

Sermon Notes: *Pray Always* (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Intro: Why do we often not withstand Satan's temptations? It is not that our enemy is too strong because our Savior has triumphed over him. Nor is it that we are too weak since the power of Christ's resurrection dwells in us. It is not that our armor is too weak, for our Savior during his earthly ministry wore it and triumphed over Satan in it. No, what we often lack is the heart to use the armor Christ has fitted us with. Prayer stirs our hearts to wear and use the armor of God. How pray?

#1: In the Spirit (18a). This is probably Scripture's most comprehensive single sentence on how we must pray. Note Paul's fourfold use of the word "all" in this verse. The repetition helps us understand what prayer is. Prayer is not simply the act of a moment. It is a lifestyle. Healthy relationships require communication and prayer is person-to-person communication with God. God created us and then redeemed us by Christ's blood for communion with himself. That is what prayer is—communion with God. Put another way, prayer is an expression of how we live, as Calvin said, *coram deo* (in the continual presence of God). Jesus promised his followers that it would be to their advantage that he was leaving them since he would send another Helper or Comforter to be with them forever—the Spirit of truth. Because Jesus ascended to God's right hand of authority and poured out that Helper on us, we are the temple and dwelling place of God the Spirit (2:22). Thus, the wise Christian adopts what we might call "the temple principle"—keeping his heart in all the affairs of life, a place of continual communication with his Lord and "practicing the presence of God." But we are to pray not only "at all times" but "in the Spirit." That is we must avoid praying as hypocrites with only our mouths and tongues rather than with our minds and hearts fully engaged. How? Remember two things which the gospel guarantees to all who cleave to Christ by faith: Joined to Jesus Christ (2:1-10).

Remember: *your past*, dead in sin; *your present*, made alive with Christ, because of God's rich mercy, raised up with Christ and seated with him in the heavenly places; *your future*, so that in the coming ages God might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness to you. In your prayers, fan your devotion from a flicker into a flame by praising God for who you are as one joined to Christ. Indwelt by the Spirit. "Through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father" (2:18). The Spirit's role is to impress on our hearts that we are not only redeemed by Christ's blood but adopted as God's children (1:5). God's Spirit indwells us as the Spirit of adoption. How eagerly our Father receives us! Jesus promised God's children that he would always be waiting to meet them in prayer (Mt 6:6). Murray: "The Father is in secret: in these words Jesus teaches us where he is waiting us, where he is always to be found. Christians often complain that private prayer is not what it should be. They feel weak and sinful, the heart is cold and dark; it is as if they have so little to pray, and in that little no faith or joy. They are discouraged and kept from prayer by the thought that they cannot come to the Father as they ought or as they wish. Child of God! Listen to Jesus. He tells you that when you go to private prayer your first thought must be: The Father is in secret, the Father waits me there. Just because your heart is cold and prayerless, get yourself into the presence of your loving Father."

#2: With All Perseverance (18b). We must pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication and all perseverance. We may think of God in many ways: a loving Father, a powerful king, a righteous judge, to mention only a few. But basic to all of these perspectives is seeing ourselves as needy servants. Only when we acknowledge our complete dependence on the Lord can we begin to pray with a proper focus on God (cf. Ps 123:2). To pray as dependent

servants, let us remember: Prayer is a privilege. Scripture invites us to come to the Lord at all times. God installed our Savior and King at his right hand with all authority and gave him as head over all things to the church (1:22). In our world, monarchs and presidents may be approached only when he sends for people. But our King has sent for all his people and they may come at all times. Prayer is a precept. Scripture exhorts us to shake off our sluggishness. As we must breathe without ceasing, so we must pray without ceasing. Through prayer we experience “the expulsive power of a new affection” (Chalmers). Our hearts are renewed and we desire to walk closer with God.

#3: For the proclamation of God’s Word (19). We must pray “for all the saints” but also for the proclamation of the Word. God’s Spirit working through prayer and his Word is necessary for the life and vitality of God’s people (Ezk 37:4). Proclamation with clarity. Paul requests prayer not for words of eloquence but those blessed by the Spirit which penetrate and piece dark minds and hard hearts. Proclamation with courage. Not conforming to culture but cutting across the grain of culture. Let us pray in the Spirit with all perseverance for the ministry of God’s Word so that we may have the heart and will to wear the armor Christ has fitted us with by his death and resurrection.