

Main Idea: Redemption produces prayer warriors, and specifically gospel-shaped prayer warriors. That’s the message of Ephesians. Specifically, according to Ephesians 6:10-20, redemption creates prayer warriors who engage in two ongoing activities.

I. Prayer warriors stand (10-17).

- A. We wear the belt of truth (14a).
- B. We wear the breastplate of righteousness (14b).
- C. We wear the gospel of peace boots (15).
- D. We raise the faith shield (16).
- E. We take the helmet of salvation (17a).
- F. We take the sword of the Spirit (17b).

II. Prayer warriors speak (18-20).

- A. We speak to God (18).
 - 1. Praying in the Spirit means to pray in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. Praying in the Spirit means to pray in agreement with the Word He has given.
 - 3. Praying in the Spirit is the same thing as praying in the name of Christ.
- B. We speak to God in behalf of others (19-20).
 - 1. Paul asked for words.
 - 2. Paul asked for courage.
 - 3. Paul asked for help in making the most of God-sent, gospel-opportunities.

Make It Personal: If I have experienced redemption, I can be a prayer warrior.

Special 2026 emphasis: We’re beginning 2026 with a special focus. *Redeemed People...Pray the Word*. Two weeks ago we learned from Jesus by looking at what we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” Last week we considered “Praying and the Promises of God” from 1 John 5:14-15. This morning, we are going to learn from Paul by considering another familiar passage in Ephesians 6.

I’m going to say two words and I want you to think about who comes to mind first when you hear these words. *Prayer warrior*. Who came to mind? Perhaps it was George Muller, the man who built orphanages in England in the 1800s and prayed down daily bread for thousands of children. Maybe it was one of your grandparents, or parents whose prayer life has impacted you greatly. Closer to home, maybe it was Don Boggs, a long-time servant of God in this church. I always loved to hear that man pray.

Are *you* a prayer warrior? While most of us probably wouldn’t use that term to describe ourselves, we’re going to learn today that we could and should. Prayer warriors are not elite, exceptional Christians, a few here and there. Prayer warriors are what God intends us to be *and* what God enables us to be.

Prove it, you say. Okay. Consider the book of Ephesians. When we read through Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus, this is precisely what we discover. *Redemption produces prayer warriors, and specifically gospel-shaped prayer warriors*. This is the message of Ephesians. Paul did not write Ephesians merely to give us knowledge about wonderful realities, but to create prayer warriors. What do I say that? Think now. Where does Ephesians begin? With a glorious presentation of the redemption God has provided for us in Christ, amazing and breathtaking! Where does Ephesians end? With a vivid description of armor and a command to pray.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the messages preached at WBC in 2008, 2014, and 2021.

I'll say it again. Redemption produces prayer warriors. This is today's message in a sentence. You can be a prayer warrior, my friend, if you know Christ and are appropriating the armor He has provided for you. This is one of the primary reasons God has redeemed you. As I read today's text, please take note of two actions that Paul emphasizes by repetition. **Stand.** And **speak.**

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

Listen first to verses 10-17 and notice Paul's emphasis on the word **stand** (or a variation of it). "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. **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."

Now listen to verses 18-20 and Paul's emphasis on **speaking**, primarily speaking to God (i.e. praying) but also speaking to others. "**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**."

Who can be a prayer warrior? Brothers and sisters at WBC, each of us can be! Paul didn't write Ephesians to give us mere knowledge. This letter creates prayer warriors. What is a prayer warrior? According to Ephesians 6:10-20, prayer warriors engage in two ongoing activities. Prayer warriors *stand*. And prayer warriors *speak*.

I. Prayer warriors stand (10-17).

Stand, stand, stand, repeats Paul. Why wouldn't we stand? Because there's an enemy who is attacking us. The evil one doesn't want us to stand and he has a might host that shares his ambition. But the Lord has given us precisely what we need to stand.

Armor. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand, says Paul. We've studied this armor several times before, but today I want us to see this connection. This is what prayer warriors wear, and it's what prayer warriors want the people they're praying for to wear. This is our battle uniform. This is what enables us to stand.

