

The Battleground of Prayer

Ephesians 6:18-20

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**14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,
15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.
17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;
18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—
19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,
20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.**

We have learned in our study of Ephesians 6 that every believer needs to put on the **"whole armor of God."** Putting on the armor of God is preparing for the battle. We need the BELT OF TRUTH, God's infallible truth as our standard. We need the BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, the imputed righteousness of Christ and the practical righteousness of a pure and holy life. We need the SHOES OF PEACE, the peace of God that overcomes discouragement and is ready to take the gospel to others. We need the SHIELD OF FAITH that deflects the flaming arrows of Satan's lies. We need the HELMET of salvation, the assurance of our security in Christ and confidence that the ultimate victory is His. We need the SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, the living, powerful Word of God.

Putting on the **"whole armor of God"** is not the battle, it is preparation for the battle. The battle is found in v. 18. The battleground is prayer. Remember from verse 12, **"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."** How do we wrestle with them? In prayer. The army of Christ advances marching on its knees. Some of us are so defeated because we are not in the battle. We have the armor on but have not begun to fight. Two OT passages to illustrate beautifully the place of prayer in spiritual warfare.

The first one is an episode in **Exodus 17:8-16**. As Israel was going into the Promised Land, an enemy named Amalek came out against them. Moses told Joshua to take the army and fight him in the valley and he would **"stand on top of the hill"** with **"the rod of God."** As long as Moses **"held up his hand... Israel prevailed."** When he became weary they sat him on a stone. Aaron and Hur supported his arms. Some of the soldiers might have said, *"Moses why don't you come down here and fight."* Moses would have replied, *"I am fighting."* Where was the battle won? In the valley or on the hill? *Satan doesn't care how many songs we sing, how many sermons we preach, how much money we raise or how nice and spacious our building may be. He mocks our efforts. He scorns our*

commitments... but he fears our prayer. If he can keep us from **"lifting up holy hands,"** he has defeated us.

The second is in **Daniel 10:10-15**. This is a mysterious passage. Daniel had prayed, mourned and fasted for **"three full weeks"** (v.2). He had no answer. In v.10, we learn why. An angel tells him that when he first began to pray his **"words were heard"** and that he had come **"because of your [his] words."** However, the **"prince of... Persia"** withstood the angel for **"twenty-one days."** Then **"Michael"** the archangel came to **"help"** him. Daniel was wrestling in prayer **"against principalities... powers."**

Prayer is the major battleground in spiritual warfare. Paul uses the word *all* four times in verse 18. In addition, he tells us that we are to pray "in the Spirit." These five points will be our outline.

I. Pray at All Times (v. 18a).

"Praying always" does not mean "always saying prayers." Jesus said we are not to **"use vain repetitions as the heathen do"** (Mt.6:7). The phrase is literally, "at every opportunity." It's the same idea as 1 Thessalonians 5:17, **"Pray without ceasing."** We are to be in constant communication with God. Warren Wiersbe says it means *"keeping the receiver off the hook."*

In Paul's day, Jews prayed at specific, prescribed times each day. With the coming of Christianity, early believers constantly emphasized the spirit of **"praying always"** not just at legalistic time slots. In fact, there are a number of NT passages that speak of this.

Acts 2:42 says **"they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine... fellowship... breaking of bread, and in prayers."**

Rom.12:12 says we are to be **"rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer."**

Phil.4:6 says, **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."**

Col.4:2 says, **"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving."**

"Praying always" means taking everything to God in prayer. When we experience good and beautiful, we pause to thank him. When we see evil around us, we pray that God will make it right. In temptation we ask for deliverance; when we encounter a lost person we pray for their salvation and boldness to share Jesus; in trouble we pray for protection, in sickness we pray for healing. Our life becomes a continually ascending prayer, a perpetual communing with our heavenly Father.

"Praying always" is not something for the most pious or most spiritual believers. It is for all of us. No excuses. John Bunyan wrote (*The Works of John Bunyan* [Baker], 1:65), "Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge for Satan."

II. Pray All Kinds of Prayers (v. 18b).

We are to pray with **"all prayer and supplication."** The *NIV* translates this **"all kinds of prayers and requests."** The *NCV* renders it **"all kinds of prayers, asking for everything you need."** If we are **"praying always"** we will encounter varied situations that call for various types of prayer: confession of sin, thanksgiving, intercession, adoration.

The Greek word for **"prayer"** here refers to general requests. The word for **"supplication"** refers to specific requests. We are to pray **"always"** in **"all"** types of prayer. We are to pray publicly and privately. Pray verbally and silently. Pray in loud cries and soft whispers. Pray with hands raised and with hands folded. Pray standing, sitting, kneeling and lying down. Pray with a list of requests and pray spontaneously.

The Lord's Prayer gives us a helpful outline of different kinds of prayer. **"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name"** (Matt. 6:9), points us toward worship as we pray for God's glory. **"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"** (Matt. 6:10) points to prayer for missions, evangelism, and discipleship. **"Give us this day our daily bread"** (Matt. 6:11), is prayer for our personal needs. **"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"** (Matt. 6:12), is confession of sins and prayer for our relationships. **"Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil"** (Matt. 6:13) is prayer for holiness, both for others and for ourselves. The prayers in the Psalms and in other Scriptures may give us other types of prayer. But Paul's point is that we fight for God against the enemy as we always pray with all types of prayer.

III. Pray in the Spirit (v. 18c).

We are to pray **"in the Spirit."** Do you ever have a desire to pray and just can't get started? Have you ever begun to pray but it lasted only a few minutes because you ran out of things to say? We've all been there. It's not enough to pray, we must pray **"in the Spirit."**

What is praying **"in the Spirit?"** Simply put, it is allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pray. **Romans 8:26-27** describes how this works. This tells us that the Spirit knows our **"weaknesses."** He knows that **"we do not know what we should pray for."** We don't fool God. He knows we don't know how to pray so He sends the Spirit to lead us!

