

Ephesians 6:18-20 "Pray In The Armor Of Prayer"

Ephesians 6:18-20 ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

As we've been studying through the letter to the Ephesians we've seen how Paul's intent was to encourage the saints in Ephesus to consider the awesome gift they have in Christ and the continual blessings our Lord lavishes upon us for the express purpose of walking after Him and serving Him to the glory of God. We see this in the very beginning of this letter.

EPH 1:3 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

But these blessings are not meant to be treated like toys that we play with, or some object we bring to show-and-tell class as we boast in this gift or that gift. All of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and all the blessings we have in Christ, are meant to be treated as weapons of life as we go forth into this world to declare the praises of God, advancing His Kingdom through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so, as the letter starts by giving us hope that we have these blessings personally given to us by our Lord and Savior, Paul ends this letter by showing us what these blessings are and how to utilize these blessings.

And this is why chapter 6 deals with the armor of God, which is synonymous with the blessings we have in Christ: the truth of God's word, the gospel of peace, faith and salvation, all working together to enable us to be the soldiers for Christ we were called to be.

Paul wants every believer to understand the importance of standing firm for Christ. And the way in which this is to be done is through the working of the Spirit of God in our lives as we submit to His leading and direction which is found primarily through the word of God which He delivered to us through the prophets and apostles.

To be a representative of Christ is to walk after Him in love and gentleness and humility and patience. This is what Paul was saying earlier in this letter.

EPH 4:1-3 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to [walk in a manner] worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

This is what it means to be a soldier for Christ. Pleasing our Lord is our primary duty and this is brought about as we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Paul touches on this when writing to Timothy who was a fellow soldier of Paul's.

2TI 2:4 "No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer."

Nothing pleases our commanding officer more than to walk in a way that lifts up the name of Christ who loved us even unto death. And He loves us enough to continue to use us in the battle for the souls of men everywhere.

This spiritual armor, which is none other than God's armor, God's strength working in and through us, is vital to our ability to wage war effectively in this world. And yet there is an aspect of spiritual armor which seems to be the most neglected in our lives and yet is probably the most important. Prayer. And so we come to our text this morning.

EPH 6:18 "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

The NASB puts it this way. Eph.6:18, "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."

As I've said, prayer has a tendency to be down on the list of importance for many Christians. Not that Christians don't think it isn't necessary, it just seems in the everyday affairs of our lives prayer has a way of getting crowded out. And yet what could be more important than communicating with our God and Savior?

Let's look at our text. "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..."

As William Hendrickson has pointed out, there are 4 *all's* in verse 18 which give us some insight into prayer.

The variety and type of prayer which is intimated is found in the phrase *all* prayer and petition. The when and where of prayer is found in the phrase, at *all* times in the Spirit. The manner of prayer is described as being alert with *all* perseverance and petition. And the indirect objects of prayer is *all* the saints.

The first word in our text is the word prayer. This is speaking of a variety of different types of prayers which would include praise and thanksgiving, profession of faith, confession of sin and of course interceding on behalf of others.

The second word is petition which speaks of specific requests expecting specific answers from our Lord. Petitioning the Lord is asking God for those things in our lives or in the lives of others where immediate needs may be at issue. There may be a specific missionary in a specific country who needs specific items to carry on a specific work. Maybe it's a truck to get to the back country to reach those who have no access to the gospel. This could be considered a petition.

We do it all the time. 'Lord, please help me meet this financial need we have right now.', or 'Lord, please heal this person of this particular affliction.' Petition is more specific in nature. And so, between the two words Paul is saying that *all* types of biblical prayer are legitimate and *all* types of prayer should be used in communication with our God.

But, we should never limit ourselves to just petitioning our Lord with things we need. We must also pray as we praise Him for our salvation and His blessings, thank Him for life with Christ, confess that we are sinners in need of His constant grace and mercy, and so on. Or as Solomon once put it, "in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (PRO 3:6)

Our Lord wants to hear from us and He wants it to be done in all the ways which honor Him, which is why Paul adds, to pray in the Spirit. Some have suggested that to pray in the Spirit means only to pray in tongues. The gift of tongues is certainly a legitimate way of approaching our God with praise and adoration, but Paul does not limit this to speaking in tongues as the context clearly points out.

So, what does it mean to pray in the Spirit, especially in light of the fact that we are to be walking in the armor of God? Well, quite simply it means we are to be praying after the Spirit, or according to the Spirit and His will for our lives as He empowers us for service.

To properly understand this aspect of the Spirit's involvement in our lives we should start with the context and let the writer define these things. And of course the context would include the entire letter.

EPH 3:16-19 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

In this passage Paul is showing us that to pray or walk in the Spirit includes the idea of being empowered by the Spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. This is a Spirit-controlled life as we are rooted and established in love with the express purpose of being filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

Why? To show off one of our gifts? No! Rather, to be strengthened for the war at hand so that we may be faithful soldiers for Christ. This is the way we should be praying. We should understand that to pray in the Spirit is to pray according to the will of the Spirit. And to understand what the will of the Spirit is we must seek to know the mind of God found in the revealed word of God.

