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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on Wednesday evening 5 June, 1929

Ephesians 6 v 18

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

I was interrupted on Lord's Day afternoon from the subject which I had in the morning. Some hope I had, that the interruption was of God, at least it seems that in one case some difficulties were removed in the evening. Now I have felt that the subject of prayer has more or less distinctly continued with me, and I would bring it before you in this passage, an important, very important passage. It relates to a severe warfare; a warfare in which victory must be on one side or the other. Those engaged in it can never become friends. The warfare is a deadly one and means the extermination of one of the two engaged, and Christ says "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and am sat down with My Father in His throne" That is what Christ sets before all believers who are engaged in this conflict, and heaven is before one of the parties; hell is the end of the other of the parties. Having spoken so beautifully and directly to the different relationships and duties of our lives, the Apostle comes to a final word - "Finally my brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" A great reason exists for this exhortation; it may arrest our attention. Here comes the end of an important and wonderful Epistle. "Finally" - I sum up all in this - "Finally my brethren be strong in the Lord" Weak in self, you have strong enemies. "Be strong in the Lord". "Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil". This armour is described. We are told what the enemy is, or rather the enemies are, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against

spiritual wickedness in high places. Therefore the armour must be of a nature that will enable those who have it to meet these enemies. In one place in the Corinthians, the Apostle says - "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God" and they kill not men's bodies, but they cast down imaginations and everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God. Here then we have our enemies before us, intangible in a sense, painfully present in a sense. And, says the Apostle - stand. "Take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand;" to stand on Christ's side; to stand in Christ's truth; to stand by His cross; to stand in a life of denying self; to stand in a life of faith on the Son of God; to stand in the profession of the truth, as the truth is in Jesus. "Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering" As if he should say, there will be much opposition to your holding your profession, to holding it fast; but hold it fast. Heaven is in the matter; hold it fast. Soul and all's at stake; hold it fast. "Stand fast" What a trial such a word may be to some of us wavering, fickle, foolish, turning aside, going after vanity, wishing for an easier path, indulging flesh and blood, listening to the devil, walking in this and in that foolishness, often forgetting the deceitfulness of sin and the deceitfulness of our own hearts. How difficult to hold fast without wavering the profession of our faith. But God has made provision in His Son for this holding on and holding fast, and the provision is in this whole armour. Stand fast, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth whereby you will be able to gather up the long, loose, flowing, entangling robes of the flesh and gird your loins. There are many entanglements with respect to our flesh, and unless the truth of the gospel is given to us and received by us and put to this divinely ordained use, these long, loose, flowing, entangling robes will give us many a fall. Perhaps some here may now be saying mentally with myself, how many falls we have had because we have not had our loins girded about with truth. O the flesh is dangerous; these robes, they entangle, they make an awful danger for us, and the Lord says - "Stand fast"; take this girdle, the glorious gospel of the grace of God, and put on the breastplate of

righteousness. Righteousness imputed, be this the breastplate of our hearts. A righteous life will never stand against the wiles and fiery darts of the devil. It is good to live righteously but the best thing is to have an imputed righteousness, a breastplate that will intercept and make harmless all the fiery darts of the wicked one, and he has many of them. And take the helmet of salvation which will keep your judgment well informed and strong against the many subtelties, new doctrines of devils, that will ever be coming and asking admission into the mind. You will never be safe against any error of doctrine, any doctrine of devils, unless you have this helmet covering you, defending you, in that particular. And the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. We have greatly, some of us at least, neglected God's word. Many may be found, perhaps all, looking unconsciously to their own conscience of things for a guidance, and if they do not feel condemned in their conscience, you may bring a hundred scriptures to them and mention them, but still their natural armour, their pride, will admit no error. I have met such people. Mind this dear friends, the Lord Jesus used the Word in the wilderness of temptation. "It is written" He said "It is written", and that was His weapon and may it be ours. "Taking the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God". The word of direction, the word of doctrine, the word of truth, the atonement of Christ, the imputed righteousness of Christ, these being the Word of God are to be taken as a sword in the hand of a soldier of the Lord Jesus. Then he comes to that which I have read as a text.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit". Prayer is one of the most solemn exercises that a man can ever have in his heart. It is the means of coming to God; it is the open mouth, the open heart, the trembling desire, the humble confession, the prostrating of the soul before God. It is the acknowledgement of His divine Being and the rendering to Him of the worship due to Him. It is the laying before Him bad cases, opening out leprosies, confessing dreadful things that are in the heart; the bad state that you may feel to be in. And this exercise, spoken of thus, is what will preserve us if we are

