

**Ephesians 6: 18; “Praying Always with All Prayer”, Sermon # 13 in
the series – “To Be Strong in the Lord”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on December 16th, 2012,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

Being a good soldier of Christ Jesus involves not only being valiant for truth and courageous in spiritual battle; it also requires our engaging in the activities of prayer and watchfulness. The attacks of the Devil may come softly and subtly in the form of whispered suggestions. They may come as appealing falsehoods. Or it may come as an all-out attack of wicked men persecuting, slandering, or abusing God’s people in an attempt to destroy their testimony or discourage their obedience. But the Christian is called to the service of His King Jesus not only against outward enemies but also in relation to the greatest concerns of his mind and heart. His righteous desire to obey Christ in his heart will lead him to cultivate a life of prayer. One of his greatest concerns in prayer will be for the prosperity of Christ’s kingdom at home and abroad. And, if he is wise, he will learn to pray for the spiritual and physical welfare of God’s people in every place. This is why I must assert to you this afternoon that the cultivation of prayer in your heart as a Christian is the most important spiritual activity that you can engage in, in order to see the kingdom of God and Christ advance in this generation. You say, “But how can this be, that prayer is the most important activity? Is it not enough that I read and understand the Word of God? Is it not enough that I have grace coming to me from my Lord Jesus Christ, and that I know and believe in God’s sovereignty in salvation? Will not God who is sovereign fulfill His own promises in His Word irregardless of whether I pray? The answer is that if you have correctly understood the doctrines of grace and the sovereignty of God in salvation you will be striving to pray all the more. You will strive to prayer more because you will have come to understand that God is a God who uses the means of the prayers of His people to contribute in bringing to fulfillment the promises which He has made in His Word; of what He will do in relation to advancement of Christ’s kingdom.

Perhaps you have not yet seen how essential prayer is to the advance and triumph of Christ’s kingdom. As we look carefully at the words of our text we know that prayer is the greatest spiritual responsibility of the Christian’s mind and heart. The prayers of the Christian, in and by the power of the Holy Spirit, God considers very carefully; for they are related to everything that God Himself will do to bring about what He Himself has promised that He will do, to exalt Christ’s kingdom in all the earth. To be involved in Christ’s glorious cause of truth and righteousness is a great privilege which has been given to all His people. To overcome the spiritual forces of darkness that hinder the advance of His kingdom, we must pray. We know that together with the exercise of the graces of faith, hope,

and love, which we have been given by Christ Himself, that prayer is our greatest spiritual responsibility. We know this because of the comprehensive language of the verse 18; the “alls” of the text. 1st – The words “praying always”. 2nd – The words “with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”. 3rd – The words “being watchful with all perseverance”. And 4th – The words “for all the saints”.

1st – The words “praying always” indicate that prayer is the essential spiritual activity of the Christian’s mind and heart.

Now, how is this to be? How can this be, that a person can pray always? Well, we should begin by saying that a person who would learn to pray always must understand what the goal of this instruction is. It is that you, the believer, would be able to be “strong in the evil day”. You should realize that in order to be strong when you are sorely tempted and tried you must pray, and pray often. But how to pray always, that is the question that will keep coming to your mind. Certainly when we see the pressing need of God’s help and intervention in our own life, and also in the lives of other people, we will then know that we ought pray. It is very important if you have not done so yet, that you begin to think of those around you who need you to be praying for them. You also ought to be praying for God’s power and grace to be upon all those men who are called to preach. Indeed you should also be much in prayer even for your own witness and the witness of your whole church in relation to spreading the gospel and helping Christ’s kingdom to go forward. Do you do this? Prayer sets the stage for a real witness for Christ to be born. It is the womb of real and effective evangelism. You can see a good example of this if you will turn with me over to Acts Chapter 12, verse 1. “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.” “Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” “And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also.” “Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.” “So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after the Passover.” Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.”

This was heavy spiritual warfare; when Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.” He killed James the brother of John with the sword. And it says that when he saw that this awful sin pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take Peter into custody as well. It was a very dangerous situation, both for Peter and the whole early Church. Peter was a well-known and important servant of Christ. He was a great preacher for the Lord Jesus. If the congregation at Jerusalem had been insensitive or lackadaisical toward the cause of Christ they could have said – “Well, these things happen.” “We will probably lose Peter as well to the sword.” But they did nothing of the sort. The text says, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” Prayer was made without ceasing for him. They were praying far into the

night; the night before he was to be brought out to the people. They were praying (many, it says) gathered together at John Mark's mother's house. And God heard their cries for Peter. Verse 7 says – "Now an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, "Arise quickly!" "And his chains fell off his hands." "Then the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and tie on your sandals;; and so he did.'" "And he said to him 'Put on your garment and follow me.'" "So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought that he was seeing a vision." "When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him."

See how God will sometimes will work wonders on behalf of Christ's disciples when they pray. Verse 11 says, "And when Peter had come to himself he said, 'Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.'" It is good for us to remember that God is well able to spoil the expectations of wicked unbelieving people, like he did here with Herod and the Jewish people who supported and approved of his wicked actions. Prayer played a major part in Peter's deliverance. If you will learn to pray, and cry out to God for those who are being attacked by men, and attacked by Satan, God will always hear and answer in accordance with His sovereign will. If a Christian suffers martyrdom, as James did, this was his good will for him; but if he is delivered as Peter was, it is also His good will for him at that time. Later Peter also would suffer martyrdom, but God had many things for Peter to do until that time. Prayer is the right approach in all cases, in order for the Christian to glorify God in all situations; both good and bad.

