

A CATALYST FOR THE CHURCH TO PRAY

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God has entrusted many facets of ministry to the local church. Teachers are to edify others who are Christ's people, and seek to lead the unsaved to salvation and then to edification. It is consistent for all the genuinely redeemed to show in their lifestyles the fruit of a believing life (Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9). The church ought to cultivate and equip leaders to be true to the Scripture. Leaders should counsel those of the church family in moral living that truly reflects the riches of God's grace. In all that the church is and does, prayer is a native breath, and of utmost importance. Ephesians highlights the church in vivid images—Christ's "body," "bride," "temple," and army waging spiritual warfare. In this all, prayer is to be a priority. Paul models vital prayer and summons others of the church to pursue intimacy before God. He emphasizes an urgency to praise/thank God, intercede to fulfill spiritual needs, and revel in declaring God's bounties of grace. Clearly the Lord has opened intimate access to Himself, and He gives godly aspects of fruit as relevant issues of prayer, and key words/phrases that can stoke prayer. Ephesians also urges believers to pray against spiritual foes, and to pray in all things, even to be considerate to keep intercessors updated on how God answers. The church should rise to lay hold of its potential in the Lord's throne room.

Introduction

Commentators on the Ephesian letter often note Paul's special emphases on the church. Paul spotlights those whose faith is in God by vivid analogies. The church is Christ's spiritual *body*, His *building* as a temple, His *bride*, and His *batallion* of soldiers.

God endows believers with astounding riches.¹ The Father has lavished on them "every spiritual blessing" (1:3).² From this outset, onward, the message

¹ Riches fill God's treasure vault in 1:7, "the riches of His grace"; cf. 1:18, "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"; 2:4, God "rich in mercy"; 2:7, "the surpassing riches of His grace"; 3:8, "the unfathomable riches of Christ"; 3:16, "the riches of His glory"; cf. Rom 2:4; Phil 4:19.

touts ways in which God has made His people incredibly wealthy. Treasures of grace spring from Him who is “rich in mercy” (2:4). Believers’ spiritual capital skyrockets far higher than all material assets. Think of mind-boggling funds in the U. S. Federal Treasury. Imagine astonishing bank accounts of the world’s billionaires. All these pale in significance with salvation’s riches now and eternally.

Ruth Paxson, a missionary to China, put ink to paper to describe the benefits of God’s people. On furlough, Ruth arose at 4 a.m. to stake out a vigil on the lip of the Grand Canyon. As she meditated on Ephesians, the canyon’s awe-inspiring depth and magnitude nearly snatched her breath away. The rising sun’s rays kissed rock strata far down in the chasm and brightened colors from the lower parts and up to her. Ruth felt the inrush of thoughts. These led her to write a book on Ephesians which she called, “the Grand Canyon of the Scriptures.” This sub-title was based on the fissure’s vast reaches, then by analogy the el dorado of riches God has given those He chose to salvation. Many would drench their spirits in Paxson’s devotional entitled *The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian*.³

Here is the Ephesian bonanza, a spiritual “Comstock Lode” of unmatched resources. Believers’ breaths quicken at the amazing blessings. The letter sees them as God’s elect ones, sons, those His own Son purchased with His blood, the redeemed, and the forgiven. Other descriptions are that God has raised them spiritually from death in sin to life in Christ,⁴ put His Holy Spirit within them as His seal that guarantees their security eternally.⁵ He has destined them, as His heirs, to bask in His kindnesses now and forever.⁶ They are people He has caught away to a marvelous hope, fitted to praise Him, gifted to serve

² The “heavenlies” (a plural word) makes good sense whether rendered as “heavenly places,” or “riches” in a heavenly venue (cf. n. 1) or “things/realities” or “plans” in that realm (i.e., of God’s “eternal purpose,” 3:11; cf. 1:10; 2:7). Evidence best points to a heavenly location. Paul in 1:10 contrasts “things upon the earth” with “things upon the heavens.” Christ was resurrected to be seated “at His [God’s] right hand” (1:20); God sees believers “seated . . . with Him” there (2:6), in the realm where “the rulers and authorities” are (3:10; 6:12). And Christ’s ascent was to “far above all the heavens,” in contrast to being, in His first advent descent, “in the lower parts of the earth,” i.e. in His tomb in parts “lower than the earth’s surface,” or else “lower parts [in contrast to the heavens] which are the earth” itself (4:9).

³ Ruth Paxson, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian: Ephesians, The Grand Canyon of the Scripture* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1938; reprint, 1989). Cf. Introduction, 11–17, and various references after this; also Lewis S. Chafer, thirty-three blessings God confers upon each person when He is initially saved (*Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1984, “The Riches of Divine Grace”) II:135–148). In this writer’s early Christian growth, these books gave their warmth as truly yet more crucially than the old wood ranch stove that was cherry red on top against the winters’ chill.

⁴ Eph 2:5–6.

⁵ 1:13–14; cf. 4:30; 2 Cor 5:5.

⁶ Eph 2:7.

this Lord and fellow believers,⁷ and to reach out to others who still are far off, without hope. God has set these believers apart to be His very own possession, to showcase His fullness individually or in marriage and the home.⁸ He has enlisted them as soldiers arrayed in the armor that He supplies.⁹ He has pitted them in battle, clashing with Satan and other evil foes which march under the black banner of the prince of darkness.

Prayer stands out in about twenty-five percent of the letter's verses. It makes withdrawals from the believers' bank as "spiritual billionaires."¹⁰ Speaking to God occurs in at least thirty-nine of the 155 verses. Paul even surges to prayer in its aspect of intercession¹¹ as quickly as his second verse. His next breath, still in prayer (1:3), exults as he is awestruck at God's own infinite majesty as the Blessed One.¹² God, out of His absolute, unlimited perfection, has

⁷ 4:7–16.

⁸ 4:1–5:33: Paul portrays the believers' lives by the analogy "walk," i.e. live as *God's workmanship/masterpiece* (2:10) in contrast to the earlier, unsaved walk after impulses of Satan (2:1–3; cf. 4:17–19; 5:8a), or a present vulnerability to him (4:27); or the unsaved state of being "dead," 5:14; walk in *unity* (4:1–16), in *holiness* of a new life distinct from the old life (4:17–32), in *love* that is in contrast to lusts (5:1–7), in *light* that shines conspicuously against the darkness (5:8–14), in *carefulness* of wisdom devoted to doing God's will (5:15–17), in the *Spirit* (5:18–33), in *obedience* (6:1–9), and in soldiers' *warfare* (6:10–20). These concepts are all different ways to picture what is true at the same time, the one, godly life; in some degree an authentic walk exhibits all of these and grows (cf. 4:15).

⁹ 6:10–17.

¹⁰ More detail on each Ephesians prayer passage is in James E. Rosscup, *An Exposition of Prayer in the Bible*. 5 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, Libronix, 2008); www.logos.com/rosscup; the same material is in Jim Rosscup, *Exposition on Prayer*, 4 vols. in print, hardback (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International Publishers, 2011); also Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," *The Master's Perspective on Difficult Passages*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998): 224–46; the latter is also in *The Master's Seminary Journal*, vol. 6 (1995); in "Prayer's Strategic Role" cf. lists at the end on aspects of armor that relate to prayer (Eph 6), thirty-six aspects of godly fruit in the epistle about which to pray, the consistency of spiritual values in John 13–17 and Eph 6:10–20, and facets of praying in the Spirit. On the church's ministry in preaching (Eph 6:19–20), cf. Rosscup, "The Priority of Prayer in Preaching," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 2 (1991), which also appears in Richard Mayhue and Robert Thomas, gen. eds., *The Master's Perspective on Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2002): 157–80.

