

## EPHESIANS 6:18-20

### SANCTIFIED DIPLOMACY

Put on the whole armour of God, “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, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”<sup>1</sup>

“Diplomacy,” said Will Rogers, “is the art of saying 'Nice doggie' until you can find a rock.” Diplomacy is the continuation of war by other means. Diplomacy without arms is like music without instruments. We Christians long for peace; but peace at any price is too dear a cost. As we have seen in previous messages, we are at war with a vicious and ruthless enemy. I stress that this is not a war against flesh and blood, but against the enemy of the soul. Accordingly, Christians must not make peace with the enemy. Rather, we must recognise that we are at war and stay alert against every assault.

We Christians can honestly say that we are enemies to no man—we have no scriptural warrant to hate anyone or to fight against any other mortal. However, we are appointed to occupy sacred ground that was purchased by the blood of our Master. We are commanded to stand firm, resisting evil. To accomplish the assignment we have received, our Master has provided equipment that will permit us to withstand the onslaughts of the enemy. We also are armed with the Word of God, a weapon that is capable of turning back every assault.

As the Apostle listed the various items that comprise the panoply of the Christian warrior, he included instruction that that must be obeyed for the armour to be effective and for us to be able to stand. Turn again to **EPHESIANS 6:13-20**. “Take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 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, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

Focus on the **18<sup>th</sup> VERSE**, taking special note of two verbs, translated into English as “praying” and “keep alert.” Either verb is a present participle, which would normally be translated “praying” and “keeping alert.” Each is related to the instruction that has preceded. These are not additional commands, but rather they are instrumental—that is, they are the means through which all that is commanded is accomplished.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

In other words, donning the Christian panoply, standing before the attacks of the evil one, and wielding the sword of the Spirit, are accomplished through “praying” and through “keeping alert.” Since the words are present tense, it implies that this is to be an ongoing condition for the child of God. Underscore in your mind, then, praying is not intermittent, but constant. Likewise, vigilance is not occasional, but continual. Thus, the hallmark of the engaged Christian is prayer and vigilance. The Christian that does not depend upon prayer and fails to maintain vigilance cannot be counted as a mature believer, and such a one is disobedient to the expectation of the Master. May I say that the Christian that does not live a life of prayer and does not remain vigilant endangers not only his own spiritual well-being, but that of his or her fellow believers.

What has this to do with diplomacy? We do not go seeking a fight; but neither do we flee before the enemy of the soul. We are gracious to all whom we meet, showing courtesy and kindness, even as we have received kindness and mercy from the Master. However, we realise that we are part of a divine army, supporting one another and holding one another accountable. We are always seeking to hold the enemy at bay.

This means that we must be “always ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope [we] possess” [1 PETER 3:15]. This means that each believer understands and is aware that “though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5]. We endeavour to live lives that are pure and godly, assuming control over both our mind and our body. We seek to advance the Kingdom of our Saviour through telling the Good News of His great salvation and urging all mankind to believe this message of life. And we resist the insinuation of wickedness into our lives or into our assemblies. Join me, as we examine the disciplines of prayer and vigilance, discovering how they complement the equipment God has provided.

**THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE** — It is important to note that while Paul emphasises that the armour we are issued is divinely given, we are responsible not merely to don it, but to do so with prayer. Miss Baker was an elderly woman living in San Francisco when I ministered there; she was a completed Jewess, having received Jesus as the promised Messiah. I suppose some people would have thought her extreme in some of her practises, but there could be no question that she did love the Saviour and endeavoured to serve Him with all her heart.

One evening Lynda and I offered Miss Baker a ride home from the service. The church was located in a somewhat unsavoury section of town, and a woman walking alone placed herself in some peril. After Miss Baker climbed into the car, I started the engine and placed the transmission in gear. “Hold it,” she exclaimed! “Don’t move until we pray.” And then she prayed for God’s protection for our journey through the streets of Daly City.

“You are doing God’s work,” she explained, “and the devil will attack that work by injuring God’s servant if he can.” She continued by explaining that she did not do anywhere without asking for God’s protection and God’s direction. It was a sobering experience for me, compelling me to examine the minutiae of life. Upon reflection, I concluded that there were truly no minute areas of life. Since that night, prayer has been a vital part of my life as I confess my dependence upon God and seek His direction. I do not hold myself out as a great prayer warrior, but I am conscious of my dependence upon God and His mercy to accomplish the tasks He assigns. I confess that I seek His direction in my life in the minutest aspects. I confess that on occasion I have even asked what shirt I should wear or what tie would be best.

