

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Strength for the Battle

Ephesians 6:19-24

Intro: In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul has explained in glorious detail what the believer was before they met Christ, who they are now in Christ and thus, what their conduct should be because of their relationship with Christ. As children of God and followers of Christ, believers are to walk in unity, in purity, in love, in light and in wisdom because their Father and their Lord and Savior are all of these things. Nowhere in this letter or in any of his other Epistles, does Paul offer this new lifestyle up as an option or a choice; that's because it is neither of these things. It's just the natural result of the supernatural new life that's been breathed into the believer by the Holy Spirit. What Paul is saying is: since this is who you now are then this is how you are to live. This doesn't mean that believers won't often fail at this, because we do, but it means that a true believer will never be truly satisfied with a life that's below this standard. If you find yourself comfortable living like the world, it's likely because you're still part of the world.

Paul then concludes his wonderful theological treatise by warning his readers of the reality of the spiritual warfare that they face and informing them of the spiritual armor that has been provided to them for the fight. Paul then lists each piece of armor; a literal, physical piece of military equipment that parallels a spiritual reality or attribute in the Christian's life. This armor is not something the believer must work to obtain, as though we will "level up" to it by our own efforts. No, this armor is ours for the using at the moment we accept Christ as our Savior. And, even though each piece of armor coincides with a piece of contemporary Roman armor, we saw that that the imagery Paul uses here comes straight out of the OT. It's there in the pages of scripture that the Messiah is seen using this same armor, His own armor, to defend His people and defeat His enemies. This is His armor that He makes available to us.

Last time, we looked at the spiritual energy that enables the Christian soldier to not only wear the armor correctly but also to wield the sword effectively. That energy, that secret resource from which we draw both strength and ability is prayer. Paul has lots to say about prayer in 18. He says we should pray always (on all occasions): we should be in constant

communication with the Lord. We should pray using all forms of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication and intercession. We should pray in the Spirit because it's only by the Spirit's power and direction that we can pray in the will of God. We should pray with our spiritual eyes open; being watchful, staying on the alert. We should pray with all perseverance (keep on praying) and we should consistently pray for all the saints. Paul means this in a general sense; we can't know every believer but we can wage spiritual warfare on behalf of others through prayer. The Lord's Prayer begins with Our Father not My Father. We pray as part of a great family that talks to God and we should pray for the other members of the family.

19 – Now, while we are to pray for all saints generally, it's also clear that, whenever possible, our prayers should be specific. Paul shows this by bringing himself in as an example. After bringing up the idea that spiritual warfare can be waged on behalf of others, Paul asks his readers to pray for him. When Paul introduces himself as an example of one for whom the Ephesians could pray, he seems to be saying, "Above all, don't forget to pray for ministers of the gospel." Paul was a great man, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Yet he sincerely believed his work would be ineffective unless Christians prayed for him.

Of course, it's not surprising that Paul asked for prayer for himself; what is surprising is what he asked them to pray for! Ephesians is known as a prison epistle. Paul wrote this letter from captivity, possibly in Jerusalem, Caesarea or most likely, Rome. But, what is striking is that in the midst of this unfortunate dilemma, Paul doesn't request prayer for the improvement of his situation. He doesn't plead for God's favor being shown in an early release or even more comfortable accommodations. No, he simply asks them to pray that he might be given words. Paul seems to have been more eloquent with words than perhaps any other writer in the Bible (**1 Cor 13**). He was a master of words. Yet he knew he needed God's help and blessing that he might choose words that would be effective in reaching others. He asked them to pray for his ongoing proclamation of the gospel. Paul's desire was that God would give him the wisdom to know what to say in whatever circumstance he finds himself in. This should be our desire as well.

Paul doesn't just desire to have the right words to say but he wants to be able to speak those words boldly. The word carries the connotation of

“fearlessly.” Fearlessly? That Paul might be fearless? This seems strange to us, because **Acts** reveals Paul as eminently fearless—before rioting mobs (at Ephesus), before kings (Agrippa, Felix and Nero), in natural disasters (ship destroyed by storm/ snake bit), in prison facing death (in Rome). We see him confronting demon possessed people, pagan mobs trying to worship him, who then nearly beat him to death. He confronts the Philippian magistrates that had him unlawfully beaten and imprisoned. He even had the nerve to stand up in front of an angry mob of his own countrymen who had just tried to kill him and preached the gospel to them.

