

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN EPHESIANS

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Ephesians in general and its "armor" passage (6:10-20) in particular devote a major focus to the importance of prayer in Christian life and ministry. The power in the armor is essential if believers are to win the battle against Satan and his demonic forces. The parts of the armor denote different spiritual aspects of Christian living that are also essential. None of the above can be appropriated without prayer modeled according to the principles of Scripture. Eleven considerations show prayer to be inseparable from victory in spiritual warfare. The uses of "all" in Eph 6:18 are a call to an "all-out" commitment to prayer and remind Christian soldiers of its crucial importance.

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The urgent exhortation of Eph 6:10 presses home to each Christian: "be strong in the Lord." Each one must live in that power of God's armor (Eph 6:10-13). Through this means alone can the believer successfully encounter the devil and his demonic associates, who seek to prevail. A life based on such *power* finds expression in the six *parts* of the armor that the Christian should implement (6:14-17). The power represented by the armor relates vitally to *prayer* (6:18-20). The writer himself models prayer for his readers (1:15-23; 3:14-21). Later, he calls on *them* to pray in all things and for him as they realize God's power in their lives and demonstrate it in implementing the armor. In the two long passages of Paul's model, prayer is strategic in the realization of the wealth of Christians in Christ. Further, it is strategic in the closing of the epistle as it climaxes the call to live in God's power, possessing His whole armor and letting that power permeate every part of the armor.

This study spotlights the summons for Christians to use the power of God's armor. The parts of the armor specify the elements of that power, and prayer imparts effectiveness to the armor.

Rereading all thirteen of Paul's epistles with a special eye for references to prayer is a rich experience. Checking these references against a list found in the Society of New Testament Studies monograph by Gordon P. Wiles (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers*

[Cambridge: University Press, 1974] Appendices I and II) has also been helpful. Wiles includes lists classified into categories of prayer: doxology, praise, blessing, cursing, worship [actually, worship should be involved in all things in life], hymns, thanks, boasting, petition for self, intercession, and general prayer (297-99).

This writer's count of references to categories of prayer combined with Wiles' lists showed 56 verses in Romans and 42 in 1 Corinthians. The third highest total was in Ephesians with 31 verses. Romans has a total of 433 verses, and Ephesians only 155. Romans covers ten and a half pages in the *New American Standard Bible*, and Ephesians three and a half pages (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1973). Despite being only about one-third the length of Romans, Ephesians has proportionately more than 55% as many verses directly related to prayer. Colossians also emphasizes prayer, devoting over 20 verses to it. Yet Colossians does not have as many separate longer passages on prayer as Ephesians (cp. Col 1:9-14 with Eph 1:15-23; 3:14-21; 6:18-20).

The relation of Eph 6:18-20 to the armor passage just before it in 6:10-17 is significant. This study will examine the nature of the connection between the two sections.

PRAYER AS EXEMPLIFIED IN EPH 6:10-20

Before he *exhorts* the readers to pray, Paul provides them with an *example* by modeling prayer for them. He blesses and praises God (Eph 1:2, 3, 6, 12, 14). Then he injects two bursts of intercession for them in chapters 1 and 3 while describing the spiritual wealth Christ has conferred on believers. The bounty that grace has bestowed, amounting to "all spiritual blessings" (1:3), leads Paul to these prayers. He is anxious for his readers to realize in daily practice the style of life such amazing riches make possible (1:15-23; 3:14-21).

Each intercessory labor exhibits features that Paul pled for before God. They are key items on his "prayer list." Both prayers reveal facets of paramount import for Christian living. They are also examples of how all Christians can make their prayers relevant in spiritual matters, whether for personal needs or for other Christians. The intercessions exemplify a passionate concern for spiritual progress, just as Paul prays elsewhere that Christians may please God "in all respects," being fruitful in every good work (Col 1:10). In the Colossians passage, Paul prays that God will fill believers with the knowledge of His will, His power, His steadfastness, His joy, and thanksgiving to Him (vv. 9-12). His burden is for them to be vitally concerned over spiritual matters. It is not for a physical relief from a broken arm, a new job, or sleep as a solution to insomnia. Though the latter burdens are also very important, they should intertwine with the

things Paul puts on his epistolary prayer lists. Christians should cast *all* their care upon God (1 Pet 5:7). Yet the life-shaping issues that Paul makes prominent should gain the pervasive place in their prayers. Sadly, they are all too frequently missing from a prayer bulletin, or pop up only here and there.

Does that sound familiar? Where imbalance exists, pastoral leaders must labor to remedy the imbalance through loving teaching, personal example, and emphases that draw together the different elements that are urgently needed in prayer.

In Ephesians, after his focus on wealth and a modeling of what prayer should be, Paul devotes his final three chapters to a lifestyle that matches this wealth. He emphasizes the need for it to be expressed in practical relationships. He shows how believers for whom he prays can translate their riches into a "walk" that reflects positive responses to what he has prayed for. Fond of that word "walk," Paul mentions it in 2:2, 10, returns to it in 4:1, then keeps it before the recipients through regular repetition (4:17; 5:2, 8, 15). Believers can behave in a manner consistent with the high privileges God has granted them. They can display this in a walk (or behavior) of unity (4:1-16), holiness (4:17-32), love (5:1-7), light (5:8-14), and carefulness to be filled with the Spirit (5:15—6:9). These are all descriptions of the same life, and are simultaneously true of a believer.

