

THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

Day 1

John 4:24: “God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and reality.”

Jude 20 : “But you, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,”

I. PRAYER MUST BE IN SPIRIT

We know that the existence and operation of the universe and everything in it is governed by laws. If we want to do anything effectively we must keep the particular laws of that thing. Concerning prayer, there is an iron-clad law: prayer must be in spirit; for in praying you pray to God, and God is Spirit. If you pray in the mind, emotion, or will, but not in spirit, you cannot touch God nor pray into Him. These faculties cannot get you through to Him. In order to touch God and pray into Him, we must pray in spirit. It is when the Holy Spirit utters prayers in and with our spirit that we can touch God.

Even a sinner who repents and prays to the Lord after hearing the gospel must pray from his spirit in order to touch God and be saved. Until that time he is not yet regenerated, and his spirit is still not quickened; but when the Holy Spirit moves him, enlightens his conscience, and causes him to repent, he prays from his enlightened conscience. Since the conscience constitutes a major part of the spirit, a prayer that comes out from the conscience is a prayer that comes out from the spirit. Having been enlightened by God as well as touched by the Holy Spirit, the conscience is convicted of sin. The cry that issues from such a condemning conscience is, no doubt, a prayer in spirit. Hence, such prayer can contact God, and there is an echo within us. However, there are some who pray when they first hear the gospel, yet there is no response. They have heard some doctrine, received some instruction mentally, and have made a confession before God according to their mind, but their conscience remained untouched. Such prayer cannot touch God.

As the children of God who have been regenerated and have the Holy Spirit dwelling within, our prayers must be in spirit to touch God and be answered. This is the first point about which we should be clear.

II. PRAYER REQUIRES THE EXERCISING OF THE SPIRIT

Since prayer should be in spirit, it requires the exercising of the spirit. One who never exercises his spirit does not know how to pray. For example, a runner must exercise his legs in order to run. A boxer exercises to concentrate the strength of his whole being into his fists. Those learning a language must train their tongue if

they would speak that language. Learning to speak Mandarin is difficult because of the sounds which require rolling the tongue. This is difficult not only for foreigners, but also for those from the southern regions of China. Therefore, whatever we do, we need to train the faculty involved.

Day 2

1 Tim 4:7-9 ...and exercise yourself unto godliness. For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.

Faithful is the word and worthy of all acceptance. (As in gymnastics.

Unto godliness means with a view to godliness. Godliness is Christ lived out of us to be the manifestation of God. Today this very Christ is the Spirit dwelling in our spirit. Hence to exercise ourselves unto godliness is to **exercise our spirit** to live Christ in our daily life.

Likewise, if we want to pray, we must exercise our spirit. If someone cannot pray well and is not willing to pray, it must be because his praying faculty lacks exercise. Whenever an organ lacks exercise it ceases to function properly. Medical doctors tell us that if we cover the eyes from light for three years, when the cover is removed the eyes will not be able to see anything. Although the rest of the body may be strong, the eyes will have lost their function after such a long period of non-exercise. One time an illness forced me to take complete bed rest for six continuous months. After I recovered, I got out of bed and, to my surprise, fell to the floor. I found myself unable to stand or walk. I then realized that since my legs and feet had not been used for six months, they had lost the ability to stand. Therefore, I had to learn how to stand, and then, after a long period of exercise, I was able to walk again. Although you have the legs and feet, the organs for walking, they are useless unless they have been exercised. Similarly, the spirit is the organ for praying. In order to pray we need to exercise the spirit. Never consider that since we have a spirit, then surely we can pray competently. The fact is, unless our spirit has gone through some exercise we cannot pray and we will not enjoy praying. The less we practice something, the less we enjoy doing it, and the less we are able to do it.

