

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Christian's Armor: All Prayer and Paul's Request

If Martin Luther had not stood his ground at the Diet of Worms (1521) the Protestant Reformation might never have happened. In June 1520 Pope Leo X issued a bull, *Exsurge Domine*, ordering Luther to recant under threat of excommunication. In January 1521 Luther was excommunicated and in March was summoned to appear before the emperor Charles V at the imperial diet meeting at Wörms. Luther was given a safe conduct, guaranteeing that he could travel safely to and from Wörms. But Luther remembered that the martyr John Hus had traveled to Constance with an imperial safe conduct.

Rome had sent the noted scholar Johann Eck to serve as the prosecutor. Eck, who was described as a man of very large stature, began to speak in a loud, sonorous voice, first in Latin and then in German. "His Imperial Majesty has summoned you, Martin Luther, to find out two things: First, are you willing to confess that the books which have been circulated under your name are yours?"—here he pointed to a pile of twenty books which Aleander had placed at the disposal of the high assembly as a *corpus delicti*—"second, are you ready to renounce these books or part of them?" Aleander (the court clerk) claimed that he had specified what questions should be put. He was probably correct to this extent, that the "remarkable Dr. Eck, who had burned Martin's books in Trier with such extreme thoroughness," had informed him beforehand as to what he intended to ask the heretic. Luther, who had been instructed prior to this Pappenheim (by his council) not to argue but only to answer the questions put to him, was already on the point of answering the first question in the affirmative when the suspicious Schurpff suddenly interrupted the deliberations by shouting from Luther's side, "Let the titles be read!" Thereupon the imperial notary, Siebenbürger (Transsilvanus), arose and read the titles. "All of the books were mine," the Reformer reported later, "but I do not know how they managed to get them." He had no idea how much effort it had cost Aleander to gather this little library. Then with a cheerful expression, speaking first in German, and then in Latin, "in a very low voice, as if he were frightened or awed," but in actuality probably because he did not deem it proper to shout in this exalted assembly as his friend Schurpff had done, he declared the books to be his."

As to the second question, inasmuch as it involved faith, the salvation of souls, and the highest treasure on earth, the Word of God, Luther requested a respite and time for reflection; for it would be presumptuous and dangerous, he said, not to deliberate carefully over his answer to such a question, since he could easily, through want of caution, say a word too much or too little. This request was so fair that the princes and councilors of the emperor—for the emperor himself did not understand a word of the negotiations, but always had to have Eck's and Luther's speeches translated for him by his councilors and "little red hats" could not restrain themselves from giving some sort of retort to the heretic at this time. They insisted that he be given only one day for reflection, and that his answer should not be read from a manuscript but spoken freely. Luther retired to his quarters and in great agony of soul penned this prayer. "O God, Almighty God everlasting! how dreadful is the world! behold how its mouth opens to swallow me up, and how small is my faith in Thee!... Oh! the weakness of the flesh, and the power of Satan! If I am to depend upon any strength of this world—all is over... The knell is struck... Sentence is gone forth... O God! O God! O thou, my God! help me against the wisdom of this world. Do this, I beseech thee; thou shouldst do this... by thy own mighty power... The work is not mine, but Thine. I have no business here... I have nothing to contend for with these great men of the world! I would gladly pass my days in happiness and peace. But the cause is Thine... And it is righteous and everlasting! O Lord! help me! O faithful and unchangeable God! I lean not upon man. It were vain! Whatever is of man is tottering, whatever proceeds from him must fail. My God! my God! dost thou not hear? My God! art thou no longer living? Nay, thou canst not die. Thou dost but hide Thyself. Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it!...

Therefore, O God, accomplish thine own will! Forsake me not, for the sake of thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my defence, by buckler, and my stronghold.

Lord - where art thou?...My God, where art thou?...Come! I pray thee, I am ready...Behold me prepared to lay down my life for thy truth...suffering like a lamb. For the cause is holy. It is thine own!...I will not let thee go! no, nor yet for all eternity! And though the world should be thronged with devils - and this body, which is the work of thine hands, should be

cast forth, trodden under foot, cut in pieces,...consumed to ashes, my soul is thine. Yes, I have thine own word to assure me of it. My soul belongs to thee, and will abide with thee forever! Amen! O God send help!...Amen!¹

Luther, like his hero the Apostle Paul, was constrained to pray for boldness in his proclamation of the gospel. Listen to Martin Lloyd Jones in his comments on Eph. 6:19, 20. "The Apostle ends on the following note: '...and for me also'. This is still more remarkable. 'And for me!' He wants them to pray for him.. What a staggering thought that this mighty man of God, this exceptional Apostle, this greatest preacher that the Church has ever known, this incomparable founder of churches, should be asking these people to pray for him! It was because he was such a great Christian. The greater the Christian the more he realizes his dependence upon the prayers of others. This is the man who went to Corinth 'in weakness, and in fear and much trembling'. There was no self-confidence in the Apostle Paul, none at all. He knew what he was doing, he knew whom he was representing, he knew the power that was against him. His one fear was that, at some point or other, he might fail his Lord and Commander, and the army of the living God. He was in a very prominent position and a mistake on his part would have terrible repercussions. So he trembles, and asks the Ephesian Christians to pray for him.