You may recall Jesus' admonition that disciples "should always pray" [LUKE 18:1].<sup>2</sup> Throughout the letters Paul wrote, we see the same encouragement for Christians to pray. Nearing the conclusion of his Letter to the Christians of Rome, the Apostle commanded, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" [ROMANS 12:12]. The Roman Christians, as is true also for us, were to fill their lives with hope that brings joy, remain steadfast in our trials, and pray continually. This is the same message that Paul penned to the Christians situated in Colossae. "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" [COLOSSIANS 4:2]. These words echo what he wrote in his first Letter to the Thessalonians saints: "Pray without ceasing" [1 THESSALONIANS 5:17].

I am always astonished at the dearth of a vigorous prayer in the life of contemporary churches. At one time, Lynda and I were part of a congregation of over 24,000 members. I served on staff at that congregation and Lynda was involved as a volunteer. We attended the multiple services, including Sunday School, the early morning worship service, Training Union each Sunday evening followed by the Sunday evening service. Each Wednesday we attended prayer meeting. Seldom were there more than eighty people, out of 24,000, present to pray at that prayer service. The percentage is not vastly different from most churches.

One cannot read the account of the meeting of the apostolic congregation following the resurrection of the Master and that of modern churches. Listen once again to the familiar words of ACTS 1:12-14. "Then [the disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers."

The nascent congregation faced insurmountable difficulties. They had received the charge to carry the Good News of the resurrection of the Master throughout the entire world, beginning in the very city where He had been crucified. Left to itself, that congregation would have died a lingering death as had a thousand other sects. That they did not die testifies to the residence of power that is almost unknown to contemporary churches, though that same power is freely available to any Christian congregation. What those first believers did is precisely what few believers do in this day—they devoted themselves to prayer!

Someone has well said that the first congregation devoted itself to prayer for ten days and preached for a few minutes, providing what is perhaps the greatest demonstration of power the world has witnessed to this day as three thousand individuals came to faith in the Risen Saviour. The modern congregation devotes itself to prayer for a few minutes, preaches for ten days, and if three people respond to the message they say they have witnessed a great revival!

How vital is prayer to the people of God as they prepare themselves for battle! The belt of truth must be cinched with prayer. You will recall that when we looked at this in a previous message, I noted that the truth to which Paul referred likely pointed both to Christian doctrine and personal integrity.<sup>3</sup> Without prayer for discernment, we are prone to drift into all sorts of fantasies. Balance is woefully lacking in the doctrine of many of the professed saints of God, and a primary reason for the lack of balance is a failure to pray as the believers formulate a doctrinal stance. Consequently, without sound doctrine filling their mind, they lack integrity.

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<sup>2</sup> The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press) 2006

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Stark, "Battle Dress," (sermon preached October 25, 2009),

<http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/ephesians613-18battledress.pdf>

Likewise, the breastplate of righteousness speaks of the life expected of the child of God who must stand firm while resisting the wicked one. The righteousness that is witnessed outwardly is rooted in the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to each believer. Again, it is impossible for us to be righteous without prayer to avoid sin, or to resist temptation while living holy and godly lives. Being righteous does not simply happen for the child of God, he or she must choose at each critical juncture to do what is right, and this requires prayer.

When we are charged to be always prepared to make the Gospel known, we know this is an impossible task if we neglect to pray. Without prayer, we will be unresponsive when opportunity is presented to speak of Christ the Lord. Without prayer, we will be insensitive to the needs of others, excusing our failure to speak with any convenient alibi. Without prayer, we will find ourselves paralysed before those who most need to hear the message of life.

Why do parents fail to plead with their children to believe the Gospel and be saved? Is it not because they fail to pray and are thus paralysed because they fear the loss of relationship? Why are we silent when friends and colleagues speak ill of Christ of His people? Is it not because we fail to pray, asking that God would make us bold to speak the truth in love? Why are we mute when the godless ridicule the Faith? Isn't it because we fail to pray for holy boldness, and we fear ridicule? Having prayed, we will find ourselves seized with urgency to speak of the Master's salvation. As we speak to others of the gracious offer of life in the Son of God, let us each resolve to prepare ourselves daily by praying for wisdom and grace. Our pleas will exhibit unimaginable power as result of having bathed them in prayer.

Dare we imagine that we can face the enemy of the soul if we do not have faith? Can we say we have faith when we fail to seek strength and courage? Soon, we will be like Peter when he attempted to walk on the boisterous seas. All was fine so long as his eyes were fixed on the Master of the billows. However, the moment he took his eyes off Jesus he began to sink. In the same way, if we fail to look to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith [see **HEBREWS 12:2**], we shall surely sink beneath the cares and sorrows of this dying world. For our faith to be sufficient and strong, we must pray. For our faith to be a shield from the flaming darts of the evil one, we must pick it up with prayer.