A. We wear the belt of truth (14a). "Stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist."² Someone else wore this belt of truth before us. Our Messiah did. This image comes from the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 11:5. The Lord made it clear to Isaiah that when the Messiah comes to earth, He's going to come as a soldier on a fighting mission, a shoot from the stump of Jesse (1), with the Spirit of the LORD resting on him (2), and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth (4), and righteousness and faithfulness/truth shall be his belt (5).

² The soldier put on his belt first. Actually it was an undergarment, and not a piece of armor. Yet it was essential. He wrapped the belt around his waist in order to draw up his tunic and keep it from dangling down to his feet. He couldn't go to battle if his garment was loose fitting.

And He has come. His name is Jesus. He is the One who put on that belt of truth, conquered the enemy, and rescued the hostages. Now we, the people He has rescued, are called to do the same. Fasten on the same belt He wore.

Our belt is truth. The Christian life begins when we embrace that Jesus is the truth, but putting on the belt of truth takes it a step further. To put on truth means we allow the One who is truth to be seen through us. We resolve to speak as He spoke and walk as He walked, in integrity and honesty and clarity.

Every day we must affirm that we will speak and practice the truth, as our Savior did. “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is our head,” said Paul back in 4:15. Truth is the belt we wear.

B. We wear the breastplate of righteousness (14b). Who else arms Himself this way? God does.³ Just look at Isaiah 59. And why? Because when God looked at His world, He saw that “righteousness stands far away” (14) and “it displeased Him” (15). He also saw that there was “no one to intercede” and fix this problem (16). So “His own arm brought him salvation,” says verse 16.

This is another Messianic prophecy. When Messiah comes, He will come as a warrior on a mission, reveals Isaiah, to rescue His people, and destroy those who resist. What will He look like? You won’t miss Him, says the prophet. Just look for the One wearing “righteousness as a breastplate,” says verse 17, “and a helmet of salvation on his head.”

To put it bluntly, the world has gone wrong, but when Messiah comes He will make things right. And one of the ways He does it is by sharing what He has with His people. We who have repented and put our trust in Messiah Jesus are now privileged to wear what He wore, a “breastplate of righteousness.”

What is righteousness? Again, it’s not so much *what*, but *who*. Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30). To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to put on Christ. It’s to acknowledge that our standing before God is based on what Christ did, not on what we do. We put on the breastplate of righteousness by declaring that we trust in Christ and then let Him live His righteous life through us.

Then come the boots. The Roman soldier wore a battle boot, a leather sandal with hob nails on the bottom, tied up with leather straps around the ankles and shins.

C. We wear the gospel of peace boots (15). This picture comes from Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”

Whose feet are beautiful? According to Isaiah, the beautiful feet belong to the Lord Himself who will come and say, “Here I am (verse 6). I have come to bring salvation.” And how will He do it? Isaiah gives that prophecy in the very next chapter, Isaiah 53. There He says that the One with beautiful feet will become a Lamb that will rescue sinners by dying for them. And once He rescues them, He will give them a pair of shoes. His shoes. The same ones He wore. Gospel shoes.

Think of it this way. What do our feet do for us? They take us places. What are we as Christ-followers to take with us wherever we go? We are to take the good news that produces peace, first peace with God, and then peace with people. We are to take the gospel wherever we go, and we do that by intentionally wearing gospel of peace boots.

³ Observation by David Powlison, p. 28.

We don't just run out into the day. We put these boots every morning. Why? Because others need what we have, and we want to be ready to share it with them.

But there's another reason. We, *Christians*, need the gospel too. We need to put on daily reminders of what Christ has done for us. It's this gospel message that protects us from error, from pride, from complacency, from anxiety and fear. This gospel produces peace, and we need it just like our unsaved neighbors need it.

So, we put it on daily. We put it on so we can share it with each other, and the lost. We proclaim this news again and again, that God is holy and worthy, and that we are all sinners who have rebelled against Him and deserve His just wrath. But we also proclaim that the Holy One has sent His Son, His beloved only begotten Son, to become our substitute. He lived the righteous life we all fail to live, and He died the death we deserve to die. He conquered the foes we could never conquer, including sin, death, and the devil. Now, whoever calls upon the One whom God has sent will be saved. This is the gospel. Have you believed it, my friend? If so, then put it on your feet, as your Savior did. Stand in it, and take it wherever you go.

