

Pray for Ministers in the Battle

Ephesians 6:19-20

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Introduction:

Last week, we saw in Ephesians 6:18, how Paul added prayer as an essential discipline for the Christian who wishes to stand.

- In addition to putting on the whole armour of God, you must engage in prayer.
 - As a believer, you are in a relentless battle against Satan and all who are in league with him.
 - Satan is not at all pleased to see you reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, enjoying the riches of God's grace, and living in joyful communion with your Lord and with His people.
 - Even though people will sometimes say to you, "Whatever makes you happy,"
 - and to a certain extent they are sincere,
 - it really bothers them for you to be reconciled to God if they are not also reconciled to Him.
 - They are trying to pretend that they don't need to be reconciled to him,
 - but you are a constant and painful reminder to them that they are not and that they need to be.
 - And so you live under the constant pressure of a Devil, a host of fallen angels, and a very confused and blinded world to come away from a true walk with God.
 - In a thousand subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways,
 - there is a constant pull upon you
 - to weaken your sincerity,
 - to slacken your obedience,
 - to dampen your delight in the gospel,
 - to mix a little doubt to your faith,
 - to cause you to forget your hope,
 - and move you away from a simple receiving of the word—to complicate the message.
 - That is why you must keep your armour on at all times...
 - And that is why you must also pray.
 - With the armour, you repel the attack of Satan so that you do not give way,
 - And by prayer, you call in God's assistance as you engage in the battle.

- Last week, we looked at six directives for prayer... namely...
 - That you are to pray in all times—every season...
 - That you are to pray all sorts of prayers—both general and specific...
 - That you are to pray in the Spirit...
 - That you are to pray with alertness, looking for the things you need to be praying for...
 - That you are to pray with all perseverance...keeping it up!
 - That you are to pray for all the saints.

And now as we come to verse 19-20, we see that Paul asks prayer for himself.

- This is something Paul frequently asks for.
 - Here are a few examples:
 - Rom 15:30: “Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,”
 - 1 Thes 5:25: “Brethren, pray for us.”
 - 2 Thes 3:1 “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run *swiftly* and be glorified, just as *it is* with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.”
 - Col 4:3: meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,”
- From the inclusion of this request, we are taught two things.
 - First, from the fact that he makes this request, we are taught the importance of praying for ministers...
 - Second, from the content of his prayer, we are taught what to pray for when we pray for ministers.

Let us consider each of these points...

I. See here the importance of praying for ministers.

- A. You can see that Paul’s request for prayer here is in particular a request for himself as a minister.
 1. A quick glance at our text will show you that this is what he is asking for...
 - He asks in particular that he would be faithful in making the gospel known.
 - That as an ambassador, he would not faithfully communicate his Master’s message to all.
 2. Paul served in the office of apostle—the very highest office in which one could serve.

- As an apostle,
 - it was His task to bring God's word to God's people,
 - not only for the sake of his own generation,
 - but for all future ages of the church.
- The Apostles and prophets of the first century were unique in laying a foundation for all the ages to come.
 - Jesus had come and He had completed the work of our redemption that all the prophets had foretold...
 - And now it was the task of the apostles and prophets to give the church a divinely inspired account of what Jesus had done...
 - And to explain the meaning of his work and how it applies to us...
 - and to leave us with His instruction about the way we are to conduct ourselves as His disciples, both privately and in corporately in the Christian assembly.

TRANS> It was a task of tremendous importance and Paul felt the weight of that!

3. His ministry was very important for the standing or falling of the church.
 - a. Paul was a leader in the battle upon whom very much depended!
 - 1) Just think, if Paul and the other apostles had compromised their message,
 - the message would have been distorted for the whole church...
 - If he, as an apostle, had twisted and distorted to truth of God because of his own bias or his own ignorance,
 - It would have been detrimental to every generation that followed!
 - 2) Of course it was not possible for him to distort the message because the Holy Spirit carries along the prophets and causes them to bring forth pure Word of God.
 - We can fully trust the Scriptures as the very Word of God, without error or omission...
 - As Paul himself teaches,
 - the Words we find in Scripture are god-breathed.
 - They are not the word of man, but the word of God that effectively works in those that believe.
 - 3) But there is a very real sense that in the providence of God,
 - He graciously brought together apostles and saints who prayed for their faithfulness...

- And because the saints prayed, these apostles were faithful.
- These men were upheld by the prayers of the saints.
- These men were dependent on the prayers of the saints.
- These men requested the prayers of the saints.

