



“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for, we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26).

Praying in the Spirit

Central Truth: the Holy Spirit helps the believer express his innermost desires to God.

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Do you feel inadequate at times when you come to pray? Do not be dismayed. Every Christian has that experience at one time or another. There is blessed hope for such occasions. It is expressed in the truth of this study: “The Holy Spirit helps the believer express his innermost desires to God.” It is expressed in statements of Holy Scripture, *“The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities:... the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us”* (Romans 8:26). That means you can have a meaningful and effective prayer life. Take courage and pray!

God delights to answer prayer. The Bible teaches you to address prayer to the Father, in the name of the Son, and with the help of the Spirit. All three persons of Holy Trinity are involved when you pray; they assure you of an answer to prayer.

The subject of this study is “Praying in the Spirit.” It sounds wonderfully simple. But men argue back and forth over what the statement means. Some think it means praying in “an unknown tongue,” sounds which have no meaning to the speaker or the hearer. Others think it means praying in one's heart rather than praying aloud. Yet others think it means praying under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand that phrase, for three times the Bible commands believers to pray in the Spirit.

I. WHAT IS PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT?

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26, 27).

Christians are commanded to pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20). They are given assurance of the help of the Holy Spirit in their prayers (Romans 8:26, 27).

Notice that “*Spirit*” is spelled with a capital *S*, indicating reference is to the Holy Spirit of God (called “*the Holy Ghost*” in Jude 20). Reference is not to the human spirit, as in I Corinthians 14:15 where a different subject is discussed.

Romans 8:26 describes praying in the Spirit as the Spirit helping our infirmities: “*The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*” To pray under the leadership of the Spirit and in cooperation with the Spirit is to “pray in the Spirit.”

What are the “*groanings which cannot be uttered*” in relation to Spirit assisted prayer? Such groanings are attributed to creation (verse 22), believers (verse 23), and the Holy Spirit (verse 26). The “*groanings which cannot be uttered*” are not “unknown tongues” as some insist. The inanimate objects of nature do not speak with “unknown tongues” (verse 22). The “*groanings*” mean “sighings of desire; longings.” Reference is to the attitude of heart rather than to sounds of the lips. Those “*groanings*” are beyond utterance in any language, known or unknown: They “*cannot be uttered.*” Christians are often bothered that they do not know what to pray for in a particular situation. “What is the will of God?” “Should I ask for this or that?” Because of such infirmity, the Holy Spirit comes to aid. He guides the desires of the Christian into the areas of the will of God and joins in the prayer of the Christian by making intercession for him. Thus praying under the direction of the Holy Spirit, for the petitions which He inspires, the Christian is “praying in the Spirit.”

II. WHY PRAY IN THE SPIRIT?

“But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having

not the Spirit. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 17-21).

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication 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” (Ephesians 6:17-20).

A. We should pray in the Spirit because of our infirmity (Romans 8:26). *“We know not what we should pray for as we ought.”* The Spirit leads us in prayer because we know not how to pray aright.

“What we should pray for” is a key statement. There is a definite article which precedes *“what”* in the Greek text. It says we do not know “the what” we should pray for. That indicates we do not know the particular petition we should offer in a particular situation. The Spirit knows and comes to our aid to help us pray aright. Thank God!

B. We should pray in the Spirit because of His relation to God (Romans 8:27). He is the Spirit of God. He knows the will of God. He has perfect communication with God who knows His mind. To approach the Spirit is to approach God, for He is God. Praying in the Spirit we always receive the answer we petition for because we pray in His will (1 John 5:14, 15).

C. We should pray in the Spirit because that is a way to spiritual growth. Jude wrote, *“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”* (verses 20, 21). It all goes together. He who is not available to the ministry of the Spirit in prayer will not be built up in the faith, or kept in the love of God, or anticipate the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. To grow, we must have a life of prayer. To have a life of effective prayer, we must pray under the direction of the Spirit.

D. We should pray in the Spirit because of the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged (Ephesians 6:19). The elements of the Christian's spiritual armor include *“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”* That is how to have weapons of warfare which are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (II Corinthians

10:4). The divine aid is needed as “*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*” (Ephesians 6:12). We need the help of the Holy Spirit in prayer battle!

E. We should pray in the Spirit because of the needs of our brethren (Ephesians 6:19). No less a man of God than the apostle Paul recognized his need for the prayers of his brethren. He asked them to pray that he might be able to speak and that he might speak with boldness. If Paul needed help like that, how much more is it needed by Christians today! We do not know the needs of missionaries, pastors, evangelists, Bible teachers, or other Christians away from us today. We do not know their trials, their temptations, or their opportunities to serve. The Holy Spirit knows. He will guide us in praying for them as we pray in the Spirit.

III. WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY IN THE SPIRIT?

A. Times of uncertainty should be times of dependence on the Spirit to direct our prayers (Romans 8:26). Such uncertainty about the will of God or the proper petition in prayer does not leave us hopeless. The Spirit helps. Thank God for that word “*helpeth*” in the statement, “*the Spirit also HELPETH our infirmities.*” It is a compound word made up of three words in the Greek language. They are “together,” “over against,” and “to take.” It pictures a person carrying a load far too heavy for him. Another comes and takes hold of the other side and helps bear the weight. That is what the Holy Spirit does for believers. Joining with them, He takes hold on the other side of the issue. They walk with Him as He directs and their prayers become miracles of answers before God.

In any time of uncertainty, depend on the help of the Spirit as you pray.

B. All times of prayer should be times of praying in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18). “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.*”

“*Prayer*” is a general term which refers to every approach to God.

“*Supplication*” is a more technical term which refers to petition, particularly petition which is presented with deep intensity of emotion.

Every approach to God, particularly those which are related to great needs, should be “*in the Spirit.*” No Christian is very sufficient in prayer without the help of God. That is why we approach the Father “in the name” of Jesus and pray “*in the Spirit.*” We need the Son and the Spirit to help us, even though the Father loves us (John 16:23, 24). Thank God, all three persons of Holy Trinity are willing to answer prayer.

Thank God for the privilege to “*pray in the Spirit.*” That is the guarantee to effective prayer. It is the will of the Father that the Spirit help our prayer life. The Spirit always directs us to come through the Son and pray in the will of God. There is the reason for answered prayer.

Do not make something difficult of it. Accept it with joy. You can have an effective prayer life and see answers to your petitions. God is on your side when you pray!

Questions

1. Why should Christians pray?
2. What does it mean to pray “in the name of Jesus”?
3. What does it mean to pray “in the Spirit”?
4. How is “Spirit” in Ephesians 6:18 different from “spirit” in I Corinthians 14:14-16?
5. What does “what we should pray for” mean in Romans 8:26?
6. What are the “groanings” of Romans 8:26?
7. How is praying in the Spirit related to spiritual warfare?
8. What is meant by the statement that the Spirit “helpeth” our infirmities?
9. What does Ephesians 6:18-20 teach you about praying for Christians?
10. How has this study improved your prayer life?