¹¹ The main aspects (parts; emphases) in prayer, none that ever rates as more important than any other in the Bible itself (cf. Dick Eastman, *The Hour that Changes the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2002). Another part is oaths (pledge commitments), etc. Those of the church can find examples in how to turn every part of Ephesians into prayer in some vital aspect in ways akin to F. B. Meyer's provocative examples from throughout Scripture in *Daily Prayers* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, reprint, 2007). This veritable gold mine gives touching words to God that the Bible inspires for every day of the year.

¹² This in essence sees God as due men's praise because He is the fountainhead of blessing. He is blessed (*eulogētos*) within Himself, the Blessed One (Blessor) as the absolute, infinite fullness of blessing, the God who blesses. From Him, out of His vast watershed fullness, all His streams of living water flow (1:23; 4:10; cf. Ps 1:1–3). T. K. Abbott recognizes that Paul is in awe of God not as one on whom he pronounces blessing, but the One who in His own wealth is

poured the watershed of His kindnesses to those He claims as His own. Paul's prayer mode goes on to dwell in praise for the work of the Father (v. 6), the Son (v. 12), and the Spirit (v. 14).¹³ Instantly after that, in 1:15–23, Paul is also in God's throne room, here again lifting up intercessory pleadings. His quest is that believers realize, in practical "shoe leather," dividends of their wealth. And soon, in 3:14–21, the apostle is caught up in a third intercessory pleading. His vigil in this case is a high-stakes passion for the answering God to help the saints close with the practical implications of God's endowment.

Direct communion with the Lord in these six chapters is a fitting comeback to God's spiritual riches. A wonderful nearness belongs to believers "in Him," in Christ. Some form of this phrase "in Christ" is a repeated focus in chapter 1 (vv. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13), and in the epistle overall the boon occurs twenty-seven times. A powerful conviction fastens its grip on Paul. It is this: inclusion in God's family makes possible an intimacy of fellowship with God. Prayer is a strategic channel of this communication.

The Church's Varied Experiences in Prayer

So how should those of the church respond to riches that surpass all riches? How should they react to the potential that prayer can have with the God who answers?

In often sad actuality, the church's responses have run a gamut. Some believers have taken very seriously the opportunity to live all out in prayer. They make much of prayer, as does their pacesetter Paul. The church from its outset has had many extraordinary people of prayer. Look in, for example, on believers gathered to plead for the imprisoned Peter (Acts 12). Glimpse Epaphroditus, the stalwart at Colossae (Col 4:12–13; cf. 1:7). And mark those of Philippi insofar as they rallied to Paul's counsel, "in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil

worthy as the absolutely complete One, who gives out blessing (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1968)): The call to prayer is not to add a seventh piece of armor to the six in vv. 14–17; instead, prayer is the permeation in faith's appropriation of or gratitude for God's power to work in all of the parts (cf. v. 10) to make them effective as pleases Him (cf. 5:10). Prayer even is pertinent in its confession of sin so as to be in agreement with God, or in affirming realities back to God, such as "I know You love me," or "I love You." What supports prayer as relevant in this way? (1) A genitive (as "belt [that consists of] truth," etc.) occurs with each of the six parts of armor, but suddenly is absent with prayer; (2) no comparison occurs with prayer, as with a "belt," etc.; (3) Paul's comments about armor flow on immediately into the prayer; (4) prayer is to be "at all times," so it is obviously crucial at any time that each believer truly lives any aspect of the armor (cf. Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role").

¹³ Cf. the Father/Son/Spirit co-equality as God in Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:18; 3:14–21; 4:3–6; 5:18–20; cf. 2 Cor 13:14. The Spirit is a person as shown, for example, in His intelligence to seal and His ability to be grieved (1:13–14; 4:30), and to reveal things to the prophets (3:5) and strengthen the saved (3:16).

4:6). How well do I remember the Saturday night prayer at the Gilcomston South Church on Union Street in Aberdeen, Scotland. I was there at times during doctoral studies in the nearby University of Aberdeen in the mid 1970s. People pleaded before the hearing Lord in passion that lighted in one a torch to be bold at the throne of grace (Heb 4:16). They expected the Almighty God to pour forth blessing. I felt the Holy Spirit grip me and burn His appeal in flame, “this is a fitting way to pray with others.”

But be warned by examples in the church which reduce prayer to a very small thing. Some pitifully impose the very service they do for God as a thick wall that blocks and distances them from prayer to this God. They justify their neglect with excuses. Their delusion is—too busy to pray. They do not pray beyond piddling snatches when on the run, in a pathetic shallowness. Many are the put-downs to prayer. “I never get the time.” “I do not know how.” “I do not get answers.” “God will do what He will do regardless.” “I have no place to be alone.” “I run dry in a few seconds.” “I just do not feel the need.” “I am a person of action, not words.” “Prayer is so boring.” “God knows my needs already.” “I give my money to the church; that seems enough.” On and on go the evasions. Still others knuckle under to habits that reduce prayer to selfish, greedy clutching. They focus only on their pathetic, small ambitions. They then feed on frustration as did readers that James rebukes, “you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your own lusts” (Jas 4:3).

So, by contrast, we gasp at the Ephesian riches. And, as in this “handbook for the church,” how important prayer ought to be—the Christian’s native breath!

How then shall we live? If we focus on how the church can pray as this one epistle floodlights the path, God supplies us with vivid guidance. The prayer life we then settle for is a matter of our choice. But be careful! Will we retire prayer to a pathetic piddling? Or will we raise earnest voices to God’s hearing ear and pursue after Him with all our hearts in everything? A Christian quipped, “anything—provided it be forward.” In Ephesians, the apt words are, “anything—provided it be upward!”

Paul’s Modeling for Prayer by the Church

Intercession

The apostle himself showcases prayer as promptly as when only a step inside the epistle’s front door. Hear him in verse 2: “[I ask this] that grace and peace may be yours from God.” His vision prizes this spiritual capital from the providing Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer’s answers are no doubt also from God the Holy Spirit. He is co-equal to Father and Son, a person, for He can be grieved (4:30). And the prayers of believers are to be “in the Spirit” (2:18,

22; 6:18; cf. Jude 20).¹⁴ Paul's immediate plea for grace seeks for God to stock believers with all they need in unmerited favor, in sufficiency of power, tempering, and toning that fosters their growth in Christ (cf. 4:12). Peace is also crucial in his beseeching. This is so that God's people will flourish with a composed serenity. Thus furnished, they then can be tranquil to cope with whatever they face. For their minds will be stayed on the Lord who keeps them in perfect peace (Isa 26:3; Phil 4:7).

Praise

In 1:3 Paul prays in awe at God's exaltedness. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." In adoration he recognizes the absolute fountain head fullness of blessedness in God Himself (cf. n. 12). First Paul sees infinite perfection of sufficiency in the One who gives blessing out of bounty that is unlimited. He celebrates details of this in which God has begun His drama of redemption in vv. 4–14. Three steps sum this up. God the Father picked out the ones of His will for salvation (vv. 4–6); God the Son purchased them (vv. 7–12); and God the Holy Spirit is preserving them, eternally secure in salvation (vv. 13–14).

