

ARM YOURSELVES! Part 4

COMMUNICATING WITH HEADQUARTERS

“... praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints....” (Eph. 6:18 ESV)

The development of communication technology has come a long way since the days when the American Indians communicated by sending smoke signals. During the Civil War messages were relayed from the rear command posts to the front lines by messengers on horse-back or by telegraphed messages sent over wires. Other means of communication, such as signal towers were also used.

In WWII messengers on motor-cycles were used but battery powered telephones were the primary means of keeping in touch with headquarters. My cousin was a motor-cyclist messenger during WWII. He has some harrowing tales to tell of narrow escapes. Today technology makes communicating in war easier than ever. Now satellites enable the soldier to have instant access to headquarters via his cell-phone. Military communication has thus long played an important role in warfare.

In any type of warfare, communication with Headquarters is essential. Not only is this true in actual physical combat, but it is especially true in our spiritual warfare against the enemy of our souls. We must hear from and be able to communicate with our General at all times.

Paul concludes his Call to Arms with a statement about the importance of Communicating with Headquarters. He writes, *“praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints....”*

While prayer is not considered a part of our armor, it nevertheless is essential that the Christian soldier keep in contact with His Commander in Chief. He needs to know what to do, when, where and how to do it. Sometimes the warrior needs to call for help in the heat of the battle. Jesus said to His disciples, *“Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation.”*

How foolish to engage the enemy without consulting our Commander! Every Christian soldier has the privilege of a direct and instant connection to our Commander in the Throne Room of the Universe! It is amazing to realize that this astonishing resource is so available and so rarely used. And it is the deciding factor in spiritual warfare for prayer is power.

Praying *“in the Spirit”* is to avail ourselves of the power of the Spirit of God. Unless we are praying with the mind of the Spirit, in the will of the Spirit, praying consistent with His nature, we are praying in the flesh and consequently, merely saying words to no avail. Praying is conversation with God and is therefore, serious business!

Notice that Paul uses the little word **“all”** four times in this verse. Let us examine each **“all”** and learn more about prayer.

THE TIME TO PRAY

*"praying at **all** times in the Spirit"*

Some of the saints only pray now and then when the notion or the situation presses them to God. They have a very skimpy prayer life. Paul says that we are to pray "*at all times*" or "*at all seasons*" or "*at every opportunity*" as some translations render the phrase. We are to pray not only in times of danger, but we are to be in the mood of prayer at all times. There are prayers of thanksgiving (Phil 4:6) prayers of praise, "*let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name*" (Heb. 13:15), etc. We need to keep the lines of communication open at all times.

This requires that we have a sense of our constant and utter dependence upon God not only for our duty in warfare but also for our daily welfare. We are prone to pray only at times when we are confronted with trials, temptations and troubles that we can't handle ourselves. Prayer should be our first resource, not our last recourse!

We are to have a constant awareness of the conflict that rages unceasingly around us and against us. Daily we need to lay hold of the resources of God, in this case, the whole armor of God, in order that we may triumph over the enemy. When you cannot use your sword, and even when you can hardly grasp your shield, you can pray!

THE TYPES OF PRAYER

*"with **all** prayer and supplication"*

There is a variety of prayers. There are two different words used here for two different levels of communication with God: "*prayer*" and "*supplication*." What is the difference?

A. General Praying.

The word "prayer" is a very general word used to represent adoration, thanksgiving, and intercession, etc. This word covers our general prayer life. In other words, we might say a general prayer for the missionaries we support saying, "Lord, bless our missionaries." We might pray a general prayer for a brother or sister in Christ praying, "Dear Lord, bless so-and-so today." We might say a prayer of thanksgiving with words like, "Thank you God for your goodness to us." This is praying in generalities, like shooting a shot-gun, scattering pellets over a wide area. To be sure this is praying and is to be commended and encouraged.

B. Specific Praying.

There is another type of praying that requires greater concentration of our mental and spiritual powers. It is praying that focuses upon specific needs, persons and problems. This is what is meant by "*supplications*." Some translations have "*petitions*" (nasb) or "*requests*" (niv). The word "supplicate" means: "to make a humble request." (Webster)

While general praying is like shooting a shot-gun, specific, definite, particular praying is like aiming a rifle at the bulls-eye, targeting a definite need. For instance, when praying for missionaries, we target a particular missionary with a particular need, like the following, "Dear Lord, help Jane Doe learn the dialect of the tribe she is working with." When praying for

others we pray for a particular situation through which they are going saying, "I ask you, Father, to give John Doe a speedy recovery from his surgery." When thanking God for His goodness we specify and say, "Thank you Lord, for the much needed rain we are receiving."

Illust. An example of specific praying is seen in a prayer Martin Luther prayed. In 1540 Martin Luther's friend Friedrich Myconius was very ill and was on, what many thought was his deathbed. Friedrich wrote Luther a farewell letter. Luther immediately sent a reply saying, "I command you in the name of God to live because I still have need of you in the work of reforming the church. The Lord will never let me hear that you are dead but will permit you to survive me. For this I am praying because I seek only to glorify the name of God." Friedrich, who had already lost the ability to speak, did soon recover and lived an additional six more years but then did die - two months after Luther himself had died.