But we don’t see people’s hearts. Just because people seem strong and self-composed on the outside doesn’t mean that they’re not trembling within. They still need our prayers. At one point Paul said he was with the Corinthians “in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling” (**1 Cor 2:3**). Think of the most fearless person you know, one who presents the gospel of Christ without hesitation in the most difficult circumstances and then pray that they might remain fearless. In the same way, pray that the holy might remain holy, the passionate might remain passionate; the great prayer warriors might remain faithful in prayer.

Finally, while Paul hopes to know what to say in every situation, he already clearly knows the goal of his speech: to make known the mystery of the gospel. Paul has already articulated this mystery in his letter, the most instructive reference being found in **3:6**. The mystery Paul proclaims is inextricably linked to the gospel. It’s the message of inclusion of all people in Christ, making them co-heirs, incorporated into the same body and partners in the promise of God. If the mystery of Christ is the inclusion of the gentiles into the promises to Abraham then the gospel is the means by which they come to Christ. The phrase mystery of the gospel appears to be shorthand for this concept.

20 – Paul describes himself as an ambassador in chains, clearly seeing himself as an envoy or representative of the gospel. In the Roman Empire, an ambassador had a responsibility to travel to a specific destination in order to convey the interest of their sender. Paul definitely considered himself to be Christ’s representative through whom God speaks (**II Cor 5:20**). Yet here, his ambassadorship is to the gospel, or more specifically, the mystery of the gospel. But there’s no disparity here as Paul’s proclamation of the gospel is an expression of his service for Christ.

The reference to his chains is the 2nd clue that reveals his imprisoned status (3:1). The significance of this particular mention here is that it comes immediately after Paul's prayer request that he might be bold enough to speak about the mystery of the gospel as he should. So, if we remember our study in the Book of Acts, we should recall that it was exactly because of Paul's proclamation of the mystery of the gospel that he was arrested and imprisoned in the first place (Acts 22:23). When Paul made his last appeal for the gospel before his angry countrymen on the courts of the temple, they listened intently to his speech up until he uttered one particular word – Gentiles. When he spoke that word – the crowd went wild, and not in a good way! And yet now, knowing good and well that this is what got him arrested, Paul wants to be sure to proclaim the gospel boldly. Crazy? No, that's just what an ambassador does. His proclamation of the gospel is his entire reason and purpose for being an apostle.

21-22 – Paul doesn't sign off this letter by offering greetings to anyone by name in the Ephesian congregation. This is probably because this letter was meant to be circulated among several churches located in the province. But, Paul didn't need to write and personal greetings because he was send Tychicus to offer those greeting personally. This man became a traveling companion of Paul's on his 3rd missionary journey. After nearly 3 years in Ephesus, Paul spent several months traveling through Greece and Macedonia before sailing to Jerusalem and Tychicus is named as one of his companions during this part of the journey (Acts 20:4). He's said to be from Asia so it's highly likely that Tychicus was originally from Ephesus and came to know Paul during his ministry there. It follows that if he knew Paul's readers personally; he'd know their great concern for Paul and would share his news with them faithfully.

Of course, Paul didn't just comfort the Ephesians with an update of the goings-on of his life. The letter he wrote was also meant to encourage them greatly and I'm sure it did. Now, let's just imagine that Tychicus was present when Paul was writing his letter. Is it possible, as Paul was formulating his thoughts and putting them down on parchment that Tychicus might have a question or 2 about the subject matter? Maybe he asked for cross references to the OT or clarification on certain points of theology or doctrine. You know Tychicus was thinking about what he was going to say when the Ephesian Christians started asking him to clarify certain portions of the letter. Imagine being able to pick Paul's brain about his own writing in real

time! Over the last 2K years, there've been countless pastors and Bible teachers who have expounded this epistle to the Ephesians but Tychicus would have been the first expositor and probably the best because he got it straight from the horse's mouth!

23 – As he closes, Paul offers peace to his brothers and sisters in Ephesus and love with faith from both the Father and Jesus Christ. These are not empty platitudes, something sweet to end the letter with. No, Paul wished peace to his readers at the beginning of his letter (1:2) and the theme resonates throughout. Christ is referred to as our peace in 2:14, as He reconciled Jews and gentiles, making both groups into one by removing the dividing wall of hostility. He created in Himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace (2:15). Christ came and declared the good news of peace to those who were afar off and to those who were near (2:17). Paul exhorts his readers to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (4:3).

