

John Kleinig © 2008  
"Grace Upon Grace"

## THE HIDDEN BATTLE

Since the Early Church, the confession of faith in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has proved to be a powerful, effective weapon in the battle against evil. By reciting the Apostles' Creed, people have disowned Satan and all the powers of darkness. The Apostles' Creed is still used in Baptism to resist the devil and to renounce his works and ways. It is also used in confirmation to instruct and equip young Christians as soldiers of Christ. It is used in the Divine Service to challenge and reject the forces of darkness that try to interfere with the hearing of God's Word and the reception of Christ's body and blood by the congregation. It is used, as Luther teaches, in our daily devotions to protect and equip us for the daily battle. As we confess our faith in the triune God, we fight the good fight and live as conquerors together with Christ the conqueror. In fact, through our faith in Christ and His self-sacrificial love, we are "more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37). Our common faith in Jesus as the Son of God gives us the victory by which we overcome the world that is hostile to Him and to us (1 John 5:4-5).

The final weapon that we have received from Christ for spiritual combat is not really a new weapon; it is, rather, the way we make use of all the armor that Christ provides. By it we put on the armor of Christ and protect ourselves with His blood; by it we serve under Christ's authority and act in His name; by it we use God's Spirit-giving Word and our common faith to overcome the evil one. Because we rely on Christ for everything and receive everything from Him, we begin and end with it. That weapon, the resource, is prayer to God the Father in the name of Jesus.

Our situation is similar to the plight of the Israelites at the Red Sea. Pharaoh and his army had cornered and trapped them against the sea. Yet Moses did not, as we would expect, tell them to fight their way out of the ambush. Instead, he told the Israelites to do nothing except to witness

the victory; since the Lord would fight for them single-handedly against the Egyptians, they had only to "stand firm" and await their deliverance (Exodus 14:13-14). When we come under attack, we do not need to defend ourselves, let alone launch a counterattack. We need to do nothing except pray. In prayer we call on Christ, the great champion, the Lord of the heavenly armies, to fight for us. And that turns the attack. By praying we stand firm in faith and rout the enemy.

Christ engages and defeats the enemy for us in a most unexpected way. He joins us in the battle and prays for us, just as He prayed for His apostles. So when Jesus warned Peter that Satan would sift him like threshed and winnowed wheat by a farmer, Jesus added that He had countered the impending attack by praying for him and his fellow apostles (Luke 22:31-32). His prayer for the consecration of His disciples at the Last Supper in John 17 shows us how He prays for them and for us. At the Last Supper, He prayed for His heavenly Father to keep them safe and protect them from the evil one after His death, just as He had, until then, kept them safe by praying to the Father on their behalf (John 17:11-15). Jesus defended His disciples and delivered them from the clutches of the evil one by praying to God the Father for them. He also gave them His own prayer for them and the whole world, His prayer against the evil one, the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). Through that prayer He joins them in the battle and includes them in His victory. Our deliverance comes through His intercession for us and by our inclusion in His intercession (Hebrews 7:25).

The climax of Christ's battle against the powers of darkness came with His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. There He overcame the ultimate temptation of Satan by His prayer for the ability to submit to the will of His heavenly Father—for all temptation exploits the desire to do our own will and to get our own way with God. That victory in prayer

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was as much for us as for Him. It is instructive that when the Gospels describe His great agony in the garden, they do not just tell how He engaged in prayer for Himself in the face of impending death; they also tell how He urged His disciples to overcome temptation by vigilance in prayer (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38). Luke emphasizes the connection between His prayer and our victory over temptation. Jesus gives the command: "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" to His disciples both before and after His agony in prayer (Luke 22:40, 46). So our ability to resist temptation depends on His victory over temptation, the victory that He won by His prayer that the Father's will be done through His self-sacrificial death. Through our prayer we share in His defeat of Satan because of our faith in Jesus.

The Church has always known about the importance of corporate prayer in spiritual warfare. No one has been more acutely aware of its value than Luther. He says:

Such prayer is a precious thing and a powerful defense against the devil and his assaults. For in it, all Christendom combines its forces with one accord; and the harder it prays, the more effective it is and the sooner it is heard. At the present time, for example, it is of real benefit as a defense and barrier against the many tricks which the devil might otherwise perpetrate through the members of his body. Thus it is certain that whatever still stands and endures, whether it is in the spiritual or in the secular realm, is being preserved through prayer.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, much of the modern Church has forgotten this truth. The result has been a resurgence of the occult throughout the western world in many different guises. Intercessory prayer has been and still is the strongest weapon that we have here against the occult and the power of evil. It is our mightiest bulwark against Satan. When we pray for

15. AE 21:140.