TRANS> With this in mind, you are reminded that

- b. the Battle is not just a personal encounter—it is a corporate affair.
 - It is true enough that each believer must stand individually,
 - but it is also true that we often stand or fall together.
 - In preaching this series,
 - I have often reminded you that it is not just individuals who apostatise, but whole congregations—even whole branches of the church.
 - We are in constant need of each others encouragement and prayers as we stand together in a day when there is a huge pull upon churches to compromise our message.
 - We are in it together and we must stand shoulder to shoulder in the battle.
 - It has always been that way!
 - We have the emergent church, the neo-orthodox, the liberals, and so on...
 - And Paul had the Gnostic heresy, the Judiazers, and whole host of others to contend with...
 - While Calvin had the Romanists, the Libertines, and the Radical Reformers.
 - The labours of the ministers upheld by the prayers of the saints are used of God to cause the church to stand.
- c. As the church faces these enemies,
 - she needs leaders who will be able to point her to God's truth to help her to stand.

TRANS> Now I want you to consider the application of this to us...

- As the health of the church was dependent upon the Apostles to lay the foundation,
 - so it is dependent on those who preach the Word of the Apostles in every generation.
 - And so it is dependent on those who preach the word today.

B. That means that you need to pray for ministers today.

1. The ministry of the word is very important.

a. When I first began to preach, I took my calling far too lightly.

- I did not consider the weight of the words that Jeremiah spoke to the prophets of his day who were distorting the Word of God...
 - He told them that they had caused His people to err!
 - Jesus told the Jewish leaders the same thing in His day...
 - He told them that they had made disciples that were twice as much the children of hell than they were!
- Nor had I felt the burden of those words of Paul to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 when he said to them:
 - Acts 20:28-31: ““Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”
 - And even reading them now, I am gripped by the fact that I do not yet grasp the weight of these words.
 - It is a terrible thing to realise that you can bear responsibility for causing others to err.
- How many ministers have been used by Satan to pull multitudes into Hell!
 - And how many other ministers have, by their slackness, done nothing to prevent it!

b. Ministers of the Word must lead the way in battle...

- It is their task to
 - “Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”

2. If they do not stand, they will cause the people to err

- And if they do stand, they will make known the light of the glorious gospel and will, by God’s enablement, help the people to stand firmly in the gospel.

a. But ministers who stand are rarely alone—

- In God's providence, they ordinarily have a whole array of people who uphold them in prayer.
 - God has arranged things in such a way that the church will not ordinarily have faithful leaders without a people praying for them.
 - It is truly a corporate affair, and each saint has a role to play.
 - Of course, ministers have the Lord standing with them and interceding for them,
 - but they also have an army of faithful saints upholding them in prayer and encouraging them to go on for the Lord...
 - sometimes correcting them, sometimes admonishing them... but always holding them up in prayer.
- b. But it is also true that those ministers who do not stand are rarely alone...
- They almost always have a whole army of compromising saints around them who are not praying for them or encouraging them...
 - They have an army that is full of complaining and resistance to the Word of God.
 - Compromising ministers are not sent to a faithful praying people...
 - They are sent by the Lord as a judgment against an ungrateful people who do not pray for the ministry of the Word among them...
 - So though the minister may be charged with causing God's people to err...
 - the people who err are also fully responsible for erring!
 - If they had prayed, God would have answered and given them faithful ministers...
 - At least for the ones praying if not for the whole congregation.
 - I am convinced that the reason there are not more faithful ministers in our communities is because no one is praying that there would be faithful ministers.
 - If such prayers were being made, God would answer those prayers.

TRANS> And let me add to this an admonition... that...

- C. You must never slacken your prayers from the vain thought that a minister does not need your prayers because of his godliness or maturity.
1. When a Christian grows, he does not become less dependent on grace—he becomes even more dependent!

- The growth of the Christian is not like the growth of a child in this regard.
 - The child becomes less dependent on his parents as he matures...
 - He is able to do more and more on his own.
 - He is able to dress himself and feed himself...
 - But the growing Christians learns to depend on the Lord more and more...
2. Take the example of Jesus.
- He is the strongest one who ever lived, yet, in being a man, He constantly depended on His Heavenly Father.
 - He was the ideal man, and the ideal man often went off to pray...
 - He often cried out for assistance with urgent prayers and supplications.
 - He did this when His disciples, being far less mature, saw no need to pray.
3. My brothers and sisters,
- dependency on God is not something you grow out of,
 - a. It is something you grow into!
 - If you are growing out of dependency on God, you are not growing in the right way at all.
 - Of course I don't mean that you remain in need of milk and baby food,
 - but I mean that you realise more and more that your standing or falling does not depend on you but on the Lord.
 - And so does the standing of falling of others!
 - If you see a Christian who is standing strong for the Lord, you can be sure that He is one who has learned to depend on the Lord...
 - You can be sure that he needs your prayers!
 - b. Paul, as strong as he was, begged for prayer for himself...
 - He understood where his strength was to be found.

