

The Devil's Opposition To Prayer By F. J. Perryman

Classic Christian Writings:

A number of people tell me how sometimes it is difficult to pray, and that confirms my own experience. The universal admission is that whenever people give themselves to prayer, they never find it easy. Stagnation in prayer may be encountered through lack of information, smallness of outlook, absence of vision, self-centeredness in petition, even slavishness to methods, and "walking after the flesh."

But apart from all these, there are some striking passages of Scripture which make it abundantly clear that in the unseen world there is a tense battle for supremacy in progress all the time (Dan. 10:12,13,20,21). That is a primary reason why prayer may be difficult--the Devil opposes it.

Read these sentences of the Bible and weigh every word: "Laboring fervently for you in prayers" (Col. 4:12). "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph. 6:18). "Strive together with me in your prayers" (Rom. 15:30). "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16). "Continue in prayer and watch" (Col. 4:2). "Watch unto prayer" (1 Pet. 4:7). "Pray, and not...faint" (Luke 18:1). "He...offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7).

There are many more, but look at the words: "Laboring fervently," "supplicating," "persevering," "watching," "striving," "strong crying," and "tears." These are expressions wedded to work and war. They indicate a situation of dire necessity. They suggest deep urgency, sustained effort, undaunted courage, and a persistence and faith that is supreme. Why? Because the man of prayer operates in a world where every inch of the ground has to be taken in the teeth of the opposition. Make no mistake about it, the Devil knows when a man is really praying effectually, and he does his utmost to stop him.

In some parts of Scripture the language employed is of a distinctly military character and unmistakably descriptive of the existence of a tense battle for dominion. What else can be meant by such words as "Put on the whole armor of God...stand against the wiles of the devil...We wrestle...withstand...overcome"? "Take...the sword of the Spirit...praying always" (Eph. 6:10,17,18). "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: For the weapons of our warfare are...mighty through God" (2 Cor. 10:3,4). Here is the word "war" spelled out for us. Moreover, let us recognize the fact that the foe is so obstinate that he will let go only what he is compelled to let go, and he is so powerful that none but a God-endued man can overcome him. Even then the basis of that overcoming lies only in Satan's having been conquered by Christ at Calvary.

A Wide-Awake Prayer Warrior

Prayer is one of the most effective ways of administering the victory of Calvary, and it is one of the two tasks to which the apostles gave themselves (Acts 6:4). You can be sure that it will be hindered and assailed from all quarters. Who has not gone apart to pray and found his mind to go blank or to be flooded with unholy or distracting thoughts?

Some, on the other hand, fall asleep while at prayer. Again, it is surprising what a lot of things you remember that you have to do when you decide to pray. Have you ever associated these hindrances with the powers of evil? Do you realize that they can interfere in your prayer life?

I always associate the Devil with that sluggish, helpless night which the disciples spent near our Lord on the eve of Calvary, when reprovably He said to them, "Could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that (lest)..." The Devil must have caused them to sleep when they should have been vigilant and supporting the Lord in His conflict. The incident at least shows the advantage of fellowship in watching and prayer.

Here and there we find souls who are so eager to pray that they wear themselves out in battle. They allow the Devil to press them beyond the measure of the Spirit, as their physical collapse indicates. With most of us, however, there is a grave lack in prayer. If we understood the wide range of administrative power that prayer offers, we would pursue it to its limits and press the battle to the gates.

Let us remember that talking and writing about prayer is not praying. The Devil does not care how much we discuss and applaud the subject, so long as we do not pray. A book on how to pray is good, but the best and only way to learn to pray is to do it.

Place yourself at God's disposal as a prayer. Study as much to pray as to preach. Be ready to cooperate with

God for the deliverance of some of the captive souls in the church and see what happens. You will no longer wonder if there are forces to content with other than flesh and blood. You will know, and in knowing you will understand that unless these satanic powers are reckoned with, you are not going to get the answer you need.

Guard The Power To Pray

People who have discovered the value of prayer know that they will be assailed from every quarter and in every quarter, and they know it to be worth while to guard their power to pray more than anything else. How easy it is to lose the spirit of prayer! The Holy Spirit of God is so easily checked and grieved by sin on our part that sometimes without our knowing it our ability to pray is gone. We may not know it until we kneel to pray or are faced with some situation demanding immediate dealing with God, but such powerlessness soon reveals itself.

The thing to remember is that the Devil is probably more concerned with hindering prayer than anything else. Therefore, he schemes to get us to take ever so little a step "out of the Spirit." A wrong look, a feeling of resentment, a hasty word, some apparently trifling thing, and the line of communication is interrupted. A relatively little thing can rob us of our power to pray and our ability to believe.

Ready Access, Little Power

I do not mean that our access to God is surrendered. That remains intact eternally, guaranteed through the blood and Person of Christ (Heb. 10:19; Eph. 2:18; 3:12). The working value of the blood of Christ implies a cleansed life (1 John 1:9), and we must never forget that that is the only basis upon which we can speak to God.

