

Combat Prayer, Part 1

Ephesians 6:18-20

Our topic for today is prayer, and it's not just about prayer, but about the essential role of prayer in spiritual warfare. I'm following up on sermon on the full armor of God. I wanted to do a focused time on prayer because if we make no progress in our praying, we will make no progress in our fighting, either. Prayer is what brings divine power onto the battlefield.

Ephesians 6:10-20. So if you have your Bibles, turn to Ephesians, chapter 6. Find your way to verse 10, and we'll set the context for today's topic, which is about combat prayer, combat praying. Ephesians 6:10-20. Paul says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the might of his strength. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world forces of this darkness, against

the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 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.

“Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. In addition to all, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, also receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end, being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, as well as on my behalf, that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel—for which I am an ambassador in chains—so that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.”

This passage is referred to as the passage on the “Full Armor of God.” It's appropriately titled that way because we see

that term show up a couple of times in the passage. It's also called the *Believer's Armor*. I like that title because it reminds us that this armor belongs to believers and to believers only. It's believers who are covered in the full armor of God. This is how God covers his people. This is how God covers Christians with his own armor, which is the armor of virtues, virtues of truth, and righteousness, and reconciliation, peace, faith. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God itself. All these things are the armor for the believer and for the believer only.

And I just say that by way of reminder, so that we're, we know who we're talking about and we know who Paul is writing to. He's writing to believers in the Ephesian church. These are people who have acknowledged before a holy and righteous God their sinfulness, their lack of any qualification to come before God at all because of their sins. They are those who see that there is an eternal gap between themselves and a holy and righteous God, and that they are under his condemnation, just condemnation, because they've sinned against him. They know that they are not qualified. They know that they do not deserve any favor from God whatsoever. They know that they don't deserve to

be a part of his church, don't deserve to be numbered among his people, don't deserve anything from God because of everything that God has already done for them, giving them life, breath, strength, goodness, family, joys, pleasures. All these things they have taken from God. They've not honored God as God or given thanks, and because of that, they are guilty and rightly condemned before a holy, perfect, righteous God.

And so they are left before him, helpless, without any hope in and of themselves, without any hope on this earth except that God has sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, very God of very God, sent his Son Jesus Christ to be the Savior of all who repent and believe, all who acknowledge their sin before a holy and righteous God, all who bow the knee before Jesus Christ. God has seen fit to grant those salvation. He opens their eyes to the truth of their standing before him, opens their eyes to their true condition, that they are sinners in need of a, of a righteous Savior in Christ, and they turn and put their faith in Christ. And God is pleased to draw them near, to reconcile them through this Gospel of peace that Paul writes about in this passage.

And when God saves a sinner, and when God reconciles a sinner to himself, it's not part way; it's all the way. It's a full embrace. It's a full invitation to the entire storeroom of heaven, to all the treasures of heaven, to the armory of heaven, to pick and choose, pull all the things that God has for us to be used for our benefit, for our holiness, for our sanctification, for our growth to maturity. There is nothing that explains a church like ours or any individual Christian, true Christian, there is nothing to explain that person, their miraculous salvation and transformation by God through his Spirit and through his Word, nothing explains that except God himself. And so Paul writes to people who have counted themselves not righteous in and of themselves, but righteous in Christ. Paul writes to them and tells them about the panoply of God, the full armor of God that is available to each and every Christian. And we must clothe ourselves in that full armor every single day, every single day.

If we take note of Paul's command language in this passage we just read, the imperatives in the text, we see that he begins with two exhortations. "Be strengthened in the Lord," verse 10; and then "put on the full armor of God" in verse 11. The purpose

of being strengthened, of putting on the full armor, as we see in verse 11, verse 13, is to resist in the evil day and to stand firm. This means resist temptation, do not give in to sin, do not fall into sin, but continue moving forward in righteous obedience. That's the command.

And this makes perfect sense, doesn't it? For battlefield imagery, for the Christian life, for any endeavor, it makes perfect sense because sin is what undermines everything. Take the most gifted, talented, equipped, trained; take the most accomplished and fruitful life, insert just one little scandal into the mix, and everything comes crumbling down, doesn't it?

We've seen manifold evidence of this in our time. We know that if a man or a woman fails to attend to his heart or her heart, fails to attend to her thoughts or her tongue, or his habits, fails to do that by constantly weeding and cultivating the garden of the heart, constantly feeding the fruit of the Spirit with the Word of God as Moses warned Israel before entering in to possess the blessings of the Promised Land. He told them, "Be sure your sins will find you out." Nothing is hidden for long in God's economy.

So God has loaded us up, here, as Christian soldiers, giving us resources that we need to resist temptation and to stand firm. He opens up the armory, as it were, shows us his own armor and says, Go ahead, put it on. You'll find it's a perfect fit. And when we do put on his armor, we are covered with divine virtue, which is divine power, which provides comprehensive protection for any attack from the enemy.