TRANS> I belabour this point because I think it is crucial for you to understand it! For you see,

- c. The pride of self-sufficiency goes before destruction!
 - Do you see an apostate church?
 - You can be almost certain that before it became apostate, it became self-sufficient...

- that instead of seeing her ministers as vulnerable and subject to every temptation,
 - she began to think of herself as invincible!
- Prayers diminished and soon grace diminished!
 - Now the church is apostate.

TRANS> Oh brothers and sisters,

- If the Apostle Paul needed the prayers of the saints in order to stand,
 - so does this poor minister who stands before you today.
 - So do all the ministers in the church of Jesus Christ today.
- But how should you pray for them?
 - That is the second thing we want to look at this morning...

II. The content of prayers for ministers.

- Our first point was demonstrated by the very fact that Paul asked for prayer for himself as a minister of the word...
 - Now we look with more detail at the content of what he asks them to pray for.

A. First, you are to pray for utterance to be given to the minister.

1. At least, that is what Paul asked prayer for...
 - He is asking here that the Lord would give him a message.
 - The word *utterance* is the Greek Word *logos* which means “Word.”
 - That it should be *given* to him is based on the special promise of the Lord Jesus to His Apostles.
 - You know, He told them that they would not need to worry about what they were going say beforehand because it would given to them.
 - In Matthew 10:19, He told them,
 - Mt 10:19: But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be **given** to you in that hour what you should speak;
 - And in Matthew 13:11, He said,
 - Mt 13:11: it has been **given** to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven...
 - Mysteries were things that could not be known until they were revealed from God.

- It was given to the apostles to know them directly from the Lord,
- Now that they have been revealed, we know them by the words of the apostles given to us in Scripture.
- They were men who were literally given the words that they spoke.

TRANS> But the testimony of the apostles concerning Jesus was completed in the first century.

- This special ministry in which the very words are given to them was necessary to lay the foundation and to give us an infallible record of Christ and interpretation of what His work means to us in Scripture.
 - Now that we have the precious word of God,
 - you should still pray that God will give the minister a message to preach,
 - but you can no longer pray for the gift that was given to the Apostles.
2. Now you need to pray that the ministers will bring forth the sense and the application of God's Word with faithfulness and wisdom.
 - a. The evidence of the Apostle's ministry was that it was accompanied with signs and wonders...
 - Like all who were given direct revelation, they were given signs and wonder to perform...
 - But the evidence of the minister's message today is that it is true to the Scripture.
 - You test it by its faithfulness to Scripture.
 - b. The minister needs a heavy supply of God's grace and Spirit to be able to faithfully expound the Scriptures...
 - He has his own fears, his own laziness, his own prejudices, his own sin, his own pride—and all sorts of other things to contend with...
 - And you need to pray that out of such a vessel,
 - God's message would be heard in truth.
 - Pray that he will have a message from God—a message that is from His precious Word.

TRANS> You will notice how Paul refers to himself as an ambassador...

3. As an ambassador, the minister of the word needs prayers for his message...
 - a. This too was especially true of the apostles...

- But it is true of all other ministers who are set apart by God to preach the gospel of peace.
- b. An ambassador, you know, is someone who is an official representative, sent for the purpose of officially representing a nation or a king.
- This is why ministers are to be carefully examined as to the soundness of their message before hands are laid upon them.
 - Paul warns not to lay hands on any one too hastily.
 - You need to make sure that he is not someone who will distort the message of King Jesus.
- c. An ambassador does not convey his own message, but his task is to faithfully convey the message of His master.
- This is why any minister who does not claim to believe the Scriptures and promise to adhere to them should not be a minister at all...
 - And why those who do claim to believe and preach the Scriptures should be prayed for regularly—
 - that they will indeed faithfully proclaim their master’s message.

TRANS> And this brings us to the second thing you are to pray for.

B. Secondly, you are to pray that ministers would have boldness to speak the word.

1. Paul mentions this twice in our text.

- In verse 19, he says,
 - Eph 6:19: that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,
 - And in verse 20 he says,
 - Eph 6:20 that...I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.
- a. This word “boldness” refers especially to openness and plainness in speaking—speaking freely and without restraint of reserve.
- 1) God’s word is not to be handled with ambiguity or deceitfulness, but with boldness...
- In every age, there are certain doctrines that are held to be either absurd or evil.
 - And the danger is that the minister of the word will trim his message down to suit the present age...
 - that he will avoid speaking about what is ridiculed—such as six day creation...

