

Praying in the Spirit

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Ephesians 6:17-20

Ephesians 6:17-20 NASB

¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

¹⁹ and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

1. Praying in the Spirit is praying in a mind conscious of God.

¹⁸ With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints... ¹⁹ and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth,

Let me say at first, that I do not disparage Charismatics. I have love for them as I do for all of the body of Christ. I have learned much from some of them and hold them in my heart. I studied for two years under Francis Frangipane in his course for becoming Christlike. I appreciate his humility. I do not agree with Charismatics on the interpretation of tongues. In this passage, they would understand that praying in the Spirit is referring to tongues. I do not see that here. Here we read about a variety of prayers and requests, some, such as asking that Paul be given words to preach, require mental conception and understanding. The Corinthian tongue seems to operate without mental understanding. Paul does not encourage it for the body. He seems to argue oppositely.

1 Cor. 14:14-15 the Corinthian tongue was praying without understanding. Paul preferred praying with understanding.

¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

¹⁵ What is *the outcome* then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. ¹⁶ Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen " at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? (1 Cor. 14:14-16 NAS)

¹⁹ however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Cor. 14:19 NAS)

The issue of speaking in ecstatic tongues was unique to the church at Corinth. Paul only addresses it with this church. It was not a common experience of the early church. Yet, today, to say you are charismatic implies the ability to speak in tongues.

When Paul teaches us to pray in the Spirit he includes with it descriptions of such prayer that includes praying in all kinds of prayers and requests. Then he goes on to ask that we pray for all of the saints (believers) and for his ability to proclaim the gospel as well.

So what is praying in the Spirit?

Instead of a mindless, ecstatic prayer, to pray in the Spirit is to pray with a conscious connection to God through the Holy Spirit.

Praying in the Spirit: Consciously and purposely allowing God to guide your prayers with His thoughts, and joining with God in praying the issues of heaven.

Praying in the Spirit is being aware of the presence and the thoughts of the Holy Spirit when you pray. Too often people launch into prayer without any time to draw near to the Lord. They are so busy talking they have no time to listen to the thoughts of the Lord. When we make prayer a mere human activity we do not engage in the Spirit.

Praying in the Spirit means to give your conscience mind and spirit an openness to the Lord so you can receive God's thoughts as you also give your thoughts to God. Such praying may be both verbal and silent.

2. The Holy Spirit can pray in a level deeper than consciousness.

While Paul's "praying in the Spirit" seems to have the idea of conscious expressions of thoughts from God, there is another level in which the Holy Spirit communicates which is deeper than our thoughts and words.

²⁶ And in the same way the Spirit also 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; ²⁷ 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.* (Rom. 8:26-27 NAS)

The context of this passage is suffering. Paul speaks of our suffering in which we long for our final redemptive state free of suffering in the body. He also speaks of the suffering in creation. The creation groans in its suffering as it waits the day of our redemption. The same word for groaning is used here again when Paul says the Holy Spirit speaks on our behalf with groans which are unutterable. The Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ in us. He takes residence in our lives so we can have an eternal connection of spirit with the eternal One. When we suffer, we do not know how to pray. We may not be able to express our concerns adequately to God. Yet, it is no problem with God. God is able to convey our deepest needs to the Father in heaven, because the Holy Spirit resides deep in our spirit.

In this groaning of the Spirit, it is not an utterance you make, but an inner movement within your spirit and God's Spirit. Remember, the word for Spirit is the Greek and Hebrew words for wind or breath. God speaks as the breath of God deep in our souls. Your deepest needs need not be expressed in words. God knows your need because God lives in you as a believer.

These words should comfort us because we know we do not have to always express our prayers in some exact wording. It is not the most eloquent prayer which reaches heaven's throne, it is the simplest yearnings of the

heart laid out before God. Such issues of the heart are not even made into words most often.

What this means for us is that praying in the Spirit may not always have to be about saying prayers at all. Living in an awareness of the presence of God in life opens our spirit to the reality of God's communication deep in us. Go out and stand alone looking up at the sky. Look beyond the clouds. Look beyond the stars. Let your soul reach out to the living God. He is connecting you to Him who spoke all things into existence.

When you meditate on the Scriptures, it is He, the living One who is reaching deep into your soul delivering His Word to your soul. He lays his thoughts deep in you.

3. Praying in the Spirit is the sword of spiritual warfare.

Let us go back to Ephesians 6. When Paul speaks about praying in the Spirit, he does so after he speaks about putting on the armor of God. I want us to look at the role of warring with the sword of the Spirit.

