

The Protection of Prayer

Ephesians 6:18-20

Turn with me this morning to the book of **Ephesians 6:18-20**. Believe it or not we have come to our final study in the book of Ephesians - 39 weeks of revelation from God of what we have because of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 1:3-5** tells us:

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. 4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

God's plan has been to bring us into relationship with himself, changing our position from being his enemy to his ally, making us spiritually alive, giving us an understanding of what his plan is for us and this world, equipping the church with those whom he gifts to teach and show us these things.

God wants us to understand the great love that He has for us which cannot be quenched. God has not limited it to just us but gave us brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we can celebrate the same faith, the same baptism, the same future, possess the same Holy Spirit.

God sends his Holy Spirit and begins a resurrection of our soul that helps us to change and mature in the faith. God gives us a sense of responsibility to our brothers and sisters in Christ to love, stand along side, to respect, loving them as Christ loved the church, working with enthusiasm to do our part for God's church.

Finally, God gives us His armor which is the work of Jesus Christ – we have been given the truth through Christ, we have been made righteous because of Christ, we have peace with God through Christ, we have a future hope and confidence in God's sovereignty which was shown in the resurrection of Christ, and when Jesus ascended into heaven he sent the Holy Spirit to live in us, making his word, his scriptures turn from mere words on a page to living and breathing and active words that impact this physical realm.

All these things we have and Paul calls us “blessed” with unseen things – things that only faith can see – all because God loves you and me. It is overwhelming at times to think of all of these things that we truly don't deserve, yet given as a free gift to us – that is the Good News.

We have one more aspect of blessing that ties us to the unseen invisible realm and that is in the issue of prayer. Paul wants to make sure that as believers in Christ, we have everything that we need to make to the end. When the attack of the enemy comes, when life become overbearing and difficult, not only do we have the work of Jesus to reflect on

but we also have a means of talking to God from the heart. **Ephesians 6:18-20** (Read this with me):

18 Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. 19 And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. 20 I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.*

To Paul prayer was the second line of defense against the tactics of the enemy. The armor of God and prayer go hand in hand. Yet they are given in this specific order for a reason. When we talk about the armor of God we are talking about a battle that happens in our mind - we need our thoughts and understanding based on the truth. That is what Paul meant in **2 Corinthians 10:5**:

5 We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

We need to understand truth, our given righteousness, our peace with God, our future hope, and the working of the Spirit in our lives. When we have this right frame of mind, then we are to go to God in prayer with all these things considered and talk to him with understanding. **Instead of just rattling off what we want and using God as a spiritual genie we need our prayers to be an outgrowth of thoughtfulness about our faith. It helps us to be a bit more specific and insightful.**

When I come before God I need to remind myself of who I am in contrast to God, I need to remind myself of his love and kindness, I need to remind myself of his character and his purity and his wanting to make more in character into his Son Jesus Christ – turning me from a prideful sinful self, to a humble, obedient, and grateful servant. When I come to God with this in mind, I will ask for His will in my life, trusting him, and following his response.

A famous theologian once wrote that **“The missing link between Bible intake and prayer is meditation.”** We need our mind and thoughts dialed in on God in order that our prayers are effective and released to the sovereignty of God.

In the New King James **Ephesians 6:18** tells us to be “praying always with all prayer and supplication” – two different types of prayers. **First, prayer is a general conversation with God, yet the second type, “supplication” means “to make a specific request”.** When we find ourselves in the battlefield of life, we need to tell God what we are going through, how we are feeling, carrying on a conversation and yet asking for his promises to come to pass. Paul wrote about prayer in **Philippians 4:6-7**:

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace,

which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

God wants us to stand strong in our faith and love for him, he wants us to be able to come through every battle that is thrown our way, he wants to hear our hearts our desires, yet he wants to lead you and I to a place of peace and faith that exceeds human reasoning. I have said it before “Be careful what you ask for”, but that is a human way of dealing with God.

I think we know what we need but we are afraid to ask for it - because it will move us out of our comfort zone, out of our routine, it will be difficult to go through, but I tell you this, the lesson learned is far more valuable than any comfort or routine. Instead of surrendering and trusting God we come with our arms crossed, our feet dug into the sand, our childish temper tantrums, but if we only knew what laid at the other end of the lesson.

