

Strength Of Character

Long Beach Alliance Church • November 15, 2015 • Pastor Chris Lankford

Pray(ing) at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

~Ephesians 6:18-20 (ESV)

1) Sharpening Focus on the Character of the Spirit of God

- A) Like the 'Fruit of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22-23) with its variety of types but one singular/whole fruit, putting on "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11, 13) is not meant for instruction pertaining to each individual part of armor, but finds its significance in the unity and usage of the whole armor in the strength of Christ.

- B) However, an initial reading of the 'Armor of God' section (6:10-24) may strike us as a set of new ideas from the Apostle Paul. But, several readings and consideration of the material in light of the rest of Ephesians, will reveal a repetition of previous concepts, attached to a vivid cultural picture of the mighty Roman soldier.

- C) Once we are able to 'cut through the rind' (to mix my metaphors) of the vividness of Paul's military examples, we arrive at the actual 'fruit' of Paul's illustration (truth, righteousness, readiness of the gospel, faith, salvation, Word of God, prayer, and perseverance). These are not new ideas, but did serve as a 'picture' for remembering the critical importance of identity in Christ and His power.

- D) As Paul draws his letter to the Ephesians to a close, he is not concerned with weaponry, armor, or militaristic views of Christianity. Rather, he is interested in finding ways for Christians to remember their true identity in Christ. Without remembering who we are in Christ, without the core character of the Spirit of God in our lives, we will never be able to live for the purposes of the Gospel (6:19-20)!

2) Praying In The Spirit

- A) Continuing the thoughtline of “standing firm” (6:11, 13-14), Christians are to “pray at **all** times,” “with **all** prayer and supplication,” “alert with **all** perseverance”, and “for **all** the saints” (6:18). Paul uses broad and exaggerated language to make the point that prayer is crucially important. Prayer is attached to the Word of God through the mutual use of being in “the Spirit,” with God’s voice coming to Christians through the Word of God (cf. John 16:13-14, 17:17), and Christians responding through prayer (Ephesians 6:18).
- B) This is the essence of prayer “in the Spirit” (6:18), prayer which is responsive or in the same character as God has revealed in the Scriptures. The repetition of “all” communicates that there is no aspect of the Christian life for which these aspects are not central and necessary. Hearing God’s voice through the Word, and also responding to God through prayer are foundational for any possibility of “standing firm.”

3) Encouragement In Sharing The Gospel Boldly

- A) As he often does, Paul ends this letter with prayer for himself and others, and for the sake of the Gospel (6:19-24). Paul’s appeal for prayer to “boldly proclaim the mystery of the Gospel” (6:19) should encourage us! Even the Apostle Paul, an exemplary Christ-follower, needed encouragement and prayer for facing opposition and speaking boldly for the Gospel! We all need one another in communicating the Gospel!

