

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SEVEN)

“PRAYING WITH ALL PRAYER” (PART 2)

EPHESIANS 6:13-18

- 13. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*
- 14. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.*
- 15. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*
- 16. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*
- 17. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*
- 18. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.*

Last week we stated that in **Ephesians 6:18**, Paul begins to address the matter of **Prayer** as it relates to spiritual warfare. In this verse, he makes the point that the believer's victory over the devil and his hosts, involves a great commitment to prayer. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and petitions for all the saints.*”

Commenting on **Ephesians 6:18**, **Warren Wiersbe** wrote, “*Prayer is the energy that enables the Christian soldier to wear the armor and wield the sword. We cannot fight the battle in our own power, no matter how strong or talented we may think we are.*” **Expositor's Greek Testament** explains that, “*This great requirement of standing ready for the combat can be made good only when prayer, constant, earnest, spiritual prayer is added to the careful equipment with all the parts of the panoply.*”

Paul writes, “*With every prayer and petition, pray at all times.*” (**New English Translation**). The Greek word translated “*prayer*” is **proseuché**: (**pros-yoo-khay**), which refers to prayer addressed to God. The prefix “**pros**” conveys the sense of being immediately before Him (face to face), and hence the ideas of adoration, devotion and worship. The word “*supplication*,” or “*petition*” is a translation of the Greek word **deésis**: (**deh'-ay-sis**), which refers to prayer for a specific need that is personal and urgent. The word emphasizes the fact that the one making the petition is in urgent need of the thing he or she is asking for.

Paul exhorts the believers in Ephesus to, “*pray at all times.*” The Christian soldier is to be prayerful in every season, at every opportunity. The Greek word translated “*times*” is **kairos**: (**kahee-ros**), which means, “a fixed and definite time; the time when things are brought to a crisis, the decisive epoch waited for; an opportune or seasonable time.” **Kairos** speaks of a moment or period of time as being especially appropriate; the right, proper, or favourable time. The Christian soldier is to ensure that he or she seizes every opportunity to seek the face of God!

Believers are urged to pray “*in the Spirit.*” To pray in the Spirit is to pray consistent with God’s nature and God’s will. It is to pray in harmony with the Holy Spirit, by aligning our minds and our desires with the mind and desires of the Spirit. We do so by ensuring that we are “*filled by the Spirit*” (**Ephesians 5:18**). As we deliberately and consistently submit to the Holy Spirit, we will be drawn into a more intimate fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the Spirit will enable us to pray in the Spirit, because our prayer will then be in harmony with His will for our lives.

We explained that praying in the Spirit is not the same as praying in tongues. Nor is it a special form of prayer. Paul makes this very clear in **Ephesians 6:18**. He urges believers to pray in the Spirit, “*at all times.*” In other words, Paul is informing us that **all** prayer should be “in the Spirit!” It is the way that **all** prayer is to be offered. Every time we pray we should pray “in the Spirit!” To pray in the Holy Spirit is to be moved and guided by the Holy Spirit in prayer. It means to pray by His power and according to His direction. It is praying out of hearts and souls that are indwelt, illuminated, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that prayer goes hand in hand with the reading of God’s Word. They must not be separated. Our understanding of Scripture is enhanced through prayer, and our prayer is enhanced through understanding the Scriptures. We must read the Word and we must pray; we must pray and we must read the Word!

Paul’s theology is, that while the Son pleads for His people in heaven, the Holy Spirit who indwells them, makes intercession **for** them and **by** them, by helping them to understand and embrace the promises that are contained in God’s Word, so that they in turn may plead these promises before the throne of grace. The Holy Spirit also intercedes for them with “*groanings which cannot be uttered*” (**Romans 8:26**).

There are persons who argue that the phrase, “*groanings which cannot be uttered,*” refers to a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues or ecstatic cries, but that is **not** what Paul is teaching. In fact, he specifically says that the intercession of the Spirit is too deep for words. It cannot be expressed and so is unuttered. It never comes to the lips as a verbal expression. We should not confuse these **groanings** with praying in tongues. Nowhere in Scripture is tongues necessarily connected with intercessory prayer. **Romans 8:26** indicates that the Holy Spirit prays **for** us to the Father, **not** that He prays through us to the Father. We must bear in mind that tongues are words. They are utterances in languages unknown to the speaker. If **Romans 8:26** referred to praying in tongues, it would mean that the one praying would be

expressing in other languages the feelings of his or her heart. But this verse has nothing to do with that. The verse clearly states that it is the Spirit who “groans,” **not** the believers. This verse describes the groans of the Spirit within, which are so deep that they are impossible to verbalize.

