

AUGUST 2004 – *Prayer*

Samuel Chadwick once said, “The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies/work/Christian activities. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom but trembles when we pray.”¹

It is not surprising then, that one of the devil’s great aims is to hinder our prayers. C.S. Lewis alerts us to this danger in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*. In the book, the master demon Screwtape writes to Wormwood, his nephew and underling, giving advice on how to gain the soul of Wormwood’s “patient,” a young Christian man. In chapter four, Lewis offers several valuable insights into some of the devil’s schemes, thus helping us avoid these common hindrances in our prayer life:

“The best thing, where it is possible, is to keep the patient from the serious intention of praying altogether.”

Failing that, another approach is to get the “patient” to think of prayer as something akin to his childhood prayers, in order to stimulate a negative attitude toward prayer. Screwtape says, “In reaction against that, he may be persuaded to aim at something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal and unregularized; and what this will actually mean to a beginner will be an effort to produce in himself a vaguely devotional *mood* in which real concentration of will and intelligence have no part.”

“At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers, for they constantly forget what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls.”

“If this fails, you must fall back on a subtler misdirection of his intention. Whenever they are attending to the Enemy [God] himself we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from him to themselves. Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce feelings there by the action of their own wills....teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling; never let them suspect how much success or failure of that kind depends on whether they are well or ill, fresh or tired, at the moment.”

Yet another scheme is to keep the “patient” focused on the conflated idea he has of God rather than on God himself. “But whatever the nature of the composite object, you must keep him praying to it—to the thing that he has made, not to the Person who has made him....for if he ever comes to make the distinction, if he ever consciously directs his prayers ‘Not to what I think Thou art but to what Thou knowest Thyself to be’ our situation is, for the moment, desperate.”²

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
Colossians 4:2 NIV

¹ *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Hampshire, UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2000), p. 783.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 15-19.