Thus, if someone does not pray regularly and you ask him to pray, it is really a hardship for him. It is not because he has a lazy disposition; rather, it is that his spirit is lazy. To people who cannot walk well it is a real suffering if you compel them to walk. On the other hand, those who really enjoy walking will eagerly accept an invitation to walk somewhere. This is because their legs are very strong and agile from exercise. Some brothers and sisters have a spirit of prayer that is very strong and agile. Before you finish mentioning a matter, such a person will have begun to pray in his spirit. But there are some whose spirit of prayer is very

lazy because they do not ordinarily use their spirit. Some are very strong-willed, so that when they encounter something it is not their spirit but their will that comes first. Others are very emotional, so that when something happens their emotion takes the lead. With others who are sober-minded and very quick to think, their mind takes the lead in any situation. But all who learn how to pray must exercise themselves to let the spirit dominate in every situation and not allow their mind, will, or emotion to take the lead. We need to train ourselves so that whenever we encounter some problem we can exercise our spirit immediately.

Some have heard the teaching concerning the exercise of the spirit, but since, in reality, they do not practice it much, their spirit is still weak. Such a person especially has difficulty exercising his spirit in prayer. Just as when I lay on the bed for six months my legs became the weakest parts of my whole being, when one does not exercise his spirit it becomes the weakest part of his whole being. My weight increased, and my blood count improved, but due to lack of exercise the walking ability of my legs decreased. Due to lack of exercise many brothers' and sisters' spirits have become extremely weak and flat, so that even when you encourage them to pray, their spirits cannot rise up. Therefore, we not only need to exercise our spirit at prayer time, but whenever something happens in our daily life we must return to our spirit, exercise our spirit concerning the matter, and then use the consciousness in our spirit to discern the situation. At such a time, the spirit must take the lead—the faculties of the soul must wait.

Day 3

Eph. 6:18 “By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints,”

Some are so clear in thought and deep in thinking that whenever they meet a situation, the first organ they use is their mind, considering the matter over and over. This does not mean that it is wrong to use the mind. What it does mean is that to exercise the mind first and then the spirit, or even to exercise only the mind and not the spirit, is wrong in principle for a Christian. For a Christian, the principle in handling any matter is to first sense out the matter by exercising the spirit and then think it over with the mind. The mind should be a slave, an instrument, of the spirit. We should not allow the mind to take over; rather, we should allow our spirit to take the lead in touching every matter. For example, a brother may come to see you and talk with you. Your attitude should be to use your spirit first to contact and sense his situation; then use your mind to comprehend the consciousness in your spirit. Many people, whenever they meet someone or hear something, immediately exercise their mind to think and

ponder. This is reversing the proper order. When we contact people or handle things it is especially important that we first exercise our spirit and then our mind.

The principle is the same concerning the will. Never use your will to make a decision concerning some matter and ignore the consciousness of your spirit. First sense it with your spirit, and then allow your will to serve as an instrument of the spirit to make the decision for you. In making any decision, we should submit our will wholly to the control of the spirit.

This is also true with the emotion. The sisters are usually full of emotion. Many times a sister's spirit is not strong because it has been subdued by her emotion. Emotion includes numerous elements, such as human preferences, hatred, fear, boldness, and so on. Never consider that all sisters are timid. Sometimes the sisters are bolder than the brothers, because they are more in their emotion. When the sisters are for something they are so bold that they fear neither heaven nor earth. But sometimes when they are afraid of something they are afraid to the extent that they do not care about reasons or anything else. All of this is something of the emotion. Therefore, if we want to learn how to be a proper Christian, in every situation we must first turn to our spirit and sense how it feels about that particular matter. We must keep this principle in our daily life, which includes our actions, our attitude toward others, our help to others, and even our service in the church. We should not say, "This is good, why don't we do it?" It is not a matter of good or bad, but it is a matter of what our spirit says. No matter how good something seems, if our spirit does not sanction such an action, we should not do it. By all means, we must allow our spirit to take the lead in all things.

