

Prayer 7 — Prayer and War

Sermon File Type	Sermon
Passages	Ephesians 6:18
Sermon Series	Prayer
Topics	War; Prayer; Spiritual Warfare
Tags	
Date	March 15, 2020

Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to Ephesians 6]

Tension:

“Life is war. That’s not all it is. But it is always that.”¹

And I’ve found something else to be true as well.

In this war, there is no regard for one’s character or for one’s devotion and compassion. “There is always danger, and the better you live the more dangerous it gets.”²

If you aren’t a threat to the strongholds and strategies of Satan, then you aren’t a target...

Especially if you don’t even realize there is a cosmic war going on, right now, a war between light and darkness, the kingdom of God versus the forces of Satan.

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 45.

² Dr. Sandy F. Ray quoted in “Danger in the Jungle” by Kings Kaleidoscope, *The Beauty Between*, 2017, independent release.

Are you living with a war-time mentality?

Do you wake up realizing that you're already behind enemy lines?

For half of my Christian life I wasn't convinced; I grew up in a kind of Christian environment that failed to teach on spiritual warfare, that failed to at least make me aware... so I wasn't convinced.

When I got to college I started hearing stories from other believers whose character I trusted about their interactions with demonic spirits.

I at first rejected it as nonsense saying that stuff doesn't happen... but it eventually forced me to wrestle with Spiritual Warfare and the reality of it.

I mean, so far, at that point in my life, my only experience with anything like that was watching *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*... which wasn't a good idea, I do not commend that to you.

I finally got to this place where I believed Satan was a real being commanding real forces in the supernatural seeking to devour my life and thwart God's plans, and in getting to that place, I joined a small percentage of Christians that do.

A study conducted by the Barna Group in 2009 found that only 26% of people who call themselves Christians believe Satan is a living being, not just a symbol of evil.³

26%????

³ Barna Group, "Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist" (2009), available online at <https://www.barna.com/research/most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exist/> [accessed March 12, 2020].

I think that statistic explains why most of our prayer lives can suffer so easily.

Today, I don't have time to argue if there is spiritual warfare or the legitimacy of Satan and demons... the biblical narrative already assumes all of this to be the present reality until Christ returns and conquers him.

But today I want to show you what God says about how prayer plays a massive part in spiritual war.

Exposition:

Let's take a look at Ephesians 6, starting in v. 10.

Eph. 6:10-20 — "10 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 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 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.*"⁴**

You may be pretty familiar with this passage, but there is still a lot to digest here, and I can't cover it all today.

Paul commands us twice to put on the whole armor of God... why? Why should we get dressed for war?

v. 11 says we dress for war in God's armor so that we can stand against Satan's schemes and v. 13 says we do it to withstand in the evil day.

But why do we need to stand? What would even make us fall?

That's what Paul explains in v. 12.

We need to get dressed for war because there is a war going on in the supernatural, not in the natural.

v. 12 — "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood (the war isn't a physical one), 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."

Why suit up? Because we're in a supernatural war.

C. S. Lewis said, "There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan."⁵

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 6:10–20.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*.

When you hear wrestle, don't picture two men in leotards rolling around on a comfortable mat in a circle with a referee.

This kind of wrestle means hand-to-hand combat in a war zone... your life is on the line and you're engaged a fight to the death with unseen forces.

Rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, spiritual forces of evil... these are different strata and rankings of demons in the supernatural empire in which they operate.⁶

We are waring against an incredibly evil and potent enemy.

Paul doesn't really take time to clarify exactly what all this means, but he tells us what to do in response to it, and in that he also tells us who we are.

He commands that we all suit up in the armor of God... which means what about us?

To be a Christian is to be a warrior... The occupation of a Christin is war.

We war against an enemy that lurks in the world today like a lion, seeking someone to devour, whose aim is to kill, steal, and destroy.

We war against an enemy within us called sin, the old self, that we can't seem to get away from, who seeks to take back the throne of our lives.

Spurgeon said that if our enemies were far away, we could rain down artillery on them from a safe distance which means a pretty easy life for

⁶ John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1986), 340.

us... but no, they are here! At our doors, within us, nearer than our hands and feet.⁷

Think about it... who talks to you the most? You do!

You and I are in an endless conversation with ourselves... no one talks to you more than you do.

You can be speaking to yourself words of life, the goodness of God, the gospel... or you can be speaking words of loneliness, poverty, and inability, doubt and fear... even though you know better.⁸

There is an enemy in the world and an enemy in you, both seeking to destroy you... and in this war you can count on it that you will be forced to wage war in such close quarters as your heart and your mind... that's why we don't have in the list of armor "the spear of justice" or "the bow and arrow of sanctification"... but the sword of the Spirit... a close quarters weapon.⁹

This is hand to hand combat in an unseen war, and as Paul warns in 1 Cor. 10, If anyone thinks he can stand in this war, be careful or else you'll fall.¹⁰

We must stand in this war!

If you're in hand-to-hand combat, what's the best position for you to be in?
On your back?

Down on your knees crawling like a dog?

⁷ Charles Spurgeon, "The Sword of the Spirit," in *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 15:201.

⁸ Paraphrased from Paul David Tripps February 4th devotional in *New Morning Mercies*.

⁹ Paraphrased from Charles Spurgeon, "The Sword of the Spirit," 201.

¹⁰ Paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 10:12

No... standing... every part of you is ready for the attack.

But this isn't talking about the war that is waged against us, this is about the war that we wage against the darkness.

That's why Paul speaks of both withstanding as well as standing.

