

## Building on our Knees, Part 4: “And Pray...”

**Ephesians 6:10 NIV** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. **12** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. **13** Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **14** Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, **15** and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. **16** In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. **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. **19** 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, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

- I. The book of Ephesians can only be described as a glorious exploration of the truth and majesty of the Gospel. In it, Paul is celebrating the unspeakable treasure that is found only in Christ.
  - A. Paul explains how that, even though we were dead in sin, all the benefits of the gospel have come to us entirely through the grace of the Lord, and through no merit or effort of our own.
  - B. He prays that this revelation will not be lost on the Ephesians, but that they will be strengthened by God in order to understand the full ramifications of God’s love through Jesus.
  - C. In Chapters 4, 5, and the beginning of 6 he explores what Christ has provided in order for the saints to be unified in their worship and mission, and how that the Gospel should result in a morally transformed life.
- II. But in verse 12 of chapter 6, Paul begins to wrap things up with the words, “**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.**”
  - A. He is going to conclude his epistle to the Ephesians on a very serious and somber note.
  - B. Although he has littered this letter with words like “riches”, “peace”, and “power, the theme of his remaining words will be wrestling, conflict, and spiritual warfare in heavenly realms.
  - C. And this reference to battle is not an isolated occurrence in the book of Ephesians.
    1. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul makes mention of the “weapons of our warfare” having “divine power to destroy strongholds”.
    2. To his young protege Timothy, he made several allusions to spiritual warfare.
      - a) In 1 Timothy 1, Paul encourages Timothy to “wage a good warfare”.
      - b) **1 Timothy 6:12a ESV Fight the good fight of the faith.**

- c) **2 Timothy 2:3 ESV** Share in suffering as **a good soldier** of Christ Jesus. **4 No soldier** gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.
- D. The point is being made throughout the New Testament that the life of the disciple is not an **analogy** of war, but that it **is** a war, in the most real sense of the word!
- E. I made the point last week that many people are recruited into a life of following Christ with vapid promises of peace and prosperity; that they are offered a kind of a resort life on the way to an eternal vacation.
  - 1. But the truth presented throughout scripture is of a life of hardship, sacrifice, loss, persecution and death.
    - a) When Paul went to the city of Lystra (in present day Turkey), he was stoned and left for dead. But he crawled back to town and kept preaching, along with Barnabas. And the very next day was preaching the gospel in the neighboring town of Derbe!
    - b) **Acts 14:21 ESV** When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra (where they tried to stone him!) and to Iconium and to Antioch, **22** strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.**
  - 2. How different is that than the way the gospel is preached today? When I was a kid there was frequently-distributed Christian pamphlet called "The Four Spiritual Laws".
    - a) The first of which was, "God loves you and has a **wonderful plan** for your life."
    - b) This, of course, on a basic level is true. But it misses the fact that the Bible teaches over that when I join myself to God in order to be saved, I must go through tribulation and persecution and suffering, all of which serve a glorious purpose of sanctifying me so that I am brought into the image of Christ.
    - c) But more than that, these troubles also serve to show me the absolute treasure that can only be found in Christ!
      - (1) There is no possession or status, no comfort or success that can rival the glory of belonging to Jesus!
      - (2) **2 Corinthians 4:6 ESV** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison...**
- F. If this is true, how do we face, with any hope of success, such a life of combat? Paul says in our text, "Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."
  - 1. Paul intends to make it clear here that our battle is spiritual, and against a foe that is totally unlike us. He says we do not wrestle "against flesh and blood, but against ... the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms".

- a) It's as if our fight was against sharks in the ocean, or eagles in the sky. We are battling in an environment completely foreign to us, in which we are **completely** ill-equipped to win.
  - b) Therefore, in the infinite grace of our heavenly Father, we are given divine weapons and armor to guarantee our success.
  - c) Anyone reading Paul's words would have understood the imagery, having seen detachments of Roman troops in every city of the empire.
  - d) They would have seen a belt like the one Paul calls the "belt of truth". This was no narrow leather band, but rather a 8-10 inch leather strap, with even more long straps hanging down from it in the front to protect the lower body.
  - e) It looked more like a modern day weight-lifters belt. It provided back support as well as a place to tuck in clothing, to secure the rest of the armor, and store a sword or other armaments.
  - f) That is exactly what truth does! It provides support and gives you backbone! It provides a structure for everything else you will use in battle. Without the belt of truth, you will be caught with your spiritual pants down!
2. Next, Paul speaks of the "breastplate of righteousness". The breastplate was armor that protected all of the vital organs from the neck to the waist.
- a) It is the righteousness that we have been given in Christ that protects our souls and results in a clean conscious, keeping us safe from spiritual shipwreck.
  - b) **Proverbs 4:23 HCSB Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life.** This is done by righteousness!
3. Paul points next to "your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace". Romans didn't have easy-to-slip-on loafers or velcro straps, so "readiness" was important! You couldn't just jump out of bed. put on your slippies and be ready for battle!
- a) Every day we as believers are faced with opportunities to proclaim God's message to lost people, deceived people, and hurting people. But we're not ready! We don't have your shoes on! They are not laced up so that we can march out on God's battlefield and win victories for his great name!
    - (1) This is not only about verbally proclaiming the gospel (as important as that is!), but living the transformed life that results from the gospel.
    - (2) We show that we are not ready when we are more concerned with our own affairs than those of others, when we are seduced by the same things that the world around us is clamoring for. We fail to be prepared when we have no heart or endurance to know Christ more, digging into his word and meeting him in prayer.
      - (a) These things must not be so! We must be ready "in season and out of season" as Paul told Timothy.
      - (b) **Isaiah 52:7 ESV How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."**