There are two exhortations in that armor section, verses 14 and following. There's one in verse 14 and one in verse 17. We're to "stand firm," verse 14, by putting on several pieces of armor, and the main command, there, to stand, and then three participles follow it: "having girded," "having put on," "having shod." And that's telling us how we're to stand. And then in verse 17, we are to take, in my translation, here, it's receive, but it's translated, take. We're to take the helmet, take the sword. And it's, then there's another participle, there; it's by praying that we enter into the battle. So the main command is take. And then the participles of verse 18, there are two of them, praying and being alert. That is how we go into the battle. That is how we do battle. That's how we engage the

enemy, praying and being alert, or you could say praying and being watchful.

Those are not so much weapons that we carry as they are the ways that we use the weapons, being prayerful, being watchful. We're constant, instant, and strategic in our prayerfulness and in our watchfulness. That's how we fight the battle. And those happen to be, those three words, outline points. The First, we'll start with that first word, which is constant. Number one: Combat prayer is constant. Combat prayer is constant.

We get the idea of constant prayer, as you can see in verse 18, when it says "praying at all times." That means constant prayer, "praying at all times, with all prayer and petition in the Spirit." Four times in verse 18, Paul uses a word for prayer. Two times it's the word *proseuche*, which is a comprehensive word for prayer of all kinds. And two times he uses the word *deesis*, which is the more specific word, which is entreaty or supplication. So praying at all times with all kinds of prayers; so thanksgiving, praise, petition, you might even say imprecation, you know, imprecatory prayers, as well, but then specifically praying entreaties, supplications. We're to be



praying at all times, constantly giving thanks, making requests, entreating God, and with specific requests at all times in the Spirit for all the saints. And then verses 19-24, specific saints as well, those specific saints who are on special assignment.

I mentioned last time that Paul, when he came to this topic of prayer, he left the metaphor behind to speak about prayer because it sort of defies metaphor. Prayer is as essential to the Christian's spiritual warfare as communications to the soldier's physical warfare. We talked about prayer being like battlefield communications, like a field radio or a satcom radio. It's the way we keep in contact with command, or keep in contact with headquarters, or keep in contact with our air support or a medevac or a quick reaction force.

But unlike battlefield communications, which is a two-way communication, prayer is obviously one-way communication. In prayer we speak to God, but God does not speak to us in prayer. Prayer is not listening to the voice of God or listening for that still, small voice or some impression, throwing it out there, laying out a fleece, and seeing what God does to, to show

himself to you. Prayer's not like that. It's not anything like that. We hear from God when we read the Word. If you want to know what God says or what God thinks about things, read your Bible. Prayer is us speaking to God, responding to God because he has already spoken to us in Scripture, so we respond in prayer.

Prayer is the means that God has ordained through which he chooses to act. Oftentimes, you can see in a church when many people have the same concerns on their heart, and they come together and start talking about it, and then they start taking these, these matters before the God in prayer and pray and show concern before God. It's often the case, God is putting that on the hearts of his people. He's moving them to prayer because he's about to act, and he's about to answer the very thing that they are praying for. He involves us in his work as we engage in this ministry of prayer.

God has given prayers as the means by which he involves us in his work, but it's also the means by which he sanctifies us. It's us exercising faith. It's us exercising love for one another. We do one another the greatest kindness when we pray

for each other. It is not like, I'd do more for you, but I can't, so I guess all I can do, really, is pray. That's not the attitude. It's, I can pray for you, and that is really all you need is divine resources to help you. And if there are any other needs I can meet which are kind of at a lower level, I'll help with that, too. But I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray because God is at work on your behalf.

Prayer is the vehicle for calling out for God's help. It's the way we express praise and gratitude for God's faithfulness whenever he gives us his help. The two brief points I want to make about the constant nature of combat prayer, in specific, praying as a matter of spiritual warfare, first of all, we need to make sure that we're always ready for prayer. And secondly, so that we can be always praying. That makes sense, right? We need to make sure we're always ready for prayer so that we can always be praying.

So first, be always ready for prayer. Just as the comm guy in a platoon has to make sure, very certain, that his radios are always working before he goes into combat, that they're fully tested, they're ready to use in battle, he's used that equipment

before, he's put up antennas before, he knows what he's doing, he knows how to get a signal, he knows how to get comms. So vital. In fact, if a radio man can't get comms as he goes into the field, you know what they do? Abort the mission. It's that vital. That's what they're supposed to do, anyway, no matter what the movies tell you. But the guy, the comm guy has got to make sure that that radio is always ready.

In the same way, the Christian has to make sure his life is always ready for the purpose of prayer. And to figure out how we're to do that, we simply need to look back at the metaphor that Paul has already provided for us, that we've already worked through. Think about it. To be prepared to pray well, we need to have our armor on. We need to pray with our armor on. It's inseparable. We are to pray while wearing the full armor of God. And we can make this obvious by being explicit and lifting the virtues out of their metaphors. And going back to verse 14, we obey the command to stand firm in the manner that Paul described, our minds girded with truth, all the loose ends tied together with what is true, not what we want, not what feels good, not what everybody's saying, not with the flow of the

crowd, not the impulses of my own heart. No, it's truth that ties everything in.