And part of the will of God is to seek Him diligently that we may draw close to Him as the battles rage and as life seems to want to crush us at times. What Paul would have us to understand is that all of life is a trial because of sin and the curse, but this life should never get in the way of the real life we have in Christ.

And I believe that's one of the reasons our prayer lives suffer. This present life has a tendency to redirect our focus to where the flesh, instead of the Spirit, takes prominence. Instead of seeing with spiritual eyes we only see everything in this world trying to cave in on us.

Now, again I'm not suggesting that this present world isn't real and that our trials are make-believe. But, the point Paul would have us understand is that the Spirit of God resides in every true believer and that He dwells in us who are in this present world. In other words, God is only a heartbeat away, He's only a prayer away from helping us to understand that we are not alone in this spiritual war which involves this present life.

And so we must be praying at all times, in all circumstances. This is what Paul told the church at Thessalonica.

1TH 5:17-18 "...pray continually; [pray without ceasing, NASB] 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

To pray in the Spirit is to be dependent on the Spirit. You see, prayer is a form of worship. This is why we don't pray to dead saints or the angels. Prayer is directed only to God who alone is able to answer prayer in a way that strengthens us and glorifies Himself.

I like the way one commentator put it. "All of life is to be prayed, not just lived. That is why Paul instructs us to pray in the Spirit on all occasions. Prayer is a kind of spiritual breathing." (Klyne Snodgrass)

By that last phrase he simply means that just as we naturally take our breath for life, prayer should be a natural part of constantly communing with God on all occasions. But like everything in life which becomes "second nature", it must be practiced to reach that point.

When I was in radio, I needed to learn to do two to three things simultaneously. While you're talking on the air you need to be able back-time your music so that just before the vocals come up you're ending your talk, all the while you're pushing the right buttons and turning the right knobs.

To do all of this for the first time at a radio station is very nerve-racking. But over time, it becomes so natural that you don't even think about it, you just do it because you've done it so often. In a similar way, prayer must be practiced in a way where we are always coming before our God. And before you know it, it's just a part of our lives where we are praying without ceasing, in a sense.

It's much too easy to plan God out in our lives. We pray in the morning before going to work. We pray over our food. We pray

before going to bed. "Specific times of prayer are crucial, but all of life is to be prayed." (Snodgrass)

But we must understand that prayer to God does take a commitment and an understanding that in this spiritual war the enemy will try to do everything to break the lines of communication with our King. And this is why we must be on the alert with *all* perseverance.

The idea of being alert is found in what the original language conveys. The Greek word is *agrupneo* and it means (1) to be sleepless, keep awake, watch (2) to be circumspect, attentive, ready.

That's language of a soldier on watch, not letting his guard down. And if we are to pray effectively and walk effectively for Christ we must always be alert and be attentive to what is going on around us knowing that all of life is spiritual. Therefore, we need to be depending on the Spirit of God for all things, including prayer.

Paul realized this when he wrote to the church in Rome concerning the many trials we all face in life and the Spirit's involvement in our lives in those trials. But he knew that perseverance was essential in being able to go forward with Christ and that our Lord will use life to produce that perseverance.

ROM 5:3-5 "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Do you think God is concerned with our spiritual life and our ability to seek Him and walk in His ways? Of course He is. He's the One who has given us the Spirit for that specific purpose.

And so, to pray in the Spirit necessarily means that we have the ability to do that very thing since God gave us the Spirit for that purpose as well. There's nothing magical about it. You don't need to work yourself up into some spiritual frenzy to be able to pray in the Spirit any more than you have to do that to walk in the Spirit. It's a matter of looking to the Spirit by faith as He directs us to Christ through the means He has provided according to His word. And prayer is part of His will for us.

Who must we be petitioning for in our text? Paul says, *all* the saints. The context has to do with all the saints in their local body.

Remember, the word petition has more to do with specific prayers for specific people for a specific reason. Therefore, all the saints would include those you would pray for specifically.

It would be hard to petition for every saint everywhere in the world since you don't know every saint. But to the degree that you do know specific needs we must approach God on their behalf. I suppose we can pray generally for every saint in the world but that would be different than petitioning on their behalf.

But in our prayers should we also pray for unbelievers? Of course. We must pray and petition God on their behalf that God would turn their hearts to Christ as He uses us, or any believer in their lives. In fact, Paul alludes to this when he continues in our text.

EPH 6:19-20 "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

The prayer is for Paul, but it's directed in a way where unbelievers will be blessed as God is pleased to answer that prayer for Paul as he opens his mouth and fearlessly declares the gospel and many come to faith in Christ.

