

“PRAYER, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND GOD’S BLESSING”

**I. Introduction**

- A. As you may have noticed, the text that we have just read not only begins mid-paragraph but also mid-sentence.
  - 1. I do not usually preach on passages that begin mid-sentence, but there is good reason to do so in this instance.
  - 2. For one thing, the verses that discuss the armor of God stand on their own, and there is plenty that can be said about them.
  - 3. For another, verse 18 introduces a new idea: the crucial role of prayer in a Christian’s life.
- B. That being said, there is a close connection between Paul’s metaphor of the armor of God and what he says in the closing verses of this letter.
  - 1. The armor of God was a metaphor for our utter dependence upon God as our source of strength.
  - 2. Prayer is how we express that dependence on a daily basis.
  - 3. Perhaps we could even say that it is by prayer that we put on the armor of God.
  - 4. Or perhaps Calvin’s way of expressing the relationship is better: “Having instructed the Ephesians to put on their armor, he now enjoins them to fight by prayer.”
- C. As we study this passage tonight, I want us to see three things that it can teach us.
  - 1. First, this passage teaches us when, how, and for whom we should pray.

2. Second, it tells us that we should be encouraged by examples of Christian faithfulness.
3. And third, it tells us that Christians need to know that we live our lives under God's blessing.

## II. When, How, and For Whom to Pray

- A. In the first part of our passage, Paul discusses three aspects of our prayer lives: when to pray; how to pray; and for whom to pray.
  1. As far as when we should pray, Paul says that we should do so "at all times."
  2. Of course this doesn't mean that prayer is the only activity we should engage in.
  3. If that were the case then Paul was not practicing what he was preaching, since he was writing a letter when he penned these words.
  4. The point being conveyed here is that we should never neglect prayer.
  5. There is no time in life when we don't need to pray.
  6. You need to pray in times of prosperity, and you need to pray in times of adversity.
  7. You need to pray at all times because the spiritual battle keeps on raging at all times.
- B. Next, Paul tells us several things about how we should pray.
  1. Our prayers need to be offered up "in the Spirit."
  2. We pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.
  3. He is the one who animates and guides our prayers.

4. Paul even tells us in Romans 8 that the Spirit makes up for our inability to pray properly by interceding “for us with groanings too deep for words.” (Rom. 8:26)
- C. Another aspect of how we should pray is that we need to do so with spiritual alertness.
1. There are many situations in life where it is critical for us to stay alert.
  2. If you are not alert when you are driving a car, you put your life and the lives of others at risk.
  3. If you are not alert when you are watching a baseball game from seats close to the foul line, you might end up having a line drive hit you in the face.
  4. In the same way, you put yourself at spiritual risk if you are not keeping a prayerful watch over your life.
  5. We need to be spiritually alert because Satan is always prowling about in hopes of devouring our souls.
  6. We need to be alert because there are so many false teachers seeking to lead us astray.
  7. We need to be alert because the world is always trying to press us into its mold.
  8. We need to be alert because the deceitfulness of our own sinful hearts never rests.
- D. Another characteristic of prayer that Paul mentions here is that we should pray with perseverance.
1. Even though we do not immediately receive what we ask for, we need to keep on praying.
  2. Don't let yourself get discouraged.

3. Keep waiting on the Lord.
  4. He will answer in due time.
- E. Perseverance in prayer also relates to the way we respond to our failures when it comes to prayer.
1. Even though we know that our prayer life is not what it should be, we need to press on in prayer.
  2. Don't let your disappointment about your prayer life cause you to give up on prayer.
  3. If you struggle with this, if it seems like you can never seem to get things going in your prayer life, let me give you one word of advice: come to the Wednesday Prayer Meeting.
  4. If you commit to doing that, you will set aside at least one hour a week in focused prayer.
- F. The last thing that Paul has to say about prayer here has to do with for whom we ought to pray.
1. First, we should pray "for all the saints," for our brothers and sisters in Christ.
  2. Do not allow your prayer life to be dominated by your own concerns.
  3. By all means, pray for yourself, but make sure that you are also considering the needs of your fellow believers in your prayers.
  4. Pray for the advance of the kingdom.
  5. Pray for the evangelization of the lost.
  6. Pray for the sanctification of God's people.

- G. In addition to praying for other Christians, Paul also asks the Ephesians to pray for him.
1. This shows us the vital need that ministers, elders, deacons, and missionaries have for the prayers of God's people.
  2. As zealous as Paul was for Christ, he knew that he needed God to give him boldness to keep on proclaiming the gospel faithfully in his imprisonment.
  3. And note that he does not ask them to pray that he will be a great debater or a highly polished orator or an entertaining speaker.
  4. He simply wants the Lord to give him courage to openly state the mystery of the gospel, the revelation of God's plan of salvation.
- H. It is also interesting to consider what Paul doesn't ask the Ephesians to pray for.
1. Remember where he was when he was writing these words.
  2. He was imprisoned.
  3. But he doesn't ask the Ephesians to pray for his release.
  4. This does not mean that Paul didn't want to be set free.
  5. I'm sure that he did.
  6. But it was obviously not at the top of his priority list.
  7. This tells us that Paul did not view his imprisonment as a sign of failure or a mark of God's displeasure toward him.
  8. We can learn a lot from this.
  9. It shows us the importance of learning to be content in the situation in which God has us, whatever that situation is.

10. Of course, you can certainly try, in appropriate ways, to improve your situation when you don't like it, but you should not make that your focus.
11. Focus instead upon honoring Christ in the place where you are right now.

