

EPHESIANS #104 6:18F 7-5-15

A CALL TO PRAY

(Ephesians 6) On January 16, 2011 I called your attention to the first chapter of Ephesians and introduced you to what I said may be a lengthy study of Paul's Ephesian epistle. But, in less than four and a half short years, our series in Ephesians is wrapping up. This is our 104th and final look at the rich teaching of the apostle in this great book of Ephesians. We have spent the last several weeks looking at the description of spiritual armor supplied for us in verses 14-17 and the spiritual war described in verses 12-17 and continuing on into our passage for today. Paul ends his great letter, as I end most of my sermons, with a call for prayer. We will read his call to prayer and the closing words he offers 6:**18-24** *With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. 23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.*

I won't take time to study the simple words of affirmation and love expressed in the last four verses. You see in those words the kindness, the sensitivity of the apostle to his Christian friends, but our focus will be on the final part of the main body of the epistle which comes in verses 17-20. For six chapters we have been speaking from Ephesians about God and we close with this reminder that we must also speak to God. Our first of four points for today will be "what prayer is" and I already gave it away when I mentioned speaking to God. Prayer is simply speaking to our Lord, our Heavenly Father. It is no more complicated than that. Some of our brethren tell us that we pray best when we just listen to God instead of speaking to Him. But the man or woman who says that doesn't get it from the Scriptures. Everything called "prayer" in the Bible involves a human being addressing God. When Jesus taught us to pray he said, "When you pray, say, Our Father etc," There

may be a listening dimension to our prayer life for sure. I would expect that as you open up your life to the Almighty that he would, in those times, speak to you in the stillness of your soul about what He is looking for you to do and to be and to remember. That may happen when you pray but that is not the primary point of prayer by any means. Prayer is speaking to God. The old adage that children should be seen and not heard is not God's idea. He wants to hear from His children and invites us to make our requests known to him and to pray often. When most people think about prayer they think about asking God to do stuff and believe it or not that is the primary element of prayer. The Lord's prayer contains petitions. When we read the prayers of Moses and David and Elijah and Jesus and Paul they are mostly requests of God. Now, that isn't all they are. Prayer is to include worship, praise, thanksgiving, confession - all of that, but typically needy people like us will have a great deal to ask of God. In our call to prayer in Ephesians 6:18 we find twice the word "petition" is used and if we petition God we are asking Him to do certain things for us. Too many times I have heard Christians speak ill of coming to God with a laundry list of prayer requests. We are told that we need to come to God to bless Him and thank Him and worship Him and I agree with that but not if it excludes the long list of requests. God is honored not only by our praises but also by our petitions which say to the Lord that we need Him, that we believe in His power and His love and His fatherly interest in all that concerns us. Our goal should not be to replace asking with praising but to include a greater measure of both in our prayers.

On to point 2 which is where we pray ®. Do you see the answer supplied in our text? It is not a geographical location because geography doesn't matter in prayer. You can pray with your body in any place and in any posture. But you can pray rightly only if your soul is rightly located "in the Spirit." Now, I understand this to mean that the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the believer is absolutely critical if we are to pray and the reason for that is that prayer is a spiritual exercise. If you are not a spiritual person, if you are still carnal, if the Spirit of Christ has not taken up residence in your soul you are not able to pray. But the opposite of praying in the Spirit is not praying in the flesh. The opposite would be praying in form only. You know what I mean by a form of prayer? This is the difference between saying a prayer and really praying. Anybody, even a parrot, can say a prayer. Here I have a book entitled, "The Prayers of Peter Marshall." You know what it contains? This book doesn't contain any prayers does it? You can't put prayers in a book, all you can do is put words in a book. Anybody who can read can take the book and say a prayer,

but that doesn't mean they engaged in real prayer like Peter Marshall did. The substance of prayer is not found in words but in the Spirit where we commune with God, where our souls touch the King of Kings. And that touching is in the realm of the Spirit. It begins with knowing God and if you don't know Him you can't pray in the Spirit but only in form. How many are there in church this morning saying prayers but not connecting with God? The numbers are staggering, and these same folks somehow hope that their prayers will make a difference but they are completely deceived about the nature of prayer. Some suggest that we must be in a certain type of building or use certain devices or say certain formulas but true prayer is prayer "in the Spirit" which is the opposite of relying on forms and ritual. In Philippians 4 Paul says the true believer is one who worships in the Spirit and in our text he says we pray in the Spirit as well.

