

Sermon #87 — Ephesians Sermons

Title: **“PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT”**

Text: Ephesians 6:18-20

Subject: *Prayer*

Date: Tuesday Evening — November 28, 2017

Readings: *Bobbie Estes and David Burge*

Introduction:

I am always reluctant to preach on some subjects, because I have not personally experienced them as I would desire. And it would do you no good for me to simply give you a doctrinal recitation. Prayer is one of those subjects. When I come to speak to you about prayer, I feel shamefully unprepared. But it is a subject about which the Lord is teaching me some things. And I want to share them with you.

My subject tonight is — **“PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT.”** Our text will be Ephesians 6:18-20. — **“PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT”** (Ephesians 6:18-20). Let’s read Ephesians 6:10-20.

(Ephesians 6:10-20) “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. (11) Put on the whole armour of God, that

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ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (12) For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. (13) Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (14) Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; (15) And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; (16) Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. (17) And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: (18) Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; (19) 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, (20) For which

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I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

PRAYER.

What is prayer? When and how are we to pray? Do we have any reason to expect God to hear our prayers? I hope that the Lord will enable me to answer those questions for you in a practical way. I am not going to give you any set formulas for prayer. Nor will I try to establish a certain time for you to pray. The Pharisee made long prayers with a definite formula and in a formal posture. He prayed long, prayed frequently, and prayed publicly. But God did not hear him. Whereas, the poor publican offered to God but one, short, humble prayer, trusting in the merits of Christ; and the God of all grace heard that publican.

PRAYER DEFINED

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It is very difficult to give a definition of true prayer. It has been called the breath of a new born soul. It is characterized by confession, faith, intercession, request, and praise. But all of these things come short. **Perhaps I can best describe it by first pointing out some mistaken notions about prayer.**

- Prayer is much more than a mere ritual performed at given times.
- Prayer is much more than repeating something someone has written. — “I don’t say prayers.”
- Prayer is much more than simply asking and receiving.
- Prayer is much more than just filling in the amount of a blank check from heaven.

True prayer might be defined in this way. — **It is the believing, submissive heart worshipping God and seeking his will.** Prayer is an act not of the body, but of the heart. Prayer is an act; but it is much more than an act. — It is a spirit of faith, confidence, and submission.

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LAST STATEMENT

Here in verses 18-20 the Apostle Paul comes to his last statement with regard to what we as God’s people have to do in this matter of our spiritual warfare against Satan and all the hosts of evil.

The New Testament plainly teaches us that because we are the children of God we must expect attacks upon us by the powers of darkness, such as we have never known or realized before. But, thank God, we are not only told that we will have to wrestle and fight with our enemy, we are also told how to do so successfully. Paul has assured us of the final triumph of the kingdom of Christ over the kingdom of darkness. He has described for us each piece of armor. Now he concludes his exhortations by instructing us in this matter of prayer.

What is the meaning of this final exhortation? What relationship does this praying in the Spirit have with what Paul has been saying up to this point? It is

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simply this: — **Praying in the Spirit is something we must do, and keep on doing, in order to rightly use our armor.** This is to be our relentless, prevailing attitude and work throughout the days of our warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil. **Paul is saying**, “Take these pieces of armor and put them on. Put them on carefully and use them in the way I have described. But, in addition to that, always at all times, and in every circumstance keep on praying in the Spirit.” One of the hymns which we sing expresses Paul’s meaning very well.

“Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
You dare not trust your own:
Put on the gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer,
Where duty calls, or danger,
Be never wanting there.”

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What Paul teaches us in these verses is that everything we have to do as God’s people in this world must be done in the spirit and attitude of constant prayer.

It strikes me that Paul had a very specific reason for ending this particular epistle with an exhortation to prayer.

Perhaps above all other books in the New Testament, the epistle to the Ephesians is devoted to doctrine. This is a book full of the deepest mysteries and most profound theology to be found anywhere in the Bible. Those great principles which govern the life of every individual believer and the life of the church as a whole are clearly taught in these six chapters. This is probably the culmination of Paul’s greatest works. Therefore, it is interesting to observe that as he comes to his closing remarks they form an exhortation about prayer. **It appears to me that Paul is telling us that praying in the Spirit is the most important aspects of the believer’s life.** Perhaps

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this is the thing of greatest importance if it is properly understood.

Proposition: Praying in the Spirit is the secret source of the believer’s strength.

Divisions: I will raise three questions which Paul evidently answers in this text. Then I will make a practical application of my subject.

1. When are we to pray?
2. How should we pray?
3. What should we pray for?

WHEN?

