

“Communication With God And Others”

22 November 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 454(i) Rejoice! The Lord Is King!

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Joan Ryan

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-24

Sermon:

If you or I were asked to summarize the letter to the Ephesian Church, what would our answer be? Immediately I would speak of being “in Christ”, of the relationship God has given and secured for us in the gospel. The letter is about the gospel and about how we live to please God as those “in Christ”, focused on relationships and the hostility the devil has for us because we are “in Christ”. So, we must put the armour of God on. Being “in Christ” highlights the relationship we have with God, and in every relationship communication is vitally important. Paul concludes his letter with a section on prayer (communication with God) and evangelism (communication with others), which flows from our being “in Christ”.

I. Communication With God (v.18)

A. Prepped and Ready

A soldier is of little use if they are not dressed for action, if they are not alert, at post, awake and ready for whatever reality comes. This is the person in Christ; we must be prepped and ready for the new day.

“Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in his strength alone, the arm of flesh will fail you, you dare not trust your own. Put on the gospel armour, each piece put on with prayer, where duty calls or danger, be never lacking there.” George Duffield

You need to *“pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints”* (v.18).

Everyday there is a need to thank God for the blessings He has lavished on us. How did you get on with reading Ch 1:3-14 each day this week? Did it thrill you that it pleased God to have you as His adopted child? Did you luxuriate in the lavishness of His grace? Did you marvel at the coming together of heaven and earth in you, a foretaste of the Kingdom of heaven, and that you have the Holy Spirit dwell in you? Such understanding drives prayer throughout the day. By doing this, you put on the gospel armour, reminding yourself of who you are “in Christ”.

How was your week? Tough perhaps! Did you experience relationship difficulty, opposition to your ideas, disappointment? Were you shocked and saddened by the sin and darkness in the world? Did you wonder how best to navigate a situation or were you unsure of the future? Because we are “in Christ”, we seek to live for Him, stand firm in Him against the evil one, and seek His guidance and help. We are able to do so, because we have this wonderful access to God in prayer. We speak with

God, we listen to God - prayer is the natural breathing of being "in Christ". It is how we maintain our relationship with God and live out the reality of being "in Christ".

B. All Prayer

John Stott popularised this idea in his commentary about Paul's desire for "all prayer". He said most of us practice some prayer - we pray some of the time for some people. But Paul calls us to *all* prayer - *all* occasions, *all* kinds of prayers, *always* keep on praying for *all* the saints - and that is a good way to recall and remember what is being taught here.

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions: Being "in Christ", we communicate with Him about every situation we face. We speak to Him about our day, when entering a new situation, when unsure. This is a recognition of our relationship and dependency upon Him. These are not usually formal times of prayer, but I suggest to you that the formal times are the structure they are built upon. Reserving time to pray once, twice, or three a day is part of "all occasions", and this is supplemented by a continual awareness of our relationship and our dependence.

What does "in the Spirit" mean? Some commentators think it means speaking in tongues, but I do not. My initial thought was it meant listening to the Spirit's voice in the word of God, which I think is better. When in doubt about the meaning of a text, phrase or word in the Bible, one of the interpretative principles we should use is to examine what the context means, and Eph. 3:16-17 provides a helpful insight. "In the Spirit" means looking for God to empower, give us strength, develop our relationship with Him and guide us into the truth of the word of God. In the immediate context, we are putting armour on, and of course this is not literal armour but a spiritual armour. By doing so, we are empowered, strengthened to stand firm against the devil's assault. As mentioned last week, we can flounder if we don't, tending towards dullness, negativity and depression. We need the "Spirit" to empower us.

With all kinds of prayers and requests: Elsewhere, Paul speaks of requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving as types of prayer (1 Timothy 2:1) There is not one single way or type of prayer, and Paul here encourages everyone to pray with cries of need, making requests about everyday realities, praying for others using information and letters, and thanking God for His lavish grace and love.

Always keeping on Praying: Persistence in prayer is wonderfully taught by the Lord Jesus in Luke 18 with the parable of the persistent widow. The takeaway in that story is faith - do we believe in our relationship with God? Do we believe that God is unlike the unjust judge? Is the issue important enough for us to keep praying?

Think about the reality of being "in Christ" - persistence in prayer makes sense. As Klyne Snodgrass said, it is like "spiritual breathing". It gives life to our relationship spiritually. The Christian life is a relationship with Jesus and therefore "*all of life is to be prayed, not just lived*" (Klyne Snodgrass). On my desk, I have a cross with the inscription "Prayer Works" on it. This is the belief that drives us on in prayer. God our Father hears us; He *will* answer us - yes, no, or not yet.

So in prayer, you and I are in the heavenlies, His throne room. We have access to the Sovereign Ruler. We seek His Kingdom come, His will be done, so we pray that it will be so, and pray continually.

For all the saints: This takes us outside of ourselves, moving us to think of others, bringing their needs and concerns to God. It also, in the present context, tells us to be involved, to be alert to the reality of evil in our surroundings, and pray. What are the needs of this community of faith? What are the needs of the community in and around the Dublin 2 area? What are the needs of those where we live and where our members come from, which is now all over the world?

II. Communication With Others (v.19-20)

The gospel is good news, but sharing it remains a task that, for most of us, is difficult and easy to shy away from. Not many of us are what we might call “natural evangelists”. We probably assume that Paul had no fears, was really bold in sharing the gospel. But his request for prayer, his request for an ability to speak the gospel and to do so with words fearlessly, suggests the opposite, that he, too, found it a struggle.

He calls himself an ambassador in chains. He has previously described himself as an apostle, a messenger of God, mandated to declare the mystery of the gospel (the revelation of the good news of Jesus) to Gentiles. As an apostle and ambassador, he holds a position of great honour; he represents and speaks for the King of Kings, God Almighty. Yet he is disrespected, dishonoured, seen as a threat and a nuisance, living in chains for carrying out his task.

Sadly, this is an increasing reality in our culture; but note that he does not stop, withdraw, or hide. Instead, he asks that whenever he has opportunity to speak, he would speak fearlessly, so that people would understand the gospel. He is asking that he would do so, because he should! “Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should” (v.20).

This is a life worth living, a life pleasing to God. This is necessary if light is to be shone into evil and darkness, if people are to hear the good news of the gospel and be saved. Now, we certainly do not need to be guilted into doing this and we need to live a life of integrity first, so that when the opportunity comes we take it. We pray for the right words and the freedom to express it. Let us pray for each other, that we would speak about Jesus with freedom and be given the right words to say. Speaking to others about Jesus is something we should do.

Hymn of Reflection: Holy Spirit, Living Breath Of God

Prayers for Others: Ken Gillanders

Announcements

Advent Prayer meeting: The elders are calling ARPC to prayer during Advent on Sunday evenings from 7-8 pm via Zoom. We see the present circumstances of Covid as an opportunity to cry out to God and ask Him to lead us, bringing about profound and significant change.

Closing Hymn: Hear The Call Of The Kingdom

Benediction: To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory,

majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

Discussion & Application:

Think about your prayer life as an individual, as well as our corporate prayer life as a church and in 3D groups. In light of Ephesians 6:18, how are we praying well? How can we grow in prayer? We'd love to hear your thoughts!

Consider what Jesus teaches us in Luke 18:1-8 about persistence in prayer. What enables us to persist in prayer?

Discuss your experience of speaking to others about Jesus. How can we encourage this?