

XIII. Lesson 13 Spiritual Warfare – Ephesians 6:10-24

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Stuart chapter 13

Aim: To recognize the spiritual nature of our warfare.

Part of the reason for having biblical relationships (the subject of 5:21-6:9) is to be prepared for the battle ahead.

A. Principalities and Powers (Eph. 6:10-12)

1. Be Strong, Put On, and Stand (6:10-11)

Being a Christian is not a hobby. It is not something in which we can get involved for only part of the week. It demands all that we are, all of the time. It is our life. We are soldiers at war. Everything is difficult and dangerous. It is a battle. All that we do is worth it, as we have so constantly seen in Paul's letter. But this does not lessen the reality of the war. The blessings of the Christian life are indescribable. Chapters 1-3 have made that more than clear. But every day and hour brings us new hardships and difficulties.

Therefore, strength in the Lord is the essential ingredient. An individual cannot war against the principalities and powers in his own might, for he does not stand a chance. He can however, do all things through Christ, who strengthens him (Phil. 4:13). Christ imparts power to the community of faith. We cannot strengthen ourselves; we must be empowered, and that not once for all but constantly, as the tense of the Greek indicates.

We are reminded by the combination of commands in verses 10& 11 ('Be strong – *endunamoō* – in the Lord ... put on the full armor of God') that we are unequal to the battle. We have no strength; our strength must come from the Lord. Nevertheless, endued with His strength we are to fight these spiritual forces arrayed against us. Clearly the victories of the Christian life are to be achieved by a relentless and lifelong struggle against evil.

'Stand' (*stēnai*) is the keyword of the passage. The present picture is not of a march, or of an assault, but of the holding of the fortress of the soul and of the Church for the heavenly king. The Christian must stand, not just against the strength of man, but also against the stratagems of a spiritual enemy.

2. Our Enemies (6:12)

- *Whom does Paul say our real struggles are with (6:12)? Paul calls us to battle. Do you feel stimulated by the call (6:13)? Why or why not?*

a) *Satan*

We do have a physical, visible struggle. But over and above that, over and above what we see, there is an invisible spiritual struggle going on against the devil (*diabolos*) and his forces. We cannot see the devil or his legions. Yet, as Peter says, 'Your enemy the devil prowls like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' (1 Pe. 5:8).

The epistle to the Ephesians has already spoken of the existence of the devil (2:2; 4:27). He is a personal, invisible, and powerful spirit who controls the minds of the unconverted (2:2). Paul says three important things about the devil. First, he is a great and powerful foe. Paul indicates

Ephesians – Lesson 13

this by the words used to describe the devil's agents—'rulers,' 'authorities,' 'powers,' and 'forces'—and by the fact that he warns us to take arms against them.

Because he is a spiritual rather than a material being, many people are inclined to think of Satan as more or less the equal of God. It is true that he is a counterpart to the greatest of the unfallen angels: Michael or Gabriel. But he is not a spiritual counterpart of God. God is God. Every other being has been created by God and is therefore limited for the simple reason that he or she has been created. God is omnipotent; that is, He is all-powerful. The devil is not. God can do anything he wishes to do. The devil, like the rest of us, can do only what God permits him to do.

God is omnipresent; God is everywhere at once (*cp.* Ps. 139:7-10). This cannot be said of Satan. Satan can only be in one place at one time. Consequently, he must either tempt one person in one place at one time, or he must extend his influence through one of the other spiritual beings that fell with him. In all the Bible, we know of only six individuals who were tempted directly by Satan himself: Eve (but not Adam), Job, Jesus Christ, Judas, Peter, and Ananias (but not his wife Sapphira). No doubt there have been many others, but these are the only ones the Bible tells us of specifically.

God is omniscient; that is, He knows everything. This is not true of Satan. Satan does not know everything. True, he knows a great deal, and he is undoubtedly a shrewd guesser. But the ways of God must constantly surprise him, and he certainly has no more certainty about what is going to happen in the future than we have. Yet Satan is still a powerful enemy. So although Satan is not the spiritual counterpart to God—he is not omnipotent, omnipresence, or omniscient—he is nevertheless a very formidable foe, and a Christian is foolish if he thinks Satan can be resisted by human strength alone.

