

*“And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” - Ephesians 6:18*

### **“Satan’s Strategies Against Prayer”**

Ephesians 6:10-18

#### I. Satan hates prayer because prayer:

1) Has great power (James 5:13-17)

2) Brings glory to God (Revelation 5:8-9; 8:3-4)

#### II. Satan’s strategies include:

1) Making us feel we don’t really need prayer (Judges 16:20)

2) Making us feel unworthy to pray (Psalm 66:18; 1 John 1:9)

3) Making us believe we don’t have the ability to pray (Luke 18:9-14)

4) Encouraging us to put off prayer until later (Luke 22:39-46)

5) Causing worldly thoughts to run through our minds (Matthew 13:22)

#### III. Applications from Ephesians 6:18:

1) Pray “*in the Spirit*” (18a), meaning reliance on God’s Spirit within to help concentrate (Romans 8:15; 26-27)

2) Pray on all occasions (18b)

3) Pray with all kinds of prayers and requests (18c)

**“Satan Strategies Against Prayer”**  
Ephesians 6:10-20

During the past several weeks we have been looking at the armor God equips us with so that we can withstand the many schemes of the evil one. We have read about the belt of truth, the shield of faith, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. We have seen that the spiritual armor even applies to our feet, as we are to have *“feet fitted with readiness of the gospel.”*

So perhaps it seems strange now that we come to these verses on prayer. This section closes by focusing on the importance of prayer: *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”*

*“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.”* (Ephesians 6:18-20).

Is prayer really necessary if everything else is in order? After all, God knows everything anyway, so does it even matter if we pray? This is one of the first strategies Satan has in keeping us from prayer.

**Prayer Has Great Power**

Satan realizes the power of prayer more than we do. Precisely because he knows how powerful prayer really is he puts every impediment he think of in front of the Christian, to keep him or her from faithful and fervent prayer.

Most of us are familiar with James 5:13-17: *Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.*

By the power of prayer sickness is healed, if it is God’s will. By the power of prayer, through faith in Christ, forgiveness is granted. The passage from James reminds us that even rain is dependent on prayer, as he cites Elijah’s example. No wonder James 5:16 says: *“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*

In spiritual warfare, prayer is the secret resource of the Christian. The power of prayer will wilt Satan. William Cowper rightly observed: "Satan trembles when he sees even the least of saints on their knees in prayer."

### **Prayer Brings Glory to God**

A second reason Satan hates prayer: Prayer brings glory to God. Satan's downfall came because he coveted God's glory. And whenever we pray God is glorified. This is certainly true in prayers of adoration. An important part of prayer is to express our adoration and thanksgiving to God for who He is and for what He has done, is doing and will do throughout all eternity.

But God is also glorified in our prayers of petition as we acknowledge our total dependence on Him. In prayers of petition we are to praise God whether He answers as we desire or if He answers differently than we ask. God is to be praised, both in the way He answers prayer according to our petitions, and God is to be praised for His wisdom in denying our prayer requests.

Both Revelation 5:8-9 and Revelation 8:3 speak of our prayers as rising to God like incense, - a pleasant aroma to Him. He loves to hear our prayers and He is glorified by them. That is part of the reason why Satan works so hard to keep us from faithfully praying.

### **The Necessity of Prayer**

One effective strategy of Satan is to try to convince the Christian that prayer isn't really necessary. That strategy worked so well on Samson, and it continues to work on so many who are strong and self sufficient, at least in their own mind's eye.

Samson came to know the value of prayer. He grew up knowing the Lord; his parents were godly. He died with a prayer on his lips. But there was a large portion of his life where prayer was the last thing on his mind. After all, he was Samson. He was self sufficient! Or so he thought. He thought he had the strength to deal with life, even those Philistines on his own power. Judges 16:20 describes the scene, "*Then she (Delilah) called, 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!' He awoke from his sleep and thought, 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the LORD had left him.*"

Satan loves to get us in that same self sufficient frame of mind. We have our spiritual armor on. We have the sword of the Spirit; we know the biblical doctrines of grace and have a good grasp of the Word of God, - so is prayer really that necessary...?

## **Unworthy to Pray**

A second strategy of the evil one is to make us feel unworthy to pray. One of the many names for Satan is “Accuser.” He knows the Scripture, and as we saw last week, he tries to use Scripture - our “sword of the Spirit” - against us. Who among us hasn’t dwelled, at times, on these disconcerting words Psalm 66:18? *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”*

Have you ever wondered if your prayer would be heard and accepted by God, because you know that in your heart you have cherished some sin? I’m sure most thoughtful, honest Christians have been deeply bothered by a verse like that at times in their lives.

But there is an answer to that accusation. It is found in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

The Psalmist, looking ahead to the Messiah, undoubtedly knew that God is faithful and just. Although conscious of his sin, he concludes Psalm 68 by writing, *“But God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me!”* (Psalm 68:19-20).

## **Unqualified for Prayer**

A third strategy of Satan’s against prayer is making us believe we have no ability to pray. The only qualification, or ability, that anyone needs to pray is a heart that by God’s grace is focused in saving faith on Christ. He is our Intercessor. Because of Him we can come boldly into the presence of our heavenly Father.

