

**“PRAYING ALWAYS”**

Ephesians 6:18

**Intro:** You probably will remember that after the Lord intervened in the life of Saul of Tarsus, who was later know as Paul, the Apostle, as he was on the way to Damascus to arrest any Christians he found there and bring them back to Jerusalem in chains, and quite possibly to death, Saul was led blind into Damascus. He was in that condition for three days during which time he did not eat or drink anything. But when one of the believers, Ananias by name, was told by the Lord to go to a street by the name of Straight where a man by the name of Judas lived, and ask for a man named Saul, who was from Tarsus – the Lord told Ananias that the way he could identify Saul was that *he was praying!* The KJV translated what the Lord said, “Behold, he prayeth.” That is all that I want to point out from Acts, chapter 9, about the beginning of Paul’s life as a Christian, but *prayer* was from that moment on to become the identifying characteristic of the Apostle Paul. He was an apostle. He was a teacher of the Word. He was an evangelist. He established churches and was used by God to establish many churches in the faith. *But preeminently he was a man of prayer.* Many of his prayers are recorded in the epistles he wrote which make up a large part of the NT. Probably all of us who know the Lord have been helped in our praying by reading and re-reading the prayers of the Apostle Paul.

We have two of his major prayers right here in Ephesians – one in chapter 1, and another in chapter 3. In our text for this morning he commanded the Ephesian believers to pray, to pray continually, “always,” as one of the major necessities of a true Christian life.

It is perfectly accurate for us to call the Bible our prayer book. Most of the Psalms are prayers. The best way to learn to pray is by studying the prayers of the Bible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 6:18 is a verse about prayer. It is an extremely important verse about prayer because it tells us the place that prayer has in our battle with the Devil and his evil principalities and powers. Many who have written commentaries on Ephesians have shown how essential prayer is in facing the Enemy of our souls – and we all have to face him in our lives. Prayer basically is our means of fellowship, or communion, with God, and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said in his messages on Ephesians “that the armor which is provided for us by God cannot be used except in fellowship and

communion with God” (*The Christian Soldier*, p.339). The Puritan, William Gurnall, to whom you have heard me refer, says in his masterpiece of exposition on this final passage in Ephesians,

The Christian’s armor will rust except it be furbished and scoured with the oil of prayer. What the key is to the watch, that prayer [is] to our graces – it winds them up and keeps them going (p. 288).

And then he added on the next page:

The saints’ enemies will not fall till God riseth; and God stays to be raised by their prayers (p. 289).

The armor represents our understanding of the great doctrines of Scripture, especially the doctrines having to do with our salvation. But, as important as correct doctrine is, it alone is not sufficient. We need the blessing from God upon the truth we know, and that blessing is given to us in answer to prayer.

The armor without prayer is like equipping our soldiers for combat without teaching them how they are to be used. Every single one of us needs to learn to be “praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18). It would be good for all of us to memorize this whole passage from verse 10 all the way through verse 20, but whatever you do, *don’t forget to memorize verse 18, and then do what it says.*

Now let’s spend our time this morning looking at this verse in detail. Let us assume that we have put on the armor of God. We have given ourselves to understand the truth of God’s Word. We have the girdle of truth in place. We have on the “breastplate of righteousness.” We are saved, and we know we are saved, and we are seeking to live righteously in this world. That is saying a lot for anyone. Next we are seeking to carry “the Gospel of peace” to a world held in the grip of sin. We know that there is only one way, and one Person, through Whom we can be accepted by a holy God. We have been seeking to strengthen our faith by getting acquainted with the Word and the God of the Word, to protect ourselves from the fiery darts which the Devil and his cohorts shoot our way. We have on the helmet of salvation, and in our hand we have the sword of the Spirit.

Now that is a lot to say about anyone, and we know that we do not have the armor all on in perfection. But we are saved. We love the Lord. We

love His Word. We are seeking to understand it better all of the time. We are here this morning to have our faith strengthened. But now comes the crucial question. Let me ask you the way Dr. Lloyd-Jones put it to his people at Westminster Chapel in London, England. He asked his people, and then he turned the question upon himself. This is what he said:

What is the place of prayer in your life? What prominence does it have in our lives? It is a question I address to all. It is as necessary that it should reach the man who is well versed in the Scriptures, and who has a knowledge of its doctrine and its theology, as that it should reach anyone else. What part does prayer play in our lives, and how essential is it to us? Do we realize that without it we faint? Do we practice it the way the Apostle indicates here? There can be no question as to the answer given by the lives of the saints to this question (*The Christian Soldier*, p. 342).

As Dr. Lloyd-Jones indicated, this is a question to be faced and answered by the most mature saint. And it is a question that young people and even children who know the Lord, need to answer. How do our lives measure up to Ephesians 6:18? Well, before we can answer the question correctly, we need to know what Paul meant when he wrote this verse under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Let's begin at the beginning.

## I. "PRAYING."

This is a word which speaks of communion with God, and it carries with it the idea of worship. And in the word itself is expressed the idea of always praying about everything. But he added words which come into English as "always." It is important for us to have special times when we pray, such as, before we eat our food that the Lord has provided for us, when we begin a day, and just before we go to bed at night. We pray when we have some special need, or possibly are facing some trial. But do we only pray when we want the Lord to do something for us, or when we want to thank Him for what He has done for us? I don't mean to discourage either kind of prayer. It is important to bring our thanks to the Lord, and to bring our needs to Him. He wants us to do that. But prayer also includes worship, just going to the Lord because we love Him, and want to be with Him. **Illus:** Dr. Tidwell's little boy. The Lord knows that we love Him, if we do, but He loves to hear us say that we do.

