

The Church on Bended Knee

The Armor of God

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Bible Verse: Ephesians 6:18-20
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Well, we are nearing the conclusion of our series on the armor of God and the spiritual battle that we face as believers, and I just want to remind you that we've done this series at this time because it seems that the battle is so very open in our day and age in a way that perhaps it hasn't been so much in past years. The potential for division in the church over issues related to the Covid virus, the Black Lives Matter's movement and just the ordinary issues that come up in church and family life are all putting a great stress on the unity of Christians throughout the world, certainly in the United States, and we want to do what we can to help the people of God and especially to be a blessing within the confines of our own body here at Truth Community Church. It's very important for us to understand and remember that there is an active evil realm that is opposed to Christ, that is opposed to his people, and that is opposed to the proclamation of the Gospel, is opposed to the spiritual growth of God's people, and this is a big battle that we are engaged in.

Look at Ephesians 6 with me. I want to read the text and kind of give us momentum going into our three verses for this evening. Ephesians 6, beginning in verse 10 says,

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Now we've looked at those verses over our past several times together and saw that when you drop the metaphor the emphasis that Paul is making is this, that God has revealed

himself in his word, the written word and in the Incarnate Word. He's made himself known in the 66 books of the Bible, and he has made himself known in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone has seen Me, he has seen the Father." And so we have a revelation of God in human flesh in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we have an inerrant interpretation and manifestation of him in the Scriptures, and so the revelation of God is essential for the fighting of this spiritual battle that we're engaged in. We've spoken of the righteousness of Christ, that we cling to the righteousness of Christ in this time. We realize that his righteousness is perfect, that he has never sinned, he never could have sinned because he is God Incarnate and God cannot even be tempted to sin. Christ was tempted in his humanity but in his God-man status he was never going to sin. That was an impossibility and it is that perfect righteousness that satisfies all the demands of God that has been imputed to us in our position in Christ.

So we have bold and confident access to God through the righteousness of Christ and that's a reflection of the fact that we are reconciled to God in Christ; that you and I, you and I who have sinned so greatly and so often throughout the course of our lives even as believers, all of our sins are forgiven in Christ. If anyone believes in the Son, his sins are taken away and that that gift of reconciliation, that forgiveness of sin, is received not by what we do but by believing in Christ and giving ourselves, as it were, to him in the Lordship and the Savior-hood of our Lord Jesus. So we're reconciled to God and in that revelation and in the righteousness of Christ and in our reconciliation with him, we have what we need in order to resist the devil. What we saw on Sunday is that the fullness of our salvation, we realize that there is a coming and complete victory. We will be with Christ in future glory. We will see him face-to-face and we will be made like him because we will see him as he is, and as a result of that, we have something in all of these things, in the revelation of God, the righteousness of Christ, the reconciliation we have in Christ, our future glory, these are all things that Satan cannot touch. And so as we abide in the word of God, we have everything that we need to walk through spiritual times like this. We are safe, we are protected, we are even able to prosper spiritually in the midst of these things and yet it is our responsibility to take these things and appropriate them, the question is how do you do that? What is the key that unlocks these spiritual riches so that they, as it were, fall upon us and we enjoy the richness of the blessings that we've been describing. Well, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones used to say, it's not like a thermostat in a room that just automatically rises and falls as the temperature adjusts and fluctuates, faith doesn't operate like that. Faith is something that is to be exercised. There is an effort that you put into it and we see the primary aspect of this effort that we put into it, into our text tonight in verses 18 to 20, we see that it is appropriated by the people of God on their knees, so to speak. And if you just to kind of put a little word picture and a wordplay in your mind here, go back to verse 11. We've been told to stand firm, verse 11. Verse 13, stand firm. Verse 14, stand firm. And while there are different postures for prayer, just to make the metaphor stick in our minds, how is it that we stand firm? Well, we bend down and we get on our knees. We apply ourselves to God in believing prayer and that is the point that Paul makes in verses 18 to 20 which is our text for this evening. As Paul is closing this passage and closing the entire book of Ephesians, he calls on the people of God to pray and to pray in a comprehensive way that covers everything in life and every time in life.