Paul moves to a fourth piece of armor in verse 16. The ESV says, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith."⁴

D. We raise the faith shield (16). Why do we need a shield? Because as we march through the world with the gospel of peace, there's an enemy who doesn't want this message to go forth. And he's shooting at us. What kind of ammunition does he use? Flaming darts, says Paul.

David Powlison points out, "The shield is the one piece of weaponry that Paul did not pull from Isaiah. It is the only piece that intends to communicate a protective role as we face counterattacks of lies and hostilities."⁵

The Roman soldier's shield was large, about 4' by 2', a big, thick plank of wood. It was covered on the outside with metal and even leather at times. The metal would deflect arrows, while the leather would extinguish the fiery pitch on the arrows.

What is our shield? This image comes from the Psalter. Again, it is the Lord Himself. Listen to Psalm 18:1-2, "I love you, O Lord, my strength. ² The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."

To be clear, faith itself isn't our shield. Faith doesn't have protective power. It's the Lord who has the power, and it's the Lord who is our shield. Faith is simply the means He uses to share His power with us. The Christian life *begins by faith*, but Paul's not talking about saving faith in verse 16. He has in mind *living* faith. Day by day faith.

It's worth noting that the edges of Roman shields were made to interlock, so an entire line of soldiers would hook their shields together and march into the enemy like a solid wall. And so, Christian soldiers, we're not to fight this battle alone. We need each other. Raising this daily, living-faith shield is a community project, something we raise up together as a church.

Why specifically do we need this shield of faith? The NIV says we need it to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." The KJV says "fiery darts." The ESV says "flaming darts". In Roman times, archers would put a cotton material on the tip of their arrows and soak it in pitch, which would burn slowly but very hot. Before

⁴ The NIV says, "In addition to all this."

⁵ David Powlison, p. 30.

shooting the arrow, they would light it. When it hit its target, the pitch would splatter and start little fires on the clothing of the soldier. That's why a shield was so vital.

Where do these flaming darts originate? Verse 16 says they come from the "evil one." [KJV "the wicked," that is, the wicked one, Satan]. The devil is like an archer on a wall shooting at us. But if we raise the shield of faith, we'll be okay.

What are his darts? Notice the word "all" in "*all* the flaming darts of the evil one." This indicates Satan has a variety of missiles in his arsenal.

One is *doubt*. "You've messed up way too many times," whispers the evil one. "God doesn't listen to you like He does those other people at church." Another fiery dart is *vanity*. "If only other people appreciated you. That's why you're not getting along with them, you know. It's their fault." Another is *disappointment*. "After all you've done for the Lord, life should be better than this, shouldn't it?" Another is *fear*, a big-time fiery dart in our day. "Things are so bad out there, you better just pull back and not get too involved for a while." Another is *lust*. "You deserve a little pleasure today, don't you?" Another is *deception*. "You shouldn't have to suffer like you're suffering. God is unjust. You can't trust him." And there are many other darts he fires at us.

Several years ago, I was in my study on a winter morning and took a break and looked out the window. The ground was bare, but millions of individual snowflakes were falling out of the sky. One at a time they hit the ground. And one at a time they disappeared. It didn't seem like those little flakes were having an impact on anything. They were so small, so insignificant. But before long I didn't see the individual flakes anymore, just a blanket of snow.

This is how Satan's fiery darts work. He throws a thought at us. Nothing big so it seems. But if we don't immediately raise the faith shield to that thought, it sticks. And then a subsequent thought sticks to the first, and then another, and another.

