
Prayer for Gospel Speech

Ephesians 6:10-20

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Pray always for divine strength to stand firm and speak fearlessly.

In this way, we will engage in spiritual warfare with the powers of evil for the prisoners of war.

Starting last September, we set aside evening service to think together over praying. To help us do this, we've looked at the prayers of the Apostle Paul. All the Elders and Zach Hedges (11 speakers) have teamed up to preach 16 messages on prayer. Our aim is to establish from Paul's prayers priorities that should frame, focus and fill our praying. These messages ranged from prayer for grace and comfort to praying for ministry and obedience. Some of the messages centered on the need for insight and wisdom while others looked at praying for providential direction and endurance amid affliction.

Tonight, our attention centers on a certain type of prayer needed for spiritual warfare. The context for this kind of praying was cogently outlined for us in last Sunday's message preached by Pastor Russ.

A week ago Russ preached from Mark 8 helping us to see Jesus' identity, mission and his call on our lives. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus was killed on a cross and after three days rose from the dead. And Jesus calls us to his mission by saying, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:31-34). For Clearcreek Chapel, following Jesus was a topic of conversation last week. If we are to follow Jesus, it stands to reason that he is taking us somewhere. Where is that?

Tonight, as we think together over the topic of prayer, we will see that to follow Jesus is to move out into a combat zone. It is to engage in spiritual warfare. This battlefield for us is the American culture. This is where we live. And though our surroundings may not resemble or feel like Benghazi, the flaming missiles from the enemy are more deadly and the stakes are higher than we witnessed in Libya. The powers of evil on this battlefield manifest in different ways and at times are difficult to detect. For example:

(1) The prominent professor Peter Enns in 2005 lobbed new challenges to biblical authority¹. His sophisticated and nuanced hermeneutics continue to this day to raise questions in the minds of students and pastors over biblical inerrancy. Can we really trust the Bible in all areas? Really, how are we to understand the Bible?

(2) US Supreme Court in June, 2015 redefined marriage. They noticeably disregarded biblical teaching in preference for a more popular basis on which to cast new categories and frame new definitions.² Are we really supposed to take the Bible at face value? Come on, today is a

¹For an account and critique of Enns' hermeneutics see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

² http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf

different day. When it comes to my personal life, I lean on other sources of authority to determine what's good for me.

(3) Pop star Taylor Swift and her *Out of the Woods* music video³ proclaiming self-discovery/self-actualization as key to life. Maslow was wrong and yet still we buy into it. This video premiered about a week ago on New Year's Eve, during Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve celebration on ABC. Her message echoes throughout our culture – anything that helps you find and express your true self will all be worth it. Ya know, the Bible is irrelevant when it comes to the bigger issues in life, isn't it? Knowing self is far more valuable than knowing Christ.

You see, whether it is coming out of Westminster, coming out of the closet, coming out of the woods – American culture is a warzone of ideologies and worldviews that vie for attention and imagination of those in the US. They hold sway over desires and shape resolutions. They lead humans into conclusions and lifestyles that view the Bible as an old book. And left unchecked they lead unbelievers to hell.

Following Jesus on mission leads us onto this battlefield. In Ephesians 6:10-20 we find a certain context in which we discover a certain lifestyle that is strengthened by a certain type of prayer.

The message for tonight might be summarized in this way:

Pray always for divine strength to stand firm and speak fearlessly.

In this way, we will engage in spiritual warfare with the powers of evil for the prisoners of war.

Tonight, we focus on a certain type of prayer – *pray always for divine strength*. And to value this certain type of prayer, we need to understand the context in which this prayer is found – *spiritual warfare with the powers of evil for the prisoners of war*. And to grow in this certain type of prayer we need to understand the purpose for this type of prayer – *stand firm and speak fearlessly*.

<PRAY>

Take a listen as I read for us Eph.6:10-20.

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

³"Out of the Woods" video premiered on December 31, 2015, during Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve celebration on ABC. At the end of the video, the "woods" she was crawling through disappear as she finds a beach, where another version of her is waiting by the shore. Swift reaches for her. The video ends with the caption "She lost him, but she found herself, and somehow that was everything."

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 y 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.

Stand Firm

v.10-17

The first purpose for praying always for divine strength in the midst of war is noticed in v10-17. We must pray always for divine strength for each other so that we will **stand firm**.

To see this clearly, note the structure of this paragraph.

In v11, we come to the command, *“Put on the armor”*. And this command is followed up by the reason Paul gives this command, *“that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil”*. He wants the reader to appreciate both the command and the reason for it by giving an explanation for both in v12. *“for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...”* And now, Paul in v13 circles back around to the original command: *“therefore take up the whole armor of God”*. Now watch what he does. He follows this up with the reason for the command: *“that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm”*. Then in v.14-17 he simply reverses the pattern to say that we are to stand firm by putting on the armor.

In other words, he says we are to put on the armor so that we can stand firm. And then says we are to stand firm by putting on the armor. So these first seven verses of this passage (70%) are saying essentially one thing. Engaging spiritual warfare biblically means we are to stand firm against the schemes of Satan. We are to pray always for divine strength for each other because the temptations are great on this battleground. Satan wants to destroy us. He hates us. He desires to assail us by means of his deception. Paul teaches that to stand firm and resist demonic temptation means that we “put on the armor of God”.

To understand the command “stand firm” we need to pay attention to the pieces of armor. They are: Belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes for your feet = readiness given by the gospel of peace, shield of faith and helmet of salvation, sword of the Spirit = word of God.

