

*Building Biblical*  
COMMUNITY *in* CHRIST

THE WARFARE OF PRAYER  
Ephesians 6:18-20

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:18-20

Prayer is a puzzling mystery, isn't it? Have you ever wondered why we pray, after all? I mean, if God is absolutely sovereign and perfectly able to carry out his purposes without your help or mine, then why pray? The One who spoke the worlds into existence and upholds them by the word of his power, does he really need you and me and our prayers in the carrying out of his purposes? Why would the all-sufficient God, the one declared the great "I am" – the one who exists in and of himself...why would such a one put into play the rather paradoxical program of prayer?

And beyond all of these questions, why does Paul talk about prayer here? What does prayer have to do with our spiritual warfare as believers? And what does prayer have to do with the pieces of the Christian's armor in verses 10-17?

In these verses, Paul doesn't tell us all there is to say about prayer. But he does give us several insights which answer three specific questions:

- Why are we to pray?
- How are we to pray?
- For whom and for what are we to pray?

## THE CALL TO PRAYER: WHY ARE WE TO PRAY?

He gives us first of all the *call to prayer*, answering the question, “Why are we to pray? Four times he repeats the command to pray:

- “And pray in the Spirit...” (verse 18)
- “Pray also for me...” (verse 19)
- “Pray that I may declare...” (verse 20)
- “Keep on praying...” (verse 18b)

However, in giving us these commands to pray, Paul is simply explaining *how* we are to carry out the primary command of these verses on spiritual warfare which is found in verse 14: “Stand firm!” There is nothing merely defensive about this term. It means to draw up in military formation for combat. And we do that, not only by *putting on* each piece of the armor, but also by *praying for* one another. Prayer is not merely the seventh piece of armor mentioned in this passage. It is rather the *means of deploying* all the other pieces of armor. No wonder that Paul devotes four entire verses to the subject of prayer.<sup>1</sup>

But notice this. In calling us to prayer and in linking praying to “standing firm” against Satan, Paul is telling us *why* we are to pray. We are to pray because of the invisible, titanic spiritual battle that rages around us.

We can have complete knowledge of the enemy. We can have the best armor capable of resisting his vicious attacks. But all of this is worthless without direct and constant communication with the Commander and Chief. And so beyond each piece of armor, God has given each of us a “walkie-talkie” for our warfare. This “walkie-talkie” of prayer not only enables us to effectively put on each piece of the armor, but also to remain in intimate contact with our Commander and Chief, listening to his commands and following his directives. But for this to happen, we must keep our “walkie-talkie” of prayer attuned to the right frequencies.

A beautiful example of this is found in Daniel chapter 10. We only mentioned it in the first message in this series, but I would like us to look more closely at this passage today.

10:1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it

concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. 2 At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. 3 I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. [In verses 4-9 Daniel sees what is called a *theophany*, a vision of God in the person of Jesus Christ. It was overwhelming, leaving Daniel speechless and without strength.] ...

It is April-May, 535 B.C. Daniel is preoccupied with one thing: the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1-4). Daniel is engaged in a partial fast for three weeks, during which time he reads the prophecy of Jeremiah 25:11 which speaks of Israel and other nations serving the king of Babylon for seventy years. He realizes that that period of captivity is nearing its end.

But Daniel has another concern. Though the ruler Cyrus has been very favorable to Israel, allowing some to return and begin reconstruction on the temple in Jerusalem, Cyrus' son, Cambyses, holds a deep hatred towards the Jews. Cambyses is now ruling as vice-regent with this father, Cyrus, and will soon take full control of the kingdom. Seeing opposition on the horizon, Daniel devotes himself to prayer.

Suddenly, a hand touches Daniel (v. 10). It is Gabriel, the messenger angel.

11 He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. 12 Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.

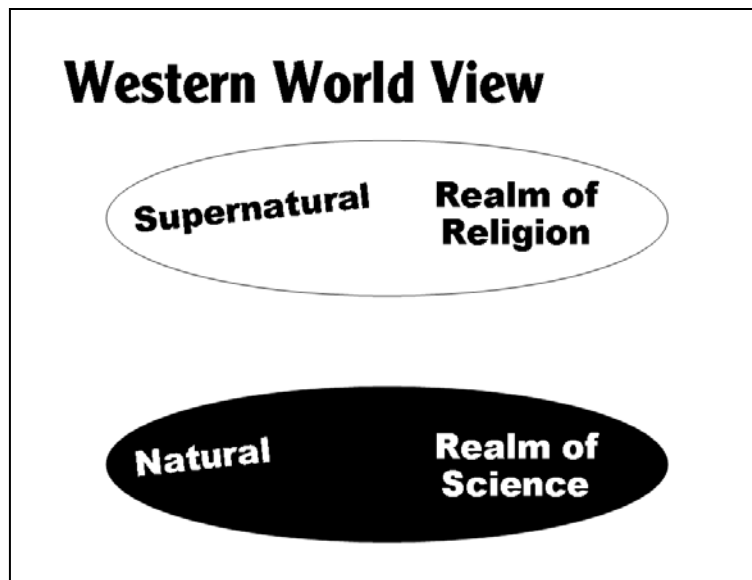
This is absolutely amazing. Daniel's prayer sets off a chain of events in the heavenlies, resulting in angelic intervention. Gabriel is sent to Daniel in response to his prayer. But notice what happens:

13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom [i.e. an evil angelic power; the same word is used in Ephesians 6 to describe the "authorities in heavenly places"] resisted me twenty-one days. [That is, three weeks, the exact amount of time that Daniel had devoted himself to prayer

and fasting.] Then Michael, one of the chief princes, [and the guardian angel of Israel] came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

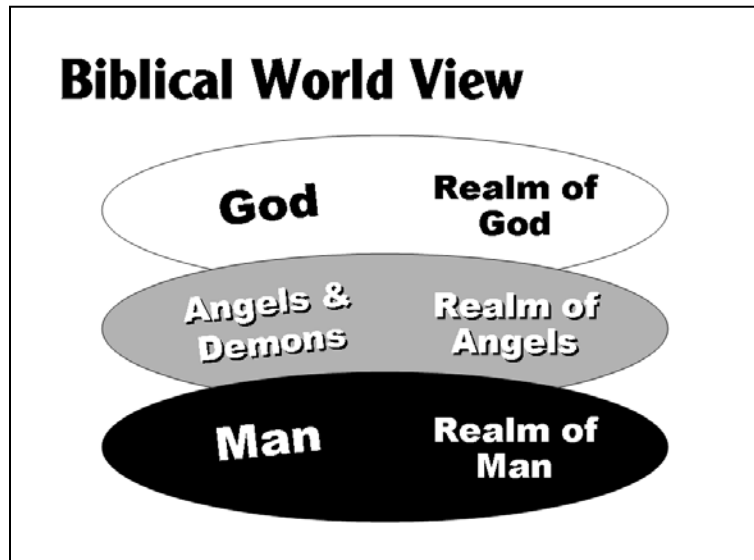
This passage gives you and me an unusual glimpse into the spiritual warfare that is taking place in the heavenlies. Daniel chapters 1-5 tells the story of the history of world empires. But Daniel chapters 6-12 unfolds the reality of the spiritual conflict raging behind the scenes, in the heavenlies. And it is this truth, Paul says in Ephesians chapter 6 that should motivate you and me to prayer. Though this is not the only motivation to prayer, it is an important motivation to prayer.

The growth and effectiveness of our prayer life is closely tied to our world view. Remember this diagram?



Far too many Christians are influenced by our western world view. The realm of the supernatural and religion is above and the realm of the natural and science is below. And nothing is between. It is the “excluded middle.” And so we can subtly compartmentalize our lives into Sunday religion and everyday reality.

But the worldview of the Bible as seen in Daniel 10 and Ephesians 6 is like this diagram.



There is the daily, moment by moment reality of both angelic and demonic powers at work around us. And the Bible says that our prayers play an important role in this spiritual conflict.

But why? After all, God is all-powerful. He defeated Satan and his hordes of demons at the cross. Why does he involve Daniel and you and me and millions of believers down through the centuries in this activity called prayer?

It's been said: "*Without God, man cannot; without man, God will not.*" "Without God, man cannot." That is why we pray. We are absolutely powerless in and of ourselves against these evil spiritual powers. "Apart from me, you can do nothing," Jesus said. But there is another reason why we pray. "Without man, God will not." In his wisdom, God has chosen to work through people like Daniel and you and me in the accomplishment of his purposes. And his means *par excellence* for the accomplishment of his purposes is prayer.<sup>ii</sup>

In prayer, God has given you and me a "walkie-talkie" for our warfare. But as John Piper puts it, some of us view prayer more as a domestic intercom asking for the servants to bring another cushion. We must keep our walkie-talkie constantly attuned to the right frequencies. We do that not only by

knowing *why* we should pray, but also *how* we should pray. What are the characteristics of prayer?