Brothers and sisters, Christ conquered our enemy on the cross. And when He returns to the earth, as He will soon, He will cast Satan and his wicked hosts into the lake of fire. Those are facts. And what's needed now is *faith*. Raise the faith shield.⁶

E. We take the helmet of salvation (17a). Once again, Paul is using an image from Isaiah. The situation was bleak for Isaiah. His people were sinful and heading for destruction. But in His mercy, the Lord announced that He Himself will solve their problem. He will come as a warrior and this is what He will be wearing. "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head (Isaiah 59:17)."⁷

We now are told in Ephesians 6:17, "And take the helmet of salvation." Yes, *take* it, says Paul. Do what the Lord did. He is sharing His helmet with you. Put on your helmet, Paul says (the imperative indicates we are to take this piece of armor, put it on, and leave it on).⁸

Why does a soldier need a helmet? To protect his *head*. Why do we need a helmet? For the same reason. My friend, your most vulnerable target as a Christian is your head,

⁶ "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith (1 John 5:4)." Faith is being confident of what we cannot see, according to Hebrews 11:1. To borrow a definition from our Hebrews series a few years ago, "Faith is trusting in the person of God and acting on the promises of God regardless how I feel."

⁷ Observation by David Powlison, p. 33.

⁸ The Roman soldier's helmet was made of a tough metal-like bronze or iron. It was obviously heavy. The inside was lined with sponge or felt to make it bearable to wear. Nothing short of a blow from an axe or hammer could penetrate the helmet.

and Satan knows it. That's why he attacks your thinking with all the ammunition he can muster. But he cannot harm us, not if we take the helmet of salvation (see 1 Thes 5:8).⁹

What does it mean "take the helmet of salvation"? Paul isn't telling his readers they need to "get saved." They've already been saved, by the Spirit's gracious work. This is a call for saved people to *think* like saved people.

A saved person is one who has admitted he was a lost sinner and condemned to suffer God's wrath. A saved person is one who accepted the teaching of the Bible that Jesus Christ lived and died in our place, taking God's wrath for us. A saved person is one who has placed his full confidence and trust in Jesus Christ. That's a saved person.

So what does it mean to take the helmet of salvation? Simply this. A saved person needs to learn to think like a saved person. Christians are to think differently than non-Christians, and Christians who overcome the evil one do think differently, about their goals in life, about money, fame, entertainment, about *everything* (Phil. 4:8).

F. We take the sword of the Spirit (17b). "Take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." This piece of armor also comes from Isaiah. In Isaiah 49:2, the Servant of the LORD, the Messiah, says, "He made my mouth like a sharp sword." A few verses later we're told that this One with a "mouth like a sword" will be "a light for the nations" whose "salvation will reach to the ends of the earth" (49:6).

This is Jesus, and now we, the people whom Messiah Jesus has saved, are called to take up this same sword, to work with Him as He makes His salvation known to the nations. We fight this battle with words, with His Word.

Now step back and look at the armor. But let's not just look at it. Let's *stand* in it, and prepare to *pray* in light of it. This is Christ's provision for us. This armor is essentially what the first half of the letter was all about. God blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing (1:3). When we were dead in our sins He made us alive with Christ by His grace (2:4). We have been saved by His grace through faith, and this not from ourselves, it is the gift of God (2:8-9).

If you do not know Christ as your Savior, you're reading someone else's mail right now. But if God has saved you, then God has given you a provision in His Son that He intends to affect every aspect of your life, as Paul explains in the second half of his letter.

It should affect your view of the world (4:17), your view of work and money (4:28), the way you talk to and about people (4:29-32), your view of sex (5:3-5), your view of wine (5:18), your view of music (5:19), your view of your marriage role (5:22-33), your view of your parents (6:1-3), your view of your children (6:4), your view of your job (6:5-9), and your view of *prayer*.

Perhaps as Paul penned those words, he was chained to a Roman soldier and thought, "There's a fitting picture of who we are in Christ. A soldier needs a belt and we have one, the belt of truth. He needs protection for his heart, and we have that too, the breastplate of righteousness. And good boots for sure footing, which we have as well in the gospel of peace. And a shield to knock down enemy arrows—we have the shield of faith. And a helmet to protect our heads—we have the helmet of salvation. And a sword for offensive purposes—we have the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

To put on the armor is simply to put on Christ. Christ is the truth. Christ is our righteousness. Christ is our peace. Faith in Christ is the shield that protects us from the flaming arrows of the evil one. Christ is the salvation that protects our heads. Christ's

⁹ We see this image elsewhere in Isaiah 59:17, "He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak."

word is our sword. Our Savior has not left us deficient. We have His armor, we have *Him*, and to put on His armor means that we live our lives in total dependence on Him. We stand in Him. Prayer warriors *stand*.