The five participles in 5:19-21 reflect what accompanies being "filled by the Spirit" (5:18). They include speaking to one another in edification, singing, rejoicing, giving thanks, and showing submission to other Christians. Paul narrows his focus in 5:22—6:9 to specific groups. Wives are to live in the submission of a Spirit-filled life true to the unity, holiness, love, and light, expressing this toward their husbands. Husbands are to love their wives, children to obey their parents, and parents to model the Christ-life to their children. Servants and their masters are to fulfill what is good to one another.

A "walk" of this many-splendored nature is "worthy" (4:1)¹ of the wonderful calling that Paul describes in chaps. 1—3. Such conduct manifests the benefits that Paul highlighted in his own prayers for the believers in earlier parts of the epistle.

¹Ajiv in Eph 4:1 had the basic root idea based on ancient scales with two arms, "to have equal weight with." It came to have the concept of one thing being a match to the other, appropriate, fitting, consistent, corresponding to. So it became a term for the practical Christian life displaying a resemblance or appropriate reflection of blessings God has given (e.g., 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12).

Paul has more to say when he arrives at the last of his crucial words in the letter (6:10). He draws this walk befitting such great wealth into a focus that realistically characterizes what form it takes in the world believers face. It is a *hostile* world. All the decent things that God stands for are pitted against the ugly evils used by those who march under the black banner of "the prince of the power of the air" to oppose God and His people (2:2). Those whom God called to the wealth (chaps. 1—3) and the walk (chaps. 4—6) are in a deadly warfare (6:10-20). To cope with this, Paul urges the *power*, the *panoply*, and the *prayer*. The third item is the principal focus of this discussion.

THE POWER IN THE ARMOR

To be victorious, believers need the power of being "strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (v. 10). They must have "the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left," as 2 Cor 6:7 describes. Or, as 2 Cor 10:4 defines, "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but mighty before God. . . ." Nothing other than *God's power* is able to win, a theme frequent in Scripture, and the power is intermeshed with prayer.² For Christians go up against the ranks of devilish legions in the heavenlies and across international areas who influence and target believers to attack (6:12). These are demonic powers. The devil is ready to take advantage of any opening to assail those in Christ's church (4:27). They are desperately in need of "strength" (6:10), because they are in peril in having to contend with the enemy's *methodeia* (meuodea), his "cunning stratagems" (v. 11).

How do Christians secure the only power sufficient to win against sinister odds so great? They appropriate weaponry that God supplies. They "put on" or "take." This is in a welcoming trust, receiving what God makes available in grace to be utilized. "I take, He undertakes" has been a winning theme for Christ's people in conflict. Believers made strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might

²Scripture emphasizes God's strength in various ways: believers need it (1 Cor 16:11); God is believers' strength and shield (Ps 28:7; cf. Ps 46:1; Isa 40:29); they are to pray for strength (Ps 31:2), realizing that God is their strength (Ps 31:4); God girds them with strength for battle (2 Sam 22:40; Pss 18:39; 61:3); He guides men in His strength (Exod 15:13; Deut 8:17); they can celebrate His giving of strength (e.g., Ps 138:3; Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 4:17). Strength relates to the main aspects of prayer: praise/thanks (Pss 59:16-17; 81:28), petition (Pss 31:2; 86:16; 105:4; 119:28), intercession (Isa 33:2; Eph 3:16), affirmation of love or trust (Exod 15:2; Pss 18:1; 73:26), and confession (Psalm 51).

receive ability to stand their ground as spiritual soldiers, no matter what onslaught the devil and his hordes may mount. They can stop the forces of wickedness personally as individuals and corporately as a church.

They are to "stand, therefore" (v. 14). In the imperative "stand," Paul presses his main exhortation in this section on warfare. "Receive" in v. 17 is subordinate to this in the flow of thought, though coordinated with "stand," and expresses a trustful receptivity toward God who is sufficient to make the stand effective.

As part of the unified Word of God, Eph 6:10-20 repeats much of what Jesus taught in His Upper Room Discourse.³ There, John 15:7, 8 fulfills a vital service in teaching a close relationship between a *Word*-filled life and a *prayer*-filled life and its fruitfulness. Paul, a good disciple of Jesus, is saturated with His mind (cf. 1 Cor 2:16) and reflects it in many facets of Eph 6:10-20. See Exhibit C (76, all exhibits located at the end of this article).

THE PARTS OF THE ARMOR

Six pieces⁴ of military equipment make up the panoply or list of armor.⁵ These are drawn from Paul's knowledge of Scripture and

³Comparisons are also frequent between Psalm 18 and Eph 6:10-20, between Jesus's teachings in Matt 4:1-11 and parallels with Eph 6:10-20, and between 2 Cor 6:2, 6-7 and Eph 6:10-20. In the last passage, Paul draws together salvation, the Spirit, truth, the Word, God's power, weapons, and righteousness. He relates these to the ministry (v. 7), just as he wanted Timothy, a pastor, to "fight a good fight" (1 Tim 1:18).

⁴Prayer in Eph 6:18-20 is not a *seventh* piece of armor, but a *saturation* in all pieces of armor. The reasons for this conclusion are: (1) Paul uses no figure after v. 17; (2) "and" is used before four of the six pieces, but absent with prayer, and the fourth, though having no "and," has three figures before it and two after it; (3) no genitival form appears with prayer as it does in five of the six figures of speech; (4) no part of the body is used with prayer as with the others; (5) Paul repeats prayer, mentioning it five times (vv. 18, 19), which he does with no part of the armor; (6) verbal action is no longer combined with a reference to a part of the body after v. 17. Some say that prayer is a seventh piece, as E. K. Simpson (*Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957] 143), but later reverses himself (153). Andrew Lincoln says it is not (*Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990] 451).

