

Prayer and Warfare

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I would like to talk for about 25 minutes or half an hour about prayer and spiritual warfare. And I'd like to point out that one of the things we do before we're baptized with the Holy Spirit is try to fight spiritual battles with the forces of our own personality. I'm preaching to myself tonight as I share this with you because I see how often God still has to pull me up as I try with even a joke to put something right that needs to be put right by prayer. And often, (more often before I was baptized with the Holy Spirit) I was tackling spiritual problems with the forces of my own personality. I would try and change my wife, or change someone else by either criticism or what I thought was a very gentle and kindly hint but what was just a big sledgehammer to the person listening.

And so when you're baptized with the Holy Spirit you die to your own ability or power to change anything permanently inside people and you really do realize that. You begin to realize that by the force of your own personality you can only make temporary, superficial changes in people or in situations and so you determine from then on to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit.

One effect that the baptism of the Holy Spirit has is that it gives you discernment into the real problem behind the apparent problems. And so when you're baptized with the Holy Spirit you get clarity of spiritual vision. You begin to deal with the spiritual realities rather than just the superficial symptoms. There is that verse in the New Testament that illustrates it in a symbolic way and it might be worth looking at it. It's in Mark 8:23-28. Even though it's just an illustration, I think it does bring the point home in a graphic way. Mark 8:23-25, Jesus you remember came to Beth-saida and they brought a blind man to him and then verse 23-24, "And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking.'"

The first time Jesus lays his hands upon us in the new birth for forgiveness of our sins we do see something spiritually but we see them like trees walking. We don't see them too clearly. We sense that there's some reason why our mom is at critical as she is, we sense there's some reason behind the boss being as sarcastic as he is, but we just sense it as trees walking. We don't see it clearly. When Jesus gives us a second touch with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, "Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly."

And it seems that the baptism of the Holy Spirit brings a very clear spiritual insight so that you really do see the issues. Of course, one of the results of that is it brings much more peace to yourself and to others because you don't end up in those traumatic arguments or those traumatic emotional crises that you caused in the past with your words used wrongly. I believe that's something we still learn after being baptized with the Holy Spirit but that's certainly a big change that the baptism of the Holy Spirit brings. He enables you to see the battle for what it is, a spiritual battle.

When we produced our first Dunamis Magazine/Newspaper we covered the back page with a picture that had come from the World Liberation Front in Berkley. It was a picture of a rural countryside with little church spires and farms. The greater part of the picture was the top two thirds and it was

filled with all kinds of demons fighting against angels. And of course, the message was clear. Down below the thing seemed quiet and peaceful but up above there was a tremendous spiritual battle ranging.

Now in the trouble that you have in the office, or the problems that we have in our homes, or the difficulties that we have in school, or with our roommates, or in our houses, that is the situation.

What you see is only part of the battle. The real battle is going on in the heavenlies. You get a picture of that battle if you look at Daniel 10:10-14. "And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees." (Obviously an angel), "And he said to me, 'Oh Daniel, man greatly beloved, give heed to the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.' While he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. Then he said to me, 'Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days.'"

The angel is saying this, "The prince of the kingdom of Persia," and obviously not a physical prince because this is an angel from the spiritual realm saying this so there must be in the spiritual realm a, "Prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come." So there is a glimpse into the spiritual battles that go on in the unseen world.

Now when you enter into the baptism of the Holy Spirit a great sense of discernment inside comes to you brothers and sisters so that you see those battles more clearly. The Father is good and he allows us to see just the battles he believes we can take part in but he does allow you to see those battles. It is a great relief. For one thing, it is much more economic of your personality powers, much more economic of time, and it is much easier on other people because what we're often involved in is fighting the wrong enemy. Satan loves to create a disturbance and then step out and let the two adversaries beat each other to death which is often what we end up doing in roommate situations, in house situations, and in work situations.

When you're baptized with the Holy Spirit you have great spiritual insight into those things. If you ask me why we don't have it before I'd say I'm not absolutely clear. Except that I think before you're baptized with the Holy Spirit you want to depend on your own power. You have a great sense of pride in your own ability to achieve things. You tend to want to look at the things that you can deal with and you tend to be too proud to depend on an invisible counselor like the Holy Spirit to show you those things. So undoubtedly the baptism of the Holy Spirit brings a great deal of power, light and insight.

