

## “Prayer in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18-20)

At the end of his letter Paul says, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph 6:10-11). Then he mentioned about the armor of God. Belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet and sword. They are the symbols. You cannot buy these armors at churches. They illustrate our life of faith. And v.18 comes as a result of all these. This verse is tangible and practical.

### 18 NASB

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,

When we look at v.18, there are 4 “All”s. All prayers, all times, all perseverance, and for all the saints. And it is the Holy Spirit who makes this prayer possible. In the Holy Spirit, we pray at all times. In the Holy Spirit, we pray for all the saints. In the Holy Spirit, we pray with all perseverance. We pray all prayers in the Holy Spirit.

Today, we will study the theme “Prayer in the Holy Spirit.”

### 1. At All Times

The Holy Spirit is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance of the kingdom of God (Eph 1:14).

We are saved, received the righteousness of God and live as imitators of God. But we live in the days that are evil (Eph 5:16). The evil spirits are working in the places of our daily lives (Eph 6:12). If we leave them, we will end up right back where we started. Because everything around us are going against the gospel. Moreover, we also used to be on the enemy’s side (Eph 2:1-3). But God by His grace gave us the Holy Spirit as the assurance. The Holy Spirit is with us, guides us and empowers us.

The Holy Spirit will help us to put on the full armor of God at all times. The Holy Spirit, Parakletos is always with us, stands beside us, and helps us. But it is not that the Holy Spirit appears like a super hero and fight with Satan. But when Satan attacks us, the Holy Spirit reminds us who we are. We will protect ourselves

with the full armor of God, and we will fight off Satan with the Sword of the Word. The Holy Spirit will remind us of the Word of Jesus. He will help us to turn our heart to Jesus at all times. He will help us to fix our eyes on Jesus (John 14:26).

“Praying always has nothing to do with formulas and repetition; it is simply living your life with God-consciousness.”<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes we get emotional and say some words or take an attitude that we regret later. We may feel, “Dear Holy Spirit, you should have told me earlier.” Actually the Holy Spirit might have been speaking to us at that time. But we weren’t willing to listen. Then we can’t hear him. Or the Holy Spirit may sometimes be silent. We may later realize we must rely on the Holy Spirit, otherwise we will be in trouble. Through all these experiences, our relationship with the Holy Spirit will be deepened.

The Holy Spirit is always with us, no matter where we are, what we are doing, whom we are with. And He will speak to us. We live while having fellowship with the Holy Spirit. That is what it means to pray in the Holy Spirit at all times.

How can we make our prayers consistent with the Spirit? By walking in the fullness of the Spirit. As our life is 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.<sup>2</sup>

“Praying in the Spirit is the same as praying in the name of Christ – praying in a manner consistent with who He is and what His will is. Learn to pray in concert with the Spirit. Make your prayers a duet with the One who intercedes for you.”<sup>3</sup>

If our prayers are just a list of our wishes, our relationship with God won’t be deepened. We can understand why, if we compare this to our relationship with our friends. We cannot make our relationship closer with a person who only speaks about his needs. It is almost impossible to have deep relationship with a person who just ask you for something whenever you meet, and don’t listen to you. God loves us with his infinite love, no matter what we pray, no matter how we talk. But if our prayer is only a list of our wishes, we cannot understand God’s

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The Believer’s Armor*, Word of Grace Communications, 1986 (193)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 201

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 201

love. I am not saying it is wrong to make a wish, but I am saying if that's all we pray, our relationship with the Lord will not be deepened.

"But, all I can think of is to make wishes. What else can I say in my prayer?" Some people may think like that. For people like that, I want to introduce one thing I am doing. That is to pray based on Psalms. If possible, it would be great if you can choose a Psalm that describes your thoughts and feelings. Read one verse as prayer, then replace that with your own words. It is not to explain the meaning, but to express it before God with your own words.

As you pray further, you can express more and more what is deep inside in your heart. It is all right if the content of your prayer is not exactly what the verse describes, but stay with the same verse as much as you can. And then, move on to the next verse. Repeat this same process with several verses. You may find that it is you who are praying, but God himself speaks through your prayer. The prayer will become fellowship with God.