⁵The armor is the "armor of light" (Rom 13:12), as fruit is "fruit of light" (Eph 5:9) and "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), light emphasizing the *nature* of it and the Spirit the *Person* (Source). We might well refer to the armor as the "armor of the Spirit," who is prominent in the close context of Ephesians (6:17-18).

sensitivity to Roman military dress in connection with this. See Exhibit A (73-74). He must regard the *few* parts of armor that he specifies as representative of *all* aspects in the Christian life. Many key words that surprisingly do not appear here are strategic elsewhere in the letter—e.g., grace, love, joy (5:20), goodness (5:9). God's grace is abundant in all of His provisions (e.g., 1:3-14; 2:8-9). So is love (1:4, 5; 2:4-6; 4:14-16; 5:2; 6:23). Paul also refers earlier to humility, gentleness and patience (4:2), holiness (4:24), and kindness (4:32).

Paul begins his list of key elements in 6:10-18 with two that characterize the "fruit of light" against facets of darkness (5:9). These two are the belt of *truth* and the breastplate of *righteousness* (6:14-15). A third word in 5:9, *goodness*, has been prominent in the context as well (4:28, 29; 6:8).

Why does Paul put truth *first*? Other Scriptures sometimes mention it before righteousness (Isa 48:1; Zech 8:8), but righteousness also appears before truth (Eph 4:24; 5:9; 1 Tim 6:11). Word order with such terms is flexible. Truth is certainly appropriate, wherever it occurs. The Christian has entered the realm of God's truth by being identified with Him in opposition to all influences blossoming from the devil's lie. So truth is as fitting as any word to begin the armor. Standing for truth against the tempter's falsehood was the issue for the first man and woman in the *creation* context (Gen 3:5). Truth was again the crux for Jesus in His *conflict* with the tempter before His public ministry (Matt 4:1-11). Truth was also the issue when the deceiver captured Ananias and Sapphira in the infant *church* (Acts 5:3). Truth is ever the point that the unsaved miss when they listen to the father of lies (John 8:44).⁶ Truth is the point of issue in the Christian's struggle against the devil and those who peddle his lies (1 John 4:1-6).

The call to put on armor comes in a context that has made a practical stance in truth crucial (e.g., 4:15, 24). Truth works as a defensive weapon in the battle, standing staunchly against what is false. But it also takes the offensive in ministering positively to help and foster growth in others (4:3, 15, 25, 28). Truth adds fragrance to life through whatever is "pleasing to the Lord" (5:9, 10). In Phil 4:8, truth is first in a list of six positive qualities.

Why does Paul in naming parts of the human body begin with the girded loins? It is because belting the armor securely permits freedom in movement of the feet and legs. And as they are free and

⁶It is instructive to check a concordance on the frequent use of "true" and forms of it in the Gospel of John.

able to keep good balance, agility, and speed, so it goes with the upper part of the body (cf. John 8:32, "the truth shall make you free"). The Christian stays upright. Everything in life depends on a basic commitment to God's truth (cf. 4:21, 24). With truth, a believer makes a viable stand against the enemy.

The second piece of armor, righteousness, is often linked with truth in God's Word.⁷ Righteousness is a matter on which the Spirit of truth (John 16:13) convicts the unsaved (John 16:8-11). This is the same Spirit as in the armor passage (Eph 6:17, 18). Righteousness is the absolutely necessary benefit that God has imputed once for all to everyone who believes (Rom 3:21—5:21). It is also a character quality He continually imparts in practical living (e.g., Rom 6:1-22; 8:1-17).

The third piece of armor, after truth and righteousness, is fittingly "the preparation of the gospel of peace." In the gospel people agree with God's truth, by which they take their stand against error and stand in unity; they also stand for righteousness that is pitted against unrighteousness. In the gospel a person believes to righteousness (Rom 10:10). The same gospel ministers to confer peace with God (Rom 5:1)—amity in place of enmity—and just as surely, the gospel fosters the peace of God (Phil 4:7). The center of that gospel is Christ. He *is* the believer's peace (Eph 2:14). He also *established* peace (v. 15), and He *preached* peace (v. 17). Those who have received His gospel message are to live as peace-makers (Matt 5:9). In this, they bear witness to how God gives peace with Himself, bidding others who hear and be reconciled (2 Cor 5:19-21). They also can have a daily, peaceful composure that reflects God's sufficiency to cope with any circumstance (Phil 4:6, 7). One of the slickest tricks the devil employs—i.e., one of his arrows in Eph 6:16—is to gain an advantage (Eph 4:27) and replace peace by creating discord in a believer's heart or between believers.

The "preparation" of the gospel of peace for the feet may refer to a firm foundation, the solid footing (Ps 18:36) that provides stability (Pss 18:33; 37:31; Hab 3:19).⁸ Or, better, it can mean a God-imparted, steadied composure that flows from such a gospel to give one the ability (or, preparedness) to stand true to the gospel.⁹

⁷E.g., Ps 119:142; Isa 48:1; Zech 8:8; Eph 5:9.

