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February 22, 2022

# Prayer in the Spiritual Battle

## Ephesians 6:10-20

Please take your Bible and open to Ephesians 6:10. Thank you for being here tonight. Tonight we want to see how prayer plays a major part in the spiritual battle that we all face as those called to belong to Jesus Christ. So far in this class we have been considering how Paul prays for the believers in the church in Ephesus. We've been learning from Paul's prayers. Tonight we are going to see Paul exhorting the church to pray for one another and to pray for him.

As you are turning there I want to begin with something I remember about my middle school career. I went to Hubbard Middle School growing up. I was actually the first paid athlete at Hubbard Middle School. When I was in the 7th grade I played on the football team. I was a 75 pound strong safety. Please let that sink in. There aren't too many people who play strong safety who weigh less than 100 pounds.

I can still remember a couple of times the other team would hand the ball off and the running back on the other team would run right through our defensive line and he would be running right for me. I was 75 pounds and this guy was probably 175 pounds and may have already had children. I remember the only way I could tackle him was to put my face mask into his knees and try and chop him down. If I tried to wrap him up he'd drag me 80 yards into the end zone and that wouldn't be good for my middle school reputation. Remember when Blake got dragged all the way down the field for a touchdown.

I was a little guy in the 7th grade. I was what one of my friends mother's called a late bloomer. I think she was trying to be encouraging. After my dad watched me play strong safety for a season and get continually run over by the opposition he offered me some cash to stop playing football. It wasn't much but it didn't take much. So I was the first paid athlete at Hubbard Middle School who was actually paid to stop playing.

As a 75 pound strong safety I went up against players that were much more powerful than me and there was really nothing I could do about it. I didn't have the power to stand up to whoever was coming against me. Whenever we think about the enemies of a Christian, things that are against us glorifying God in the Christian life, what are our three enemies? Our three enemies are commonly referred to as the world, the flesh and the devil. These are things that are against us in our attempt to live for Christ.

Each of these three enemies is too powerful for us to overcome or overpower in our own strength. The world, the flesh and the devil are too much for us to handle in our own strength. Thankfully, we're not alone in this fight. We have Someone who is for us who is infinitely more powerful than our three enemies.

**Warren Wiersbe reminds us, "By His death and resurrection, Christ overcame the world (John 16:33; Gal. 6:14), and the flesh (Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 2:20), and the devil (Eph. 1:19-23). In other words, as believers, we do not fight for victory—we fight from victory! The Spirit of God enables us, by faith, to appropriate Christ's victory for ourselves."**

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is an encouraging reminder that the power of Christ is real power for real Christians still living in the real world. God doesn't save us and then set us up for spiritual failure. He saves us and gives us what we need to glorify Him. But again we have to know what we have for it to make a difference in our lives. If we don't know the spiritual battle we are in or the spiritual power we have in Christ we will keep coasting through life and what should matter most won't matter as much as it should.

The first two prayers that we have studied together in Ephesians 1:15-23 and Ephesians 3:14-21 both are prayers for us to understand the power of Christ for us and the power of Christ in us.

If we don't understand the power we have in Christ we will sort of view our three enemies like I viewed a running back breaking through the line and coming toward me in middle school - This dude is about to run me over. If we don't know the power we have through the gospel we will inevitably feel like what we have

coming against us is too much. When we don't grasp the power we have in Christ and live in it we easily get discouraged.

Maybe you are here tonight and you're discouraged. I hear it happens from time to time. Maybe you look around at the world and what appears to be coming for the local church in the future and you wonder, "Do I have what it takes to keep living for Christ no matter what comes my way? When Satan turns up the heat on Christians in America do I have what it takes to keep living for Christ?" This is where Ephesians can help us, especially this last section.

As Paul lands the plane in this letter he reminds us that what we have in Christ is more than enough to enable us to glorify God by standing firm in the spiritual battle. This last section of Ephesians is an important reminder that we are all in the same spiritual battle but the resources God has given us in Christ are enough to enable us to glorify God by standing firm in the victory that Christ has already won for us through His death and resurrection. We don't need more than we have in Christ.

So, since this is a class on prayer we want to consider what role prayer plays in the spiritual battle. Let's read the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesians from Ephesians 6:10-20 and notice as Paul ends this section on the spiritual battle how he finishes this section with a call to prayer:

#### Ephesians 6:10-20

- 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
- 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.
- 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
- 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.
- 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,
- 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.
- 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;

- 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,
- 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,
- 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,
- 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

The final section in Ephesians is a reminder that the Christian life is a straightforward life but it is not an easy life. It's a war. When God saves us, He transfers us from the domain of darkness into a new kingdom with a new king. Satan doesn't like it. He hates Christ and he hates people who glorify Christ. Satan opposes every church and every Christian who wants to live genuinely for Christ.

