

## *Spiritual Warfare – Part IV*

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*Eph 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints;*

*Eph 6:19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,*

By the time we get to this section in chapter six, we are still dealing with the subject of spiritual warfare.

In verse 11 Paul writes, “*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*” Then he proceeds to introduce his readers to each piece of the armor of God and tells us how it is to be used.

Remember, Paul is in prison when he writes Ephesians and uses the armor of the Roman soldier to illustrate the Christian’s armor. He says, in verse 14, “*Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, (vs. 15) and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; (vs. 16) above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. (vs. 17) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...*”

When he gets down to verse 18 and mentions “prayer” the analogy of the armor has run its course but there is still another piece of the armor that is needed—*prayer!*

That’s makes for an interesting picture—Imagine the Roman soldier receiving his equipment; he gets his belt, breastplate, military-grade footwear, shield, helmet and sword. When it’s time for the inspection he lines up with the other soldiers. The inspector walks up and down and then stops in front of each soldier. When he gets to one particular man he says, “*Something’s missing soldier! I see the belt, breastplate, your feet are covered...I see the shield, helmet and sword---but WHERE IS YOUR PRAYER???*”

Prayer is an important part of the Christian’s armor. Paul says in verse 18, “*praying always with all prayer and supplication (petition) in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication (petition) for all the saints...*”

The Christian, according to verse 18, is to “always pray”—to be in constants seasons of prayer—to have a prayerful attitude. Prayer is not to be a last extremity—it’s a first necessity.

The Christian is to pray “pray with all prayer”—for the big things for the small things—If a care is too small to be made into a prayer, it is too small to be made into a burden.

I believe that when Paul says to pray always with all prayer” he is referring to the *kinds* of prayer we can pray. There is the prayer of “praise and thanksgiving;” There is the prayer of “confession;” There is the prayer of “petition or supplication;” There is the prayer of “intercession;” And lastly, there is the prayer of “meditation.” Paul says, “*praying with all prayer.*” We will look at each of these kinds of prayer next time.

Paul says in verse 19 and 20, “*and pray for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*”

Someone has aptly said, *“Prayer is like a computer—you can only get out of it what you put into it.”*

Another has said, *“Prayerless pews make powerless pulpits.”* If you want powerful preaching and teaching from this pulpit at GraceWay Church then you need to support it with your prayers.

Paul believed this truth and so he asks the Ephesians to pray for him: *“...pray for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*

Like Paul I need you to pray for me. God has called me to GraceWay Church as an undershepherd to shepherd to His flock (Acts 20:28). The task of shepherding God’s flock is too big for me if it’s going to be done right. I am just a man; I have my own weaknesses and fears and temptations and like Paul I need you to pray for me that *“utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel...that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*

*Prayer* is the last piece of the Christian’s armor that we need to look at. Though it is listed last among the other pieces of the Christian’s armor, it may very well be one of the most important pieces that we can put on.

Martin Luther once said, *“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”*

*“Prayer - secret, fervent, believing prayer - lies at the root of all personal godliness.”* William Carey

*“All great soul-winners have been men of much and mighty prayer, and all great revivals have been preceded and carried out by persevering, prevailing knee-work in the closet.”* Samuel Logan Brengle

*“Prayer is weakness leaning on omnipotence.”* W. S. Bowd

*“Our prayers lay the track down which God’s power can come. Like a mighty locomotive, his power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without rails.”* Watchman Nee

Someone has said, *“A day without prayer is a boast against God.”* It is boasting in your heart, *“I don’t need you God; I can do life myself.”*

With all this in mind, let’s complete our armor—let’s get outfitted, prepared and equipped with prayer.

Let’s move from Ephesians chapter six and park ourselves for a while in James chapter 5.

*James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

In James 5:16, James writes, *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”* It is interesting that immediately following that exhortation James makes the statement, *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

Would you agree that effective, fervent prayer is linked then to the Christian's ability to keep him or herself clean from sin and in unbroken fellowship with other believers?