Let's look at it in verse 18, and as I do, let me just pause and jump ahead to the announcements. This Thursday is our monthly mid-week prayer meeting at 8:30 here at the church. It's led by our brother Sid Steinke, and for those of you that plan to be there, this is of a special moment for you, a special interest for you to see what that prayer time, what our prayer times corporately, what our prayer lives individually, what they should be like and what they should become when we gather on the last Sunday of the month, Sunday morning at 8 o'clock for elders' prayer, you know, what is it that should be marking the spirit of prayer, what is it that should be most on our hearts and minds as we go before God in prayer. And I think that if we were honest with ourselves, if we could hear our own prayers we would be somewhat embarrassed by the things that we pray on and the subjects that occupy the thoughts of our heart as we go to God, because we all tend to be, we all tend to walk by sight in prayer, by which I mean that we tend to pray on earthly temporal matters rather than the things that Scripture places the emphasis on. Well, tonight we have an opportunity for all of us together, myself included, as we come to the word of God to grow in grace, to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ and to grow in this crucial matter of prayer.

Let's look at verses 18 to 20 here with those things in mind. The Apostle Paul writing on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ and through his Spirit says this,

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

So Paul had earlier said the whole emphasis on the spiritual armor was to stand firm. Here's what you need to see, this is the connection that we need to start to make in our minds because it's the connection that is made in Scripture itself. Standing firm and an earnest prayer life go together. You can't have one without the other. Prayer is what undergirds your ability to stand firm. The ones who are weak in prayer are the ones who stumble along the way. And so standing firm leads into a consideration of prayer in the mind of the apostle, and so a Christian is someone who has been born again, a Christian is someone who is in union with Christ, who identifies with Christ, and as a result of that, what you and I need to see is that that identification that we have in Christ works itself out in believing prayer. All of the doctrine that we saw in the first three chapters of Ephesians, all of the duties, all of the spiritual armor, all of it has funneled down to this particular point now and this becomes the closing focus of Paul in his instruction to us.

So what are we to see out of this passage? Well, there's two aspects that I want to bring out for you here this evening. Our first point for this evening is that we need to pray for the people of Christ. We pray for the people of Christ and this is immediately something that is a challenge for some of us. I know looking back in my early Christian life, how self-centered and how self-focused my prayers were. "God, help me with my day. God,

help me with my studies. God, help me with this. God, help me with that." And it was all very, it was very much focused on myself and wanting my day to go well, and for my things to go well. Well, think about it this way, my friends, if you and I are called to love the brethren, if we're called to love one another, then obviously when we go to prayer, that spirit of love should be expressed in believing prayer on behalf of the people of God, not simply on behalf of our own individual concerns, however legitimate those concerns may be. Think about it this way. Jesus Christ died for all of his people. The death of Christ covered and expanded to cover all of those who would one day become a part of the bride of Christ and a part of the church. Well, in like manner as we take our cue from the atoning work of Christ on the cross, there should be an ever-expanding recognition that our prayers go out to others beside us, and an ever-expanding sense of concern and earnestness seeking the well-being of the people of God as we pray for them at the throne of God.

If I could picture it this way for you, I can promise you that none of us, none of you want to show up at the throne of God, at the judgment seat of Christ, and show up there having carried and presenting a lifetime of prayer that was primarily just about yourself because it's just so contrary to what the purpose of Christ is for his people. And so we want to grow in this manner. If Christ loved his people so expansively and so deeply, then that informs the way that you and I pray and our prayers should reach out for them and, beloved, not simply or even primarily for their physical needs here in life, in this earthly life which is temporary and passing, rather we want our prayers to be aimed toward their spiritual well-being. In the language of 2 Peter 3:18, that they would grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ; that they would be sanctified in the truth, John 17:17.

So our first recognition here is that we're praying for the people of Christ not simply for ourselves. A true view of prayer should purge out and sanctify you of that selfish spirit that we're all prone to in our flesh and transform us into one that has a heart that reaches out for the people of God. That's the only way it could possibly be and you see it that way very clearly in verse 18. Let's look at that together, shall we? In verse 18,

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Four times in that one verse Paul uses the word "all" to express this comprehensive view of prayer. It is a comprehensive call to prayer and ever so briefly we'll just try to break down these individual clauses as we look at it.

