

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRAYER LIFE

Ephesians 6:18-20

During World War I a battalion of soldiers went into the Argonne Forest and was lost. For days they were out of touch with headquarters and the papers across this country referred to it as "the lost regiment." When at last the battalion was spotted, their ranks had been depleted pitifully. When a Christian in the conflict with our adversary, Satan, gets out of touch with headquarters, he is in a perilous condition.

This Christian may have on the armor of God—he may be equipped with the breastplate of righteousness, his loins may be girt about with truth, his feet may be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, his head may be protected with the helmet of salvation, he may have in his hand the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and he may have the shield of faith wherewith to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. But, in addition to all of this armor, he must keep the line of communication between himself and God free from obstruction. He must not get out of touch with headquarters, or he will suffer spiritually, even as "the lost battalion" in the Argonne Forest suffered physically.

"Be strong in the Lord" is the admonition that epitomizes our obligation as soldiers of Jesus Christ and warriors of the faith. It is prayer that links the believer with the power of God.

A sword avails for nought if the arm that wields it is slack and listless. The armor avails for nought if behind it beats a craven and cowardly heart. The armor is effective only in proportion to the strength and courage of the warrior. Prayer is the avenue by which the very strength of God is directed to the believer. Prayer brings victory when nothing else will. No matter how complete the armor, and no matter how skilled the warrior in the science of Christian warfare, without prayer defeat is certain.

I. The Manner Of Praying. Ephesians 6:18a.

1. Incessantly.

"Praying always." The trouble with many of us is that we pray only when caught in the swirl of difficulty, oppression and hostile circumstances. At such times we think of Psalm 50:15, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

Perhaps you have heard the story of two Irishmen, Pat and Mike, who had narrowly escaped death on a sinking ship. They were floundering around in icy ocean waters on a couple of planks. Pat was addicted to the greatest profanity and decided that if he would repent of it the Lord would come to his rescue. Mike thought his theology was sound. Whereupon Pat assumed the countenance of a horrified Mohammedan at Mecca and began to pray. Just before he got to the main thesis of his repentant prayer, Mike spotted a ship coming toward them. As delighted as Columbus was when he first spotted the North American shore, Mike yelled, "Hold her, Pat. Don't commit yourself. Here's a ship." Pat stopped praying.

Many Christians act that same way. For them the Lord is only an escape mechanism. But the prayer life of a real Christian should be incessant. We must maintain a spirit of prayer. One admires the prayerful disposition of the scrub woman who said, "I always pray. When I go to bed at night, I thank the Lord for the joy of resting on His everlasting arms. When I awaken the next morning, I ask Him to open my eyes that I may behold new and wondrous things out of His Word. When I wash, I ask Him to cleanse me from secret faults. When I dress, I ask Him to clothe me with humility and love. When building the fire, I ask Him to kindle the fire of love for souls in my heart. When I eat, I ask Him to cause me to grow on the bread of His Word."

2. With supplication.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication." Prayer may be general, but supplication is specific. It is one thing to come to God in a general way with thanksgiving and praise. It is another thing to come to God with a definite supplication about a specific matter.

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus," (Philippians 4:6-7). No problem that a Christian has is too insignificant or too great for God's care. What a thrilling thought!

3. In the Spirit.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." We are to pray with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Spirit means to pray in accordance with the leadership of the Holy Spirit Who indwells every believer. Two classes of people cannot pray in the Spirit--the unbelievers and the carnal Christians. One cannot pray in the Spirit when he is holding a grudge in his heart. The Psalmist said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." You cannot pray in the Spirit when you are unkind, cantankerous, selfish or covetous. "Delight thyself also in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart."

4. Watchfully.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto." Christ said, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." If one would pray aright, he must live right. That is why a Christian must watch against those things which would come into his life and grieve the Holy Spirit and hinder his usefulness for the Lord.

5. Steadfastly.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." We must never allow ourselves to become discouraged. Perseverance is essential to triumphant prayer. In Luke 18:7 our Lord Jesus said, "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?"

Monica, the mother of Augustine, prayed for thirty-six years for the conversion and salvation of her son. What a monument he was to the efficacy of persevering prayer! And invalid lady in Scotland prayed for twenty years for a revival and at last saw the fruit of her prayers in the souls won by Dwight L. Moody. Satan trembles when he sees a Christian on his knees in earnest prayer.

II. The Persons For Whom To Pray. Ephesians 6:18b-20.

1. All believers. 18b.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Our Lord does not want us to be concerned with our own affairs only. So many people confine their interests to the little sphere of me, myself and I. We may not pray as the man who prayed, "God, bless me, my wife, my son John, his wife, us four and no more. Amen." But in many cases we pray mostly for those most intimately associated with us.

Our prayers are to include all saints. This is logical and scriptural since they are our brethren. Nothing so effectively tends to make us forget their faults and love them as does praying for them. What a tonic to know that there are prayer warriors far and near crying to God: "Keep that brother from stumbling, keep him from sin."

2. Ministers. 19-20.

"And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

If Paul needed the prayers of God's children, how much more dependent on their prayers are the ministers of the gospel today. Do you want a better church? Pray for your pastor. Do you want better sermons? Pray for your pastor.

THE CONCLUSION

Ephesians 6:21-24

1. A personal greeting. 6:21-22.

"But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts."

2. A parting message. 6:23.

"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

3. The benediction. 6:24.

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen."