

PRAYER AND VIGILANCE

"David Brainerd was pursued by unearthly adversaries, who were resolved to rob him of his guerdon. He knew he must never quit his armour, but lie down to rest, with his corselet laced. The stains that marred the perfection of his lustrous dress, the spots of rust on his gleaming shield, are imperceptible to us; but they were, to him, the source of much sorrow and ardency of yearning." -- LIFE OF DAVID BRAINERD.

THE description of the Christian soldier given by Paul in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, is compact and comprehensive. He is depicted as being ever in the conflict, which has many fluctuating seasons -- seasons of prosperity and adversity, light and darkness, victory and defeat. He is to pray at all seasons, and with all prayer, this to be added to the armour in which he is to fare forth to battle. At all times, he is to have the full panoply of prayer. The Christian soldier, if he fight to win, must pray much. By this means, only, is he enabled to defeat his inveterate enemy, the devil, together with the Evil One's manifold emissaries. "Praying always, with all prayer," is the Divine direction given him. This covers all seasons, and embraces all manner of praying.

Christian soldiers, fighting the good fight of faith, have access to a place of retreat, to which they continually repair for prayer. "Praying always, with all prayer," is a clear statement of the imperative need of much praying, and of many kinds of praying, by him who, fighting the good fight of faith, would win out, in the end, over all his foes.

The Revised Version puts it this way:

"With all prayer and supplication, praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplications, for all saints, and on my behalf, that utterance may be given unto me, in opening my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am in bonds."

It cannot be stated too frequently that the life of a Christian is a warfare, an intense conflict, a lifelong contest. It is a battle, moreover, waged against invisible foes, who are ever alert, and ever seeking to entrap, deceive, and ruin the souls of men. The life to which Holy Scripture calls men is no picnic, or holiday junketing. It is no pastime, no pleasure jaunt. It entails effort, wrestling, struggling; it demands the putting forth of the full energy of the spirit in order to frustrate the foe and to come off, at the last, more than conqueror. It is no primrose path, no rose-scented dalliance. From start to finish, it is war. From the hour in which he first draws sword, to that in which he doffs his harness, the Christian warrior is compelled to "endure hardness like a good soldier."

What a misconception many people have of the Christian life! How little the average church member appears to know of the character of the conflict, and of its demands upon him! How ignorant he seems to be of the enemies he must encounter, if he engage to serve God faithfully and so succeed in getting to heaven and receive the crown of life! He seems scarcely to realize that the world, the flesh and the devil will oppose his onward march, and will defeat him utterly, unless he give himself to constant vigilance and unceasing prayer.

The Christian soldier wrestles not against flesh and blood, but against

spiritual wickedness in high places. Or, as the Scriptural margin reads, "wicked spirits in high places." What a fearful array of forces are set against him who would make his way through the wilderness of this world to the portals of the Celestial City! It is no surprise, therefore, to find Paul, who understood the character of the Christian life so well, and who was so thoroughly informed as to the malignity and number of the foes, which the disciple of the Lord must encounter, carefully and plainly urging him to "put on the whole armour of God," and "to pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." Wise, with a great wisdom, would the present generation be if all professors of our faith could be induced to realize this all-important and vital truth, which is so absolutely indispensable to a successful Christian life.

It is just at this point in much present-day Christian profession, that one may find its greatest defect. There is little, or nothing, of the soldier element in it. The discipline, self-denial, spirit of hardship, determination, so prominent in and belonging to the military life, are, one and all, largely wanting. Yet the Christian life is warfare, all the way.

How comprehensive, pointed and striking are all Paul's directions to the Christian soldier, who is bent on thwarting the devil and saving his soul alive! First of all, he must possess a clear idea of the character of the life on which he has entered. Then, he must know something of his foes -- the adversaries of his immortal soul -- their strength, their skill, their malignity. Knowing, therefore, something of the character of the enemy, and realizing the need of preparation to overcome them, he is prepared to hear the Apostle's decisive conclusion:

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

All these directions end in a climax; and that climax is prayer. How can the brave warrior for Christ be made braver still? How can the strong soldier be made stronger still? How can the victorious battler be made still more victorious? Here are Paul's explicit directions to that end:

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

Prayer, and more prayer, adds to the fighting qualities and the more certain victories of God's good fighting-men. The power of prayer is most forceful on the battle-field amid the din and strife of the conflict. Paul was preeminently a soldier of the Cross. For him, life was no flowery bed of ease. He was no dress-parade, holiday soldier, whose only business was to don a uniform on set occasions. His was a life of intense conflict, the facing of many adversaries, the exercise of unsleeping vigilance and constant effort. And, at its close -- in sight of the end -- we hear him chanting his final song of victory, a "I have fought a good fight," and reading between the lines, we see that he is more than conqueror!

In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul indicates the nature of his soldier-life, giving us some views of the kind of praying needed for such a career. He writes:

"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea."

Paul had foes in Judaea -- foes who beset and opposed him in the form of "unbelieving men" and this, added to other weighty reasons, led him to urge the Roman Christians to "strive with him in prayer." That word "strive" indicated wrestling, the putting forth of great effort. This is the kind of effort, and this the sort of spirit, which must possess the Christian soldier.

Here is a great soldier, a captain-general, in the great struggle, faced by malignant forces who seek his ruin. His force is well-nigh spent. What reinforcements can he count on? What can give help and bring success to a warrior in such a pressing emergency? It is a critical moment in the conflict. What force can be added to the energy of his own prayers? The answer is -- in the prayers of others, even the prayers of his brethren who were at Rome. These, he believes, will bring him additional aid, so that he can win his fight, overcome his adversaries, and, ultimately, prevail.

The Christian soldier is to pray at all seasons, and under all circumstances. His praying must be arranged so as to cover his times of peace as well as his hours of active conflict. It must be available in his marching and his fighting. Prayer must diffuse all effort, impregnate all ventures, decide all issues. The Christian soldier must be as intense in his praying as in his fighting, for his victories will depend very much more on his praying than on his fighting. Fervent supplication must be added to steady resolve, prayer and supplication must supplement the armour of God. The Holy Spirit must aid the supplication with His own strenuous plea. And the soldier must pray in the Spirit. In this, as in other forms of warfare, eternal vigilance is the price of victory; and thus, watchfulness and persistent perseverance, must mark the every activity of the Christian warrior.

The soldier-prayer must reflect its profound concern for the success and well-being of the whole army. The battle is not altogether a personal matter; victory cannot be achieved for self, alone. There is a sense, in which the entire army of Christ is involved. The cause of God, His saints, their woes and trials, their duties and crosses, all should find a voice and a pleader in the Christian soldier, when he prays. He dare not limit his praying to himself. Nothing dries up spiritual secretions so certainly and completely; nothing poisons the fountain of spiritual life so effectively; nothing acts in such deadly fashion, as selfish praying.

Note carefully that the Christian's armour will avail him nothing, unless prayer be added. This is the pivot, the connecting link of the armour of God. This holds it together, and renders it effective. God's true soldier plans his campaigns, arranges his battle-forces, and conducts his conflicts, with prayer. It is all important and absolutely essential to victory, that prayer should so impregnate the life that every breath will be a petition, every sigh a supplication. The Christian soldier must needs be always fighting. He should, of sheer

necessity, be always praying.

The Christian soldier is compelled to constant picket-duty. He must always be on his guard. He is faced by a foe who never sleeps, who is always alert, and ever prepared to take advantage of the fortunes of war. Watchfulness is a cardinal principle with Christ's warrior, "watch and pray," forever sounding in his ears. He cannot dare to be asleep at his post. Such a lapse brings him not only under the displeasure of the Captain of his salvation, but exposes him to added danger. Watchfulness, therefore, imperatively constitutes the duty of the soldier of the Lord.

In the New Testament, there are three different words, which are translated "watch." The first means "absence of sleep," and implies a wakeful frame of mind, as opposed to listlessness; it is an enjoinder to keep awake, circumspect, attentive, constant, vigilant. The second word means "fully awake," -- a state induced by some rousing effort, which faculty excited to attention and interest, active, cautious, lest through carelessness or indolence, some destructive calamity should suddenly evolve. The third word means "to be calm and collected in spirit," dispassionate, untouched by slumberous or beclouding influences, a wariness against all pitfalls and beguilements.

All three definitions are used by St. Paul. Two of them are employed in connection with prayer. Watchfulness intensified, is a requisite for prayer. Watchfulness must guard and cover the whole spiritual man, and fit him for prayer. Everything resembling unpreparedness or non-vigilance, is death to prayer.

In Ephesians, Paul gives prominence to the duty of constant watchfulness, "Watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication." Watch, he says, watch, WATCH! "And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

Sleepless wakefulness is the price one must pay for victory over his spiritual foes. Rest assured that the devil never falls asleep. He is ever "walking about, seeking whom he may devour." Just as a shepherd must never be careless and unwatchful lest the wolf devour his sheep, so the Christian soldier must ever have his eyes wide open, implying his possession of a spirit which neither slumbers nor grows careless. The inseparable companions and safeguards of prayer are vigilance, watchfulness, and a mounted guard. In writing to the Colossians Paul brackets these inseparable qualities together: "Continue in prayer," he enjoins, "and watch in the same, with thanksgiving."

When will Christians more thoroughly learn the twofold lesson, that they are called to a great warfare, and that in order to get the victory they must give themselves to unsleeping watchfulness and unceasing prayer?

"Be sober, be vigilant," says Peter, "because your adversary, the devil, walketh about seeking whom he may devour."

God's Church is a militant host. Its warfare is with unseen forces of evil. God's people compose an army fighting to establish His kingdom in the earth. Their aim is to destroy the sovereignty of Satan, and over its ruins, erect the Kingdom of God, which is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." This militant army is composed of individual soldiers of the Cross, and the armour of God is needed for

its defence. Prayer must be added as that which crowns the whole.

"Stand then in His great might, With all His strength endued; But take, to arm you for the fight, The panoply of God."

Prayer is too simple, too evident a duty, to need definition. Necessity gives being and shape to prayer. Its importance is so absolute, that the Christian soldier's life, in all the breadth and intensity of it, should be one of prayer. The entire life of a Christian soldier -- its being, intention, implication and action -- are all dependent on its being a life of prayer. Without prayer -- no matter what else he have -- the Christian soldier's life will be feeble, and ineffective, and constitute him an easy prey for his spiritual enemies.

Christian experience will be sapless, and Christian influence will be dry and arid, unless prayer has a high place in the life. Without prayer the Christian graces will wither and die. Without prayer, we may add, preaching is edgeless and a vain thing, and the Gospel loses its wings and its loins. Christ is the lawgiver of prayer, and Paul is His Apostle of prayer. Both declare its primacy and importance, and demonstrate the fact of its indispensability. Their prayer-directions cover all places, include all times, and comprehend all things. How, then, can the Christian soldier hope or dream of victory, unless he be fortified by its power? How can he fail, if in addition to putting on the armour of God he be, at all times and seasons, "watching unto prayer"?