One thing we know about a war is that neglecting it or avoiding it won't make it go away. A few years ago I read a true story about something that happened during the first major battle of the civil war. Something unique happened and an important lesson was learned by a group of people during the battle of Bull Run that took place on July 21, 1861.

On the morning of July 21, 1861 the roar of artillery seemed to awaken all of Virginia as the Union and Confederate armies clashed among the farms by the stream called Bull Run. As the battle intensified, a strange thing occurred. Hundreds of Washingtonians—Senators, Representatives, government workers and their families, all dressed in leisure apparel and carrying picnic baskets—raced to the hill to watch the battle unfold. Armed with opera glasses to survey the fighting, they chatted amicably as men were slaughtered on the fields below.

As spirits were high and entertainment level maximized, a Rebel counterattack occurred, sweeping over the Union flank. This put the army to flight and the implications became obvious - The serene picnic ground was about to become a battle zone. Mass confusion erupted as the spectators fled, just moments before the Confederate wave washed over the hill. The entertainment was over. The battle was upon them.

The point of that story is that the people who tried to take in the battle of bull run by enjoying a picnic learned an important lesson - You cannot be close to war and safe at the same time. In this last section of Ephesians Paul sounds the alarm on any of us who live like the Christian life is a cakewalk. We can't be in a spiritual battle and live like it doesn't exist. It does exist. Every Christian and every church that is truly seeking to make a difference in this world for Christ must expect opposition.

In order to keep glorifying God in this spiritual battle, Paul tells us to do three things and we will spend most of our time on the last thing Paul tells us to do:

- 1. Trust In the Power of Christ - Ephesians 6:10-12**
- 2. Take up and Put on the Protection of Christ - Ephesians 6:13-17**
- 3. Turn in constant prayer to the Presence of Christ - Ephesians 6:18-20**

Notice each of these three things connect back to our Savior. Why? 1 John 3:8 tells us that one of the reasons Jesus came into the world was to destroy the works of the devil. Jesus is the seed of the woman God promised all the way back in Genesis 3:15. Remember one paragraph after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden God showed up and told Satan that someone is coming to crush His head. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. Jesus crushed Satan's head at the cross.

I don't know about you, but I don't always think about this particular part of the gospel - The Jesus defeating Satan part. I tend to think of salvation more in terms of what it does for me - Through the work of Christ I am justified, I am reconciled, I am forgiven, I...I...I... But there is more to salvation than just what we get out of it. God's salvation also includes defeating and then destroying the evil one.

Satan is defeated right now, but Satan is not destroyed. He is not yet in the lake of fire. Satan is not bound right now like he will be in the millennial kingdom. Therefore., we should expect opposition in our attempt to live for Christ. We need to understand what Christ has done and how it affects the spiritual battle we all face once God delivers us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of Christ as Paul describes it in Colossians 1:13-14.

Once we grasp that the spiritual battle is real, what do we do? The first thing Paul commands us to do in this section is to trust in the power of Christ. Satan and the demonic realm is too much for us, but not too much for Christ. Satan is not sovereign. He is a created being. Jesus is sovereign over Satan and the demonic angelic realm.

Right now our Savior is in the position of power. After Jesus completed the work of redemption God the Father raised Christ from the dead. Christ is head over all things and He exercises His sovereign power on behalf of the church. That should be encouraging. So, what do we do with this power of Christ?

Look back at Ephesians 6:10. Ephesians 6:10 is an interesting command for all of us. We are commanded to do something but we are passive in the process. We're all commanded to be strong but our strength comes from Christ. We're commanded to be strong in the Lord but we have to rely on the Lord to make us strong.

**James Rosscup, "Paul commands saints to "be strong in the Lord," in the sphere of His resources. Only in God will they find the appropriate ability; without His enabling they will go down in defeat. He says more. This adequacy in the sphere of the Lord is in the strength that His might furnishes; this is what the Christian life will take."**

Christ strengthens us as we trust Him and we do what Paul says in Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armor of God." Be strong and put on are both commands we are to be doing all the time. We have to continually rely on Christ for spiritual power and put on the armor God provides for spiritual protection.

Again, this is not something that just happens automatically. We have a role to play in this. This is not let go and let God. Paul commands every Christian to take up and put on every piece of the spiritual armor God provides. You would almost think Paul knows what we're up against.