The second thing Paul tells us about the devil is that he is wicked and destructive, for he stands behind the powers of 'this *dark* world' and the forces 'of *evil*' in the heavenly realms. The third thing Paul says about Satan is that he is extremely sly and crafty. We are warned against the devil's 'schemes' or 'wiles' or 'devices,' depending on your translation. What these words mean is that the devil does not always attack us directly or in the same way. On the contrary, he uses a variety of times and methods.

b) Spiritual Powers

Satan works through his countless agents mentioned in verse 12. They, like him, are evil spirits. They are organized into various ranks, some of the name which are given here. Paul is talking about cosmic warfare.

Paul mentioned principalities (*archai*) and powers (*exousiai*) earlier in this letter in a general sense (1:21; 3:10). Paul uses the word *exousiai* for human powers in Romans 13:1-3, but here it seems that the stress is on the reality of spiritual warfare. The enemies are not human ('flesh and blood'), although of course, the spiritual powers of evil may use human instruments. There is one world in Greek (*kosmoskratoras*) for world rulers. It can be used for one who is the ruler of the whole world, or for one whose authority is in the world, in the sense in which the devil is so described in John 12:31, 14:30, and 2 Corinthians 4:4. What is most important is that the apostle would not have his readers underestimate the power of the forces against them.

These spiritual enemies are the highest angel-princes who, although created by God (Col. 1:16), rebelled against Him and sought worship and homage by men. Believers must remember that Christ wrestled with these rebels, overcame them, and disarmed them (Col. 2:15). Although

Ephesians – Lesson 13

Christ has vanquished these evil powers, He allows them to roam about and harass even Christians, for God uses the harassment of trials and tribulations to perfect a believer toward maturity in Christ (James 1:4). As foes, these powers have already been defeated, but individual battles remain.

Paul uses four terms to describe our spiritual enemies. When Paul talks about ‘principalities’ or ‘rulers’ (*archai*), he is thinking about the devil’s control of certain regions. Unlike God, demons are not omnipresent. That is, they are not everywhere at once as God is. They are finite creatures, though of great power; so they must be in one place or another. When Paul speaks of them as ‘rulers’ or ‘principalities,’ he is probably thinking in this way, regionally. The second term is ‘powers’ or ‘authorities’ (*exousiai*). Authority is not the same thing as rule. Authority has to do with values. So when Paul speaks of authorities he is saying that the values of our culture, as well as specific territory, are demonically controlled.

The third term is ‘world rulers’ or ‘powers’ (*kosmoskratoras*). Power concerns control. So the powers are those who control what people think and do. The final words make clear that Paul is not just thinking of particularly evil men and women, like Hitler, who somehow control others for their own dark designs. He is thinking rather of ‘the spiritual forces (*pneumatika*) of evil (*ponēria*) in the heavenly realms (*epouranios*).’ The emphasis here is upon the evil of this spiritual control. The spiritual forces against which we struggle are not holy or beneficent. They are wicked and destructive.

Our real quarrel is not with our fellow human beings, but with the satanic spirits who have degraded and enslaved them. Diabolical personalities control their minds. Battle is joined, and that battle is for the mind. Will God liberate it, or will it remain in enemy hands? We are to gain ground from the devil without giving in to him ourselves. He will do all he can to make us stand down on our beliefs and standards, while we will do all we can to bring people out of error and oppression into the glorious liberty of the gospel. We are soldiers at war, and our warfare is spiritual.

B. The Armor of God (Eph. 6:13-17a)

- *What are the five main defensive pieces of armor God has given us (6:14-17)? How is each rooted in Christ? Notice that not one piece goes on our back. What does that suggest?*

1. The Whole Armor of God (6:13)

Christians should be warriors, not wimps. Without a firm foothold in Christ, Christians become an easy target for the devil. Paul emphasizes Christian stability as a prerequisite for withstanding the onslaught of the enemy. Three times he repeats now the word that had been used in verse 11, when he says that the great objective of the Christian warrior is to be able to ‘stand.’ In fact, the first use of the word in this verse is in the compound verb ‘withstand’ (*antistēnai*; the simple verb is *stēnai*, ‘stand’), implying a stand against great opposition.