1st — The first question that we are confronted with is this: — **When are we to pray?** The apostle says “*praying always*”. What is the position of prayer in your life? What prominence does this matter of prayer have in our lives? This is a question that I address to us all. I ask it of the humble and unlearned. I ask it of the well-educated and

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knowledgeable. I ask it of the preacher and the hearer. **Do we know anything of real prayer?** If so, what is the place of prayer in our daily lives?

Let me say at the outset that in the New Testament it is assumed that all true believers are people of prayer. It is true, our attitude toward prayer may vary. The strength and liveliness of prayer may at times be hindered. The confidence and joy of prayer may be interrupted for a season. But **all believers pray.**

- Prayer is the breath of the heaven born soul.
- Prayer is the cry of the newborn babe in grace.

Frequently, we hear of a person who is describes as “a praying Christian.” But there is no such thing as a Christian who does not pray. We grow in prayer, just as we grow in faith. But all of God’s people pray.

In our text Paul does not admonish us to pray, but to pray always.

- Our Lord said to his disciples, “*when we pray,*” assuming that they would pray.

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- The wicked, the unbelieving, the hypocrite, the Pharisee, the religionist say prayers; but the children of God pray.
- Prayer is not just a mark of strong faith; prayer is a mark of faith period. All of God’s children pray.
- That which convinced God’s church that Saul of Tarsus had been truly converted was this statement, “*Behold, he prayeth.*”
- Prayer is simply the panting of our souls after God.

When Paul admonishes us to pray always, he is telling us that the armor which God has provided for us cannot be used except in fellowship and communion with God.

The armor and the spiritual application of it must always be conceived of in a vital and living manner. Every single piece is utterly useless, unless always and at all times we are in a living relationship to God, and receiving strength and power from him.

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- To put it another way, the Apostle is telling us that even **orthodoxy is not enough**. We must be orthodox. But we must seek God’s power. There is nothing so tragic as dead orthodoxy.
- Prayer is more important than mere **religious knowledge** and understanding. The ultimate test of my real knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures is my attitude toward prayer. The more I know God, the more I seek him.

Paul’s admonition is this: — As the children of God in this world we should always pray. Our Lord taught us that *“men ought always to pray and not to faint.”* By his own example, he has shown us the great value of prayer. Time and time again we see the Lord Jesus coming apart to pray. He spent the entire night in prayer at times. He rose up early before the dawn to pray. Surely, we who are but mortal men and women should learn from the Savior’s example the value of prayer. **When Paul says, “praying always,” I think that he has three things specifically in mind.**

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1. **The apostle means that we ought to pray as often as we have opportunity.**

- We ought to pray at all times and under all circumstances.
- Our prayers may be oral, or they may be silent.
- Our prayers may be lengthy, or they may be brief.
- Every blessing and every trial, every joy and every sorrow, every pain and every relief, every temptation and every deliverance, should bring us before the Lord in prayer.

2. **For another thing, Paul is showing us the necessity of walking by faith** (Proverbs 3:5-6).

When he says, “*Pray without ceasing,*” he is simply telling us to live in the constant awareness of our utter dependence upon God’s grace, strength, and wisdom.

- We are dependent upon our God for the necessities of life.

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- We are dependent upon him for our entire salvation.
- We are dependent upon him for our entire sanctification.
- We are dependent upon him for our instruction.
- In all things we must be looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Here the Apostle Paul is showing us the necessity of seeking the Lord (Psalm 63:1-8). Prayer is seeking God. When Paul tells us to be “*praying always*,” he is telling us to make prayer our way of life, — seeking the Lord.

- Seek his grace always.
- Seek his will always.
- Seek his wisdom always.
- Seek his guidance always.
- Seek his presence always.
- Seek his power always.
- Seek his glory always.

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3. **When Paul urges us to pray always, I think he has in mind the idea of constantly waiting upon the Lord.**

“Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psalm 27:14). — *“Truly, my soul waiteth upon God, from him cometh my salvation. My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him”* (Psalm 62:1, 5).

Waiting upon the Lord is not a passive state of indifference. It is watching, looking, expecting, and anticipating at all times the accomplishment of God’s promise and purpose, without tense anxiety and fear (Philippians 4:5-7).

HOW?

2nd — My next question is this: — **How are we to pray?** The Apostle assumes that all of God’s people will pray. He teaches us to pray always. And now he

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shows us how to pray. — *“With all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication.”*

It is needful for me to point out that there are certain prayers that are clearly opposed to Paul’s language in this verse.

You will notice that the language Paul is using is full of life, vitality, energy, fervency, and zeal. Any prayer that is not marked, at least in measure, by these things is contrary to the spirit of our text.