4. Paul then speaks of the “Shield of Faith”. For those in the Roman era, this was no little hubcap that you strapped to your arm. Instead, their shield could be as big as a small door, enough to hide your entire body behind.
  - a) Paul is pointing out that God has given us the gift of faith to protect every part of our lives. Just like a Roman soldier was safe from whatever his enemy threw at him when he was behind his shield, a believer is unharmed when he is shielded by faith. The devil will fire his missiles at you, but his arrows of doubt, fear and unbelief cannot lodge in someone who has hidden themselves in faith toward God!
    - (1) And faith **in GOD** is the key! So many people today want to say that they are empowered to do whatever pops in their heads, or whatever they feel inclined to demand from God because of their version of “faith”.
    - (2) But we are never called to have **faith in faith** alone! We are called to have faith in **who God is, what his word has said**, and most of all, in **all he has accomplished through Jesus!**
  - b) That kind of faith will carry you and protect you even when to the outside observer, nothing seems to be going your way! The devil can’t touch that kind of faith! The kind of faith that believes that God is always good and that he cannot be otherwise!
5. Next we hear of the “helmet of salvation”. A good helmet was so critical to a Roman soldier because most of the weapons of the day were either bladed, in order to cut and slice, or of the blunt-force-trauma variety (like clubs, war-hammers and maces). Even an otherwise well-armed soldier without a helmet was a soon-to-be-dead soldier!
  - a) Paul equates our salvation, purchased by Jesus’ death on the cross, to a helmet. You can be moral, wealthy, smart, talented, strong, beautiful and of great reputation; but if you have not been saved by fully surrendering your life to Christ, you are going to get your brains beat out by the devil!
  - b) It is the gift of God’s salvation alone that gives life. Everything else your flesh, this world, or the devil tells you will save you is a false promise of security!
    - c) **Psalm 108:12 ESV** Oh grant us help against the foe, for vain is the salvation of man!
6. Along with the helmet of salvation, we are told to take up “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”. A Roman soldier’s sword was his lifeline. All of his defensive armor was rendered meaningless without an effective weapon to wield.
  - a) Similarly, all the items that we have examined so far are useless when they are not considered in the light of God’s Word, the bible.
    - (1) All eternal truth is found in scripture. Jesus prayed to the Father and said, **John 17:17b ESV** your word is truth.
    - (2) Righteousness cannot be known apart from God’s word, **Isaiah 45:19b ESV** I the Lord speak the truth; **I declare what is right.**
    - (3) **Romans 10:17 ESV** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

- b) Isn't it interesting that when Jesus defeated the devil in the wilderness, that he used one tactic. In all three temptations the devil fired at Jesus, Christ simply and confidently quoted scripture to him!
- III. Would you not agree that we as believers in Christ Jesus have been given an incredible array of armor and weaponry at our disposal? What trial could you not face with this kind of arsenal? But many (if not most) believers are never gain any benefit from this armor!
- A. It's not because they don't have it available to them. From **the instant** they believed in Jesus they had access to the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, gospel-ready shoes, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and God's word, the sword of the Spirit.
- B. It's also not that they haven't put on God's armor, either! The problem is actually that many of us **have** gotten all dressed up, but we just never went to the battlefield! Many churches have been reduced to fashion shows, where we admire each other as we stand around in our armor, yet we never allow our precious armor to splattered with mud and blood on the field of battle!
1. "What shiny righteousness this one has! What precious faith! What great command of the word of God!" we say as we sit around the barracks!
  2. But practically, what makes the difference? How do we go from being an outfitted, fully armed and armored soldier, to a **warring** soldier?
- C. If you keep reading in Ephesians 6, you'll find that the Apostle doesn't stop talking about spiritual warfare at the same place where most believers stop reading (right after he mentions the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"). Look at it again with me, beginning in verse 17...
1. **Ephesians 6:17 NIV Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18a And pray...**
    - a) The work of warfare doesn't begin when we suit up, it begins when we **pray!**
      - (1) It is never enough in Spiritual warfare to know the truth, to be morally righteous, to know the gospel, to claim great faith, to be a good Christian or even know your way around the Bible!
      - (2) God has called us, to be both fully armed and fully armored, as we do **actual warfare** on our knees! **Until you've prayed, you haven't fought!**
- D. Paul becomes very direct in the importance of prayer in spiritual warfare here. In Ephesians 6:12-20, he mentions 6 pieces of armor and weaponry, which we have discussed. But, in the last three verses, he uses the words "pray", "prayers", and "praying" a total of **5 times**. Let read those verses again...
- IV. **Ephesians 6:18 NIV 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. 19 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, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.**
- A. Notice all that Paul tells us about how prayer works in Spiritual Warfare!
1. How should we pray? "In the Spirit"!