As Paul dictated this paragraph, under house arrest in Rome, the apostle probably had a Roman soldier in the same room. He may have even been chained to him (Acts 28: 16, 30-31). The first person to hear the epistle to the Ephesians, other than Paul’s secretary, was this living visual aid!

‘The full armor of God’ is translated from the Greek word *panoplia*, from which we get the English word ‘panoply.’ It connotes the complete armor worn by a heavily armed Roman

Ephesians – Lesson 13

soldier. Paul wants his readers to understand the necessity of wearing God's divine protection. There were five pieces of armor that no Roman soldier ever dared neglect. If he did, he knew that he was virtually certain to die in battle. Paul now mentions these five pieces of protection in the order that a Roman soldier would have put them on.

Although Paul's description of armor may seem to be referring to a warrior, he is really talking about a priest, because in the Bible, the priest is a warrior. The warrior is the priest and the husband who guards the bride. The description here is taken from Aaron's high priestly garment.

Isaiah picks up on this language and amplifies it (Isaiah 61:10; 59:17). Thus Paul's description of this armor is also based on the description of the heavenly warrior, God Himself. So, when Paul speaks of the 'armor of God,' as he does here in Ephesians 6, he is not thinking of it only as the armor which God supplies—His in the sense that He gives it—but rather that it is God's own armor, that which He Himself wears. Paul says we are to be dressed the same way God is. We must be armed with Him.

2. Belt of Truth (6:14a)

First is the girdle or belt (*perizōnnumi*) of truth (*alētheia*). The first thing a Roman soldier donned was his protective apron, or girdle. It was like a thick leather belt from which hung down a number of thongs, often with metal plates attached to them. This girdle protected the lower part of the soldier's body while at the same time giving him freedom of movement by gathering his tunic together. The standard form of dress in the ancient world for the Jews as well as for the Romans, was a robe or tunic. Imagine a soldier trying to move quickly and deftly in battle, while his legs are getting caught in this flowing robe. Before the armor can be put on the garments underneath must be bound together. When it was time to go into battle, the soldiers pulled their robes above their knees, and gathered the folds of the robe tightly around their waist with a heavy belt. It was also used to secure his sword. To tighten one's belt meant to prepare for the battle ahead. The metaphor of girding is often used in the Bible because it describes a preparatory action necessary for a person with the flowing garments of those days before work could be done, a race run, or a battle fought (*e.g.*, Lk. 12:35; 1 Pe. 1:13).

In the same way, the Christian believer is to bind himself round with 'truth.' It is the first thing he must be sure of before he goes to battle. In context, 'truth' can have two meanings. First, it can mean objective truth, the truth of the Bible, and a true understanding of the things of God in the gospel. That is, it can refer to Christian doctrine or the specific content of God's revelation in the Bible. It also can refer to a lifestyle of truthfulness or in other words, personal integrity, which includes honesty, sincerity, loyalty, and faithfulness in everyday life (*cp.* Ps. 51:6). We do not need to choose between these alternatives. Inner truth or truthfulness begins with a knowledge of God, who is truth, and a knowledge of the truth of God (if it really is known) inevitably leads to a life change consistent with God's character.

The high priest had a sash around his waist or loins. It was the foundation of the inner garments. Everything depends on truth. If you don't have truth, there is no way you can have anything else. Successful Christian warfare begins with fixing Christianity's great doctrines firmly in our minds. In Christianity, truth comes first and then action follows. Truth is not just ideas, it is Christ Himself. Truth is foundational – having the right understanding.

Ephesians – Lesson 13

3. Breastplate of Righteousness (6:14b)

Second is the ‘breastplate (*thōrax*) of righteousness (*dikaiosunē*).’ This was a very tough leather smock which covered his chest, and sometimes his back as well. As often as not, the front part was reinforced with metal. Its chief purpose was to protect the vital organs of the body from being pierced by an arrow or a sword or other weapons. If the breastplate was not securely fastened, the soldier knew he was unlikely to survive even the briefest encounter with the enemy.

Paul may have also pictured the breastpiece of judgment worn by the high priests (Ex. 28:15-30). On this breastpiece were twelve jewels for the twelve tribes of Israel whom the high priest represented to God. Truth is foundational, and then based on truth we can make sound judgments. It is not just taking on a breastplate of personal righteousness and holiness; he’s already said that with the belt of truth. Rather, it means the exercise of sound judgment and righteousness. The high priest was the proxy of righteousness in character and conduct for all the tribes, for no unrighteous person would dare approach a holy and righteous God.