The Holy Spirit **"intercedes"** for us when we do not know what to pray. He prays for us **"with groanings which cannot be uttered."** I think this is the idea of being quiet before God. Ps.46:10 says, **"Be still, and know that I am God."** It's not *"Lord, listen for Your servant speaks"* but **"Lord, speak for Your servant listens."**

The Holy Spirit is a powerful force in prayer. Jude 20 carries the same idea, **"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit."** I heard Adrian Rogers define praying in the Spirit like this: *"The Holy Spirit finds a desire in the heart of the Father and speaks it to our hearts. Then we pray it back and the Spirit delivers it to the Father in the power of the cross."*

There are two supernatural events that take place when we pray **"in the Spirit."**

1. *First, the Holy Spirit tells us what to pray.* Apart from the Spirit, our prayers are limited to our own reasoning. However as we seek to be led by Him, He will settle certain issues in our hearts. When you don't know what to pray, be still.

2. *Second, the Holy Spirit energizes our prayers.* He gives us strength, power and conviction when we are tired and weak.

IV. Pray Alertly with All Perseverance (v. 18d).

Underline the phrase "**being watchful**" or "be on alert" in your Bible. It means we are to pray with our eyes open. We are to be alert as we pray for the attacks of our enemy. Let's note three biblical illustrations:

When Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to rebuild its broken walls, he was attacked from within and without. He won the victory by praying and watching. He said in Neh.4:9, "**Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.**"

When Jesus spoke of the timing His return, He told His disciples in Mk.13:33, "**Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.**" We are to be watching for His return.

When Jesus entered the garden on the night of His betrayal, He said to His disciples, "**Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.**" (Mark 14:38). As you know, they promptly went to sleep! But before I condemn them, I've got to admit that I've often done the same!

This word, *be alert*, ties in with the military analogy. You're a sentry on duty. You must watch for any signs of infiltration by the enemy and go immediately to prayer. Do you see a person who is suffering? Pray that Satan might not get their eyes off the Lord and devour them in their trial (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Do you see someone who is depressed or discouraged? Pray that she will put her trust in God and His salvation. Do you see a husband and wife who are having conflict? Pray! Do you hear of church members at odds with one another? Be alert and pray!

We are to pray "**with all perseverance and supplication.**" We are not only to pray a long time, but we remember "**supplication**" refers to specific needs. We are to remain in prayer about specific problems. Many times we quit before we get the answer.

To pray "**with all perseverance**" mean to "stick to it and not quit." The early church prayed that way and saw Peter released from prison. Rom.12:12 says we are to be "**continuing steadfastly in prayer.**" Col.4:2 says, "**Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it...**"

To pray "**with all perseverance**" does not mean we are trying to force God to do something. Rather, it means we are to be so burdened that we cannot rest until we get God's answer. Robert Law wrote "*Prayer is not getting man's will done in heaven; it is getting God's will done on earth.*" Prayer is not so much changing God's mind, but knowing God's mind.

To pray "**with all perseverance**" means to keep on praying until we have the answer or until we feel the release of the Holy Spirit.

VI. Pray for All the Saints (v. 18f-20).

A. Pray for All Believers (v. 18e).

Paul says we are to pray "**for all the saints**" all believers. If you're on the battlefield and your fellow soldiers get shot, you're in big trouble! The point is, we're not Christians in isolation, but in fellowship with the entire church. As Paul has emphasized in Ephesians, we are one body in Christ. If one member hurts, the whole body hurts. Also, praying for your fellow soldiers in the battle will motivate you to love them and work out any relational conflicts. It's difficult to pray for someone and still be at odds with him. Pick up a church directory and work your way through it, praying for each person. Even if you don't know the people, if you meet them there will be an instant connection, because you've been praying for them.

B. Pray for Pastors and Leaders (v.19 a).

Here Paul says "**and for me,**" "**pray for me especially.**"

Paul asks for prayer for himself, that he will "**open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel**" (6:19-20). He is asking for prayer that he would have opportunities to proclaim the gospel and the boldness and liberty to make it plain. Every Christian is in the ministry, but evangelists, missionaries, pastors, and other Christian leaders are especially targets for the enemy. If Satan can bring down a leader, he scores big time! Pastors especially need your prayers. I want to take this opportunity to ask you to pray specifically everyday for me. Pray also for our church leaders, teachers, and missionaries.

His hope was that their prayers would enable him to be bold when Satan tempted him to be quiet about Jesus. He needed reinforcements in his own personal battle against Satan.

When a police officer makes a call in an area that is potentially threatening, he calls for backup. That's what praying for each other does. We need to call for back up in boldness.

One of the priority prayers of the early church was for boldness. Acts 4:29,31 says, "**Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.**"

The first prayer request for our church and for us as individuals should be that we may speak "**boldly**" of the Lord. 2 Cor. 3:12 says, "**Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech.**"

What would happen if we began to intercede for each other and for the church? What would happen if you prayed continually for your pastor to speak boldly with the power of the Holy Spirit? What if we prayed like this not just for a week or a month, but year round as the Spirit leads. I think God's Spirit would move in families, in marriages, in teenagers, in individuals, in the church leaders, in our missionaries, in a way that can only be described as supernatural so that God alone receives the glory. We have not because we ask not! Ask and ye shall receive, exceeding, abundantly more than you can even imagine according to His power which works in us, His church!

Preaching and witnessing are not the real battleground. The battle is prayer. Preaching and witnessing are collecting the spoils of war won in the battle on our face before God.