

Eph 6:18-20 Prayer  
Jason Henderson  
Market Street Fellowship

## Eph 6:18-20 Prayer

We are going to continue this morning in the book of Ephesians chapter 6. As you know, I've been out of town and missed two Sundays. But if you will think back a few weeks I shared some things having to do with standing in the Lord and in the strength of his might. That was from Ephesians chapter 6:10. And from there we talked about the armor of God, and how we must be clothed in every way with Christ.

Today we're going to pick up where you left off, starting in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 18. Let me read it first and then I'd like to share a few thoughts.

***Eph 6:18*** *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

I have not shared very much about prayer over the years. Maybe a few times here and there. There's a reason for that, and I'm going to try to explain it. The reason is not that I do not believe prayer to be real and important. On the contrary, I believe that prayer is just as real and important as any facet or function of Christ in his body. The reason I have not shared very much is simply, to be quite honest, because I have not seen or understood very much.

And I want to say up front that the things I'm going to share today are by no means a clear or complete treatment of this subject. What I'm going to say this morning is simply reflective of what I think I can see this morning. I realize that to be very little.

Some of you know my history with prayer. What I mean is that I was involved in a prayer ministry for a number of years. First of all, I was involved with the church that was massively dedicated to prayer and intercession. But beyond that I was involved in leading prayer and intercession group meetings for hours at a time, five or six days a week. And then when I moved here and became the pastor of this church I began as a pastor by establishing six prayer meetings a week. There are a few of you still left here that might remember that. In fact, I started by calling the church to a period of 40 days of prayer and fasting. All of this was before I began to see the Lord.

I mention this because I want you to understand something. I want you to understand that my ignorance with respect to prayer is not because I've never done it. It is not because I have not tried to give my life to it, or to discipline myself to pray and fast. I have...even beyond what is normal. I have prayed countless hours in the way that man understands prayer. My ignorance is not because I've never tried to pray. My ignorance is due to the fact that I tried to dedicate myself to prayer before I knew what prayer was. I tried to pray, indeed I tried to give my life to prayer, before I had seen the Lord.

And even after starting to see the Lord, for a time I held onto my understanding of prayer. Even after I had seen that my understanding IS the kingdom of darkness, after I had seen

that I was by nature a fountain of spiritual ignorance, even after this I continued with my many assumptions, and therefore my prayer meetings. I continued to hold on to what I had always assumed I knew.

I don't say these things to try to get people to feel guilty about praying. I certainly don't feel bad about that, or about anything. That's not my point at all. My point is simply to admit that I dedicated myself to my own understanding of prayer. I dedicated myself to being a "man of prayer" without ever turning my heart to the Lord to teach me something beyond my own ideas. I remember that I loved the idea of being a "man of prayer". "Hey, have you met Henderson? Oh, you mean the man of prayer?" I loved that idea.

Eventually, the cross began to demand my understanding of prayer. Do you understand what I mean by that? The cross demands your understanding of everything. If we keep looking to Christ and him crucified, if we keep turning our hearts to know the reality of the cross, then the cross demands everything that was formerly in our understanding, in our heart, in our nature. Sooner or later, the cross comes calling. You can bet on it. It comes knocking on the door of every one of your theologies. It comes knocking on the door of every one of your ideas. It knocks to see if you and I will open. And if we do open, if we do let the cross take what it demands, then it destroys everything that is not Christ. It destroys every uncircumcised thing that it finds in the land.

So eventually when I allowed the cross to demand my understanding of prayer, when I loosened my grip, the cross quickly did its work. It quickly exposed my weak and worthless understanding of all spiritual things...and that included prayer. It exposed the kind of relationship that I wanted to have with God. It exposed a relationship with God that I had grown to love. An imaginary relationship, to be sure. But one that I loved. Of course I loved it, I had created it. I'd created a relationship with God where prayer was an ability to request what I wanted, and ask that God bless and protect the things that were most important to me in the Earth. I had developed an imaginary relationship with God where prayer was the means by which I could try to control God, or least try to make him work on my behalf. The cross quickly consumed this understanding.

