

Praying in the Spirit

by John Bunyan

"We do not know what we ought to pray for, the Spirit helps us in our weakness." Romans 8:26

"I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind" 1 Corinthians 14:15

Prayer is a command of God, and is to be practiced both in public and in private; yes, such a command brings those that have the spirit of prayer, into great intimacy with God; and the prevailing prayer, will receive great things from God, both for the person that prayed, and for those that are prayed for. Prayer opens the heart of God, and is a means by which the empty soul is filled. By prayer the Christian can open his heart to God, as to a friend, and obtain fresh testimony of God's friendship to him. My purpose today will be to show you the very heart of prayer, without which, all your lifting up, of hands, eyes, and voices, will be to no avail.

My outline will be as follows:

- I. I will show you what true prayer is.
- II. I will show you what it is to pray in the Spirit.
- III. I will show what it is to pray with my spirit and with my mind.
- IV. I will make application of what we have learned.

I. WHAT TRUE PRAYER IS

Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart and soul to God, through Christ, with 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. In this description are seven things that we need to consider:

1. Prayer is to be sincere.

Prayer is a sincere pouring out of the soul to God. Sincerity runs through all the graces of God in us, and influences all the actions of a Christian, or else our actions are not really from God. It is the same with prayer, as shown when David speaks about prayer, "I cried out to [the Lord] with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened [to my prayer]" (Psalm 66:17, 18).

Part of the exercise of prayer is sincerity, without which God will not look upon it as prayer in its proper sense. God says in his Word, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). The lack of this sincerity made the Lord reject the prayers in Hosea 7:14, where he said, "They do not cry out to me from their hearts," that is, in sincerity, "but wail upon their beds." Their prayers were only a fake, a hypocritical show, only to be seen by men, and applauded by them.

And why must sincerity be one of the essential ingredients of prayer which is acceptable to God? Because sincerity causes the soul to open its heart to God, and to plainly tell him the situation, without rationalization; to clearly condemn itself, without deceit; to cry out to God as a friend, without flattery. Sincerity is the same no matter if you are praying alone in a closet, or before the face of the world. The sincere praying Christian does not know how to wear two masks, one before men, and another in the closet; rather it must have God, and be honest with him in prayer. God will not listen to lip service, for God looks at the heart, and listens only to prayer which is accompanied with sincerity.

2. Prayer is to make sense.

It is a sincere and rational pouring out of the heart or soul. It is not, as many take it to be, a few babbling, verbose, flattering expressions, but rather, a sensible utterance of the heart. Prayer has in it a reasonable understanding of different things; for example, sometimes the sense of sin, and sometimes an understanding of mercy received.

A. Sometimes it is an awareness of the need of mercy, because of the danger of sin.

Effective prayer bubbles out of the heart when it is overcome with grief and anguish. David experienced this, saying that he was "feeble and utterly crushed; groaning in anguish of heart, his heart was pounding, his strength failed him; even the light was gone from his eyes" (Psalm 38:8-10). The Lord heard Ephraim's moaning (Jeremiah 31:18). Peter weeps bitterly (Matthew 26:75). Christ "offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). And all of this came from a sense of the justice of God, the guilt of sin, the pains of hell and God's wrath. The Psalmist said, "The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD" (Psalm 116:4). In all these instances, and in hundreds more that might be named, you will see that prayer carried with it a reasonable understanding of the situation, and that coming from a sense of sin.

B. Sometimes in prayer, there is a sweet sense of mercy received; encouraging, comforting, strengthening, and instructive mercy,

Thus David pours out his soul, to bless, and praise, and admire the great God for his loving-kindness to such poor vile wretches. "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalms 103:1-5). And we can see that sometimes the prayer of saints are turned into praise and thanksgiving, and yet they are still prayers. This is a mystery: God's people pray with their praises, as it is written, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6). A conscious thanksgiving, for mercies received, is a mighty prayer in the sight of God; and it has a great influence on His actions.

A good sense of sin, and the wrath of God, with some encouragement from God to come to him, is a better prayer-book than that which is taken out of the Roman Catholic mass-book, which are nothing but the scraps and fragments of the inventions of some popes, monks, and who knows what else.

