

## THE CHURCH AT WAR – THE BATTLE IS FOUGHT ON OUR KNEES

Ephesians 6:10-20

October 30, 2022

This is the last message in this series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians – and the third message on Paul's self-defence course in Spiritual Warfare. Whether we like it or not, as believers we are all involved in spiritual warfare with God's enemy Satan and his demonic army, and here in **Ephesians 6:10-20** Paul teaches us how to deal with Satan and his demonic army to ensure victory every time. In his teaching Paul wants us to realize that there's nothing to fear, because the ultimate victory has already been won for us by Christ on the cross; however, the devil and his demonic army are still a real threat and we will need to deal with them until Christ returns at which time they will be put in chains during the millennium reign of Christ and then released for a short time until their final destination will be thrown into the lake of fire that has been prepared for them. So, the crucial fact we need to know in this spiritual war is this: "*As believers in Christ, we do not fight FOR victory; we fight FROM victory. In Christ's power we are invincible.*" So, to help us fight from victory as God's army, we have been provided with six critical pieces of armour to equip us to fight this invisible war, but it's our responsibility to pick them up and put them on as we head out into battlefield every day!

The sixth and final piece of armour is the **SWORD OF THE SPIRIT** – which is the only offensive weapon we are given, and this wasn't the long heavy sword the Romans soldier carried, but the short light sword they would pull out of the scabbard fastened to their belt. This sword was used in close, hand-to-hand combat, and required great skill, so the soldiers would spend hour-after-hour in practice so they would become experts, because their lives depended on it. Paul defines the razor-sharp sword for us as the Word of God, and the Greek word Paul uses for the Word of God is ***rhema*** = the spoken word given to us by God to do close, hand-to-hand combat against the lies and deception of our enemy the devil, bringing the written Word (***logos***) alive and active in our specific situations. So, we need to speak the living Word of God out loud, because there's power in the spoken word to demolish strongholds. We need Satan and the demonic realm to hear God's Word from our lips so there is no confusion of what we believe and what we hold on to for victory. We can't be silent!

If you want to know how the ***rhema*** Word of God works – we need to look to Jesus – He clearly modeled how to use the sword of the Spirit in **Matthew 4:1-11**. We are told that Jesus was tempted by Satan at the end of His forty-day fast in the wilderness. During those forty days, Satan waited for his opportunity when Jesus was physically weak and hungry, coming in close to attack Him. “***Satan came to Jesus and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’***” (Matthew 4:3-4). Three times Satan came in close, in hand-to-hand combat, to tempt Jesus in every area in which we are also tempted: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes (greed), and the pride of life, but each time Jesus pulled out His weapon and rebuked the devil with the sword of the Spirit. Jesus spoke out three times: “***It is written.***” “***It is written.***” “***It is written.***” And when Jesus was done wielding His sword with the authority given to Him by His Heavenly Father, Satan departed. One of the problems these days is that many think the Word of God is only an opinion, not an authority, and then we wonder why our sword is so dull!

Paul is telling us here that if we are going to win this invisible war – the Word of God must become an absolute authority in our lives. So, it helps to picture the absolute authority of God’s Word as it is portrayed in **Hebrews 4:12**: “***For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than a double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.***” As well as Paul’s words to Timothy about the usefulness of God’s Word in every situation, “***All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servants of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work***” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We need to know, quote, and apply the truth of God’s Word to the specific lies of the enemy against us, as he comes in close in hand-to-hand combat. Realizing that yes we are the ones that fight with the sword of the Spirit, but a stronger hand enables it, the powerful hand of God. Over-and-over throughout the Bible we get this clear picture that God’s Word is a life-and-death matter, and like a sword in the hand of a soldier is critical that we know how to wield the sword of God’s Word so that it becomes second nature!

The way to wear God’s armour is to read His Word with an open and teachable heart, so that as you read His Word it speaks directly into your life, causing you to

make the necessary changes to be transformed to Christlikeness. So whenever the devil and his demonic army come up close, we are never to fear them, that is what they want; instead, you need to realize who you are IN CHRIST and your position IN CHRIST according to **1 John 4:4**, “*the one who is living in you is far greater than the one who is in the world,*” and **1 John 5:4-5**, “*You see, every child of God overcomes the world, for our faith is the victorious power that triumphs over the world. So who are the world conquerors, defeating its power? Those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.*” Christ is greater than Satan and his demonic army, and the Good News is that Jesus lives in you by the Holy Spirit. You are a child of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Your authority is your position IN CHRIST, and you have strapped on your side the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Whether they like it or not, dark powers must believe, respond to, and obey the authority of every child of God who wields the Word of God effectively and powerfully!

