

Battlefield Praying
Prayer that Wins Spiritual War
Armor of God Series – PBC

Text: Eph 6:18-20

“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, 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, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” (NASB95)

Introduction:

As we come to the end of the year, we are also coming to the end of our series on ***Spiritual Warfare – Winning the War for Your Soul*** and to the end of this marvelous letter Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers.

As we have learned, Ephesians is about a magnificent mystery that God has given Paul to reveal to His people. That divine secret is a stunning plan that God the Father determined to accomplish through the work of God the Son and appropriated and protected by God the Spirit.

The plan God is accomplishing is cosmic in scope – it is to restore all fallen creation to the splendor and beauty it enjoyed before Adam fell. Beyond that, God is restoring harmony and unity to everything in the Heavenly realm through the ministry Christ accomplished. Finally, God intends for His New Creation to fill up the earth with followers of Christ Jesus who have been put right with God and with each other.

The word Paul uses to sum up the goal of this plan is “shalom” – a full-orbed peace that mirrors what Eden was like at the end of the creation week.

God has sent an anointed appointed champion to make the peace and extend the peace to those who were near (Jews) and far off (Gentiles) thereby drawing people from both groups and forming out of them one new group – the Church over which Jesus is the head.

Christ commissioned these people to live for His pleasure and glory by walking worthy of their calling and by invading the kingdom of darkness with the good

news of this peace to set free as many captives to the prince of darkness who would repent of their sins and trust in Jesus.

Believers like the Ephesians were not merely carrying light into darkness, they were themselves lights. They were not carrying lamps or lanterns into the darkness – they were themselves the light. They had not always been this – in fact, they had once been darkened. But now, they are light – they are the lanterns God is sending out to go everywhere in world to dispel the darkness and be gospel lights!

And since they were invading a dark kingdom under the rule of God’s ancient enemy, Satan, they could expect to be relentlessly resisted and ruthlessly attacked by Satan and his wicked spiritual forces.

As they take the good news of the gospel to the kingdom of darkness God has given them two important means by which they can successfully withstand even the most withering spiritual attacks:

1. Battle-tested Spiritual Armor – Won and Worn for us by Christ.
2. Victory Winning Spirit-Enabled Prayer – Practiced by Christ.

Don’t miss the important connection Paul makes between the two – the armor alone is insufficient to win spiritual victories against such powerful enemies. We can’t win without the armor, but we won’t win with the armor alone. For the armor to be effective, we need a second important element – effectual, Spirit-energized praying.

This may be why so many of us know all the spiritual truths related to the armor and yet constantly find ourselves defeated when the battle comes upon us – it is because we have missed the essential element of prayer.

Context and Background of this Paragraph

1. Because of the importance and difficulty of their mission, Paul prayed for the Ephesians twice in this letter – for enlightenment in 1:15-23 and for enablement in 3:14-19. Paul knew they would not succeed in this war apart from God granting them the things he prayed for in these prayers.
2. Because of his difficult situation on account of the mission, Paul now asks them to pray for him. He will not succeed in this war apart from God granting to him the things he is asking them to pray to God about on his behalf.

So, prayer is at the very heart of the success of the mission. It is not a seventh piece of armor – it is what we are to do as we advance under fire. We are to wear the armor faithfully, wield the sword confidently and submissively, and pray fervently! And to help the Ephesians (and us) know what such praying looks like, Paul points out four important aspects of such praying in these three short verses (6:18-20).

I. The Exhortation to Prayer that Wins Spiritual Victories (6:18a)

*“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,”*

A. An Important Exhortation

- Paul devotes more space (three full verses) to prayer than to any individual piece of armor – this should alert us to its prominence and vital importance in spiritual warfare. In other words, it is critical to our success as Christian soldiers doing battle for the gospel.
- Paul expresses the urgency of battlefield praying by using two present tense imperative verbs that are both associated with prayer.
 1. They are to be praying – *“pray at all times”*
 2. They are to be alert (watching) – *“be on the alert”*
- As we put on our armor and take up our helmet and sword, we need to be sure to move out into the field of battle praying and, on the alert, as we advance.
- Illustration: Soldiers moving through a field of fire – fully armed and fully alert to any sign or movement of the enemy, or any hint of where he might attack.
- Commentator Clinton Arnold stated it well, *“Prayer is the essence of spiritual warfare and the most important means by which believers are strengthened by God.”*
- This kind of praying is not another piece of the armor, it is in addition to our armor. We won’t survive a battle without our armor, but our armor alone is not enough; it must be accompanied by the kind of praying Paul has in mind here.

B. A Corporate Exhortation

- This whole section (6:10-18) is addressed to the corporate body of believers at Ephesus.
- To be sure, each individual Christian would need to wear his/her armor and engage in prayer, but the controlling verbs in this section are all plural indicating Paul’s intent is that the church as a whole wear this armor and

engage in corporate prayer for this mission. There is a sense in which they are a fighting unit, and they are being called to wear this armor and pray as a group – together.