What we see here is that the apostle Paul is asking for prayer. Often times we might get the impression that an apostle was so close to God that he didn't need anyone else. And yet, we see clearly that Paul was a person just like us who needed the prayers of the saints.

ROM 15:30 "I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me."

2CO 1:10-11 "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many."

The first thing we notice is that Paul was constantly requesting prayer from the saints. But the second thing we notice is that Paul expected God to answer those prayers. This is one of those areas which in a sense remains a mystery about our God.

On the one hand our God is sovereign. Nothing will keep His will from being accomplished. No one can get in the way of what He desires to accomplish. And yet, we see that human beings are actually given the privilege and responsibility to not only pray to God, but to be assured that God will be pleased to answer our prayers.

Does this mean He will always answer them according to the way we expect Him to answer? No, not necessarily. But, to suggest that God is only teasing us with a way to make it look like we have some sort of involvement in His will is to miss the significance of prayer and the significance of God's command to pray on behalf of others.

Prayer is not some empty spiritual placebo to make us feel good. Prayer is real communication with real hope that God not only hears us but responds to us as well. The prophet Isaiah records these words of hope for us.

ISA 59:1 "Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear."

How many times do we see God throughout Scripture answering the prayers of His people? Was it just blind luck that it worked out that way or did God actually respond to specific prayers and petitions precisely because His people prayed?

God is a God who desires our fellowship and part of that fellowship includes Him personally getting involved in every aspect of our lives. Prayer is a gift which God's people can employ, not pulling the strings of God, because He bows to no man, but rather as a way in which to share in the will of God as we fellowship with God.

That is God's will. To commune with Him according to His will. And as we approach our God with the attitude of knowing Him and loving Him more and more we will find that our wills begin to conform to His. Prayer is not a vehicle to change God's will as much as it is in participating in His will.

God will be pleased to answer our prayers, but to suggest that we can foolishly pray for things which will harm us or be out of His will is to ask something of God which He most likely will not answer in the affirmative. And yet, we do know that sometimes God will answer prayer in spite of whether or not it's good for us.

Sometimes God will answer prayer to show us that we must stay dependent on Him for all things, by giving us that which we request which may not be best, so that we'll seek His best.

A classic case of this can be found in Israel who got tired of being ruled directly by God through His judges and prophets. This was known as the Theocracy of Israel; Theocracy meaning rule by God.

1SA 8:4-7, 9 "So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." 6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."

Samuel did listen and then warned them extensively of what it would mean to receive an earthly king as they gave up many rights and privileges. But listen to their response.

1SA 8:19-20 "But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. 22 The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Everyone go back to his town."

Did God answer them, according to their request, even though it was not the best for Israel? Yes, He did. But He did it because it was ultimately according to His will to deal with Israel through a king. God was not obligated to answer in that particular way.

Will God answer our prayers even if our stubborn hearts ask amiss? Sometimes. How many times have we had a particular desire or a particular bent? And we tell everyone, we've taken it to the Lord, when in fact, sometimes, we simply went to the Lord to try and get His approval for what we've already decided.

Of course, it sounds much more spiritual when we put it in the context of taking it before the Lord, but in reality God may answer such a prayer and allow us to go off in a particular direction only to

show us later how that direction was not according to His best will for our lives.

Does this mean God's will was thwarted? Not at all. You see, in His perfect and sovereign will He uses everything in our lives to draw us closer to Himself and equip us in such a way that we will be stronger for it.

That should never be an excuse for doing our own thing and then expecting that God will bless it. It simply means that God can bless even the mess we ask for as He turns us back to Himself seeking His will not ours.

And that's what I love about Paul here. Notice what he doesn't ask for here. He wants prayers from the saints, but he doesn't ask to get out of his imprisonment. He asks for the opportunity to speak boldly for Christ through the gospel he was entrusted with.

He was willing to be a witness right there in prison. This doesn't mean he never prayed to be delivered from such circumstances, but here in this letter there is no hint of it. His desire was to be used of God and that God's people would pray to that end on his behalf.

Paul knew the importance of his ministry which Jesus Christ gave him. He also knew that he could not accomplish the task in his own strength. And in asking for the saints to pray for him he was showing them by example that if apostles need the prayers of other believers then every one of us need each other's prayers as well.

Do our prayers make a difference? You better believe it. Otherwise God would be playing mind games with us allowing us to think that somehow we can participate in His will being accomplished in this earth when in fact it's not.

He's not playing games with us. This is one of the most important ways for us to stay near our Lord as He equips us for the battle. Put on the full armor of God and stand firm in His strength, but never forget that living armor which brings us into the very throne room of our Lord and Savior; prayer

May we pray for each other. May we each give thanks and praise and adoration as we come before our God in prayer, never limiting ourselves to just petitioning with things we need. Our heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask. But, oh how He loves it when we come to Him as His children in Christ, to praise Him, thank Him, give Him glory, as we depend on Him for all things.

1TH 5:17-18 "...pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."