Paul says in verse 18 there, he says, "With all prayer and petition." Well, prayer is a multifaceted thing in and of itself. If you've been with us for the past few years as we've gone through so many of the Psalms, you see in the Psalms a widely diverse approach to the throne of God. There are times where the Psalmist is praising God or honoring his word, for example in Psalm 1. Sometimes he is honoring God and praising him for his sovereign majesty as in Psalm 2 where he speaks about God and ruling over the nations, and that comes up in Psalm 1:10 as well. You see the Psalmist confessing sin, for example, in Psalm 51, other times expressing exclusive dependence on God as it happens

in, I believe, Psalm 62 is what I have in mind. Dependence and confession and intercession and praise and majesty, such a broad spectrum of different aspects of prayer, and so when Paul says we pray with all prayer and petition, he's using a shorthand form to remind us that there is a diversity in the matters of which we speak about to God in prayer. We approach him with praise. "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Your name," Matthew 6. And there should be a consistent over time approach, a mindset if not, you know, not followed necessarily every single time but the general mindset that you and I should have toward prayer is that as we approach God and as we approach, in a sense, the majesty of his throne, we are doing so with an attitude of praise and adoration for him; that, "The primary reason, God, that I am here is to honor Your name, is to praise You, to ascribe glory to You, and to give You the worship that You deserve, to thank You for my redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ, to thank You that He took away my sins at the cross, to thank You that He generously shared His righteousness with me so that I could be reconciled to You. And God, I thank You for the way that You've made Yourself known in Your word, in Christ, in the skies, in nature. God, I just honor You for the fullness of all of these things." That becomes an aspect of the mindset with which we approach him.

All prayer and petition. "Well, Father, I'm mindful of the fact, I'm mindful of the fact that I'm sinful even now. Father, forgive me. Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. Father, forgive me for the way that I've sinned against You in this past day, or since I last came to You. Father, the hateful and degraded thoughts that I've churned about in my heart and in my mind that have maybe expressed themselves in my words or in my deeds, Father, forgive me of my sins." And you start to see as you expand these things out, you start to realize that Jesus taught us so much and informed so much of it in Matthew 6 as to what it is that we actually think about and articulate before God in prayer. "Father, Thy will be done. As in heaven, so also upon earth." And we thank him and we pray for the saints and we intercede for them as well.

Now and so there's just this diverse richness to a genuine Christian prayer life. Maybe with the exception of Sid, we all feel like we're just on the very beginning part of the learning curve for that. I'm just saying that to toy with Sid a little bit and to make this the family time that it is. We all feel our weakness in prayer and what we have here, in a sense this convicts us when we recognize that, but at the same time, beloved, there should be in your believing heart this willing desire to say, "Oh, prayer can be like that. That sounds really rich to me. That sounds like wonderful communion with my God. Let me move in that direction. Let me aim my heart in that direction because this sanctifies the desires of a Christian heart to understand these things." Well, just get a sense there of what "all prayer and petition" means, it's a broad perspective on what the purpose of prayer is.

Now when should we pray like that? When should we pray? Well, verse 18 says this, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit." Now that's kind of intimidating, isn't it? Pray at all times in the Spirit. It reminds me of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that says pray without ceasing. Well, obviously he's not calling us to pray 24/7, 365 days a year. That's a physical impossibility. You cannot do that because, if nothing else, you

have to eat and sleep, right? What he has in mind here is that when we're praying at all times, it has the idea of in all seasons of life; that there would be a consistent pattern of prayer through the mountains and through the valleys as you go through life. Now follow me closely here. Follow me closely here. Most of us and most Christians, will pray in bad times. When we feel a lack and a need, we're looking for supernatural help to get us out of the mess that we find ourselves in. Well, what Paul's instruction here does, it lifts us beyond that utilitarian approach to prayer, I'll just utilize prayer when I need something which is the mindset of moralistic therapeutic deism. I know I keep referring back to that series. There's a reason for that. But we want to move beyond that as believers. Paul, stated differently Paul calls us beyond that as believers that are just using prayer and, in effect, using God to accomplish and advance our earthly agendas. This is something different of which Paul speaks. You see, the biblical Christian, the growing Christian is one who knows how to pray in bad times but also knows how to pray in good times, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and in poverty, in temptation and in strength, in the vigor of youth and in the weakness of old age, at all times, praying in the Spirit and looking for the opportunity to express our love and our dependence upon our Lord consistently through the days, months and years of our lives. You see, prayer is not simply something that we come to as a last resort and, you know, we've got everything else covered until we stumble a little bit. No, prayer is a pattern of life that governs the way that we live.