Observe how Paul ends each of the three spotlights on what members of the Godhead have done. He writes in vv. 6, 12, and 14 that the blessings God bestows are to redound "to the praise of His glory." Such praise can exult when redeemed ones magnify God for His unpacking of such riches; they exalt the Blessed One, the Giver, in prayer offered up.

Intercession Again (1:15–23)

An article that I wrote in 1995 has detailed facets here and in Paul's second prayer, which is in 3:14–21 (cf. n. 10). At the moment, let it suffice to sum up the things the praying apostle prizes from God to shape believers after His heart. He asks things that show others who are saved what they too can ask of God for their fellow believers. He requests the Lord to deal out a spirit of wisdom for the saints to grasp in the most life-changing fashion things in the knowledge of Him. This he pleads that, by God's enabling, the believers' inner

¹⁴ Praying "in the Spirit" means "in the sphere of the Spirit", in sync with His mind (cf. 1 Cor 2:16), in what is fruit in His will (cf. Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9), in His bounty, in success His power enables, in submission to His purpose, in being toned to His values (moral standards), etc. In such prayer, believers have the Spirit's help to remedy their own weakness about "what" to pray (cf. Rom 8:26–27), His teaching (John 14:26), His leading (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18), His empowering in fullness by His might (Eph 5:18; cf. 3:16; 6:10), and the perspective that He prompts, etc. For the Spirit's aid to pray "according to God," in the norm/standard of His aim, in Romans 8:26–27, cf. J. E. Rosscup, "The Spirit's Intercession," *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 10:1, Spring (1999), 139–62; E. A. Obeng, "The Reconciliation of Romans 8:26f. to New Testament Writings and Themes," *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 39:2 (1986), a summary in part of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland.

capacity to grasp truths might have God's light flicked on so that they will know three things.¹⁵

The three requests are clear. First, prayer beseeches God to help believers know the hope related to His having called them. This is the present life-transforming expectancy, fused in continuity with the full, final realization of this that the Lord will give them in eternity to come. The latter is all the blessedness God will fulfill to them in their ultimate bounty (cf. 2:7).

Second, Paul implores God to help believers grasp the rich dividends of His glory that make up the inheritance He has in prospect for them. This inheritance of v. 18 is the prospect Paul has just twice mentioned (vv. 11, 14). It is the endowment which God has given in promise, now, and also keeps in store to fulfill to His saved ones in their final destiny. It is an eternal inheritance. It is to involve ultimate glorious welfare He will make good in perfection, beauty, and satisfaction for God and for them. No doubt God gives John even more detail in his picture of the New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1—22:5 (cf. 21:7). Paul briefly anticipates this consummate prospect in Gal 4:26 as “the Jerusalem which is above,” and the writer to the Hebrews is aware of it as the city for which Abraham looked (11:10), the lasting city yet to come (13:14).

Third, in Ephesians 1:19–23, Paul prays that believers will know God's power now, in life-shaping practical terms. This is of a surpassing greatness of might that God already put on display when He accomplished four phenomenal things for Christ. He raised Christ from the dead, seated Him in honor at His right hand in heaven, subjected all things under His control, and assigned Him headship over all issues that relate to the church (cf. Matt 28:19; Phil 2:10–11).

Before both of his longer prayers in Ephesians, Paul prays “for this reason” (1:15; 3:13). In both instances, God's lavished riches are reasons that ignite the prayer—reasons in 1:4–14 and 3:2–13. In the latter case, “for this reason” as early as 3:1 gets set for the prayer, then Paul launches into blessings that catapult into the prayer, adding to what he has said in chapters 1–2. In this way, he delays actually starting the prayer so that he first can recount in a parenthesis blessings relevant to it (3:2–13). This done, he ends the aside, repeats “for this reason” (v. 13), and finally launches right into the prayer.

Even More Intercession (3:14–21)

Paul's new prayer seeks for God to transmit a spiritual voltage of strength into believers in might by His Spirit. For the Spirit does spectacular things in His plan that the New Testament shows. He regenerates His own (John 3:1–7), indwells them (1 Cor 6:19–20; Eph 2:19–22), baptizes or identifies them

¹⁵ These three are rightly discerned in the Greek structure. Cf. Hoehner, p. 253; Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990)), 49; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1999), 134–38.

into Christ (1 Cor 12:13), fills them (Eph 5:18), teaches them (John 14:26), bestows gifts of service to them (1 Cor 12), and leads them (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18). They walk according to the Spirit (Rom 8:5), and in the Spirit (Gal 5:16–17, 25). They even have the Spirit's special help for what to pray (Rom 8:26–27), and whatever they do that pleases God (Eph 5:10) is “the fruit of the Spirit,” things the Spirit gives as His produce (Gal 5:22–23). The Spirit gives power to the saints when He fills them (Eph 3:16–19; 5:18; cf. on 5:18 later; and Rom 15:19).

Paul's intercession envisions a purpose for God's strengthening. This enabling is so that Christ may “dwell” in believers (Eph 3:16–17). Since Christ already resides in them from initial salvation on (2:19–22; Col 1:27), the point here, in harmony with this, is “may Christ be realized [in a practical, transforming sense] to dwell.”¹⁶ Paul's plea is for Christ to assert His presence functionally in life-changing realities. This is by the difference that His acting at home in the believers is able to produce. He then will be, in effect, not only resident, but President (cf. Col 1:18).

Christ's asserting the provocative profit of His presence within is another way of saying “Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20). This vital boon is as Paul said, “to me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21) and “it is God who works in you both to will and to energize for His good pleasure” (2:13). In Jesus' illustration such a benefit is when He, the vine, lives conspicuously in His branches and in their growth bears “fruit,” “more fruit,” and “much fruit” (John 15:1–11; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10).

Paul's prayer of Ephesians 3 leaps on to a further enrichment of Christ's in-living. It is that the saints become “rooted” firmly like an immovable tree, and “planted” like a building locked fast by a rock-solid foundation. This quality, in not budging, holds believers steady for a growth in love. And in this, Paul pleads to God that His people may grasp and know His love in its breadth and length and height and depth. The love's breadth can show up in their vision for evangelism and edification as the love can extend to all their situations, and to people wherever in all the world (Eph 2:11–22; cf. Matt 28:19f.). “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), for example as the witness for Christ in the Book of Acts went out to those in all the earth (Acts 1:8). In the love's length, it can endure throughout the present life (Ps 103:12) and eternally (Eph 2:7; cf. Ps 103:17; Rom 8:29–36). The love's height can rise in faith to all the magnitude of God's throne in heaven (Eph 1:20–21; cf. Ps 103:19), to which He will rapture believers so that they can worship Him eternally (1 Thess 4:13–18; Rev 22:4–5). The love's depth, as in Rom 11:33, allows it to extend all the

¹⁶ Hoehner, 481: “that Christ may ‘be at home in,’ that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in believers' lives. Christ must become the controlling factor in attitudes and conduct” (cf. Rom 13:14; 1 Cor 2:16; 2 Cor 13:3; Gal 2:20; Phil 1:21; 2:13; 4:13; Col 3:4a). He can indwell not only in the surety of His presence, but in all the practical transformations He makes. In John 15:1–11, He can live in His own just as certainly as a vine by its life lives in its branches, bearing fruit (cf. Phil 1:11, “filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes through Jesus Christ . . .”).

way from God who gives it to saints on the earth (Eph 4:9–10a), and under the earth, wherever others need the Lord’s saving and edifying work.