Let us give a further explanation. When someone brings a matter to you, you should not let either your preference or fear take the lead. You must not approve the matter simply because you like it, refuse it because you are afraid of it, or put it aside because you are disgusted with it. Rather, you should first use your spirit to touch the matter, and allow your spirit to take the lead, overcoming the liking and approval, fear and distaste, and even the mind and will of your soul. Toward every thing that is set before you, always first exercise your spirit. In order to be a proper Christian, we need to have a strong spirit. In everything we need to exercise our spirit. I may not like a particular person, but if he comes to see me today, by all means, I must touch the consciousness in my spirit. I should not react according to my particular preference or distaste but according to my spirit.

I believe, brothers and sisters, you are clear about this point. May you henceforth put it into practice so that your spirit can become the strongest part in your whole being. I once saw a child learning to play the piano spend many hours each practice time. He practiced continually until his hands became the most skillful parts of his body, and his piano playing was excellent. The strongest part of a

Christian should be his spirit. When our spirit is strong and living, we can pray well. However, just to know the teaching is useless; it is an absolute necessity that we faithfully put it into practice.

Day 4

1 Tim 1:5 “But the end of the charge is love out of a pure heart and out of a good conscience and out of unfeigned faith;”

III. THE SPIRIT MUST BE PURE

Strictly speaking, the spirit itself is not easily defiled. Any uncleanness of the spirit is due to its being contaminated by the soul and body while passing through them to come forth. For example, if your mind is defiled, when your spirit passes through the mind to come forth, the defilement of your mind becomes the defilement of your spirit. If your emotion is unclean, when your spirit comes forth it will surely be contaminated with the uncleanness of the emotion. If your will is improper, when your spirit comes forth, it also becomes an improper spirit. For example, water may be very pure at its source, but if it passes through some material containing sulfur it will pick up some sulfuric element and eventually flow out as sulfuric water. Just so, it is not easy for the spirit to have contamination of itself. Rather, the defilement of the spirit is usually the result of the spirit's passing through our being.

Hence, in order for the spirit to be pure, man's mind, emotion, and will must be pure. One who has a peculiar mind will surely evidence a peculiar spirit. If one is very emotional and does not know how to control his passion—pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy—when his spirit moves, it is unstable and uncontrollable. You may say that is something of the spirit. Yes, it may be so; for at that time elements of the emotions have been mixed with the spirit. But, strictly speaking, it is still not the spirit itself; rather, it is something of the emotion that has been mixed with the spirit. Someone may have a very obstinate and stubborn will. When his spirit comes forth, it will certainly be an obstinate and stubborn spirit. This is inevitable. Whatever kind of person you are, it is easy for your spirit to bear that flavor. If your faculties are not pure, your spirit will also be impure. In order that the spirit might be pure, the person himself must be pure. When the spirit of one who hates comes forth, his spirit expresses that hatred. So it is with one whose thought is unclean. When his spirit comes forth it will inevitably be unclean.

Once your spirit is impure you will have a bad conscience, and once you have a bad conscience your spirit will suffer total bankruptcy. It is not possible for such a spirit to pray. Thus, in order to have a spirit of prayer, the primary requirement is that you be a pure person. When one is pure, then his spirit is pure. Only one who

has a pure spirit can have a good conscience. A good conscience will enable him to be strengthened in spirit and become a man of prayer.

IV. THE SPIRIT MUST BE FRESH, NOT OLD AND STALE

Many times in the prayer meeting or at the Lord's table, a brother or sister may have stood up to pray and made you feel that his spirit was very old. Every time such a one prays, although he may be chronologically young, you have a sense within that his spirit is old. And since it is old, it is stale. An old, stale spirit cannot pray.

A spirit of prayer is a fresh spirit. Such were the spirits of men of prayer in the Scripture. For example, Nehemiah, Ezra, Daniel, and Abraham were all men of prayer. And when you read their prayers, you can sense the freshness of their spirit. Some confessed their sins, while others repented deeply before God. Take, for example, Psalm 51, which is David's prayer of confession. In that psalm he was full of repentance and under a deep sense of condemnation, yet you still can sense that his spirit was fresh.