**William Hendrickson writes, "Man must equip himself with the full suit of arms, that is, it is he who must put it on. It is also he, and he alone, who must use this entire panoply. Nevertheless the weapons are called the full armor of God. It is God who has forged them. It is God who gives them. Not**

**for a single moment is man able to employ them effectively except by the power of God. Then he says the entire war will be lost unless we exert ourselves.”**

What are we in if we're not doing this? We're in sin. Sin is what we do when we don't obey what God commands us to do. That's not good. We need to care. Love for Christ flows into obedience, right? I am preaching to myself tonight. If we know we are in a spiritual battle and we know what Christ has done and what we are commanded to do and we don't do it we're sinning. That's not good. Some of us may need to spend some time confessing our sin - That we are not doing what we need to be doing in this battle.

At the end of verse 11 Paul tells us why we have to do this. We have to do this in order to stand against the schemes of the devil. We don't attack Satan. We don't go mono e mono with the devil. We don't revile angelic majesties. To stand firm has the idea of holding your position. Not flinching or retreating in the face of opposition. Maintaining your spiritual position. Harold Hoerner, "Christians are not to attack Satan; they are only to "stand" or hold the territory Christ and His body, the church, have conquered."

What are Satan's schemes? Paul doesn't tell us what they are. Schemes mean they are multifaceted. I think it is helpful to see Satan's schemes against the backdrop of the armor God provides in verses 13-17. Each of the pieces of armor God provides protects us against the schemes of the devil. Spend some time with this this week. Think through each of the 6 pieces of armor God tells you and me to take up and put on in order to stand firm and then think about those times in your life when you weren't doing this and think about what happened. It makes a big difference to our spiritual traction when we take up and put on each of the pieces of the armor God provides.

Whenever we think about the different pieces of armor I know the temptation is to think literally. It makes me think of a time at a previous church when my wife was in a ladies class on a Thursday morning and my daughter was in a class with other little kids. The class was taught by a sweet older lady who was teaching on the armor of God and she passed out little plastic swords. What do you think those kids did with those little plastic swords? They went to war with each other. My little girl left class that day a little tougher.

Paul may have been thinking of Roman soldiers when he wrote this, but Paul wasn't describing a literal physical battle. Ephesians 6:12 tells us, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Our battle is a spiritual battle with the unseen realm.

The 6 pieces of armor that Paul tells us to take up and put on are not literal pieces of armor. Our spiritual battle is not physical. Again, it is a battle with unseen forces that hate God and His people that exists in an unseen yet nevertheless real realm. It's a spiritual battle in the unseen realm. What's important is that Every part of the armor is connected to Christ - what Christ is and provides for believers. That's really important. We have to make the connection between the armor God provides and Christ who supplies the power to enable us to stand firm in our spiritual battle.

James Rosscup, "Every part of the armor is what Christ is and provides to believers. In Paul's conception, Christ is the Christian's life (Col. 3:4), "to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21), "Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), and Christ can be "magnified" in him (Phil. 1:20). He is the one Paul prays will "be at home" in the saints (3:16), the One he counsels they "put on" to be victors over sin (Rom. 13:14). So Christ is finally all of the six portrayals of armor. He is the truth (John 14:6), righteousness both imputed or imparted (1 Cor. 1:30), peace which He "is," "established," and "preached" (Eph. 2:14-17), the perfect example of faith in God and the grace giver of it through His Word (2:8; Rom. 10:17), wearer of the helmet that consists of salvation and Savior to those who believe (Isa. 59:16; Matt. 1:21), and the very Word of God which the Spirit wields as His sword, making timely use of any aspect in it (John 1:1; 1 John 1:1; cf. 2 Cor. 13:3)."

The armor of God shows us how to take what we have in Christ and apply it to the battle we all face. It all connects back to Christ who came to destroy the works of the devil.

We've seen our need to trust in God's protection through Christ and to take up and put on our protection through Christ, but what role does prayer play in this spiritual battle?

*Prayer is what permeates every piece of the armor God provides.*



Kent Hughes, "Those who would engage in spiritual warfare, regardless of how well they wear truth and righteousness and faith and salvation, regardless of how well they are grounded in peace, regardless of how well they wield the Word, must make prayer the first thing. The Christian soldier fights on his knees!"

That is why in verses 18-20 we see the comprehensive nature of prayer connected to the spiritual battle we all face and every church faces. Before we spend a few minutes praying together tonight I want you to see two things from Ephesians 6:18-20 - Let's consider the four all's in verse 18 and the also in verse 19:

### **Prayer in the Spiritual Battle**

1. **The Four All's of Prayer for One Another – Eph 6:18**
2. **The Also of Prayer for Preachers of the Gospel – Ephesians 6:19-20**

In putting on the armor God provides and in withstanding the attacks that will inevitably come our way, we must constantly be praying for ourselves and for other saints. Why? We are on the same team. We all have the same Savior and the same spiritual battle. We fight this battle individually but we don't fight alone.