II. Prayer warriors speak (18-20).

Stand. Then speak. If I'm struggling to speak (to God and others), it's probably because I've lost sight of where I stand. So if I'm struggling to pray, I need to put on the armor again, piece by piece. Stand! And then I'm ready to speak.

Verse 18 begins, "And pray." Stop there. The verse begins with a connective word "and" which takes us back to the preceding verses. We have His armor. Now let's use it. How? By speaking. And *pray*. That's what praying is. Speaking. In two ways.

A. We speak to God (18). Verse 18 begins, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

Is Paul saying that prayer is another piece of armor? I don't think so. Yes, prayer works in connection with the armor, but it's not something that we add to the armor. In a sense, it must accompany every piece of armor.

In the Greek, "pray" is a participle (lit. "praying"). It modifies the verb "stand" back in verse 14. We stand by putting on our armor, and we also stand *by praying*.

In his book *The Fight*, John White writes, "Hell's legions are terrified of prayer. Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." Prayer is how we claim what we have in Christ. Prayer is how we stand. We stand against the evil one by falling on our faces before God.

What does it mean to "pray in the Spirit"? Be careful. Some use these words to support the notion that we need to become passive, stop thinking, and give way to whatever feeling may come over us. That's not what Paul has in mind at all. Praying in the Spirit means three things.

1. *Praying in the Spirit means to pray in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.* Paul is talking about a person here, God the Holy Spirit. Paul has a lot to say about the Holy Spirit in this letter. Back in 1:13 he says that when we heard the gospel of our salvation and believed in Christ, we were marked in Christ with a seal, "the promised Holy Spirit." In 1:14 we learn that the Holy Spirit is a "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance." In 1:18 Paul indicates that the Spirit is the One who enables us to know God better. In 2:22 we learn that the Spirit lives in us who are in Christ. In 3:5 Paul says that the Spirit has revealed the mystery of the gospel to the apostles and prophets, the mystery that God is now forming one body for His dwelling comprised of Jews and Gentiles alike who know Christ. According to 3:16 the Holy Spirit is the One who uses His power to clean us up on the inside so Christ can be at home there. He's also the One who produces unity in the church (4:3) and who can be grieved by our sin (4:30). It's our responsibility, says 5:18, to reject all other controlling substances, like wine, and let the Holy Spirit fill and control us, and that when He is controlling us His presence will manifest itself by our Christ-centered singing, thanksgiving, and submissive relationships with each other (5:19-21).

When Paul says we are to "pray in the Spirit," he is telling us to pray in cooperation with this wonderful Person, yielding our will to His.

2. *Praying in the Spirit means to pray in agreement with the Word He has given.* It's the Holy Spirit who inspired and gave us this inerrant book we call the Bible (2 Tim.

3:16). If we want to know the mind of the Spirit, we don't shift our brain into neutral. We engage it and fill it with the truth of the Scriptures.¹⁰

Some equate praying in the Spirit with speaking in tongues. No. Again, it's praying in agreement with the written revelation He has already given.

3. *Praying in the Spirit is the same thing as praying in the name of Christ.* In John 16:13-14 Jesus said, "When He comes [referring to the Holy Spirit]...He will glorify me." Far from being a mindless activity, praying in the Spirit is making my prayers consistent with the mind of the Holy Spirit. And since it's the mind of the Holy Spirit to bring glory to Christ, what we pray should always be consistent with Christ's name, with who Christ is and what His will is.¹¹

Look at the phrases that Paul uses next. "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." How often should we pray in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, in agreement with His Word, and with fame of the name of Christ in mind? *On all occasions.* That's pretty comprehensive. *With all kinds of prayers and requests.* Again, this goes behold a generic, "Bless my family today." There's variety, and intentionality. Do you have a prayer schedule? Again, I recommend you use the Family Prayer block this year, and use specific prayer passages to guide your prayer times.

Prayer warriors speak, and they do it in two ways. First, to God. Secondly...

