

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SIX)

“PRAYING WITH ALL PRAYER”

EPHESIANS 6:13-18

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.

In 1836 the English poetess and hymn writer, **Charlotte Elliott**, wrote the words of the hymn: ***“Christian! Seek Not Yet Repose:”***

*“Christian! seek not yet repose,
Hear thy guardian angel say;
Thou art in the midst of foes;
Watch and pray.*

*Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours;
Watch and pray.*

*Gird thy heavenly armor on,
Wear it ever night and day;
Ambushed lies the evil one;
Watch and pray.*

*Hear the victors who o'ercame;
Still they mark each warrior's way;
All with one clear voice exclaim,
Watch and pray.*

*Hear, above all, hear thy Lord,
Him thou lovest to obey;
Hide within thy heart His Word,
Watch and pray.*

*Watch, as if on that alone
Hung the issue of the day;
Pray that help may be sent down;
Watch and pray."*

In this hymn, **Miss Elliott** stresses the point that the believer's victory over the devil and his hosts, involves a tremendous commitment to prayer. That is precisely what the apostle Paul is saying in **Ephesians 6:18**. The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: "*With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and petitions for all the saints.*"

In verses **11-13**, Paul spoke to the believers in Ephesus concerning the spiritual warfare that they were engaged in, and urged them to "*put on,*" or "*take unto [themselves,]*" "*the whole armour of God.*" In verses **14-17**, he itemized the offensive and defensive pieces of equipment that

believers are to employ in spiritual warfare. In verse **18**, he begins to speak about **Prayer**, which becomes the closing theme of his letter to the Ephesians.

Commenting on **Ephesians 6:18**, **Warren Wiersbe** wrote the following: "Prayer is the energy that enables the Christian soldier to wear the armor and wield the sword. We cannot fight the battle in our own power, no matter how strong or talented we may think we are. When Amalek attacked Israel, Moses went to the mountaintop to pray, while Joshua used the sword down in the valley (**Exodus 17:8-16**). It took both to defeat Amalek-Moses' intercession on the mountain, and Joshua's use of the sword in the valley. Prayer is the power for victory, but not just any kind of prayer. Paul tells how to pray if we would defeat Satan."

John MacArthur says, "All the while that we are fighting in the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, we are to be in prayer. Prayer is the very spiritual air that the soldier of Christ breathes. It is the all-pervasive strategy in which warfare is fought."

While, we are attending to all the pieces of equipment that comprise the "*whole armour of God*," we are to be engaged in prayer. All through the process of arming ourselves and engaging in spiritual warfare we must be praying. Paul is saying that prayer should be woven into the putting on, and the use of all the pieces of armour.

Expositor's Greek Testament explains that, "This great requirement of standing ready for the combat can be made good only when prayer, constant, earnest, spiritual prayer is added to the careful equipment with all the parts of the panoply."

Brothers and sisters, as we consider the vitally important matter of prayer as it relates to spiritual warfare, let us bear in mind that Paul's

discussion of spiritual warfare, and of the **panoplia**, is in the context of **Ephesians 5:18**: “*And do not get drunk with wine, which is debauchery, but be filled by the Spirit.*” (**New English Translation**).

The spiritual Holy War that believers are engaged in, cannot be successfully fought in our carnal unholy strength. It can only be successfully fought in the strength of the Holy Spirit! We must never think that we can stand against **supernatural** powers in our **natural** strength! As **Martin Luther** noted in the second verse of his hymn, “***A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,***”

*“Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God’s own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.”*

These words remind us of Paul’s exhortation in **Ephesians 6:10**: “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*”

Paul writes, “*With every prayer and petition, pray at all times.*” (**New English Translation**). The Greek word translated “*prayer*” is **proseuché**: (**pros-yoo-khay**’), which refers to prayer addressed to God. The prefix “**pros**” conveys the sense of being immediately before Him and hence the ideas of adoration, devotion and worship. In early Greek culture an offering was brought with a prayer that it be accepted. Later the idea was changed slightly, so that the thing brought to God was a prayer.