Brothers and sisters, Paul is explaining that our failure to know God’s will, and consequently, our inability to petition God specifically and assuredly, is dealt with by the Holy Spirit, Who expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God. We know that the Holy Spirit’s intercession is effective in securing God’s help for us because the Spirit always prays in harmony with God’s will (**Romans 8:27**).

In **Philippians 2:12-13** Paul writes,

12. So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence,

13. for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God. (New English Translation)

As it relates to prayer, Paul is advising us in this passage that while it is true that God Himself is continually working in us, giving us both the desire and the effort to pray, which of course is something that pleases Him, it is our responsibility to work out what He is working in. In other words, we are **100%** dependent on the Holy Spirit for the desire and the effort to pray, and at the same time we are **100%** responsible to work out that desire and effort by actually praying! Paul says our prayer should be accompanied by, “*watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.*” The **New English Translation** renders this clause as follows: “*And to this end be alert, with all perseverance and petitions for all the saints.*”

The phrase “*watching thereunto,*” or “*be alert,*” is the translation of the Greek word **agrupneó**: (**ag-roop-neh’-o**), which means, “to be sleepless, to keep awake, watch; to be circumspect, attentive, ready.” The word is in the **present tense**, indicating that an attitude of readiness and watchfulness as it relates to prayer is to be the believer’s lifestyle. **Agрупneó** means to exercise constant vigilance over something, to be on guard. To be vigilant means to be alertly watchful especially to avoid danger. The idea is to stay awake in order to carry out a task.

Brothers and sisters, we must continually be alert as we pray. We must keep our spiritual eyes open, because the enemy may launch an attack against us at any time.

In **1 Peter 5:8-9** the Apostle wrote,

8. Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.

9. Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering. (New English Translation)

The believer is to “watch.” He or she is to remain spiritually alert and vigilant in order to guard against **forgetfulness, neglect, formality, distraction, frustration** and **discouragement**. It may be that Paul also has in mind the idea of “*watching*” in the sense of eagerly expecting an answer from God. The only way we can continually be on spiritual “high alert” is to be continually filled with the Spirit, for He is the One Who energizes the spiritual attitude of “high alert!” **Our only sufficiency in spiritual matters is Christ’s sufficiency** and He makes us sufficient, not by our attempting to strictly observe this instruction to “watch” as a regulation, but as we are led by the Spirit!

Our Lord’s repeated admonition to his disciples was, “*Watch and pray*” (**Matthew 26:41, Mark 13:33, Mark 14:38, Luke 21:36**). As it relates to the matter of “watching and praying,” one commentator made the following observation: “*In this regard it is interesting to note that the prayer posture of closing the eyes, bowing the head, and folding the hands is not found in Scripture. In fact the Jews prayed with their eyes open toward heaven and their hands lifted toward God.*”

In the Gospel according to **John**, we have two descriptions of our Lord Himself praying in this very manner:

John 11:41

“*So they took away the stone. Jesus **looked upward** and said, “Father, I thank you that you have listened to me”* (**New English Translation**).

John 17:1 “*When Jesus had finished saying these things, he **looked upward** to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son may glorify you”* (**New English Translation**).

Perhaps we have an illustration of “looking upward” in prayer in **Psalm 121:1-2**. The **English Standard Version** translates the passage in the following way:

1. *I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?*
2. *My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

(See also **Psalm 40:12, Psalm 123:1-2, and Daniel 4:34**.)