Paul’s intercession presses on to an astounding potentiality. It pleads that in this love believers might be filled “to all the fullness of God.” This is not to God’s capacity, for God alone is God; only He has that infinite fullness of 1:2 (cf. Eph, His giving out of this in 1:23; 4:10; 5:18). The fullness to the believer is to his God-given, individual, unique human capacity (cf. Matt 25:15; Rom 12:3). This is as God wills for each differing son to be blessed in His supply (cf. 1 Pet 4:11). The fullness can show in any scenario of his present experience, or in his final capacity in the ultimate perfection to which God will bring each saint (Phil 3:12).

Two more assets can motivate us of the church in Paul’s modeling of intercessory prayer. These appear in 3:20–21. The first is God’s unlimited greatness to answer. His power is indescribable (Jer 32:17, 27). He is able to do things on a staggering scale. He is prepared to supply all that believers ask that pleases Him (cf. Eph 5:10; Col 1:10); able to work all that they can imagine; adequate to do above even this; capable to effect abundantly what yet is greater; resourceful to accomplish what is exceedingly abundantly beyond that; and mighty enough to do according to (or in the capacity of) His power that works in the saved. This power, the almighty ability of God (1:19; 6:10), can be made effectively life-changing in the saints by His Spirit (3:16; 5:18; cf. Rom 15:13; Col 1:29). This Spirit is also the One who empowered Christ, the God-man, in His ministry on earth (Luke 4:1, 14).

The second thing Paul highlights as he ends this prayer is God’s glory. His intercessory fervency is aggressive for God to get the glory in His church both now and for eternity (cf. Eph 1:6, 12, 14). And in John’s writing, this glory of believers giving all the credit to Him will even be eternally God’s in the New Jerusalem. For there, His bond-servants will ever worshipfully serve Him and look attentively on His face (Rev 22:4–5).

Paul’s Focus on Access into Prayer

Two passages in Ephesians erect the sign, “open door to God.” Believers can enter right in to His cordiality (2:18; 3:12). God’s church, His sons and daughters, can profit from this immediacy; we can visit God often with hearts that, in Jesus’ terms, “ask” and “receive,” “seek” and “find,” and “knock” and “it [the door of God’s storehouse supply] shall be opened” by Him. For He is the answering host (cf. Matt 7:7–8; Eph 2:19), out of His unlimited treasures (Phil 4:19). God’s people can get their cue, then, in the two passages that assure this access.

The Access in 2:18

Prayer, even when the word “prayer” itself is not here, is clear enough. Christ came to people in v. 17; they then come to Him in v. 18. Prayer is one boon in the chain of intimacies that draws us closer step by step in the privileges of 1:3. We, God’s people, are no longer strangers and aliens of 2:19 (outsiders) as in the unsaved days of 2:1–3, but are now fellow-citizens, insiders, as saints. Even more intimately we are the dear, inner members of God’s privileged, family household! Then, in vv. 21–22, believers have still a deeper contact with God. They are a dwelling (temple itself) of God Himself in the Spirit—this both individually and together. The Father is within, closer than their very skin (cf. 4:6). Colossians 1:27 even says Christ is in them, and Eph 2:18–22 that the Spirit is; and the Spirit is the seal of salvation’s security (1:13–14; 4:30) and the One who fills them (5:18; cf. 3:16–19).

At the same time, 2:18 in itself offers clues of impressive nearness. And, having such immediacy, we can pray. One clue is in “access,” a clear pass to enter into the very throne chamber of God to commune close-up with Him! As in Hebrews we can come boldly to His throne (4:16), go into His holy of holies by means of a new and living way Christ has opened wide to us (10:19–22). It is more breath-taking even than when an empire’s subject is ushered into interchange with his king, in his innermost cordiality. For here our entrance is to the infinite God, and we can draw near continually, repeatedly, at any time, as is evident in “we . . . have” such access (Eph 2:18), in the present, ongoing sense. Both Jewish and Gentile believers (vv. 11–16) can take heart at this intimacy, and come. The words “in one Spirit” also reflect our mutual possibility; all believers can bask in this. It is even apt to add that, as Paul sees it, believers, though humbled by our human weaknesses, have the special help of the Holy Spirit even for “what” they pray (Rom 8:26–27). And God the Host swings His door open (cf. Matt 7:7–11), endorsing our “praying . . . in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18; Jude 20).

Even these things are not all in 2:18. The words “to the Father” speak of an inspiring approach, right up close, face to face. And the overall context on being united in one body (2:11–22) focuses on a doorway into God’s cordial fellowship, a clearance into His presence. For its contrast is from “far off” when unsaved (v. 13) to “brought near” when saved as in 2:8–9. This is in sync with other Scripture, opening outright entrance to all the justified (Rom. 5:2), the forgiven (Eph. 1:7), those escorted near through Christ (1 Pet 3:18). And it is before “our Father . . . in heaven” (Matt 6:9), as sons and daughters (Matt 7:7–11; 2 Cor 6:18). Our prayer can draw close to God to plead our own needs (Phil 4:6, 19), as well as in requests to God in heart bonds for each other (Eph 6:18–20; cf. Acts 12:5–17; Jas 5:16).

In my college days, one of my upbeat memories is in being “a bump on a log” in a fireside circle. The scene was the Christian camp, Prescott Pines in the Arizona highlands. My Bible lay in my lap with a note pad I was filling. I was enthralled as a young man, Tom Stacy, vividly taught Ephesians, on being

near to God. I recall the song Stacy taught our hearts; how often I have hummed it over, and exulted at its thrill. Catesby Paget wrote it in the nineteenth century, and called it “A Mind at Perfect Peace with God.” Believers can exult with Paget as in his third and fourth of five stanzas:

So nigh, so very nigh to God,
I cannot nearer be,
For in the Person of His Son
I am as near as He.

So dear, so very dear to God,
More dear I cannot be,
The love wherewith He loves the Son
Such is His love to me.

Take stock. God’s seeing us near and dear beckons us to prayer passports into His throne room. That can stoke us to be magnetized to Him in prayer. This is far more than when a bee rushes to nectar deep within a flower, or a prospector penetrates to a prized vein of ore in a great gold rush.

The Access in 3:12

Paul revisits in essence the way in to God that he already has celebrated in 2:18. He simply says more about the access. Christians are caught away to God’s eternal purpose to form a blessed community of eternity (v. 11). The Father is carrying out this plan in Christ (v. 11). In His Son He has given His own a richness in two things; these Paul casts in the present tense. They are continuous. One is “boldness” in an open-faced, outright, audacious, opportune access; with it is an “entrance” in which those who come apart to God can expect a confident, upbeat, warming, sure and free welcome. Such a striking privilege to pray at any time and for any matter (cf. Phil 4:6; Heb 4:16) is our bounty “through faith in Him,” Christ. He is our usher into the throne scene and our Host there. We came to Him in our faith to be saved (2:8), and we can rejoice in continually coming by faith that He hears us (Matt 21:22; Jas 1:5–7). And Paul has scarcely told of the Christians’ astounding advantage of access (Eph 3:12) when he, in the context in vv. 14–21, says in effect, “come with me; enter right in to the throne presence with me.” Once there, in the inner chamber, he prays and we listen in to him interceding for us! At the same time we learn how we, too, can pray for other believers.

