

In order to pray effectively, we must know two things:<

1. How to pray.
2. What we are praying for.

The “*How to pray*” part is well addressed in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, not as a set prayer to repeat, but as a model or example prayer to teach us how to pray and what to pray for. Here, I particularly want to address the part that says, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10 and Luke 11:2).

We are in a spiritual war of cosmic proportions. When you surrendered your life to Christ and committed yourself to discipleship, you became a soldier in that war. There are many examples in the Scriptures that point to the reality of that war.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Daniel it is clear that Daniel’s petition was hindered (not stopped, but *hindered*) by “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” who withstood the archangel Michael for a full twenty-one days as he was endeavoring to carry out his divinely appointed mission to answer Daniel’s prayer.

Now, it should be clear that this “prince” was not a human being, not any political figure or potentate who was able to stand against the archangel. No, this was, in its entirety, a battle that took place in the spiritual realm.

The Bible speaks at length of spiritual powers that rule over certain aspects of the earth and of humanity.

**Let’s start with Ephesians 6:12** -- *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,*

against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (ESV)

Paul is clearly teaching us that there are spiritual powers of darkness that have certain dominion in this realm in which we live. The KJV calls them “the rulers of the darkness of this world.” As a matter of fact, the preponderance of English translations uses the word “rulers” where the ESV chooses “powers.” The Greek holds the feeling, in my opinion, of world rulers that have some jurisdictional right or authority. After all, you cannot be a “ruler” without authority, right?

This is no reason for worry or fear, though. **Colossians 1:16** assures us that:

*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

The same epistle goes on to tell us, in **Colossians 2:15**:

*He (God) disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Christ Jesus).*

Even the prince of darkness, when he attempted to tempt Jesus in the desert, confessed that the authority that he has has been given to him, that it is not his own. In the account in Luke 4:6, he says to Jesus:

*“To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered (handed over, committed) to me, and I give it to whom I will.”*

There are those even in Christendom who would deny the reality of the spiritual realm and the spiritual war that rages all around us. Truthfully, though, if one will deny the spiritual reality that the Scriptures so clearly teach us, he might as well deny the virgin birth and the physical resurrection as they are all equally a part of the Bible's cosmology.

So, what does this have to do with our prayer digest? **MUCH!**  
**VERY MUCH!**

As one looks through history, from the earliest tribes of humanity, through the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Greeks and Romans, the Celtic and Nordic tribes, and the indigenous people of Mesoamerica and throughout the Americas, there is a pattern that becomes clear. Each of these cultures had their own pantheon of gods, and the pantheons often had similarities; if not similar structures, then at least many of the same classes of gods.

Now, let me be clear. When I talk about “gods,” I am referring to a certain class of spiritual powers that have ruled over humanity though the millennia. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 8:5-6**:

*For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

So, we know – according to the great apostle and theologian Paul - that there are many “so-called gods in heaven or on earth.” He goes on to say that “indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords.” But “for us”, that is to those who understand the reality of this spiritual

war - we know that there is only one true Sovereign, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent Creator God. These “so-called gods,” however, are spiritual entities who are “the rulers ... the authorities ... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 6:12)

This brings us to a specific prayer need for Mexico in general, and for our work specifically.

You probably hear a lot in the news about the violence in Mexico. As one who lives here, I can tell you that the violence is not as all-pervasive as the news wires would have you believe, but it is definitely a phenomenon that affects most of Mexican society. Probably 90% of the people I know have lost relatives to the violence that has become a part of Mexican folklore.

But why is this?

There is a cult of death that is widely spread throughout Mexican culture. The name of its god is “*Santa Muerte*,” which literally translates a “*Saint Death*.” It is a spirit, *a ruler, an authority, a cosmic power over this present darkness, a spiritual force of evil in the heavenly places* that definitely has a powerful sway over Mexican culture and society.

You see, the violence is not a political problem, nor a social problem, nor an economic problem. It is a spiritual problem. And its roots go back many, many generations to pre-hispanic Mesoamerican cultures and their religious practices.

Every Mesoamerican cosmology had a god of death and the underworld. The Aztec version was called Mictlantecuhtli (MIK-TLAN-TE-KU-TLI), though every Mesoamerican society each had their own version with its culturally appropriate name and visage, though I am certain that each one was simply a localized expression of the same spiritual ruler, the same *cosmic power over this present darkness*, the same *spiritual force of evil in the heavenly places*. This demonic entity held people in the bondage of fear and death.

Now, you see, this entity did not simply fade out with the dilution of the indigenous cultures; it has simply shifted its form and been adapted as a more modern version. *Santa Muerte (Saint Death)* is the modern manifestation of that same evil principality. It has been folded, throughout Mexico and even other parts of Latin America, into folk Roman Catholicism and is the object of worship and supplication by many people. The prayers made to it are never for blessing, for good and holy things. Supplications are made for vengeance, for material gain, for protection in less-than-righteous endeavors, for success in less-than-honest enterprises.

Again, I am convinced that it is the driving force behind the violence and wickedness that is so prevalent throughout Mexico. Again, these are not political, social or economic problems at the root; they are spiritual in origin and nature.

As one travels through the mountains of this region, often at the entrance of towns and villages one will see an altar with an idol that looks something like the modern depiction of the grim reaper. There will be some kinds of offerings (flowers, candles, coins, a bottle of liquor, etc.) before it. It is a common element in the drug trafficking

culture; those involved in what we refer to as “the business” are generally devotees of this demonic entity.