⁸So Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) 2:797-99; and much earlier, A. F. Buscarlet, "The 'Preparation' of the Gospel of Peace," *Expository Times* 9 (1897-98):38-40.

⁹Lincoln, *Ephesians* 448-49: in the OT and other literature, the term nowhere actually

How fitting that after truth, righteousness, and the preparation of the gospel the fourth weapon is the shield of faith (Eph 6:16). Faith is the instrument by which the unsaved came into salvation ("through faith," 2:8). Faith continues to be of paramount importance in the lives of the saved. Paul writes, "We walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). Though he does not include "love" as in his armor passage in 1 Thess 5:8, what he says here is consistent with his point that faith "works through love" (Gal 5:6). To Paul, love and faith go together (Eph 6:23). He would concur with John that faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4, 5). He also agrees with Peter (1 Pet 5:8) that steadfast resistance to the devil is by faith.

Here in Ephesians 6, faith is a spiritual shield, no doubt because it defensively wards off fire-tipped arrows that the devil's emissaries shoot at Christ soldiers. The devil and his demons often use people to inflict hurt, or they can work directly on a believer. Arrows of all sorts strike at God's people—arrows that wound by disunity (Eph 4:2, 3); unholy anger in thought or words (4:25 ff.); sexually permissive thoughts, words, or acts (5:3-7); the temptation to indulge in drunkenness (cf. 5:18a); attitudes that assault joy, thanksgiving, and submission (5:19-21); unloving attitudes and acts instead of a husband's Christ-like love (5:22 ff.), and on and on. The arrows of the enemy are many.

Faith is crucial, then. No wonder the Christian needs it to resist these attacks. Pastors as well as those in their flocks face the same danger. God offers them the same weaponry. By faith, believers such as those in Hebrews 11 have not only staged defensive victories, but have made offensive advances to carry out God's cause. Most references to faith in Ephesians deal with positive advances.¹⁰

After the above four weapons comes the piece of armor called "the helmet of salvation" (6:17). This may mean the helmet of protection that salvation is, because the wealth is illimitable (chaps. 1—3, especially 1:3). Or, Paul may mean the helmet as the protection which salvation supplies. Either idea points to salvation as protective.

denotes "firm footing; its more usual sense is readiness, preparedness, or preparation (LXX Ps. 9:17; Wis. 13:12; Josephus, *Antiq.* 10:1:2 etc.)." Lincoln takes it as "readiness . . . for combat and for standing in the battle," a preparedness in harmony that the gospel of peace bestows. The emphasis is on the stand in battle, not readiness to speak the gospel, as the most effective means of combatting the enemy, as in A. Oepke, "podv," *TDNT* 5:312.

¹⁰Offensive victories through faith seem evident in Eph 1:13, 15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 6:23; and often in Hebrews 11 (most of the examples at least).

Salvation is deliverance; salvation means deliverance. God in Christ supplies deliverance in the *past* sense, eternally clearing Christians from the penalty sin would exact. He also gives deliverance from sin's power in the *present* process of struggles (Rom 7:14-25; 8:1-39). And He will yet effect deliverance in the *prospective* anticipation, for He promises finally to set them free from the very presence of sin. Some day they will no longer have a sin principle within. They will be redeemed in the grandest completeness, glorified, totally monopolized by God's holiness (Rom 8:30; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

Paul is not through with the armor. Finally, he urges believers to take up a weapon in trustful receptivity. It is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17). The Word with its gospel is in a wonderful sense the Spirit's sword. The Spirit gave it in inspiration of Scripture. He penetrated believers' hearts with conviction (John 16:8-11) when He gave them the new birth (John 3:3-7). He uses the Word to nourish Christian growth, and ministers the Word through them in witness to the lost as well as in edifying other believers. Here, faith wards off the enemy arrows by the Word that the Spirit utilizes.

As in John 15:7, 8, Paul draws a close tie between God's Word and prayer. The Word is the sword *of the Spirit* (Eph 6:17), and Christians are to pray *in the Spirit* (v. 18). The Spirit teaches the Word that is God's will (cf. John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:12, 13), and helps the saved to achieve God's will in prayer (cf. Rom 8:26, 27).

It is important to observe that Christ Himself is every part of the armor to Christians (cf. Exhibit A). He is the *truth* (John 14:6; Rev 19:11), the truth and the Son that sets them free (John 8:32, 36). He wears a girdle of truth in Isa 11:4, 5. He also is their *righteousness*, whether imputed or imparted (cf. 1 Cor 1:30), and He has "put on righteousness like a breastplate" (Isa 59:17; cf. 11:4 f.). He is their *peace* (Eph 2:14) and the "good news," the gospel. He is the *Faithful* One toward whom faith is directed (Rev 19:11).¹¹ He is their *salvation* (Ps 27:1), and has worn "a helmet of salvation on His head" (Isa 59:17). So He has covered the believer's head in the day of battle—and that is

¹¹Hudson Taylor celebrated a new joy in his servant life when this concept in a letter by John McCarthy moved him: "How then to have our faith increased? Only by thinking of all that Jesus is and all He is for us; His life, His death, His work, He Himself as revealed to us in the Word, to be the subject of our constant thoughts. Not a striving to have faith . . . but a looking off to the Faithful One seems all we need . . ." (Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* [Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.] 156).

relevant to Eph 6:10-17—evidently with a helmet (Ps 140:7). He is the *Word of God* (John 1:1; Rev 19:13) that the Spirit ministers. His mouth as the ideal Servant speaking His Word is "like a sharp sword" (Isa 49:2). Christ is the armor, and when Paul writes of this armor in a composite sweep, *personalizing* it, he says, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts" (Rom 13:14). Christians put on Christ when putting on the new man (person), who is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph 4:24), created to good works (2:10).