Please remember, a fresh spirit comes from a pure spirit. Every fresh spirit, therefore, is the result of many severe dealings before God. The more the dealings, the fresher the spirit. The reason a brother's or sister's spirit of prayer is stale is because he has not had any dealings with God for a long time. This is just like walking into a room that has not been cleaned for a month: immediately you feel everything is old and stale. But go and observe the Japanese homes. Many of the Japanese clean and wash their houses within and without almost every morning. When you go into such a house, or just walk past the door, you can feel the freshness.

Without dealings, there is staleness; with dealings, there is freshness. To this day you and I are still in the old creation. We still live among men of the old creation, and in an unclean, dark age on this corrupt, evil earth. We do not realize how much our spirit has been covered with the dust of this old creation and corrupt age. Even if we don't get ourselves defiled by it, this dust automatically falls into our being, causing our spirit to become old. Therefore, in order to maintain the purity of our person there must be the daily dealings. When there is the purity, then there is the freshness; when there is the freshness inside, the spirit can pray.

Day 5

2 Tim 1:7 “For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.”

V. THE SPIRIT MUST BE BUOYANT

A fresh spirit is surely a buoyant spirit. If you do not have regular dealings before the Lord, your spirit cannot be fresh. A spirit that is not fresh is invariably depressed and is definitely unable to pray. Even if by the exercise of your will you force yourself to utter some words, or you use your mind to think of something to say, it is still futile. Therefore, whether you can pray and how much you can pray depend upon whether your spirit is depressed or buoyant. This is a real test.

VI. THE SPIRIT MUST BE LIVELY

That which is pure is fresh, that which is fresh is buoyant, and that which is buoyant surely is lively. Only such a spirit can pray. The moment you open your mouth others can sense whether or not the spirit in you is leaping and living. By contrast, you may have heard a brother pray and felt that his prayer was dead. Although he prayed, his spirit did not move. It was neither living nor released, but dead. It is not possible for such a spirit to pray. Thus, in order to be able to pray, the spirit must be lively, full of vitality.

VII. THE SPIRIT MUST BE FREE

Freedom means having no bondage or anxiety. Once you are anxious over a certain matter you cannot pray. You keep worrying about your son who is studying abroad, your wife who is being treated in the hospital, and your business that is not making money. Since your spirit is bound by these many things it cannot be free, and you are thus unable to pray. Even these good things can cause your spirit to be bound. On the other hand, there are still some whose spirits are captured by the theater, being bound by the movies. Thus, the spirit is bound and unable to pray. To the extent that our spirit is not freed from everything that is outside God there is no way for us to pray. Therefore, one who wishes to learn how to pray must exercise his spirit, making it able to be independent at all times—bound neither by the attraction of that which is good nor by that which is bad. Regardless how difficult, how heavy, or how troublesome the matter may be, your spirit can remain free and unbothered. A spirit that can pray is one that is not bound and entangled but is transcendent and free.

VIII. THE SPIRIT MUST BE LIGHT AND EASY

The spirit must not only be free; it must also be easy. When praying, you must learn not to bear burdens that are too heavy. One who is heavy-laden can never

pray. True, the spirit should not be lazy, but neither should it be overloaded. Freedom means to have no bondage; whereas, easiness means to have no heavy burden. Freedom means to get out of all entanglements that are outside God; whereas easiness means to not bear too heavy a burden in the spirit. For example, you may go before God today to pray for two matters and be able to pray very well. However, if you bear five things with you while you pray, you cannot pray well, because the things, being too many and too heavy, have caused your spirit to become completely worn out. It is just like an ordinary person who may be able to walk well when he is carrying a fifty-pound load, but who is not able to walk if he is bearing a five-hundred-pound load.

Therefore, in prayer, we need to guard against laziness in our spirit. However, at the same time we need to prevent our spirit from being over diligent and taking too heavy a load, thus falling into uneasiness. We need to maintain a balanced spirit which is neither lazy nor overdiligent. Take only the burden that you can bear, so that your spirit will be light. This should be our attitude in prayer.