Here's a quick review of our armour:

- We first put on the belt of truth, the absolute truth of the written Word of God, which holds everything in our life together, and when it is securely fastened, we are protected from the devil's primary threat, deception.
- Then, we need to make sure the breastplate of Christ's righteousness, not our righteousness, is covering our heart, protecting us from Satan's accusations, as he is constantly trying to condemn us of our sinful past.
- And as we walk-out-our-walk in a world filled with the shifting sands of uncertainty, we need to be certain of our salvation and stand firm with the boots of peace strapped to our feet, having the peace that passes all understanding, regardless of what comes against us. We are protected because we live by the Gospel!
- We make sure that our mind is protected by the helmet of salvation, so that everything we hear and everything we see is filtered through the lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord!
- Then we can hold up the shield of faith that is large enough and strong enough that when Satan shoots his fiery arrows at us, we are covered and protected, and are able to easily extinguish them before they can do us any serious damage. And we come together as God's army – the church – in unity as we lock our shields together to become an unstoppable force against evil!

- Lastly, we will not fear and will not doubt, as we skilfully use our offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit, in up-close hand-to-hand combat, telling Satan whenever he tempts us, “***it is written,***” and he must flee.

As believers we have to stay focussed on the fact that anyone who believes in Christ as their Lord and Saviour has overcome the world – when we have our armour on, we come against the forces of darkness not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord, having the authority of God to speak against the evil forces, and they have no choice but to flee. When Satan attacks, and he will attack every believer who is committed to serving Christ, you’re size and strength are not the issue, it’s only your position IN CHRIST and the act of wearing your armour, and using the sword of the Spirit effectively. And you don’t have to be a seminary-educated pastor or a super-spiritual lay person to win the invisible war, all you need is to know God’s Word and act on what is true!

Now that we are dressed and equipped for battle – there’s one more area that Paul needs to cover as he concludes his letter to the Ephesians, and I am titling this last section on spiritual warfare “***THE BATTLE IS FOUGHT ON OUR KNEES!***” The assignment for every soldier of Jesus Christ which is most often the most neglected element of our warfare – is **PRAAYER**. Martin Luther said this: “*Prayer is the mightiest of all weapons that created nature can wield.*” Here’s what Paul tells us in **Ephesians 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 Lord’s people.***”

As the church at war, the six pieces of armour are connected to our prayer life. The means by which believers are to withstand and overcome the attacks of the enemy in spiritual warfare is by passionate, consistent, intense, and strategic prayer for one another. The privilege of prayer is one of the greatest gifts God has given us and we need to open the door for God’s help through praying to cover our homes, children, grandchildren, marriages, finances, our minds, our health – and anything we want protected with prayer. Our daily assignment is to intercede on our knees for ourselves, for our children and family, for others, for our church, for our community, for our leaders, for our nation. Prayer is a powerful force as we go out into the world to fight our daily battles, in preventing us from getting knocked down, in protection us from being defeated, in keeping us from giving into temptation, and in helping us to be Christ-like to everyone we encounter. The

Bible clearly tells us that Satan trembles whenever he sees, even the weakest Christian, down on their knees in prayer!

However, strong Biblical prayer that is full of faith and trust is one of the most difficult disciplines for most believers to follow – it is the missing ingredient in most Christians' lives, and the missing ingredient in most churches. In a way we can say that Satan has infiltrated every church to keep us from prayer, placing all kinds of barriers in the way of us attending prayer meetings, so we can see that Satan is very good at his job! Most Christians don't spend a lot of time on their knees for many reasons, and especially on our knees in the kind of strong Biblical prayer that Paul writes about here. The kind of prayer that is full of faith and trust, that is consistent, intense, and strategic against the tactics of the enemy. Satan knows that this is the kind of prayer that brings change in churches and change in lives. Burdens and bondages are broken, old sinful habits are discarded, people become contagious as others notice their changed lives, dividing walls are broken down, and marriages and family relationships are restored. Satan knows that God can use this kind of prayer along with the armour of God to transform lives, transform churches, and transform communities and that's why the devil tries hard to defeat us in our prayer life!

Richard Foster in his book called "*Prayer*" writes this: "*We today yearn for prayer and hide from prayer. We are attracted to it and repelled by it. We believe prayer is something we should do, even something we want to do, but it seems like a chasm stands between us and actually praying. We experience the agony of prayerlessness. We are not quite sure what holds us back. Of course, we are busy with work and family obligations, but that is only a smoke screen. Our busyness seldom keeps us from eating or sleeping or making love. No, there is something deeper, more profound keeping us in check.*" The main problems is that Satan knows the power of prayer, so we experience spiritual opposition whenever we try to pray. We get the attention of the demonic forces when we open our Bibles to read and study God's Word; however, they shudder when God's people begin to pray. So, there is a reason why prayer doesn't always come easily for us; we have an enemy that makes it difficult, and we often have to break through those barriers to pray as we should pray!