B. We speak to God in behalf of others (19-20). Now notice the second half of verse 18. "With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." Who are we to pray for? *All the saints.* Wow, that's pretty comprehensive. Not just my family and friends, but all my brothers and sisters in Christ.

If we're going to do that well, a strategy helps. Here are some prayer guides I've used over the years you might consider. You might use our church directory and take a couple of pages a day and pray for those people. Or you might use 3x5 cards and pray by category (Monday for neighbors/people at work; Tuesday for our government officials; Wednesday for our missionaries; Thursday for friends; Friday for extended family; Saturday for those who teach you the Word at church; immediate family every day; etc).

Prayer warriors speak to God in behalf of others. And there's one particular "other" that Paul mentions next. "And also for *me*," he says in verse 19.

When Paul penned these words, he was in chains, incarcerated for a crime he hadn't committed. It's not surprising that he asks the church to pray. What is surprising perhaps are the requests that he wants them to bring to God in his behalf.¹²

He doesn't ask the church to assemble a prayer chain to call on God for justice in his trial, nor for release from prison, as valid as both petitions would have been. Instead, he calls for something else. Let's call it gospel-shaped praying.

Paul identifies his prayer requests in verses 19-20, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

What would you ask for if you were locked up in prison? Paul asked for three things.

¹⁰ When a person says they're going to divorce their spouse without biblical grounds, or marry someone who isn't a Christian, justifying it by saying they have prayed about it, you can be sure that person is not "praying in the Spirit." The Holy Spirit never leads a person to violate His Word.

¹¹ Here are some related texts in which Paul elaborates: Romans 8:15-16; Romans 8:26-27; Galatians 4:6.

¹² There are at least four other passages in which Paul requests prayer for himself (Rom. 15:30-32; Col. 4:2-4; 1 Thes. 5:25; 2 Thes. 3:1-5), and in each passage he does as he does here.

1. *Paul asked for words.* “Pray for me, that whenever I open my mouth, *words may be given me.*” Paul, the man that wrote half the New Testament books, said he needed *words*! If anybody, humanly speaking, could “wing it,” Paul could have, but he refused to do so. The stakes were too high, and he knew it. “Whenever I open my mouth,” he confesses, I need the right words, when I’m talking with the soldiers chained to me, and the fellow prisoners I meet, and when I stand before Caesar my judge on my day in court, pray that God will give me words!

What kind of words did Paul want to come out of his mouth? He says, “Pray for me...so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.” Those are the words Paul wanted to speak, words that told the story of the gospel. He calls it a “mystery,” not because the gospel is mysterious but because it’s yet unknown to those who haven’t heard it. In his parallel request written to the Colossian church he calls it “the mystery of Christ, for which I’m in chains” (Col 4:3).

Why was Paul so burdened to make that gospel message known? In verse 20 he tells us, “for which I am an *ambassador* in chains.” An ambassador, of course, is a person who represents the leader of a country in his dealings with those living in another country. Paul saw himself as an ambassador. By using that term he was acknowledging the following facts, facts that are true of us if we know Christ.

I was saved by the work of another. That’s the gospel message. Christ died for our sins, was buried, and raised on the third day (1 Cor. 15:3). That’s the good news. I was heading for eternal hell, but God pardoned me. He accepted His Son’s payment, gave me His Son’s righteousness, and adopted me into His family. I did nothing to deserve or earn this. I was saved by the work of another.

I belong to another. He is the *Lord* Jesus Christ, my master and owner. “You are not your own,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “you were bought at a price.”

I represent another. I am the ambassador of the One who saved me and to whom I now belong. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” But not only was I saved by the work of another, belong to another, and represent another.

I will give account to another. As Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

No wonder he asked for words! We’re going to be judged for the words we speak, and for the words we *failed* to speak, too.¹³

Think about your unsaved family members, neighbors, the people with whom you work and go to school. Think even about your worst enemy. If they die without Christ, they will perish forever. Have you warned them? Have you presented Christ to them? Is it hard to be a faithful witness for our Savior? Yes! That’s why even the apostle Paul himself prayed for words. And this.