To protect the mind, each Christian is given the helmet of salvation. In that previous study we saw that this item points us forward to the hope of being united to the Master when He comes again. The helmet of salvation is an eschatological item which is to be donned with prayer; it is not the possession of salvation that is in view, but the hope that arises from our salvation. Just as John prayed, we also pray, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" [**REVELATION 22:20**].

George Duffield's glorious hymn, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus," captures in lyrical form the necessity as followers of Christ to prepare ourselves through prayer for the spiritual conflict we are certain to face.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,  
Stand in His strength alone;  
The arm of flesh will fail you,  
Ye dare not trust your own:  
Put out the gospel armour,  
Each piece put on with pray'r;  
Where duty calls, or danger,  
Be never wanting there.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> George Duffield, Jr., "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus"

There is that final item that must be taken up with prayer, and that is the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. We dare not imagine that we will expertly wield the Word without considering our utter dependence upon the Spirit to guide us. How will we know what to say or what portion of the Word to use, unless the Spirit guides us?

It is vital to comment further on a couple of other aspect of prayer as part of sanctified diplomacy. We are to pray at all times. Obviously, this does not mean that we are to remain on our knees in formal prayer at all times. It does mean, however, that we are responsible to cultivate an attitude of prayer that permits us to approach the Throne of Grace momentarily. John Wesley was known for saying that a Methodist should be ready to pray, preach or die at a moment's notice. That saying applies to all Christians, just as it does to Methodists; it distills the wisdom of the Word to bite size pieces that which any of us can chew.

Each Christian is responsible to keep short accounts with God. We sin, and when we sin we must quickly seek restoration of fellowship so that we will not succumb to discouragement and failure in the war in which we are engaged. We will do well to remember the instruction of the Word as given through the Apostle of Love. “If we say we have fellowship with [God] while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” [1 JOHN 1:6-10].

A colleague of mine used to say that a sheep may fall into a mud puddle, but a sheep will never lie down in the mud. When you sin, because you are a Christian, you are miserable. The Master promises full restoration as you turn again to Him. When you maintain an attitude of prayer you will find it easy to readily turn to Him seeking forgiveness and restoration.

Note, also, that we are to be “praying at all times *in the Spirit*.” This does not mean that we are to use some ecstatic utterance that we cannot understand; it does mean that we are to be submissive to the Spirit of God, permitting Him to direct us in our requests. It means that we are to realise that prayer is not simply presenting a shopping lists of wants to the Master; it is seeking His will in all things through the power of the Spirit that dwells within each of us.

The Apostle is clearly reminding us that we are dependent upon the Spirit of God to direct us even in what we should ask and say before the throne of the Living God. You will no doubt recall the humbling statement that informs us that “The Spirit helps us in our weakness.” The reason we require this help is because “We do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us” [ROMANS 8:26]. Enough of this nonsense that creates multiple classes of Christians—the ground at the foot of the cross is level! Enough of this nonsense that says you are spiritual if you don't understand what you ask—“I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:15]!

Note, also, that the Christian is responsible to pray “with all prayer and supplication.” The word translated “prayer” speaks of general requests, while “supplication” speaks of specific requests. Paul's own words illustrate the distinction intended. The Christian warrior is to “pray ... with all perseverance and requests for all the saints” [VERSE 18]<sup>5</sup>. However, the Apostle asks that the readers pray for him, specifically asking of the Master “that words may be given to [him] in opening [his] mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel [VERSE 19]. Pray for believers, but pray specifically for those who entrust to us their particular requests.

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<sup>5</sup> The NET Bible, op. cit.

Elsewhere, the Apostle instructs Christians to pray for unbelievers, to pray for government leaders and for others who are not involved in spiritual warfare [see 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, 2]. However, in the text he instructs us to pray for fellow Christians. It is only believers who are engaged in spiritual warfare. Therefore, Paul urges believers to pray for those engaged in the ongoing conflict and to pray that those who are AWOL to become engaged. We pray for the former to be strong and courageous in fulfilling their assignment; and we pray for the latter to be awakened to the need to assume responsibility for their duties.

Often, Christians will say that they do not know how to pray. I suppose that what they mean is that they are not comfortable praying publicly. We imagine there is a formula that we must use, and if we do it wrong, our prayer will be negated. Make it simple—prayer is asking. I often advise believers to use the acrostic **ACTS** to guide them in praying. **ACTS** stands for “Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.”