Of course, there are times when burdens would press us into fasting and prayer, but that is another matter. In ordinary times, we need to allow our spirit to feel at ease and not be pressed continually. A spirit that is not free cannot pray; neither can a spirit that is not light pray well. One who prays well always exercises his spirit, keeping it free and light.

Day 6

1 Pet. 3:4 “But the hidden man of the heart in the incorruptible adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very costly in the sight of God.”

IX. THE SPIRIT MUST BE RESTFUL AND CALM

One cannot pray if his spirit has no rest and is always in turmoil. When hearing joyful or sorrowful news, some get very excited in their spirit and cannot calm down. This stimulation, which results from either joy or sorrow, can make one unable to pray. Therefore, we must train ourselves so that whether a situation we encounter is happy or sad, our spirit will not be too excited or stirred up. A spirit cannot pray if it is restless or in turmoil.

Seriously speaking, if we are well-trained to pray then we have learned a great deal before the Lord. If the organs of our body need exercise in order to be useful, then, much more, our spirit needs to be exercised in order to function. Prayer requires learning the lessons—especially the lesson of the proper exercise of the

spirit. If you can always maintain a calm and peaceful spirit in any situation or circumstance and with anyone, then you can pray.

X. THE SPIRIT MUST BE OPEN

A spirit of prayer is also an open spirit. Once the spirit is closed it cannot pray. The spirit should be open toward God, toward the brothers and sisters, and also toward others. But this does not mean that our spirit is never closed. Sometimes it needs to be closed. Our spirit should be able to close as well as open. This is just like a proper and frequently-used door which opens and closes flexibly according to the need. However, some doors are not frequently used and, therefore, are difficult to open and close. It is hard to open them, and once they are opened, they cannot be closed. With respect to their spirit, some brothers and sisters are just like this. Such a person cannot pray. In order to pray, the spirit must have the ability to open and close with flexibility. It should be able at any time to open toward God and men. When it should be closed, it should do so automatically. A spirit that opens and closes properly is an open spirit. Within a brief space of time it may open and close several times.

When one whose spirit opens freely contacts others and talks to them, after only one or two sentences, his spirit opens. This in turn causes the spirit of the others to also open. Only someone with such a spirit is able to lead people to salvation and to render help to others. Sometimes a brother may speak to someone for ten minutes. If the brother's spirit is not open, whatever he would speak or pray is vain. Thus, in order to have a proper prayer, the spirit must be open.

XI. THE SPIRIT MUST BE TRANSCENDENT

To be transcendent means to be risen above the different parts of the soul—mind, emotion, and will—and not to be under their control. A spirit that is transcendent is able to pray normally, and at the same time, it is able to be released to the degree that it ought. If you allow the various parts of your soul to dominate your spirit even a little, you are defeated in prayer. Thus, in prayer always allow the spirit to transcend everything. You need to allow your spirit to be both the strongest and the highest part of your being. You are then a man of prayer.

XII. THE SPIRIT MUST BE STABLE

Our spirit should not be buoyant and transcendent one day and depressed the next day. Neither should it be so free this minute and so bound the next minute. Stability of the spirit means that the spirit is not affected by any circumstance but is always steadfast before the Lord.

The weather in Taiwan fluctuates a great deal. It may be calm and windless in the morning, and yet a typhoon may come in the evening. You may need a sweater in

the morning but only a shirt at noon. This is instability. Such are the spirits of some of the brothers and sisters. Yesterday your fellowship with a certain brother was wonderful and the prayer was excellent. However, today when you see him his whole being is collapsed, and he has become helpless. Such an unstable person cannot pray. In order to pray the spirit must remain balanced and stable: free, yet stable; transcendent, yet stable; buoyant, yet stable. We need to be exercised that our spirits may manifest these characteristics.