## **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PRAYER: HOW ARE WE TO PRAY?**

In these verses Paul explains the “frequency” our prayers should be on by the little word “all.” Notice that it’s mentioned four times (verse 18 *NASB*):

- With *all* prayer and petition ...
- Pray at *all* times in the Spirit...
- Be on the alert with *all* perseverance and petition...
- For *all* the saints.

### **VARIETY**

Our prayers are to be first characterized by variety: “*all prayer and petition.*” This would include silent prayers and audible prayers; private prayers and public prayers; individual prayer and corporate prayer; short prayers and long prayers. It would include prayers of praise, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, as well as prayers of resistance and rebuke.

Just a word about that last one – prayers of resistance. I love missionary biographies and one of my favorites is that of J.O. Fraser, missionary to the Lisu tribal people in southwest China from 1909 to 1938. His early years of ministry were very difficult and he faced much resistance. Also, many of the converts continued to suffer demonic attack and reverted to their old way of life. He came to realize that one problem was his own ignorance of the spirit world.

Fraser was slow to believe that demonization is as real today as when our Lord lived and ministered. He eventually went into an extended period of depression, and was even tempted to take his own life. Mrs. Taylor writes: “so deeply were the foundations shaken in those days and nights of conflict...he soon realized that behind it all were powers of darkness seeking to overwhelm him.”

But then, in the midst of darkness came light! One day he was meditating on Revelation 12:11 “They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony.” He discovered that deliverance from the power of the evil one comes through definite resistance on the

ground of the Cross. “Definite resistance on the ground of the cross was what brought me light” he wrote.

Some time later, Fraser was once again overwhelmed with obsessive, evil thoughts. He went to a hidden place of prayer and these are his words: “I claimed deliverance on the ground of my Redeemer’s victory on the Cross...I shouted my resistance to Satan and to all these thoughts. The obsession collapsed then and there, like a pack of cards, to return no more!”

We are to prayer with a variety of prayers and that would include prayers of resistance based upon the spiritual armor that God has given us.

### **REGULARITY**

But in the spiritual battle, we are also to pray with regularity– “*at all times.*” Paul adds emphasis to this in the latter part of the verse when he adds “be on the alert.” That means literally to lie sleepless, to suffer from insomnia. What he is saying is that there is no proper time to be spiritually asleep and that the way to be spiritually awake is to be constantly in prayer. How do we do that? For some of us, it makes us tired even to think about it!

My wife, Mary Alice, has been an example to me in this area. Whether in the car, the yard, or a room of our house, she will often spontaneously move into audible prayer for our family or for others that God has placed on her heart. Sometimes it’s almost funny. This even takes place in the bathroom. Last Sunday morning I went into one bathroom that backs up to our master bathroom. Through the wall, I heard Mary Alice’s voice talking away in full conversation. At first it was weird and I wondered whom she was talking with. I knew that Justin was downstairs eating breakfast, so it couldn’t be him. And then I discovered it was one of the “praying at all times” moments.

Paul not only tells us to pray at all times, but he practiced what he preached. Later in his life he writes to Timothy his young son in the faith: “As night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers” (2 Timothy 1:3). Whatever your activities, learn to pray before what you do, after what you do, and during what you do. We have some here this morning who are doing that. They are “on the front lines” in prayer, praying for our service. But they are not off in some other room, isolated from activity. They are here among us, participating in the service. How hope is that we can learn to pray at “all times,” even while serving and living.

## TENACITY

Not only are we to pray with variety and regularity, but also with tenacity. Paul adds, “*with all perseverance.*”

One of the most important passages in the Bible on perseverance in prayer is found in Isaiah 62:6,7 –

I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;  
they will never be silent day or night.  
You who call on the LORD,  
give yourselves no rest,  
and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem  
and makes her the praise of the earth.

In the early 1900’s John Hyde, who became known as “Praying Hyde,” was deeply impacted by these verses. After attending seminary in Illinois, he left for missionary work in India. His itinerant ministry took him from village to village, but (as for J.O. Fraser) he saw few converts. Then he discovered Isaiah 62:6-7. Beginning in 1908 he prayed to win at least one person to Christ every day. By December 31, he had recorded over 400 decisions for Christ. The following year he asked for two per day and his prayer was again answered.

What John Hyde demonstrates is passion and perseverance in prayer. But why do we need to persevere? Do we have to somehow overcome God’s reluctance to answer? No, prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance, but laying hold of God’s willingness. But while God is ever so willing to answer, he is also involving us in “on-the-job” training for reigning with him. And our apprenticeship of faith involves perseverance in prayer.

## HARMONY

Lastly, we are to pray in harmony. Paul adds, “Pray...*in the Spirit*” (verse 18).

