

Ephesians 6:18

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[0 : 00] And so I want to speak tonight from really the last part of the whole armour of God. And I'm not convinced it is really the armour of God, although I'm not treated that way.

! So verse 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.

And also for me the words may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel. For which I'm an ambassador in chains that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. Praying at all times in the Spirit. So is it armour or not? Well, I think what I want to say is that as you think of this Christian warfare, that in many ways this is the most important weapon of all.

If it's not a weapon, it's certainly the foundation of all the others. And so each piece you put on with prayer. So if you look at verse 14, you pray as you put on the belt of truth.

[1 : 14] And you pray as you put on the breastplate of righteousness. And you pray as you put those shoes on your feet that are given readiness by the Gospel of Peace.

And you pray as you grab hold of the shoes of faith. You pray as you put on the helmet of salvation. And you pray as you hold the sword of the Spirit.

Because if you don't, none of them will work. None of them will work. If the Christian life is a battle, which I want to maintain that it is, and I hope you do as well. If the Christian life is a battle, if we are soldiers, it is of the utmost importance that the lines of communication with our Captain, the Lord Jesus, who is the Captain of our salvation, are upheld.

If communication breaks down in a war, it ends in disorder and disaster. And our communication line is prayer. And again, we've seen, and we acted quite healthily, that the Lord Jesus is the great example in all of these things.

And so we see the Lord Jesus, don't we, often in prayer. Matthew's Gospel presents the Lord Jesus as a king who goes forth into battle.

[2 : 29] And at every point, and particularly at the crisis points, we see the king at prayer. And so when the Lord Jesus is baptised, he is praying. He prays after works of healing.

He prays before choosing the twelve, after the great achievement of feeding the five thousands. We see him at prayer when he was very busy indeed, at the very time when we usually need prayer out.

We see him pray in the transfiguration. We see him in prayer in the upper room of his disciples. We see him praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. We see him praying at the cross.

And the Lord Jesus left us an example to follow in his steps. This prayer is both defensive and attacking, isn't it? And so when we pray defensively, when we are asking the Lord to protect us, or to protect our loved ones, even that is an attack on Satan.

Even a defensive prayer is attacking. It foils Satan's designs upon God's people. Every defence is an attack. Remember the Lord Jesus with Simon Peter.

[3 : 42] Jesus said to him, Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail.

And that is Christ, isn't it? Making use of this weapon of all prayer. I can see. To protect Peter. I can see. I think what Paul has in mind is a kind of attacking nature of prayer.

It's a positive thing. I say that because of verse 19. Because then he says, pray for me. Pray for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel as I wield the sword of the spirit.

In other words, he gives in verse 19 an instance of what it means to pray as an integral part of proclamation of the gospel. Three points. First of all, the word always.

Can you see that? Praying at all times. Pray always. That's something that Paul says again, listening in 1 Thessalonians 5, it's an echo of that passage, pray without ceasing.

[4 : 52] There's an echo again of our Lord's words in New Chapter 80 that men ought always to pray and not to give up. You have a parable in view of the unjust judge in Luke 18.

And the widow goes to him and goes to him again. At the start of Luke 18, Jesus says, he tells that parable so that you ought always to pray and not to give up. But it's interesting, in Luke 17, before that, you have this pattern of tribulation and trouble and distress and difficult times.

That's the end of Luke 17. And then straight away in Chapter 18, Jesus says, I tell you this parable that you ought always to pray and not to give up. But Paul is saying exactly the same thing in Ephesians 6.

He's saying, in the midst of this battle, can you see it? The end of verse 13, stand firm. Start of verse 14, stand therefore. Keep standing.

In the midst of this battle, stand, and you are to pray at all times. Now, this can't mean, can it, that you and I tonight think, right, we've got to pray a little bit more tomorrow.

[6 : 08] It can't mean that. That's a good thing to do, if you want to do that. But I don't think it means that. And I don't think it means about us going into our closet, as Jesus would say, and praying.

Jesus teaches us, that all of us should have a time and a place where we get along with God. Each of us should have a time of prayer and a place of prayer.

But there is also such a thing as a spirit of prayer. There's an attitude of prayer. And so, some of you have work tomorrow. And some of you have school tomorrow.

And some of you have duties tomorrow that you are unavoidable. Some of you have appointments tomorrow that you can't get out on. You cannot always be in the secret place. You can't neglect the duties that God has given you, whether they be at home or whether they be at work.

There is a spirit of prayer and an attitude of prayer. And this verse is telling us that we can be praying always. So if that is so, what does it apply to and what does it imply?

[7 : 15] And it implies this, it is the quality of our lives. What we are that will determine our prayer and our contact with God.

And our ability to draw on the divine resources. It is a moral reference. So what I'm trying to say is this, if we are right people, we will pray always.

And if we're not right people and the right with God, we will not and we cannot pray. And so this isn't giving you techniques on how to pray or what to pray for.

