

How Does One “Pray in the Spirit?” Analyzing the Grammatical Structure of Eph. 6:10-20 By Bob Young

[With excerpts from my *Bible Study Guide: The Pastoral Epistles*, available on Amazon]

Paul introduces the paragraph with “finally.” This word may point to Paul’s final teaching in the letter or it may simply mean “as to the rest.” The context suggests that the theme is “Christian warfare against evil.” The battle is waged in this world but is not against physical forces. Rather, the battle Paul describes is against cosmic powers and spiritual forces. This is a spiritual battle. How does one do battle spiritually?

In v. 10 we find the first imperative of several in the passage: be strong. Be strong in the Lord in the power of his might. The present imperative carries the sense of “be continually empowered.” Christians must choose which powers will guide and control their lives.

In v. 11 is the second imperative: put on. Putting on the full armor of God enables one to stand against the deceitful methods of the devil. The armor is primarily defensive. Being armed is essential because the struggle is constant, reflected in the present imperative. The struggle is against spiritual powers or forces.

The third imperative is in v. 13: take. Taking up (or, receiving) the whole armor of God provides stability and firmness. The contrast between v. 11 and v. 13 shows that some of the armor is to be worn (put on) and some of the armor is to be carried (take up). The result is the ability to stand firm.

The last word of v. 13 becomes the introductory imperative in v. 14. Stand! This fourth imperative is followed by four participles in vv. 14-16: having girded, having put on, having bound, having taken up. The participles describe what the Christian does in order to stand. Stand by doing these things. “Having been girded with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, having bound your feet in readiness, having taken up the shield of faith.”

A fifth imperative is found in v. 17: the Christian must receive two things: the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. Contextually, it seems natural to make a literary break between v. 17 and v. 18, but grammatically the participle of v. 18 relates to the main imperative verb of v. 17. Receive the helmet and sword, always praying in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication. The repeated reference to the Spirit is interesting—receive the sword of the Spirit, pray in the Spirit.

Now to the question of our title: How does one pray in the Spirit? Note the repetition of “all” – at *all* times, with *all* kinds of prayer and supplication, making supplication with *all* perseverance, for *all* the saints. Prayer in the Spirit is constant, uses various prayer types, is persevering, is all-encompassing. Prayer in the Spirit prays for gospel workers and their gospel ministry. Prayer in the Spirit requests clear words, boldness, certainty, a focus on the gospel, bold declaration, fulfilling God’s will. Prayer in the Spirit immerses the Christian in prayer in every situation and circumstance, bringing every person, pressure, and problem to God. Prayer in the Spirit will reflect the fact that the one praying has received the sword of the Spirit. Prayer in the Spirit is Spirit-informed and Spirit-disciplined.

Paul says that Christians receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit by giving themselves to prayer in the Spirit, on all occasions, with all kinds of prayer, with all perseverance, for all the saints.

Praying on all occasions forces me to short focused prayers. Everything is prayer-driven. Every occasion encompasses both the good and the bad, the challenges and the victories. Praying always leads to prayer at any and every hour of the day or night.

What does Paul mean: all kinds of prayers? Here Paul mentions prayers and supplications. In 1 Timothy 2, he adds intercessions and thanksgivings. Prayers can be short or long, relaxed or crisis-driven, hurried or deliberate. Paul’s description of prayer in the Spirit is specifically focused.

All perseverance suggests that praying is not easy. Continuing to pray is often difficult. Persevering in prayer in the Spirit reflects trusting God and never ceasing to pray. Keep on praying.

For all the saints expands the scope of our prayers “in the Spirit.” If our prayers do not reach out to include others, can we legitimately say that we are praying “in the Spirit?” Pray for those who faithfully proclaim in every place. Pray for those who have requested our prayers; pray for those who have not.

Prayer in the Spirit is connected to the sword of the Spirit which Christians are commanded to take up. Prayer in the Spirit may touch a variety of matters, but for Paul in Ephesians 6, prayer in the Spirit is “gospel focused.” Prayer in the Spirit does not mean to have a “spirit of prayer” but to boldly use the power of the Spirit in prayer and to request the Spirit’s continuing work and power in the bold proclamation of the gospel.