Now the warfare is fought with one chief weapon that is mentioned in Ephesians 6:18. I think we have looked at that verse before but it would be good to settle it in our hearts. This is the weapon, the chief weapon that we use in spiritual warfare Ephesians 6:18, "Pray at all times in the Spirit." That's it, "Pray at all times in the Spirit."

The reason is in Ephesians 6:12, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Therefore pray at all times in the Spirit. How does praying in the Spirit differ from praying with the best intentions of our mind and the strongest feelings of empathy that we have in our emotions?

It does so in several ways, but one of the chief is that you determine that God alone knows the particular enemy at that moment and God alone knows what you should pray for at that moment. That's one of the chief differences of praying in the Spirit and praying with the mind or just the emotions. Praying with the mind and the emotions is like scattering shot all over the place. It's like putting a shot gun cartridge into the gun and splaying the shot all over the place. You may hit something but you're just having a go at a general area. Prayer in the Spirit is carefully aimed and directed prayer. It's directed by the Father himself from a position where he can see everything.

Now, prayer in the Spirit, or a prayer of faith, is a prayer that comes from God's mind to your mind and you pray it. So you have three people in an argument in your office, and you're always seeing it from your view point. You can't see clearly which one has to be dealt with first by God but the Father can see into their hearts and their spirits. He knows you've to stand against Satan in a particular way. God gives you that knowledge, you take the stand and that's the first step to the resolution.

Now prayer of faith or praying in the Spirit is prayer that is directed by God. That's why it's so important to allow God to make the need known to you before you pray. So the chief weapon in spiritual warfare is prayer but it's praying in the Spirit. And praying in the Spirit is prayer in which God makes the need known to you. That's why prayer in the Old Testament involved a lot of listening.

You get that plain teaching in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools." So, to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools. Often we babble away to the Father immediately when we come into his presence and we're just offering the sacrifice of fools. We're often offering wishful thinking, prayers that we would like to see answered but that aren't what he wants to do, so they aren't going to be answered. Our job is to find out what God sees as the next move.

"To offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few." So praying in the Spirit involves a great deal of waiting before the Father, loving him, and looking into his mind. This is so that he can give you his mind on a certain issue so that you can pray in the Spirit. Pray according to the need that God has made known.

It's also not only praying according to a need that God makes known but praying according to the burden that God plants on your own intuitive spirit. In other words, it's very difficult to pray in a way that is effective in spiritual warfare unless you have a burden in your own spirit. God will lay that burden upon you if you'll only come before him and spend enough time with him.

Often we do not pray as we should. It's not because we do not know how to but because we have not a burden on our own spirits. We are simply deciding we better pray a little for this so we pray a little for that but not with a great sense of burden. Then we wonder how long should we pray? Well if we had the burden of course, that would tell us how long we should pray. If we had the burden in our spirits we wouldn't need to be taught words to pray, we would pray because we had a burden.

Now the heart of receiving a burden is back to the first step, spending time before the Father and determining, "Lord, I won't make a move until you show me what you want me to fight for in this battle." So he gives you a burden. You'll find that teaching in Galatians 4:19, "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" And that's the indication that though all is well inside a person who is baptized with the Spirit yet they do know travail, laboring, and toiling spiritually. And Paul says he is in travail until Christ be formed.

So often the reason why our prayers are not answered is they aren't prayers God wants us to pray. They aren't needs he has made known to us, and they aren't burdens that he has planted on our own spirits. They're just things that we have taken up and decided to pray for. All those prayers do is discourage us from ever praying again. That's because we pray, we don't get much sense of dealing with God over it, and we get no answer. The prayer just becomes a trial rather than a joy. But this other way, where you seek God, allow him to let the need be known to you, and receive a burden in your spirit, then you begin to pray with a sense of achieving something. Then of course it is possible to pray until the burden lifts.