Another example is here in Ephesians 6 verse 19 where Paul says pray *"also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel."*

When we are in dire circumstances we do not pray in generalities saying, "Father bless me today and cause your face to shine upon me...." No! We pray in definite terms, "Dear Father, I am overwhelmed by the problems I am facing today. Please show me what to do!" If we pray specifically for our own needs, then the question arises, "Why not pray by zeroing in on the particular needs of others also"?

"Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!"

THE TEST OF PRAYER

"keep alert with all perseverance"

The word "perseverance" means "To continue a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition." (Webster) We Americans are spoiled by the instant communication capabilities that we have with computers, cell-phones, etc. We expect instant information at our finger tips and have little patience for slow down-loads on our computers.

A television commercial promises "Service on Demand" for its customers. We have been programmed to expect instant responses to our wants. You have probably heard of the Christian who prayed, "Lord, I need patience and I want it right now!" This attitude has been carried over into the area of prayer by untaught believers.

Repeatedly God's Word instructs us to approach God in a submissive, persevering spirit:

- Psalm 27:14 - "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!"

- Psalm 37:7 - “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way....”
- Isaiah 40:31 - “But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”
- Luke 18:1 – “Men always ought to pray and not faint.”

We need to realize that God does not always answer immediately. He does not always say “no” and neither does He always say “yes.” Many times God says “wait.” Sometimes God’s silence is the answer. So, we need to be patient in our praying. This is the test that Paul has in mind when he says that we must pray “*with all perseverance.*”

The disciples were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as He wrestled in soul-agonizing prayer and they slept! What did He say to them? He said, “*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. Then He came the third time and said to them, “*Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.*” (Mark 14:38-41)

There are multitudes of churches and Christians individually, who are asleep in the midst of crises! They need to do as Paul said in Ephesians 5:14 - “*Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.*” Pray till the light breaks through! Persevere in prevailing prayer!

THE TROOPS FOR WHOM TO PRAY *“for all the saints”*

The final “**all**” in this passage deals with one of the subjects that our communication with Headquarters should include. Our payers are to be for “*all saints.*” God is no respecter of persons, He is not partial. Prayer has a vertical dimension, of course, but it also has a horizontal dimension and we are reminded to pray “*for all saints.*”

Much of our praying is self-centered. Yes, we must pray for ourselves and those nearest and dearest to us, but Paul’s admonition encourages us to cast a wider prayer net and pray “*for all the saints.*” Charles D. Meigs musical prayer is a good prayer to pray regularly:

“Lord, help me live from day to day
In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray
My prayer shall be for—Others.

Others, Lord, yes others,
Let this my motto be,
Help me to live for others,
That I may live like Thee.”

It is only saints, Christian believers, who are involved in the spiritual warfare for which God provides the armor Paul has just been describing for whom we need to pray. When one member of the Body is weak, wounded, or cannot function, the other members compensate by supporting and helping strengthen it. Samuel said to the people of Israel in 1 Sam. 12:23, *"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you."*

You will sometimes find that when you cannot pray for yourself, it is a good plan to pray for somebody else. The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. It is important for us to focus in on the spiritual battles others are fighting. I need to know there are others in the church who are praying for me!

How many of us pray for Christians who are in closed countries and are being persecuted? Do we pray for Christian leaders in government positions locally as well as nationally? How many of us pray for believers who are behind bars for their faith? Do we pray for Christians who are in prison for crimes they committed before they became Christians? And then, there are millions of Christian brothers and sisters in nursing homes, hospitals and Care Units who need our prayers. We will never run out of believers for whom to pray!

Illust. As a young teen-ager, I remember hearing Dr. Robert T. Ketcham tell about his mother and an experience she had in their two-story farm home. He said that his mother had the habit of placing items on the stair-steps that were to be taken, eventually, upstairs. Instead of going up the steep stairway every time she had something that belonged upstairs, she would lay whatever it was on the steps saying, "I'll take it up the next time I ascend the stairway."

He said he had a baby brother who was in a bassinette up on the second floor of the home and one day while the family was downstairs, the baby fell out of the bassinette. Everyone heard him hit the floor followed by his wailing cry. Dr. Ketcham said that his mother raced for the stairs and started up, but could not get up the stairs because of the clutter of things she had laid on the stairway. She had to clear the steps before she could ascend to take care of the baby while all the time the cries of the infant rang in her ears and she was imagining all sorts of injuries the baby had sustained. She finally got to the baby who was not seriously injured. He said that thereafter, his mother kept the stairway clear of any obstacle that would impede her climb upward.

Dr. Ketcham then added, "We need to keep the stairway of prayer open by keeping short accounts with God and confessing anything that would prohibit us making a rapid ascent to the throne God. If we are not getting through to God it is because there is some sin on the stairway to heaven!"

Conclusion

Note the **Victory Verbs** in Ephesians 6:10-17. There are six of them:

- v. 10 – Be strong
- v. 11 – put on
- v. 12 – wrestle
- v. 13 – take (also v.17)
- v. 13 – stand
- v. 18 – PRAY!

Now is the time to be arming ourselves - we are already on enemy turf! Learn to defend yourself with your armor; learn how to fight with your offensive weapon, the Sword of the Word of God and **PRAY!** Be ready for whatever the enemy throws at you!

Paul was able to say, "*I have fought the good fight....*" (2 Tim. 4:7) Will we be able to say the same thing?

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