

The Whole Armor of God

Our Secret Resource

Ephesians 6:18-20

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Our Secret Resource

Scripture

In our sermon series on “The Whole Armor of God” in Ephesians 6:10-24 we have examined our spiritual warfare, our terrible enemy, our only strength, our shining armor, and our mighty weapon. Today, I want to examine our secret resource in this spiritual warfare.

So, let’s read about our secret resource in Ephesians 6:18-20, although for the sake of context, I shall read verses 10-20:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ **praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.** (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Introduction

In 1984 I attended the Urbana Student Missions Conference in Urbana, IL where Dr. Eric Alexander was the Bible teacher. During his four plenary sessions, he preached on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Even though that conference was more than 34 years ago, I still remember one unforgettable statement. Dr. Alexander said, "Prayer is fundamental, not supplemental." So often we add prayer as a last resort or as an afterthought. However, prayer is fundamental and not supplemental in our spiritual warfare against our terrible enemy.

On Tuesday, March 30, 1858, Rev. Dudley Tyng, age twenty-nine, addressed a gathering of 5,000 men in Philadelphia, exhorting them to serve the Lord with all their hearts. "I would rather that this right arm were amputated at the trunk," he said, "than that I should come short of my duty to you in delivering God's message." At the conclusion of his message, 1,000 men committed themselves to Christ. A week later in a freak accident, Tyng's arm was caught in the cogs of a corn thresher and he was fatally injured. His dying words were, "Let us all stand up for Jesus." The following Sunday, Tyng's friend and fellow clergyman, George Duffield, preached from Ephesians 6 on the whole armor of God, ending his sermon by reciting this poem he'd written. The third stanza reads as follows:

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in his strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer,
Where duty calls or danger, be never wanting there.¹

¹ Robert J. Morgan, *Near to the Heart of God: Meditations on 366 Best-Loved Hymns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2010), n.p.

After Paul described the six pieces of gospel armor, he then exhorted believers to pray. Prayer is our secret resource in our spiritual warfare against the schemes of the devil.

Lesson

Ephesians 6:18-20 teaches us that our secret resource is prayer.

In Ephesians 6:18-20, we learn four truths about prayer:

1. Prayer Must Be Continual (6:18a)
2. Prayer Must Be Varied (6:18b)
3. Prayer Must Be Persistent (6:18c)
4. Prayer Must Be Intercessory (6:18d-20)

I. Prayer Must Be Continual (6:18a)

First, prayer must be continual.

Paul wrote in verse 18a, “...**praying at all times in the Spirit.**” In answer to Question 178, “What is prayer?” the *Westminster Larger Catechism* answers as follows, “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.”² This definition of prayer covers the essential basics of prayer.

To be **praying at all times** does not mean that believers stop all activities in order to pray every waking moment of every day. Paul did not do that, nor did the apostles, nor did the believers, and, nor did Jesus. John MacArthur writes, “To

² *The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs.* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

[be **praying**] **at all times** is to live in continual God consciousness, where everything we see and experience becomes a kind of prayer, lived in deep awareness of and surrender to our heavenly Father.”³ It means that we are very conscious of the presence of our heavenly Father in our daily lives. And we are having an ongoing conversation with him. So, for example, if we are tempted in some way, we ask our Father for his help to overcome the temptation. If we see something beautiful, we give thanks to our Father for his beautiful creation. If we see some evil, we ask our Father to make it right and even use us to that end. When we meet someone who is not a believer, we ask God to draw that person to himself and to use us as a witness in that person’s life. And when we encounter trouble or difficulty, we ask God to give us the strength to overcome it.

Now, none of these prayers are necessarily offered in a formal time of prayer. A wonderful example of this is Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a cupbearer in the court of King Artaxerxes during the Jewish exile in Babylon. Nehemiah had learned from some of the returning Jews that Jerusalem was in ruins. He was very sad about this. Shortly after this he took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now he had not been sad in the king’s presence. And the king said to Nehemiah, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then Nehemiah was very much afraid. He said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the king said to Nehemiah, “What are you requesting?” The Bible records Nehemiah saying, “So I prayed to the God of heaven.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 380.

And I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it’ ” (Nehemiah 2:1–5). I love the way it is phrased, “So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king.” Clearly, Nehemiah did not stop, kneel, fold his hands, and pray. No. This is what some people call “an arrow prayer.” After the king’s question to Nehemiah, Nehemiah probably said in his mind, “Dear God, please help me,” and then spoke to the king.

Thomas Kelley put it this way in his *Testament of Devotion*:

There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings.⁴

So, prayer must be continual.

II. Prayer Must Be Varied (6:18b)

Second, prayer must be varied.

Paul wrote in verse 18b, “...with all prayer and supplication.” Some people may think that “prayer” and “supplication” essentially mean the same thing. However, they do not. A **supplication** is one kind of **prayer**. John MacArthur clarifies the difference, “**Prayer** (*proseuchè*) refers to general requests, while **supplication** (*deēsìs*) refers to those that are specific.” He goes on to say, “The use of both words points to the idea that we are to be involved in **all** kinds of prayer, every

⁴ Thomas Kelly, *Testament of Devotion* (New York, NY: Harper, 1941), 35.

form of prayer that is appropriate.”⁵

Many of you are familiar with the acrostic that helps our prayers to be varied: *ACTS*. *ACTS* stands for *Adoration*, *Confession*, *Thanksgiving*, and *Supplication*. It is the guide that we use in the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church Intercessor that you receive each week in your worship bulletin.