### **III. Be Encouraged by Examples of Christian Faithfulness**

- A. The last two paragraphs of Ephesians contain Paul's closing greetings to these Christians.
  1. It is easy for us to gloss over these portions of God's Word, but we shouldn't do that.
  2. This too is part of inspired Scripture, and we need to consider the ways in which it is profitable for our edification.
- B. In the first of these two closing paragraphs, Paul tells the Ephesians that he is sending a man named Tychicus to them to carry news of how Paul is doing.
  1. Tychicus also carried Paul's letter to the church in Colossae on the same trip in which he delivered this letter to Ephesus.
  2. In fact, verses 21-22 are almost exactly the same as Colossians 4:7-8.
  3. Notice that Paul refers to Tychicus as a beloved brother and faithful minister.
  4. Paul thought very highly of this man, and he valued him as a partner in ministry.
  5. Even though Paul was an apostle, he was not a loner in his ministry.
  6. He relied very heavily upon his associates.

7. This is the biblical model for ministry.
  8. Ministers shouldn't be alone in their work.
  9. This is one of the reasons why I am so thankful for our form of government.
  10. It ensures that ministers are not alone in their work.
- C. Paul knows that the Ephesians care about him and his ministry.
1. He doesn't want them to worry about him.
  2. He doesn't want them to think that his imprisonment is a sign of failure.
  3. He doesn't want them to get discouraged.
  4. So he sends his valued co-laborer Tychicus to them.
  5. I would imagine that Paul would have liked to keep Tychicus with him in Rome.
  6. There would have been a number of ways in which this good man could have been of help to Paul while he was in prison.
  7. But instead of keeping Tychicus with him, he sent him to Ephesus because of his concern for the Christians there.
  8. Paul wanted them to be encouraged by Tychicus' report of how and what he was doing.
- D. I think that there is a lesson here that can apply to every Christian.
1. As we look at the church in the world today, there are a lot of things that can be discouraging.
  2. The Christian faith seems to have less and less influence over people in our culture.

3. The prevailing standards of morality are moving farther and farther away from the standards of the Bible.
4. A relativistic mindset causes many people to shrug off our attempts to share the gospel with them with assertions like, 'That may be true for you, but it is not true for me.'
5. Many churches are compromising with the surrounding culture in serious ways.
6. And on a worldwide scale, cults and false religions appear to pose a considerable threat to the advance of the gospel.
7. Our situation is really quite similar to the situation of Christians in the first century.
8. Paul expected the Ephesians to find encouragement in hearing about his faithful ministry, even though he was an ambassador in chains.
9. In the same way, we should be encouraged by the faithfulness that we can see in many saints and church officers throughout the world, even though their faithfulness is often met by opposition.

#### **IV. Know that You Live under God's Blessing**

- A. This brings us to the final paragraph in the letter, where Paul pronounces a blessing upon the church in Ephesus.
  1. One thing to note about this is that the letter began with a greeting of grace and peace, and it ends with a blessing of peace and grace.
  2. The words 'peace' and 'grace' sum up the basic message of this letter.
  3. In Christ we have peace with God and with each other.

4. And the only reason why we have this blessing is because of God's free grace.
- B. Paul also pronounces a blessing of "love with faith" upon the Ephesians.
1. This is referring to God's love for us, a love that we come to know by faith.
  2. This blessing brings to mind what Paul said back in 3:14-19, where he prayed that these Christians would have strength to comprehend with all the saints the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love for us in Christ, a love that surpasses knowledge.
- C. Notice also that this blessing is pronounced upon those who love Christ with love incorruptible.
1. One way of summing up what it means to be a Christian is to say that a Christian is someone who loves Jesus Christ.
  2. Of course, this is not what makes us Christians.
  3. We only love Christ because he first loved us.
  4. But every true Christian loves Christ.
  5. Listen to how John Owen expressed this: "They know nothing of the life and power of the Gospel, nothing of the reality of the grace of God, nor do they believe aright one article of the Christian faith, whose hearts are not sensible of the love of Christ therein. Nor is he sensible of the love of Christ, whose affections are not therein drawn out unto [Christ]. I say, they make a pageant of religion...whose hearts are not really affected with the love of Christ...so as to have real and spiritually sensible affections for him." [*Works*, i, 166-167]

6. C.S. Lewis put it this way: "Every Christian would agree that a man's spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God."
- D. I am sure that when each of us sincerely examines our hearts, we realize that we do not love Christ as we ought to love him.
1. We know that he is not as precious to us as he should be.
  2. We know that we are not as taken up with knowing him and serving him and honoring him as we ought to be.
  3. But Paul's words in verse 24 give us reason to be encouraged.
  4. They show us that every Christian's love for Christ, weak and feeble though it often is, is an incorruptible love.
  5. It is a love that will never perish, spoil, or fade away.
  6. We can be confident of this because our love for Christ is not something that we produce but something that God produces in us.
  7. Just as the faith that God works in our hearts will persevere to the end, so also will our love for Jesus Christ.
- E. One last thing to point out about this closing blessing is that it is not just a formality.
1. These are not merely pleasant-sounding words.
  2. They are an assurance that God is really with us, and that he is with us in the ways that are spelled out in this blessing.
  3. The same thing is conveyed by the benediction in our worship service.
  4. That blessing does the same thing that the blessing at the end of this letter does.

5. It assures us that as we leave our gathering in God's presence to go out into the world to serve God in our daily work and witness, we go forth under God's blessing.
6. Your God really is with you in everything that you do.
7. Every moment of every day, you live under his blessing.