Go back, if you would, to Matthew 6. I just want to point out something about this. There's just the Lord's instruction on prayer and this passage in Paul wed together so very well, and in this particular point, praying at all times, you see a similar theme reflected in what the Lord says in verse 11 when he says, "Give us this day our daily bread." The very context, the very words which Christ gave to us to model our prayers after communicates to us that prayer is a matter of daily involvement. This is an ongoing aspect of life and something that is to be pursued consistently.

Now as you continue on, going back to Ephesians 6:18, pray at all times in the Spirit, praying in the Spirit, well, what does that mean? Well, let me just give you a couple of things to kind of hang your thoughts on here. First of all, the Holy Spirit is the one who gave us the word of God and what we have and when we are praying in the Spirit, our priorities and our desires in prayer are shaped and informed by what is revealed in the word of God. More and more as you grow in Christ, you want the priorities of God advanced regardless of what the personal impact is on you in your daily life. That's reflected in what Christ said as well, "Father, Thy will be done. As in heaven, so also upon earth. God, I am here to pray not to get You to change Your mind or Your plans, I'm coming here to advance, as it were, Your plans. I am seeking Your will. I want what You want. I'm not trying to make You want what I want, I'm telling You that I desire what You want." And what God wants is revealed in his holy word, the 66 books of the Bible.

So we pray in the Spirit as we learn what the priorities of prayer are as they are revealed in Scripture, but we also pray in the Spirit in another way, in that we rely on the Holy Spirit to make our prayers and our lisping stammering tongue acceptable to God. We pray in the Spirit in the sense that the Spirit carries our prayers to the throne, the Spirit

sanctifies our prayers. In our weak, human, selfish, limited language, the Spirit sanctifies our prayers to make them acceptable to the Father despite our sin and weakness. And so we are trusting – oh, watch this, beloved because this makes such a difference – we are trusting not in our own earnestness to make our prayers acceptable to God, we are trusting in the fact that the Spirit of God helps us in our weakness as we pray, and the Spirit assists us, the Spirit sanctifies and takes our prayers and makes them acceptable to the Godhead. He helps us. He is our Helper. He is our Intercessor. He makes our prayers acceptable which on their own would never be so. And I can tell you that this has been a great comfort to me as the years continue to roll by and accelerate so quickly in my Christian life. It is often as I'm praying I say, "God, my prayers are so mechanical here. I'm mindful that this just seems to be repeating the things that I've said in the past and it's just so cold and lifeless. God, I am not relying on my earnestness. I ask You to hear me not according to my persuasiveness in prayer, I'm relying on the Spirit to make my prayers acceptable to You because I know that my words are not worthy of Your holy majestic presence."

So we rely on the Spirit of God to elevate, as it were, to make our prayers acceptable to God in a way that they never are on their own. That's a great comfort when you are physically weak. It's a great comfort when you are buffeted by temptation. It is a great comfort when the years go by and the strength saps out of your body. It is a great comfort to know that God receives our prayers for the sake of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. That has a very liberating effect because there are those aspects of teaching on prayer that try to get you up, try to get you up to get really emotional and the idea that your emotion is what's going to prevail upon God. Well, that's really wrong and a lot of that emotion is just passing carnal agitation that has nothing to do with this kind of praying that Paul is talking about here. This gives us encouragement. The role of the Spirit in our prayers gives us encouragement to continue in prayer even if it seems so lifeless and mechanical on our end. You would much rather have God receiving your prayers on the basis of the Spirit's help than on anything that you could do in, you know, dancing around like the priests of Baal who were cutting themselves in all kind of agitation in the days of Elijah.

We rely on the Spirit. We pray in the Spirit. We depend upon the Spirit to help us pray and, again, just by way of summary, he helps us by showing us in the word what we should be praying about and you can start in Matthew 6 right there and go a long way in the school of prayer. You can get to graduate school through Matthew 6. And yet even as we're doing that, we are relying on him to help us as we pray. He is our friend. The Spirit is our Intercessor. He is the one who is like Christ, beside us and inside us and carrying our prayers to the throne, and when we pray in that way, we're praying in a way that prevails upon God and somehow, somehow in the outworking of his sovereignty and his decree and the way that he operates in time that somehow has an effect on the things and the people for whom we pray.