- or that he will never say anything about what is considered evil—such as that sodomy is a an abomination to the Lord or that the troubles we see around us are an evidence of God’s judgement.
- 2) Just this past week I listened to a sermon that was a prime example of this squeamishness to speak the truth...
- The minister was expounding Acts 17- where Paul spoke about the unknown God...
 - He was a fine speaker...
 - He had excellent illustrations and he understood the setting of the passage.
 - He made some great applications!
 - But then as he spoke about Paul’s quotation of a pagan philosopher,
 - He began to speak about noble pagans—which was still okay...
 - but then he said that he did not know if noble pagans would necessarily go to Hell.
 - He said that it was not for him to judge, which sounded quite humble, but was not really humble at all!
 - It was not humble to say he did not know because the Judge has already rendered His verdict!
 - And He has told us plainly that only those confess the Lord Jesus with their lips and believe in their heart will be saved!
 - They must believe the historical facts about Jesus cross work and profess to trust in that work for their salvation, and of course, they must mean what they say.
 - This man was squeamish to speak about hell—
 - He was not bold with the Word of God.
 - It is not at all surprising to find that there are also other unpopular teachings of scripture that he does not hold to—such as the exclusion of women from the gospel ministry.
- b. Now you can understand the temptation that preachers are under.
- Surely you can see the considerable temptation that Paul might have had to compromise!
- 1) He was an “ambassador in chains.”
- He was soon to go before the imperial court.

- Caesar was to hear his appeal
 - And his temptation might be, under such pressure, to trim his message a little!
 - What if Caesar brought up the fact that Romans were being taught to forsake the gods of that protected Rome and were forsaking the worship of Caesar himself?
 - What if he spoke thus to Paul in a threatening manner?
 - The pressure would be very great—
 - maybe not to lie, but to be a little fuzzy about the message...
 - to make use of a little sophistry...
 - to speak with a double meaning...
 - to profess to be ignorant about something that he really knew quite well!
- 2) You can understand the pressure that the minister I listened too this week is under...
- He was a very gifted speaker who pastors one of the largest churches in the world!
 - If he were to speak boldly about certain things, he would lose his position...
 - and surely, he would easily justify to himself that God's work would then be hindered!
2. But you see, this is the very thing that Paul is asking prayer about!
- This is the very sort of compromise that he does not want to fall into.
- a. He does not want to colour the message at all.
- He wants to speak plainly and directly and clearly.
 - He wants to speak without restraint—without holding back.
 - even if that means imprisonment or death...
- b. He wants to speak in a way that is appropriate for an ambassador to the Lord God Almighty!
- I tell you, no one is going to trim his message when the Lord of Glory comes!
 - He is the Lord!

- He is the one to be feared! not Caesar, not the crowds! not death, not the loss of property, not imprisonment!
- How much Paul craved the prayers of God's people that he might maintain this clear focus in the day of evil!
 - We can be so clear outside the battle, but how we need to pray that this clarity will remain once the battle begins to rage!
- c. It is interesting that in 2 Timothy, a letter that was written to Timothy when he was ministering at Ephesus,
 - Paul speaks of how this prayer that was presumably prayed by the Ephesians had been specifically answered for him.
 - In 2 Tim 4:7, he says:
 - 2 Tim 4:17: "But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."
- 3. Brothers and sisters, you need to pray that the ministers of the word will be bold today!
 - You need to pray that they will not colour the message in any way!
 - It is extremely important so that the church will have the word of God.

TRANS> You must pray for that they will have God's message, and you must pray that they will speak it boldly...

- and as you pray, you are to keep in mind the goal or objective of the prayer...

C. Third, you are to pray that the gospel will be persevered.

- The reason for having God's message and for speaking it boldly is that the gospel might be made known...
- 1. That is what is at stake.
 - a. The Gospel, of course, is the good news.
 - The word **gospel** means "good news."
 - We looked at this when we looked at the third piece of armour which is listed in verse 15 where it says:
 - Eph 6:15: and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.
 - At that time, I explained to you how the gospel is the good news that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...
 - so that all those who believe in Christ have peace with God through the blood of His cross.

- This such wonderful news when you realise that you were God's enemies!
 - There is nothing worse than to be God's enemy—to be under His wrath and curse, sentenced to everlasting destruction!
 - But to think that now there is peace with God through Christ for all who believe!
 - That is the message of the gospel that Paul wants to make known by faithful preaching!

- b. But when Satan assaults the church,
 - this is the very message he wants to distort and confuse and ruin.