The Christian’s breastplate is ‘righteousness’ (*cp.* Is. 59:17). Paul says that Christians need to protect their vital areas with ‘righteousness,’ which again can have two meanings. ‘Righteousness’ can refer to the perfect life of Christ which is put on the account of every believer. When Christ died for us, His righteousness imputed to us (Rom. 3:21-22) makes us glorious in His sight. The imputed righteousness of Christ enables the Christian to stand before God.

But there is more to it than that. It can also refer to specific acts of righteousness, to right living or uprightness of character. A Christian soldier’s breastplate stood for a righteous lifestyle, which would resist the temptations of the devil. To know that something is right, and not do it, is to leave a gaping hole in your armor.

In context, it is likely that Paul is referring to righteousness as holy character rather than to the imputed righteousness of Christ. Paul is urging those who are already Christians to ‘put on’ God’s armor. If they are Christians, they have already been clothed with God’s righteousness in the first sense. Therefore, the only thing they can put on is practical holiness expressed in righteous thoughts and deeds. When we ‘put on’ such a way of thinking, all the devil’s attempts to discourage us come to nothing.

4. Shoes – The Preparation of the Gospel of Peace (6:15)

Third are the gospel boots. Up until the modern era, perhaps the single most important dimension of warfare was the march. If the protection of the feet was inadequate, then the army was not able to carry out its mission. The Roman boot that Paul probably had in mind was the *caliga* (‘half-boot’). The half-boot was a partial sandal with the toes exposed. It was made of leather with straps to tie it to the ankles and shins. The sole was heavily studded with hobnails to prevent slippage as the wearer stood in battle. The secure fastening and the nails combined to give him the firm footing which is so essential in combat.

We too must have firm footing if we are going to fight well in our spiritual warfare. The Christian soldier’s boots are the gospel of peace. He should be prepared, ready, and firm to present the gospel, to make a defense, and to give an account of the hope that is within him (1 Pe. 3:15). We need to reflect on the fact that we are at peace with God. We should treasure it in our minds. We believe God’s truth, we are righteous in Christ, and so we are at peace with God!

Ephesians – Lesson 13

Paul's use of feet shod (*hupodēsamenoi tous podas*) with the gospel (*euangelion*) of peace (*eirēnē*) has its roots in ancient imagery. Isaiah 52:7 (quoted by Paul in Romans 10:15) describes the necessity of gospel preaching: 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"' Paul is saying that there is nothing more beautiful to see than a messenger who is bringing good news, and that is what the word 'gospel' means. It is the good news of the peace that we have with God, having been reconciled to the Father by the work of Jesus.

The Greek word *hetoimasia* has two different meanings. The first meaning is 'preparedness,' or readiness at any moment to share the good news of peace to others. According to Boice, the emphasis here is upon the readiness to make the gospel known. Any Christian already knows the gospel; he would not be a Christian if he did not. So this must go beyond mere knowledge and appropriation. It must involve readiness to share the good news with others. Moreover, Paul links the gospel to the soldier's boots or sandals. Shoes carry us from place to place, and it is as we go from place to place that we are to be ready to speak about Jesus.

Another meaning of this word is 'preparation' in the sense of a 'prepared foundation.' This would give the meaning here that the knowledge of the dependence on 'the gospel' that gives a person 'peace' in heart and life is necessary (like the hobnailed sandals of the Roman soldier) if he is to have a firm foothold in the conflict. According to Foulkes, this second meaning fits the context better, with its dominant thought of being able to stand unmoved against the foe. Even so, the words used carry the hint that warfare is not the complete description of the Christian's occupation – they are also messengers with good news.