This is so much different than the mechanical prayers that maybe some of you learned in liturgical churches, isn't it? And this is so different than desperate pleas in the night, selfishly motivated prayers. And there's something else that I would point out in terms of

the wonderful grace of God in these things to encourage you as well. You know, Jesus made a point of saying in Matthew 6 that you don't need a whole bunch of words in order to be effective in prayer. He said, "Don't be like the Gentiles for they think they'll be heard for their many repetitious prayers." He said, "Don't be like them. Don't pray like that." You can pray short and quickly to the point with God. You don't have to try to impress him with some long marathon thing to show how earnest you are. One of Peter's greatest prayers during the earthly life of the Lord came when he was sinking down in water and he said, "Lord, save me! Lord, help me here!" And the Lord reached out and helped him in response to his cry for help. I don't remember the exact statistics but if you examine the 150 Psalms, an easy majority of them are under 12 verses long. This is the inspired word of God and many of these Psalms are units of thought, units of prayer that you can read and express in two minutes flat.

And so we just have to get away from the sense that we, you know, we have to somehow prevail on God with many many words and repeat ourselves over and over again, or with an agitated emotional state in all of that. No, the power is found in the Spirit. The power is found in the word of God and we recognize as we do this, we recognize and as more of this dawns upon you, you realize that your effectiveness in prayer could never be about the emotion or the words that you bring to it. It could never be about those human fleshly elements. This is about understanding the role of the Spirit and trusting him as we pray. It changes everything. It goes a long way to eliminating prayer and being that, you know, let's just be honest with each other here. We're all, you know, we're all friends here so we can speak candidly with each other. The way that some of us first learned prayer, it becomes a rather irksome duty, it becomes an irksome thing if you're approaching it in that legalistic mindset. This is the key to getting out of that mindset and into that realm that some of you do enjoy of being able to pray with a sense that, "My Father hears me. My Father loves me. He welcomes my prayers at His throne." And prayer becomes a delight rather than a bothersome duty that you have to do. It becomes that which you love to do. This is what happens looking back at verse 18 with me, when we embrace this and with all prayer and petition we pray at all times in the Spirit.

Well, moving along. What is it that this prayer as we pray for God's people, what does that look like? Well, Paul goes on to say that we are to "be on the alert with all perseverance and petition." Be on the alert. Well, he's certainly laid the groundwork for us to consider that as he's been speaking about this struggle against rulers and powers and world forces of darkness. If that doesn't prompt us to be careful, to beware, to be on the alert, I'm not sure what would and just think through this with me, think through this with me in terms of the being on the alert aspect of prayer. Scripture tells us that the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour, and that he's ever active through personally and through his demonic host, always looking for an opportunity for a weak Christian to strike, to destroy. Well, you know, if you're driving in really heavy, dangerous, fast moving traffic and cars are weaving in and out, you're on the alert. Man, you're watching every point you can go to stay out of what could be a fatal collision. Well, multiply that by infinity and if Satan and his demons are like that, and that's the forces that we are against, then that moves us to be on the alert as we pray.

But even more than that or on the positive side, you might say, Christ made it plain, Matthew 25, for example, that we should be on the alert. Christ could return at any moment. Christ could return before I finish this message here this evening. He could come before I finish this sentence. And so we want to be on the alert because Christ could return unexpectedly. I want to be found somehow in a spirit of faithful prayer when he comes back, don't you? Wouldn't that be the wonderful way to be found when Christ returns? "Ah, this is very natural. Ah, Lord, I was just talking to You invisibly and now here You are face-to-face. This is great!" What a natural transition. He could come at any time. I want him to find me in that spirit of prayer, not in the other stuff.

Why would we be alert? Well, you and I, we're mortal, we could die at any time. Christ could return at any time, we could die at any time. We're mortal, we're sinful, we're weak, we're dependent, and so through the negative spiritual battle, through our personal spiritual weakness, through the imminent return of Christ, imminent meaning it could happen at any time, all of those things and more giving us motivation to persevere and continue in prayer at all times. We're just mindful of the great spiritual realities to which Scripture points us and, beloved, when you're mindful of these things, then prayer – watch this, this is really important – then prayer no longer becomes a matter of simply something that you turn to when earthly life is starting to become a bit of a pain in the neck, a struggle for you. No, prayer becomes a natural expression of every aspect of every kind of life. It's broad. It's pervasive. It's high. It's broad. It's deep when you understand the biblical picture of the Christian life.