¹³ Do you remember what God told the prophet Ezekiel? Listen to this sobering charge in Ezekiel 3:17-18, “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked man, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.”

2. *Paul asked for courage.* “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will *fearlessly* make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it *fearlessly*, as I should.” That Paul repeated the word *fearlessly* twice would indicate that one of our greatest foes as a gospel witness is *fear*. And the fact that he requested specific prayer for the courage to speak would indicate that through prayer we can overcome our fear.

I’m convinced that one of the main reasons we fail to pray as we ought is because we really don’t believe we are at war. Listen to John Piper:

“Most people show by their priorities and their casual approach to spiritual things that they believe we are at peacetime not wartime.

“In wartime the newspapers carry headlines about how the troops are doing. In wartime families talk about the sons and daughters on the front lines and write to them and pray for them with heart-wrenching concern for their safety. In wartime we are on the alert. We are armed. We are vigilant. In wartime we spend money differently—there is austerity, not for its own sake, but because there are more strategic ways to spend money than on new tires at home. The war effort touches everybody. We all cut back. The luxury liner becomes a troop carrier.

“Very few people think that we are in a war that is greater than World War II, or any imaginable nuclear war. Few reckon that Satan is a much worse enemy than any earthly foe, or realize that the conflict is not restricted to any one global theater, but is in every town and city in the world. Who considers that the casualties of this war do not merely lose an arm or an eye or an earthly life, but lose everything, even their own soul and enter a hell of everlasting torment?”¹⁴

If we really believe we’re at war, we’ll be alert and pray. Now Piper again:

“*Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for* [my italics]. Prayer is for the accomplishing of a wartime mission. It is as though the field commander (Jesus) called in the troops, gave them a crucial mission (go and bear fruit), handed each of them a personal transmitter coded to the frequency of the General’s headquarters, and said, ‘Comrades, the general has a mission for you. He aims to see it accomplished. And to that end he has authorized me to give each of you personal access to him through these transmitters. If you stay true to his mission and seek his victory first, he will always be as close as your transmitter, to give tactical advice and to send air cover when you need it.’

“But what have millions of Christians 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 cabins and boats and cars—not to call in fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy, but to ask for more comforts in the den.”¹⁵

I don’t doubt that you pray. Most people I talk to say they pray, at least to some degree. My question is, “For what?” For what are you asking God, the “stuff” of this world, or that which will matter for eternity? Paul asked God for words and for courage.

3. *Paul asked for help in making the most of God-sent, gospel-opportunities.* I chose those words carefully. Paul saw his prison stay as being *God-sent*, for he believed as he elsewhere taught, that “God works all things together for good” (Rom. 8:28). Had

¹⁴ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 44.

¹⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 46

he been falsely accused? Yes. But he knew ultimately he would not be chained to a Roman guard had not God purposed it.

Yet in addition to seeing this as God-sent, Paul also saw it as *gospel*-opportunity. Because he was in prison Paul knew that God had opened up opportunities for the gospel to touch many lives that previously were untouched.¹⁶

Let's be honest, our tendency is to want to *avoid or escape suffering*. Paul was no different. He struggled with the same tendency to want the easy road. But he asked for prayer. Why? Because he knew that our need is to view our suffering as *a platform for the gospel*.

All of us who know Christ are His ambassadors. We're supposed to be speaking in His behalf in this world. And He's given all of us a tailor-made platform from which to speak. He gave you job aptitudes, so your job can be your platform. He gave you a house which is a platform from which to reach your neighborhood. Has He given you a love for sports, or music, or gardening? Then use it as a platform.

Yet sometimes He grants us a special platform so the onlooking world can see and hear us more clearly. The platform is *suffering*. Cancer. A blown business venture. A pink slip. An unjust prison sentence. They're all potential platforms.

How should we pray when such enters into the lives of our brothers and sisters? We tend to pray, "Lord, heal their body. Don't let their business go bankrupt. Get them out of prison." There's nothing wrong with asking for those things, for our Heavenly Father loves to give good things to His children. But I wonder if, at times, we're not asking Him to take away prematurely the very platform He has sent into our lives, so that we might know Him better and help others come to know Him.

