

The Book of Ephesians Ephesians 6:18-20

Session 86: Notetaker

Fig. 1	Prayer that is “in the Spirit”
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Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
We look forward to hearing the doctrine today. We pray for an understanding of what our apostle has written about prayer here in Ephesians 6, and to put it to work in our lives. Change us, deepening our understanding of prayer, renew our minds by this doctrine, and transform us by Your word as we put this doctrine into practice. Putting other things aside for now, we give our full attention to Your word, and eagerly look forward to studying together with the rest of the church.
Amen.

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 6:18-20

Session 86: Prayer and Armor of God, Part 3

Since you have been reading these final verses in Ephesians 6 all week in preparation for the lesson today, we will not take the time to read the whole passage, but we will immediately begin to study out these last verses by starting with the last sentence we covered in our previous study. Previously, we were studying the various phrases contained in verse 18. In order to put the context into our thinking, let us read the entire sentence and then we will unpack it.

Ephesians 6:17 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 I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Now, we will continue to define the terms and phrases contained within it, and then we can put it all together again.

In previous weeks, (sessions 81 and 82), we covered the last two pieces of armor, the helmet and the sword. We have also spent time with the phrase “praying always with all prayer and supplication” (sessions 83 and 84).

What we need to do now is add the qualifying phrase, “in the Spirit.”

Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with **all prayer and supplication in the Spirit...**

It is notable that Paul does not simply say, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication, and watching thereunto,” but he adds the phrase “in the Spirit.” This is a qualifier that tells us that simply “saying prayers” is not enough, but these prayers are meant to have a quality to them that makes them, “in the Spirit.” Notice the capital “S,” which denotes the third person of the Godhead.

Paul's definition of true prayer is wrapped up in three words, "in the Spirit." This is the essence and spirit of prayer as it is meant to be.

So, what does it mean to "pray in the Spirit" and how do we pray in the Spirit? To answer this question, I would like to begin by talking about what it is not.

"Praying in the Spirit" is not liturgy.

By this I mean the constant repetition of prayers that have lost their meaning and taken on a "spell-like" nature whereby just the saying of the words is all that is necessary.

This is not to say that prayers should not have thought and intent behind them, they should. But even carefully crafted prayers, which were originally "in the Spirit", can, over time, lose their efficacy when they are performed as ritual.

Take for example what is commonly known as "the Lord's Prayer." That prayer is carefully thought out and contains a lot of doctrine in a short amount of words. It contains all the elements of prayer. It contains references to Scripture, but it includes things that are God's revealed will, and it contains references to what God was presently doing at that time in Israel's program.

But even this great prayer, which I believe Jesus Himself had been praying in much greater detail in His personal prayer life, has been co-opted by religion as a sort of "magical charm" or "protective incantation" which is no longer understood by those who are repeating it over and over as a "cure all" for all kinds of situations. It has become liturgy.

The problem is not that the prayer had no thought and intent behind it, for when the Lord offered it, it was "in the Spirit," and we will see what that means momentarily. My point is that when any prayer becomes liturgical, it is no longer "in the Spirit."

Prayer that is "in the Spirit" is not prayer that requires external facilities, formalities or aids to prayer. For example, some have been erroneously taught that certain **types of buildings** (those with stained glass windows, for example)

are necessary for true prayer because they have been set apart for such use. Any other type of building would be too common to qualify for such a thing as prayer.

Also, “praying in the Spirit” is not talking about the use of certain forms, **ceremonies** and rituals which are considered necessary contexts for true prayer. For example, it is taught that prayers must only happen at certain times within a ritual; that the prayer must be of a **prescribed wording**, and the **posture of kneeling** is considered necessary for true prayer.

Praying in the Spirit is not simply “saying a prayer.” I read of a man who was sightseeing in a foreign country and upon seeing a church, stopped in to “say a prayer.” Afterward, he resumed his sightseeing activities. This is not what Paul is talking about when he says our prayers should be “in the Spirit.”

Praying in the Spirit is not the vain repetitions of some kind of a “mantra” or “chant.”

Praying in the Spirit is not determined by the length of a prayer or its publicity.

Praying in the Spirit is not about asking God to do something over and over and over as if wearing Him out with your asking will get Him to do what you want.

Neither will getting a hundred more people to ask Him be the difference between getting your request or not. If this is what you are thinking, you are confusing verses back in Israel’s program with how it is working today in this dispensation of grace.

Praying in the Spirit is not merely the rejection of liturgy, ritual or repetition.

The mere uttering of unrehearsed words off the top of our head is not “praying in the Spirit” either. Just because you are not vainly repeating memorized prayers does not mean you are praying in the Spirit. We will see this more closely in a minute when we talk about what praying in the Spirit is. But, before we do, let’s tie up a few more loose ends concerning what it is not.

Praying in the Spirit is not praying out of habit, for habit’s sake.

It is fine to have a routine and develop a godly habit, but we always want to keep track of what is behind the habit. For example, in my life as I was growing up, we

always had prayer before every meal. It was for me, a habit that I carried into adulthood. I just thought, "I'm a Christian, I'm not ashamed of it, we are going to pray before we eat and thank God for the food." But, was God actually doing something for me individually which provided the food, or the money for the meal? Not in this dispensation of grace, He wasn't. Now, it goes like this: if a man doesn't work, neither should he eat.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

So, if my prayer is not a prayer of thanks for the food, what am I doing? Well, that means my prayer has changed over time. When I am with other people in my home, I do always pray before we eat, but it is usually to thank God for the people who are at the table. It gives me a chance to express what they mean to me and to the cause of Christ as we labor together. It gives me an opportunity to express to the Lord that even in our conversations around a meal, I hope we can put things on display through our speech that will glorify Him and edify each other.

Look, there is no wrong time to pray, just align your prayer with accomplishing something that is in line with this dispensation of grace, and truly represents the desire of your heart. This is part of what it means to pray "in the Spirit."

If I am out in public at a restaurant, I am doing the same thing as at home, but with the added desire to encourage other believers in Jesus to be more open/visible about their faith, and not to be intimidated by the culture into hiding our faith. I am hoping that other believers who see our table in prayer will be encouraged to do the same; emboldened to express their faith openly and unashamedly. And those things happen all the time because people come up and say so.

What I am saying is that this is not just a habit, but I have a spiritual purpose I am achieving with the people at the table, and with those who see us. No, I did not always have this purpose, but once I began to learn the doctrine, and examine my habits of prayer, this is what I began to purpose.

This is not about showing off or offending unbelievers, for that would not be a prayer which is “in the Spirit.” That tells us that it is not just the prayer itself, but the motive behind the prayer that makes it “in the Spirit” or not. Praying in the Spirit is prayer with a **godly motive**.

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If you are not sure about where you will spend eternity, we care about you and we want you to have eternal life. Scan the QR code below to watch a short video that will explain how you can have salvation through Jesus Christ.



The Most Important Decision

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We pray to give prayer its proper place in our lives, and especially as we wrestle against principalities and powers in spiritual warfare. We also pray that our prayers may be “in the Spirit.” May we be ever watching to pray for other saints, especially those being attacked by the policy of evil. Thank you for the doctrine in the book of Ephesians; we pray to live this doctrine to Your glory. Amen.