

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/2/92
Ephesians 6:18 "Last Minute Battle Instructions"

Intro: Have you ever noticed the ritual most basketball teams go through to prepare for a game. First, they dress in the locker room, making sure they have the right equipment, ankles taped, shoes tied, uniforms tucked properly. Then they come out on to the floor. They run, stretch, jump, go through some drills, pat each other on the back. And with about 5 minutes before game time, they go back into the locker room. Why? The coach gives his team some vital last minute instructions, short and sweet.

That's the scene I see when I read the last few verses of Ephesians. There's one key difference--In Ephesians it's not a game, but a war. Paul is not a coach, but a General. And the Ephesians are not players, but soldiers.

In Eph 6:10-20, we find General Paul giving last minute instructions to the army of Christian soldiers in Ephesus. With great care he explained their Resources in ch 1-3. And then with patient detail, he summed up their Responsibilities in ch 4-6.

What was the last instruction Paul left with the Ephesians?

V 10 "Finally, be strong in the Lord."

Don't try to live the Christian life on your own strength. Why not? The reason is clear--we're in a battle, a fierce spiritual battle, with a clever, cunning enemy.

Vv 11-12 ". . . stand against the wiles of the devil. . ."

Is there hope? Can we stand in this battle, or are the odds too great? Yes, we can stand, but first we must protect ourselves. How? By putting on the Armor of God (14-17). Putting on the armor of God must be a daily priority in your life--that is, if you want to stand. For when you put on God's armor, you are aligning yourself on the victory side, right next to Jesus Christ.

What is the armor? 6 pieces. . .

- I. The Belt of Truth (14)
- II. The Breastplate of Righteousness (14)
- III. Gospel of Peace Boots (15)
- IV. Faith Shield (16)
- V. Salvation's Helmet (17)
- VI. The Spirit's Sword (18)

We need the armor of God. Why? So we can stand against the Evil One and his demonic hosts! It's tragic, yet true. Not everyone stands.

Illust: David fell to Satan's attack in I Chr 21:1. Peter was duped by the devil in Mt 16:23. Ananias and Saphira were manipulated by the father of lies in Acts 5. And do you remember what happened to Hymenaeus and Alexander?

1TI 1:20 Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

1TI 5:15 For some are already turned aside after Satan.

Challenge: Some coming to church on Sunday AM are "seekers." You're searching. You feel good when you come and hear God's Word. You leave pumped

up, filled with hope. But then you don't receive an ounce of spiritual nourishment for the next 6 days. Only Satan's darts. You don't use the shield of faith that could protect your mind. And Satan is having a heyday with you. By Thursday you are overwhelmed with feelings of doubt and discouragement. You begin thinking, "Where are you God? What's wrong? Why doesn't Christianity work?"

Listen. The problem is not with Christianity. The problem is with YOU. God offers you all the equipment you need to be on the winning side in life.

Q: What are you doing with the armor of God?

Q: How practically do we put on the armor of God?

First, you must know what you have. That's the purpose of vv 10-17, to tell us what we have. But merely knowing what you have is not enough.

Illust:

You must put on the armor. And how do you do that?

Paul tells us in v 18.

Proposition: According to Ephesians 6:18, we have 2 "last minute instructions" we must follow if we're going to stand fully armed in the raging battle.

I. We must stand by Praying (18a).

Prayer involves:

- A. Consistency
- B. Communication
- C. Cooperation

II. We must stand by Watching (18b).

Watching involves:

- A. Dependence
- B. Determination
- C. Denial of Self

If we're going to stand, what's the first thing we must do?

I. We must stand by Praying (18a).

V 18 "Praying always with all . . ."

Is Paul saying that prayer is another piece of armor? No. It's more than that. It works in connection with the armor. It's not something that you add to the armor, but must accompany every piece of armor.

Praying is a participle. It modifies the verb "stand" in v 14. We stand by praying. The word is also plural, that is, praying is not the task of a few elite spiritual giants in the church, but of all of us.

Prayer is how we claim what we have in Christ.

Quote: In his book, "The Fight," John White wrote, "Hell's legions are terrified of prayer. Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees."

Prayer involves three ingredients, acc to v 18:

A. Prayer involves Consistency

V 18 "Praying always"--lit. "in all times"

Notice Paul's emphasis on consistency in prayer--"all. . .all. . .all. . .all."

Some here may have come out of backgrounds where you read out of a prayer book, or prayed prayers at certain times of the day. The Jewish people prayed at specified times. Remember Daniel--He prayed 3 times a day.

But when Christ came, He established a new era. He sent His Spirit at Pentecost to indwell all who believe in Him. We live in the age of the Spirit. We live in the age of prayer.

We don't pray at set times anymore. We are to pray at all times. Praying ought to be as natural as breathing for the Christian.