Some people don’t want to pray publicly because they are afraid they won’t be able to vocalize the prayer properly. But a smooth tongue and an ability to link words together beautifully isn’t required in prayer at all. In fact, beware of the smooth tongue in prayer. The Pharisee in Luke 18 had the smooth tongue; he prayed a prayer that all those around him admired. But it was the tax collector who beat his chest in agony and called out, *“God be merciful to me a sinner,”* who had the prayer that was heard by God. And he, Jesus said, is the one who went home justified before God.

## **Putting Prayer Off**

A fourth strategy of Satan against prayer is to try to make us put off prayer until later. One of the saddest scenes unfolding for us in Scripture is in Luke 22, there in Gethsemane, where all the disciples slept, even though Jesus implored them repeatedly to stay awake and pray. We can all relate to that, can’t we?

But it's not only at night when we are tired that we tend to put off prayer. During the rush of the day we so often say that we will pray for someone, but then we put that off and forget to pray for them altogether.

After all, what's the rush? Why now? We're tired, how about tomorrow? For the disciples tomorrow was too late. Jesus was betrayed that very night. Oh, how Satan would love to see you postpone your prayer! He knows that tomorrow just may be too late for that prayer request that you had planned to bring to your Father's throne.

### **Drifting Thoughts**

A fifth strategy is causing worldly cares and thoughts to drift through our minds. In a couple of weeks later this month your pastor will be sitting where you are. I will be sitting in the pew when someone else is preaching. Someone else will be praying the congregational prayer and I will find, as I have found before, how easy it is to be distracted during the congregational prayer. Isn't it amazing the thoughts that come to our minds when others are praying?

Satan works hard when we pray, using the same strategy that he uses with the seed of the gospel in Matthew 13. There we read the parable of the sower. Seed that is sown among the thorns is choked by the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth. How often does the same thing happen in prayer? How often, instead of focusing on prayer, do our minds drift to all sorts of other thoughts and worldly concerns?

### **Pray in the Spirit**

Because the devil has many schemes to disrupt our prayer life, which is our direct communication with our God, our text in Ephesians 6:18 tells us to "*pray in the Spirit.*" This phrase has thrown many Christians off. Often this verse is used as proof, for instance, that we should pray by speaking in tongues, that tongues are the true way to "*pray in the Spirit.*" That's not at all what the text means. Instead it is telling us that it is only by God's Spirit within us that we are able to pray. As Romans 8:15 says, "*We have received the Spirit of Sonship, - by Him we cry 'Abba, Father.'*"

Later on, in Romans 8:26-27, Paul tells how the Holy Spirit intercedes for us "*with groanings too deep for words.*" Without the Holy Spirit our prayers will not be received by God; all true prayer is prayed "*in the Spirit.*"

### **On All Occasions**

We are to pray on all occasions. So often our prayer lives are in a rut because we pray only on the same occasion each day: Before meals, after reading the Bible, and before we go to sleep. Try praying at other times: when you drive, – but keep your eyes open! Or in a supermarket checkout line, use that time for prayer. During the course of the day many

sentence prayers can, and should be, offered. When those dreaded long slow freight trains on Central Avenue block your way, its a good time to stop and pray!

During the 90's Dr. Richard Pratt wrote an excellent book on prayer. The title of the book tells you part of the reason why the book was so good. It was entitled: *Praying With Your Eyes Open*. It's a reminder to pray on all occasions, not just at set times.

### **All Kinds of Prayers**

Third, verse 18 tells us to "*Pray with all kinds of prayers and requests.*" This includes praying Scripture back to God. Scripture is often what primes the pump of prayer.

Another way to overcome a stagnant prayer life is to write out your prayers and use an acronym like ACTS. Write a paragraph or more in adoration of the One who has redeemed you at the cost of His only begotten Son, the One who has loved you with an everlasting love. If you begin to think about that the paragraphs will turn into pages before you know it.

The "C" of ACTS is for confession. Give thought to each word and each sentence as you confess your sin. The "T" is for Thanksgiving. Too often our prayers become a shopping list that we present before the Lord. They should instead become paragraphs of praise as we raise our thankfulness to the Lord in prayer. The Heidelberg Catechism points this out in Question 116: "Why do Christians need to pray?" The answer: "Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness that God requires of us."

The "S" in ACTS is for supplication, and should be the shortest part of our prayers instead of the longest. The Lord has promised to meet all of our needs, to care for us far more than He cares for the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field in all their beauty. Instead of a long list of supplications we would do well to memorize Matthew 6:24-35 and simply pray it back to the Lord, with deep, heartfelt thankfulness!

Also, keep a prayer journal. If there is one book that the devil dislikes almost as much as the Bible it is the prayer journal of a faithful Christian, for that chronicles God's power and wisdom in His responses to our prayers.

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In the spiritual warfare we are in our enemy would like nothing more than to silence your prayers and mine. After all, our prayers have great power; they also bring glory to God.

May you and I, being aware of the devil's schemes, do as verse 18 tells us: "*Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.*" And so stand strong against the many schemes of the evil one. Amen.