When you put together the various teachings on prayer in the New Testament you discover that prayer is a highly trinitarian exercise. That is, we find a place for all three persons of the Godhead. Prayer is directed to the Father. We come to God as children addressing their Daddy, crying Abba Father, bringing our needs to Him in the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ whose redemptive work provides the basis and grounds whereby we may be heard. But we pray to the Father, thru the Son, by the Holy Spirit who is the motivator and guide for God's people when they pray. Galatians 4:6 says that God sent His Spirit into our hearts so that we cry Abba Father, in the spirit of prayer. Romans 8:26 *we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.* This is why often I begin my prayers with a request for God's help in my prayers. We need to depend on the Holy Spirit in order for us to pray effectively. Our prayers are to the Father, by the Spirit, in the name of the Son.

One other word on this and we'll move on, but please don't fall for the error some in the church make about praying "in the spirit" meaning to pray in an unknown tongue or language. Jesus prayed in the spirit in his own language. Paul prayed in the spirit in his own language. I don't see how Ephesians 6:18 can even have reference to praying in tongues because the person who prays in a tongue does not know or control what he prays about. But Paul says, "Pray in the spirit for all the saints, and pray for my ministry in the word." That is not something one can knowingly do in an unknown language.

Moving on now to major heading #3 which is when to pray. When ought we to pray? And the answer given here is what? All the time. Oh, come on! You preachers are so airy fairy and

unrealistic. How can anybody pray all the time? At some point you gotta get to work and earn a buck and fix a meal, and take a nap. Right, right, right. Contrary to some I don't think Paul means to pray every second. What he means is to pray at all kinds of times and to pray with consistency. He is attacking the habit of occasional prayer and saying it must be a continual part of the readiness of Christian soldiers. Look at this similar verse and notice the emphasis. Luke 21:**36** *But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.* Jesus connects constant prayer with alertness, just as Paul does in Ephesians 6 when he says, "be on the alert with all perseverance and petition." A soldier on the front in time of battle has to always be alert because the enemy prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour and God says our alertness is demonstrated by prayerfulness. The fact of the matter is that Christians don't pray much because they aren't alert to the spiritual conflict that rages around us. Our prayerlessness is testimony to our dullness and insensitivity. It shows that we are at ease in Zion which is a tragedy at a time like we are in, and leaves us quite liable to assault and battery at the hands of Satan. Many of you only pray when there are problems or crises in your life and you especially need to heed Paul's call to constant, regular alert prayer. Prayer is a fantastic preventative of spiritual declension, of what we call backsliding, of what we might call habitual sin. When we go before the Lord every day we are faced with who we are and what we are. Our sin requires us to forget about God, but prayer makes us conscious of him and, therefore, of our sin. It is much more difficult to grow bitter, to get caught in substance abuse, to lie and to be sexually immoral when you are always alert in prayer. But the decision to not pray, to skip prayer, to let that go is an open door to the enemy who is just waiting for us to let down our guard. Paul says to pray with consistency because thereby we will be alert.

Then he says to pray, not only with consistency, but with perseverance. ® You don't just pray once and then forget it. We are to pray often and without ceasing. We continually come to the Lord seeking His power to work on our behalf. So often I'm sure we don't get what we want because we don't ask for it with perseverance. Someone asked a man 110 years old about the secret to long life. He said you have to avoid rich foods, wild women and strong drink. The questioner said, "My father did all that and died at the age of 60." "Well, said, the old man, he didn't do it long enough." Maybe that is why we haven't seen answers to our prayers. We haven't done it long enough. God invites us to persevering prayer. Now, that word "perseverance" implies that prayer can be work.

You don't tell people to persevere in stuff that is fun, that is easy on the flesh. Perseverance is necessary when the task is difficult and prayer is difficult. Our flesh abhors it. The devil abhors it. The eyes on our head don't see things getting done when we pray. We must see with the eyes of faith and realize that God does great things for those who cry out to him with endurance. William Carey worked and prayed for seven years before he saw his first convert in India. Adoniram Judson prayed for seven years before he saw his first convert in Burma. But these patient, persevering men finally saw God move in extraordinary ways. George Mueller began praying for five unsaved friends. After five years one came to Christ. After ten more years of prayer two more were converted. Once Mueller said in Chicago, "I have prayed for two men by name every day for 35 years, on land or sea, sick or well, I have remembered them before God by name.... I shall continue to pray for them daily, by name, until they are saved or die." After 35 years of prayer the fourth was saved. For the other Mueller prayed almost 52 years and that one was saved just after Mueller's death. Monica was the name of the mother of St. Augustine who was not always a saint. Augustine was an unbelieving, immoral academic man until well into adulthood when his mother's faithful prayers finally caught up to him. On one occasion a pastor, seeing how faithfully and fervently Monica prayed for her son, said to her that "a son of such tears could never perish." Indeed, he became the greatest Christian leader between the apostles and the reformation. We are thus urged to keep on praying, not giving in to weariness but persevering at this world-changing task of intercession. When do we pray? Always - which means with consistency and with perseverance.