But we can be deprived of our power in prayer. Real power in prayer to deal effectually with situations as they arise is rather rare, the reason being that the Devil robs souls of the keen edge of their inner life without their knowing it. How much and for how long he can do this, some of us know to our sorrow, but once our eyes have really been opened to it, we should watch most carefully ("be vigilant," as Peter puts it) and see that we are not drawn out of the current of the Spirit.

Fellowship In Prayer

This interference with praying will also be the common experience of those who are placed together in the Lord's work; hence it is not at all an uncommon thing to find that missionaries as well as home workers often fail to meet for prayer through some trifling thing. Oh, these Devil's pinpricks! How tired one gets of them all when one knows that the Devil is the cause of them!

Do pray and determine that the enemy be exposed in this matter, and that those who need to pray together will want to and be able to. Many a work of God seems to lack vitality for want of this fellowship in prayer, and while it is certain that God can work mightily through the prayers of even one soul, there must be some significance in "two agreeing," or the Lord would not have stressed it (Matt. 18:19).

The truth is that two agreeing on earth in prayer can set in motion forces that were before motionless. Many a man has had to wait for his wife to join him in prayer before God did certain things; and conversely, in other situations, the wife has had to wait for the husband. It is not always so, but one has often noticed things change for the better when a situation has been tackled by two or more who were formerly praying alone.

I firmly believe that no kind of effective praying is left unopposed, and thousands could testify that all sorts of unwelcome things are constantly happening to make real prayer impossible. It is simply that the Devil ceaselessly conspires to slay the spirit and atmosphere of prayer, and until this is recognized and he is resisted, many problems in relation to praying will remain unsolved.

Family Prayers Hindered

A godly man said this to me: "We live in the country, and we have family prayers every day; but try as I will to guard that time, you would be surprised at what a task it is to keep it free. Something is always happening to prevent us from praying, or to shorten the prayer time, or to make it difficult to pray when we get down to it."

I replied that I was not surprised at all, but that probably it was the work of the Devil.

"It is something," he rejoined, "and I expect that's it, for if I had not experienced it, I would scarcely have

believed it."

That experience could be confirmed by a multitude, but the degree of interference would largely be regulated by the vitalness of the prayers, i.e., how far they affect the Devil's kingdom.

In the Name of the Lord, RESIST the interference and the powers of evil at the back of it. Do that until you are assured of God that you have touched the real cause and dealt with it.

It must not be supposed, however, that I attribute every difficulty in prayer to the Devil. There is man's evil nature to contend with. We can be lazy and sluggish, or manifest a spirit of indifference or independence, thinking that we can do this or that, whether we pray or not. We can come under the dictum of the world and believe that "God helps those who help themselves." That is not true. God helps those who trust Him, and in the long run nothing else will succeed, "for what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Groaning In The Spirit

Prayer is an ATTITUDE as much as an act, and if that be remembered, no perplexity will arise when there is a genuine absence of words as we wait before God. We must not allow the devil to perturb us because we cannot find language with which to unburden ourselves. A groan of the Spirit in us (Rom. 8:26) may accomplish more than a volume of words.

I have learned in prayer to hold up before God individuals, towns, countries and nations, counting on Him to do His will for them when I do not know what more to ask for. Undoubtedly the ideal thing is to ask definitely, especially in terms of God's Word, for the bedrock of faith is there. But if we should find ourselves going out, out, out in spirit to people and lands with no more audible expression than a heaving sigh of the spirit (Mark 8:12), let us not be troubled or dismayed. The great thing is that we are "praying in the Holy Spirit," and in due season what is in our heart may filter intelligibly into the mind and be formulated upon our lips.

But the "groanings which cannot be uttered" must not be confused with the DUMBNESS that can come through the Devil's damping down our fires. Some people never do anything but groan, if they even do that, but when the prayer time is over, they seem to have a wonderful facility of speech.

In most cases I believe it is simply that the Devil hinders them. Either he overwhelms them with feelings, floods them with fear, or in some other way holds the brain so that expression in prayer becomes impossible. That this thing--this paralysis of expression--can be broken through, I have proved.

No one should sit down under this terrible dumbness. The divine life in us MUST HAVE EXPRESSION. If the soul would grow and echo the heart throb of the Father, it must pray. So whenever you have the opportunity, dare to pray, and pray aloud. Do it on your feet, as well as on your knees. You will then more easily keep the stream of life running and battle the Devil.

Souls deprived of their speech are in another category, but they may serve God in their spirit (Romans 1:9, margin; 12:11; Isa. 26:9; Psa. 139:2).

The Christian life is lived on a battlefield! We are to be soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3,4) as well as sons, and as such we must take up the challenge of the evil forces in the heavenlies and PRAY!