Begin with *Adoration*, recounting in your mind the majesty of God. In your heart, tell Him of your sense of awe that you are permitted to be called by His Name and that He has shown you such grace. Adore Him for who He is and marvel at His perfections.

The second word of the acrostic is *Confession*. In the presence of God who knows you, don’t attempt to hide your sinfulness; rather confess your sin, receiving the forgiveness that He freely extends in His Beloved Son. I do not advise that we engage in morbid introspection attempting to recall every sinful thought or deed, but those sins that spring to mind need to be confessed and forsaken by His mercy and through His power.

*Thanksgiving* is the third word of the acrostic. It is a reminder that we are to be a grateful people, giving thanks to God for all that He has done for us, beginning with the salvation that He has freely given in Christ Jesus the Lord. When we give thanks, we must not forget to thank Him for cleansing us of the sin we have confessed. Never forget that a lack of gratitude is the beginning of a dreadful slide into religious irrelevance and spiritual senescence.

The final word of the acrostic is *Supplications*. This is the presentation of the requests we seek to see fulfilled. These are the requests for blessings for our fellow Christians, for our family and for our beloved friends. These are the requests for God to show His mercy by granting health and wholeness and salvation to those whom we love for whom we care.

I encourage you to pray for all believers, asking God to strengthen them and to be glorified in them. I especially ask that you pray for me that I may speak the truth in love, and that I may make the message of life clear so that those who hear will turn to Christ in faith. I specifically ask that you pray for me to be bold to declare the entire truth of God, refusing to compromise the teaching of the Word for the sake of personal comfort. Ask God to enable me to speak fearlessly to the praise of His glory and to the strengthening of the saints. Pray that God will use us to advance His Kingdom and the cause of the Master.

**THE NECESSITY OF VIGILANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE** — The press of the hour compels me to move to the next requirement that the Apostle addresses for those preparing for spiritual combat. He speaks of the necessity of staying alert, of maintaining vigilance, as the Christian warrior dresses for the conflict. Tragically, many of the saints appear to believe that preparing themselves for combat is something that is done once without need to prepare again. Paul implies that the Christian warrior must put on the divine armour each day, for the conflict does not cease simply because we have fought once. The war has continued for the people of God since the rebellion of the covering angel in the far distant past; and the war will continue until the day that Christ puts down all rebellion, returning to reign with His saints on this earth.

“To that end keep alert with all perseverance,” says the Apostle. The reference is to the requirement to be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.” Many Christians say prayers, but the evidence suggests that few pray. The reason for this failure is that praying is demanding work—it requires perseverance and vigilance. What is needed among the churches of our Lord are Christians who are alert to the needs of the congregation and aware of the areas where the evil one may be making inroads. Paul pointed to his own life as a model of Christian wakefulness and the cost of persevering. In this letter, he spoke of himself as “an ambassador in chains.” However, rather than seeking ease of his situation, he asked that others join him in praying for boldness in his distress.

I want to speak pointedly to this issue for a brief moment. We live in a day in which many who go to church—especially many who “run” the churches—seek to hire a preacher who will make a beautiful speech. The little speech must not be too long and it must not hurt anyone’s feelings. The modern churchgoer wants a sermon that draws beautiful word pictures but does not reprove sin. However, the Apostle seemed always to make people uncomfortable with his sermons. In their discomfort, those who heard him were encouraged to do what is right.

The stalwarts of a certain congregation were incensed on one occasion when I commented that many church members were unwilling to tolerate sound teaching, wanting instead, sermonettes for Christianettes. I heard a continual whine from one individual in particular who took the statement personally. What was humorous was that he repeatedly asked, “What’s wrong with wanting a short sermon? What’s wrong with wanting to feel good about myself?” He could never quite connect the dots when I pointed him to Paul’s warning recorded in his last letter to Timothy. “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” [2 TIMOTHY 4:3, 4]. With a bewildered look, he repeatedly asked, “What does that have to do with me?”

During basic training as a United States Marine, I had a platoon sergeant who was tough. He had only recently returned from Viet Nam where he had been engaged in one of the bloodiest series of battles to that point in the war, having served during Operation Harvest Moon. He really wasn’t concerned to make his platoon comfortable when he wakened us early each morning, demanding that we fall out of the rack and prepare ourselves for physical training. He wasn’t concerned that we might have delicate feelings that were easily hurt when he spoke gruffly, demanding that we excel at the tasks he assigned each day. He was preparing us for combat. He was our best friend, though we were not convinced of that at the time.