What does this mean to “pray in the Spirit?” Some have understood Paul to be referring to praying in tongues. While I do not believe that this manifestation ceased with the first century, I don’t think that is what Paul is

saying in this verse. If he is, are his two recorded prayers in his own native language found in Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 3 not “in the Spirit?”

I believe the explanation of what it means to “pray in the Spirit” is found in Romans 8:26,27.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

You often don't know *specifically* what to pray. I often don't know *specifically* what to pray. And guess what? Even Paul did not know specifically what to pray! In fact, he includes himself in this statement – “We do not know...”<sup>iii</sup>

Now this should be a great encouragement to you and me. Sometimes we place a great emphasis upon the formulation of our prayers. But our prayers do not have to be properly formulated in order to be effective. In fact, the most inarticulate expressions of prayer, if they spring from right intentions and are offered in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, are truly effective. This is true because the real value of prayer lies ultimately in the intercessory groanings of the Holy Spirit and not in the ignorant praying of weak believers.

But if this is true, why not just let the Holy Spirit do all the praying? Let me give you several reasons. First, prayer is part of God's ordained process for accomplishing his purposes in our lives and in the world. In fact, we can reverently say the God “depends” on our prayers, just as He “depends” on us – our hands and feet – in carrying out his purposes.

Second, the Holy Spirit prays in the hearts of those who pray. Our prayers, in a very real sense, “trigger” the praying of the Holy Spirit. And if the believer does not pray, then apparently the Holy Spirit doesn't pray either.

And third, God has commanded you and me to pray and has conditioned many of his actions upon our praying.

## **THE CONTENT OF PRAYER: FOR WHOM ARE WE TO PRAY?**

Paul not only answers the questions, “Why are we to pray?” and “How are we to pray?” But also he tells us *for whom* we are to pray. He gives us the call to prayer and the characteristics of prayer. And now he wraps it all up with the content of prayer: for whom are we to pray?

Too often we pray with our minds on hold and our mouths on automatic!  
But to avoid that, we have here two specific areas of focus in prayer.

### **MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY**

We are to pray for the *members of the believing community*. Paul says in verse 18 – “And pray for all the saints.” This would certainly include ourselves, daily in prayer strengthening ourselves in the Lord by putting on these pieces of the armor.

But we must also be in constant prayer for one another. This I believe is a practical application of the tight ranks, the Roman wedge, formed by the shield of faith covering not only yourself but also your comrade. The more we *pray for* one another, the less we will *prey upon* one another.

We have many opportunities to do this. Here at CB we have a weekly prayer sheet. Let me encourage you to take full advantage of this valuable tool. I use it weekly and what a joy it is to pray through these many requests. But I do find that often it is the same people who share their requests. For those of you who make known your requests, keep doing it. But may there be many more who share their prayer needs with us so that we can pray for all the saints at CB.

The prophet Samuel says to the people of Israel on one occasion: “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you...” (1 Samuel 12:23). May we not sin by failing to pray for one another.

### **MISSION OF THE COMMUNITY**

We are also called here to pray for the *mission* of the community. Notice verses 19-20:

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

It's believed that Paul's letter to the Philippians was written a few months after this letter to the Ephesians. And what does Paul say to the Philippians? He tells us how this prayer was answered.

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. Philippians 1:12-14

The Ephesians prayed for open doors and four months later Paul writes about the wide open doors he now had to share the gospel! And God will do the same for us...as we pray.

(Basque Ministry Update)

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<sup>i</sup> Tells us how prayer fits into "being strengthened" and "standing firm" The participle "praying" (Cf. KJV "praying always...") is still dependent on the main verb "stand" in verse 14. In this way, Paul maintains continuity with all he has said in verses 14-17 which explains the command to "stand firm" (v. 14) and "be strengthened": "*putting on*"... "*having shod*" ... "*taking up*" ... "*praying*." Prayer is not just another piece of the armor, but takes a place of prominence as "foundational for the deployment of all the other weapons." Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, 112.

<sup>ii</sup> Compare Ezekiel 22:30: "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found none!" This was written a mere 30 years before the events of Daniel 10. And yet it took nearly 15 years for the immediate obstacles to the rebuilding of the Temple to be removed.

<sup>iii</sup> Paul's ignorance about his "thorn in the flesh" is an example of this. Now we don't know precisely what that thorn in the flesh was. Perhaps it was an eye disease. But according to 2 Corinthians 12:7 he prayed three times, "Lord, take it away!" And the Lord's answer was simply, "No...my grace is sufficient for you." We often pray ignorantly, but the Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God. As a true advocate, the Holy Spirit finds us in our weakness, takes our part and speaks on our behalf.