Can anything be more important than this in the life to which God has called Christians? Can anything be more urgent than showing forth *Christ*, their "full armor," to the glory of God?

THE PRAYER WITH THE ARMOR

Christ's being the essence in each spiritual aspect of the armor has a very close association with prayer. Prayer lays hold of *Him* in that Christians are to "be strong in the *Lord* . . ." (v. 10). The kind of prayer that thus draws on Him is prayer deriving its purpose, commitment, passion, values, and priority by the Word.¹² Paul brings out the cruciality of praying like this. Furthermore, other parts of the Word attest to it. Consider the following points that show this.

First, Paul underscores how vital prayer is by his own modeling. He does this in blessing and praise (1:2, 3, 6, 12, 14) and twice in being moved to intercession for others (1:15-23; 3:14-21). His prayer model reflects how the Word from God filled with blessings naturally returns in prayer to the God who blesses.

Second, in 6:17, 18 Paul's words about the armor connect without a break to the urgency of praying. Praying relates, being vital for every part of the armor. Although the armor passage does not mention prayer until 6:18-20, the rest of Scripture demonstrates prayer to be a saturating element in the armor, as reflected in Exhibit B1 (74; cf. also Exhibit B2, 75-76). That prayer should saturate each part of the armor—each aspect of life—is evident in Paul's fourfold use of the word "all" in v. 18. For example, Christians should be "praying at all times in the Spirit." The "all times" would include all the times they

¹²For a fuller discussion of such prayer, see my "Prayer Relating to Prophecy in Daniel 9," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 3/1 (Spring 1992):47-71. E.g., God has a plan, will fulfill it, and "allows men the privilege of laboring together with Him by yearning and praying for the same wonderful ends (Jer 29:12)" (*ibid.*, 71).

express truth, righteousness, and the rest of the positive qualities.

Third, Scripture often lets readers look in on believers praying that God will strengthen them or exulting over His power realized through prayer (Ps 138:3; Acts 4:29-31). God's warriors live by power when they "Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer"—as the song "Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus" urges.¹³

Fourth, many examples in the Word of God emphasize the close tie with victories in battle or in other threats to prayer. Jehoshaphat and his people prepared through offering praise, and God overwhelmingly gave them triumph against invading masses (2 Chronicles 20). Daniel and his friends prepared to face a threat of death through a night vigil in prayer (Dan 2:17-23). Jesus faced His trials, saturating His lifestyle with prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; Heb 5:7). Paul practiced in much prayer, both by night and by day (1 Thess 3:10). Scores of other such examples emerge in the case files Scripture supplies.

Fifth, as Lincoln notes, prayer "in the Spirit" (v. 18)—the Holy Spirit—links closely with the Word that the Spirit makes effective as a cutting edge, "the sword of the Spirit" (v. 17).¹⁴ The two, God's Word to men and men's scripturally oriented prayers to God, combine in numerous passages (John 15:7, 16; Acts 6:4; cf. Eph 1:18; Phil 1:9; 4:6-8; Col 1:9-10; 1 Tim 4:5; 1 John 5:14-15; Jude 3, 20). Paul in the Ephesian letter has prayers that interweave references to riches consistent with the Word he spells out in context. For example, he has burst out in blessing (1:3) and praise (1:6, 12, 14), and prayed that the readers might realize the practical benefit of the riches in the Word (1:15-23; 3:14-21). In chaps. 1—3, he "frames" everything he writes in prayer, as Lincoln expresses it.¹⁵ And in 6:18, prayer "in the Spirit" is, as Lincoln defines, "inspired, guided and made effective through the Spirit."¹⁶ This is the Spirit who has been active in sealing believers (1:13-14), is building them as a household of God (2:22), and has revealed truth to them (3:5). This Spirit of prayer strengthens them with power (3:16), preserves unity among them (4:3), and fills them (5:18). This Spirit whose sword of power and penetration is the Word (6:17), through whom prayer will be fulfilled (v. 18), obviously fosters prayer that Christians will prevail in God's will in every spiritual aspect of the

¹³*Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville, TN: Paragon Associates, 1976) 616.

¹⁴Lincoln, *Ephesians* 450-52.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 439.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 452.

armor (cf. Exhibit D, 77-78). This Spirit consistently assists the saints to pray *kat uen* (*kata theon*, "according to God," Rom 8:26-27), i.e., according to His will that His Word expresses.

Sixth, as noticed earlier, every facet that comprises the armor portrays what Christ manifests He is as He lives His will through the saints (cf. Exhibit A). Jesus, now in His people, wants to live out the grand values He so faithfully demonstrated while on earth (cf. Gal 2:20). He displayed in character and in action living portraits of practical truth, righteousness, and every spiritual aspect of the armor. He worshipfully bathed His every move in prayer to the Father. This is clear at strategic phases of His life (e.g., Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18).¹⁷ Let those who testify with Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21), show themselves to be "strong in the Lord," as Eph 6:10 says. Let them wage the warfare against Christ's enemies in Christ-like prayer. By being strong in the *Lord*, they can show they are in touch with *Him*, the Commander of the troops. They put on the armor *of God*, maintaining contact in prayer *with God*.

