: 'Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.' 'Spirit' (Greek *pneuma*) refers to regenerate human spirit, renewed and willing to obey. 'Flesh' (*sarx*) represents fallen human nature, weak and prone to sin. This tension exists in all believers (see Romans 7:14-25, Galatians 5:17). The disciples' spirits desired to stay awake and support Jesus, but physical exhaustion and emotional distress overwhelmed them. This isn't excuse but diagnosis: even willing spirits need divine help to resist temptation. Hence the command: 'watch and pray.' Prayerfulness acknowledges dependence on God's strength. Without prayer, even believers fall to temptation. This verse warns against self-confidence and encourages humble reliance on grace. Sanctification requires both willing spirit (God-given) and active effort (prayer, watchfulness) empowered by Spirit.

Historical Context

Gethsemane's agony (14:32-36) preceded this warning. Jesus asked Peter, James, and John to 'watch' (14:34), meaning stay alert and support through prayer. Their repeated sleeping (14:37, 40, 41) despite Jesus' distress shows human weakness. The coming 'temptation' (*peirasmos*) refers to imminent trial—Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion—which would tempt disciples to apostasy. Indeed, all fled (14:50), and Peter denied Christ (14:66-72). Their failure fulfilled Jesus' prediction and demonstrated inability to stand without divine grace. Yet Jesus' intercessory prayer (Luke 22:32) preserved their faith, and resurrection restored them. This teaches

that pastoral ministry requires realistic assessment of human weakness while trusting God's preserving grace. The disciples' failure warns against prayerlessness; their restoration encourages perseverance.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. Where does your spiritual willingness exceed your practical follow-through, revealing fleshly weakness?
2. How does regular prayer strengthen your spirit to overcome fleshly weakness and resist temptation?

Interlinear Text

γρηγορεῖτε	καὶ	προσεύχεσθε	ἵνα	μὴ	εἰσέλθητε	εἰς	
Watch ye G1127	and G2532	pray G4336	G2443	G3361	ye enter G1525	into G1519	
πειρασμόν·	τὸ	μὲν	πνεῦμα	πρόθυμον	ἢ	δὲ	σὰρξ
temptation G3986	G3588	truly G3303	The spirit G4151	is ready G4289	G3588	but G1161	the flesh G4561
ἀσθενής							
is weak G772							

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 26:41 (Spirit): Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Matthew 24:42 (Parallel theme): Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

Luke 21:36 (Prayer): Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Luke 22:40 (Prayer): And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

Luke 22:46 (Prayer): And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

Galatians 5:17 (Spirit): For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Mark 14:34 (Parallel theme): And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.

1 Peter 5:8 (Parallel theme): Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

1 Corinthians 16:13 (Parallel theme): Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

Matthew 25:13 (Parallel theme): Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.