

Intercessory Warfare

by
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And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...Ephesians 6:18 NASB

Ephesians 6:18 is like a **CODE RED** message from Paul as he defines prayer in militaristic terms after telling us in verses 1-17 that we are engaged in continuous warfare with spiritual forces of evil intent on killing, stealing, and destroying as revealed to us by the Lord (John 10:10).

He doesn't see this warfare as an occasional raid by terrorists. He sees it more like constant trench warfare. Kill or be killed. But it seems like many in the church are scarcely aware that this warfare is taking place, though it is evident all around us, and many Christian believers are suffering as defeated POWs with subsequent consequences for themselves, their families, their friends, and their church fellowships.

All prayer is, or should be, communion with the Lord, and communion with the Lord involves asking, hearing, and obeying (i.e. communication). Paul's instruction is that every time we pray, whether we are interceding on behalf of the saints or when we are engaged in any other kind of prayer, we are to pray "in the Spirit."

There is some confusion about this term. Some in the Charismatic tradition presume that praying in the Spirit is praying in tongues, but praying in the Spirit simply means that we have "ears to hear" the prompting of the Spirit, our Counselor, when we pray, and we are able to pray by faith in the circumstance.

What I find to be true when I am in a time of extended intercessory prayer is that the Spirit prompts me when to move into praying in tongues and when to pray with understanding. Yet, I am praying in the Spirit whether praying in tongues or praying with understanding.

But those who pray without "hearing" and without "knowing" by the Spirit are not praying in the Spirit, and they are not praying by faith.

My profession requires me to spend numerous hours on the road, and I use this time to meditate on the word of God and to pray. For some reason, when I

meditate on the word my meditations automatically lead to prayer. At times I pray in tongues, but at some point, the Lord will drop some person or some circumstance into my conscious mind for the purpose of intercessory prayer. At the same time, He will prompt me to pray according to His will on their behalf, and I pray with understanding as I am guided and prompted by the Spirit concerning what I pray.

On one occasion, I had been praying in the Spirit for more than an hour when I suddenly knew to look at my gas gauge. It was almost empty, and the last station for fifty miles was just ahead on the right.

In that situation I know that the Spirit deliberately interrupted my time of prayer so that I would escape the trouble of running out of gas miles from a filling station, which was also a confirmation of the communion I was experiencing.

My confidence that these prayers will be answered is extremely high, and this is very much different than the polite “if it be thy will, Lord” prayers that come from our mouths when we do not know how to pray in a particular circumstance.

In **“Is Jesus ‘Real’ to You?”** I told the story of Bill Sackter, a man with an IQ of 50, whose simple prayer, “Jesus, heal my little friend,” brought healing to a seven-year-old girl in the final stages of spinal meningitis. What that testimony reveals is that Bill Sackter, who could barely read, had communion with the Lord, and when he prayed, he prayed in the Spirit.

Bill Sackter did not have to go to a healing seminar, and he did not have to learn faith “techniques.” He simply knew the heart of the Lord as the Holy Spirit revealed it to him, and he spoke it into the circumstance, which is praying in the Spirit, and, as a result, the girl was healed.

When our daughter, Becky, was born, she was born premature, and the doctors prepared the family for the worst, stating that Becky had a thirty percent chance of survival. My father-in-law, a Southern Baptist who did not pray in tongues, went apart from the somber family depressed by the doctors’ report.

This, too, is instructive to us. In the presence of great unbelief, it is sometimes difficult for us to receive the true counsel of the Lord. When Peter prayed for Dorcas, he put everyone outside before he prayed for her. There is no direct scriptural evidence to support my conclusion, but I believe the Spirit wanted to remove any source of unbelief from the room before Peter prayed for Dorcas to be raised from the dead.

When my father-in-law came back from his time of prayer, he made a simple statement. “Everything is going to be all right.”

The atmosphere in the waiting room changed instantly, and everyone there received his word as a word from the Lord, which it was. The atmosphere in the room changed instantly to one of joy and expectancy, as the enemy’s assault was

defeated by the faith of a loving grandfather who obediently spoke the word of the Lord into a circumstance, even though he did not pray in tongues.

Therefore, when Paul says that we are to pray at all times in the Spirit He is telling us that effective prayer, especially intercessory prayer, is an act of communion with the Lord and our corresponding faith response whether we pray in tongues or pray with understanding.

On another occasion, while I was still teaching in a Southern Baptist church, my Sunday School class met weekly on Monday nights to break bread together, study the Word, and pray. I am reasonably certain that no one meeting in our home, other than myself, prayed in tongues, and one night after we had finished praying for all the requests, I knew, as only the Spirit can cause us to know, that someone had a desperate, but unspoken prayer request.

“Someone in need has not spoken up tonight, but, because the Lord has informed me of this, I believe your prayer request will be answered.”