But what we are when we pray is decisive. It's saying to you and I, very challengingly, our life is our prayer. And if our life is not right, neither will our prayer be right.

And that's the importance of the first part of Ephesians. That Paul is so concerned with me that we should enter into all our wealth in Christ and make it our own.

[8 : 26] So look at chapter 1 and verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

and we are to make those blessings of Christ our own. Because then we will be right.

And so here is a believer who is living close to God. Here is a believer who has exposed her life to the discipline of the word of God to the sword of the spirit.

Here is a Christian and she has let God's word do its work and actually it's been quite costly. but she has responded and been renewed and been transformed within and God's word continues to shape and to challenge her.

And she is a crucified woman day by day. And that life in practical terms is a living sacrifice to God that is holy and acceptable.

[9 : 29] That life that she lives is a constant prayer. God hears that life. It's a wonderful thought isn't it? It speaks to God that life.

And it speaks with God you see and that is the secret to prayer. He said you would love me and I would love to find 10 great keys to making prayer easier. You would love that and I would love it.

If I could give you top 10 tips on prayer have you heard that? those kind of talks. But actually they're not very helpful. What is the secret of the prayer giants in the Bible?

Men who move the world from God. It's what they were that really matters. So you think of Elijah on Mount Carmel.

A simple sentence of prayer brings the fire of God down. but it wasn't just a simple sentence was it? It was the prayer of his life.

[10:37] Elijah speaks to God in that way. Moses, Abraham, a life. And that is what Paul means by praying always. That if we are living like that we will be praying always.

Our lives will be sending signal up to God. what is prayer? Prayer is being conformed to the mind of Christ.

So Philippians to let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. It is intimacy and fellowship with God. And so we'll never pray unless we're a certain type of person.

For you to go home tonight and think well I'm just going to pray a little bit more every day you've missed the point. Praying more has its place. But God is looking on the life.

And it is a life that speaks and not a voice like a little like that. What we are. That prayer really is the end product of the discipline of our souls by the word and the spirit of God.

[11:52] And so if we are willing to open ourselves unreservedly to the soul of God's spirit in our hearts that will make us into praying men and women.

Paul goes on to say this and secondly we pray at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication to that end keep alert of all perseverance making supplications for all the saints.

The end of that verse I want you to see that I think it's very very helpful that we are to pray for all the saints. I do I despair of emails coming in for prayer letters.

There's a great story of John Chapman the Australian evangelist who went all the missionary magazines were coming and once a month he'd pick them all up because he'd sign up them all and he'd walk to the bin and he'd say Lord bless them all.

And I do a great work with Barber's Fund Release International and Open Doors. I just can't pray for all of them.

[13:00] And so you read the end of verse 18 all the saints. Well there's millions of Christians. How do I do that? I think it's really striking. Paul could have talked about what was going on in Ephesus.

He could have pointed them to the spiritual battle that they were facing. He could have talked about their needs but he doesn't because Paul's mind is on something different.

His mind is on outward objective prayer rather than inward subjective prayer. prayer. And what I mean by that is naturally our prayers focus on ourselves and on our personal concerns.

And prayer is not to be used exclusively or primarily for our personal battle. I think that's what Paul is getting at. I'm not saying that you don't pray for yourself.

I'm not saying that you don't pray for your loved ones. But I am saying that prayer is not to be used exclusively and primarily for our personal battle. Now where do I get that from? I think you get that from the Lord's prayer.

[14:16] So when you pray the Lord Jesus says say our Father who is in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What is the first part of that prayer about? The first part of that prayer is about God isn't it? And the first part of the Lord's prayer are taken up with the things of God and the concerns of God and their concerns with the honour and the glory of God's great name and the coming of God's kingdom and God's will being done.

And it's only then when that divine order is established that personal needs come in. And so then he says give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses.

Deliver us from evil. And that cuts across doesn't it by natural heart. Because when there's a time of testing and a time of trouble or a time of pressure, my tendencies, I become preoccupied with my own battle.

When I'm really struggling with temptation, I can so easily just concentrate on my own needs and my own pressures. But don't concentrate your prayers on that.

[15:30] Pray not just for yourself, but for all the saints. And the more I've thought about this week, the more I can understand why. I think we can hear Paul saying that self-preoccupying prayer leads to morbidity.

Leads to morbidity. So let me tell you, this is the very worst thing that you can do sometimes is to pray about your temptations. And the very worst thing that you can do sometimes is to pray about your sins.

things. Because when you pray about them, you focus your attention on them, and you get bogged down with them. And Paul's advice here is really to say this, your personal battle, join your personal battle to the great battle.

Strike a blow for the larger cause. Look at the main strategy of what God is doing, not the tiny little bits. That is your problem, isn't it?

So the struggle in my Christian life, and in yours, is very real. I look back at this year, and what grand have I gained? Millimetres, not even inch by inch.

[16 : 45] What progress have I made? But I must lift my eyes to the kingdom of Christ, and I see that my struggle is just one tiny little cabbage patch in the field of God's war.