Seventh, the correlation prayer has with the armor is evident in other examples besides those from Jesus' life. Scripture flashes some of these before its readers in newsreel episodes. The Acts of the earliest Christian wearers of the armor records this example.¹⁸ They were waging this warfare before and during the time of the writing of Ephesians. Grundmann captures this when he writes,

Every great decision in the apostolic period, and in the whole life of early Christianity is sustained by persistent prayer. . . . This persistence . . . is determined . . . by looking to Jesus. . . . As the Son, He sought to do the Father's work in an ever new experience of unity with the will and intention and nature of the Father, to receive power for this purpose, and to realize that He was hidden in the Father's hand. . . .¹⁹

The book of Acts, then, illustrates the inseparability of prayer and the armor (e.g., 2:42; 3:1; 4:24-31; 6:4).

¹⁷Luke's Gospel, in sensitivity to Jesus's humanity, shows that Jesus prayed before several critical events: before the Spirit's descent (3:21-22), naming the twelve (6:12), the transfiguration (9:18), Peter's trial (22:31-32), and the arrest, trial and crucifixion (22:41-45).

¹⁸For a discussion of prayer in Acts, see Hermann Wang, "Prayer in the Acts" (Th.M. thesis, Talbot School of Theology, 1987). Wang sums up the essence in most of the references to prayer.

¹⁹W. Grundmann, "proskarterv," *TDNT*, 3:618-19.

An eighth factor leaves an impression in Ephesians. It recalls the way the power of God and prayer to God enclose the armor passage (6:10-13, 18-20). Paul's model prayers attest the close coordination between power and prayer. He *climaxes* his own prayer in 1:15-23 by pleading God's power for the believers. In 3:14-21, he *commences* his intercession with prayer for power. He seeks power from God, for "power belongs to God" (Ps 62:11). It is good always to remember in warfare that the Lord is the one by whom "I am saved from my enemies" (Ps 18:3). He is the God who "trains my hands for the battle" (Ps 18:34). Such power from the God of power comes through prayer to Him. So Markus Barth captures the conspicuous point of the matter: "Nothing less," he says, "is suggested than that the life and strife of the saints be one great prayer to God. . . ." ²⁰

Even a ninth factor bids for attention. Paul requested his readers to pray for power in his preaching—power released through forthright boldness (6:19-20). And if power for Paul emanated from prayer, then power for other believers to live successfully must also trace its efficacy to prayer—prayer to God. The closet is crucial to the combat.

In the tenth place, each part of the armor interpenetrates with the whole and synchronizes with all the other spiritual aspects. For example, combatants for Christ live "truth" only with an accompanying commitment to live by "righteousness." Nearby in 5:9, truth and righteousness join *together* as parts in the composite "fruit of light." Goodness does also. This is consistent with the exemplary Messiah who is girded with truth and righteousness (Isa 11:4). Likewise, Christians do not fulfill their soldiery with truth and righteousness apart from the "preparation" of the gospel of peace. And they do not "fight the good fight of faith" (cf. 1 Tim 6:12) without wielding the shield of faith. Nor can any of these ethical qualities work in battle apart from the benefit that God gives in His "salvation," a veritable "helmet." Nor do believers war a good warfare detached from the Word of God which is the input in truth and righteousness and furnishes the "preparation" that the gospel assures. Likewise, each spiritual aspect that comprises the armor interrelates with the Spirit. He does His work in men, stirring the very breath and content of real prayer (cf. Exhibit D).

A question might arise as to why the writer (in 6:10-17) holds in reserve any mention of praying until v. 18? A natural answer is that

²⁰Barth, *Ephesians* 778.

he wanted first to allow descriptions of "the whole armor" (v. 11) to be put before the soldiers as a composite unity. He does not want to interrupt his listing. Once he gets through with all six aspects of armor, however, he bears down hard on prayer, because prayer is to permeate "the whole armor," every facet of it.

An eleventh point is relevant. Consider how believers should intercede for "all the saints" (v. 18). For them, appropriate prayer will be involved with whatever details are strategic to the saints for whom they pray. Among the items in such an involvement will inevitably be prayer that they live according to spiritual values denoted by the armor, matters like truth, righteousness, readiness of the gospel, faith, realities of salvation, and the Word of God. Relevant prayer should also focus on spiritual aspects in wielding the Spirit's sword, through which believers can manifest sensitivity to the other saints' needs. This relates to whatever helps them to stand and even drive back the enemies in verse 12 by God's power.

Prayer has a strategic role, then, in effectiveness for the conflict that believers face.

And what of ourselves? Do we fancy that we somehow will win in the battle where these early Christians could not, though we belittle prayer among our priorities? Do we possess power gained through some driving energy, polished skills, or trusted methods? Are we capable in ourselves where people of prayer before us have sensed an urgent need to throw themselves on God? How much more candid could Paul be than in Eph 6:10-20? We make fools of ourselves, setting ourselves up for mediocrity, emptiness, and disaster, if we do not insist to be much in prayer whatever the cost.

The prayer to which Paul summons Christians is marked in v. 18 by the repeated "all." What he is calling for is an "all out" commitment to prayer. "All" is a word that should arouse soldiers to a state of urgency.

Prayer is for all situations ("in every prayer"). Prayer can take various forms, such as praise, blessing, thanks, confession, petition, intercession, and affirmation, to name a few. In the last of these, Christians affirm something like "I love Thee, O Lord, my strength" (Ps 18:1).