A young husband raised his hand and explained that his wife, who was in tears and couldn't speak, had an incurable, degenerative eye disease effecting the retina. She was blind in her left eye, and the doctor told her she would be blind in her right eye within six months.

Wow. This was not a time for an, “If it be thy will, Lord,” prayer.

As we prayed, I noticed the prayers getting bolder and bolder as we went around the room. No one laid hands on her, and no one anointed her with oil (though I certainly would have later in my ministry). But it was evident that numerous people in the group were hearing from the Lord and confessing what they heard.

On Friday she went to the doctor, and he was astonished. There was no sign of macular degeneration scarring in either eye. She was not only not getting worse, she then had perfect 20/20 eyesight in both eyes.

Paul also tells us that, as “prayer warriors,” we are to be alert and watchful not only for ourselves but also for all those around us, and we are to persevere in our prayers. In Paul's day, though, all believers were intercessors, not just some small group of Special Forces Spiritual Commandos.

There are some who are specifically called and gifted to be intercessors, but it is impossible for a small group of intercessors in a church fellowship to persevere in regard to every prayer request they receive.

Perseverance is the act of continuing to pray and of seeking the counsel of the Spirit in regard to some circumstance. This includes the possibility that the Spirit will cause us to enter into a season of prayer and fasting.

Every husband should be alert and willing to persevere on behalf of his wife. Every wife should be alert and willing to persevere on behalf of her husband, and all parents should be alert and willing to persevere on behalf of their children. But, at the same time, Paul instructs us that we should all be alert and willing to persevere in prayer for anyone whose circumstance comes to our attention. Yet, the Lord will direct each one of us who are willing to intercede on behalf of others as He wills.

On one occasion I had a beloved elder brother in the Lord who had heart disease. Several years before he had experienced heart problems, but he was healed because of the intercessory prayers of others. Now, his heart disease was threatening his life, and I entered into a season of prayer and fasting on his behalf.

Another brother and I anointed him with oil, prayed for him, and read scripture to him, and I followed up by regularly praying with him and for him after reading appropriate scripture with him.

When he passed away, I was on my face before the Lord when the Lord gave me a vision.

In the vision my elder brother was laid out on a medical exam table, and a white light passed through him from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head. Then I saw a black insect, a cockroach, almost one foot high, whispering in his left ear.

When I asked the Lord for understanding, He caused me to understand that it was His will to heal my elder brother, but for reasons that only the Lord knows, He was requiring my brother's own faith to receive the healing.

The black insect was a demonic source speaking unbelief and fear into his left ear, the ear of the flesh, and his unbelief countered our faith.

I will greet this beloved brother again in heaven, but he passed from this life without experiencing his own faith for healing.

What the Lord also demonstrated to me in this vision, because of my obedience in persevering, was that He loved me enough not to allow this brother's death to hinder my own faith by giving me an understanding of what had happened.

Persevering, though, is not just persevering in prayer for a single circumstance. It is persevering in the entire act of maintaining alertness and willingness to intercede on behalf of others as the Spirit leads. It is the lifestyle of maintaining our fellowship and communion with the Lord so that we are able to respond quickly and appropriately no matter what the circumstance.

Recently a younger brother in the faith, with whom I am in continual fellowship, received a word from the Lord concerning His desire for His

intercessory warriors to become much more aggressive in our prayers of faith, taking back ground that the enemy has stolen not only in the lives of others but in our own lives.

Sometime later a specific word of instruction came to me in which He said, “When you have taken back the ground that the enemy has stolen from you, do NOT allow him to regain a foothold.”

In addition, He imparted a POWERFUL revelation to my younger brother. In many things it is appropriate for us to ask the Father in the name (covenant authority of) the Son. But where we have already been given general orders by the Son, who is our Commander-in-Chief, we are to aggressively ACT like soldiers already under orders.

Thus, we do not have to beg the Father to heal the sick (i.e. “If it be thy will, Lord...”). It is already His will to heal the sick. Nor do we have to beg the Lord to cast out demons. It is already His will to cast out demons. And, if we are not disconnected in some way from the Lord, we do not have to ask the Lord for our protection. We ARE protected, and we already have everything we need for life and godliness in Him.

Therefore, those who are in fellowship with the Lord, hearing and responding to His voice, do not need to petition the Father once we have the knowledge of His specific will in the circumstance. We are, instead, expected to ACT on what we have heard with spiritual ears and seen with the eyes of our heart, as soldiers and bondservants under orders from our Commander-in-Chief.

Remembering that when the Lord sent out the seventy-two to cast out demons and heal the sick He did not tell them to politely ask the demons to leave in the name of the Father or beg the Father to heal the sick. Instead He told them to heal the sick, and He said: ***“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me. And the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”*** (Luke 10:16)

These seventy-two returned to Him excited that those they spoke healing over were healed and even the demons who afflicted many in various ways responded to their commands.

Then the Lord explained His source of authority over the enemy and our authority in His name.

