

“The Keys to the Armory”

Ephesians 6:18a-24

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Well, here we are. We have been studying Paul's letter to the Ephesians since April and we have finally reached the end. I have to admit that when I originally read through this passage my first thought was “there's nothing here to preach on.” I mean, really. This is the “OK I miss you, and Tychicus is going to come show you slides of our trip to Rome, etc., etc.

But as I spent time studying this passage I think this is the key to the entire book of Ephesians. Paul is saying here, “this is what you are supposed to be doing. This is what the church is for.” Before we look at this key, I think we should do a little review of what we've learned in this book.

Ephesians is written in basically two main sections. The first part of Ephesians deals with our relationship with God. In chapter one we see that we are saved only by God's grace alone. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:5 says, “In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.” Verse seven goes on to remind us that we are redeemed through Christ's blood and that our sins are forgiven according to the riches of his grace. We also learned in chapter one that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee, or down payment, of our inheritance.

It's important to notice in this section that God is the one who does all the work. There is nothing we can do to add to the work of Christ. Ephesians 2:8 says, For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. That doesn't mean that we don't need to respond. You must still commit your life to following Jesus, not just once but every day.

In Chapter two, Paul reminds us that now that we are united with Christ, we are also united with all believers. That's why we have the Church. He says, “you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are ... members of

the household of God.” The idea of household here is that of a large extended family, who generally lived together in one household. All of us together, in Christ, are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. In Chapter three, Paul emphasizes that all of this is possible only through Christ. We receive strength through Christ – strength to comprehend, and to be filled with all the fullness of God.

As a response to Christ's work in us, Paul lays out in the second main section of Ephesians how we are to live. But the focus here is never on us individually. It's always about how we are to live to build up the community, the church. In Ephesians 4:1, Paul says, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with humility and gentleness, with patience, **bearing with one another in love**, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In chapter four we're told to put off our old selves, which belong to our former manner of life, and put on Christ. In other words, Paul is saying “you have been transformed, so live like it.” But again, this is for the building up of the community. For example, we're told the thief shouldn't steal but rather work so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Chapters five and six go into detail about our relationships with other people. Chapter five deals with our relationships with those who are our equals. We are instructed in how we are to talk to one another and this is where the instructions to wives and husbands comes, and chapter six deals with our relationships which involve authority – children and parents, slaves and masters, management and labor. Your relationships are not just two people but three. It's not just you and your spouse, it's you, your spouse and Christ. The relationship is no longer just parents and children, it's parents and children and Christ. In fact 5:21 sums up

how we are to deal with other people, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This is what Jesus means when he says, “take up your cross and follow me.” We must die to our self in order to live for others.

Last time we looked at the beginning of chapter 6 and the armor of God. Most of the armor is defensive. It’s armor not weapons. That brings us to today’s passage which I think actually holds the key to the entire book—prayer. Remember, Ephesians is often referred to as the instruction manual for the church. After discussing our relationship with God and then our relationship with each other, Paul says, with all this in mind, your purpose is to pray for all the saints. In other words, you are to pray for each other. And you are to pray all the time. And you should pray that the gospel would be declared boldly.

Sometimes I wonder if, in our comfortable 21st century American church, if we really understand what prayer is all about. When you look at all the things we crowd into our lives, even into our church lives, prayer becomes a very small percent. But John Calvin, who is arguably the most important protestant theologian ever, called prayer the “chief exercise of faith.” Calvin said prayer is how we daily receive God’s benefits. He goes on to say that “we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord’s gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.” In other words, it is through prayer that we ask God to reveal himself as wholly present to us. When two or more are gathered in Christ’s name, he is present with them.

When we pray together and intercede for one another, God draws us into communion with himself and it is only through this communion with God that we come into true communion or fellowship with each other.

This kind of prayer is hard work. I’m not talking about the prayer you say on the way to work, “God, please let my boss be out sick today.” I’m talking about prayer that brings us together. When we are in relationships where we can share openly with each other and with

God, we are living out our call to be the priesthood of all believers. The priesthood of all believers doesn’t mean that you are your own priest. It means that we are each other’s priest. We carry each other’s burdens to God and in turn we can tell one another, “in Jesus Christ you are forgiven.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German pastor and martyr for the faith during the Second World War wrote, “A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner. This is a happy discovery for the Christian who begins to pray for others.”

This is why Paul says that Tychicus is going to come and share what’s happening in his life. It’s so they can know how to pray. We should be sharing with one another the same way so that we know how to pray for each other.

The Greek word *koinonia* and words with the same root, occurs 119 times in the Bible. It is translated into English as community, communion, and fellowship. The idea is spiritual fellowship or communion.

Koinonia is what it really means to be the church. Fellowship in the church means fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:4 goes so far as to say that we become partakers (*koinonia*) of the divine nature. The passages which talk about our participation in Christ use the word *koinonia*. As we are “in Christ,” we receive and find our unity. As the Father dwells in Christ through the Spirit, so Christ, through the Spirit, dwells in the church. Everyone who comes to him dwells in him and is knit together into his body.

The Gospel of John tells us that the power has been given to those who believe in the

name of the only-begotten Son of God, that they too may become children of God. As God has adopted us as His children, we have become brothers and sisters of Christ and of each other. And here Calvin points out to us that it is all of us together who can call upon God as OUR Father.

So what have we learned from our study of Ephesians? We learned that God chose us before the foundation of the world and saved us by grace through faith. In response, as those redeemed by Christ, we are to live not for

ourselves but for those all for whom Christ died. Even the ones we don't like. And we are to pray. Pray for each other, pray for unbelievers, pray for the gospel to be preached with boldness. And in praying together, we are drawn into communion with God and with each other, which allows us to live as the true church – not buildings and programs and events, but people united with Christ in fellowship with one another. When we are doing those things, we are experiencing a taste of the communion of saints which awaits us.

Amen.