We are to be alert, “*with all perseverance.*” The word “*perseverance*” is a translation of a Greek word which is only found in **Ephesians 6:18**. The idea of the word is to continue to do something with intense effort, despite any attendant difficulties. It describes a steadfast single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action. It pictures one’s devotion to a certain task, persisting in it and being earnest towards it. In the context of **Ephesians 6:18**, it describes an intense devotion, an obstinate persistence, a continuing effort, in respect of prayer. Perseverance in prayer does not mean that we are trying to twist God’s arm, but rather that we are deeply concerned and burdened, and cannot rest until we secure an answer from God. As **Robert Law** puts it, “*Prayer*

is not getting man's will done in heaven; it is getting God's will done on earth." The truth is that not every believer is so constituted that he or she is able to spend all night in sincere prayer. But all of us can persevere in prayer far more than we do. Our perseverance in prayer is to be on behalf of all believers. Paul says, *"With all perseverance and supplications for all saints."* Brothers and sisters, every believer is charged with the responsibility and privilege of praying intensely and persistently for the needs of all **genuine** believers, regardless of where they attend church, or to which organization or denomination they belong!

We noted earlier that the word *"supplication,"* or *"petition"* is a translation of the Greek word **deésis**: (**deh'-ay-sis**), which refers to prayer for a specific need that is personal and urgent. The word **deesis** was used by Paul in his prayer for the salvation of his fellow Israelites in **Romans 10:1**: *"Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer (deesis) to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation"* (**New English Translation**).

David Guzik writes, *"We can battle spiritually not only on our own behalf, but also on the behalf of others. The soldier isn't only concerned for his or her own safety. He feels an instinct to protect and to battle on behalf of others."*

Brothers and sisters, Paul did not merely speak and write about intercessory prayer. He did not merely instruct believers to engage in intercessory prayer. He practiced what he preached! This is evident in all his letters.

In **Philippians 1:3-11**, for example we read the following:

3. *I thank my God every time I remember you.*
4. *I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you*
5. *because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.*
6. *For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*
7. *For it is right for me to think this about all of you, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel all of you became partners in God's grace together with me.*
8. *For God is my witness that I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*
9. *And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight*
10. *so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ,*
11. *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.* (**New English Translation**)

John MacArthur makes some interesting remarks concerning the matter of praying for others. He writes, *"Praying for others with sincerity and perseverance is, in God's immeasurable grace, a great blessing and strength to our own souls. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones reported that before the outbreak of the Spanish civil war that country was experiencing such an epidemic of*

neuroses that psychiatrists could hardly handle them all. But the war, terrible and destructive as it was in most respects, had the unexpected effect of 'curing' many of Spain's thousands of neurotics. When they became concerned about the welfare of their families, friends, and country instead of their own, their neuroses disappeared and hospitals and clinics were almost emptied of such cases. These neurotic people were suddenly cured by a greater anxiety, an anxiety that reached beyond their own selfish welfare."

Listen to the exhortation of **Charles Haddon Spurgeon**: *"But will prayer for other people help us? Yes, very much. You will sometimes find that, when you cannot pray for yourself, it is a good plan to pray for somebody else. Think of some child of God, and pray for him, and then the fire of supplication will soon burn up in your heart. The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends, and he will do the same for you. I have heard many of our members say that, when they have felt bound in prayer, they have pleaded for their Pastor and afterwards they have been able to pray for themselves. I advise more of you to try that plan; it will do me good, and then if it also does you good, there will be a double advantage in it."*

Brothers and sisters, Prayerlessness produces a dulling of spiritual perception, a life without true holiness, and a witness without Holy Spirit power. **John Wesley** once said: *"Whatever cools my affection toward Christ is the world."* Prayer is the insulation that protects the soul from freezing to death.

Paul says, *"Praying always with all prayer."* **David Guzik** writes that, *"The idea is **all kinds of prayer or prayer upon prayer**. We should use every kind of prayer we can think of. Group prayer, individual prayer, silent prayer, shouting prayer, walking prayer, kneeling prayer, eloquent prayer, groaning prayer, constant prayer, fervent prayer – **just pray**. We can say that it is through prayer that spiritual strength and the armor of God go to work. In theory, the prayerless Christian can be strong and wearing all the armor; but never accomplishes anything because he fails to go into battle through prayer."* Brothers and sisters, prayer is a resource of the **Christian** soldier that was not available to the **Roman** soldier. Even when every spiritual weapon is prepared and directed against the spiritual foe, they will be of no efficacy in the absence of prayer.

We will conclude our Lesson this evening with a quotation from **E.M. Bounds**: *"What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer."*