

The Mighty Weapon of All-Prayer

One of my favorite books besides the Bible is The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. This allegory of the Christian life could almost be titled "The Long Road Home to Heaven" (or the Heavenly City). In one part of Christian's journey he must pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. In this place he cannot see very well where to even take a step because of how dark the place is. The straight and narrow path that he must walk has on one side a deep ditch and on the other side is a quagmire where he could be stuck. The story tells us that even more dangerously, in the middle of the valley was the very mouth of hell where he can hear the demons crying after him. Here Christian does something unexpected. He puts away his sword and takes up another weapon, a more powerful weapon than the sword that he used to defeat the monster Apollyon. Consider along with me tonight *what is the believer's greatest weapon*. Then I want to get to the answer to the question you may have which may be, "*How do we use this weapon?*" and finally "*Who are we fighting for?*"

What is the believer's greatest weapon? In Pilgrim's Progress, his mighty weapon was called "All Prayer". This mighty weapon of prayer is what Paul the Apostle speaks of in Ephesians Chapter Six *after* he has described the spiritual armor of the Christian. It is the highest caliber weapon that Paul turns to, here. Let's read the passage.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the

mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ep. 6.18-20)

Prayer is our greatest weapon as believers. Why do we need to be armed? Paul addresses this question in the beginning of the chapter and quickly all I will say about it here is that the devil, the enemy of our souls is at war with all those who follow Christ and he is ever scheming how he can steal, kill, or destroy anything he able in this life. *But thanks be to God that he has armed us with a weapon that is mighty against the foe.* We are all in the same battle. And the warfare is real. We need a mighty weapon and God has appointed the prayers of the saints for this task.

How does a believer use this weapon?

It is one thing to have a grenade launcher, but if your hands aren't trained for war, you might wish that you had a pistol instead. But here is good news. Consider how much strength it takes to wield the mighty weapon of prayer: can you say "God help me."? *God help me.* This was essentially Christian's prayer in the Valley of the Shadow of death and it is the simplest thing. This is my favorite prayer and I make use of it nearly every day. Some days I pray this multiple times a day. I don't have to call a prayer meeting or find my prayer closet to use it. And it is real prayer. Read Nehemiah and you will see an example of this.

How does a believer use this weapon? How do we pray rightly and effectively?

George Muller in his book Answers to Prayer wrote that there are five conditions of prevailing in prayer with the Lord. This is helpful. It still applies to the simple prayer "God, help me". But consider how we are called upon to exercise prayer as it says in Ephesians Six "at all times, in the Spirit...be on the alert with all perseverance" What does this mean? Now don't just take Muller's

word for it. Please look up these Scriptures that I will mention as well. Muller said that we must have

“Entire dependence upon the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only ground of any claim for blessing.” (See John 14:13,14; 15:16, etc.)

Muller writes that in order to prevail in prayer we must practice *Separation from all known sin*. If

I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear. (Psalm 66.8)

We must have *“Faith in God’s word of promise as confirmed by his oath. Not to believe him is to make him both a liar and a perjurer.”* (Heb. 11:6; 6:13-20.)

We must do all of our *“Asking in accordance with his will. Our motives must be godly: we must not seek any gift of God to consume it upon our lusts.”* (I John 5:14; James 4:3.)

And last of all we should exercise what Muller calls *“Importunity (persistent) in supplication.*

There must be a waiting on God and waiting for God, as the husbandman (farmer) has long patience to wait for the harvest.” (James 5:7; Luke 18:1-8.)

Finally, who are we fighting for?

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition ***for all the saints,***

Martyn Lloyd-Jones had this to say about praying and interceding for all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. He said that prayer for others is *“the sovereign remedy for introspection,*

morbidity, and self-pity.” It was what Jesus did before the last supper. His care for his own disciples became more evident and tender when he was hours away from betrayal, abandonment, suffering, shame, separation from his Father in heaven, being made sin for them and for us, his humiliating death on a Roman cross – all when he had done no wrong to anyone. What did Jesus do in John 13.1? **He knew that his hour was come and he loved them unto the end.**

Who are we fighting for? Ask for others to fight for you. Paul asks **“and pray on my behalf”**

One reason that the writings of Paul encourage me so much is that I tend to think that what could be said of Paul could very well be said of me: “His personal presence is unimpressive and his speech is contemptible – not weighty and powerful.” Paul in his own words says, **“When I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling... (1 Co. 2.1-3)** Paul struggled against the fear of man. Paul the Apostle. God’s chosen instrument. The Lord’s chosen ambassador to the Roman Empire. This is *why* he asks for prayer in Ephesians Six. Notice what he asks for:

pray on my behalf , that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul asks for prayer that the Spirit of God would give him the words to speak. Note what he doesn’t ask for – such as: *“Please pray that I would be delivered from these bonds so that I can have an effective ministry again.”* It is not, *“Please pray that an angel would come and kick me in the*

side and wake me up one day and lead me out of this prison. Or – Please pray that another earthquake would happen and that all of my chains would fall off and that the jailor would come in and ask “Sir, what must I do to be saved?” Paul instead asked for boldness and opportunities to speak the truth in love – as he ought to speak – about the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians Chapter Five, verse twenty is just an example of the theme of his speaking where he says,

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

It’s tempting when we read these letters in the New Testament to breeze over the kind of personal or historical notes at the end of them where Paul may give a few personal greetings and make some incidental remarks. I have often paid little attention to these statements and instead my focus has usually been directed to the teaching or doctrine that was the substance of the theology of the letter. After all, Paul isn’t here on earth needing our prayers any more - *so no need to obey this command to pray for him, right?* But don’t be like I once was and miss the application, here at the end of Ephesians – *what this teaches us about our own need for prayer.* We are in the same battle that Paul was. We need the same armor and the same weapons. And we have the same struggles to speak clearly about the gospel to those who are still lost around us. And we also need to hold fast to the mystery of Christ in order to grow and mature in the grace of God.