He does not leave them in any doubt about what they are to pray for him. He gives them instruction: 'And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak'. When the Apostle wrote these words he was a prisoner, but he does not ask them to pray that he may be set free from prison. He was a sick man, but he does not ask them to pray that he might be healed. Paul was never merely subjective, and never considered himself primarily. He was always thinking of others. It is not a purely personal or human request that he makes of them. He is interested in one thing only, the thing that had always interested him since he had met Christ on the road to Damascus, namely, the preaching of the Gospel! This mystery of the Gospel! He has told them about it in his third chapter – 'How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in a few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit' (Ephesians 3:3ff). The mystery that had now been revealed! This message, this glorious Gospel of Christ! The 'unsearchable riches of Christ'! It is these matters that Paul is concerned about. And what he desires the Christians to pray for is the preaching of the Gospel and the spread of the kingdom of God. But let us notice in more detail what he is concerned about. First, 'that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly'. Pray for me, says the Apostle, that I may have power of speech and freedom of utterance when I have an opportunity of speaking. The fact is – and we tend to forget it – that the Apostle Paul was not a good natural speaker. Certain people at Corinth had taunted him, saying, 'his presence is weak, and his speech contemptible'. Apollos was the orator. Paul was not, and so he urged these Christians – Pray for me that utterance may be given to me, that when I get an opportunity of speaking I may have the words, that I may have the liberty, that I may be able to take advantage of the opportunity. Pray, he says, that my tongue may be unloosed, that my lips may be made mobile, that I may speak with freedom. It is most interesting to observe that this mighty man of God, realizing his own deficiencies and imperfections, pleads with these Ephesians to pray for him that he may be able to speak freely, fluently, without halting and without stumbling.

But Paul particularly emphasizes the word *boldly* – 'that I may open my mouth boldly'. He repeats it: 'that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak'. This is most important at the present time. Do you pray for the preachers of the Gospel? Do you realize what happens every time a man enters a pulpit – frail, fallible, weak, and yet called of God to be His representative, and an exponent of His glorious truth? Do you pray for preachers of the Gospel? And do you pray in particular that they may 'speak boldly'? By 'boldly' the Apostle means freely, frankly, that nothing be kept back. Let me borrow the very words used by the Apostle to the elders of this church at Ephesus when he bade them farewell once, as recorded in Acts 20. He said that he had not failed to declare unto them 'the whole counsel of God'. Pray that I may keep nothing back, he said, that I may give it all, that I may give the Gospel in all its comprehensiveness. Pray, says Paul, that I may be delivered from qualifying the Gospel, and my statement of it, by carefulness and by endless modifications dictated by a concern for my own reputation or my own personal safety."²

James Boice comments that the subject of prayer was still on Paul's mind as he concluded this letter with a reference to Tychicus; "the bearer of the letter, would fill the Ephesians in on all that Paul was experiencing—that they might pray for him better—and, as he himself prays, that peace, love, and grace might be with his faithful friends and prayer companions at Ephesus. Do we need peace of mind to live as God wants us to live in this ungodly world? Of course, we do. The way to have it is by asking God for it. Do we need love? Yes. Fuller and fuller measures of the grace of God? Yes, those too. The way to have them is by asking God for them. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). James wrote, "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). How can we adequately urge the people of God to pray? By the need? Certainly, for there is a great need. By prayer's privilege? Yes, that too. It is a privilege to be able to bring our needs before God."³ Then, in a manner reminiscent of the opening of the epistle, he closes with the trilogy of peace, love and faith, and adds, "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love". How does this final greeting and benediction relate to this great epistle?

I. PERSONAL MATTERS (vv. 21-22)

Having petitioned the saints to pray for him in his discharge of the stewardship committed to him as an apostle of Christ (comp. I Cor. 4:1, 2; 9:16), Paul declares that he is sending a messenger to them, in order that they may be fully informed.