In James chapter five we are taught that harbored sin, of any type, will turn "*effectual and fervent prayers that accomplish much*" to "*weak and pathetic prayers that accomplish little or nothing.*"

James lets us know that it is the "righteous" that get their prayers answered. It is the prayers of the righteous that "*accomplish much*". In this section of the letter of James we find instructions on how to prepare ourselves for this kind of result.

If you have ever had to take a car to the repair shop, the technician will ask you some questions in order to narrow their focus to what could be the source of your problem. They will ask you some diagnostic questions: "Do you smell anything unusual?" "Do you hear a strange noise?"

In chapter five of his letter, James helps the Christian to get to the source of unproductive and unanswered prayers.

*James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.*

In verse 13, he uses the word "afflicted" or "in trouble" or "suffering." James is using this word to describe someone who is suffering in difficult circumstances.

This person's circumstances do not necessarily have to be as a result of sin or the chastening of God, these troubles are ones that come as a result of *living*. The book of Job says, "*For affliction does not come from the dust, Nor does trouble spring from the ground; Yet man is born to trouble, As the sparks fly upward.*" (Job 5:6-7 )

James says, "*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.*" One of the main reasons why people do not get their prayers answered is because they do not pray. The tragedy of our day is not "unanswered prayer" but "unoffered prayer."

The next question that James asks in verse 13 is, "*Is anyone merry (KJV) or "happy" or "cheerful."*"

I believe what James is trying to get across to his readers is that in every circumstance of their life, they should go to the Lord. When in trouble, we should take everything to God in prayer. In times of happiness, we should lift our hearts and hands to Him in praise.

The point is that God wants to be brought into all of our changing moods and the shifting circumstances of our lives. With that in mind, prayer and praise should be a continuous expression of our hearts. We shouldn't just pray when we are suffering or in trouble and we shouldn't limit our praise to times when we are happy.

In verse 14, James asks another question:

*(James 5:14-15 NKJV) Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. "And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."*

This passage of Scripture is one of the most controversial in the letter of James and perhaps in the entire New Testament.

Many have had experiences with churches, which promoted variations of “healing ministries” that included the “laying on of hands” and the “anointing with oil.” Perhaps some among us have had positive experiences when someone has laid hands on you for healing. Others have themselves had negative experiences with “faith healers” or know of someone who did.

How do we gain an understanding of what’s going on in this passage?

A principal of *hermeneutics* (how to interpret Scripture) teaches “*only one meaning should be given to any passage of Scripture, unless a later passage of Scripture assigns it a second meaning...*”

The careful interpreter of Scripture will always want to compare an interpretation of a passage with what the Bible teaches in another place to see if the interpretation “fits” with what the Bible says in other places. Using these guidelines we can conclude from the Scripture that it is not always God’s will to heal.

So we need to ask ourselves a question: “Is this the only passage in the Bible that addresses healing?”

If this was the only verse in the Bible on healing, then we could conclude that a Christian could be healed of every illness that he comes down with in life, if he met the conditions listed:

1. He must be sick
2. He must call for the elders of the church
3. Let the elders pray over him
4. Let the elders anoint him with oil in the Name of the Lord

According to this passage in James, if the Christian follows this prescription, he or she will be healed. But there are other passages in the Bible that show Christians, even godly ones, not getting healed.

One example is Paul’s so-called “thorn in the flesh” in 2 Corinthians 12:9. Paul prayed three times that God might take his illness away but God says to him, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*” After this Paul says, “*Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*”

In 1 Timothy 5:23 Paul tells Timothy, “*Don’t just drink water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.*” Paul was encouraging Timothy to mix a little wine with his water—the alcohol in the wine killed the bacteria and parasites that were present in water in those days. As an Apostle, Paul could have healed Timothy, but he told him to drink purified water instead.

So we are forced to the conclusion that in our passage, James is not talking about any kind of illness, but about a certain form of sickness. He is writing about a sickness that came as a result of specific circumstances.

