10-27-19

Ephesians 6:18-24 (1)

Paul has used the armor of a Roman soldier to give us a physical way of thinking of the spiritual protection we have as Christians. Physical armor and physical weapons will do us absolutely no good against satan and his demons. It can be very difficult for us to think in this way because we are physical beings who live in a physical world. We have to *learn* that we have a spirit and that there is a very real spiritual world in existence. This spiritual world consists of those aligned with God and those aligned with satan. Once we know this, and become followers of Christ, then we can begin to learn how to deal with the spiritual reality.

People who don’t believe in a spiritual world don’t stand a chance; they will be controlled by the world they don’t believe in, and it will be the evil part. Satan doesn’t care that people don’t believe in him; it makes his job easier. There are many people who believe in a spiritual world, but don’t have a Christian understanding. They will try to work with or control this world by physical means be it spells, chants, offerings, or even communing with the spirits. These people don’t stand a chance either and risk coming under strong control by the demons.

God does restrain the forces of darkness or they would simply kill all of us. But aside from this, Christians are the only ones who have the spiritual equipment to deal with these beings; and that is only by the name and power of Jesus Christ. In Him, we are freed from bondage to satan. Even with this, we must be careful in our attitude toward satan. This protection given to us by Jesus does not give us license to act arrogantly toward these principalities and powers of darkness. The Bible warns us of this.

Jude 9

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”

If the archangel Michael dared not treat the devil with contempt, we certainly have no business doing so. We are to rebuke him in the name of Jesus, and we are to resist him with the full armor of God. We aren’t to spend our time making fun of him or downplaying what he can do. We cling to Jesus; everything is in His strength.

Starting now in verse 18, Paul talks about prayer. Prayer is not just another piece of armor. Prayer is in a class all its own. The belt of truth of the Bible is necessary to keep the rest of the spiritual armor connected and working; prayer is what we need encompassing our lives whether we are at war or at peace. Prayer is a beautiful gift that God has given us; and through Jesus Christ we have direct access to God whenever we wish.

If we look back into the Old Testament, we certainly have examples of God’s people praying directly to Him. But for the most part, a mediator was needed. Moses was a mediator; he brought God’s word to the Israelite people and interceded on their behalf. Through Moses, God established the priesthood, starting with Aaron. The priest was then the mediator offering the sacrifices on behalf of the people. One time each year, the priest could pass through the holy place in the tabernacle and go into the most holy place; there, he would offer blood to atone for the sins of the people. Between the holy place and the most holy place there was a heavy curtain or veil.

When Jesus died on the cross, He was the perfect and final atonement for the sins of His people. He entered the truly most holy place of heaven with His own blood. This is why the veil of the temple was torn in two. This was the veil that covered the entrance to the most holy place. By being torn in two, we were shone that we now have access to God directly in prayer through Jesus Christ.

I am afraid that we are so used to the idea of prayer, that perhaps we don’t stand in awe of what is happening. In prayer, we have access before the throne of the all-powerful creator God of the universe. There is nothing wrong with having quick prayers throughout the day: a heartfelt “thank You”; a quick intercession for someone that comes to mind; mentioning something to God that you need; prayer offered up when faced with a sudden temptation. But when we come to spend some time with God in prayer, it ought to be with reverence, humility, respect, and fear. And there needs to be some genuine fear, as Jesus mentions in:

Matthew 10:28

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Now this doesn’t mean to think of God as one who is ready to smite you at any moment. He loves you more than you can possibly know. He is merciful and kind and He created human-beings to have a relationship with. It is not His will that any should perish. Remember that Jesus is the exact representation of the Father. Think of all the good He went about doing. Think about God being willing to sacrifice His Son so that His justice would be satisfied but we could be forgiven. These things are all the more reason to fear Him for how wonderful He is; all the more reason to fear causing Him grief.

Paul tells us that we are to pray with “all prayer”. There are different kinds of prayer. One is adoration, where we simply dwell on God and Jesus and allow ourselves to be in awe of Them and who They are. There is worship where we lift up glory to God for who He is; just because He is holy and deserves it. The triune God is the only being that deserves worship and He will not share it with any other. There is praise where we recall the wonderful things God has done, both in the Bible and in our lives and the lives of others. There is thanksgiving, which needs to be part of all our prayers. We ought to always be grateful to God because in His great power and love, all things will be to the benefit of we who love Him.

All prayer includes private prayer whether we are rejoicing or heartbroken; private prayer can be spoken aloud or silently or even like Hannah who prayed silently but so intensely that her lips moved without sound. We can pray corporately in church or in a group. In this setting, all can be praying silently or one at a time can pray aloud while the others agree. This is important; prayer is not a spectator sport. If one person is praying aloud, others need to be listening intently while murmuring or silently agreeing to Jesus with the prayer being offered.