Prayer is for all seasons ("at all times"). Scripture illustrates prayer at every conceivable time.²¹ Spurgeon saw praying seven times

²¹E.g., morning, noon, and night (Ps 55:17), seven times a day (Ps 119:164), midnight (Ps 119:62), before dawn (Ps 119:147), day and night (Ps 22:1-5; Neh 1:6; 1 Thess 3:10), three

a day in Ps 119:164 as "at every touch and turn."²² Seven denotes a completeness in resorting to prayer, as habitual prayer recurs. Prayer at all times would permeate every part of the armor as a Christian lives in truth and righteousness during these times.

Prayer is all in the Spirit. Where proper, prayer is in the Spirit's power (v. 10), faithful to the Word which is His sword (v. 17; cf. John 15:7). Prayer in the right pattern draws from the Word its motives, which the Spirit produces in the believer. It gains its guidance from the Spirit and in every way can be touched with commitment to the Spirit's purposes.

Prayer is in all steadfastness. Paul uses two words to express this. One is translated as "being on the alert" (from *gryponv*, *agrypne*). It refers to keeping awake, maintaining a watchful sensitivity. Alertness is essential in prayer so as to grasp what to pray in timely effectiveness and not be "asleep at the switch." The person praying is to keep this vigil "with all perseverance" (from *proskarthsiw*, *proskartersis*). This is a quality of steadfast endurance, literally a "holding fast to." Early American cowboys, who took drastic measures to keep alert and hold fast to their work while guarding cattle at night exemplify this idea. They would rub tobacco juice in their eyes to make them smart, keep them open, and help the riders stay at their vigil even when weary. They did this in the interests of their boss and for the safety of the animals. Will we remain constantly steadfast in prayer for the high interests of our Lord and for the benefit of people, who are much more important than cattle?

Prayer is for all the saints. Christians in various collective ways can pray for many saints and conceivably, all-told, for everyone of them. Paul's letter has *all* saints in the church in view as Christ's building (Eph 2:11-21), body (3:1-13) and bride (5:29, 30). No *one* believer can necessarily know all the saints, certainly not all the needs arising at all times, even in a local fellowship. Paul probably intended a corporate coverage as all believers become involved. And each individual can pray sensitively about all the Christians he can be responsibly aware of and mention in a disciplined use of opportunities.

Paul also emphasizes his own sense of urgency for others' prayer (vv. 19-20). Every pastor ought to have many praying "on my

weeks (Dan 10:2-3), ten days (Acts 1:3, 13; 2:1).

²²C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 6 vols. (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1950) 5:429.

[i.e., his] behalf." Prayer for Paul is for him to have boldness with clarity in proclaiming the greatest message, the gospel.²³ It is crucial for any who speak God's Word to have prayer for God's help, whether they speak to many or to one. The Word going forth with God's power can pierce as "the sword of the Spirit" (v. 17; cf. Heb 4:12).

Such is the vital place of prayer in Christian life and ministry. God has made His moves to steer us to this priority. He could say as one says in the game of checkers when he has made his own move: "It's *your* move." And even when we make our move in prayer, we are taught by God's Word that *He* can be making *His* move again, working in us. Let us make the right move. We can do it the way God has made clear through Paul in Ephesians.

²³Paul seeks prayer not only for boldness, but for clarity (Col 4:2-4), rapid spread of the gospel and its being glorified (2 Thess 3:1), and protection from evil men (2 Thess 3:2).

Sword Word (*rhma*) Gospel, whole message Jesus or His servants speak, or a relevant 47; 6:63, 68; 12:47, 48; 17:8; Acts 5:20 n 10:8, 17 (gospel or whole word as e word that God uses in s of His church); 1 Pet 1:25; 1 Thess rd cited by Paul)

Exhibit B1: Aspects of the Armor Related to Prayer

| <i>Key Words in Warfare</i> | <i>Ephesians 6</i> | <i>Biblical Relation to Prayer</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Power | v. 10 | Ps 119:28b; 138:3; Acts 4:24-31 |
| Deliverance from evil | vv. 11, 13, 16, 17 | Ps 119:41; Matt 6:13; Rom 10:13 |
| Truth | v. 14 | Pss 25:5; 69:13; 119:43; John 17:17 |
| Righteousness | v. 15 | Pss 5:8; 71:2; Phil 1:11 |
| Gospel | v. 16 | Rom 10:1; Col 4:2-4 |
| Witness | vv. 19-20 | Acts 4:24-31; Col 4:2-4 |
| Peace | v. 15 | Ps 4:6-8; Phil 4:6, 7; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16 |
| Faith; Victory | v. 16 | Pss 55:23; 119:42; 143:8; James 5:15; 1 John 5:4-5 |
| Word of God | v. 17 | Pss 119:17-18, 26, 32, 33-40 |
| Spirit of God | vv. 17-18 | Eph 6:18; Jude 20 |

Exhibit B2: Spiritual Aspects in Ephesians Related to Prayer
(a partial list of prayers by believers or others on their behalf)