Paul’s Counsel: Exude in Thankful Prayer

Believers acclimated to the Scriptures can soon see that the Psalms build up and stock a vast, rich library of examples on praise/thanks to God. Case follows case to magnify God’s majesty and show His praying people a biblical

guide. We see how we can saturate life with exulting in and exalting the Lord. Hebrew words that translate into “praise” or “thanks” in English seem to convey virtually synonymous adoration.¹⁷

Prayer's Thanks in 5:4

We can sum up matters early in chapter 5 in a nutshell. Christ calls us, in the spirit of 4:32, to imitate Him (5:1). He walked in love, His life an offering and a sacrifice to God that distills a fragrant aroma (v. 2). In principle, this sacrificial spirit and scent are also for us. In contrast to this unselfish love is the stench of 5:3–7. One can fall into a debauch in ugly lust, in greedy grasping for things that titillate selfish impulse. This is in immoral, sexual fornication that gratifies cravings of the flesh. Paul is right to the point about this. In sharp distinction to squandering life away on the trash heap of empty loss, which, if it is an unsaved person's life, can finally plunge the soul into God's wrath (v. 7). This is a commitment not to titillation, but to thanks living voiced in thanksgiving; it is the way not of gratifying lust as in the former, unsaved days (2:1–2; 4:17–19, 22), but of gratitude to the Lord; not of angling for what will excite bodily glands, but of appreciating blessings God gives; not of glorying in bubbles of fleeting pleasure that mock as they flee away and burst forever, but of being glad in the things that deliver eternal pleasure and never pass away (Eph 6:8; cf. 1 John 2:15–17).

Prayer's Thanks in 5:20

As part of the life that the Spirit fills in v. 18, those of the church can have aspects of fruit that the filling with the Spirit showcases. How different these are from the things that can fill the fleshly lives of ungodly people. How contrasting they are to dark things of sin in 4:17–19 and 5:8–14, for lives in God's light (cf. v. 9) stand out against lives on bondage to sin's darkness. Paul's idea in 5:14 is, “Awake, sleeper, fly to Christ who saves, and Christ shall shine on you.” For with Him as the light, “you too will be children of light” (v. 8), and in this shine with the “fruit of light,” traits that in their nature are light (v. 9), that is in things of “goodness, righteousness, and truth.” The saved can walk carefully in a wise life as in v. 15, and steer clear of a foolish life. In v. 16, they

¹⁷ For a few among a vast plethora of examples, cf.: Pss 86:12; 92:1; 97:12; 100:4; 105:1; 106:1; 107:1; 111:1; 109:30; 116:12; 118:1; 136:1–26. In view of various Old Testament Hebrew words used interchangeably for the English terms “thanks” or “praise” in many psalms and individual verses, one can reasonably converge to an overall, unifying, common idea: exalting God in adoring credit, exultant and heartfelt appreciation, or honoring recognition. The words often interchange both for what God is and the works He does. This is true whether in the variable English translations “thanks” or “praise,” or similar renderings, e. g. “grateful,” “exalt,” “extol,” “exult in,” “magnify,” “glorify,” etc. The Psalter concludes with copious examples of what elicits praise in The Great Hallel [Hallelujah or praise section], Pss. 146–150.

can “buy up the opportunities” God’s gift of time grants them, even in days that are saturated with the luring enticement of evil. They need not go down that road. As in vv. 17–18, they can walk in God’s will, in the way in which the Spirit enables them, rather than a path of man’s willfulness, wantonness, worthlessness, and waste forever. And to cast the life of light in another description, they can be filled with the Spirit, not filled with spirits of hard drink in a lifestyle of a nature that has no saving quality,¹⁸ but is utter and ruinous loss (cf. Rom 6:21; Eph 2:1–2; 5:3–7).

The life filled with the Spirit in v. 18 has no period at the end of the verse. This filling surges right on to show its products (vv. 19–21). The same life is depicted in a picture of its profusion, in “rivers of living water” (cf. John 7:37–39). Here in Ephesians 5:19–21 are the filling’s coordinate, attendant features, evident in its lush fruit (cf. v. 9). The Spirit can live in those of the church in five ways that Paul’s five participles express. These carry out the thrust of the main command, “be filled”; they broadcast how the Spirit’s filling becomes provocative in its beauties; these are in inter-personal relations of fellowship.¹⁹ And what are the examples?

One is the Spirit-enabled ability to be speaking to one another in themes that reflect the values of God’s Word, and the life He gives (“Christ lives in me,” Gal 2:20). This is in “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” with fragrances that edify rather than efface.

Another example of the Spirit’s fruit is also in singing. In v. 19, the focus of singing is first in the multiplicity of expressions; now the idea is the melody that rings in the heart. Songs can express themes about God and His love of 5:2, that is, in His light of vv. 8–14. This is His way of living in eye-opened carefulness of wisdom in v. 15, His making time count in v. 16, His will in v. 17, or in other words His Spirit’s filling that is the enabling secret behind this in v. 18. One example among so very many in the church’s songs of the modern era is: “Channels only, blessed Master, but with all Thy wondrous power, flowing through us Thou canst use us, every day and every hour. How I praise Thee, blessed Master, that Thy love laid hold of me; Thou has saved and

¹⁸ *Asōtia* has the literal, core idea, “non-saving” in nature. Hoehner (700–01) cites its usage: “excess,” what is “incurable,” “shamelessness, dissipation, profligacy, debauchery,” “waste,” “a wild and undisciplined life,” citing Werner Foerster, “asotos, asotia” (*Theological Dictionary of New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 1, 507), a “dissolute life,” “without any restraint,” “a disorderly life resulting from the lack of self-control,” a life “void of discipline,” an “incorrigibility.”

¹⁹ O’Brien is articulate: the five participles coordinate features that characterize the life, that is, the results that believers show forth when the Spirit fills (394), the fruit (cf. also John 15:1–11; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10). A different, yet consistent analogy in John 7:37–39, pictures the aspects as the Spirit’s outflow/overflow, even super flow in “rivers of living water” (cf. John 14:12b).

changed and filled me, that I might Thy channel be.”²⁰ How glorious and worthwhile to celebrate through life the treasury of songs on themes of God’s Word that the Book of Psalms suggests, and that hymn books share for us! Some of the most heart-growing touches of my life were in the times my dear wife Mildred plodded from her sick bed at the other end of the house to the living room next to my study. She struggled to the baby grand piano, and her fingers played across the keys. What rhapsodies lofted us up as on eagle’s wings (Isa 40:31)!

Yet a further outflow of the Spirit is closely akin to the last. A different participle puts it as “psalming” or “making melody” and this “with your heart to the Lord.” Of course in Ephesians the major emphasis is on the community, all the saved, those of God’s church,²¹ however, each expression of the filling Spirit’s fruit can find outlet through each individual too.²² This is at any time, and any place.

The fourth manifestation Paul mentions is in prayer, “always giving thanks for all things.” Thanks in 5:4 was in contrast to what is foul; in v. 20 it is in concord with what is fruit. Pouring forth thanks can be a habitual exulting in God (Phil 4:6). In Him we ever have things that can spread their incense in worship (cf. Ps 141:2). It was my privilege in a tribute book, *My Wife—Her Shining Life*, to devote the entire final chapter, to 154 reasons from our lifetimes that were catalysts of thanks to us.²³ I have often taken that handy list, and relished long times just offering matters of gratitude up freshly again to God. Will you, who also are of the church, think likewise of countless things to thank your God? Will you utter appreciation, as Andre Crouch did?