5. Shield of Faith (6:16)

Fourth is the 'shield (*thureos*) of faith (*pistis*).' This shield is not the small round one used by the Greeks, but the large oblong one commonly used by the Romans, which protected from the neck to the feet. From the front it appeared rectangular, but it was curved in such a way that it also protected a good deal of the soldier's sides. It was made of wood, covered with linen and hide, and bound with iron. Reported dimensions differ (4' x 2.5', 6-8' x 3-4', 4-4.5' x 2'), although its purpose was to protect the soldier from projectiles. It not only stopped the thrust of a missile, but also put out the fiery darts and arrows projected at the soldier. Often the enemy would shoot arrows whose bitumen-covered shafts were a mass of flame. Soldiers who hid behind their shields had little to fear from these burning missiles, which burned out fairly quickly.

Groups of soldiers could put their shields together in such a way that they carried a protective roof which resembled a giant tortoise, called a 'phalanx.' When the soldiers approached a city, they would hold their shields side-by-side to stop spears, rocks, and arrows that were being shot at them from the citadel. Then, as they approached the walls of the city, they would raise their interlocked shields over their heads, because of objects that would be thrown down on them. These phalanxes were the terror of Rome's foes.

Satan doesn't just throw darts that can wound and penetrate, but flaming darts that can burn and sear and scar us deeply. The darts of the devil can be all sorts of temptations, accusations, guilt, and thoughts that inflame our consciences to disobey or rebel against God.

Ephesians – Lesson 13

Notice that Paul does not say ‘the shield of *the* faith,’ as if he were referring to the specific teachings of Christianity—he has already included that in his reference to truth as the Christian’s belt—but rather to ‘the shield of faith,’ meaning a general confidence or trust in God.

Faith is the Christian’s shield. It should do three things: 1) it should cover us so that not a portion is exposed; 2) it should link up with the faith of others to provide a solid wall of defense; and 3) because it covers our entire person and links up with the faith of our fellow soldiers, it should be able to strike down whatever fiery darts the enemy hurls at us. The devil can do nothing against it. His worst attacks are frustrated. Faith offers complete protection and makes advance possible. Where there is faith, there is nothing to fear. And what is faith? It is believing what God has said, for no other reason than that He has said it. It is taking God at His word. What protects us from the enemy is our trust in the living God.

God is Himself ‘a shield to those who take refuge in Him’ (Pr. 30:5; *cp.* Gen. 15:1). Our refuge is Jesus Christ, for without faith in Him we have no protection from the incendiary attacks of the devil.

6. Helmet of Salvation (6:17a)

Fifth is the ‘helmet (*perikephaliaia*) of salvation (*sōtērion*)’ (*cp.* Is. 59:17). The helmet of a Roman soldier was made of bronze, iron, or some other tough metal. Some of the helmets were also decorated with plumes or crests.

The high priest had a golden plate on his forehead that said “holy to the LORD.” That plate protected the high priest. Salvation means the removal of the curse. The helmet of salvation protects us from the curse of God.

God’s Word uses the word ‘salvation’ in three ways. It is used of what God has done for us in the past, where it particularly refers to Christ’s saving work on the cross and our experience of it. It also refers to what God is doing for us now: He is treating us as His children and is changing us in heart and behavior by His Holy Spirit. But the word ‘salvation’ is also used of what God is certainly going to do for us in the future. Raised from the dead, acquitted at the final judgment, we shall spend eternity in the new heavens and earth. There, in perfect holiness and happiness, we shall fully enjoy God forever. This is what the apostle is talking about here. The helmet is to do with the head, and he is telling us to keep the coming salvation in mind. We shall not be on the battlefield forever. The conflict will soon be over.

The helmet of salvation could merely mean that we are saved; that would make sense. But in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul speaks of putting on ‘the hope of salvation as a helmet,’ and if that is what he is thinking of here, then he is looking to our destiny rather than our present state. He is saying that our anticipation of that end will protect our heads in the head (and often confusion) of the battle.

Although Satan cannot kill the soul, he can wound the mind. Those who are in a state of salvation have their minds covered by the salvation (past, present, and future) that has been wrought for them by Christ. The Christian’s helmet is his adornment, for the hope of his salvation (1 Th. 5:8) is a confident expectation of resurrection glory with the Lord. Assurance of salvation enables a Christian warrior to enter the battle with the knowledge that victory has already been gained in Christ.

Ephesians – Lesson 13

7. Summary

What then, is the complete armor which God gives to the Christian? It is believing correctly, behaving as God desires, remembering that I am at peace with Him through Christ, trusting His promises and looking forward to heaven. It is, in short, filling my mind with thoughts of what God has revealed in His Word. To stand firm in battle, I must feed my mind. It must be nourished by divine truth.