The word “*supplication,*” or “*petition*” is a translation of the Greek word **deésis**: (**deh’-ay-sis**), which refers to prayer for a specific need

that is personal and urgent. The word emphasizes the fact that the one making the petition is in urgent need of the thing he or she is asking for.

John Piper notes that, "Prayer is a war-time walkie-talkie, not a domestic intercom...Prayer is for mission. It is mainly for those on the front lines of the war effort to call in to headquarters to send help. One of the reasons our prayer malfunctions is that we try to treat it like a domestic intercom for calling the butler for another pillow in the den rather than treating it like a wartime walkie-talkie for calling down the power of the Holy Spirit in the battle for souls."

We should pray "*at all times.*" The Christian soldier is to be prayerful in every season, at every opportunity. The Greek word translated "*times*" is **kairos**: (**kahee-ros**'), which means, "a fixed and definite time; the time when things are brought to a crisis, the decisive epoch waited for; an opportune or seasonable time." **Kairos** speaks of a moment or period of time as being especially appropriate; the right, proper, or favourable time. The word refers therefore, not so much to a succession of minutes, but to a period of opportunity.

The Greek word **Chronos**: (**khron'-os**), refers to chronological time, to clock time or calendar time, to a general space or succession of time. **Kairos**, on the other hand, refers to a specific and often predetermined period or moment of time, and so views time in terms of events, eras, or seasons. In other words, **kairos** defines the best time to do something, the moment when circumstances are most suitable, the "ripe" moment. The Christian soldier is to ensure that he or she seizes every opportunity to seek the face of God!

Albert Barnes makes the following remarks as it relates to this matter:

"To the Christian soldier...it [i.e. prayer] is indispensable. Prayer crowns all lawful efforts with success, and gives a victory when nothing else would. No matter how complete the armour; no matter how skilled we may be in the science of war; no matter how courageous we may be, we

may be certain that without prayer we shall be defeated. God alone can give the victory; and when the Christian soldier goes forth armed completely for the spiritual conflict, if he looks to God by prayer, he may be sure of a triumph. This prayer is not to be intermitted. It is to be always. In every temptation and spiritual conflict we are to pray."

We should pray "*in the Spirit.*" Brothers and sisters, how does a believer pray, "*At all times in the Spirit?*" He or she does so, **1.** By continually **depending** on the Spirit; **2.** By continually being **filled** with the Spirit; **3.** By continually being **controlled** by the Spirit.

The "*Prince of Preachers,*" **C. H. Spurgeon**, prayed, "Lord, teach us to pray. Put the thoughts into our minds, the desires into our hearts, and the very words into our lips, if it be your will, so that all through it may be praying in the Spirit and not in the flesh."

In **John 6:63** Jesus said, "*The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life*" (**New English Translation**). In **John 15:5** He said, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing*" (**New English Translation**).

Brothers and sisters, you and I can accomplish nothing that is spiritually profitable, nothing of eternal value, apart from the Lord Jesus! This, of course, includes prayer. In order to bring forth much spiritual fruit we must "*remain,*" or "*abide*" in Jesus, and that involves continual dependence on Him.

In **Philippians 2:12-13** Paul writes,

12 So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence,

13 for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God.

(New English Translation)

In verse **13**, Paul informs us that “*the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort—for the sake of his good pleasure—is God.*” In other words, God Himself is continually working in us, giving us both the desire and the power to do what pleases Him. Without a doubt, prayer is one of the things that pleases Him. And so, praying in the Spirit is one aspect of the work that the Holy Spirit initiates and empowers us to do.