We can pray kneeling, sitting, standing, laying down, or while we are walking down the street. The Bible doesn’t tell us there is a certain position for prayer. Also, we can pray anywhere; we have no restrictions on where we can pray; it can be at home, in church, in the car, in the woods. Remember what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4:23,

But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

Spirit and truth are not physical places and they can be accessed anywhere. This is part of the reason that it is so vital to understand the spiritual reality. It is in the spiritual realm that prayer operates and it is in the spiritual realm that even our good works are pleasing to God.

Continuing in verse 18, Paul tells us to pray petitions. To petition is to ask for something. We are all pretty good at that. But we must stop to consider what all is involved in petition. The first thing we must understand is that God is not there to simply grant all our requests to make our life easier. That is the false prosperity gospel. However, He is there as the perfect good Father who loves us and desires to give us good things and blessings. We are to ask for things we need; God is the first person we should turn to for our needs. James explains the balance in chapter 4, verses 2 and 3:

You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

It is proper to ask God for a vehicle that is needed for life and work; it is not proper to ask for a Mercedes because we are tired of our Ford and want to impress our friends. It is proper to pray for healing as long as we also submit to God’s will and plan in the sickness. It is fine to pray for financial help, just not for financial extravagance.

But also keep in mind that petition is not simply for ourselves. In fact, Biblically speaking, more of our petitions should be for others than for ourselves. Jesus calls us to be servants, and servants tend to the needs of others. One of the best ways to be a servant is to pray for another person. All those things we ask for ourselves, we can ask for others.

So far, in the area of petition, I have spoken of material things. And these requests are fine because God understands that we live in a material world and we need these things to survive. But don’t forget that prayer is spiritual and its most important effects take place in the spiritual realm. We are certainly encouraged to pray for other’s spiritual well-being, which is actually far more important than their physical well-being.

When considering non-believers, our most important petition on their behalf is for salvation. We pray that the Lord would prepare their hearts to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our prayers in this manner are effective. They are effective because they are in accordance with God’s will; for the Lord wills that none should perish.

When praying for a non-believer to come to salvation, we are asking God to perform a miracle that only He can perform. When God created us, He gave us free will. This was demonstrated by Adam and Eve when they chose to disobey God. The thing about our free will now is that it is corrupted by sin and the non-believer is in bondage to satan. Free will is no longer free, it is controlled by satan. We as sinful human-beings are absolutely incapable of turning to Jesus. In fact, Paul tells us that we are enemies of God in Romans 5:10,

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

So, if our natural state is to be an enemy of God and for our wills to be captive to satan, God must work a miracle in our lives in order for us to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This is why it is good and legitimate to pray for another’s salvation. God must send His Holy Spirit to prepare a heart to receive the Gospel and to actually give them the faith to believe in Jesus. This is also why any of us who are Christian cannot claim that we had anything to do with our salvation; it is entirely the work and grace and mercy of God.

We will continue looking at Paul’s conclusion next week, Lord willing. But the admonishment now is to pray; we can never pray too much. Yes, God already knows what you’re going to ask for, but that’s beside the point. Prayer is the method God has ordained to get things done. He can certainly take care of things Himself; He doesn’t need us. But in His wisdom, He has chosen to work through us and through our prayers.

Our prayers are a sacrifice; they are a pleasing sacrifice to God. The time we spend in prayer is time we give up doing something else. By praying, we are giving up some of our short time on earth to spend it with God. Our prayers do reach the throne of God in heaven and are kept there.

Revelation 5:8

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Lift up prayer to God; all prayer, all petition. For this is pleasing to God, who loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation.

Prayer

LORD God, in Your great wisdom and mercy, You have provided us with prayer. Through Jesus Christ, we have access to You at any time to praise You, to ask of You, or to cry out to You from the depth of our souls. Your word assures us that You hear us and also that You have the power to act. You do not simply listen to us in sympathy, unable to help; all things are subject to Your divine will.

Our prayers tend to be weak, and we do not know how to pray as we ought. Therefore, we ask for the guidance and intercession of Your Holy Spirit. We know that He searches the depths of our hearts to know what we truly need. He also searches Your depths, Lord God, that He thoroughly knows Your will. He is able to work these things together for Your glory and for our benefit.

We are so grateful for Jesus and for His work on the cross. It is only by and because of Him that we are able to come before Your throne in prayer. As He told us, “no one comes to the Father but by Me”. We proclaim Jesus as our Lord and Saviour; our only sure hope and our true salvation.

It is in His glorious name we pray

Amen