C. The Offensive Weapons (6:17b-20)

God has given us two weapons to attack with. It is not enough to remain on the defensive. It is not sufficient to hold our ground. We must invade and capture enemy territory. We must go forward.

1. Sword of the Spirit (6:17b)

- *What major weapon has God given us to fight the battle (6:17)? What does Hebrews 4:12 say about this weapon? In what three ways did Jesus use this weapon in His wilderness testing (Mt. 4:1-11)?*

Our first offensive weapon is ‘the sword (*machaira*) of the Spirit (*pneumatōs*) which is the Word of God.’ How are the devil and his agents brought to release their grip on the minds they have captured? How are error and ungodliness put to flight? How are people brought to submit to Christ? How are victories won in the spiritual dimension? How are we to advance? Signs and wonders will not do it. Nor will clever arguments. What is sufficient and effective against Satan’s untruths? There is only one weapon, and that is the truths of God embodied in the Bible which is God’s Word. All God’s work is done by God’s Word. The devil cannot stand against the Holy Spirit working through the Scriptures. It is by the proclamation of God’s Word that minds are enlightened, lives are changed, and conversions take place. Spiritual work is done by spiritual weaponry. There is no true spiritual advance where the Bible does not lead the way.

The most common word used for ‘word’ is *logos*. God’s Word (*logos*) is ‘living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword’ (Heb. 4:12; *cp.* Rev. 19:15). In John’s prologue *logos* refers to nothing less than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God’s full and final ‘word’ to mankind. The Scriptures, which are the Word of God in a parallel sense, tell us about him.

However, here in verse 17, Paul does not use *logos*, but the Greek word *rhēma*. While *logos* embraces nearly everything, *rhēma* has a slighter weight. It really means ‘a saying,’ in this case, a particular, specific portion of God’s written revelation. John 3:16 is a *rhēma*. Romans 3:23 is a *rhēma*, and so on for all the other specific portions of the written ‘Word of God.’ It is important to see this, because according to Paul’s teaching we are to overcome Satan by the particular words or portions of Scripture.

What Paul has in mind is modeled by the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over Satan in the wilderness. Jesus used the Scriptures in three ways to counter the devil’s attack in the wilderness. First, He used it as a manual for life (Mt. 4:4; Dt. 8:3). As the Israelites existed on manna, the believer exists on the breath of God, His inspired Word. Second, Jesus used the Scriptures as a defensive weapon against Satan’s challenge (citing Ps. 91:11-12) to throw Himself from the pinnacle of the temple (Mt. 4:7; Dt. 6:16). Jesus used God’s Word to support His stance. Third, Jesus used God’s Word as an offensive weapon. In refusing Satan’s offer of kingdoms and glory, Jesus employed the Scriptures to counterattack the devil (Mt. 4:10; Dt.

Ephesians – Lesson 13

6:13). If Jesus, our Lord and Savior, had to know Scripture in order to resist Satan and win a victory over him, how much more do we need it to win a like victory! Having a general knowledge of the Bible is not enough. According to Ephesians 6:17, you must know the specific sayings of Scripture—you must have them memorized—if you are to resist and overcome Satan successfully.

If we leave the written Word, the Bible, unused on a nightstand or mutilate it by misinterpretation, it becomes a sword dulled by inactivity or broken from misuse. We must speak and apply its truths. The Bible is God's revealed weapon, given to His church to cut away man's defenses and penetrate into his heart, causing death to the old man but giving life to the new (2 Cor. 5:17). For a believer, the sword of the Spirit becomes a parrying weapon to resist temptations from the devil.