While it is certainly true that if we were left to ourselves, we would have neither the desire nor the power to pray, verse **12**, clearly indicates that we have the responsibility to “*continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence.*” In short, we are to work out what the Holy Spirit works in! So, there is a sense in which we are **100%** dependent and **100%** responsible. And as it relates to prayer, we are **100%** dependent on the Holy Spirit for the desire and the effort to pray, and at the same time we are **100%** responsible to work out the desire and effort by actually praying!

John MacArthur explains that,

“To pray in the Spirit is to pray in the name of Christ, to pray consistent with His nature and will. To pray in the Spirit is to pray in concert with the Spirit, who ‘*helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God*’ (**Romans 8:26-27**). As the ‘*Spirit of grace and of supplication*’ (**Zechariah 12:10**), the Holy Spirit continually prays for us; and for us to pray rightly is to pray as He prays, to join our petitions to His and our will to His. It is to line up our minds and desires with His mind and desires, which are consistent with the will of

the Father and the Son. To be '*filled with the Spirit*' (**Ephesians 5:18**) and to walk in His leading and power is to be made able to pray in the Spirit, because our prayer will then be in harmony with His. As we submit to the Holy Spirit, obeying His Word and relying on His leading and strength, we will be drawn into close and deep fellowship with the Father and the Son."

Brothers and sisters, praying in the Spirit is **not** the same as praying in tongues. Commenting on **Jude 20**, **John Piper** made the following remarks:

"The best brief statement I have found of what it means to pray in the Holy Spirit goes like this: It means 'so to pray that the Holy Spirit is the moving and guiding power.' The key words there are '**moving**' and '**guiding**.' In other words, when you pray in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God is 'moving' you to pray. That is, he is the one who motivates and enables and energizes your prayer. And when you pray in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God is 'guiding' how you pray and what you pray for. So, to pray in the Holy Spirit is to be moved and guided by the Holy Spirit in prayer. We pray by his power and according to his direction.

Let's see where this interpretation of praying in the Holy Spirit comes from in the Bible. The first thing to notice is the very close parallel passage in **Ephesians 6:18**, where Paul says, '*With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit.*' The reason this is important is that it shows that '*praying in the Spirit*' is not a special form of prayer - like speaking in tongues. We can tell this is so because Paul says in **Ephesians 6:18** that we should pray '*at all times*' in the Spirit. In other words, **all** prayer should be '*in the Spirit.*' Praying in the Holy Spirit is not one form among several. It is the way all prayer is to be offered."

Praying in the Holy Spirit is not praying in tongues. Rather, it is praying out of hearts and souls that are indwelt, illuminated, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, praying in the Spirit is simply making our own prayers consistent with the mind and the will of the Holy Spirit. We do so by walking in the fullness of the Spirit. As our lives are filled with the Spirit, as we walk in obedience to the Spirit, and as we are constantly communing with God, the Spirit of God will govern our thoughts so that our prayers will be in harmony with Him.

The Greek New Testament scholar, **Kenneth Wuest**, explains that the phrase “*in the Spirit*” is what is described in Greek as “locative of sphere.” That is, all true prayer is exercised in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, motivated and empowered by Him. That means that if the believer expects to really pray effectively, he or she must be Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is the prerequisite to effectual praying. As **William Barclay** states, “Let the Spirit be the atmosphere in which you pray.”

If we are filled with self, we will not be able to pray in the Spirit. If we are continually in a state of resisting, grieving, or quenching the Holy Spirit, we will not be able to pray in the Spirit. When we are not in a state of being filled with the Spirit, but are relying on our own fleshly, natural strength, we cannot pray in the Spirit. In fact, we will not even desire to pray at all!

In the same way that a fish functions best when it is in the sphere of water, a follower of Jesus Christ functions best in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the only way a believer can function supernaturally is when he or she is “*in the (sphere of the) Spirit.*” When a believer deliberately and consistently yields to the Holy Spirit, he or she will be led by the Spirit to pray God-honouring prayers that are consistent with the **Word** of God, and therefore with the **Will** of God. The truth is that it is **only** Spirit filled believers who can truly “*pray in the Spirit!*”