Spurgeon said: “Seek to know more of him in his divine nature, in his human relationship, in his finished work, in his death, in his resurrection, in his present glorious intercession, and in his future royal advent. Abide hard by the cross, and search the mystery of his wounds. An increase of love to Jesus, and a more perfect apprehension of his love to us, is one of the best tests of growth in grace:”

The gospel is a mystery. Paul was sent by Jesus Christ to proclaim this good news before godless gentiles and the kings of the earth. He was called to preach a message that would be foolishness to Greeks and a stumbling block to Jews. He would have been unfaithful to the Lord to try to make it seem a bit less foolish or to try to remove the stumbling block of offense to religious pride by speaking less about the cross of Christ – the cross which was the apex of a mystery. Here is the mystery that you and I as redeemed ones have been given as well, and before any one of us may hope to teach another person and make a disciple of Christ – we must first bring up this mystery which can be summarized in one verse:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. (1 Ti. 1.15) How is this a mystery? Think about all that is staggering, shocking, and even scandalous in this one verse:

Christ. Jesus. He is the eternal Son of God who is the second Person of the Trinity.

Christ Jesus ***came into the world.*** Jesus is God in the flesh.

Christ Jesus came into the world to ***save.*** For God so loved – who? Righteous people?

Christ Jesus came into the world to save ***sinners!***

This is why you can almost hear Paul exclaiming at one point when he wrote, ***“O the depth of the riches both of wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”*** (Ro. 11.33)

Paul’s prayer request in Ephesians Six strikes me for how Paul is humble enough to ask for prayer at the *very point* of his calling as a preacher of the gospel. Considering his experience speaking about the gospel before King Agrippa and boldly speaking to the angry mob in Jerusalem that

was ready to tear him to pieces – this is astounding to see him make this specific request. It makes me ask: *How often do I ask for prayer just to fulfill the calling of God in my life* – as a Christian? Do I ever ask for prayer that I would grow in grace and that the corruption that remains in my mind of flesh would be put down? How often do I ask for prayer that I might be a better husband to my wife and have grace from the Lord that I might live with her in a more understanding way and be more quick to forgive and to seek forgiveness regularly? How often do I ask for prayer that I would be the Godly father that my kids need that I wouldn't settle for a passive role in their lives? How often have I asked anyone to pray for me that I could serve in the church with a cheerful heart and bring more glory to God by it? Have I ever sought prayer that at my job I could work heartily as unto the Lord, not merely to please men? How often have I asked for prayer that as a son to unbelieving parents that God would grant me a door of utterance to speak words of life in due season to them while there is yet hope? As I asked myself these questions I find that many many times I do not ask for help. And so fewer pray for me – and those who do may pray vaguely, not thinking that I am in any struggle at all. Brothers and sisters don't value the appearance of having no need. Listen to this quote from William Gurnall and let it stir you up if you are anything like me in this regard:

“How many, alas! Concealing their temptations from others, have found their sorrows grow upon them after all their own private endeavors and wrestlings in secret against them? Like someone who, when his house is on fire, tries to quench it himself, but is not able, and so hazards the loss of all that he has for want of timely calling his neighbors to his help.”

To summarize another of his quotes in 21st century English he taught that: *As it shows that I have a lack of love if I do not pray for others – It shows that I do not have a lack of pride if I do not ask others to pray for me.*

We should ask for prayers of others on our own behalf as Paul did in Ephesians Six. When we ask for prayer we are stirring up our brothers in the Lord to go before the throne of grace. We stir them up by the Holy Spirit to seek his face and to pour out their hearts before him. When we keep our need for prayer to ourselves we actually deprive them of a means of God's grace in their own lives and quench the work of the Holy Spirit among us. For true believers, prayer is one of the outward means of grace that God has appointed to us as partakers of the New Covenant. By prayer we receive the enabling grace promised to us by Christ that can be drawn upon at all times every day in order that we might see more of God's grace at work and that we might be more able to distribute grace to others.

Who are we fighting for? These verses are clear that we should pray for all the saints, and especially for our pastors.

Paul is writing from prison and he says at the beginning of his letter that ***“I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers”*** And at the end of his letter he asks for prayers on his behalf. Brothers and sisters do you remember your pastors and their families in prayer? Consider Hebrews 13.7 ***“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you”***

What are some ways that we can pray for those who stand on the front lines for us, for Christ's sake? They need wisdom from the Lord to lead this church. They need deliverance from fear and

unbelief. We can pray for boldness in witness and that they would be given grace to lead holy and disciplined lives. Pray that they would show humble deference to one another. Pray that God would grant his blessing on their labors in the Word. Pray for our pastors that they would continue to declare to us the whole counsel of God. Did you know that faithful pastors are God's gift to the church? Dear friends, pray for our pastors.

Prayer is our greatest weapon in the fight on our long road home. We are to use the weapon of prayer at all times, in the Spirit for all the saints, especially those who God has given to us to lead us as pastors. Prayer is the weapon for walking through the darkness even in the valley of the Shadow of Death. Christ has not left us defenseless. And by his grace he is with us in the fight. Amen.