 - What a terrible thing when he succeeds,
 - because then a whole generation grows up that does not know the Lord.
 - They grow up, not knowing what God has done to reconcile His people—
 - and without hearing the gospel, it is impossible for them to believe it.
 - This is what you see in the majority of churches in our city.
 - The members do not know the gospel!
 - Many of them do not even realise that they need to be reconciled to God.

TRANS> This the Satan's goal—to remove the very gospel...

2. But Satan is very subtle...
 - a. He doesn't ordinarily attack the gospel in a direct manner.
 - He is too smart for that...
 - He knows that people would resist such a direct attack.
 - So he finds other things to attack that are much easier for believers to compromise on...
 - things that he knows will undermine and slowly erode the gospel.

 - And like fools, churches and ministers compromise—
 - sometimes even supposing that they are doing it to help the gospel go forward!

 - They will compromise with regard to how God is to be worshipped—because a little entertainment will draw a crowd...

 - They will compromise about certain standards that God requires that happen to be unpopular today...

- They will compromise about the doctrine of creation or about the final judgement...
- b. And it has been shown time and time again that as soon as these little shifts are made,
- it is only a matter of time until the gospel itself is eroded.
 - Entertainment instead of worship leads people to praise God for what they want him to be rather than for what He is—and soon they are left with a God that does not need to be reconciled.
 - The same as true with the compromise of God’s standards. Once you start to remove the ones that don’t quite sit right (the observance of the Lord’s Day or the command for wives to submit to their husbands) it will not be long until God’s standards are so weakened that sinners no longer think they need a redeemer to die on the cross—maybe a Jesus to comfort them or to guide them, but not a crucified Saviour.
 - The same is true again with trimming doctrines—
 - First creation goes to the chopping block, but soon other things will follow until at last God’s word is no longer trusted in what it says about the basic gospel.

TRANS> You have heard this a lot from me in this series on the battle...

- But there is good reason for it!
 - It is something that has stumbled congregations again and again and again.
 - I repeat it because I want you to remember it!
 - We want Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church to last for more than a generation or two!
 - We want the gospel to continue with our children!
3. Paul is concerned for the preservation of the gospel...
- That is why he asks the Ephesians to pray for a message and for boldness to speak the message!
 - He wants the Ephesians to pray about this so that the gospel will not be lost.
 - It is very striking that only a few years later when Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy at Ephesus,
 - he is having to instruct him to forbid those among them who were undermining the gospel...
 - There were pastors that were teaching false doctrine.
 - Does this not give you a sense of urgency to pray for the ministry of the word and for its perseveration?
 - Why is it that churches do not continue in faithfulness?

- Is it not because the people cease to pray for the preservation of the gospel?
- Is it not because they become proud and think such prayers are not needed?
- Is it not because they begin to desire that the message would be softened?

Conclusion: Brothers and sisters, you need to realise that the very gospel is at stake!

- There needs to be an urgency in your prayers.
 - We are in a relentless battle and Satan is going to take all he can get!
 - If he can get compromising ministers in the pulpit, he can undermine the gospel.
 - Pray for the ministers of the gospel.
 - Pray that they would be true!
 - Pray for me!
- In doing so, you accomplish many things...
 - First, you show the Lord your gratitude for the gospel—that you want it to continue!
 - This is often a problem—
 - God’s people do not want the light because the light exposes them.
 - After a time, the Lord takes away the light because of their ingratitude.
 - Your prayer (or lack of prayer) for the word reveals your attitude toward the Lord and His word.
 - The Lord will see it and he will respond accordingly...
 - Second, you do good for the minister—he needs your prayers in the battle.
 - He faces temptations and opposition,
 - he struggles with the weakness of the flesh,
 - he faces fears and threats of the enemy...
 - There is always pressure to modify the message.
 - You do your part to hold him up...
 - We saw that this prayer in Ephesians does not stand alone...
 - Paul frequently requested prayer for himself in his ministry...
 - Third, you do good for the church—doing what will help to preserve the gospel.
 - For you see, God will answer your prayers for the faithful proclamation of His truth...
 - If there are those who seek Him, He promises to come to them and bless them.

- If there is an unbeliever who does not even know the gospel, and that unbeliever by the grace of God begins to cry out for the truth,
 - God will send the truth to Him.
 - Jesus said, “he who seeks finds.”
 - There many testimonies of those who cry out to God in foreign lands and are answered by the coming of missionary.
- In the same way, if you are part of a community of people who is crying out for the faithful proclamation of the word to continue—or to come—
 - God will answer that prayer.
 - The Scripture declares to us that He is seeking for those who will worship Him in spirit and truth.
 - Such words should be a great encouragement to you if you are earnestly seeking the good of the Church...
 - You will have your answer.