

All Prayer at All Seasons

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The rendering of Ephesians 6: 18 in Darby's New Translation is rather striking — "Praying at all seasons, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching unto this very thing with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." It throws up into relief the fourfold repetition of the little word, "all."

As one result of the fearful calamities which have smitten Europe during the past months there has sprung up some revival in the practice of prayer, for which we may well be thankful. It is to our shame however, in the light of the above scripture, that any revival should have been necessary. To the neglect of prayer much of our spiritual weakness and inefficiency is to be traced. In 2 Corinthians 10: 4, 5, Paul makes it plain that our warfare and its weapons are not carnal but spiritual: in Ephesians 6 he also shows this, but adds the fact that in the struggle there are involved against us evil powers of a spiritual nature who have access to heavenly places — the world-rulers of this darkness. Against these we can only stand if clothed with the whole armour of God, and if maintained in that continual dependence on God which expresses itself in prayer.

The degree in which we are conscious of this conflict depends upon the measure in which we enter into our heavenly position, as unfolded in the Epistle, and the measure of our identification with the work of setting forward the gospel, and also the "Mystery of the gospel." Paul was filled with ardent zeal for both and hence he was engaged in this conflict continually.

In all ordinary times of war among the nations Christians have been driven to their knees in prayer, but it would be hardly possible to treat such prayer conflicts as belonging to the kind contemplated in Ephesians 6. We believe however that the present war is an exception; and for this reason: that Hitler evidently acts under the direction of a familiar spirit. The British Ambassador in his book giving an account of his work in Germany up to September last, bears repeated witness to this speaking of "the Voice" that guides all his decisions. This at once accounts; for the demonic craft and skill that marks all his actions, and for the way in which all are directed against true saints of God, against the true gospel, and against the Jews. There is therefore a very definite spiritual side to the present terrible war, and saints do well to recognize it, and call very fervently upon God for the sustenance of His tried and oppressed saints, and the maintenance of the open door for the gospel, and for His hand to restrain the aggressor to this end. The demonic power in control can only be countered by the power of God. We recognize of course that it may not please God to act in restraint but to translate the church to heaven, thereby closing the gospel door, withdrawing His ambassadors, and declaring war on the rebellious earth.

But now look at our verse. The character of the prayer contemplated is this — "in the Spirit." It is to spring not from the flesh and its desires but from the Spirit and His desires. Now the Spirit indwells the saints in order that He may not only teach them but also control their thoughts and desires, moulding them in mind and heart after Christ. The flesh is still in us of course, and very easily we may be governed by it, so that our prayers become but a crying out for just the things which an ordinary unconverted person would cry out for under similar circumstances. Let us search our hearts as to this first point, lest our prayers become powerless by reason of their being but fleshly desires. If our minds are **well furnished** with the Word of God, which unfolds to us His purposes and ways, and **well governed** by the Spirit of God, so that the flesh in us is judged, we shall be able to pray in the Spirit.

Our prayers then will bear the right character.

But this spiritual prayer may take varying forms; so the word is, "all prayer and supplication." God is our Father and we may freely approach Him with our requests. There are times when our feebleness and insufficiency is specially borne in upon us, and then we draw near with a special sense of abasement and peculiarly urgent desires — we become **suppliants** in our prayers. Then, this may mark us in our private prayers, or on public occasions when we assemble together. Even in private prayer differences may occur. Sometimes we may have a season of quiet, even a long one and sometimes our cry may be shot up to God like a flash of lightning, as was the case with Nehemiah, recorded in Neh. 2: 4. We are not to be satisfied with prayer of one special kind. We are to practice prayer in all its wide variety.

Having done so we are to watch unto the very things we have requested with all perseverance. Here are two tests and we shall find it spiritually very wholesome to apply them to ourselves carefully. When prayer is thoroughly real and fervent our souls are all alive on the matter, and we are bound to be in a **watchful** spirit so that we do not miss the answer, and while waiting for the answer we **persevere** with our request. If each brother in Christ who leads this paper would sit down and ask himself how many times he has been guilty of going to a prayer meeting and opening his mouth to ask for things of a general and indefinite nature — often at such great length as to weary all the others in the meeting - so indefinite that half an hour afterwards he would be unable to remember himself what he had really been asking for, he might reach the conviction that he knew very little of what real prayer is. When a real burden is on our hearts it moves us, like Habakkuk, not only to cry out to the Lord but also to stand upon our watch to see what the answer is going to be.

Very often the answer does not come immediately. By delay God tests our sincerity. The more earnest and sincere and instructed our requests the more we shall persevere. A full measure of these excellent qualities will mean **all** perseverance. On this point we have the Lord's own teachings in Luke 11: 5-10; Luke 18: 1-8. The latter passage is specially to the point for us as it contemplates His second Advent and the trials of His saints just before He comes. God's elect, chosen for earthly blessing, will have a time of unparalleled tribulation, and He will bear long as to them, being slow to strike in final judgment. They will persist in their cries and eventually He will avenge them. All perseverance will mark them as it is to mark us; but in our case it is not a cry for vengeance, but supplication for all saints.

Nothing less than **all** saints is the scope indicated. The epistle has instructed us as to the place of privilege into which we, whether Jews or Gentiles, have been introduced. Both have been reconciled "unto God in one body by the cross" (Eph. 2: 16), and therefore a vital link exists between all saints, producing vital and mutual interest in one another. The fact that the scope includes **all** does not militate against prayer for **each or any**, as the next verse shows, where Paul desires their prayers for himself and his service. We pray of course more particularly for those that we know, while never allowing our thoughts to be narrowed below the limits of the whole church of God. This also is of much importance to us today, when over vast parts of the earth the saints are oppressed by tyrants, scattered, and often persecuted.

Lastly there is the time factor. So long as we are here we are to pray at **all** seasons. We are certain to pass through a variety of seasons. In the earliest days of the church there were times of persecution, but after a few years the record runs, "Then had the churches rest" (Acts 9: 31). So it seems to have been throughout, but there is far more danger of growing slack in prayer during times of rest than in times of trouble. In this favoured land we have now had an almost unprecedentedly long period of rest;

and have we not grown slack? A season of dire stress is now upon us. Had we not grown so slack in times of outward prosperity, we should be more practised in prayer in these days of adversity.

There is no season which is not a season for prayer, since it is to be in **all** seasons. In seasons of sorrow, and seasons of joy; in seasons of spiritual revival, and seasons of spiritual deadness; in seasons of gain, and seasons of loss; in seasons when the cause of one's country seems to be crashing about one's ears, in seasons when its cause is prospering; in seasons of gathering into the church, in seasons when the saints are being scattered and oppressed, and doors for the gospel are closing. **All** seasons should call us to our knees in prayer. To prayer of this sort the Apostle Paul calls us in this verse.

This is a season of dire need. Let us heed his exhortation, and give ourselves to prayer.