I don’t share this to alarm you. Indeed, as children of the Most High God, we should not be alarmed by these things; *but we must be aware!*

I do not say these things to, in any way, give glory or power or credit of any kind to these wicked spirits, but the surest way to defeat is to deny or remain ignorant of the existence of your enemy. We need to be aware of the reality of the war that is being waged around and above us. And we need to understand that we are either soldiers in that war or casualties of it.

So, this is where we learn to pray against these powers, because it is only through spiritual weapons that we can see them vanquished; and we **can** see them vanquished if we will employ those weapons adequately and forcefully.

You see, these powers, those “gods” and “lords,” do have a certain legitimate authority over humanity. When our forebears – Adam and Eve – chose to ally themselves with the prince of darkness who came disguised as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14), they delivered their God-given authority over God’s creation to the deceiver. This why the devil said, in **Luke 4:6**, “*To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me...*”

However, that authority has been challenged and effectively defeated through the cross by the death and resurrection of Jesus! Again, **Colossians 2:15:**

*He (God) disarmed the rulers and authorities (cf. Ephesians 6:12) and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Christ Jesus).*

We see clearly that God has disarmed or divested *the cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* through the death and resurrection of Jesus!

Why, then, you may ask, is there still evil in the world? The vast majority of humanity still chooses to be under the authority of evil and darkness. As Jesus told Nicodemus in **John 3:19-20**:

*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*

Most choose to remain under that authority of *the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2)*, whether by choice or through ignorance. After all, “*How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*” (**Romans 10:14**)

However, there is more to the battle than just the preaching. As God’s adopted children, the Bible tells us that God, “*even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*” (**Ephesians 2:5-6**)

We are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus! And Christ Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father with all authorities and powers subject to him, according to **1 Peter 3:21-22**:

*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

Jesus has delegated his authority on to us, his elect here in this world, in this realm. He told us, according to **Matthew 18:18-20**:

*Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*

Prayer is our weapon. Engagement with these powers – with the rulers ... the authorities ... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

**(Eph. 6:12)** can only be achieved successfully through the wielding of *these weapons of our warfare*, which are not *carnal*, that is to say, not of this world, not weapons that can be wielded with unclean and fleshly hands.

Paul nails it in the verses following the ones – which we’ve already referred to - in Ephesian 6:14-20, to wit:

- **14** *Stand therefore ...* – Hold firm, hold your place without fainting or retreat, because “... *we are not of those who shrink*

*back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” ~Hebrews 10:39*

- *... having fastened on the belt of truth ...* – We walk in integrity and are anchored in the ultimate truth, the Gospel of Christ and the true doctrine handed down by the apostles. This belt keeps us together, protects our vitals.
- *... and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ...* - This is the righteousness that comes from justification in Christ. This is the righteousness that we wield in the face of the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10-12). The powers of darkness would laugh in the face of our own attempts at righteousness, but they cannot stand in the face of the Righteousness of Christ in us. *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” ~2 Corinthians 5:21. When we confront the powers of darkness, we must do so in the righteousness of God in Christ!*
- **15** *... and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ...* – Be ready in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). A good soldier always has his boots on.
- **16** *... In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ...* - Faith – confidence in our Father and his love, mercy and care toward us sustains us even in the midst of great spiritual battles as we know beyond any doubt that *“... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37)*
- **17** *... and take the helmet of salvation, ...* - It is not enough to simply believe, we must know what Christ has done for us and what our place in him is. This helmet, this assurance of our salvation, protects us from the lies and mental attacks of the enemy because we have something to respond with.

- ... *and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ...* - The Word of God is our sword. The enemy cannot stand against the eternal truths and the divine mandates of scripture. If we know what the Word tells us, we can be firm in our commitment and can stand victoriously against the enemy. Without the assurance of God's word, his promises and his laws, we stand weaponless.
- **18** ... *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. ...* - Ultimately, this is what it culminates in. We pray at all times, led by and sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Like the soldier does not move on his own, but is directed by his commanders in a unified movement against the enemy, so we must ***pray in the Spirit.***

And here (in vv. 18-19) we come to the crux of this presentation, my petition to you...

- ... *To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ...* – This is, in a crux, my prayer request to you.

We – the church – have authority over the wicked rulers of this world. *The rulers ... the authorities ... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*” (**Eph. 6:12**) must all bow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and we have the authority in Christ to make that happen!

God has *disarmed the cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, and has put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him Christ Jesus, through*

*his death and resurrection! They are defeated and we are called to participate in that already-won war!*

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I'll finish with a passage from **Jude 1:9** --

*But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"*

I think that there are two important instructive lessons in this passage.

First is that even the archangel Michael did not walk in the authority that we, as God's adopted children, walk in. We are given direct authority over the forces of evil in a way that even archangels do not possess, through the name of Jesus and our place in God's hierarchy as his children. (We are even told that ultimately we will sit in judgment over the angles: *Do you not know that we are to judge angels? 1 Corinthians 6:3*)

Second is the lesson of humility and submission. We are not to raise our own hand against the powers of darkness. They are too formidable for us. The archangel Michael recognized this, and we should, too. Our own strength and righteousness are vanity and foolishness in the spiritual realm. It is the righteousness and authority of the name of Jesus that carries us, and that we carry.