Let's start with the four all's in Ephesians 6:18:

Ephesians 6:18

praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints

This is a comprehensive verse. It teaches us how to pray (at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication - twice Paul includes supplication which means urgency in prayer based on a presumed need) and Paul tells us how often to pray (Keep alert with all perseverance) and then he tells us who we should pray for (all the saints).

What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? Jude says the same thing in Jude 20 - praying in the Holy Spirit. Spirit filled prayers are prayers based on what the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture. Spirit filled prayers are prayers based on Scripture that glorify Christ. Remember Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will glorify Me. John 16:13-14, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

I think it is helpful to pray with an open Bible. John Bunyan spent time in prison for preaching the gospel. He knew what the spiritual battle was all about. He didn't waste his time in jail. He wrote Pilgrim's Progress. He also maximized time with the Lord in prayer. He writes, "Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to the Word of God, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God."

As we rely on the power of Christ and take up and put on the armor God provides we need to be asking God to make it effective in our hearts and lives. Lord, as I put this piece of the armor on would you make it effective in my life today.

In verse 18 Paul exhorts us to pray for one another all the time because we're involved in a real spiritual battle all the time and we need the power and protection of Christ to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. But notice Paul doesn't stop there. For the first time in Ephesians Paul asks the believers in the church to pray for him. He's been praying for them a lot and now he asks the church to pray for him.

What does Paul ask the believers to pray for him? Remember Paul sent this letter from prison in Rome. Imagine you were in prison in Rome. It wasn't like the Holiday Inn Express where you woke up to warm cinnamon rolls in the morning. It wasn't fun to be in jail. Paul wasn't able to get where he wanted to go to keep preaching Christ where He had never been named. He was limited in what he could do. So, what does Paul ask them to pray for for him? What an example we see in this prayer request.

Ephesians 6:19-20

- 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth  
boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,  
20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I  
ought to speak.

This is really convicting. I'm pretty sure if I was in prison for preaching the gospel and I could ask believers to pray for me I would request for them to pray for me to be released. Let me out of here. I don't like it here. I want to be able to go where I want to go and do what I want to do. Paul cared more about the furtherance of the gospel than his own personal comfort.

Remember what Paul told the elders of the church in Ephesus. In his final meeting with these men he told them in Acts 20:22-24:

- And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there,  
23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.  
24 But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

That was Paul. Going not knowing. Going wherever the Holy Spirit led him to preach to as many people as he could the gospel of the grace of God. Paul went knowing that imprisonment and affliction awaited him where he went. And as Paul is in prison once again he asks for the saints back in Ephesus to include him in their prayers for all the saints.

Paul's need is to boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel. Twice he asks for prayer for boldness. He knows what he ought to do and he still asks for prayer. Paul knew that prison actually provided him with a unique opportunity to make Christ known.

If you take some time and read through the book of Acts you see Paul arrested for preaching the gospel time and brought before governors and kings - Governor Felix in Acts 24:1-23, Governor Porcius Festus in Acts 24:27-25:12, King Herod Agrippa 2 in Acts 25:13-26:32 and possibly Nero himself in Acts 25:11.

A great study is to go back through these times in Acts where Paul appears before these people and look at what he says. Paul is enabled by the Spirit to God to speak boldly for Christ, making the mystery of the gospel plain to these people. At the end of Paul's testimony to King Agrippa in Acts 26, King Agrippa asks, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" You'd think he was starting to catch on. He was catching on. He knew he needed to be saved and that is why Christ came.

What did Paul need when he was given these unique gospel opportunities? He needed boldness and he needed gospel clarity. How would he get what he needed? Through the power of God provided by the prayers of the people of God. If Paul asked for prayer for his ministry, how much more do we need to ask for prayer for whatever God has called us to do. It's ok to ask for people to pray for you.

This is what we need to remember tonight. The moment God saves us until we go to be with Christ or Christ returns we will be in a spiritual battle. To glorify God in the battle we all face individually and as a church family we need to remember we do not fight for victory - Jesus already won the victory for us through His life, death and resurrection. Jesus is sovereign over Satan and the demonic realm so we have nothing to fear.

To glorify God in the spiritual battle we all need to:

1. Trust the power of Christ
2. Take up and put on the protection of Christ
3. Turn in constant prayer to the presence of Christ