And so if we are equipping ourselves that way, binding ourselves that way, we are going to pray according to the truth, not our own feelings, not our selfish desires, not our ambitions, not our anger, not our resentments, not our bitternesses. If we don't bind ourselves with truth, combat prayer is combat ineffective. Our vitality, these parts, the chest and gut parts of our life must be guarded by righteousness like a breastplate.

We live in an obedient, pleasing way before God. That's what we aspire to. That's what we're always pursuing, especially in the secret, hidden places of our lives. Psalm 66:18, the psalmist says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." You ever think about that? If your prayers are being heard by God, it's based on whether or not you regard and hold iniquity in your heart. If you don't deal with sin the way you should deal with sin, if you're giving in to unrighteousness in some way, in some habitual way, and you're giving excuse for it, God's not listening to that prayer coming from that kind of a

heart. No commitment to righteousness, no effective prayer, either. Your radio's not working.

And then we must be standing firmly on the Gospel, with our sins forgiven, covered in the righteousness of Christ, at peace with God if there is to be effective prayer. If you're somehow taking credit for your own salvation, if you think that you are by your righteousness maintaining your right standing with God, and you're not covered completely in righteousness of Christ at all times, and that is the basis of your standing before God, that's going to compromise your prayer life, too.

Faith, in particular verse 16, absolutely critical to being ready to engage in effective praying, because to pray you must have faith. "For he who comes to God must believe that he is," Hebrews 11:6 says, "and that he is a rewarder of those who seek him," which is why the writer says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please him." Or, you might add, Without faith, it is impossible to pray. I'd say there's no other practice in the Christian life that more draws upon your faith than prayer.

We're speaking to invisible God, not visible man. We're not hearing an audible voice in response. God guides us, directs us by his Spirit, but all that in the moment can be invisible and imperceptible to us. Prayer is a regular exercise in faith. It's believing God. It's trusting in the promises of his Word. It's believing that the warnings of his Word are also true and that he may discipline the disobedient believer.

We take all those things seriously. If you go through all the other virtues in verses 14-15, the prayer of faith must be bound with truth and fidelity to Scripture, the integrity of the heart. The prayer of faith aims at a life of righteousness because we stand in the shoes of the Gospel of peace, objective peace of reconciliation with God, subjective peace of a clear conscience before God, the tranquility of mind that comes from peace with God. The prayer of faith forces regular confession of sin, doesn't it, keeping short accounts with God, so our sin does not prevent our close communion and intimate fellowship with our God.

Wearing the helmet of salvation gives us confidence and clear headedness in the midst of battle so that we can pray. We

want to think in the middle of spiritual warfare and think on the battlefield. That's when you need your mind clearest the most, so that you can think well to execute the strategy, execute the plan, and in need of resources, going back to headquarters and asking for the help that you need. That's why we wear that helmet: to keep our head, our noggin, our grape not squashed in warfare.

We're only going to be good looking at "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God," we're only going to be skillful in the use of the Scripture when we're prayerful. The Holy Spirit is the illuminator of the Word of God. We need his help all the time as interpreters of Scripture. There's no advancing in the knowledge of God, in the knowledge of the truth, in the wise use of the Word of God apart from prayerfulness.

Now if the radio is working, if we have readied ourselves by putting on the full armor of God and wearing this, walking around in it, then everything's ready for prayerfulness. And if the radio is working and it's not going to do much good in the hour of need if you don't pick up the handset when it's time and



hit the PTT button, that's a fancy military acronym that means push to talk, PTT, if you don't pick up the handset with a working radio and start calling in air strikes or call for a medevac or call for a QRF, whatever it is you need, if you've got a working radio ready and you don't pick up the handset and push to talk, nothing's going to happen. You must pray. You must pick up the radio and speak.

So secondly, we need to be always praying, as Paul says, "at all times and in the Spirit." At all times, in good times and bad times. Oftentimes, you know that we do pray more in bad times than good, right? I mean, think how that would be for you as a friend to another if the only time he comes to you is when he needs to dig into your pocket and get your money because he needs some more money, he's having trouble; the only time he comes and talks to you is when he's having difficulty in his marriage or his relationship. Whatever it is, he's blown it in some way, and the only time you are talked to by this person who calls you a friend is when things are bad.

Thankfully, God is unlike us. He doesn't get hurt feelings; He doesn't end the friendship. He doesn't say, you know what,

this friendship seems a little bit one-way? But just be mindful of that, that you come to God in both good times and bad, in foul weather and fair weather, too. Honor him as God for the good things. Give him thanks. Demonstrate how much he means to you by talking to him throughout everything in your life, whether good or bad. Pray to him in favorable seasons and unfavorable seasons. Pray to him in hardship and in ease. Pray to him in comfort and discomfort. Pray to him when you feel healthy as much as when you feel sick. Pray according to the fruit of the Spirit. Pray in all the virtues that are to clothe the Christian soldier for battle as Paul has unfolded here.