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven...”... (Jesus was there when Satan lost his authority in the kingdom of God) ***“Behold, I have given you...”*** (My)... ***authority to tread on serpents and scorpions...*** (the demonic legions of Satan) ***...and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you...*** (as long as you remain in fellowship with Me so that you KNOW and ACT on my will in your circumstances). Luke 10:19,20 (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

In this we are not to be presumptuous. In militaristic terms we have been given general orders (i.e. “cast and demons” and “heal the sick”), but our application of the general orders frequently requires a specific order. And the specific order may include the revelatory knowledge of how and when and with whom we are to pray.

It may require a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom, a revelatory insight, or even a prophesy, that the one we are praying for needs to confess, repent, and be delivered from some specific sin or some demonic stronghold.

In this regard a young couple came forward for prayer one Sunday. Both were in tears as they revealed that she was pregnant with twins but that the doctor told them that the boys would be stillborn, and that she would have serious complications.

Because I heard the Lord I said, “Your boys will be soul winners by the time they are twelve years old.”

Even more surprising is the fact that they received my words as a word from the Lord, because they were given ears to hear, though they did not know me at all.

At the time this article is being written the boys are nine years old.

When I asked a Charismatic brother how his church fellowship prayed for the sick he told me that they followed the James 5:13-15 model, which is to send the elders (not an office in the church but an indication of spiritual maturity), and the elders will anoint the sick or the spiritually and emotionally afflicted with oil.

Then James instructs that “the prayer of faith will heal the sick.”

But, as my brother noted, not all the sick and afflicted are healed or set free from their afflictions.

Why not?

What James tells us is that the “prayer of faith” WILL heal the sick. And, to make the point complete, the command spoken to demons in faith WILL be obeyed.

Yet, when the father of an epileptic boy came to Jesus for help, he reported that the disciples, who had been given authority to cast out demons and heal the sick in His name (i.e. with His authority) could not cast out the demon that afflicted him.

When the disciples asked why this specific demon did not respond to their commands Jesus told them that it was because of their lack of faith. (Failure to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit)

When He used the mustard seed example, He was not telling them that it had anything to do with the size of their faith, but with their faith, period, even if it was as small as a mustard seed.

Thus, as long as the demons did not resist, or the healing of the sick was instantaneous, they had “faith,” but persevering faith requires that we stay intimately connected to the source of our faith, the Lord, so that we can receive His specific orders when the general orders do not automatically apply.

When Paul and Silas were in Thyatira they were followed for many days by a young woman with a spirit of divination who continually announced to the people, “These are men of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

Paul was not deceived by her words proclaiming the truth. He knew she was empowered by Satan and he was annoyed by her presence. So, why didn’t he instantly cast out the demon as soon as she began to follow them? Why did he wait for “many days”?

This is not specifically explained to us in scripture, but, like much of scripture, the Spirit of truth who wrote it, causes us to “see” what he has deliberately left for us between the lines.

Paul undoubtedly had faith to cast out the demon, but He was also obviously hindered from doing so by the restraint of the Lord.

Satan’s intent in this event, was to give the young fortune teller authority with the people on the basis of her supposed support of Paul and Silas. Then, after Paul and Silas left Thyatira, Satan would be able to use her to deceive the many new, but immature believers in Thyatira, thus undoing the work of Paul and Silas in some way.

And if Paul had cast out the demon the instant that he recognized it he would not have had time to establish the household of Lydia and the new believers in Thyatira, because the owners of the slave girl would have done what they ultimately did many days later.

Problem solved, but not by Paul. The problem was solved by the Lord through Paul’s obedience to His restraint in the circumstance.

Thus, the importance of being able to “hear” the Lord’s specific orders in some circumstances where we already have faith to carry out the general order.

Like soldiers in worldly combat we have the general order to “shoot the enemy,” and this frequently applies without further specific orders. But we need to be attentive and stay connected to the voice of the Lord, because, at times, the specific execution of shooting the enemy needs to be directed by the Lord to be effective and achieve the will of our Commander-in-Chief.

Headlines:

Be AWARE, like soldiers in a “hot” combat zone, that He expects us to stay spiritually alert and to respond to any attack of the enemy or any stronghold of the enemy that comes to our attention.

Resist asking the Father or the Lord to do what He has already authorized us to do in His name.

Boldly ACT on whatever authority our Lord has already given us corporately and individually in regard to interceding on behalf of others, and especially other brothers and sisters in the Lord, expecting that it WILL be done. This pleases Him in the same way that a commanding officer is pleased by those men who aggressively and effectively carry out his orders.

Continually seek and expect the knowledge of His specific will in any and all circumstances, so that we are “in the Spirit,” whether in prayer or in actions of faith on behalf of others. Just as it is in worldly warfare, communication and our corresponding obedience to what is being communicated to us by our Commander-in-Chief, is the key in spiritual warfare.