Ephesians 6:17 NASB

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

When Paul talks about taking our stand in faith, he tells us to put on the full armor of God. As part of this picture, he says we are to take up the offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit. Let's consider what the sword of the Spirit is.

Paul says the sword of the spirit is the word of God. Most people who read this statement immediately interpret the phrase "the word of God" to mean the Scripture. With such a view, then, taking up the sword of the Spirit involves using the Scriptures in our prayers. In this understanding, then, we are to understand that we have greater power in our prayers when we cite the Scriptures as we pray.

This is certainly a possible understanding of the statement. However, I believe the idea is larger than the Scriptures themselves. The Greek has two words for “word.” The most common word used with the idea of God’s message or the Scriptures, or teachings of God is a form of *logos*. The idea of a spoken word or a spoken message is the word *rema*. When Paul speaks of the Sword of the Spirit, the word of God, he uses the word *rema*, the spoken word. This does not exclude the Scripture, because the Scriptures are understood to be spoken of God. However, the phrase in the Old Testament and New, is also used of receiving prophetic messages from God and also of the gospel itself.

***Rema* – spoken word**

***Logos* – message delivered**

Two possible interpretations:

(1. The *rema* of God can be the proclaimed gospel of Christ.

Rema is usually an emphasis on the word spoken, whereas *logos* is the word, message, content of a message which has been delivered. *Rema* is more connected to activity of speaking.

Romans 10:8 NASB

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart "-- that is, the *word* of faith which we are preaching, (Rom. 10:8 NAS)

Romans 10:8 it is the word of faith (spoken) i.e., the gospel of Christ.

Notice also in Romans 10:11, when Paul speaks of the Bible he uses the word “Scripture” or “writing.” In our English usage, we often refer to the Scriptures as the Word of God, and thus, we then assume any reference to “word of God” in the Bible means the Scripture.

If we understand word this way, then the Sword of the Spirit is proclaiming the message of Christ. Indeed, we should have such faith to believe in the power of preaching the message of Christ. If we do not see God’s Holy Spirit active in the preached Word, we will lack all power in the proclamation. It is for this purpose we must pray for the preacher.

(2. The *rema* of God is word spoken through us by the Spirit when we pray.

Rema is often used in the Scripture is when God sends a prophet to speak God’s word to a person. It is often used as the *rema* of the Lord, or the commandment of the Lord, or the promise of the Lord. Sometimes, *rema* and *logos* are used interchangeably. For that reason, I cannot be dogmatic about my view on this. I do think that because God is still the living God, He continues to speak to His people today. He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, who communicates God’s thoughts to us. When we pray, if we are sensitive to listen to the thoughts of God, God will direct our praying. Sometimes, if we ask God for direction in praying, God will speak to us a word or idea that we then may pray. When the Spirit speaks to us in this way, and we pray the thoughts God gives us, then we are joining in praying God’s thoughts.

Real spiritual power is not merely us throwing up our words to heaven and hoping God will hear us. This is merely a human activity. I would rather encourage you to see praying differently. When we pray, heaven is engaging with us to do God’s work in the world. Because the Holy Spirit lives in us, we are connected to the Living God. The voice of God can speak to us and we can speak His thoughts into the spiritual realm.

Paul says we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:6). How can I be standing here and at the same time be seated with Christ in the heavenly realms? It is because the Holy Spirit gives me a direct link to God in heaven, so I can hear and participate in God’s work. We are saved to affect change in our world by speaking through the Holy Spirit, the word of God given to us for our world. We are not just asking God to do these things, we are also speaking these words as the Sword of the Spirit when we speak to the issues of our day in prayer. When the Holy Spirit prompts your spirit to speak to something in our day and you declare it as such, I believe, you are praying with the Sword of the Spirit.

Pray in the Spirit!

We are called to do more than just live a Christian life. We are called to change our word through prayer. We are called to awaken the lost by praying for them to come to salvation. We are called to reveal the gospel of Christ by praying for our lost world. The Holy Spirit told me some time back to pray for the lost Muslim world to receive visions of Christ so they may be saved. When I pray that prayer, for Muslims and others, I believe I am praying in the Spirit and overcoming the spirits of darkness which hold the lost in Satan's grip.

Pray in the Spirit with all kinds of prayers, and pray the Sword of the Spirit, the living word of God.