It was for Paul. He prayed twice in the letter of Ephesians:

1:15-16 "I . . . cease not to give thanks for you. . ."

1:14 "For this cause I bow my knees. . ."

Paul prayed for others as well. . .

Ph 1:3-4 "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always. . ."

Col 1:9 ". . . we do not cease to pray for you. . ."

I Th 1:2 "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention"

II Tim 1:3 "I thank God that w/o ceasing I have rememb of thee in my prayers night and day."

Paul prayed a lot. He prayed continually and consistently. Do you?

Q: "How can I pray continually? I'd never get my work done?"

Notice secondly. . .

B. Prayer involves Communication

V 18 "Praying. . . with all prayer and supplication"

Key: Prayer is communication. We are communicating with a Person when we pray. We pray to our Heavenly Father, through the authority of the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Praying has nothing to do with formulas. When someone says, "I can't pray in public because I don't know the right words to say. . ." they're indicating they don't understand what prayer really is. Prayer involves communication, personal interaction with our Living and Personal God.

Praying "always" doesn't mean you must always be on your knees. It means you are living your life with a God-consciousness. Are you conscious that God is with you when you're driving to work, or sitting in class at school, or watching TV?

Key: Everything I see and experience in life should simply become a prayer. It should be something I share with my Heavenly Father. Constant dialogue with my Best Friend.

--When I'm picked on at school, "Lord you know what I'm going thru"

--When I enjoy a great family time, "Lord thank you for my family."

--When I read the news and see evil, "O Lord would you make that right"

--When I rub shoulders with an unsaved neighbor, "He needs You."

Listen. If you are a Christian and you don't commune with God like that, you're robbing God of one of the very purposes for which He saved you. God saved you for fellowship.

I Jn 1:3 "That which we have seen . . . that ye also may have fellowship"

Prayer involved communication.

Q: When you communicate with your best friend, do you repeat the same words every time you talk? Neither should we in prayer.

Our communication in prayer should involve 2 things:

1. With all Prayer--greek word means "requests"
2. With all Supplication--word means "specific"

There are general prayers and specific prayers. Listen. There ought to be variety in our praying.

Quote: MacArthur, "There are different ways to pray. Some people think the only way to pray is on your knees. Some people think the only way you can pray is with your hands up. Others think you must have your hands folded. Some people think you have to pray out of a prayer book. Paul says, 'Pray all the time with all kinds of prayers.' You can pray in public or in private, with loud cries or quiet whispers. It can be deliberate or spontaneous. There can be prayers of request, thanksgiving, confession, and praise. You can be kneeling, standing, lifting up your hands, or lying prostrate. . . We're to pray throughout the flow of life. . . Prayer is a way of life."

Is it for you?

Illust: Drew Baker, prayer time with deacons--Had deacons pray around the circle, then said, "OK, let's do it again!" That blew them away because they had used up their "pat" prayer. . .

Do you have variety in your prayer life? Or are you always praying the same thing, using the same words, in the same posture, at the same time, day after day?

Challenge: Learn to think of prayer as Communication with a Person.

C. Prayer involves Cooperation

V 18 "Praying. . . in the Spirit"

What does that mean? Praying in the Spirit does not mean speaking in tongues. Jude 20 tells us to "pray in the Holy Spirit" (we'll be studying that passage tonight).

Praying in the Spirit means to pray in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Spirit is the same thing as praying in the name of Christ--what we pray should be consistent with Who Jesus is, and What His will is. To pray in the Spirit is to pray in the power of the Spirit, and not our own.

Key: Praying in the Spirit is simply making my prayers consistent with the mind and will of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 8:26-27

Handout: Warfare Prayer--Pray on the Armor of God daily

II. We must stand by Watching (18b).

Watching involves three ingredients:

A. Watching involves Dependence

B. Watching involves Determination

Quote: The historian Edward Gibbon suggested that one of the reasons for the fall of Rome was the lack of discipline in the ranks of Rome's soldiers. Many soldiers complained of the weight of the armor and stopped wearing all of it. You can guess what happened. As a result, many were injured or killed in battle.

Allow me to be frank. Many of us here today are resisting the fact that living the Christian life involves spiritual discipline. It's not popular today to talk about such spiritual disciplines as prayer, watching, and fasting. They're not in vogue. Satan has infected the American church with a lazy, sloppy approach to living for Christ. We have the attitude that such ingredients are optional.

Illust: "I'm going to heaven, so who cares if. . ."

I'll be honest. I neglect these the spiritual disciplines of prayer and watching too often. Too often, I fail to see their importance and relevance. My soul becomes stifled by the tyranny of the urgent.

Can you relate?

C. Watching involves Denial of Self