- Vain repetitions are not praying.
- Cold, heartless, formal prayers are to be avoided. Frequently, men will ask us to “say a prayer.” I dare say that “saying a prayer” is near akin to blasphemy.
- Any prayer that calls attention to ourselves, except as sinners in need of mercy, is contrary to the spirit of our text.

Here Paul encourages us to constantly employ every form and aspect of prayer. I do not think that

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he is limiting us to either private or public prayer in this verse. He is telling us how we should pray, both in private and in public. We should employ “*all prayer and supplication.*”

All of our praying should be marked by reverent, adoration, praise, worship, and thanksgiving.

- We should come to God in reverence confessing our sin.
- We should come before him with adoration for his glorious Person.
- We should come before the Lord with praise for his blessings in Christ.
- We should come before the Triune God to worship him with joy, because of our knowledge of him.
- We should make thanksgiving a great part of our praying, because of God’s bountiful goodness to us.

Prayer arises from our sense of need, so we make supplication to the Lord. We ought to freely pour

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out to the Lord the needs of our hearts and ask him to supply those needs (Hebrews 4:16).

Above all else, we must pray in the spirit. This is the thing that is emphasized over and over again in the New Testament, praying in the spirit. This is the real essence, the very life of prayer. This is the vital point about prayer, — praying in the spirit (Ephesians 2:18; Romans 8:23-26; Jude 20). If we ever truly pray, we pray in a spiritual way, with fervency of heart, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

- This means that the Holy Spirit creates the prayer within us. He directs the prayer, and he empowers us to offer it.
- Praying in the spirit is praying according to the will of God.
- Praying in the spirit is praying with freedom, ease, and liberty before God.
- Praying in the spirit always results in true worship.

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- When we pray in the spirit, then we lay hold of God.

Such prayers may be no more than sighs and groans of the heart which tongue cannot utter. They may be just brief ejaculations of the heart. They may be well ordered petitions. They may be private. They may be public. But they are always powerful and prevailing with God.

Then Paul tells us to persevere in prayer. —

“Watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication.”

- Let your prayers be marked by expectancy.
- Persevere in prayer.
- Keep on making your supplication to the Lord.

“Men ought always to pray and not to faint.” — In this way, we put on the whole armor of God. In this way, we are prepared for war. To keep your armor bright, attend to it with constant care, walking in your Captain’s sight, and watching unto prayer.

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WHAT?

3rd — The last question for our consideration is this: — **What should the children of God pray for?** Our prayers should be specific. We should have a definite goal in mind when we go to God in prayer. The Apostle tells us that we should pray *“for all saints, 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.”*

We should pray for all saints. Far too often, I fear, that our prayers are selfish. We pray for our children, our families, our church, and our country. Paul says that prayer is to be made for all saints. By all means let us pray for ourselves. But do not make self the center of prayer. We must pray for all of God’s saints.

- We are all members of one body.

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- We all have the same enemy.
- We all have the same trials.
- We all have the same temptations.

Whenever I undergo some trial, some sorrow, or some adversity, it should cause me to pray for my brethren, because there are others who are facing the very same problem (Hebrews 13:1-5). This mutual caring for one another increases the love, joy, peace, and strength of Christ’s kingdom upon the earth.

Paul tells us that we should pray for the successful ministry of the gospel.

- Pray for those who preach the gospel; they are after all only men.
- Pray for the increased opportunity of ministry.
- Pray that God will give his servants both boldness and power.
- Pray for the power of the Spirit of God to attend the ministry of the Word, that the mystery of the gospel might be revealed.

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The message of substitution is a mystery which can be taught to the hearts of men by no one except God the Holy Ghost.

APPLICATION

Let me draw out a few practical applications and I will be done.

1. Let us make the disciples' request our own. —
“Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1-2).
2. Pray always.
 - Seek every opportunity for prayer.
 - Live in utter dependence upon the Lord.
 - Seek the Lord in all things.
 - Pray with importunity, like the Syrophenician.
 - Wait upon our God with expectation.
3. Pray for one another and for all saints.

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4. Pray for me as your pastor, as God’s messenger to your soul.

- Pray that God will give me wisdom.
- Pray that God will give me increased doors of utterance.
- Pray that God will make me to grow in my understanding of the mysteries of the gospel.
- Pray that God will give me boldness.
- Pray that God will make the Word effectual.
- Pray that God will keep me, for Christ’s sake.

5. Pray in the Spirit.

May it please God the Holy Spirit to make us men and women of prayer. In all things, may this be our desire: — Let God be magnified.

Amen.