Until you get used to it, you may feel a little awkward. But keep doing it. Soon you will be able to pray for 10 minutes, 20 minutes easily.

At all times, as we listen to the Holy Spirit whispering to our hearts, we can have close fellowship with God, as we understand his thoughts.

## 2. For All the Saints

Sometimes we don't know how to pray. We want to pray but we cannot express it in our words. For example, when we face unexpected difficulties, when we find bad stuff in us which we didn't realize before, we don't know how to express our thought with words, but we cannot help but come before God. Even in the situation like that, the Holy Spirit will pray for us on our behalf.

### Rom 8:26-27

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.<sup>27</sup> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us, who don't know how to pray, through wordless groans. We can pray with this Holy Spirit, by His leading. We can keep praying, even though we cannot express it with words by ourselves.

This is not just prayers for ourselves. The Holy Spirit leads us to pray for others. The Holy Spirit also intercedes for others, just as He intercedes for you and me. When we pray for others, our hearts must unite with the Holy Spirit.

Paul says, "Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere." And he continues, "And pray for me, too."

When he wrote this letter, Paul was chained in prison in Rome. Let's look back on the past so that we can imagine how he was feeling.

It was recorded from Acts 13 onward that Barnabas and Paul were sent out to mission trip from Antioch. The previous chapter, Cp.12 records an interesting incident. James, the brother of John, was arrested and put to death with the sword. Then Peter was arrested and put into the prison. The church was earnestly praying to God for him. Then the miracle happened. The angel appeared before Peter who was chained in prison. And the chains fell off Peter's wrists. The angel led him out of the prison. The iron gate leading to the city opened for them by itself. Peter went back to his church. The girl at the door could not believe it!

Paul knew all about this. And now he was chained in prison. Now if you were Paul, what kind of prayer requests would you send to the prayer team? If I were Paul, without doubt, I would ask them to pray for me as they had prayed for Peter. What did he ask?

#### Eph 6:19-20

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

What Paul earnestly sought after, while chained in prison, was not to be released from the prison. It was to make known the mystery of the gospel. What was in his mind? Please keep that question in your mind, and let's read the following part of the Bible. Please turn one page of your Bible.

### Phi 1:12-14

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

### Phi 1:18-21

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

So Paul also wrote to the church in Ephesus "I need your prayers." That is, it is not easy to live like this even for Paul. He is also just a human. If he is hit, he feels pain. If he is cut at with the sword, he will bleed.

"Saints in Ephesus, please pray for me." They receive the prayer request like this from Paul. What an honor! You know how to pray. You know the power of prayers. You know how fierce the spiritual battle is. Please pray for me so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor 9:27). Whether I live or die, may the name of Christ be glorified. That's Paul's prayer request.

It is the Holy Spirit who is supporting Paul now. The Holy Spirit is encouraging and strengthening him so that he will continue to live in the truth. It is only by the Holy Spirit that intercessors can also pray with the same mind.

"Hallowed be your name, may your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In other words, may Christ be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul asks the church to pray. Pray for me that whenever I speak, words may be given me, not the words to blame others, but the words to make known the mystery of the gospel. Pray for me that I would not mourn nor complain, but

may my heart be filled with praise and joy. Paul asked the church to pray this prayer with him.

As they were to pray this prayer together with Paul, it is not enough for them to pray that Paul can do this. This must be the desire of each of the intercessors. Otherwise, it will end up being just a falsehood. It is only by the Holy Spirit that the intercessors can pray this prayer together with Paul.

### 3. With All Perseverance

#### Eph 6:19-20

Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Paul is not saying because he is in chain, he can no longer fulfill his God-given mission. He confesses that while in chain, he is still playing a major role for the gospel.

However, he is not doing it by his own strength. He needed the prayer support from saints in Ephesus church. He realistically knew the power of intercessory prayers. Although he was isolated and in difficult situation, he kept fixing his eyes on the Lord. He was standing on the assurance, holding on God's Word. It was because of the intercessory prayer for him that he could do that.