The first kind of prayer is *Adoration*. We approach God by adoring him for his person and his work. It is an affirmation of the greatness and supremacy of our Triune God. We begin our prayer by directing our attention to God and not to ourselves, as we are so often wont to do.

Then we turn to God in *Confession*. We have come into the presence of God who is completely holy and pure, and we recognize that we have sinned against him in thought, word, and deed, both in what we have done and also by what we have left undone. We will not get far in prayer if we do not deal with the sin in our lives, as Isaiah says, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and *your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear*” (Isaiah 59:1–2).

The third kind of prayer is *Thanksgiving*. It is much easier for us to ask God for things than it is for us to thank God for his mercies and blessings. Let us not be like the nine lepers who did not thank Jesus for healing them (cf. Luke 17:11-19).

Finally, we offer prayers of *Supplication*. Boice wisely says, “Our prayer life will be poor if this is all we do, but it will also be less than it can be if we do not ask God for what we want and lay our needs before him.”⁶ Jesus taught us to ask God for

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 379.

⁶ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 262.

our needs in the so-called “Lord’s Prayer”: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11).

If you do not have a good pattern for prayer, let me encourage you to use the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church Intercessor as a guide for your prayers. The important thing is to use a variety of prayers and not just one kind of prayer.

So, prayer must be continual, that is, it must be offered on all occasions or situations. Prayer must be also be varied, that is, there must be different kinds of prayer suitable to the occasion or situation.

III. Prayer Must Be Persistent (6:18c)

Third, prayer must be persistent.

Paul wrote in verse 18c, **“To that end, keep alert with all perseverance....”** John MacArthur says that this means to pray “earnestly, courageously, and persistently bring everything in our lives before God.”⁷ And Boice says, “We are also to pray always, that is, at all times of the day and sometimes in the night. Paul does not mean that we are to do nothing but pray, of course; we would not get anything else done. Paul himself did not do it. 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.”⁸

Luke records that Jesus once told his disciples a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 381.

⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, 262.

my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming’” (Luke 18:1–5). Jesus wanted his disciples to be persistent in prayer. In our spiritual warfare we must be persistent if we are to experience any victory.

So, prayer must be continual, varied, and persistent.

IV. Prayer Must Be Intercessory (6:18d-20)

And finally, prayer must be intercessory.

Paul wrote in verse 18d, “...**making supplication for all the saints....**” Certainly we are to pray for unbelievers and for their salvation. However, Paul wanted believers to pray for one another as well. E.M. Bounds records the following story in his book titled *Purpose in Prayer*:

Some years ago the record of a wonderful work of grace in connection with one of the stations of the China Inland Mission attracted a good deal of attention. Both the number and spiritual character of the converts had been far greater than at other stations where the consecration of the missionaries had been just as great. This rich harvest of souls remained a mystery until Hudson Taylor, on a visit to England, discovered the secret. At the close of one of his addresses a gentleman came forward to make his acquaintance. In the conversation which followed, Mr. Taylor was surprised at the accurate knowledge the man possessed concerning this China Inland Mission station. “But how is it,” Mr. Taylor asked, “that you are so conversant with the conditions of that work?” “Oh!” he replied, “the missionary there and I are old college mates; for years we have regularly corresponded; he has sent

me names of enquirers and converts, and these I have daily taken to God in prayer.” At last the secret was found—a praying man, praying definitely, praying daily.⁹

Paul went on to ask for prayer for himself, when he wrote, **“...and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”** Paul gave himself as one for whom the believers in Ephesus should pray. And he seemed to be saying that they should pray for ministers of the gospel too.

When I was a pastor in State College, PA, a couple showed up a few Sundays each fall. After a while, I learned that they were Penn State football fans and regularly attended home games; six each year. After several years I was stunned when the man said that he and his wife prayed for me and my ministry every single day! They weren’t even members of our congregation. They attended worship maybe six times a year. It was a tremendous encouragement to me, knowing that someone who hardly knew me prayed for me and my ministry every day. That is the kind of intercessory prayer that Paul calls us to.

So, prayer must be continual, varied, persistent, and intercessory.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed our secret resource in Ephesians 6:18-20, let us pray diligently in our spiritual warfare against the schemes of the devil.

⁹ E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 131.

John Piper writes the following in his book titled *The Pleasures of God*:

Prayer is the walkie-talkie on the battlefield of the world. It calls on God for courage (Ephesians 6:19). It calls in for troop deployment and target location (Acts 13:1–3). It calls in for protection and air cover (Matthew 6:13; Luke 21:36). It calls in for firepower to blast open a way for the Word (Colossians 4:3). It calls in for the miracle of healing for the wounded soldiers (James 5:16). It calls in for supplies for the forces (Matthew 6:11; Philippians 4:6). And it calls in for needed reinforcements (Matthew 9:38). This is the place of prayer—on the battlefield of the world. It is a wartime walkie-talkie for spiritual warfare, not a domestic intercom to increase the comforts of the saints. And one of the reasons it malfunctions in the hands of so many Christian soldiers is that they have gone AWOL.¹⁰

We often treat prayer like the intercom in the basement of our home to call Mom upstairs to bring down some pizza. But, as Piper says, prayer “is a wartime walkie-talkie for spiritual warfare.”

Dear brothers and sisters, let our prayers be continual, varied, persistent, and intercessory so that we may be victorious in our spiritual warfare. Amen.

¹⁰ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God*, Rev. and expanded. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 225–227.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org