Unless you take this route you know nothing of burden lifting at all and you're just baffled when somebody shares this kind of truth with you. If you say, "Well, what's the burden lifting?" Of course if you haven't had a burden in the first place you won't know what it is to have it lifted. But you can pray through until the burden is firmly settled on Jesus and you sense that that is the end of your prayer.

That's another lesson that God teaches us, that we ought not to let the prayer exceed our burden. We ought not to pray longer than the burden is resting on our spirits.

This would save us from a lot of depression and pain that we get ourselves into. I remember a brother or sister coming up and being concerned about praying for some spiritualist. It's very important if you're going to pray for a spiritualist, or if you're going to pray for someone who is in trouble, that you pray for them as long as the spiritual burden is on your spirit. If you pray beyond that point you will begin to be involved in their problem and their trouble. It's very easy to go out in naïve soulful philanthropy and say, "I must pray for those people they really need it."

If you pray without a burden, and especially if you pray beyond the burden that God has placed on you, then you are going beyond what the Holy Spirit wants and you're going outside his protection. It's a little like going beyond what the General of the Army tells you to do. He guarantees you protection up to that point but withdraws it after that point.

It's very easy, for instance, to empathize humanly with someone in trouble too much. Now you may think, "Oh no brother, that's love." But loved ones, it is possible to use your imagination to become too involved in someone's difficulty, especially the difficulty of a loved one. It's possible to get so involved in their difficulty and so borne down by their problem that you are of no value to them at all. In fact, you lose out yourself on it. So it's vital only to intercede, or to pray, or to stand against Satan as long as the burden is on your spirit inside. Beyond that, the prayer itself becomes rather dead and you yourself begin to move into dangerous places.

Now at the same time I think there's another truth, it's important that we don't miss burdens through carelessness or through our own unnecessary burdens. That's where it really is important to be baptized with the Spirit and to experience a real death to self. If you die to self then you're no longer burdened down with all your own worries, and all your own troubles. And so your spirit is

light and airy, able to receive someone else's burden. The truth is that God has taken all our burdens upon himself. He has determined to look after our career, to look after our bank account, to look after our friends, to look after our bodies so that we can be free to bear other people's burdens up to him.

It's so vital to be free of our own burdens and it's vital to be careful that we don't miss other people's burdens through carelessness and through simply not paying attention to the Holy Spirit. Now, there is a verse in Psalms 37:5 that we need to walk in, in order to be in the position where we can receive burdens. Unless we do this with our own burdens we will never be able to be in the place where we can receive burdens from God himself. Psalms 37:5, "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act." It's really important to learn that verse and commit your way to the Lord.

Once you're baptized with the Holy Spirit you have signed on in Jesus' service. Your job is no longer primarily taking care of yourself. Your job is no longer primarily making yourself successful in this world. All of that you commit unto God and accept that that is part of the "all other things" that will be added onto you. Now you're in the King's service and you commit all those things unto the Lord and trust them to God as you set about Jesus' service. And so a Christian is meant to walk free of his or her own burdens so that the Holy Spirit will be able to lay on him or her burdens from other people. That is a glorious and a free way to walk and it's the way God means us to walk.

Now if you say to me, "Do you not often find your own burdens falling back upon you as you're trying to lift other burdens?" Certainly you do but that's why God gave you a mind. It's so that you can turn your thoughts from your own burdens, take your stand again and commit it unto the Lord. If you say to me, "Brother, do you not find that as you're trying to bear a burden in your spirit for somebody else a whole mass of private messes clatters on the top of your head?" Yes certainly, and at that moment you're meant to rise up, get your head erect and throw all those things onto Jesus so you can walk in the burden that he's pressing upon you. So will power and a direction of the mind is needed because you can be assured that once you begin to fight in spiritual warfare Satan will be intent on distracting you from the battle.

Now there are just another couple of things that it would be good to share. You may say, "How do you pray this way in the Spirit?" I think there's great truth in this, as your daily walk is so your prayer life will be. If you walk in the midst of your emotions your prayer life will be an emotional prayer life. If you walk every moment with just the intellect and the shrewd cleverness of your own mind then your prayer life will tend to be the same. You can't walk one way for 13 hours of the day and walk another way the 14th hour. As your daily life is so your prayer life will be.