Most of the imagery Paul uses comes straight from the book of Isaiah (Ia. 11:5; 52:7; 59:17) and provides the meaning of putting on the armor. The words he uses; belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, sword. With the possible exception of the sword, the pieces are all for protection. They are to defend us in the war:

- defending us with the **Truth** (to expose the lies of Satan),

- defending us with **Righteousness** (that is ours in Christ with which the “accusation of Satan” (Zech.3:1ff) can be deflected,
- defending us with the **Gospel of peace** that gave us and reminds us of our reconciliation with the holy God of the Universe (2:1-10) and reconciliation with each other (2:11-22) so that can stand together,
- defending us with the **Faith** to overcome the flaming darts of doubt the evil one casts our way,
- defending us with **Salvation** that is eternally ours and cannot be taken away,
- defending us with the **Word of God** as the only source of truth by which we can interpret all of life and powerfully build up each other.

Yes, to stand firm against the schemes of the devil we must have protection. And we notice that He is our protection. He is our security. These pieces of armor are not what we have done or are doing or will do. These pieces all point to what God has done for us. These pieces are sketching out God’s provision on our behalf. We stand firm in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ as we believe all that He has already done for us through and in Christ.

In other words, all these words are synonyms for one reality = The Gospel. **The armor is the gospel.** He is telling us to put on the gospel. He is telling us to rehearse the gospel, he is telling the church to renew her affections for the gospel, to remember the gospel, to relive the gospel; and to do this daily. The command “to put on” is the command to believe the gospel daily, to trust in the work and worth of Jesus Christ or our behalf daily. And we are to do all this in community. The pronoun “you” throughout v.10-20 is plural. This standing against the schemes is done together. It is a corporate act. We are not called to be the rugged Roman soldier who individually takes on the Enemy. We are called to believe the gospel and live within the gospel-centered community lovingly, humbly, sacrificially, and prayerfully

Beloved, we are to be praying always for divine strength for each other so that we will stand firm on the battlefield of Satan.

Praying always for divine strength

v.18

As we make our way to the last three verses of this text we notice a shift in emphasis. The movement of the text is from standing firm (v10-17) to speaking fearlessly (v19-20). These are the two lifestyle activities to which the church is called as we engage together in spiritual warfare.

But notice what holds these activities together. Sandwiched between the activities is verse 18. It tells us to pray always for divine strength. This is the type of prayer feature tonight for our prayer series. This is the type of prayer I want us to remember and reflect upon. A lifestyle of prayer for strength.

Well, what does this type of prayer look like? Paul gives a four-fold emphasis to tell us.

At all times, With all prayer , In all perseverance , For all His people.

What word in that four-fold description of our activity was repeated 4 x? ALL = This tells us of the importance of sensing God always, of living life before His face 24/7/365, of believing that everything is about God, of a routine that does not get monotonous. To engage spiritual warfare biblically we are to see prayer woven through our entire life! We are never out of the battle. We

therefore should never go without praying for each other. We must pray regularly that each of us will stand firm and speak fearlessly.

John Stott rightly says, “Most Christians pray sometimes, with some prayers, and some degree of perseverance and for some of God’s people. But to replace “some” by “all” in each of these expressions would be to introduce us to a new dimension of prayer”. Perhaps this is one thing God is saying to us tonight. Engaging spiritual warfare biblically requires a new dimension of prayer. Not as some of the mystics understood and thus went into seclusion and separation from people. But rather, by so believing the gospel we desire to talk with God continuously for strength on behalf of each other.

Speak Fearlessly

v.19-20

This priority of prayer leads us to the end of our text and the end of the message. We come to v.19-20 to notice the lifestyle activity we’ve eluded to throughout the message – speak fearlessly.

One piece of the armor we have not discussed. It is not defensive. It is active. It is aggressive. It is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. (17). The movement of this paragraph from standing to speaking now gives way to speaking to people about God (19). In other words, we all are to evangelize. In light of v.15, we are to have a readiness to walk into lives with the gospel.

I understand. We may not be able to preach like John Piper. We may not understand the nuances of theology like Dr. Carson. But this passage only uses the plural “you” to tell the church that the church together is to be engaging spiritual warfare with the powers of evil for the prisoners of war. We are to be readied by the good news of great joy that we are ready to walk into lives with the wonder of the gospel in our lives and upon our lips.

With God’s Word in our hearts and mouths in all boldness we are to speak to people about God and His good news. We are to pray for our preachers who are charged by God to herald the truth fearlessly (19). And we are also to pray for each other for the necessary strength to wield the sword to free captives from Satan. As Paul said to Timothy, (2Tim.2:24f)

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.(2Tim.2:24-27) see also 2Cor.4:1-4. John 8:44.

To summarize the message remember and reflect on the following.⁴

1. We cannot succeed in this war on our own.
2. We must not count on life to be smooth.
3. Remember who we are in Christ.
4. Prepare ourselves for sharing the gospel at any time.
5. Do not doubt the gospel.
6. Devote ourselves to purity.
7. Devote ourselves to spreading the gospel.
8. Bottom line in all this: PRAY ALWAYS
 - Ask God to strengthen you to resist temptation and share the gospel.
 - Ask God to strengthen fellow believers to resist temptation and share the gospel.

⁴My language communicating the 8-part reflection was heavily shaped by C.E Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities & Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 160.