enabled to go on in it, from the many evils that are in our hearts, and often perplexities in our circumstances. Praying? Why it is dealing with God; it is dealing with God. It implies some knowledge of God. You will never pray to a God you know nothing about. It implies some faith in Him, as having forgiveness. With Him is forgiveness that He may be feared. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." It implies some view of the new and living way to God. Jesus has made that and is that way and so the saints are exhorted to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus and by His High Priestly office. Prayer therefore has in it a great deal, and a wise minister, helped by the Spirit, could say a great deal about this exercise; coming to the throne of grace, pleading the only pleadable plea that the scripture discovers; making known the evils, and the difficulties, and the perplexities and the temptations that come in the way. Prayer, secret prayer, ejaculations; there is no substitute for that. Secret prayer is a great thing; it is a great matter to pray, to pray in secret. When thou prayest enter thou into thy closet and shut thy door about thee. Leave the world, and it will go with you into your closet; leave your business for the time, it will go with you into your closet. But then, says Christ, go into it, shut your door, leave as much out as you can, and then pray to your Father which seeth in secret. That is the divine prescription and order in the matter of prayer. And the Apostle here, by the Holy Ghost, tells us to be doing this always; not an occasional matter, but, says he, "always". What a solemn thing is this, when, as some of us have to do, when we have to confess that very very often we cease to pray, as if it were, we have to give it up, do give it up, for the time. The Spirit is therefore grieved, and may leave us, may have left us in days past, to fall into a deadness, an indifference, a coldness, an unexercised state of mind. And then the devil has made sore work with us and conscience has had a great deal to do in the matter.

Praying is believing in the heart and uttering before God what your believing heart desires. Sometimes this praying always

will be with respect to some particular thing, some burden you have got, some master sin that threatens destruction, some evil thing in your spirit, and the matter is urgent, for you are afraid lest you should be overcome. The world in some particular may have got hold or threatens to get hold of you, or some inward temper, which only God knows, may threaten destruction. And therefore, through the grace of God, the sinner is brought to a measure at least of compliance with this Scripture - "Praying always". We are always needy, but sometimes there is particular need, need that presses, special need that makes us realise that we shall never get through without the help of God. O it is a great thing to be enabled thus to walk before God. "Praying always". I wish sometimes this were my life; it is a great thing to pray. I have thought today it is a great thing to be a praying person. If you consider what prayer is, to whom it is made, why you pray, what is the way you walk - even the new and living way - whose name you mention, what plea you make, if you consider these things, you must conclude that a praying person is a miracle of grace, and that important passage on the subject in the Romans tells the same thing - "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" - we are too ignorant - but the Spirit helpeth our infirmities. He maketh intercession for the saints with groanings that cannot be uttered. And it is a remarkable thing, in my judgment, that the Spirit of God there says - that He makes intercession according to the will of God, that He knows all things, the deep things of God, what God has designed to give you, what He intends to bless you with. The eternal purposes of God respecting you, the Spirit knows, because He was in the secret, in the council of peace, and the covenant, and so He works in a sinner, ignorant of that, such prayer as is in exact accordance with that secret purpose of God. Oh what wise prayers ignorant people have uttered. And when their cries have entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth and they have felt they have been accepted in the Beloved in praying, they still have not known all that was in their prayer. All the petitions which they have felt welling up in their hearts have had something in them which has been discovered to them. For this I prayed; and you may, looking back, when you have got something in your hand, say