How can I say thanks for the things You have done for me,
 Things so undeserved that You did to prove Your love to me?
 The voices of a million angels could not express my gratitude.
 All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe it all to You.
 To God be the glory, to God be the glory,

²⁰ “Channels Only,” *Youth Favorites. Gospel Songs and Choruses*” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n. d.) 126.

²¹ Several clues reflect this as obvious: “saints,” 1:1; “you,” plural, 1:2, and “us,” 1:3–6, etc.; “sons,” 1:5; “speaking to one another,” 5:19, etc.

²² Paul recognizes each believer as one, a distinct individual, just as he himself is (1:1–3, 15–16; 3:1–4, 7–8, 13–14; 4:1; 6:19–24, etc.). Paul is first, with integrity, an example of what he counsels others to be (1:1; 1:15; 3:1, 7, 8, 14; 4:1, 6:19–20, 21, 22; cf. 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1), then a sincere exhorter (as in “walk worthily,” i.e. in a practical life that corresponds in a way consistent with [lit., “has equal weight with”] the riches God has given, i.e. His spiritual endowment, Eph 4:1, etc.; the wealth in God’s bestowal is the prime focus in Chapters 1–3, then the walk in an appropriate, harmonious display of this in Chapters 4–6).

²³ Rosscup, *My Wife—Her Shining Life* (Private publication, 2010) www.GBIbooks.com, Grace Books International, The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, CA, phone 818–909–5555.

To God be the glory for the things He has done.²⁴

Finally, the fifth fruit of the Spirit in this list (a collection shorter than Paul's nine in Galatians 5:22–23) is “being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” God's people can show deference to other believers. This is in honoring their importance by giving a green light to their spiritual gifts, and submitting to their leadership, or sensitively giving way to their rights. Such tender gestures contrast with a self-focused, self-inflated, arrogant spirit that would sabotage others to clutch one's own advantage, or a put-down “better than thou” attitude that fails to respect their worth to God and to the church. We believers are to shine with Christ (as in v. 14), reflecting that the Spirit lives through us; we can act “in the fear of Christ.” In this we respect Christ's designs to work with and use others, each of whom has a gift, or gifts, and can minister to the church just as every joint in the physical body helps that body (Eph 4:15). We exalt Christ as we value the uniqueness He invests in others, and can treat them with a courteous awe as they are also dear to Christ Himself.

In this Spirit-filled life, observe how prayer stands out boldly in singing to God and in “giving thanks.” The church's saints are to pray “at all times in the Spirit” (6:18), the One who fills (5:18). The “all times” must include even when they are speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and being in subjection to others—and even a lot more!

But in his valuing of prayer for the church in Ephesians, Paul is not done.

Clues that Compel Intimacy with God

Copious details in Ephesians are spiritual magnets to elicit seeking God closely, in spirit and in prayer. God's very purpose in redemption is that believers gravitate to His cordial presence, “before Him” (1:4). This will be true eternally in the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:4–5), but it also is God's passion for them now, as in the Book of Hebrews' “let us draw near” (10:22). Other clues, as well, ought to attract the Lord's people: the key phrase of Ephesians, “in Him,” surely suggests closeness; “riches” God has given (1:2, 18; 3:8, 16) quite aptly inspire a drawing near to the Giver. Praise is a spiritually natural reflex to God's blessedness (1:3) out of which He has bestowed His redeeming grace (1:3, 6, 12, 14; 3:21). And the Father has raised Christ to His “own right hand” (1:20), then seated the saved there also with Him, so remarkably close (2:6).

“Brought near” also is electric with intimacy (1:13). So are being “fellow members of the spiritual “body” of Christ (3:6; 5:30), co-members within His very family household (2:19), and cleaving to the Lord as a husband does who rightly is intimate with his wife (5:31–32). Besides, God has become

²⁴ André Crouch, *Hymns For the Family of God* (Nashville: Paragon Associates, Inc., 1976), 365–66.

close in indwelling His people (2:22), as the Father is in them (4:6), so are His Son (3:17), and the Spirit (2:22; 3:16). As the Lord of grace has dealt Himself so inwardly close, it is consistent that those of His very own possession should draw close to Him!

In light of these factors that pertain to closeness, how the church's people ought to draw near God in incessant fervor, as in prayers! Still another reality gives an urgent motive that should stir us of Christ's church to pray.

Paul's Call to Prayer in the Spiritual Battle

All that Paul has said in the letter is obvious to those who read carefully up to his famous armor passage in 6:10–17. Then the prayer in 6:18–20 that closely links with the spiritual warfare is the largess of success to seek God's ability to fight while clad in all His armor.

Six parts of the armor unite. This outfitting is very accurate to that in ancient Greek and Roman soldiery as it was in the days Paul wrote the description.²⁵ So what armor equips Christians to do battle?

First is the belt of truth. Truth in God's Word is a practical urgency for each believer in battling versus slick and cunning foes. This is in details of the Word that strengthen his moral outlook with whatever is consistent with Christ as the crystal purity of truth (cf. John 14:6). This crucial armor includes any facet of truth that wards off insidious lies which oppose ways God would have His soldier brace up and stay steadfast (cf. 2 Cor 10:4–5).

Prayer in 6:18–20 right after the six portrayals of armor is not itself a seventh article of dress.²⁶ Still, prayer is strategic to permeate all parts of the armor with our Commander-in-Chief's power. Take truth, for example. The prayer is so that truth can win. Christ Himself tacitly wedded prayer with truth in His own prayer for His own (John 17:17): "set them apart in Your truth; your Word is truth." And Paul follows up the armor passage by prioritizing prayer to support His preaching the truth (Eph 6:19–20). He needs God's answers so that

²⁵ Cf. William Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London: Taylor and Walton, 1844). Cf. "Arma" that both Greek and Roman soldiers put on, p. 84, col. 1, and p. 85, col. 2; p. 85 cites Paul's list as accurate on all the essential parts, though Paul omits an analogy for the spear.

²⁶ The call to prayer (vv. 18–20) is not to add a seventh piece of armor to the six in vv. 14–17. Rather, prayer is the permeation in faith's appropriation of or gratitude for God's power (v. 10) that can work in all the parts. This makes the armor effective as pleases Him (5:10). Prayer even is pertinent in its confession of sin so as to be in agreement with God, or in its affirming realities back to God, such as "I know You love me," or "I love You." What supports prayer to be relevant in this connection? (1) A genitive, such as "the belt [that consists] of truth," etc., occurs with each of the six parts of the armor, but suddenly is not used with prayer; (2) no comparison occurs with prayer, as it does with "the belt of truth," and the other parts; (3) Paul's comments about armor flow on immediately into his reference to prayer; (4) prayer is to be "at all times," so it obviously is crucial at any time that each believer lives any aspect of the armor (cf. Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," which gives even eleven reasons, pp. 231–35).

he can deliver God's message in bold effectiveness. Thus he can speak truth without compromise by silence or by timidity that waters down the message.