Now this final area in verse 18 may be where we need, especially need correction. As I'm thinking about it and thinking about my own weakness in prayer, I say, "Well, no, I needed all of this correction." But here for some of us we find our particular point of instruction for tonight. For whom do we pray? For whom do we pray? We've kind of answered when do we pray, we pray at all times. How do we pray, we pray with all prayer and petition. What's the spirit with which we pray, we're on the alert. Well, for whom do we pray in this way, and the answer to that question could not be more plain in the text than it is, we pray "for all the saints." There is a particular place that the genuinely redeemed people of God have in our prayers.

Look at it there at the end of verse 18. He says "with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." And I say this gently and I repeat myself because I opened with this to some extent but, beloved, prayer is not simply about you. When you pray, you're not in a silo, inside a silo praying up to God with a circle around you and nothing else to consider but what's in your little personal silo. No, it's not like that. To carry out the imagery for those of you that have spent time in farmlands, you know, this is like we're sitting on top of the silo and looking out at the whole landscape in a 360 degree way that considers broadly the people, all the people of God, not simply what's happening in my own life. And just think about this with me. You know, a few months ago we were going through 1 John 4. We went through the whole book but I'm thinking of 1 John 4. "Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and everyone who loveth is born of God and knoweth God." Well, if we are to love one another and prayer is such a central aspect of that, then part of

the way that we express love for one another is that we pray for one another. It's not just about what you or I can privately individually get out of it or benefit from it.

Now think about this, just think about each other in this room. We can expand out to those of you on the live stream. We're happy to do that. We're glad you're with us. But just thinking within the room and just, you know, expanding and thinking out of the, you know, the scores of people that are here with us here this evening, here's what's true of each one of us. Here's what's true of each one of us: you and I are swiftly moving toward eternity in the midst of demonic opposition. For many of us, many of us, we have far more days in the rear view mirror than we have ahead of us in the windshield. You know, 50 years goes like that and now, you know, and you're saying, you know, most of us are going to live 70, 80, maybe 85 if we haven't, you know, if the Lord extends it. Well, that's going to happen just like that and it's not going to be long before we're all gone from this earth and time and life have just continued to move on without us. We're moving in that direction. We are on a fast treadmill that is taking us toward death and an appointment with the judgment seat of Christ and we're doing this in the midst of demonic opposition. For some in the room, you're not even Christians. Either you're too young to understand the Gospel just yet, or you're old enough and you've been hard-hearted and you've rejected it, and you are spurning Christ in the midst of demons that are seeking your spiritual destruction in the midst of a world that is plunging you toward your final mortality. You know, and yet you look at it from that perspective and here we are as Christians, we all have different struggles that we're facing, that we're going through, all of us moving toward an appointment with death, the judgment seat of Christ, and eternity with lots of things at stake, with lots of loved ones who are straying far from Christ, and you know, we privately carry those burdens on our hearts, all of those things taken together. Beloved, what could there possibly be, what could we possibly conclude from those obvious, evident, scriptural realities except that we ought to pray for one another? I ought to be praying for you and you for me if we love each other. We recognize these spiritual realities, we realize life itself is difficult and then the devil is mixing things up and making it difficult, you and I struggle with our flesh, all of these things weighting down upon us, making it hard, and rather than becoming each other's critics as we go through life, recognizing, "Oh, I love Christ and He loved these people and gave Himself up for them. As a result of that, I care for them and I want what's best for them." And the spirit of love informs the way that we pray and we're mindful of the fact, "I need to pray for these people." You and I, we need to pray for each other because there is so much at stake and there is so much opposition and yet there is an even greater hand of love, power and assistance waiting from the throne of God to be carried out and unleashed, as it were, as we pray for one another.

So my friends, as we pray, we're not simply concerned about where we stand personally. Think of your brother. Think of your sister. Let the Spirit of God develop a sense of empathy and compassion in you that matures you in your prayer life, that increasingly starts to conform you. Look at the end of verse 18 with me, this comprehensive view that we pray with petition for all the saints, and we persevere in it, which indicates that we do it over the course of time. So I don't know, sometimes I like to say, you know, I like to say, "Well, if you only take one thing away, take away this." I can't limit it like that

tonight. The breadth of prayer, the time of prayer, the objects of our prayer, all of those things are essential and it's essential in a church, it's essential that a church be marked by this.