2. Prayer (Eph. 6:18-20)

We can be clothed in God's armor—having the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, our feet shod with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit—and yet fail to triumph because we do not call upon God. Therefore, God has given us a second attacking weapon. As Paul talks about it his Roman soldier fades from view, for this spiritual weapon has no earthly equivalent. We have a secret weapon which has no human parallel. It is prayer. Our armor must be worn, and our sword wielded, in a spirit of prayer. Praying in the Spirit means that the Spirit helps us to communicate with the Father, interceding for us.

a) All Prayer (6:18)

Once armed, the believer receives auxiliary support in prayer. As artillery supports the infantry, prayer supports the wielding of the sword of the Spirit, for it goes hand in hand with the word of God. All of our warfare and all of our activity must take place in the context of constant, unceasing prayer. Just as a soldier on the battle line has to keep in constant communication with his general headquarters and his commanding officer, so the Christian who is on the battle line must be in constant communication with his Lord. Nothing less is suggested than that the life and strife of the saints be one great prayer to God, that this prayer be offered in ever new forms however good or bad the circumstances, and that this prayer not be self-centered but express the need and hope of all the saints. Here the particular point is that every incident of life (*kairos*, cp. 1:10; 5:16) is to be dealt with in prayer.

We are not just to be praying for ourselves, but for all of those who are part of the fellowship of the household of God. It is unlimited in outreach to those for whom it is offered. Christians are not to think only of their own spiritual conflict, but to be concerned for the whole church of Christ, and for the victory of all their fellows in the fight (cp. 1 Tim. 2:1).

Paul lets us know how important prayer is by repeating the word 'all' four times in this passage. First, we are to pray on all occasions. It is not wrong to pray in sticky situations, but what Paul is saying when he commands us to pray 'on all occasions (*kairos*)' is that *all* situations in life should draw forth prayer from us. If we are happy, we should express our happiness to God. If we are despondent, we should pray about that. We should pray in work situations. We should pray on vacation. We should pray when we are with friends and when we deal with enemies. There should be no situations in life from which prayers to God are absent.

Ephesians – Lesson 13

Secondly, Paul says we are to pray ‘with all kinds of prayers (*proseuchē*) and requests (*deēsis*).’ Prayers include requests, but requests do not exhaust prayers. There are many kinds of prayers that we should know about and use effectively. One way to highlight different kinds of prayers is through the use of the acrostic ACTS – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

The third ‘all’ is imbedded in the word ‘*always*.’ It is not just that we are to pray on all occasions (or situations) and with all kinds of prayers and requests. We are also to pray always, that is, at all times of the day and sometimes in the night. He means that prayer is to be a natural and consistent part of our lives. It is not to be regulated just to special seasons or special days. We are to be people of prayer.

The final thing Paul says about the Christian warrior’s prayer is that it is ‘for all the saints.’ We obviously cannot pray for every Christian by name. But we can pray generally (in cases where we do not know who they are), and we can pray specifically (where we do know who the saints are). It is okay to pray generally for groups of Christians, but our prayers must also be specific, which Paul shows by bringing in himself as an example: ‘Pray also for me,’ he said.

b) Paul Prayer (6:19-20)

At this point, as Paul has asked prayer for others, he cannot forbear to ask his readers to pray in a special way for him as well. As he prayed for the churches, he constantly asked their prayers for him (*e.g.*, Col. 4:3; 1 Th. 5:25; 2 Th. 3:1). He was aware of his position in the forefront of the battle, even though he was in prison, and of his vulnerability. His great desire was not that they should pray for his liberation, but rather that they should intercede for the great ministry of the word that was his still. Paul was a great man, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet he believed his work would be ineffective unless Christians prayed for him.

Paul reminds them more specifically of his condition in prison (*cp.* 3:1; 4:1): he is an ‘ambassador (*presbeuō*) in chains.’ He was aware of the many ambassadors who came to Rome from far and near; he, though in prison at the will of the powerful Roman emperor, felt the dignity and tremendous importance of his position as representative of the King of kings. What concerns Paul most is not that his wrist may be unchained, but that his mouth may be opened in testimony; not that he may be set free, but that the gospel may spread freely and without hindrance.

Two things he craved for the task: wisdom and boldness, clarity and courage in proclaiming the message. Like the early apostles (Acts 4:29), his prayer was not for success, nor for deliverance from danger or suffering, but for boldness in proclaiming the gospel of God that was entrusted to him. As he uses the Spirit’s sword, he needs to be able to speak as he should. Paul seems to have been more eloquent with words than perhaps any other writer in the Bible. Paul was a master of words. Yet he knew he needed God’s help and blessing that he might choose words that would be effective in reaching others.