3. Prayer is to be an affectionate pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ.

O! the heat, strength, life, vigor, and affection, that is in the right kind of prayer! "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1). "How I long for your precepts" (Psalm 119:40). "I long for your salvation" (Psalms 119:17). "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." (Psalm 84:2) "My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times." (Psalm 119:20). Note in these verses that I just quoted how the Psalmist's, "pants, yearns, and is consumed," for God and his Word. O what affection is revealed here in prayer!

Again, it is a pouring out of the heart and soul. There is in prayer a disclosure of a man's inner self, an opening of the heart to God, an affectionate outpouring of the soul in requests, sighs, and groans. "All my longings lie open before you," said David, and "my sighing is not hidden from you" (Psalm 38:9)." And again, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? These things I remember as I pour out my soul" (Psalm 42:2, 4). Note, "I pour out my soul." It is an expression signifying, that in prayer the very life and entire strength is poured out to God. And in another place, "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him" (Psalm 62:8). This is the kind of prayer to which the promise is made, for the delivering of a poor creature out of captivity and bondage. "But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Again, it is a pouring out of the heart and soul TO GOD. This also shows the excellency of the spirit of prayer. It is the great and holy God that prayer is addressed to. "When can I go and meet with God?" And it argues, that the soul which prays in this manner, sees an emptiness in everything under heaven; that in God alone there is rest and satisfaction for the soul. "The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help" (1 Timothy 5:5). David said, "In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. Be

my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men. For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth" (Psalm 71:1-5).

Many speak to God with lots of empty words; but the right kind of prayer makes God his hope, rest, and his all in all. The right kind of prayer sees nothing more important, nor worth looking after, but God.

Again, it is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart and soul to God, THROUGH CHRIST. We must add that prayer must come through Christ, or else it is to be questioned, whether it really is a prayer, even though it may appear so lofty and eloquent.

Christ is the way through whom the soul has admittance to God the Father, and without Christ it is impossible that even one prayer request would be heard by our Heavenly Father (John 14:6). Jesus said, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13, 14). This was Daniel's way in praying for the people of God; he did it in the name of Christ. Listen, "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary" (Daniel 9:17). Likewise, David prayed, "For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great" (Psalm 25:11).

But note this, it is not every one that makes mention of Christ's name in prayer, that truly prays to God in the name of Christ. This coming to God through Christ is the hardest part of prayer. A man may be aware of his deeds, and sincerely desire mercy, and yet not be able to come to God through Christ. That man that comes to God by Christ, must first have a knowledge of Christ; "because anyone who comes to [Christ] must believe that he exists" (Hebrews 11:6). And so he that comes to God through Christ, must know Christ. Moses said to the Lord, "teach me your ways so I may know you" (Exodus 33:13).

4. Prayer is to be by the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit.

These things are so dependent on one another, that it is impossible that one could have an acceptable prayer, without all of these things working together; without these things, it is only a prayer that will be rejected by God. For without a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart to God, it is nothing but lip-service; and if it is not through Christ, then it falls far short of ever sounding acceptable in God's ears. In the same way, if it is not prayed in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, then it is the same as the sons of Aaron, presenting an offering with unauthorized fire (Leviticus 10:1, 2). Any prayer which is not petitioned through the teaching and assistance of the Holy Spirit, cannot possibly be "according to the will of God (Romans 8:26, 27).

5. Prayer is to be for things that God has promised.

It is prayer when it is within the compass of God's Word; and it is blasphemy, or at best vain babbling, when the petition is for things outside of God's Holy Book. David, when he prayed, kept his eye on the Word of God, "I am laid low in the dust; preserve my life according to your word" (Psalm 119:25). And again, "My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word" (Psalm 119:28; see also 41, 42, 58, 65, 74, 81, 82, 107, 147, 154, 169, 170). And, "Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope" (Psalm 119:49). And surely the Holy Spirit does not immediately stir up the heart of the Christian without the Word of God, rather it is by, and with, and through the Word, by bringing it to the heart, and by opening the sinful heart, whereby the man is provoked to go to the Lord, and to tell him how it is with him, and also to plead, and supplicate, according to the Word.