The key to understanding this passage is in the words at the end of verse 15, “*And if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.*” The New English Bible translates it, “*...and any sins he may have committed will be forgiven.*”

So in view of this, we must conclude that *healing* in this section is connected with *the forgiveness of sin*.

As parents, how do we deal with a son or daughter who repeatedly disobeys? Do we continue to shower them with gifts and privileges? Parents, who are faithful to the Bible, discipline their children. Parents who love their children, discipline them.

Our Heavenly Father has an infinite love for His children and because of this love, disciplines them. Hebrews 12:5b-6 says, “...*My son, do not despise the discipline of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He disciplines, And scourges every son whom He receives.*” So God disciplines His children.

Now when the Christian is “bad” that person doesn’t see a big hand come down from the sky and whack his bottom. God has His own ways of spanking us. One of these ways (not the only way; and certainly not the main way) is through sickness.

Here is the picture that James has painted in chapter five. James is writing about a person in the church who has sinned. It is very likely that his sin was public and involved the testimony of the local church, thus James’ use of words in 14 “is any *among you* sick?” and “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*”

We need to know that God doesn’t discipline His children because He delights in bringing pain and misery into our lives. As a parent, I don’t enjoy disciplining my children--but I discipline them when they do wrong so that they will not grow up and become a menace to society and bring dishonor to our Lord.

God disciplines us for our good because He loves us. God also wants to restore us and bring us back into a warm fellowship with the Lord Jesus and each other.

James is letting us know all of this because it is the prayers of the “*righteous*” that avails much. An unrighteous believer or one that sways in and out of fellowship with the Lord will not receive much if not anything from the Lord (James 1:7-8).

James continues in verse 15, “*And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*”

Based on this promise in James, there is some hope that after the person who is in sin repents and turns back to God for forgiveness, God may be merciful and take away the sickness He used to get the person’s attention. Please keep this promise in mind when you pray for people who fall into this category.

*(James 5:16 ) Therefore, confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

Remember the context. James is giving us a remedy to sicknesses that are sent by God as a result of sin in someone’s life.

In verse 14 he has already told the sick person to call for the elders of the church and pray. In verse 15 he tells this person what would happen if he did pray—“*And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*”

In verse 16, most translations include the word “therefore” either at the beginning of the sentence or somewhere in the middle indicating that something should be done as a result or on the basis of what was just said.

James is saying in effect, *“Since calling for the elders and praying the prayer of faith brings God’s healing and forgiveness, then by all means, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed!”* In other words, James is saying, *“Since this is a promise of God, do it!”*

We are being told to *“confess our faults to one another.”* Let me say at this point that James is not giving us this verse as a proof-text for what the Catholics call “confession.” James is not speaking of the act of going to a priest and confessing your sins to him.

A characteristic of authentic Christianity is the confession of sin. Confession comes from the Greek word, **homologeō**, which is a combination of two Greek words, *homo*, meaning “same,” and *lego*, meaning, “to say.” It literally means to “say the same thing.”

Let’s look at four characteristics of confession:

*(1) Confession is an acknowledgment of sin.*

It is saying the same thing God has already said about your sin.

Is confession of sin an admittance of wrongdoing? Yes. But who is characterizing your actions as being wrong? We are living in a day where people believe “There are no moral absolutes.” In other words, what’s wrong to one person may not be wrong or sinful to another person.”

In the Old Testament the Bible says that when there was no king in Israel, *“everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* (Judges 21:25) That’s the way it is in our nation today. “King Jesus” has been evicted from society and everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes.

But Proverbs 16:2 says, *“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the spirits.”* In other words, God declares in His Word what is “right” and “wrong”.

When it comes to confession, in essence, confession is saying the same thing that God says about your actions; it is agreeing with God that what you did was sinful.