The gospel requires bold proclamation. Paul’s request for ‘fearlessness’ seems strange to us, because we think of Paul as eminently fearless—before rioting mobs (as at Ephesus), before kings (like Agrippa and Felix and Nero), in natural disasters (like the storm and shipwreck), in prison facing death (as in Rome). But we do not see people’s hearts. Just because people seem strong and self-composed on the outside does not mean that they are not trembling within. They still need our prayers. It is his preaching of the gospel which has landed Paul in prison, and there is always the temptation to soft-pedal its message in order to avoid even worse suffering. So they must pray that he may be as bold as ever. No other sort of ministry will do. If ever there

Ephesians – Lesson 13

was a request answered by the people of God, it was this call to prayer. Who has ever preached the gospel with greater perseverance and with greater boldness than the apostle Paul?

The gospel will advance in this world if we will but use the weapons God has given us. We need to proclaim the Word of God and pray. This must not be done in fits and starts, but with constancy and determination. The difference between real soldiers and part-time ones is that real soldiers use their weapons. It is not enough to clean weapons, to use them in drill and to generally admire them. They must be turned on the enemy! Not until them can we even begin to imagine what is their true power.

Who will take the Word to the unconverted? Who will let it loose in this darkened world? Who will preach, or print, or write to others, or speak to them personally? What will you do to bring rebellious thoughts into captivity to Christ? Who will pray for those who spread the Word? Who will intercede for gospel preachers nearby and across the world? Who will do it every day, and several times a day? Who will implore God to bless Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, home visitors, and all personal witnesses? We need to advance. Holding our ground is not enough.

D. Conclusion (Eph. 6:21-24)

The apostle's final personal words are very closely similar to Colossians 4:7-9. It seems likely that Paul refrained from personal allusions, either to himself or to his readers, in order to give it a wider usefulness among the church of Asia. But there are strong personal links that bind him to most of these churches. Therefore, he adds a few personal words here.

Paul probably dictated his letter to Tychicus, who then probably carried it to Ephesus, along with delivering the letter to the Colossians and to Philemon. We first hear of him as one of the representatives of the Asian church who went with Trophimus from Greece and presumably on to Jerusalem at the end of Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 20:4; 21:29). Tychicus was one of Paul's closest associates. In Titus 3:12 Paul speaks of sending him or Artemas to Titus, while 2 Timothy 4:12 refers to him as actually sent to Ephesus from Rome, by which it is implied that he was one of those who served faithfully with Paul in his last trying days. This exemplary Christian worker will tell them in detail about Paul's present situation, which will also prove to be a considerable source of encouragement to them. We pray for those with whom we have a sense of fellowship. That sense of fellowship is greatly strengthened when we have personal news of them.

Paul ends his letter in the traditional style of proclaiming a blessing or benediction. A benediction is not a prayer. A benediction means 'a good saying' and is a prophetic utterance. When the apostle gives his apostolic benediction to his readers or to his hearers, he is speaking as an ambassador of the King. He is announcing God's benediction upon His people. Paul picks up the three great qualities of the Christian life, the three blessings, of which he has said so much in this letter, and blesses his readers that they may possess them.

First, he wishes for 'peace (*eirēnē*) to the brethren.' It was the great desire of every Jew to understand, to know, and to experience a lasting peace; not only a cessation of warfare with foreign enemies, but a cessation of warfare with God Himself.

Secondly, there is 'love with faith (*agapē meta pistis*).' In once sense love springs from faith, and without faith's union with Christ love cannot begin to grow. Peace and love should be

Ephesians – Lesson 13

inseparable, for peace brings reconciliation (between Jew and Gentile, men and God), but love is the source of peace.

Finally, Paul wishes that ‘grace (*charis*) be with all those who love’ the Lord. This love is incorruptible or unfailing. Paul opened his letter with greetings of love and peace (1:2). He now closes with a similar expression, for it was the atoning work of Jesus Christ that brought peace through reconciliation with God.

E. Application Questions

- *I realize that I am in spiritual battle and need the constant support of other believers. I will endeavor to build my relationships with others. How can I choose to become accountable to other believers?*
- *There is a need in my life for more study and application of God’s word. What can I do to fill this need?*

For next time: Review Ephesians 1:1-6:24