So I say, as the Spirit is the helper and the governor of the soul, when it prays according to the will of God; so it is guided by and according to, the Word of God and his promise. Therefore, our Lord Jesus Christ himself did not pray except in accordance with the Word, even though his life was at stake. He said, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (Matthew 26:53, 54).

In other words, Jesus was saying, "Were there only a word for it in the scripture, I would soon be out of the hands of my enemies, I would be helped by angels; but the scripture will not warrant this kind of praying, for that says otherwise. It is praying then according to the Word of God. The Spirit by the Word must direct, both in the manner, and the matter of prayer. "So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind (1 Corinthians 14:15). There is no understanding without the Word. For if they reject the word of the Lord, "what kind of wisdom do they have?" (Jeremiah 8:9)

6. Prayer is to be for the good of the church.

This means that the prayer must be for the honor to God, or Christ's advancement, or his people's benefit. For God, and Christ, and his people are so linked together that if the good of the one be prayed for, then the church, the glory of God, and advancement of Christ, must also be included. For as Christ is in the Father, so the saints are in Christ; and he that touches the saints, touches the apple of God's eye. He that prays for the peace and good of the church, does, in fact, ask in that prayer that which Christ has purchased with his blood; and also that which the Father has given to him for paying that price. Now he that prays for this, must pray for abundance of grace for the church, for help against all its temptations; that God would let nothing be too difficult for it; and that all things might work together for its good, that God would keep them blameless and harmless, the sons of God, to his glory, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.

7. And prayer must submit to the will of God.

As Christ has taught us, prayer must say, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10); therefore the people of the Lord in humility are to lay themselves and their prayers, and all that they have, at the feet of their God, to be disposed of by him as he in his heavenly wisdom sees best. And never doubting that God will answer the desire of his people in a way that will be most advantageous for them and for his glory. Therefore when the saints pray with submission to the will of God, they are not to doubt or question God's love and kindness to them. But because they are not always wise, and sometimes Satan may take advantage of them, so as to tempt them to pray for that which, if they had it, would neither be to God's glory nor for his people's good.

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us-whatever we ask-we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14, 15). For, as I said before, that petition that is not prayed in and through the Spirit, will not be answered, because it is outside the will of God. For only the Spirit knows the will of God, and therefore only he knows how to pray according to the will of God. "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). But more of this later. Thus we have seen what prayer is.

II. WHAT IT IS TO PRAY WITH MY SPIRIT

1. I will pray with my spirit.

There is no man nor church in the world that can come to God in prayer, but by the assistance of the Holy Spirit. "For through Christ we have access to the Father by one Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18). Therefore Paul said, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26, 27). And because there is in this scripture a complete discovery of the spirit of prayer, and of man's inability to pray without it; therefore I will in a few words comment on it.

"We." Consider the person speaking, Paul, an apostle, the extraordinary elder, the wise master-builder, he that was taken up into paradise (2 Cor 12:4). "We do not know what we ought to pray for." Surely everyone will admit, that Paul and his fellow apostles were able to have done any mighty work for God, yet, he says, "We do not know what we ought to pray for," without the help and the assistance of the Spirit. Should we pray for communion with God through Christ? Should we pray for faith, for justification by grace, and a truly sanctified heart? We do not know the

answer to any of these things. "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

"We do not know what we ought to pray for." Paul said, we must pray as we ought; and this we cannot do by the skill, and cunning devices of men or angels. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit"; no, it must be "the Spirit HIMSELF" that helps us in our weakness; not the Spirit and man's lusts. What man's own brain may imagine and devise, is one thing, and what they are commanded, and ought to do, is another. Many ask and do not receive, because they ask with wrong motives; and so they never enjoy those things they pray for (James 4:3).

While we are praying, God is searching the heart, examining our motives and spirit (1 John 5:14). "And he who searches our hearts knows," that is, approves only, what is agreeable to, "the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (Romans 8:27) For he only hears that which is in accordance with his will, and nothing else. And it is only the Spirit that can teach us what to ask; only the Spirit is able to search every thing out, even the deep things of God.