We aren't to merely defend, but to attack. It isn't enough that we are not conquered... we have to conquer; it's why we have both defensive and offensive equipment given to us in our armor.¹¹

We must wage war to not be conquered and to conquer.

We must slay this enemy, or our enemy will slay us.

There isn't any room for a peace treatise... friendship with the world is enmity with God.

So do you want to be able to stand in this war?

Do you want to be able to stand against everything that Satan wants to accomplish in your life, with all of his backhanded schemes and strategies?

Do you want to be able to stand against the enemy within you that is your old sinful self that seeks to retake the throne of your life?

Then suit up! I feel like Captain America! "This is the fight of our lives!"

Suit up!!! Look at what we have for us in the armory.

v. 14-17 — "Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for

¹¹ Paraphrased from Charles Spurgeon, "The Sword of the Spirit," 195.

your feet, having put on 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...

Every vital organ is covered and defended and we have a double-edged sword for attack, all of which Christ won for us permanently and must be personally appropriated daily.

We are equipped for this war, entrusted with weapons that have divine power to demolish enemy bunkers and strongholds.¹²

But then Paul keeps going in v. 18.

We must stand, therefore we suit up with all of this...

v. 18 — “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.”

We get all this armor from the armory, and then he says, “pray at all times, with all prayer and prayer” basically.

Don’t make a mistake here and liken prayer to equipment we have in the armory along with truth, righteousness, and the rest.

Paul doesn’t liken prayer to something like a helmet, sword or breastplate.

Prayer is so much more than that... prayer isn’t just another godly weapon.

Prayer is the act of war.

Prayer is getting ready for the war.

¹² 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Prayer is getting strong for the war.

Prayer is getting sensitive enough so that we can really discern what is really going on around us in the war.

Prayer is the way God's truth is worked into our hearts to create new war-like instincts, reflexes, and dispositions.¹³

Prayer is calling down fire support against a spiritual enemy who stands against you or your family or your church.

Prayer is requesting for headquarters to send a bunker-busting missile into a stronghold of sin in your own life.

Prayer is the act of war.

I love the way John MacArthur puts it: "Prayer is the very spiritual air that the soldier of Christ breathes. It is the all-pervasive strategy in which warfare is fought."¹⁴

Remember John Piper's book that I mentioned last week called *Let the Nations Be Glad* about missions, and how all of chapter two is about prayer and mission?

He said this about prayer: "Prayer is a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief... so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world. Prayer gives us the significance of frontline forces and gives God the glory of a limitless provider."¹⁵

¹³ Paraphrased from Tim Keller, *Prayer; Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 131-132.

¹⁴ John MacArthur, "Ephesians," *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 377.

¹⁵ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 45.

Brothers and sisters, “until we know that life is war, we cannot know what prayer is for.”¹⁶

Do you know what millions of Christians have done?

“We have stopped believing that we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance. No strategic planning. Just easy peace and prosperity. And what did we do with the walkie-talkie? We tried to rig it up as an intercom in our houses and work places and cars—not to call in firepower for conflict with a mortal enemy but to ask for more comforts in the den.”¹⁷

Prayer is not a domestic intercom to call in God like he’s a butler to bring us another pillow and hot tea, so no wonder prayer malfunctions when we try to use it that way according to James 4.

Prayer works best when we use it for what it was designed for: to get us in touch with God our Commander and Chief who is in Command Central ready to strategically use us to make war and send divine support.

So pray!!! Look at the four alls Paul gives us concerning prayer.

Pray with all kinds of prayer! Public or private, with loud cries or soft whispers, planned or spontaneous, sitting, standing, kneeling, laying down, walking, at home or at church, working or traveling, with your hands folded or raised, eyes opened or closed, offering praise and adoration, thanksgiving, or confession, making petition with specificity or in general.

Pray at all times! Walk in continual God-consciousness, where everything we see and experience becomes a kind of prayer.

¹⁶ Ibid., 49.

¹⁷ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 45.

Pray with all perseverance! Earnestly, courageously, and persistently bring everything in your life before God!

Pray for all the saints! Brothers and sisters, the greatest thing we can do for one another is pray for each other.

Application/Challenge:

This is my call to war: PRAY! Pray! Pray!

When the urge to lie or lust rises, pray!

When your family member is drowning in their own sin, pray!

When you're totally lost and feeling alone, pray!

When you need to figure out what all is going on in your life and get some direction, pray!

When you have the sense that you can't make it through the darkest night of your life, pray!

When Satan seems to have surrounded you and your life is on the verge of ruin, pray!

Pray in the Spirit! Pray with alertness! Pray all kinds of ways! Pray all the time!

When Jesus called you out and saved you, he didn't call you to a life of ease and comfort!

Following Jesus will always lead into severe conflict with evil.

It will mean war!

Evil will surround us and attack us and threaten to destroy our faith.

Especially when you really go hard after Jesus; especially when you live in such a way that demons know your name like they knew the names of Paul and Apollos.

I want us to live our lives in such a way that when we die all of hell will rejoice that we've been taken out of the war.

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

So how hard you going to live?

How committed to God's mission will you be?

If you want your life to be comfortable, then don't fight to do anything of eternal significance.

The harder you live, the more dangerous it gets.

If you want to see God's kingdom advance and the forces of darkness retreat, if you want to see strongholds destroyed and chains broken, then suit up and go to war, praying again and again and again and again.

This is a call to war: pray.

[Invite to pray over strongholds of lust, envy, anger, bitterness, pride, doubt, fear...]