We are told in the book of Acts – that the early church broke that barrier by devoting themselves to prayer. We read in **Acts 2:42** that they **devoted**

themselves to four spiritual disciplines or habits: 1) “*to the teaching of the Apostles*, 2) *to spending time in fellowship with one another*, 3) *to Holy Communion*, and 4) *to prayer.*” Then, in Acts 3, right before the first major miracle of the church, the healing of the lame beggar, Peter and John were going to the temple to pray as was their daily habit and God steps in when we are committed and devoted to prayer. And then the early church was not only known to be devoted to prayer, but known for their bold prayers, because they knew the power of the risen Lord and that knowledge fueled times of intense prayer. And they asked God for big things, world changing things. There’s a big difference between praying, “*Lord, please help me find a parking spot at the mall,*” and praying, “*Lord, send me into the world unafraid and unashamed to declare your goodness and grace through Jesus to everyone I meet and see lives changed!*”

Then another reason I believe that we don’t pray more – is that we may have misunderstood the primary purpose of prayer, which is more about getting to know God than getting answers. Prayer was central to Jesus’ ministry while He walked this earth as He was completely dependent on His heavenly Father. Jesus’ intimate relationship with His heavenly Father was centered on spending the first part of His day in prayer – as **Mark 1:35** tells us that, “*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*” So, if the Savior of the world who was God in the flesh found it absolutely necessary to set aside time to be alone with His heavenly Father, we should also realize that prayer has to be a priority for us as well, as we are called to stay in constant touch with our heavenly Father, so that we would know and follow His will.

Another reason we may not pray as much as we should – is that we assume prayer is something we have to master and be good at before we can pray, especially in public, so we often leave praying to the professionals. However, prayer is not to be complicated! Jesus’ teaching on the **Lord’s Prayer** reminds us that prayer is to be simple, much like a little child coming to their parents. For example: our children and grandchildren can come to us with the craziest requests at times, and we may get upset at the selfishness of their requests, but we would be all the more upset if they never came to us with their questions and requests at all. We should be glad that they come to us because it indicates that they have a fearless, intimate, and loving relationship with us. And this is exactly how it is supposed to be with our prayer life. Like children, we will never come to God

with pure enough motives, or be good enough, or know enough in order to pray correctly. Instead, we come to God like children, who feel loved and accepted enough to come to their parents or grandparents without hesitation because they know they are accepted, cherished, and loved.

The uppermost and holiest activity you will ever be involved in – is when you communicate with the Creator of the universe in prayer as the Apostle Paul wrote to us in **1 Thessalonian 5:17-18**, “*Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*” And that doesn’t mean you need to stay on your knees 24/7; instead, it means you maintain a constant attitude of knowing that you can speak to God at any moment, day-or-night. Think of it like keeping a heavenly telephone line constantly open with God – you never hang up or put God on hold – you keep your prayer line connected 24/7.

You will also notice that **Ephesians 6:18** tells us that we need to – “*be alert and always keep on praying.*” So, the role of a Christian is to first be vigilant, like a watchman on the wall, having their eyes wide open, always looking around to see the needs around them, as well as paying attention to what God is already doing and then join Him in that work. So, if God is already working in an area, we don’t need to invent something new; instead, we need to come alongside of Him and get involved in the area He wants us to get involved in. The second thing we find in **verse 18** is that we need to be persistent, we don’t stop praying. We are constantly interceding for others. The problem with many of us is that we treat prayer like a fast food drive through – when we need prayer we pull up and roll down our spiritual window, order what we want and then go on our way. “*Lord, give it to me quick. I want it right now.*” A New Testament church is a praying church. Not just a church that has a prayer meeting, not a church that has a few prayer warriors behind it, but a church that is in the regular practice of coming together with urgent and intense prayer. A little prayer here and there when it’s convenient is not what Paul is writing about in Ephesians!

