

Praying in the Spirit – 2

Zechariah 12

Ephesians 6¹⁰⁻²⁰

We are picking up where we left off last time in our study of praying in the Spirit.

We mentioned five arenas in which the power of the Spirit becomes evident, as we respond in faith, love and obedience to the Lord and His call on our lives.

Let us remember that this is not a view of all that is involved in prayer. There is so much to this topic, to fill a hundred sermons.

John Bunyan reminds us of all that prayer is:

“Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to the Word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God.”

We are zeroing in on one part – the Spirit’s work in prayer. And we said that the Spirit is connected with his presence last time, and today we see him connected with what we need – power. To pray in the Spirit is to pray with power. The Spirit of God is a freight train out of heaven to us.

If we would keep in step with Him, we need his full assistance. And he works strongly in these five considerations.

First, the power of the presence of God. The Spirit reveals God to us, his being and character, his glory, greatness, goodness and grace.

As all wisdom and knowledge begin with the fear of God, with reverence and awe, God's greatness to us; so the Spirit brings us into union and communion with the Lord in a personal way.

There is in the Holy Spirit a solidarity with the Lord of glory, and especially with the Son. All prayer in the Spirit is God-centered and Christ-centered. And obviously, godless prayer is no prayer!

Prayer is truly laying hold of God, who has laid hold on you! Draw near to God and He who first loved you will draw near to you, by the Spirit.

As we have seen, the Spirit is united to the Son of God incarnate now, and we are united by the Spirit to our living Head. All our life flows from Christ by the Spirit. Without him, we can do nothing.

And Jesus also said of the Spirit: *"He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will [declare] it to you. "All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will [declare] it to you. (Joh 16:14-15)*

Here is a true mark of prayer in the Spirit. Who can rise from the presence of God the be the same as when they entered?

Now we can be deceived, which makes our second point crucial.

The power of truth is in prayer. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of understanding, knowledge and wisdom. To be led by the Spirit is to be led by the Word, and not contrary to the Word.

How do we know we have the Spirit in prayer? When we pray according to the will of God. And where do we find the will of God? Stored up for us in the Word of truth alone.

The Shorter Catechism summarizes this matter: What rule has God given for our direction in prayer? A. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called The Lord's prayer. (WSC 99)

You should recognize the parallels in Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians, Paul says do not be filled with wine, under the control of alcohol, but be filled with the Spirit. But over in Colossians, in the same context, 3:16, he says let the word of Christ dwell in you richly and fill you.

We have the Word of the Spirit to fill our hearts with the Spirit; and we have the Spirit of the Word to fill our hearts.

Have you not found as you are praying through the Psalms, or taking some promise or command to heart in the Word, that word is mighty and powerful, and has a profound impact on our thought, your heart, your convictions, your will.

We must never identify the Spirit with our thoughts, or feelings, or tingling, as we are gripped in our souls. We will and should have reactions to the work of God within us.

But our feelings are not the same thing as the Spirit working and willing within us.

Much, much more could be said here, but we need to talk about the third point: **the power of humility in prayer.**

The Spirit is in our prayers as we humble ourselves as clay in the potter's hand. Prayer changes us, as a means of grace. The sanctification of the heart can be summarized in these words in the Lord's prayer – "Your will be done!" That means our will, our thoughts, our affections, are molded to depend and embrace His will as we embrace Him in our lives.

There is a solidarity you have with God through the Spirit, and prayer builds up and reinforces this union and communion. You are growing only as you move upward and forward to conformity to Him in truth.

So here is where the Spirit in prayer convicts of our sins, of our non-conformity to the Lord. There is what is called a "withering" work, not the same as hardening, which the Spirit does in our prayer life. We love the warm winds of grace and kindness and comfort. But we need too the sharp north winds of his holiness and righteousness, held by a hand pierced for you.

If the power of truth has a more objective quality, this has a more subjective one, where the Spirit owns us more and more. We are growing in self-control, not self-will. The word "meekness" is a lost word, and yet it comes into play. To be meek means to be easily led – it is the crowning work spoken of by our Savior in the first three beatitudes. The believer sees himself as poor in spirit – the mind; then as well, to mourn for his sinfulness – there are the affections. Then blessed are the meek talks about your will. This is the foot of the soul, to submit and be owned of God, head to toe!

The Spirit of prayer shapes you in humble dependence to be and to do all God commands. We pray by the Spirit what Augustine discovered: “Lord, give what you command, and command whatever you will!”

This brings us to the Spirit’s power of holiness in prayer.

Prayer does not just put us in the dust. This is an important and even edifying part of prayer. But the same Spirit is making us more and more like God, like the Savior, rebuilding the image of the Holy One in our lives.

True prayer in the Spirit is *transformative*. You are the temple of God, and in the presence of Jesus, you are being renewed more and more before His face. As we grow from grace to grace, we go from strength to strength, and progress from glory to glory.

This seems especially to be the point of the Ephesians 6 passage. Prayer is not a separate piece of armor so much as that which puts on the other pieces of strong armor – truth, righteousness, peace, faith, hope and the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

The same goes for Jude 20 – praying in the Spirit is part of building yourselves up on your most holy faith.

Oh, Christian, you have been given an indestructible life in Christ! Nothing can separate you from His love grace! Let hope fill you as you continue to build, however so slowly, toward your final and promised end and purpose! Keep your eye on the prize and persevere! Waiting anxiously, writes Jude, for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life!

This brings us to our fifth and final power of the Spirit in prayer, the power of love – and by this we mean the fellowship of the Spirit in delight, joy, comfort, and peace.

Again, the Jude passage joins praying in the Spirit with keeping yourselves in the love of God.

In a sense, this brings us back to the presence of the triune God. But it also crowns prayer with His kisses, His embraces, His love for us.

It is a sweet hour of prayer we sing of. And especially as it stands out against all the trials of life – our troubles within and without; our temptations which distract and harm our peace; our transgressions and the sins of others.

We have the Spirit in prayer when he pillows our souls on the heart of our Savior.

*From every stormy wind that blows,
From every swelling tide of woes,
There is a calm, a sure retreat;
'Tis found beneath the mercy seat.*

Prayer in the Spirit is a powerful fire – it is light and heat; He teaches and sanctifies, impressing us with our need as well as our duty; he moves us to breath, to pant for things above, and inclines our souls to comply. But he does this in a way of warmth; prayer is a duty but it is also our great privilege to speak to the Almighty!

O God, pour out on me the love of God in my heart by your Spirit!
The oil of joy and delight in what is pleasing to You, first and foremost! Let me prize eternal comforts, eternal peace, the peace and

joy of Jesus! Spirit of grace and of love, in the presence of my risen Redeemer, who has engraven me on his hand! Let me, by prayer engrave him on my heart too!