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1:1; 5:17; 6:6 | will of God | cf. Ps 143:8, 10; Col 1:9; 1 Thess 3:11; Phlm 22 |
| 1:2 | grace | Acts 4:29-31; 2 Thess 3:18 |
| 1:4; 5:2, 25, 33 | love | Eph 3:17-19; Phil 1:9; 1 Thess 3:12 |
| 1:6 | praise | A part of prayer (e.g., Psalms 145—150) |
| 1:7 | forgiveness | Psalms 51 |
| 1:8; 5:15 | wisdom, insight | Eph 1:17-18 |
| 1:13 | salvation | Rom 10:13; Ps 143:9 |
| 1:16; 5:20 | thanks | A part of prayer (Col 1:12) |
| 1:16 | mention of saints in | In Paul's prayer |
| 1:18 | hope | In Paul's prayer |
| 1:19; 6:10 | power | Eph 3:16; Col 1:11; Ps 138:3 |
| 2:10 | good works | John 15:7-8; Phil 1:11; 2 Thess 2:17 |
| 3:7 | one's spiritual gift | Eph 6:19-20 |
| 3:9 | mystery (gospel) | Eph. 6:19-20; Col 4:3 |
| 3:12 | boldness | Heb 4:16; Eph 6:19-20 |
| 3:17 | faith | 1 Thess 3:10 |
| 3:19 | fullness | Eph 3:19 |
| 3:21 | glory | Eph 3:21 |
| 4:1; 5:15, etc. | walk | Col 1:10 |
| 4:2 | patience | Col 1:11 |
| 4:24 | holiness | 1 Thess 3:13 |
| 4:24; 6:15 | righteousness | Ps 5:8 |
| 4:25; 6:14 | truth | Ps 25:5 |
| 4:27 | giving Satan no opening | Matt 6:13 |
| 4:29; 5:4 | wholesome speech | Phil 1:9; Col 1:10 |
| 5:9 | fruit | John 15:8; Phil 1:11 |

(Exhibit B2 continued on next page)

| | | |
|---------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 5:10 | learning what pleases the Lord | Col 1:10 |
| 5:18 | filling | Eph 3:19; Phil 1:11 |
| 5:19 | joy | Col 1:11 |
| 6:12 | victory vs. satanic hosts | Luke 22:31, 32; John 17:15 |
| 6:14-15 | truth, righteous- e (cf. earlier) | |
| 6:17 | Word of God | John 15:7 |
| 6:18 | steadfastness | 2 Thess 3:5 |

Exhibit C: Spiritual Essentials in John 13—17 and Eph 6:10-20

| <i>Key Words</i> | <i>John 13—17</i> | <i>Eph 6:10-20</i> |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Power from God | 15:4-5, ability | v. 10 |
| Prayer related to the Word | 15:1, 16 | vv. 18-20 |
| Presence of evil one | 13:2; 17:15 | vv. 11, 13, 16; cf. 2:2; |
| Protection from evil one | 17:15 | vv. 10-17, esp. 11-13, |
| Truth | 14:6, 17; 16:26, etc. | v. 14 |
| Righteousness | cf. 17:15, 19 | v. 15 |
| Peace | 14:27; 16:33 | v. 15 |
| Faith | 14:1, 10-12; 16:9, 27, 30 | v. 16 |
| Salvation | 14:6; 17:3 | v. 17 |
| Word of God | 14:21; 15:3, 7 | v. 17 |
| Spirit of God | 14:26; 15:26; 16:9-11, | vv. 17-18 |

Exhibit D: Prayer in the Spirit

(how prayer in the Spirit [6:18] relates to spiritual aspects of the armor and the entirety of 6:10-17)

| <i>Spiritual Area</i> | <i>Spirit's Part</i> | <i>Ephesians 6 Verse Here</i> | <i>Other Scriptures</i> |
|---|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Power | "by My Spirit" | 6:10-11, 13 | Zech 4:6; 1 Cor 2:4; Eph 3:16-17 |
| Warfare (weaponry) | Spirit | 6:11-17 | Matt 4:1-11; |
| Truth ("fruit of light" in Eph 5:9 is "fruit of the Spirit" in Gal 5:22-23 and "armor of light" in Rom 13:12) | Spirit of truth | 6:14; 5:9 | John 14:17, 26; 16:13; Eph 5:9; 1 John 4:6 |
| Righteousness | Spirit convicts of righteousness | 6:14; 5:9 | John 16:8-11 |
| Peace | Fruit of the Spirit | 6:15 | Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22; cf. John 7:37-39 |
| Faith | Strengthened through the Spirit | 6:16; 3:16-17 | 1 Cor 12:3; Acts 6:5; 11:24 |
| Salvation | rebirth is by the Spirit | 6:17 | 2 Cor 3:6, the Spirit quickens; John 3:3-7; 6:63 |
| | sealing is by the Spirit or the Father | 1:13-14; 4:30 | 2 Cor 1:20; cf. 5:5 |

(Exhibit D continued on next page)

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------|---|
| Word of God, Sword of the Spirit | This word came via human channels, "carried along by the Holy Spirit" | 6:17 | 2 Pet 1:21 |
| | He is the Spirit of truth, righteousness, etc. | 6:14 | cf. above |
| | He uses the Word when He leads into testing | | Matt 4:1-11; |
| | He reveals God's truths to men | 3:5 | 1 Cor 2:10-11 |
| | He convicts concerning sin, judgment, etc. | | John 16:8-11 |
| Prayer in the Spirit | It is in His sphere, purpose, power, etc. | 6:18 | Rom 8:26-27; Jude 20 |
| Preaching effectively | He gives utterance | 6:19-20 | Luke 4:18; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:10; Rom 15:19 1 Cor 2:1-5; 12:8; 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Pet 4:10-11 |