What is the second word?

## II. “ALWAYS.”

This word “always” is a word that I have used over and over throughout my life, but I never have looked it up in the dictionary. I looked it up as I was preparing my message, and I found out that it means *at all times, on every occasion, invariably, perpetually, ever*. That has to be what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote to the Thessalonian believers and told them to “pray without ceasing.” “On every occasion, at all times, invariably.” When we are together with our family and friends, and have had a good time, before we break up, do we thank the Lord for giving us a good time? King David must have had something like this in mind when he wrote, “I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psa. 16:8).

But let us move on:

## III. “WITH ALL PRAYER.”

“All prayer” is usually taken to mean *all kinds of prayer*. And this, in turn, can be taken to mean *in all kinds of places*.

A favorite expression among the Puritans concerning prayer was “closet prayer.” They take it from the Lord’s teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:5-6:

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

The Lord did not have in mind what we may think of when the word *closet* is mentioned, that is, a clothes closet or a broom closet. He was thinking about an place where you can be alone with the Lord. We all need such a place. My mother’s closet was my folks’ bedroom. My Dad’s closet was his car as he drove for thirty years from Tacoma each day to work in Seattle. I am sure that a man like Jerry Bridges who travels a lot, has had many places that have been his closet if even for just one day. My study at home is my closet. We all need a place where we

can be alone with the Lord.

There are times when Lucille and I pray together, usually in our living room. We have prayer meetings here at church. The men meet every Saturday morning at 7:30 for prayer. We have a prayer meeting on Wednesday night here for prayer. We have prayer together on Sunday morning as we did a few minutes ago. We must have a time and a place for prayer by ourselves, but any place actually can become a place for prayer. I suppose that hundreds of times throughout my life I have had prayer with someone in a hospital room. The house where Gary and his family and Lucille and I were a little over a week ago at Pacific City is a wonderful place to pray. I prayed down on the beach, and probably they did too.

But there are different kinds of prayer. "All prayer" includes the confession of sin (because we all sin). It includes worshiping God. "All prayer" includes when we pray for others – our family members, those we pray for and with at church, prayer for our country, prayer for special needs that we learn about. "All prayer" includes petitions we bring to the Lord for ourselves. And we must always make time for thanksgiving to God for His blessings upon us, for health, for our Savior, for the Word, and on and on. We never are as thankful as we ought to be.

And to "all prayer" Paul added:

#### **IV. "AND SUPPLICATION IN THE SPIRIT."**

The difference between prayer and supplications has been described as the difference between devotion to God as compared with petitions for others, as well as for ourselves. But supplication always seems to carry with it the idea of a humble approach to God. When we get down to it, neither we nor those we pray for, are worthy of the blessing of God. All of God's blessings are given to us through the mercy and grace of God. We are unworthy supplicant, and there must always be a note of submission in such prayer.

However, all prayer that is to be effective must be "in the Spirit." Paul said in Romans 8:26-27:

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be

uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

As Jude was concluding his epistle, he spoke of praying in the Holy Spirit. This is what he had to say:

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life (Jude 20-21).

Walking in the Spirit, is to walk in dependence upon the Spirit of God. Praying in the Spirit is praying in dependence upon the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God will never lead us to pray contrary to the will of God which is expressed for us in the Word of God. In all of our praying we pray in submission to God and to His Word.

However, the last part of our verse clearly indicates that we have a God-given responsibility “for all saints” – not for all without exception. That would be impossible, but for all saints within the realm of our acquaintances – those of our own family, those in our own church, all believers with whom we are acquainted. The Apostle Peter’s word in the fifth chapter of his first epistle are appropriate here. Let me read to you 1 Peter 5:8-9:

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

Some of the most inspiring stories that have come out of the war in Iraq have been of those incidents which show the concern that our service men and women have for each other. Perhaps you remember the story of the member of one of the military who threw himself on a grenade that exploded and killed him, but he saved the lives of several of his buddies.

Paul was teaching that in our spiritual warfare. We not only need to be concerned about ourselves, but we need to be concerned about each other. The Devil and his forces are out to get all of us, or as many of us as they can. We need to protect ourselves, but we need also to protect each other. And the greatest way of being effective in the use of the armor we have, and the weapons that have been provided for us, *is by prayer. Humble and believing prayer enables those of us who have put on the armor of*

*God to be of great usefulness for God's glory in our own lives, but also enables us to have a part under the blessing of God in the lives of those who are our fellow soldiers in the army of the Lord.*

Before we leave this tremendously important verse, let me call your attention to the word "perseverance." One of the five doctrines of grace is "the perseverance of the saints." What does it mean? The noun which Paul used here appears just this once in all of the NT. But the verb from which it comes is used a number of times. To persevere means to continue steadfastly. It means to continue. To persevere is not to give up regardless of the opposition. One special use of the verb which means to persevere and which applies to prayer which we have been discussing today is found in Romans 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."

**Concl:** We face a real Enemy. He is greater than we are, and he often deals some severe blows to us in our walk with the Lord. But he is not greater than our Lord. In fact, before our Lord went to the Cross, He anticipated what He would accomplish by His death regarding the Devil, and He said that when the Holy Spirit comes, He would convince the world of judgment, "because the prince of this world is judged."

The Lord defeated our Enemy. And by His grace we can defeat Him too. But there is only one way. We need to put on the whole armor of God. One has been provided by God for each one of us. And there is only one armor. But the armor will be useless unless we use it, "praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all supplication and perseverance for all saints." So we need to put on the armor, keep it on, and use it by constant prayer.