Without the Holy Spirit, though we pray a thousand different prayers, yet we would be unable to know what to pray for, because we have a built-in weakness that makes us absolutely incapable of praying correctly. These weaknesses within us, although it is difficult to name them all, yet the following are eight key weaknesses which prevent effective praying.

Weakness #1 - Not having the Holy Spirit within us.

Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, man is so weak that he cannot think one right saving thought of God, of Christ, or of his blessed things; and therefore the Word of God declares about the man without the Spirit, "In all his thoughts there is no room for God" (Psalm 10:4); unless it is that they imagine God to be basically like one of them (Psalm 50:21). For "every inclination of the thoughts of [unsaved man's] heart is only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5; 8:21). Thus, since unbelievers are not able to correctly conceive who God is, the very God to whom they pray, the Christ through whom they pray, nor of the things for which they pray, as was shown before, then how will they be able to address themselves to God, without the help of the Holy Spirit?

The acceptable prayer to God must, in the outward expression, and as well in the inward intention, come from what the soul understands by the illumination of the Holy Spirit; otherwise the prayer is condemned as a vain abomination, because the heart and tongue do not agree, neither can they, unless the Spirit help us in our weakness (Mark 7; Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 29:13). And David knew this full well, which caused him to cry out, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Psalm 51:15).

I suppose no one would doubt that David could speak and express himself as well as any one in our generation, as is clearly manifested by his words recorded in the Scriptures. Nevertheless when this good man, this prophet, comes to worship God, then the Lord must help him too, or he can do nothing. "O Lord, open my lips," and then "my mouth will declare your praise." He could not speak one proper word, unless the Spirit gives him the utterance. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for.

Weakness #2 - Not praying with the Spirit.

We may have the Holy Spirit within us, but if we do not pray with the Spirit, then we are senseless, hypocritical, and cold, and both we and our prayers are abominable to God (Matthew 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 18:11, 12; Isaiah 58:2, 3). It is not the quality of the voice, nor the apparent affection, and earnestness of him that prays, that means anything to God. For man, as man, is so full of all kinds of wickedness, that he cannot keep a word, or thought, much less a part of a prayer pure, and acceptable to God through Christ; and because of this the Pharisees, and their lengthy prayers, were rejected. There is no question that they expressed themselves with excellent words, and also said long prayers; but they did not have the Holy Spirit to help them, and therefore in their weakness they fell short of a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of their souls to God, through the strength of the Spirit.

Weakness #3 - Not being aware of our unconfessed sins.

No one but the Holy Spirit can clearly show a person their sins, and therefore cause them to have the proper attitude of prayer. Without an clear sense of the sin of our hearts then our prayers are nothing but "lip-service" to God. O the cursed hypocrisy that is in most hearts, and that accompanies many thousands of praying men and women today, and all because they lack a sense of their sin! But now the Spirit, will sweetly show the soul its sinful state, and exactly the areas where the sin exists, and what is likely to be the consequence of that sin if it remains unconfessed, and also that it is an intolerable condition. For it is the Spirit that effectually convinces men and women of their sin and misery, and therefore causes the soul to pray in a pure, discerning, and tender way to God according to his word (John 16:7-9).

Weakness #4 - Seeing our sins and being unable to pray.

Even if men and women are aware of their sins, yet without the help of the Holy Spirit they would not pray. For they would run away from God, with Cain and Judas, and utterly despair of mercy, were it not for the Spirit. When a man is aware of his sin, and God's curse on it, then it is very difficult to persuade him to pray; for, his heart says, "It's no use," it is in vain to seek God (Jeremiah 2:25; 18:12). I am so vile, so wretched, and so cursed, that I will never be forgiven! Now here comes the Spirit, and calms the soul, helping it to hold up its face to God, by letting into the heart some small sense of mercy to encourage it to go to God, and for that reason the Holy Spirit is called "the Counselor" (John 14:26).

Weakness #5 - Not knowing how to come to God-His way.

In order to pray we must be in the Spirit; for without that no man can know how to come to God the right way. Men may easily say they come to God through his Son: but without being in the Spirit, it is impossible to come to God the right way-his way. It is "the Spirit" that "searches all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10). It is the Spirit that must show us the way of coming to God, and also what there is in God that makes him desirable: Moses said, "Teach me your ways so I may know you" (Exodus 33:13).