- This would have been extremely comforting and natural to a group of weary, battered Christians facing extreme opposition from the entire city of Ephesus.
- We are much more comfortable wearing our armor alone, fighting our own battles, and praying privately – and there is a place for that. However, this text points to the corporate nature of what Paul is calling for as the Church heads out to do Gospel battle.
- Paul calls them *all* to pray together for him (6:19).

C. A Comprehensive Application

- Note the four-fold use of the little word “all”
- Praying at *all* times, with *all* the different variations of prayer, with *all* vigilance, for *all* the saints.
- Nothing and no one stands outside this circle of prayer.
- We are to pray always because we simply don’t know when or where the next attack will come.
- We are to pray for all Christians because we do not know when or who or how someone will come under enemy fire.

So, given the intensity of the conflict and the strength and ruthlessness of the enemy, Paul exhorts us to pray as we armor up and head out to the battleground. ***But what does this kind of praying actually look like and how does it differ from the way we are perhaps accustomed to praying?***

II. The Explanation of Prayer that Wins Spiritual Victories (6:18)

- Prayer is not a perfunctory or preliminary duty to be dutifully uttered before we engage the enemy – it is an awesome opportunity to come into the presence of the Living God whose power will sustain us and defeat the enemy as we advance the gospel of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!
- Through prayer, we get to be with God. We get to see His plan as it is being accomplished in real time. We get to experience His power as He defeats our enemies for us when we cry out to Him for aid.
- Battlefield praying is marked by three important qualities:

A. Pray Constantly and Consistently – marked by consistency

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit

- The idea is not that we never do anything else but pray – but rather that we never do anything without praying!
- It is a constant, running conversation with God as we go through our day.
- Prayer is our consistent daily practice – our entire day is punctuated by all kinds of praying. Confession, Adoration, Celebration, Thanksgiving, Petition, Crying out for help and aid, for provision, for protection, and for victory. Short prayers, longer prayers, formal and informal prayers, structured and unstructured, planned and spontaneous, for ourselves and for others – we should be doing all kinds of praying all day long!
- We are to be eager and ready to seize every opportunity to pray just as our feet are eager and ready to seize every opportunity to advance the gospel!
- God’s army and the Christian soldier advances on its knees!

B. Pray Watchfully and Vigilantly – marked by alertness and fervency

and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints!

- “**Alert**” is a rare term – it means to be on guard and on high alert against danger or a potential threat.
- This is what Jesus exhorted his disciples to do when they were praying together in the garden, “**Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**” (Matthew 26:41)
- A clear threat and present danger was upon these men – and the very thing necessary to avoid the threat and escape from the danger was vigilance in prayer ... but the disciples slept instead of praying because to them, the danger did not seem real until it came upon them (in a cohort of Roman soldiers).
- Nor was this alertness to be occasional! Paul exhorts us to be in a constant state of readiness and vigilance and to remain on high alert at all times!
- We are to persevere in our commitment to battlefield praying given the strength of the enemy, the nature of his strategies, and the danger of his attacks! We must not be fooled into letting our guard down by failing to pray because we seem to be in a momentary calm season.

C. Pray Intentionally and Specifically – marked by selfless specificity

and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints!

- Paul culminates by exhorting the Ephesians to pray fervently and specifically for other believers and not just for their own needs!
- When you are in the heat of battle, you fight with your unit, and you watch out for the other members of your unit! This is the idea here.
- Paul had a co-laborer who modeled the kind of praying Paul has in view –Epaphras! Listen to Paul describe what Epaphras was doing in Colossians

4:12: “*Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.*”

- But what will energize and enable this kind of praying among weary saints?

III. The Enablement for Prayer that Wins Spiritual Victories

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit

- If we are honest, there are times when the battle has so exhausted us and drained our spiritual energy and vitality that we have no strength to pray and even if we did, we are no longer confident our prayers are being heard much less answered. How do battle-weary saints find strength to pray?
- They find strength from the same source that provides strength for standing and withstanding Satan – strength and power that comes from the Lord (6:10).
- So how are believers to get this strength?

A. *They are to get it from the Spirit who enables and energizes their praying!*

- After all, this is exactly what Paul did when he prayed two lengthy prayers for them in this brief book!
- In the *first prayer* Paul prayed fervently and specifically *that God would enlighten them* – that their eyes would be open and they would have confident knowledge of their calling, their inheritance, and the unlimited power of God available to them!
- In the *second prayer* Paul prayed *that God would enable and energize them* in their inner man for the difficult but glorious mission He was sending them to do for His glory.

B. *The Holy Spirit of God enables our praying; but He also interprets our praying when we don't know how or what to pray for as we pray.*

- At times we simply do not know the right thing to pray for – and so we utter our prayer to God and the Holy Spirit comes to our aid and intercedes with us and interprets our praying for us to God.
- Praying in the Spirit means we are dependent on the Spirit to guide our praying so that we are praying for God's will – He helps us come to be willing to pray for God's will and not our own. *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26–27)*

C. *The Holy Spirit builds our strength in the faith as we pray! (Jude 20)*

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,”

Which brings us to the fourth important aspect of battlefield praying – what should we pray for?