There was a girl named Sarah who told her dad she wanted a brother or sister and was going to start paying for one. At the time Sarah didn’t know that her mother was already three months pregnant, and her parents didn’t tell her; instead, her dad told her, “*Okay honey, I’ll tell you what to do. You pray to God to give you a brother or sister and in about six months God will answer your prayer.*” So Sarah

started praying. After praying for two or three days, she told one of her kindergarten friends, “*I’m praying that God will give me a brother or sister and in six months I am going to have one.*” Her friend said, “*Nuh uh! My mother had a baby and it takes more than a year.*” Sarah answered, “*Over a year! I don’t want to pray for that long.*” So, she quit praying. Sure, enough after six months, her dad took her up to the hospital room and said, “*Honey, there’s something I want to show you.*” And he pulled back the blanket and there was a little baby brother, and then he pulled back the other side of the blanket and there was a little baby sister. Sarah’s dad said, “*Look Mommy had twins! Now aren’t you glad you prayed, and God answered your prayer by giving you one of each?*” Sarah replied, “*I sure am Daddy, but aren’t you glad I stopped praying when I did!*” YES, there are times when we should stop praying, but usually that’s not our problem; instead, our problem is that we don’t pray long enough, we give up too easily. Jesus promised in **John 15:7-8**, in His teaching on the vine and the branches, that we need to remain or tarry in prayer to have them answered, “***If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be by disciples.***”

The most distinguishing characteristic of powerfully praying in the Spirit is having a burden for something on your heart – it’s labour, its hard work, and when you really pray hard, you will work up a sweat and lose sleep. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night He was arrested, we are told that He was under such agony and anguish in prayer, that His sweat contained drops of blood. This is an actual medical condition known as *hematidrosis*, it’s not very common, but is caused when a high degree of stress releases chemicals, which break down the blood vessels in the sweat glands, causing blood to be mixed with the sweat. Have you ever wrestled in prayer all night? Have you ever prayed intensely for something? In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said to His disciples who had fallen asleep, “***Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak***” (Mark 14:37-38). And as a result, since His disciples couldn’t labour in prayer with Jesus for one hour, they didn’t have their spiritual armour on, so when Jesus was arrested, they all deserted Him and went into hiding because of fear. Prayer strengthens us to endure and stand when those difficult time come!

Then lastly, Paul tells us we need to pray especially for those in the front lines – those soldiers in the most dangerous and most intense parts of the spiritual battle. That is what Paul is requesting from this church in **verse 19-20**, *“Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare if fearlessly, as I should.”* Paul is in the front lines leading the charge against the enemy, so is target number one, who the enemy wants to take out. Satan is always focussed on the leaders who are in the front lines, because if he can take out the leader, the rest of the troops will usually fall away. That is why we need to pray for those in the front lines, those leading churches, denominations, and ministries. As well as Christians in positions of power within the seven mountains – government, education, health care, business, entertainment, and the arts who are standing up against the downward trend in society!

In closing his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is trying to tell us here that prayer is powerful – more powerful than you and I have ever imagined. And the reason we’re not usually convicted of that fact is that we fail to pray passionately, consistently, intensely, and strategically. So, the enemy has done a good job of trying to convince us that prayer doesn’t work, telling us why bother – people continue to get sick and die, the world continues to be a mess, churches struggle reaching the lost, and our life is not as victorious as it should be. So, the lies and accusations keep many believers off their knees! Satan has spent a lot of effort on that sort of propaganda because he knows that prayer defeats his schemes every time. So, any casual approach to prayer is the result of the devil’s aggressive attempts to neutralize the most powerful weapon we have against him in this spiritual battle we are called to fight. Knowing Satan’s strategy against prayer then is essential if we want to have a greater impact for the kingdom of light against the kingdom of darkness. The answer should be clear. Pray with passion! Pray with consistency! Pray intensely! Pray with a specific plan! And pray because your heavenly Father loves to hear from His children on a daily basis!

Paul urges us, as a matter of utmost importance – to be strong in the Lord. To stand firm and be alert at all times. Gird yourself, take up and use your weapons. And above all, pray-pray-pray! You represent the greatest army in all of history, and you fight for the greatest of causes – bringing the Kingdom of God down to this earth. And when the King of glory returns in victory, you will receive the

honours of a fearless warrior. And the invisible war will never need to be fought again as victory has been assured and guaranteed!

At the beginning of this section on Spiritual warfare – I asked a question. Watching old footages of WWII naval battles, when a naval ship encounters the enemy, we hear the words over the loudspeakers, “*Battle Stations! Man your Battle Stations!*” So now, after studying in detail this section on **Ephesians 6:10-20** over the last 3 weeks, hopefully in a spiritual sense, if I was to cry out this morning, “*Battle Stations! Man your Battle Stations!*” You should know who the enemy is and their strategy; you should know that you have to put on the armour God has provided on a daily basis, and you should know how to use your armour to win the spiritual battle we fight every day against Satan and his demonic army, and especially realize the power of prayer and how we need to cover everything with prayer!