Confession is also an acknowledgment of specific sins:

*“God I have lied—Your Word tells me not to lie and that is what I have done.”* (Colossians 3:9)  
*“God I am bitter—Your Word tells me not to be bitter; Lord I’ve been harboring bitterness.”*  
(Ephesians 4:31)

*(2) Confession is a recognition that your sin needs to be forgiven.*

Agreeing with God about your sin is only part of confession. The other aspect of confession is recognizing that your sin needs to be forgiven. It is one thing to agree with God and His Word about your sin, it is another to realize that your sin is an offense to Him and requires that you go to Him and seek His forgiveness.

The Bible says in 1 John 1:8-9, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

If we want our prayers to accomplish much, we need not only acknowledge our sin, we must confess it.

*(3) Confession of sin is vital to maintaining a close, warm, fellowship with God.*

You see, sin breaks our fellowship with God and it clogs the “spiritual pipe” which connects us to God.

Like that drain cleaner commercial, the flow of fellowship, prayer and power becomes clogged and the Christian becomes weak and sin in his life becomes strong. Psalms 66:18 says, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”*

John says, *“if we confess our sin,”* God is *“faithful”* and *“just.”* He is "faithful" by honoring His promises to forgive sin (e.g., Jer. 31:34). He is "just" because He doesn't base His forgiveness on our worthiness to receive it, but on the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

*(4) Christians also need to confess their sins to one another—not for divine forgiveness—but to be forgiven on a human level.*

Forgiveness on the divine level restores fellowship with yourself and God; forgiveness on the horizontal plane restores the fellowship between yourself and another.

God is serious about maintaining unity with your brother and sister in Christ. He is also serious about the reputation of His children before a lost world.

James 5:16 says, *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

In 1 Peter 3:7 the Bible lets husbands know that if they are dishonoring their wives their prayers are negatively impacted. Peter writes to husbands, *“Husbands dwell with your wives with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”*

Jesus even puts reconciliation with your brother or sister above worship:

*(Mat 5:23 NKJV) “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,*

*(Mat 5:24 NKJV) “leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

If you want prayers that accomplish much, you better live in harmony with your brother or sister—you better strive for unity in the church. You better be living a life where there is no that can pin a sin on you and make it stick.

James 5:16 says, *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

The act of confessing your faults to one another is not just saying, “I’m sorry” to the offended person.

So many Christians go to an offended brother or sister and say “I’m sorry” or “I apologize” and that is all they say.

While the act of “seeking forgiveness” isn’t just saying, “I’m sorry” it does include the *feeling* of sorrow but is not limited to it. The act of “seeking forgiveness” communicates a “godly sorrow” but it also seeks to be *reconciled* with the offended party by allowing the offended party to participate in the process by granting forgiveness.

The sad thing about so many Christians is that they hold grudges and the holding of these offenses produces bitterness in their lives and this bitterness spreads to others.

Many people in the church hold grudges because they have not been sought and asked forgiveness by the person who offended them; thus they are still holding on to the offense. Because of this, we see bitterness, strife and division in the church and have lost our power.

The best way to deal with an offense is not by just saying “I’m sorry” but by asking the person or persons you have offended to forgive you.

Stay away from the words, “I apologize.” You must say something like, “*Will you forgive me?*” Why? This places the ball in the court of the offended person and they must now grant you forgiveness.

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Effective, fervent prayer is linked to the Christian’s ability to keep him or herself clean from sin and in unbroken fellowship with other believers.

In James chapter five we’ve found that harbored sin, of any type, will turn “effectual and fervent prayers that accomplish much” to “weak and pathetic prayers that accomplish little or nothing.”

In Ephesians chapter six, Paul challenges the Christian to, “*pray with all prayer.*” There is the prayer of “praise and thanksgiving;” There is the prayer of “confession;” There is the prayer of “petition or supplication;” There is the prayer of “intercession;” And lastly, there is the prayer of “meditation.”

Next time we will continue on the topic of prayer, looking at the kinds of prayers prayed in the Bible.