- a) If you were brought up in the pentecostal/charismatic tradition (as I was), you may immediately interpret this to mean: “praying with the spiritual gift of tongues”. It may mean this, but perhaps we shouldn’t limit it’s meaning this way. Why? Well, what if someone hasn’t been given the gift of tongues? Can they simply disregard the admonition to “Pray in the Spirit?” I think not. Let me suggest an alternative.
  - b) First, **Romans 8:26 ESV** Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. **For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**
    - (1) Perhaps the message is that we should not merely try to string together words, but that we should **trust** that one benefit of being a believer is that we have the Spirit’s help and guidance as we pray.
    - (2) This is something we can only apprehend by faith! We must **believe** that God has provided the Spirit of God, dwelling within us, to empower our prayer.
  - c) Secondly, in Isaiah 29, God rebukes those who would honor him with their **lips** but whose **hearts** are far from him.
    - (1) Since the word translated “Spirit” in Ephesians 6:18 (Greek: “pneuma”), can mean either the Holy Spirit or the spirit inside of a man or woman, perhaps he is telling us that cold, vain, repetitious, religiously grounded prayers won’t cut it!
    - (2) What we need is prayer that is born out of a relationship with God that has overcome our old nature and rooted itself deeply in our inner man! We need to pray like transformed men and women!
2. When should we do battle in prayer? “On all occasions”! Someone once remarked that there are only two occasions on which we are to pray: when we feel like it and when we don’t.
- a) Paul says here that we are to pray on all occasions! That means morning and evening; when we are alone, and when we are with others; when we are filled with faith, and trembling in fear. When everything is coming up roses, and when our world is falling apart.
  - b) Like he commanded the Thessalonians, **1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV** **Pray without ceasing!** The bible says that God is “an ever-present help in time of need”! He’s available 24/7, on weekends and all holidays!
3. How should we pray? “With all kinds of prayers and requests!”
- a) The Bible lists several different types of prayer: The prayer of Faith (for miracles and healing), prayer of agreement (praying together), supplication (requests for special favor), prayers of thanksgiving and worship, prayers of consecration, prayers of intercession (praying for others who are in trouble), etc.
  - b) All of these are appropriate at different time as an expression of doing battle in the heavenlies.
4. Who should we pray for? “All the Lord’s people” and leaders! In other words, all Christians!

- a) How often do you pray for others? I know many of you pray for the sick and hurting! The church needs so much more of this! We should all try to get in the discipline of praying with brothers and sisters in the Lord whenever we are with them (lunch, work, church, etc.)! This would start a very good revolution!
- b) How often do you pray for others for the sake of the advancement of the kingdom of God?
  - (1) **Ephesians 6:19 NIV 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, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.**
  - (2) I cannot express to you what your prayers mean to me. Many of you pray for me. I know it. I sense it. Some of you have told me that you do. I can never express how grateful for that I am. Please don't stop.
    - (a) If you love me, will you pray for me? I love my job, but to honest, oftentimes it seem like a heavy burden to lead. I really do need your prayers if I'm ever to do this in a God-honoring way.
    - (b) Pray for me that I'll know what to say. That I'll be an effective teacher, counselor, and discipler. Pray that I'll be strong in the face of temptation. That I will have a character that looks like Jesus and that I'll be a man of character and forgiveness.
    - (c) Pray for my family. My wife. My kids. Pray that the enemy won't be able to destroy us on the altar of ministry. That we will stand firm until the end.
  - (3) And it's not just about me! Pray for the other leaders of our church and their families! Pastor David and Caty! The elders! The staff and other leaders.
  - (4) Pray for other Christian leaders in the city and around the globe. Pray for missionaries and those in the persecuted church.
- c) It is through the warring prayer of the saints that the kingdom advances, the enemy is defeated and church is established.