From these references it should be clear that peace is personified in Jesus Christ as He...is our peace (2:14) and we are reconciled with each other just as we are reconciled to the Father – in Him! Thus, Paul's wish of peace is no mere platitude, nor is it a hollow concept. It's well known that the Hebrew notion of shalom expresses more than just the end of hostilities; it actually points to a positive and healthy flourishing within relationships. Peace is at the heart of what Christ has achieved for His people and as such, it must now reign within their relationships with one another.

Love also permeates this letter and accurately describes God's posture towards us (2:4) and Christ's (3:19). It should also mark the believer's posture towards one another (1:15; 3:17; 4:15-16). Just like peace, love isn't a hollow concept as it is demonstrated and exemplified by the self-giving and sacrificial love of Christ (5:2b). This is the kind of love we are to show to one another as we bear with one another in love (4:2), speak the truth in love (4:15), support the building of the body of Christ in love (4:16b) and walk in love (5:2a).

It's interesting that Paul qualifies this love with faith. Faith also appears throughout the letter, of course; but 1:15 and 3:17 are especially instructive since these are the other 2 places where faith and love are connected. In both places we see that faith describes the connection between believers and Christ, while love describes the posture of believers towards each other.

We can conclude from this that love with faith as mentioned in 6:23 refers to a kind of love that is inspired by having a relationship with Christ. It is a love that flows from Christ dwelling in our hearts. This love is not simply learned by following Jesus' example (5:2): it's Jesus-powered love. In fact, the rest of v23 reminds us that both peace and love with faith are gifts from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 – Finally, Paul offers grace to his readers. Grace is often found in Paul's greetings but it also features prominently throughout this letter. Just as peace and love have vertical and horizontal aspects so also grace comes from God and is to be shared with others. Believers are saved by grace (2:5, 8). Paul was made an apostle to the gentiles by God's grace (3:1, 7-8), just as grace is given to all through different gifts (4:7). Believers ought to speak to others in such a way that it gives grace to their hearers (4:29) and they are to forgive (or show grace to) one another as God has shown grace to them (4:32). When we include grace alongside the peace and love of v23 we see that Paul's final greeting is theologically rich as these 3 terms summarize some of the letter's most important themes. Each one comes from God and reveals His character, just as each one is to shape the believer's character and their interactions with one another.

One last observation: Paul qualifies his offer of grace to those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. This is both logical and rational. The meaning of sincerity is different than its normal use. Normally it would imply honesty or a lack of deceit but here, the word means incorruptibility or immortality. It literally refers to an undying love but not an undying love for Christ but rather a love for Christ that exists in the sphere of incorruptibility or immortality. The word is not referring to the quality of the believer's love but the state or situation that believers are in. Believers have been made alive with Christ, are seated with Him in the heavenlies and will be with Him forever in the coming ages (2:5-7). Everyone who has been raised and seated with Christ loves Him as they exist in the state of immortality.

Our life as it currently exists in time and space, in imperfection and expectation, is still embedded in God's eternity. Our love for the Lord demonstrates our awareness of our salvation and our gratitude for the good life given to us. Yes, it is an undying love but only because those who love Jesus Christ will never die. Thus, grace is not dependent upon the quality of our love, but is the gift of God.

Do we need peace of mind to live as God wants us to live in this ungodly world? Yes, we do and the only way to get it is by asking God for it. Do we need love? Yes, for our Savior and for our brothers and sisters. Do we need fuller measures of the grace of God? Yes, those too. The way to have them is by asking God for them. Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). James wrote, “You do not have, because you do not ask” (4:2).

How can we adequately urge the people of God to pray? Should we urge them by the need? Certainly, there is great need all around. Can we urge them by prayer’s privilege? Yes, it’s a privilege to be able to bring our needs before God. But the best argument of all for us today is prayer’s results. We’re oriented to achievement in our time. Let us remember that prayer will give victory as we go about our tasks and try to live for Jesus.

Will the devil attack? Yes, you can be sure he will—he or one of his minions, or maybe the attack will come through evil influences, false teachings, or immoral social structures. But what of it? There’s an old saying that goes, “The devil trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees.” Is that true? You can be sure that it is because the praying Christian is calling upon the inexhaustible and irresistible power of God. 😊