He was in chain, put in prison, and he was deprived of freedom. But he was still the ambassador of the gospel. It was not that he couldn't fulfill his call any longer. If we look at the situation, it looks impossible. All the more because of that, we need the help of the Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes. Then, we can make our judgement and action based on God's Word. Then we can persevere by faith. We can keep praying with perseverance.

#### John 11:1; 3-4

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

<sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

<sup>4</sup> When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

But Jesus didn't go to Lazarus immediately (v.6).

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days (v.17). "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (v.21). She also said, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v.24).

Martha was confident about resurrection and eternal life. It is a blessing to be able to say this when our loved passed away. But she wished if Jesus had only come a little earlier. It was the same for Mary.

### 11:32

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

I think both Martha and Mary are wonderful women of faith. They had close personal relationship with Jesus. The bible mentions them by name that Jesus loved them (John 11:5). There are only few people like that. That's a great honor. But they thought it was too late.

They surely believed Jesus. But they shut Jesus up into their agenda. They limited Jesus within their idea.

What did Jesus say to them? "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (v.4).

When they heard this, Martha and Mary thought Jesus was talking about healing of sickness. They believed that Jesus was going to heal Lazarus. But he didn't say that. He said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

"For God's glory to be shown in this situation, there must be healing of sickness" they thought. Of course, it was their wish that Lazarus would be healed. They believed Jesus, yet they push the Word of Jesus into the frame of their expectation. That's why they thought it's too late, they were disappointed. But in fact, Jesus showed God's glory as he promised. Lazarus died in his sickness. But it was not the end. Jesus used it for God's glory. In this case, he did it by raising Lazarus from the dead. But it's not about healing nor resurrection of the dead, but it is all about God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified.

Now we come back to Paul.

He was put into prison, and chained. He had no freedom. If he focuses on those, it appears he can no longer play the role of the ambassador of the gospel. Perhaps God may be glorified if an angel appears, the chains fall off from his wrists, the gates open for him by themselves and he could get out of the prison, as in the case of Peter. Or, if a big earthquake happens, and he would be released from the prison. But he did not limit God's work to those miracles.

What he sought was not for the situation to change for the better, but for him to be able to declare the mystery of the gospel without fear. He hoped that the glory of God would be revealed through him. For him it's not the matter if he was released or killed, alive or dead. His hope is always Christ will be exalted in his body, whether by life or by death. God is far greater than our understanding. He is able to do much greater things than what we can ask or imagine. He prayed to God that God would show God's glory in God's way.

But it's not easy for him. It's not comfortable for him to carry out the call in this situation. That's why he sent a letter and asked people to pray for him. He asked the church to pray in the Spirit, not to be discouraged nor give up, but pray with all perseverance. He asked the church to pray so that he won't lose hope, but persevere to carry out his mission.

We also need the Holy Spirit whenever we pray. Because the Holy Spirit helps us to understand how great God is, encourages us to submit to him. When we trust him fully and stop limiting Him with our way and let Him work freely, we will no longer be discouraged, but we will be surprised! It's good to pray with all perseverance in the Spirit!

Today we studied about prayer in the Spirit. Let us ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit. Let us pray that the Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts so that we may know the hope to which the Lord has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Eph 1:18-19). Let us pray with all perseverance, ask God to reveal His glory through each one of us. Let's keep praying for each one of us, NLIF and all churches to be used for His glory. Pray that NLIF will be the church of prayer in the Spirit.

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection:

1) "Hallowed be your name, may your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What kind of help from the Holy Spirit do you need in order for your life to be integrated with this prayer? Whom do you ask to pray for what in order for your life to be integrated with this prayer?

2) Have you ever be disappointed because you limited what God would do? Though you were disappointed once, have you ever realized later how great God is?

3) Let's pray based on Psalms this week. (e.g. Ps 8:1-5; 13:1-6; 25:4-7; 31:1-4; 51:1-4;10-12)