Paul's advice is to relate your battle to the battle, and strike a blow for the larger cause. Look at the main strategy, Paul says.

Relate, says Paul, your little battle, and they are real, I'm not minimising that, your battle to the main battle. And ask yourself, why are you under attack? And ask yourself, why are you struggling?

Why are you under pressure? What relation does this attack upon literally you have with the great cosmic battle in the heavenly places? What does this have to do with the larger purposes of God? And it may be tonight that you're in really deep waters, we meet here tonight in different states, different tunnels, tunnels, but they can all of them be related to a larger work on a bigger canvas and you're part in it.

[17 : 59] And you pray for the larger work that it may go forward and be fulfilled and when it does, we'll be carried along with it. And we will find our little problem dealt with in the larger victory.

Let me try and illustrate it. Let's say that God plans a work of grace in a congregation. He plans to do a work where he'll bless a church family.

When God begins a work, he's never in a hurry to do that, we know that, don't we? And Satan, he sets out to frustrate it. Behind the scenes, that's what's going on.

We don't see that, but that's behind the scenes what is going on. And so in the concrete situation, what we see, we suddenly see various people come under pressure in different ways.

One believer suffers with terrible temptations. is in deep, deep water and another believer has got a major crisis in her home. Another believer has got terrible trouble in work.

[19 : 04] One Christian is passing through doubt and difficulty. One is just being gripped by a really dark, dark, dark discouragement. There's one believer and they just seem to slack off completely in their commitment.

there's another believer that suddenly is very, very sick and so on. And on the surface they bear no relation to each other. But that is how the enemy works. Well at first they don't know that they're not aware of God's plans of grace.

They're just aware of their own personal problems and they cry out to God about it. please sort this out Lord please deal with it. Please Lord take it away.

And Paul says to you look up for a moment and see the wider horizon and ask yourself why is this happening to me? And of course that's where the advantage of the real fellowship comes in.

Fellowship means sharing it is certainly not the will of God that in a time of trouble we should lock up our problems in our own hearts and share them with nobody.

[20 : 25] Now what is fellowship? Fellowship is bearing one another's burdens. It is opening up to your brothers and sisters. And when they are shared it is there isn't there that there is the possibility of people putting two and two together so and so is under fire.

She is really struggling. Why are all these things happening? Well this is the enemy's strategy. And Paul says ask these questions and see where your problems fit into the wider strategy of God.

And pray for all the saints. Get into gear for the main battle the real battle. play your part in it. Let your own victory be won by looking to the greater victory.

Play your part in the big battle. It's a great way to think. It's a great way to live next time you're under pressure related to the work of the church.

Think of the church as a unit. God has unified us into a working fighting force. So no attack comes to you personally out of relation to anything else.

[21 : 44] It is all in relation to what we're committed to and we pray for the larger work. Remember what God is doing in the world. Thirdly and lastly pray for me. Paul says to his name.

Jesus actually focuses in pray for me that words may be given to me opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. He gives a particular instance and a particular example.

Focus your prayers. Here he says and this will give the gospel word power to make inroads into the kingdom of darkness and it will help you. So see the pattern. Paul is gently and firmly lifting the Ephesian hearts and minds from their own woes but related he says to the greater work.

Here is the spearhead the preaching of the gospel. He writes from Corinth he's up against it in Corinth. Do you remember what he says in Thessalonians pray for me that I may be given boldness sorry two Thessalonians chapter three verses one and two finally brothers pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men but not all have faith.

What's he praying there? He's praying that the word of the Lord may run. It's the kind of prayer that will set the gospel word word like a fire blazing through the place.

[23 : 29] He said I want you to pray that the word of the gospel might have free course like wild fire. Remains true after 20 centuries doesn't it? there is one effectual way for the work of God to be done.

You can have the finest orator you can have the greatest rhetorician but if there isn't prayer behind the preaching it will fall to the ground. Every preacher is entitled as of right to plead with his people and say pray for me that I may speak as I ought to.

2 Corinthians 4 that great passage talks about the gospel being veiled. He says even if our gospel is veiled it is veiled to those who are perishing in their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your savants for Jesus sake. For God who said let light shine out of darkness that shone in our hearts to give the light and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So what's Paul saying there? He's saying will you pray that eyes would be opened that the veil would be withdrawn. It's the weapon of all prayer. Pray always.

[24 : 57] Pray for all the saints. Pray for me. Pray always. It's a challenge for what we are that matters.

Not just more prayer. Pray for all the saints which means relating our battle to the great battle. And then that focal point pray for the preaching of the gospel.

He doesn't mean utterance. He doesn't mean eloquence. You as people of God here are responsible! My responsibility is to preach the word and to dig it.

And your responsibility is to thrust the preacher of the gospel forward like a sword. That preachers would speak boldly. And I cannot fulfill my responsibility before God unless you fulfill yours.

Let's pray. Thank you.