- A. Tychicus: Paul's Messenger—"The dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord." Tychicus is dear because he is a brother. Based on the references in which his name occurs, we can gather that he began his association with Paul on the apostle's third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). He is with the apostle during Paul's first imprisonment (Col. 4:7, 8). The years roll on and the faithful Tychicus is still at the apostle's side (Titus 3:12). It should be noted from this last reference that Paul evidently considered Tychicus extremely capable, since he felt him to be a worthy replacement for Titus at Crete. Finally in the apostle's last epistle, shortly before Paul's death in his last Roman imprisonment, the beloved Tychicus is dispatched to Ephesus (II Tim. 4:12). While others had deserted the Apostle (II Tim. 1:15; 4:10), Tychicus remained steadfast. Again, it is probable that Tychicus was sent to Ephesus to relieve Timothy in order that Timothy might see Paul for the last time.
- B. The Purpose for Tychicus's Mission – Two things are stated regarding Paul's messenger:
1. He will make known Paul's personal affairs and circumstances. The Apostle's welfare and health were a matter of personal concern to his friends. An example of this personal affection can be seen in Acts 20:36 - 38, where Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian Elders.
 2. Information is not the sole reason for Tychicus's trip; consolation and encouragement are included (PARAKALE \square , to comfort, to encourage, to strengthen. The word, PARAKL \square TOS, the Comforter, used of the Holy Spirit, Jn. 15:16, is a related word).

II. BLESSINGS IN THE BENEDICTION

Our English word "benediction" comes from the Latin "benedictio", lit. "bene", well, and "dicere", to speak; thus, to speak well of, which came to mean, "to invoke a divine blessing", and that is exactly how the Apostle Paul concludes!

- A. Blessings Among the Brethren – "Peace...love...faith." This great triad of divine riches has to do with the brethren in their relationship to each other. "Peace" refers to harmony among the brethren, as well as "love". But all things are of God, the Author and source of every blessing. Before they can exist among the brethren, they have to exist with the individual believer and God, but then they must exist among the brethren (cf. I Jn. 3:16 - 20). Notice, as in 1:2, how Paul links the blessing to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ with only one preposition (APO, from). This is another one of the indirect affirmations of the deity of Christ.
- B. Blessing With Eternal Love – "Grace" – the glorious word! Some expositors have sought by the reverse order of the words in vv. 23, 24 to show the proper sequence of divine blessings, thus: *grace* brings about *faith* which in turn issues into *peace* and *love*—and this is entirely correct, but these also react upon one another and enrich each other so that in the Christian life they are like a chained circle, each one linked to the other and related in such a way that they cannot be separated. Finally notice how love to the Lord Jesus Christ (His full title and name) is described as "undying love". The word "undying" is APHTHARSIA, lit. non-corruptible or incorruption, not capable of perishing. "The word...does not point merely to time but to character, and that suits very well here as an attribute of love."⁴ Cf. also Rom. 2:7 and II Tim. 1:10.

CONCLUSION: Jay Adams points out that the war is all about sin (Heb. 12:3, 4) and, as in any battle, there are casualties and there are the faint-hearted who grow weary of war and want only to retreat to the safety of the rear. But there is no such area. "Whatever your condition, soldier of the cross, remember that the Lord is with you and wants you to win. You *can* win and you *will* win if you fight in His strength. Life is not really all that long. In just a little while you will taste the fruits of ultimate victory, and then all the miseries of the present life—the battles, the wounds, the casualties on the field—will be but a sanctified memory in which you will praise the Lord that in His mercy He was willing to use you, with all your imperfections, to fight for Him.⁵ Yes, that is all true—wonderfully so. But for now...do you hear the bugle sounding? The enemy is once again astir; the flesh is up and moving. Be alert; he is poised for the attack. Your God is calling you to the front. Put on your armor—all of it. Pick up your sword and go forth into battle—for Him." May God grant us the realization of these truths we have been studying. May He enlighten the eyes of our understanding so that we may know the reality of the tremendous promises set forth in this glorious epistle—if we love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love, we can love our brethren and dwell in peace as we seek to bring glory to our blessed God in the midst of war.

ENDNOTES

¹ Sources Heinrich Boehmer, *Road to Reformation* (Muhlenberg Press, 1946) and J.H. Merle D'Aubigne,

History of The Reformation (rpt. Baker Book House, 1976).

² M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Soldier: An Exposition of Ephesians 6:10 – 20* (Baker Book House, 1981) p. 359 - 360.

³ J.M. Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Baker, 1997), p. 264.

⁴ T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (T & T Clark, 1897), p. 167.

⁵ J.E. Adams, *Winning the War Within* (Timeless Texts, 1996), p. 151.