At first I did not see anything of what prayer truly was. At first all I could see was the Golden calf that I had created prayer to be. I could see very little of the truth. But I saw enough to expose some lies. For me, all my Christian life, prayer basically served two functions. Now I'm not trying to project this onto you. I'm just telling my story here. **But the first and most obvious function of prayer was a means by which I could move God's hand according to my interests. And the second function of prayer in my life was to give me a sense, by spending time in prayer, of being a spiritual person. Prayer, even if God didn't answer it, made me feel spiritual. It made me feel good about myself.**

Alright, I don't want to focus on the silliness of our natural mind this morning. I just wanted to say some of that, as always, simply to make us cautious of ourselves, cautious of our own ideas. Knowing the Lord begins and continues with the realization of what we are not. Knowing the Lord always points your heart to a blood covered door where all flesh was cut off. We've been talking about these things in some of our groups.

So I surrendered my understanding of prayer to the Lord. And I began to take seriously verses in the Scripture like the one in Romans chapter 8 where Paul tells us that we do not know how to pray as we ought. He says that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Elsewhere he says that the Spirit of the Son within us cries out Abba Father. I understood that prayer was real and that prayer was important to the apostles. And so I ASSUMED that, probably like many of you...I assumed that a more true reality of prayer, a more real experience of

prayer, would be one of the first things that I began to see in the light. I really did. I really did expect that the Lord would quickly give me back a right understanding of prayer.

You know what I mean? This journey of knowing the Lord for me has been like watching the Lord erase my entire blackboard. The Lord takes His eraser end erases everything I have ever thought, everything I thought that I knew. He erases exactly as much as I let him. He desires to write on my blackboard, the tablet of my heart, he desires to write his name, his truth, his life, his righteousness, his understanding. The tablet of my heart, Paul says, is the tablet of the New Covenant. But we all, by nature, bring to him a blackboard completely cluttered and filled up to every corner with natural, fallen, corrupted understanding.

So the Word of the Lord approaches your heart and looks for room on the blackboard. It looks for a place where you'll permit him to erase what you have known and replace it with what he is. And only when you begin to allow him to erase your understanding, your earthbound perspective, of every spiritual word, every spiritual reality, that you have given your understanding to... only when these are dead and buried do you have room on your blackboard for Him to start writing his own understanding. His own understanding of every spiritual word and concept and reality. His own understanding of faith, and love, and glory, and prayer.

And what I'm trying to say is that when I had finally allowed the Lord to get out the eraser and go to work on my unrenewed mind, go to work on my cluttered and carnal black board, I assumed that one of the first things that I would get back (in a true understanding) was prayer. Prayer, to me, had always seemed to be so basic. It had seemed to be so simple and foundational. Anybody can pray...I thought. I had always thought that even a newborn baby Christian can pray just as well, or even sometimes better, than a person who had been a believer for many years.

What is prayer to the natural mind? Is it simply chatting with God? Is it not simply talking to the Lord? I mean the very first thing I learned as a Christian, whether through a teaching or just through watching other people, was that if I wanted something from God I should ask him, and this is called prayer. If I was happy about something I could thank the Lord, and this is called praise. If I had a decent voice or could play an instrument, I could sing a song for the Lord, and this is called worship. These things were just simple facts of Christianity to me.

And because I had such a simplistic and natural view of prayer, for some reason I supposed that when the Lord started to hand back to me spiritual words and realities, I figured that prayer would be one of the first things that I understood in the light. I assumed that prayer was still going to be something that even a newborn baby Christian could do. I assumed that my previous understanding of prayer needed a few adjustments but would quickly be given back to me according to his understanding.

But that didn't turn out to be the case. So many other things started coming into view long before prayer. And that was strange to me. There were many things that apparently were far more foundational than prayer. There were many many other words that apparently I needed to comprehend in the light before I could comprehend prayer. All of this makes sense to me now, but at the time it was quite confusing. It was confusing because I thought, as we always do, that I understood something. **But long before I caught my first glimpse of new covenant prayer, long before I could understand the union of mind and purpose and will that is involved in prayer..the Lord had much to show me about death, about burial, about resurrection, about judgment, and purpose, and faith, and the renewing of the mind, and the body of Christ, his view of the church, etc.**

Little by little I started to understand that prayer was nothing if it was not rooted in and flowing from God's foundational and finished work of the cross. In fact, without a personal experience of this death, without a living understanding of this resurrection, prayer was always going to be an exercise of my own mind, my own will, my own purpose, myself. Do you understand what I mean? Does this make sense to you?

I began to understand that prayer, like every other spiritual thing, where Christ himself is its foundation and as its fountain. Prayer could not be separated from Christ any more than life could be separated from Christ. We all know by now that life is not something Christ gives you. Life is Christ himself being given to you. We all know by now that righteousness is not some form of natural behavior. Righteousness is the perfection of Christ abiding in and operating in your soul. We have hopefully all seen that good works can also not be separated from Christ. Good works must be increase of the only good Seed. Good works are the fruit of his Spirit, and not a religious disguise that we wear.