If you walk primarily depending on your physical powers in your ordinary everyday life so you will walk that way in your prayer life. Now I think that comes again in Galatians 5:25. It is important to walk each day in the Spirit if you hope to pray in the Spirit. There's no mystery about walking in the Spirit. It's walking with your eyes on God. It's considering primarily him and what he's thinking and what he's surrounded with rather than the visible things that you can see. So there's no need to get complex and esoteric about what praying in the Spirit is. Praying in the Spirit is not being preoccupied with the things that you see. Walking in the Spirit is not being preoccupied with the things that you see. It's being preoccupied with the Father and with looking at him and with what he's thinking.

So Galatians 5:25 says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Here's the mistake that many of us make in regards to this. I think many of us receive prayer burdens from Jesus. We receive insight into other people's lives and instead of receiving them as prayer burdens we dissipate them by sharing them with other people. I think that's why many of us don't have a living prayer life and a living intercessory life. As soon as God shows us something about somebody else we're sharing it. It's in confidence of course, but we're sharing it with someone else, or we're sharing it with the person themselves. And so as we go before God we've dissipated all the burdens that he gave us for the person.

In other words loved ones, many of us lack prayer burdens because we do not have a private interior life with God on our own. You can tell what we are by listening to our tongues. We're nothing more than that. We never keep anything to ourselves. We never keep anything between ourselves and God. We receive an insight into someone's life, we don't realize it is a prayer burden, and so we go and tell them about it and try to put it right. Or, we go to a friend and tell them, "I think I know what so and so's problem is."

Loved ones, usually when God gives you a private insight into somebody's life, that's a prayer burden for you to take before him. If you'll take it that way he will answer it and use it to change the person's life. If you dissipate it by sharing it with somebody else, or sharing it with the person themselves, you just lose everything. Nothing happens except frustration alone. So I think brothers and sisters that praying in the Spirit will come if we will begin to have a private negotiation with God about other people and about their lives.

I think if you pray in the Spirit this way, if you cultivate an interior life with God then your spirit becomes more and more sensitive. It's really just a rule. It's a psychological rule as well as a spiritual rule that if you use your mind a lot then your mind will become very effective and very powerful. If you use your emotions a lot they will become very effective and very powerful. If you use your spirit a lot it will become very effective and very powerful. And so the secret of praying in the spirit is in our own private lives to walk in the Spirit more often. Begin to look at situations and ask God to show us, "Lord, what is behind this situation?" Begin to ask the Father to show us, "Father, is there something spiritual behind this? Lord, if there is will you show me it?"

Instead of reacting against the human situation, begin to look for what God is showing you about the spiritual problem behind it. In that way you begin to walk in the Spirit. If you begin to walk in the light of invisible things more really than in the light of the physical and visible things that you see, then you will begin to come into prayer in the Spirit. Prayer in the Spirit, while it has burdens and travail, is a life of peace compared with the prayer burdens that we engage in. You know how our intercessory prayer often weighs us down instead of raise us up to the Father.

Loved ones, I should stop. I think I should keep my word. Are there any questions? I'm going to continue to speak further about that next Sunday evening.

Question: How do you stand against Satan?

Brother if you would be patient enough to wait until next Sunday I'd like to share about standing against Satan and I will try to be specific about it.

Question: When waiting upon God to wait for his mind to come to you, where should our minds be?

Answer: You remember my sharing a couple of Sundays ago that our minds certainly should not be passive. Waiting on God is not passivity because if you simply make your mind blank and wait for God to write his words upon that blank slate then you engage in transcendental meditation. This is just what brings the eastern religion practitioners into contact with evil spirits. So it is not a passive mind.

It seems to me “thou will keep in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee”. It seems to me you stay your mind on the Father. I do it every morning and I did it this morning again, I read the first verse of Psalms 104 and I used that to stay my mind on God so that my mind would not be on the responsibilities of the day, or on how I was feeling but on God. So I would use the spirit a great deal to actually set my mind on God or whatsoever things are lovely and true and of good report. Think on those things. I would think on those things.

