

SPIRITUAL WARFARE¹ A FINAL EXHORTATION TO PRAY

Texts

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.

Summary of Message

The apostle Paul concludes the teaching on spiritual warfare by exhorting us to pray. Specifically, he calls us to an “all out” commitment to prayer (notice the repetition of “all” in 6,18): we are to pray (1) about all things (general and specific requests); (2) at all times; (3) with all perseverance; (4) and for all the saints. In short, fervent prayer ought to be an integral part of our Christian lives.

The question is often asked, however, as to why we should pray. Do we presume to be able to provide counsel to God? Three basic reasons for prayer were put forward in the message. (1) We pray because the Bible—which is the authoritative over the lives of believers—commands us to pray. (2) We pray in order to remain in Christ and to grow in our appreciation of our faith-union with him. (3) We pray because it is God’s ordained means for accomplishing His sovereign redemptive purposes. See 2 Thessalonians 3,1.

There are three practices we ought to adopt in order to facilitate a healthy prayer life. (1) We learn how to pray biblically by imitating the many prayers we find in Scripture. Specifically, we learn to pray by memorizing prayers like the ones found in Ephesians 1:15-21 and 3,14-21. (2) We learn how to pray by praying regularly, but this regularity is something that can only come about if we are vigilant about guarding our appointed times of prayer. In short, we need to be more deliberate and disciplined about our prayer lives. (3) We ought to pray “in the Spirit,” that is, as children of God who, on the one hand, pray with a childlike confidence as a result of our adoption through Jesus Christ, and who, on the other hand, pray with a view of putting the “agenda” of the Father’s above our own (“Not my will but Yours be done”).

Admittedly at our church and in many homes prayer is not a strong point. May we, therefore, take seriously the apostle’s final exhortation to an “all out” commitment to pray. In doing so, may we come to know and experience the gospel in new ways in 2009.

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Discussion Questions

1. Describe your prayer life in terms of the “grid” provided in Ephesians 6,18: Do you pray (1) about *all* things; (2) regularly (vs. simply before meals); (3) with endurance, i.e., without giving up; (4) and for all the saints.
2. Of the four aspects of “all out” prayer, where is improvement needed in your prayer life? What concrete steps do you plan on taking?
3. 2 Thessalonians 3:1 reads: “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you.” Prayer, again, is one of God’s appointed means for accomplishing His sovereign redemptive purposes. How does this truth affect the way you think about our approach to evangelism? Do you believe that our church holds enough prayer meetings for the lost? What priority should prayer have among our church activities and programs? What priority should prayer have in your own life?
4. Read the following prayer by the apostle Paul. How does it compare with your own prayers?²

Ephesians 1:15-21 (NIV) ¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

5. How does the gospel of Christ Jesus affect the way you approach prayer? Do you approach God with a childlike confidence, knowing that God hears you not on the basis of your performance but because of our faith-union with Jesus Christ? Do you approach God with a desire to put His Kingdom-purposes above your own desires? In short, are you praying regularly “in the Spirit”?
6. As a community group (CG) discuss practical ways to foster an “all out” commitment to pray. Perhaps your CG can commit to meeting once a month on a Saturday morning to pray for the needs of the CG members. Maybe the men and women can gather regularly before the formal CG times to pray for their unique struggles.

² It may be a helpful exercise/discipline to write your prayers in a prayer journal.