I can't remember who I was speaking to recently. It was somebody that was recounting their experience at a different church at another time. But they were assuring me that when the final amen was said from the platform, that literally within two minutes the sanctuary was empty. Everybody couldn't wait to get out and to get away. Well, do you know what? I'm quite certain whoever those people were, I honestly don't remember so I don't have anybody in mind, this isn't a jab at anyone or any church, but churches like that, I can guarantee you they're not praying for each other. I can only imagine how dead and lifeless it is. Their geography expresses what's in their heart. It makes me grateful to be a part of a church like this where people want to be together, they want to talk after the service, and that's an indication to me. I don't have to be with you in your prayer closet, I know that many of you are praying for the saints in just this way because your life, your interaction, your interest in others is an expression of just that thing and I'm trusting God to bless us for that.

So Christians identify with more than their own needs, they identify with Christ and identify with each other. Now secondly, there's a lot in these verses here, we pray not only for the people of Christ but, secondly, we pray for the proclamation of Christ. We pray for the proclamation of Christ and this is just what's in the text, and if this happens to motivate you to pray for a certain pastor before you in the days to come, I'd be grateful for God for the impact of that. This here in verse 19, Paul is speaking of himself and remember this as we look at verse 19, Paul is in prison when he writes this. He makes that plain in chapter 3, verse 1. He says, "I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of your Gentiles." In chapter 4, verse 1, he says, "I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of Christ." He's a prisoner. He's a prisoner. His freedom has been taken away from him and yet as he's in the middle of this prayer, if he was to follow the American pattern for prayer, he would no doubt say, "And pray for my soon release that I might get out of this hole and be free to be with you again." That's not what he prays for. That's not what he asks for prayer at all.

Look at this in verse 19. It's humbling. It's moving. It's illuminating. He says in verse 19,

19 and pray on my behalf, that [the word "that" indicating the content for which he wants them to pray] pray that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

This is remarkable. This is supernatural. Look, a lot of us can't stand it when we think our First Amendment or Second Amendment rights are somehow being tapped upon by the government, and as soon as that happens, there are a lot of Christians that are quick to talk about the Constitution, "My freedom of speech. My freedom of religion. My freedom to bear arms." All of that stuff. Well, that's okay as far as it goes, but I want you to see that there's an element of self-centered concern in that, that is below the spirit of what

we're seeing here in Paul who's liberty really was taken away. It wasn't simply threatened. He was in genuine danger of execution as he wrote these words and his prayer was not a complaint about his trampled rights, his prayer wasn't for his physical deliverance from prison, he's asking for a spiritual impact of the prayers of the people of God on him for the sake of the advance of the Gospel of Christ. He says, "You pray for me so that when I open my mouth, I would make known the mystery of the gospel with boldness." That's how a Christian responds when his liberty is threatened. He says, "Brethren, ask God to help my tongue proclaim Christ clearly and boldly. Pray that I could be an effective witness for the gospel."

At this point, Paul very well may be anticipating the fact that he was about to have an audience with Caesar, that he was about to appear before Caesar and to make explanation of why he was charged and why he should be delivered. Coming to the Emperor of the known world and what his prayer is, "I don't care if I'm released or not. I just want to speak before the highest authority in the land, I want to speak clearly, boldly, and without shame about Christ to him." The word "boldness" here was originally used to express the right to free speech in a free society. Paul says, "I want to speak in a way that is clear. I want to have courage when I speak. I want to have no fear of man when I speak. I want to speak it rightly, truly, accurately. I want to speak it with power so that it has an effect on those who hear. I don't simply want to be an actor on a stage, I want God to use the event of my preaching to have eternal impact on everyone who hears. Would you pray for me to help that to happen," Paul says.

And he goes on and he makes this very poignant reference again to his imprisonment. He said, "I want to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel," and then he uses a clause to talk a little bit about the Gospel, "for which, this Gospel, it is for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of Christ I am an ambassador in chains. I represent a sovereign authority as an ambassador." Now normally throughout the course of human political conduct, a nation's ambassador is given respect because he represents an entire people, he represents the Sovereign, and so you accord the ambassador the respect that is given to the one whom he represents. Well, for Paul, Paul being a high ambassador of the highest Sovereign, being an ambassador of Christ, he's accorded no respect at all. He's an ambassador but he's not welcomed to the highest places of accommodation in this world in which he's living. They took this ambassador and put him in chains. "I'm an ambassador in chains."