Well, prayer is exactly the same way. The prayer that Paul and John and Peter came to know was not a vocalization of Adamic thinking, natural desire, personal interest. **Prayer to these men became yet another experience of the life of Jesus Christ. Prayer was a different mind, a different will, a different purpose functioning in their soul by a completely different life.**

So can you see why prayer was not the first thing that God began to give back to me. Can you see that even though in religion we make prayer the most basic and simple function of the natural mind relating to God, in Christ **prayer can't even really begin until you have experientially started to end.** That may sound strange. Let me try to say it another way. **Prayer is a union and communion with the Spirit of truth, and something like a breathing forth of the mind and purpose and heart of God, that cannot be reached with the natural hand or seen with the natural mind. You and I can pray in our name for anything and everything that we want. But in order to pray in Jesus' name, we must have His named formed in us. We must lose our own name.**

This is why I believe Paul, in Ephesians 6:18, tells the Ephesians to "pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit". You'll notice he says "in the Spirit". What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? I think it means the opposite of what it means to "pray in the flesh." What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? I think it means the opposite of what it means to walk in the flesh. These are not merely two different *methods* of prayer. These are two completely different lives praying. These are two entirely different natures, completely opposite kinds, bringing their desires and supplications before the Lord.

We have seen, I believe, that to "walk in the Spirit" is something more than simply an attempt to imitate spiritual things. We have seen that walking in the Spirit involves being conformed to and in alignment with the indwelling Life and Spirit of God. And that becomes real in us through the cross. That becomes an experience through death to one man and life in and of Another. Walking in the Spirit requires a real and powerful termination of the flesh that we used to walk in.

It is the same thing with prayer. Praying in the Spirit is not something you choose to do with your mind. It is not like you simply calm yourself down, put on a nice Sunday suit, concentrate and pray in the Spirit. This kind of prayer doesn't come from you. That is why Paul says it is prayer in the Spirit. It is something perfectly foreign to our nature.

Consider this Scripture.

**Joh 16:24** *Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. 25 "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.*

Jesus says, "until now you have asked nothing in My name". It is like he is saying, "you have asked for many things, you have prayed many prayers, but until now you have never known what it means to ask in MY name." I am giving you a new name. As Jesus says in the book of Revelation 3 - "I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."

Do we know this name? Do we know what it means to pray in this name, to live in this name, to act out from this name. Can we understand what Paul means in **Col 3:17** "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

What I am trying to suggest to you this morning, and this might be all that I am really able to communicate this morning... is that **the prayer of the New Covenant is something that belongs to His name**. It is something different than what we know in the flesh. It is different than simply vocalizing our own desires and needs to God out from our own name. I'm not trying to make you stop something you might be doing, or make you afraid to pray. I'm simply asking you to consider something. I'm asking you to consider what Paul is saying to the Ephesians. He certainly does intend for them to pray. He tells them that plainly. But he intends for them to pray in every way **in the Spirit**. To pray **in the name of Christ**.

Paul says in Romans chapter 8 (Young's Literal)

**Rom 8:26** *And, in like manner also, the Spirit helps in our weaknesses; for, what we may pray for, as it behooves us, we have not known, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings unutterable, 27 and He who is searching the hearts has known what is the mind of the Spirit, because according to God he does intercede for the saints.*

This passage isn't referring to the Spirit teaching us a method of prayer. It is not the "correct words" that we lack. It is the correct mind. The correct nature. By nature, what we lack is the one who has known the mind of God and intercedes according to His eternal and perfect will.

I believe, for the Apostle Paul, prayer became like a constant pressure in his soul created by the Truth. What I mean is that I don't believe Paul's prayer life was a spiritual discipline. I don't believe that Paul needed to be reminded to pray. I believe that the NAME of Christ grew so real in this man, that he was constrained and controlled by that name. His perspective grew and changed until it corresponded with God's perspective for the church. Its almost like prayer was not something that he offered to God...but rather prayer was something that God offered to Him. It was a participation in God's mind, and burden, and purpose. Prayer was the only way that Paul's heart could respond to what he was seeing. **The pressure of the truth burst out of his soul through prayer.**

Listen to how he describes these things, and consider whether we know prayer in this way.

**1Th 3:9** For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, 10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

**Phi 1:3** I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, :4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ... 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart,... 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

**Col 1:9** For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

**Rom 1:9** For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, 10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.