- for this I prayed. What a great thing it is to pray. I must repeat it because it is, in my judgement, a very, very great thing to be a praying person. And again, prayer is the expression of felt need; it is not the chattering of a person; it is not the eloquent sentences of a person; it is not a lot of words; it is just what the sinner feels his need of, and that sense of need comes to him from the Spirit's grace. All men need, but all men do not know what they need. They need God, but comparatively few know that need, feel that need. But the Spirit gives a sense, a feeling of that need and that guides the sinner in praying - "Lord save or I perish". True worship is here; the ear of God is open to this; the heart of God is intent on this. Said the Lord, in answer to Solomon's prayer with respect to the temple to which his people were to turn and go - "Now shall Mine eyes be opened and My ear attent unto the prayer that is made in this place." And this place is the anti-type, is the Lord Jesus. And sinners, with a sense of need, go to the Lord Jesus who has all goodness, all fulness, all grace, all mercy. They go to Him for a supply. And here, at times, their eyes are taken off one great object, taken off the object of self, that object on which they look with such scrutiny, about which they say, we do not know that we are sincere; we do not know that we have right feelings; we do not know that we really, rightly want or desire God. Sometimes it is as if the eye is taken away from all this, and the sinner says - Lord, I am lost; O save me. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication". Prayer is the expression of need, and supplication is the earnest entreaty with respect to that need. It is not a matter of indifference with you whether you get an answer or not. There is a supplication; you can sometimes say, Lord I am in earnest; I want something. Bread for my soul; salvation for my ruin; justification for my person. Lord I want a blessing. I want my temper to be subdued; I want my attention to be riveted, fixed on the Lord Jesus; I want to be spiritually minded. You have often said it, but sometimes it has come to that, there has been a supplication, not simply saying, and sincerely saying, what you want, but entreating the Lord, as if you must say "I cannot let Thee go". It is a great thing to say that "I cannot let Thee go". If there be a

child of God present who has got into a distant, dark and indifferent state of mind, I would say to that person, may the Lord look on you. You do not know, you do not know what a rod you are preparing for yourself. You do not know what terrible things in righteousness God may use to bring you back. It is a great and a grievous sin to neglect the throne of God's heavenly grace.

"All prayer and supplication." Now, for the manner, the motion of this, the influence, the power - "In the Spirit". Not in the flesh; it is against the flesh. You have to war against the flesh; you have to go fighting and that power, that motion, that direction of your heart and spirit in prayer, you get from the Spirit, and here, let us look at this. Prayer, real, acceptable prayer, is indited, indited by the Lord. Then the heart of the christian indites it. There is a real inditing; there is. One gets, perhaps suddenly, a sight, a need and a sight of Christ's fulness. His heart indites a petition - O that of that fulness I might receive". "In the Spirit". This inert nature of ours, this lumpish nature of ours, this ignorant nature of ours, can never rise to prayer. It is the Spirit of God who comes and makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, and it is this that gives the true direction to the heart, this work of the Spirit. It is also His work that fixes the heart on the atonement and puts that plea, that alone pleases God, into the heart and the mouth of faith - "For Christ's sake". It is the Spirit who keeps the sinner at this business. "Praying always" Nature tires of this; the old man wearies of this. O it is a heavy thing for some of us to say that we have learned painfully, to our shame, what it is to find God's ways weariness. They said it of old; the prophet Malachi reprovved them for it; God, by him, said - My people have said that My service is a weariness. They have said that My table is contemptible. If any of you good gracious people have been kept from that sin, do thank God and ask that you may be kept from it; some have not been kept from it.