Allow the Spirit of God to speak to you and show you things about yourself that he wants to develop - take actions, ask God for it, and most importantly ask him for the strength to make it through it. I think right now God is already saying things to us and we are afraid to step out and trust him, we are afraid to ask him as Jesus did, “not my will, but yours be done.” Yet, if we only knew what lie ahead.

When we pray we need to understand that we are touching the heavenly realm where battles are going on and where God intervenes on our behalf. Our prayers play both a direct and essential part of bringing God’s invisible power to effect the visible life. When I need help, when I need strength, when I need hope and insight God wants us to have these things and all we need to do is ask. **James 4:2** tells us:

Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it.

*5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. **James 1:5***

At times, when we face trials in life, we go to God as the last resort. We try to fix it ourselves, we try to figure it out on our own, we do all that we can to keep God out of it, and then when we have to we go to God. When these times come, it’s not time to avoid God, its not time to skip coming together with other Christians, its not time to avoid the church.

It is during trials that you need to hear from God, when you need some of his living word, when you need the support of fellow believers, when you need the spoken word of God to fuel our faith and confidence. That is why Paul writes to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit. I don’t just need head knowledge but something that is living.

I need to position myself to receive as much of God’s written and living word so that I will hear his voice to me. I need to pray and as God the first time, not after I have tried to figure it all out. I need God’s voice in the process of life, not when it is over.

So when we are being tempted or attacked by our adversary, Satan, when he is launching the fiery darts at us trying to wear at the weak links in our armor, we need to pray and ask God to cover us, guide us, lead us and sustain us. We not only want to make it through the battle but we also want to learn and grow in our character as we go through the battle. Prayer is a powerful and effective invitation to God to be sovereign and active in our lives. But notice that the prayer that we are to offer is not just for ourselves. In **verse 18** it tells us:

Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.

How many of us have ever had someone come up to us and tell us about their struggles and then we come back with the pat answer, “Well, I’ll pray for you” only to go away and not come through on our commitment? We all have. Yet, **the help and health of our brothers and sisters is also dependent upon our prayers for them.** We need to constantly be praying for each other – not just the people we know but even those in countries who are going through far more difficult battles than we are. Paul modeled this attitude of prayer for others in **Romans 15:30-31** where he asks the roman church to pray for those in Jerusalem. He writes:

30 Dear brothers and sisters, I urge you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to join in my struggle by praying to God for me. Do this because of your love for me, given to you by the Holy Spirit. 31 Pray that I will be rescued from those in Judea who refuse to obey God. Pray also that the believers there will be willing to accept the ministry I am taking to Jerusalem.

*18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. *Ephesians 1:18*

*9 I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. **Philippians 1:9***

*11 So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do. **2 Thessalonians 1:11***

How often do we spend our day praying for others in this way. “Lord, may their eyes be opened, that their understanding may be enlightened, that their intelligence may be clarified, that they may see things as they are, and that they stand strong in their faith through it all, growing and maturing in Christ.” Our prayers for others can change their life.

I am reminded of a true story of a pastor who began to experience a revival in his ministry. Everything he did just seemed to flow with power and divine inspiration. On Sunday mornings, after years of dry teaching, his messages all of the sudden to be packed with deep conviction and the response of the people was

just overwhelming. After a month or two this new sense of renewal stirred up within him a sense of pride causing him to think that his new study routine was the answer to this fresh move of the Holy Spirit in his ministry.

Until, one day a group of elderly women in his church came to him and thanked God for the new work that was taking place in the church and proceeded to explain to the pastor that a month or two ago, God had moved on their hearts to pray for their pastor and so every Sunday morning this group of elderly women would wake up and come together and pray for their pastor, that God would use him, and that his words would go out and touch the hearts and minds of men.

Was it the study routine, the eloquent words, or prayer that made the difference? **If we expect to see the hand of God move in this church, in this community and in this world we need to welcome the invisible hand of God into the visible reality of this world.**

We need to remind ourselves that we are not to pray as lone soldiers, but as an army standing united against the enemy, pleading with God for the open hearts of men, and welcoming his will, his purposes and his promises.

Today, not only do we have the work of Jesus Christ as our armor but we have a living and involved God who waits for us to welcome him into our world. Today, not only do we have the defense from attacks of our enemy but we have hope that cannot be taken away unless we allow it. Today, not only do we have a greater confidence in Christ, but today we have a greater understanding that truly we are a blessed people who possess the most valuable invisible possessions of faith, hope and love. Truly, all that we need is found in our God today. Let's pray!