Second is the breastplate of righteousness. God Himself, in Isaiah's book (59:17), is clothed with a breastplate and with a helmet. This principle, as well, is a life that Christ lives in believers, as He taught in the picture of a branch bearing fruit, fruit that issues from Himself the vine (John 15:4; cf. v. 8). Paul agrees in writing of Christ living through a believer (Gal 2:20; cf. Col 3:10). Righteousness in practical ways, just as truth also, is a crucial asset to stop things that are devilish, pitted against the right. And positively all that is in accord with God's righteous will forms a battle prowess by which the believer even surges forward through enemy ranks, snatching the victory. As Paul had just written (5:9), what is spiritually of the nature of light opposed to darkness is in the realm of "all goodness, righteousness, and truth." And so the battle armor, "the armor of light" (Rom 13:12), helps crucially in a stalwart defense to be a victor against the enemy; it also is necessary for an offensive thrust that gains ground in things pleasing to God (Eph 5:10; cf. 2 Cor 5:9; Col 1:10).

Some make a short-sighted claim that loses track of a natural, unified reality in fighting. This spin is that in the six pieces of armor in Ephesians 6, "the sword of the Spirit" is the only offensive weapon. But realistically, in spiritual struggles, just as in other fighting, every part of the gear is strategic both defensively and offensively. Take, for instance, soldiers in natural battles. Each aspect of their equipment is an asset crucial both to stand and ward off enemies and to forge ahead. The belt secures their clothing firmly, holding it in place, so that it does not hinder their struggle as they resist foes, but at the same time sets them free to gain over combatants and positively break forward (cf. Ps 18:29). The same is true as policemen use their belts, life vests, shoes, helmets, and guns. And football gear protects from blows by the other team as well as aiding a player to help his team bang their own position forward to score on the gridiron.

Other contexts in Ephesians show rather constantly that believers do both—the defensive and the offensive.²⁷ The all-around, two-way completeness is also true in New Testament passages that depict the image of warfare.²⁸

The shoes shod with the "preparation of the gospel" are strategic too. Paul's point is probably that believers' need a God-given, sure-footed, bracing composure that such a gospel can supply in preparedness to represent God's message.²⁹ This solid leverage affords sufficiency to hold forth the gospel against counter slams that try to render it ineffective, and aggressively to herald it forth. For by the gospel others too are saved. Significantly, the gospel in

²⁷ Eph 4:1–3; 4:15, 21–24, 25–32; 5:1–7, 8–14, 15–21. All focus on both defensive and offensive factors as these coordinate together in a crucial, unified, sensible balance.

²⁸ Cf. Rom 13:11; 2 Cor 6:7; 10:3–5; 1 Tim 1:18–19; 6:11–16; 2 Tim 2:3–4.

²⁹ Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," 229.

Ephesians before 6:16 always is active, forward moving, and positive.³⁰ And even immediately after the warfare context the one writing it, Paul, requests prayer for his offensive thrust—to preach the gospel boldly. By this, even in heavy conflict, he will make a positive, forward-moving presentation which will have clout to lead others to the Savior (vv. 19–20). And, as he also prizes, prayer at the same time can implore God to defend him, a witness who is intact despite enemy devices (Rom 15:30–32; 2 Thess 3:1–2).

The “helmet of salvation” is a protective reality that salvation provides (cf. Ps 140:7). Christ can keep His soldiers safe, protected from sin and living by righteousness that He has given them. So in confidence that this holds true, the believers can be braced to stand their ground firmly against false ideas the devil and his hosts can use as strategies to shame, confuse or deride them. At the same time, the safety the helmet provides sets them at liberty also to press ahead confident in the security that is certain. They have firmness in that the Father picked them out (1:3–6), the Son purchased them (1:7–12), and the Spirit preserves them (1:13–14).

Prayer of 6:18 is vital to plead living that gains the victory by any part of the armor. The believer praying for himself, or believers praying for one another, relates quite aptly to salvation. How so? One urgency prayer can press is that assurance of salvation will be firm. Another needed prayer is that one will have boldness in his/her salvation, and a forthright witness of it. This is just as Paul in his example needs sufficiency by God answering others’ intercessions that he will preach forthrightly, not be cowed into a capitulating shyness (vv. 19–20).

Taking up “the shield of faith” is another utter necessity. With the shield believers can “quench all the destructive, fire-tipped missiles” that their enemies send blazing to sabotage them. Faith as a shield not only wards off attacks; at the same time it keeps God’s people upright, positive, to push on forward, to make surges that win against the world, the flesh, and the devil. In other parts of Ephesians, faith does things that work as in a good football game. Whether a team has the ball or does not, its strategic play can gain yardage toward the right goal line; Christians can advance aspects of God’s will that are victorious to glorify Him (5:17).

How, for example, does prayer relate to faith? Think of a few among the possibilities. As Paul himself hears of the believers’ faith and love, he prays in 1:15–23. His prayer seeks that their faith will be open to receive from God wisdom to live as pleases Him; this is in the enlightenment His Word can teach them of a life that can have fruitful potential (1:17). Prayer bids that the saints’ faith will grow as God’s light gives vision to their hearts to grasp what is the hope God has in store, the destiny He has called them to reach (1:18). Prayer seeks that their faith will be sharp to realize the riches God’s glory assigns to the inheritance He has destined for them (1:18). And prayer requests God to stretch

³⁰ Eph 1:13; 3:6; cf. 2:17; 6:19–20.

their faith to act by the excelling might of power He can work in the ones who believe (1:20).

Prayer likewise is relevant for exercise in another example Paul gives in his own prayer (3:14–21). May God bestow to these who “fight the good fight” (1 Tim 6:12) a faith to receive strengthening with power through His Spirit in their inner beings (Eph 3:16). So may they act in faith that truly wins in the battle Paul anticipates in Eph 6:10–17, as they “walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). This is a success over feelings, whims, errant notions, or wilting fears that intimidate them to shrink back, feeling that they cannot win because the onslaught that they face is too formidable. Or as Paul’s prayer of chapter 3 further pleads, may Christ dwell in their hearts by faith, faith that acts in forthright success (v. 17). And prayer is apt that they will be able to perceive by a discerning faith what is the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ’s love (vv. 18–19). In the warfare, may they look to God in faith ready to be “filled up to all the fullness of God” (v. 19). This is the fullness in being strengthened with might by His Spirit in the person within (v. 16), or in other words the fullness that is a victor’s supply in being “filled with the Spirit” (5:18). In that same passage in chapter 3, as relevant in the warfare, prayer is cogent for faith to expect the possibilities in what God Almighty is able to do (3:20).

The China Inland Mission and the Wycliffe Bible Translators have used faith’s theme to inspire exploits. Their fight song has followed a version of words Charles Wesley wrote (1707–1788). A part of it is:

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to God alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries it shall be done.

And this faith has been multiplied on so many battle fields that Scripture is bold to show. Moses believed the waters of the Red Sea would part and God would open a path (Exod 14). Jehoshaphat believed the Lord would find a way to defeat the armies bent upon attacking Jerusalem (2 Chron 20). Isaiah believed the shadow on the sundial would go backward—the impossible would happen (Isa 38).

Last in the six parts of the armor is “the sword of the Spirit.” The sword is the weapon the Spirit provides. With it He gives winning help as He fills and leads (cf. Eph 5:18; Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18). This sword pictures “the Word of God.” Just as the Psalms see the Word as vital against the enemy (Ps 17:4; 37:31), and Jesus used the Word as a sword to defeat the enemy, Satan, in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–11), His spiritual sons (Eph. 1:5) now are to cut this way and that with this sword as they forge ahead.