This is totally contrary to what should be happening with an ambassador and he writes to these Ephesians without any sense of, there's no sense of resentment in what he's saying here. He's simply stating a fact in a very picturesque way. But these Ephesians to whom he has written and spoken about how they have all the blessings in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and he's unfolded for them all of the glories that Christ has bestowed upon them and all that lies ahead for them, and he's expanded and expounded upon all of the greatness of what it means to be in Christ, and all that belongs to them in Christ, and as he serves them with his letter and in the past with his ministry, what's Paul gotten out of it? What's happened with Paul? It's put him in prison. His service to Christ and his service

to the people of Christ has cost him his liberty, and in the midst of it he says, "Would you just pray for me so I'd get it right in what I say?"

Look at it there at the end of verse 20. He uses that word "boldly" again, "help me that I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." He simply wanted a free tongue to speak about Christ with whatever audience without shame. We can pray that way for one another as we share Christ in our family, in our workplace, at our school, with loved ones. But beloved, there is a place for you to pray particularly for those that you know that preach the word, that have the responsibility of teaching it. They need the help of the Holy Spirit. They are men of like flesh like you. They stumble along the way. They need help from the Holy Spirit and what Paul says is a part of the way that we serve one another in the body of Christ is that we pray for those that have that responsibility, and when we see a man like our brother John MacArthur standing so clearly, so boldly in the face of government threats, yeah, we pray for him. We honor Christ by praying for him and praying that his bold and courageous ministry to have its rightful effect, and we pray that the Lord would strengthen him to continue being that bold witness that he has been for over 60 years, but we understand as we pray that, that men like him, they need the help of the Holy Spirit to continue doing that. Spurgeon spoke about the people in the basement of his church who prayed and called them, you know, the boiler room or the engine of his ministry. You see, it's not about the man but it's about the Spirit who helps him speak and a biblical ministry needs biblical Christians praying biblical prayers so that it would have a biblical effect as he does.

J. C. Ryle in his book "Old Paths" said this, I quote, he says, "Does any one of us desire to help the church of Christ? Then let him pray for a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit alone can give edge to sermons and point to advice and power to rebukes, and the Holy Spirit alone can cast down the high walls of sinful hearts. It is not better preaching and finer writing that we need in this day but more of the presence of the Holy Spirit."

And so, beloved, as we wrap up this series on the armor of God, I'm gonna preach on the remaining verses in Ephesians 6 on Sunday, but we're pivoting away from the armor of God now. What we've seen through this text is in these perilous times we can know the full blessing of God, but the question that this passage tonight presents to us is will you pray for each other, and will you pray for those who teach the word? My desire is that Truth Community might be known as the church on bended knee.

Let's pray together.

As so, Father, we come before You to honor Your name, to confess our sins, to express our thanks to You for our many blessings in Christ, and to pray for one another, Father, that You would sanctify each one in the truth, that You would help each one grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, that You would sanctify each one completely in body, soul and spirit, that You would preserve us and keep us until that great day when we see Christ face-to-face. Subdue by Your Spirit our sin, subdue our rebellion and our doubt, and bring to bear on our hearts the wonder of grace, the wonder of trusting

Christ, the fullness of reliance upon Your Holy Spirit to carry us through these times, to defend us in the midst of the struggle with evil forces, and to complete that work which You so powerfully began in us on the day that we were first saved in Christ. And yet, Father, as we look at our church, we pray for that as well on a corporate level, that the work that You have begun in us some eight years ago, eight and a half years ago, that You would complete it, that You would give each one of us in our evangelism in our different realms of ministry, that You would give us boldness to make known the mystery of the Gospel, to proclaim Christ and Him crucified to sinners without fear, without shame, and with a sense of anticipation that You will bless that to the conversion of souls, and that You will use our witness and our ministry to call men out of darkness into Your wonderful light, that You would release them from the bonds of Satan and help them to enter into willing bonds at the feet of our Lord Jesus. O Father, help us each one to proclaim it boldly as we ought to speak. We pray these things in the blessed name of our wonderful King Jesus. Amen.

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