But we are commanded to pray without ceasing as it says in 1 Thessalonians 5: 17; not only when the spiritual battle is raging, but to be praying always. We should be pursuing and engaging ourselves in the holy and happy duty always. In Luke 18, verse 1, Jesus says that men ought always to pray and not to lose heart. In order to do this, our thoughts must become prayers. Indeed this is a vital part of our being transformed into the image of Christ. In Romans 2: 2 it says, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." There are thousands of thoughts that go through our minds each day, and certainly every one of them will not be a prayer. But you and I can assume an attitude in our thoughts, of prayer, that will turn many more of our thoughts into prayers when we think of ourselves in relation to God, and ourselves in relation to others, and God in relation to others. In other words, we introduce prayer into our everyday thoughts, even as we meditate on His word day and night as it says in Psalm 1.

The 2nd “all” of the text which indicates that prayer is our greatest spiritual responsibility is, “praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”.

Turn with me over to Romans 1: 8-10. “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.” There are different types of prayer mentioned in the Scripture and we are to use all of them. It is good to begin where the Apostle begins with “giving thanks”. “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all. Let me ask whether you are thankful for all of God’s dear people? Prayer recognizes, first of all, that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift. He is the source of all true and lasting blessing. The believer, by faith, recognizes that God will give what is good to His people. The mind and heart of the Christian ought to be filled with thanksgiving because of the sure supply of God’s blessings. The person who truly knows God, knows that all blessings flow to him through Jesus Christ their Lord, and all of their thanksgiving, and all of their prayers, are offered through Jesus. Paul, here, thanks God for those at Rome who had come to saving faith in Christ. Notice that he served God “with”, or “in”, his spirit. This the thing that I am driving at this afternoon; prayers attached to thoughts, thoughts which meditate on God’s Word; thoughts as he preached God’s word in Paul’s case; listening to God’s Word in your case. Prayer, here, is called, “a making mention” of those saints and persons who are a concern to you. I am sure that he mentioned them by name. Paul says here that without ceasing he made mention of them always. Do you have this kind of love for the brethren? Are you thankful to God for them; so much so, that you carry them in your heart and mind, praying for them unceasingly? This is quite impossible, you say to me. Well, we have a lot to learn, don’t we?

Prayer is called, “making a request”. It is to ask, and to plead; it is to be earnest with God about your concerns, your desires, in regard to these people whom you love. You petition Him; you formally request, you earnestly entreat God on their behalf. You become a suppliant; one who supplicates God; that is, you humbly and submissively beseech Him. The Latin word, “supplicare” means “to kneel down”. The French word – “plicare” (pronounced – pli-cair) means “to fold”. You bow your knees before the Father, because you want to find a way in the will of God to do good to, and to build other believers up. You really want to see God’s people established in their faith. You want to encourage their faith; you want to encourage their doing the will of God; that is, you desire to see spiritual fruit be borne in their lives to the glory of God.

The 3rd “all” which indicates that prayer is our greatest responsibility is found in the words, “being watchful with all perseverance”.

The true Christian is on guard duty for himself and for the Lord's people. He is watchful as well as prayerful. "Watch and pray," Jesus would say, "lest you enter in to temptation". We are to watch against our enemy Satan's attacks, and we are to watch for God's people. Indeed, one of the reasons that we are to submit to our elders and obey them is that they "keep watch over our souls". So too; you in prayer, are to learn to watch for other people in a righteous way. Pray for the saints; don't complain about them. Pray for your pastor, don't criticize him. Persevere in watching. Watching is your observation of people in the church in a holy way, so that you can then pray about everything that you see. It does not at all involve gossip or tale-bearing. It is an act of humble and holy love for the brethren. And it is a prayerful watching over your own heart that you do not fall into an unbelieving and critical spirit. I want to turn you to a couple of Scriptures which will confirm what the Scriptures are saying here. 1 Corinthians 16: 13 – "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong." The word "watch" here, in the Greek, is *Gregoreite* (*Γρηγορευτε*) It means "to keep awake" and "to be vigilant".

This is what you are to do in prayer. You are to be alert and watchful in your prayers. You are to be watchful against the attacks of Satan; the wiles of the Devil. You are to be watching against errors in doctrine, false teachers, and bad attitudes which might develop in yourself toward the brethren when things become difficult for you, or for them. Turn with me also over to 1st Peter 4: 7. "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers." "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins." If you are making progress in praying more for the brethren, it is because you love them, and because you are serious about doing them good, for Christ's sake. You watch them, and you watch against sin and Satan, because you love Christ, and know that this is what He would want you to be doing in relation to all your brethren around you.

And then, the 4th "all" which indicates that prayer is your greatest responsibility, is "for all the saints".

You are praying for all the saints. Let me ask you in closing; Do you carry the saints in your heart and your mind, praying for them, as you go through your day? I think of Aaron, the high priest in the Old Testament. In Exodus 28: 29 it says that he bore the names of the sons of Israel on the breastplate of judgment over his heart when he went into the holy place. He did this as memorial before the Lord continually. Listen to me now, my brethren. You are, under the New Covenant, priests before God as well. Your prayers ascend to the Father as a memorial before Him. They are remembered before God. Your prayers are remembered before God when you remember all the saints before Him. Don't be selective in your remembrance. Be all inclusive. Be not a respecter of persons, unless they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit. Remember that all sins and blasphemies can be forgiven except that one. So remember to pray for all the saints. Grow in your remembrance of each and every one as they come to your

mind. In 2nd Timothy 1: 3, Paul says, “I thank God whom I serve with a pure conscience, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.” Let’s learn that prayer really is the essential activity in the Christian’s mind and heart for success, not only in the spiritual battle, but also in living all of the Christian life.