

## **“Pray in the Spirit”**

### **Ephesians 6:18**

#### *Introduction:*

1. In order to bring any battle to a successful conclusion, an army needs how to defeat its enemy. It is easy to become sidetracked by gaining lesser goals while letting the enemy escape defeat.

*Illustration:* The football team that is able to amass a lot of yardage, but fails in the red zone, or a baseball team that loads the bases with no outs, but can't get any runners across home plate, or the chess player who wins a lot of material but doesn't know how to checkmate.

2. In the spiritual realm we face the same problem. A Christian or a church can do a lot of “right things”, but it is far too easy to get distracted from the main objective, which in this context is standing firm and resisting the enemy of our souls.

3. Although praying in the Holy Spirit is not part of the full armor of God (neither is being strong in the Lord and in his mighty power), it is an essential part of God's whole plan for the way we engage in spiritual warfare.

#### *Exposition:*

I. What does it mean to “pray in the Spirit”?

A. First of all, the Spirit refers to the Holy Spirit, and not the human spirit.

1. Since Paul has just mentioned the Holy Spirit in the previous verse, this is the most natural way to understand the expression. If the apostle had wanted to refer to the human spirit, he could have made that point by saying something like, “pray in your spirit”.

2. In addition, Paul has already taught the importance of the Holy Spirit whenever we approach God (Eph 2:18). And this agrees with other passages (Jude 1:20; Rm 8:15, 26-27; Gal 4:6).

B. To pray in the Spirit means to pray “in the realm of the Spirit”; that is, “under the influence of the Spirit, and with his assistance....” [Hodge] (The Spirit does more than I can do when I teach. He can increase insight and strength into the inner person of the heart!) Compare 1 Cor 12:3. To pray in the Spirit certainly involves two attendant ideas.

1. When we pray in the Spirit, we pray in a new covenant manner (Jn 4:23-24). We do not approach God with any kind of ceremony or ritual, nor do we come to him with slavish fears. This is one reason we do not use rosaries, candles, pictures, icons or altars when we pray. We do not need them. We have something better—the Spirit himself!

2. When we pray in the Spirit, we do not pray in a formal manner. We are relying on the Spirit for assistance, and not on any form. Someone might ask, “Can you use a written form?” Certainly, you can. Jesus gave a model prayer (Mt 6:9-13), and there are other models in the Bible. As a preacher uses notes when he preaches, so you may use written notes. May you fold your hands and close your eyes and get down on your knees? Doing such things is adopting a form. The Bible shows people using reverent body language in prayer. What about saying, “In Jesus name, Amen,” at the end of a prayer? You can do that, if it’s meaningful, though you won’t find a prayer in the Bible ending that way.

*Point:* We cannot pray in the Spirit if we are praying in a form, relying on a form “to get the job done”. You can pray “the Lord’s prayer” in a formal way, and it means nothing. You can pray it in the Spirit, and it is very powerful.

## II. How does a Christian pray in the Spirit?

A. Partly, it is a matter of attitude that the Spirit gives us when we pray.

1. When we pray in the Spirit, we go to God our Father with the attitude of an adult son of God. By faith it is entering into our rights and privileges as a member of the Father’s family.

2. This means a filial boldness or confidence, like children of a famous or powerful parent display.

*Illustration:* Picture of President Kennedy’s son playing under his desk. So when we pray in the Spirit, we dare to approach the throne of grace boldly. As **adult** sons, we revere greatly the Sovereign Lord who sits on the throne, but because we are adult **sons**, we approach with joy and boldness.

B. Mostly, it is a matter of dependence on the Holy Spirit when we pray.

1. The Bible clearly states that we can only approach God the Father through the merits and intercession of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tm 2:5; Jn 14:6; 16:23-24;

Eph 2:18; Rm 5:1-2). It is also true that as we pray we **must** rely on the Holy Spirit for assistance in prayer.

2. A person may say words apart from the Spirit that seem to human ears to be a prayer. But even a parrot can say words apart from real understanding. If we are going to converse with God, we simply need the Spirit's help in attitude, understanding and faith.

### III. What help does the Spirit provide when we pray in the Spirit?

A. When we pray in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit gives grace in our inner person (cf. 3:16).

1. He enables a son or daughter of God to approach the Father as one who is a new man through union with the ascended Christ.

2. Then we may mourn sincerely about our sins, or state our desire for Christ and the grace that is in him, or simply to cry out, "Abba, Father!" There is a realization that our hope is in the Lord as the Father through the Son refreshes us with his love.

*Point:* When the Spirit fills us, we have boldness. This is a necessary ingredient in powerful witness and powerful prayer.

B. The Spirit of God reveals the real nature of spiritual things to the heart.

1. He unmasks any hidden declines from God's love or other weaknesses in our spiritual condition. He might speak to us like this. "How can you confront the enemy when you have this inward desire for what God forbids? A desire like that is like a worm eating at the root of your growth in grace."

2. He reveals to the heart the real value of God and his blessings and creates a new desire for what is excellent and worthy of praise (Ph 4:8).

3. He convinces us of the all-ability of our Father, though we are in the face of the greatest difficulties (Ps 23:5).

4. He saturates us with right desires; he opens the eyes of our hearts to see the glory of God.

*Apply:* In order to engage in spiritual warfare successfully, we must pray in the Spirit. Are you striving to grow in this matter? If we are to experience God's blessing on this congregation, we must pray in the Spirit. There is no other way.