Fourthly, we look at what to pray for. We are given lots of direction in the Bible about proper subjects for our prayer. We are told to pray for our civil leaders, for the filling of the Holy Spirit, for laborers to go forth into the missionary harvest, for wisdom, for healing, for power against temptation, for spiritual growth, for what things we desire. Here in our text we see three things that we ought to include in our prayers. First, we see the call to pray for all the saints. I take this to mean that we need to be constantly in prayer not just for ourselves, and our needs and the concerns of our family but for the body of Christ as we know it. Jesus told us to love one another and a great way to love each other is through prayer. If you properly understand the New Testament teaching about the body, about being the family of God this should come naturally. If we pray at all, we tend to pray for concerns within our families, and the Lord simply broadens our concept of family to

include our spiritual companions. I believe God expects you to be praying for your friends at church, for your friends on the mission field, for Christian friends wherever they are. I guarantee that if your friends went off to war you would pray for them and if we see that our friends are at war in the spirit we will pray for them consistently with perseverance and petition for all the saints.

Secondly, we see from this that we ought to pray for those who ask. In verse 19 Paul says, “Pray for me.” Wouldn’t that be great to have an apostle ask you to pray for him? Any man or woman of God desires this kind of attention. They know the power of prayer and long to have that kind of covering for the battle. Don’t be shy about asking for prayer. You aren’t being selfish to do so. It is humility. It is letting others know our need and have a hand in meeting it. We should want others to know how to pray for us, and we should be inviting that. Paul does that often. He makes the same request in Colossians 4 and elsewhere. Christians should be constantly sharing prayer requests with one another. That is a major way to love each other and it is Biblical.

Thirdly, we are to pray for the ministry of the word of God. Paul not only says, “Pray for me.” He says, “pray for the word that I preach, that I would preach it boldly, as I ought.” The same request is given in Colossians 4:2-4 *Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.* We spoke last week about the power of the word of God, but that power depends on the blessing of God’s Spirit and that blessing depends in great measure on our asking for it. The awesome preacher of the 19th century in London, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who saw so many converted under his preaching was once asked to explain the effectiveness of his ministry and he answered simply, “My people pray for me.” As Spurgeon uttered the truth in his Metropolitan Tabernacle, downstairs in the basement members of his church were gathered in prayer for their pastor. So Paul says, “Let’s pray for God to empower his messengers.” Paul didn’t ask us to pray that he would get out of prison, or be treated more fairly or would get over his thorn in the flesh. He was concerned about one thing. The influence of the word over the world. If you know the apostle that comes as no surprise. He said in Acts. 20:24 *I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.* This is all he cared about. At one point Paul said, “I may be in prison, but the word of God isn’t.” John the

Baptist at one point referred to himself as a voice. Someone asked him if he was the Messiah and John said, *No, I am just a voice*, and Paul would say the same. He called himself as well an ambassador in chains. Ambassadors are supposed to be treated grandly, but the ambassadors of the King of Kings are often scorned and found in chains. When the world treats us with contempt there is special need at times like that for boldness. Paul says to pray that he would speak boldly as he ought. The gospel message calls for bold proclamation. It is not something to preach timidly. We are heralds of the King. We are ambassadors of Christ Jesus. Ron Jensen tells of getting on an airplane and sitting next to a very well-dressed man who it turns out was the president of a corporation. And, as the two talked, the man asked Ron what he did and he said, "I'm an ambassador." "Oh really," said the man. "What country?" "Oh," said Ron, "its bigger than a country." "Bigger than a country? What is it a continent?" "Oh, oh," said Ron, "it's bigger than a continent." "Bigger than a continent? What do you represent?" Jensen said, "I represent a kingdom, and not just any kingdom, the biggest kingdom, the kingdom of God. I've got royal blood flowing through these veins!" And you know, what he says is true. We do represent the biggest, greatest kingdom ever. Can you be bold in prayer? Will you be bold in prayer? Will you pray with me that when we stand up and stand firm for Jesus we might open our mouths with boldness to speak for Christ?