Similarly, the preacher that speaks the truth is equipping us for spiritual warfare. He is not trying to make us feel good about ourselves. Rather, he seeks to honour the Master, encouraging us through speaking the truth in love. He loves us enough, and he loves the Master enough, to “reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” [see 2 TIMOTHY 4:2]. Though the sermon presented may not be polished, he will faithfully “preach the Word,” and we will be encouraged to persevere because of his faithful declaration of the whole Word of God.

Whenever the ambassador from the Court of Saint James comes to Ottawa to present his credentials, he will wear his many medals and decorations as demonstration of his position. Paul was the ambassador of the highest court of heaven. In effect, through the text the Apostle asks, “Would you like to see my medals?” Then, he points to his chains and says, “I am an ambassador in chains.” He was suffering, he was in bondage, he was treated meanly; nevertheless, he represented the Living God to sinful man. His invited those reading this letter to enter into the battle by praying for him to be bold as he declared the mystery of the Gospel.

Paul was unconcerned for his personal comfort, though he undoubtedly was suffering. He would write Timothy, urging him to “share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God” [2 TIMOTHY 1:8]. This invitation to join in suffering was repeated. “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus,” [2 TIMOTHY 2:3]. He would urge Timothy to anticipate that his service would entail suffering when he wrote, “Always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:5]. It was not merely academic, for the young theologian was reminded, “You ... have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured” [2 TIMOTHY 3:10, 11]. Paul pointed out that suffering is the lot of all believers who have a desire to follow the Master: “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” [2 TIMOTHY 3:12].

Deprivation and trials are the lot of the child of God.

Do you suppose modern Christians in the Dominion of Canada will be able to point to their own body and say, “I bear on my body the marks [*stigmata*] of Jesus” [GALATIANS 6:17]? Evidence would appear to suggest that we have adopted a Gospel of personal comfort, eschewing deprivation or discomfort and unworthy of a servant of Christ. However, we need to remember that “There is no discharge in the time of war” [ECCLESIASTES 8:8]<sup>6</sup>, and we are at war.

Were the prayers of those who read this letter successful? Undoubtedly they were, for we read in another place, “All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household” [PHILIPPIANS 4:22]. The Apostle was not speaking of the butler or the baker, but of the guards who had been assigned to watch him. Chained to these soldiers, he preached the Gospel and lived out under their watchful eyes what he preached with the result that many were saved. We must assume that in no small measure this was an answer to the prayer of the believers to whom he wrote in our text.

**THE SYNERGY OF PRAYER AND WATCHFULNESS** — As we exercise this sanctified diplomacy, the issue is not that we have either prayer or vigilance; the requirement is that we have *both* prayer and vigilance. The panoply of heaven is of little value if we fail to become people of prayer and maintain vigilance. The enemy seeks infiltrate our ranks and to insinuate himself into our lives. Therefore, we must be ever alert and always praying.

The old saying is true, never is a Christian taller than when she is on her knees. By the same token, never is a Christian more secure than when he is alert and watchful. We are at war, and we are on the winning side. There will be casualties, but they are inevitably the result of failure to obey the commands each of us has received from the Master.

If this congregation has a deficit, it is our failure to make prayer a priority. This must become a priority in the life of each believer so that each individual lives a life marked by prayer. Developing sensitivity to the will of the Spirit will be necessary if we are to have a vibrant and powerful prayer life. Likewise, we must make corporate prayer a priority, insisting that we commit each meeting to pray and disciplining ourselves to seek opportunities to pray together. Until this is evident, not much will happen among us.

May I say that as we pray, we must be vigilant. The elders of the congregation must be alert to danger, to be certain. However, each member is responsible to watch out for the welfare of every other member of the congregation. Each one needs to take seriously the admonition to build up one another, encourage one another and comfort one another, esteeming others as better than ourselves.

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<sup>6</sup> **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** (The Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, CA 1995)



There is a place for you in this battle if you are a Christian. Join us in standing firm, praying and watching. Come, place your life in the membership of this congregation. We receive all who have faith in the Son of God and who have professed that faith through believers' baptism. If you have yet to obey the call of the Master to identify with Him in baptism since you believed, come now to submit to His command.

Perhaps you are outside the faith, but the Spirit of God has spoken to your heart. The Word of God is very clear in calling you to faith in the Son of God. He died because of your sin; and He was raised to declare you righteous before the Father. Therefore, the Word of God promises, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." The divine promise is concisely summarised in these words, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**].

Our invitation is to each listener to believe this message of life and to take his or her place with us in advancing the cause of the Master by standing firm in this most holy Faith. Come, join us in this battle. Amen.