Now it pleases the Spirit to come and teach a sinner, and

show him the blessedness and the graciousness, and the necessity and the sweetness of prayer, so that he continues in it. "Prayer and supplication in the Spirit". And Jude has the same teaching; he says "Praying in the Holy Ghost". Praying in the Holy Ghost appears to be just praying as He dictates and assists and tells the sinner in his heart to continue instant in prayer, watching unto the same. Well, dear friends, what do we owe to the Holy Ghost. O that He should ever condescend to come to a sinner and quicken him into life divine and then dictate prayer, indite petitions, enlarge the sinner's understanding in his needs and in understanding of Christ's fulness to supply these needs. Is it not wondrously good of Him? Ought we not to thank this Holy Spirit more than we do for the blessed sustenance He gives and the kind impulse we receive from Him to go on seeking the face of God? He is good, this divine Spirit. We can do nothing without Him. You can get to heaven as well without Christ as you can without the Holy Ghost. He is needful for it in every right and good thing.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." And what then? If your prayer has entered into the ear of the Lord God of Sabaoth, it is done; you have got the blessing in Christ; it will come down. But the Holy Ghost (and this is very different from legality, let me say that here) the Holy Ghost has said this "with all perseverance and supplication for all saints". Now this tells us two things; it tells us first that there is a perseverance in prayer by the power of the Holy Ghost; that, as nature does not take it up, so nature is not allowed to put it down; as the flesh has no part in it to help, but only to hinder, so the flesh shall have no power to kill this. The work is God's; the saints know it, they feel it; the work is God's. And the second thing it tells us is this, that the matter of prayer is not only for yourself, but for all saints, and I am disposed to say this, that this has a relation to the passage I a little dilated on on Lord's Day. "Thy kingdom come"; that the Lord, the Spirit, helps His people to pray for Jerusalem, to love her, and seek her good. In the Psalms one sign of God's coming to bless His people is this - His servants

take pleasure in her stones and favour the dust. The very dust of Zion is beautiful, that is to say, the least, the poorest, the most tried of all the saints, who say they are only dust and ashes, and say that honestly, these have favour in the eyes of God's servants, and the stones, lively stones, quarried and being fitted to be put in their home, their divinely ordained places, these, the servants of God favour, love, and seek to benefit.

"For all saints" It is good to find God has saints here and there; it is good to find that God has ministers here and there; saints whom He has made saints and ministers whom He has made ministers. What a favour it will be, if we are enabled, by the Spirit, to look at this word and regard it. I well understand, if one is saying - but my own case is so bad, it perplexes me so, I have not time as it were to think of anybody else. But my friends, here the Lord says, now pray with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. This is part of the armour you are to put on, because you have the devil to fight against, you have principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. They are all against you and will oppose every step of the way. Therefore, weak as you are, and ignorant as you are, and unable to fight as you are, do this - go to God and beg of Him to help you, guide you, defend you, bless you, enlarge you. This is part of the armour of God. A christian man who, for a time, gives up prayer, has lost, for the time, part of that armour that God has provided. Then, when this has taken place, and is taking place in a child of God, then says the Holy Spirit I will add this - pray for all My people; pray for the church of the living God. And there is a very kind word in the Psalms for people who are enabled to walk in this exhortation - "They shall prosper that love thee" it is said of the lovers of Jerusalem. O what a mercy then it will be for us to be enabled thus to walk before the Lord, praying for all saints with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching unto the same, watching to see if you get any answers; and a great point - unanswered prayers are a trial; waiting for answers is not easy. Many difficulties come in the way of waiting; it seems impossible sometimes to wait any longer. So the prophet felt - "What should I wait for the Lord any longer". And you may feel

it; you may say perhaps out of painful experience the more I pray about anything the worse it becomes. I have said, in the wickedness of my heart, more than once, the more I pray to be a useful minister, the worse minister I become and then I have felt, I will give up praying thus. What an abomination. You may feel just something like that in your own case; the more you pray about your temper, the worse it gets; the more you beg of God to give you faith, the worse you feel in your soul, through the power of unbelief. But Paul says - go on; yea, the Spirit says, - Continue instant in prayer, watching unto the same; as if the Lord should say, notice not these objections, (we do notice them) there is power in the Lord to overcome them; there is goodness in the Lord to satisfy you; there is grace in Christ to increase you and make you more fruitful. And these mercies exhibited in the gospel are made so many incentives to prayer, as if they should say - Why are you so silent, Christ has plenty.

Christ has blessings to impart

Grace to save thee from thy fears

O what a rich Christ we have, and yet how backward are we to go to Him. Now beloved friends may we be enabled to observe this great word - "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit and watching thereunto with all perseverance for all saints," and, says Paul, for me a minister. Like Paul, asking these people to pray for him, well now may a poor servant of Christ say to his brethren here - when you pray, when you get near your God, when you have the Holy Spirit helping you, put a word in for me; ask the Lord to bless me and to make me a better minister, more useful to you, and His Name shall have the praise.

AMEN.