IV. The Objects and Content of Prayer that Wins Spiritual Victories (6:19-20)

“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, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

A. We are to pray for others more than for ourselves

...and pray on my behalf

- Twice Paul has prayed extended and passionate prayers for them and now he turns and asks them to pray for him personally.
- He has just been instructing them in battlefield praying and when it comes time to ask them to put such praying in practice, there is no mention of praying for their needs but rather for the needs of another – in this case his.
- But why did Paul exhort them to pray for him?
 1. In light of his pressing circumstances – “in chains”
 2. In light of his compelling ministry – “an ambassador”
 3. In light of his urgent message – the mystery of the gospel
- Paul was appointed by Christ to be His apostle to the Gentiles. He was a priest in the service of the gospel and the offering he was bringing to Christ was the Gentiles (Romans 15:15-20). These Gentiles needed to be sanctified and cleansed from the impurity and defilement of their former idolatry and immorality – how would they be sanctified? Not by the law of Moses but by the Holy Spirit.
- And right in the middle of this amazing ministry, Paul finds himself in prison awaiting a trip to Rome where he is to appear before the tribunal of the most powerful individual in all of Rome – Nero!
- Given Paul’s message, this was a very precarious situation. All of Rome considered the Emperor Nero to be their Lord and the Savior of the Empire. Coming before him to announce that Jesus was the true Lord and only Savior would potentially have deadly consequences.
- However, it was a spectacular opportunity for the gospel to advance right to the center of all the spiritual power and darkness of the empire – into all that darkness God was sending a light – Paul.
- So, what does Paul request they pray for when they pray for him?

B. We are to pray for God's Agenda and not for Our Own

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

- So what did Paul ask them to pray for? He did not ask them to pray that God would spare his life, grant him release from his chains, or even that his personal circumstances and trials would be eased.
 - He prayed that God would grant him boldness to speak the gospel message clearly, completely, and courageously regardless of the cost to him personally!
 - He wanted them to pray that God would give him opportunity to present the truth of the Gospel; clarity to explain the content of the gospel; and boldness to articulate the demands of the gospel.
1. ***Clarity because of the nature of his message*** – mystery that God has now made clear in the Gospel.
 2. ***Candor because of the significance and the demands of the message*** for the eternal destiny of its hearers.
 3. ***Courage because of the potential consequences and opposition to his message*** once it was boldly uttered and clearly understood.
- Paul understood that God really doesn't make mistakes. Even though his ambassador was in chains, those chains would open doors to the highest places in the kingdom of darkness in that day – the Roman Empire.
 - Perhaps this is why he didn't ask for God to change his circumstances – he asked rather that God would provide opportunity through his circumstances to advance the God's agenda through the proclamation of the Gospel!

Conclusion:

So ... does this kind of praying work? Does it accomplish anything significant in the battle? What happened when the Ephesians prayed for Paul? Let's listen carefully to three amazing texts: 2 Timothy 4:17, Philippians 1:12-14, and Acts 28:30-31.

1. 2 Timothy 4:17 – Paul's recounting of what happened to him personally when he finally appeared before the tribunal of Nero as Christ's Ambassador in chains.

“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth.”

2. Phil 1:12-14 – Paul’s recounting of how God used his chains (circumstances) to provide the very opportunity for him to proclaimed the Gospel boldly and courageously. *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”*
3. Acts 28:30-31 – Paul’s recounting of how God granted him freedom in spite of his chains to proclaim the gospel with clarity, candor, and courage in the center of the Roman Empire without human opposition or hindrance for two entire years! *“And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”*

This is what God did when a small, humble, seemingly powerless group of Christian’s in Ephesus – hopelessly outnumber and totally surrounded by pagan darkness put on their armor and began to pray earnestly for one of God’s soldiers who was headed into the thick of battle!

Out of this praying came many converts who ended up becoming part of the church at Rome. Out of this came four of the most spiritually impactful letters in our Bible – Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon!

So, what do you think God might do if another small group of Christians at PBC take Paul’s exhortation and begin to pray in this way?

- What do you think will happen when you pray for your spouse and children – your marriage and family?
- What do you think will happen when you pray for the men of this church? For the women? For the pastors and ministry leaders? For our college students? For our young people and children? For the growth and strength of this ministry?
- What do you think will happen when you pray for gospel advancement through our church and through our missionaries and ministry partners?

- What do you think will really happen if this body of believers were to pray more than they talked about praying?

Will we pray? And when we do, will we pray for God's agenda and not our own? For the advancement of the Gospel in the kingdom of darkness rather than the furtherance and comfort of our own little kingdom? May God's Spirit help us to pray faithfully and fervently in the midst of gospel warfare!