MacArthur offers this challenge, "We also need to get past physical needs...We need to pray for those things, but they are near the bottom of my prayer list. I'm more concerned about the spiritual battle. Are the believers winning the battle? The physical is immaterial by comparison. What gets my heart anxious is someone who is not seeing victory in their life and seeing God do His mighty work. I am praying for the advancement of the kingdom of God in the lives of His people. I am praying for souls to be won to Jesus Christ...I pray for people's physical needs, but more than that I pray that God will give them victory in the battle against the enemy. I don't really care what happens to my physical body as long as I gain victory for the glory of God."¹⁷

Paul asked people to pray for him because he knew he needed prayer. But he requested gospel-centered prayers, prayers in light of the provision of Christ and in light of the purposes of Christ. Can you imagine what would happen to our church if we started praying fervently for each other the following prayer?

"Heavenly Father, please open up doors for us to talk to people at school, at work, in our community about Jesus. And when you do open the doors, give us the courage to walk out on that platform, and stay on it until You're done using it. Don't let us be intimidated and afraid of people's reaction. Fill us with words and boldness so we can initiate conversations and spread the good news about Your Son."

¹⁶ He actually put it this way in Philippians 1:12-14, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

¹⁷ J. MacArthur, *The Believer's Armor*, p. 198-9.

Make It Personal: If I have experienced redemption, I can be a prayer warrior.

Prayer warriors *stand*. And prayer warriors *speak*. Let's do this this week!

Closing Song: #506 "*I Will Sing of My Redeemer*" (all four verses) – we might change the title to "*I Will **Pray** of My Redeemer*". What He has done for us should shape the way we pray, and sing, and live.

Response:

Take an honest look at what you have. Do you have Christ as your Savior? If you do, then you have a home reserved for you in heaven, and until then you have His armor and His Spirit to protect and sustain you. So stand in it!

But look further. What else has the Sovereign Christ, the One who said "all authority is given to me in heaven and earth," placed in your life? For Paul it was chains, an unjust prison experience. For you it may well be a health problem, or a vengeful neighbor, or a hard-to-love family member, or a hard to please coach. That's what you *have*, by God's design, and be assured it is by His sovereign design. He could have prevented it, but for gospel-purposes He has allowed it and intends to use it.

And what else do you have? Maybe for you it's not chains, or a tough boss, or a health challenge. In fact, maybe this season of life is really good for you and full of abundance. Then acknowledge it, thank God for it, and consider *why* it's so. Why has God blessed you with abundance? Look at what you have. Then...

Take an honest look at what you are doing with what you have. Perhaps you're wasting the abundance He's given you on self-centered, trivial pursuits. There are ministries that could benefit from your time and resources, but you're squandering them on toys and pursuits that will rust, spoil, and fade.

Perhaps you're wasting the suffering He's given you, wishing, even *praying* it would go away. He's given you a platform for gospel purposes, but you, in effect, are wanting to rip those two-by-fours down and get off the platform.

You say, "But I'm too weak! I don't have the strength to stay on the platform." Be encouraged, for neither did Paul! He was weak, too, and that's why he asked for prayer, for gospel-centered prayer. Why don't you do the same? It's our privilege as a church to pray for you. Why not ask?

Take an honest look at what God wants to change today, by His grace. There are changes God desires to make in all our lives. Will you submit to His purposes for you?

Community Group Discussion:

1. What is a prayer warrior? Who comes to mind when you hear the words *prayer warrior*?
2. Today in our series, *Redeemed People Pray the Word*, we pondered carefully Ephesians 6:10-20. Take time to read the passage again. What does it mean to say that redemption produces prayer warriors? What are two characteristics of prayer warriors?
3. Verse 11 says we are to put on the armor of God. What is the armor of God? How do we put on the armor of God? What does the armor of God have to do with prayer?
4. What kind of prayer requests did Paul give for himself in verses 19-20? What do we learn from this about how to pray for other people as well as ourselves?
5. This is a wonderful passage to learn how to pray the word. How so? How can we use this passage when we pray? After discussing, allow this passage to guide you as a group in a time of meaningful conversation with the Lord.