Now with anybody here who says, “Brother is that not soulish prayer?” No, the mind can be used to aid the spirit. I agree with you, that the Spirit has to take hold of your spirit. Then you can rest it in the Father where thoughts begin to fade away and you aren’t conscious of thinking specific thoughts. But it’s good to prime the pump by thinking specific thoughts in the beginning so that your mind is cooperating with the Spirit rather than just lying passive.

Question: And so do you usually use scripture to move into the realm of the Spirit?

Answer: That’s what I do. You can read a verse of scripture that sets your mind on the Father. I think a mistake that many of us make is that we don’t do that and therefore sink into our own subjectivity. Or, we do it in a purely soulish way and never expect the Spirit to take fire and lift us beyond that. I agree with anyone here tonight who says, “The Spirit does lift your spirit and lift you beyond thoughts.” I agree with that and that’s what he will do if we set about it with a mind that is active.

Question: Is using a prayer tongue praying in the Spirit?

Answer: It’s very important to see that praying in an unknown tongue is praying in the Spirit but that is not the only way to pray in the Spirit. You see that when you study the verses that are used by Paul. He says for instance, “Pray in the Spirit,” and it is a capital S in Ephesians. That’s what he commands us to do, pray in the Holy Spirit. Whereas when he talks about, “What happens when I pray with a tongue, I pray in the spirit,” he uses a small s and he says, “Then I’m praying just in my spirit without praying in my mind.”

So it’s important to see that the command to pray in the Spirit is to pray in the Holy Spirit and that can be done either with an unknown tongue, or it can be done in our own language with our own words.

Maybe I could do a small commercial for tongues. One of the advantages is that it does lift you above just the thought life and the preoccupation with thoughts and lifts you definitely out of the soulish realm. Now there’s no question you can be out of the soulish realm simply praying in your own language but that is one of the values of the tongues, especially to a person just beginning to learn to pray in the Spirit.

Question: I’ve been using the recommended technique but it isn’t producing results. I’m getting up

in the morning and using a verse of scripture to keep my mind on God but it doesn't seem to be making prayer real and I'm not getting thoughts from God.

Answer: It's very important to see (and that's why it is good to laugh about those things), that every Christian operation that Jesus has started has always drifted into soulish techniques or methods and we thought that they were the answer. And that's why I think it's very important to see that the teachings that we share on Sunday will of themselves achieve nothing. They are only guides to us as to how we might get in contact with God's Spirit.

I think only the Holy Spirit can make prayer real and can bring you into a real and living prayer life. Any of us that are having difficulty entering into a real prayer life ought to look again, even those of us who say, "We've been baptized with the Spirit." We should look again and ask, "Holy Spirit, is there something else you can do in my spirit to make me more alive and to strengthen my spirit in the inner mind?" I think that it's a question of the Holy Spirit showing you what it is in yourself that is still involved in perhaps soulish prayer.

Question: What is meant by praying soulishly?

Answer: I think a number of us would differ on just what we mean by soulish. But, in the teaching that Jesus has made real in my life the soul would be the "pseuche" or the psychological part of the mind, and the emotions, and the will. And it would seem that many of us have failed to see that there are levels of the personality at which we exist. I'm certain with anyone that says you can't take the soul out and say that's it, or the soul goes to heaven. I agree that we're a unit. But we exist at different levels of a personality and the spirit is the level at which we contact God.

So that's it brother, I'm trying to make a distinction of just praying with the mind, the emotions, or the will and praying in the spirit. It seems that many of us are involved in this kind of soulish prayer that is really almost the reflex reaction of our own thoughts and feelings. It's not really getting through to God at all. Now I do agree with you that the only way to pray in the Spirit at all is to believe God to be working in your spirit and making your spirit alive. But those of us who have come into some awareness of spiritual prayer do know a very real difference between praying in their Spirits and praying in our souls. With prayer in the Spirit there's a reality and a sense of being hand-to-hand in touch with God and face-to-face with him that there isn't in soulish prayer. There's also a great restfulness about it and a real sense of knowing what you're doing whereas in soulish prayer you're hoping that something is happening.