And how does prayer permeate so that this aspect of the armor works? In many ways. A Christian can pray, or believers pray for one another (6:18). This can be effective in crying to God for the Spirit first to make us usable, then

to use us to make headway as God wills against those who defy us. Prayer can work in beseeching the Lord to bring truths of the Word to our minds and lips so that we will wage a good warfare. Prayer is strategic in pleading that God will drive the Word home to us in themes that help us prevail and say or do what will convict the unsaved also to be saved.

When young, unsaved, and profligate, George Mueller accepted a friend Beto's invitation to a Christian meeting. There Mueller saw an elderly man bow and pray to God. The Lord was working in the visitor's heart, drawing him as by a magnet (John 6:44). Mueller went home, deeply convicted about his own need of this God of prayer, and received the Savior! The rest fills out the history—his children's orphanages and his incredible modeling of faith, with "much fruit" that lasts forever (John 15:8, 16; 1 John 2:17).

And in the Ephesians context, how does prayer in vv. 18–20 fit with "be strong in the Lord" (v. 10) and having on all of the armor (vv. 14–17)? In another place this writer details eleven ways.³¹ Suffice it to sum up here. (1) Praying to God (v. 18) follows hard on the armor passage (v. 17); the thought leaps quickly from panoply to prayer, from armor to asking. (2) Paul must mean that the prayer is vital for the armor since it is "all prayer," covering every need of battle about which saints can pray (cf. n. 11). (3) The prayer also is "at all times," again extending to any occasion one knows about (as Phil 4:6; cf. 1 Pet 5:7), and every moment of warfare. Prayer is (4) "with all perseverance and petition," relevant for all things that need steadfastness, touching anything, and here attitudes, acts and words to stand and go forward despite enemies. (5) Intercession is for "all the saints," so it potentially embraces every saved person one knows or hears is in need, and all that is pertinent in life for God. Surely this includes times in battle, and every facet of living to please Christ (cf. 5:10).

Paul, the pacesetter example of prayer for others (1:2–14, 15–23; 3:14–23; 6:23–24) here counts as critical the others' intercession in turn for him (6:19–20). Crucial in his preaching is a crystal clarity in bold speaking to set forth God's Word as he ought to present it. This is to fulfill the stewardship God entrusted in his case (3:8–11).

Paul's Follow up on Prayers' Answers

How often in church prayer meetings, or other Christian exchanges of prayer concerns, items are not followed up publicly later. People share requests, but later nobody reports answers publicly.

Paul is an example here of a remedy. His policy is follow-up, not fold-up or fade out. In vv. 21–22, he wants believers who receive this epistle to "know" how things are with him. Paul mentions a form of the word "know" three times. Believers in his day who meditated on this epistle evidently in some degree knew his needs earlier, just as he has requested in vv. 19–20. On

³¹ Rosscup, "Ephesians: Prayer's Strategic Role," 231–35.

matters about which they already had prayed, here is a considerate update report. A member of his ministry team, Tychicus, “will make everything known to you.” He will in a personal visit brief the believers on the latest about matters. Paul suggests the quality of the update by his estimate of this friend. Tychicus is “the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.” With loving, trustworthy service for the Ephesians’ sakes, he will update them on concerns—sensibly, reliably, as honors the Lord. As to God’s answers to prayers, his strategic information will “comfort your hearts” (v. 22).

It is a timely help in a ministry for any in the church to get back to prayer supporters. Keep them posted. This zeal follows the example Paul gives. To neglect being specific this way may reflect a withering of gratitude for prayer help, poor sensitivity, and a “too busy,” selfish attitude (seek the prayers, but not take time to share with praying people God’s answers when they have devoted love on its knees). God forbid that Christians fall down at this point!

Paul’s Intercession at the End

Peace, love, faith and grace are urgencies Paul pleads for God’s people in 6:23–24.

Two of these, grace and peace, now leap again into his prayer, just as when he began the letter (cf. on 1:2). His principle of repeatedly keeping hot his concern to boost “the brethren” is evident. The prayer shows he is aware that God’s “sons” (1:4–5) constantly need sufficiency that God’s grace accords (cf. 2 Cor 12:9), and the life-settling composure the Lord can supply.

Love, whether that of God the Father, His beloved Son, or by the Spirit in God’s people, has appeared fourteen times earlier in Ephesians. Love obviously is vital in a sensitive response to God’s own love (1:4–5; 2:4), to being in Christ “the Beloved One” (1:7), and the saints’ being firmed up in the Lord (3:17). It is a key in experiencing Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge (3:19), in a forbearing deference that is zealous for the benefit of each other (4:2), and in truth’s gestures that join expressions of spiritual gifts to spark mutual growth (4:15). Love is crucial in lives laid down for the sake of others as Christ’s sacrifice modeled (5:2), for example in a husband’s care lived all out sacrificially to bless his wife (v. 25). No wonder Paul intercedes for the practical advantages of love!

This love is “with faith.” As Paul once phrased it, “faith works through love” (Gal 5:6), that is, faith cuts its assets of blessing along its own refreshing channels where love floods forth. The love is what faith in God puts on display in benefits by His Word. This is in words, attitudes, and acts. In these the Lord’s power works the humanly impossible. All that such love can accomplish, as Paul has made evident, is what God can do when He answers prayer (3:20)!

Conclusion: A Call to the Church to Pray

Prayer is a priority for those of the church. This is of high-noon clarity.

How then shall we live? How can the church surge forward, onward, and not in a stupor, a neglect, a half-hearted ministry if even that? How can it burst ahead if it is too busy (or not busy) side-tracked with other things, and pathetic in rating by its actions that prayer is a minor thing? If God has made prayer a crucial urgency, how can those of the church live if virtually writing it off to a pitiful level? How can we hear that we have desperate need to change, yet not change? How can we live with touting prayer as important but tolerating a hypocrisy that shouts, blatantly when the rubber meets the road, “we can take it or leave it”?

We accept God’s “every spiritual blessing” (1:3), such as being sons, heirs, redeemed, forgiven, members of the very bride of Christ and soldiers in His ranks. How, then, can we dismiss practically from our schedules prayers that seriously prize the face of God? How can we candidly belittle talks with God and bypass Him, the God of prayer, as if, in brutal reality, He is not worth our time? One church group of young couples and singles responded to a missionary’s question why they had not responded to her appeals in promises to pray for her. “Why, to us—prayer? That’s for the old blue hairs.”

The church does not need to settle for such a misguided dodge. God’s offer can awaken us like the crack of thunder if only we will rise up and insist to be men and women of God! Take Him seriously as the prayer-answering God, the mighty One who is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think” (3:20). Acclaim Him as the hearing, throne-room Lord of Eph 6:18–20. What is our answer to Him? When I was a boy the words came home, “Listen, my children, and you shall hear, of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.” But as to prayer, something far, far more important appeals for us to hear. You have just heard what God has said. Now comes the bottom line, What will you say—and show—by your actions that you heard as if your ears were on fire? The answer we should give comes down through centuries of biblical examples. I expounded more than a thousand passages on prayer in the Bible (cf. n. 10); the answer we ought to give mainly comes down from heaven; this answer can change our lives; this answer can set the church aflame.

Listen! Can you hear—hear what your answer and involvement should be? Can you hear the answer to the question, “What will I do, and what will I have the church do?” If you are listening you will hear what God says. Can you hear His thunder rumbling in the deepest conviction of your heart? Is this your answer?

YES!