Weakness #6 - Being unable to call God our "Father."

Without the Holy Spirit, though a man sees his misery, and also the way to come to God; yet he would never be able to claim a share in either God, Christ, or mercy, because God would not allow him. O how great a task it is, for a lost soul that becomes aware of his sin and the wrath of God, to say in faith, this one word, "Father!" I tell you, even the Christian finds difficulty in this very thing, it cannot say God is its Father. "O!" he says, "I dare not call him Father"; and therefore the Holy Spirit must be sent into the hearts of God's people for this very reason, to cry "Father": for without the Spirit it would be too difficult for any man to knowingly and believingly call God his Father (Galatians 4:6).

When I say knowingly, I mean, knowing what it is to be a child of God, and to be born again. And when I say believingly, I mean, for the soul to believe, and that from experience, that the work of grace is completed in him. This is the right way to call God, our Father; and not as many do, by saying it in a babbling way, the Lord's prayer (so called) from memory, just as it is written in the words of a book. No, here is the life of prayer, when with the Spirit, a man being made aware of his sin, and how to come to the Lord for mercy; comes in the strength of the Spirit, and cries out "Father." That one word spoken in faith, is better than a thousand prayers, as men call them, written and read, in a formal, cold, or lukewarm way.

Many people think it is enough to teach themselves and their children to say the Lord's prayer, the creed, and other sayings; when, in reality, God knows, they are senseless of themselves, their misery, or what it is to be brought to God through Christ! Oh, poor soul! Study your misery, and cry to God to show you your blindness and ignorance, before you get into the habit of calling God your Father, or teaching your children to do so. And know this, that to say God is your Father, without any work of grace in your souls, is to say you are Christians when you are not, therefore you lie to God.

You say, "Our Father"; God says, "You blasphemer!" You say I am "a true Christian"; God says, "You are a liar!" "You are of the synagogue of Satan, you who claim to be a Jew though you are not, you are a liar" (Revelation 3:9).

"I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). And the more the sinner hypocritically boasts of God being his Father, then so much greater is his sin. The Jews did this to Christ, in the 8th chapter of John, which made Christ, even in plain terms, to tell them of their doom, because of all their hypocritical pretences (John 8:41-45).

And even today, prostitutes, thieves, drunkards, blasphemers, and liars; are considered by some to honest people because with their blasphemous throats, and hypocritical hearts, they will come to church, and say, "Our Father!" But because they obey the "traditions" of their religions saying the "Our Father" over and over, they are considered to be members in good-standing in their church, while God's true children are, as it has always been, looked upon to be a troublesome, opposing, and dissident people (Ezra 4:12-16).

Weakness #7 - Being unable to keep our "heart" in our prayers.

Just as the heart must be lifted up by the Spirit in order to pray acceptable prayers to God, so also the heart must be held up by the Spirit, if it is to continue to pray correctly. It is impossible that all the prayer-books, that men have made in the world, can lift up, keep up, or prepare the heart; for that is the work of the God himself. And truly here is the life of prayer, to keep the heart devoted to God while praying. We see in the Book of Exodus that it was very difficult for Moses to keep his hands lifted up to God in prayer; likewise, it is difficult to keep the heart in our prayers! (Exodus 17:12).

The lack of this heart in prayer is that which God complains of, when He says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isaiah 29:13). And truly I can speak of my own experience; I can tell you the difficulty I have of praying to God as I should. For, when I go to pray, I find my heart hates to go to God, and when it is with him, it hates to stay with him. Many times I am forced in my prayers, first to beg God that he would take my heart, and set it on himself in Christ, and when it is there, that he would keep it there. Many times I do not know what to pray for, I am so blind, nor do I know how to pray, I am so ignorant, but praise God's grace: the Holy Spirit can help us in our weakness in prayer (Psalm 86:11).

Weakness #8 - Praying without the help and strength of the Spirit.

It is impossible for the heart to pour itself out before God, with those groans and sighs that come from a truly praying heart, without the assistance of the Spirit. It is not the mouth that is the main thing to be looked at in prayer, rather one needs to look at the heart and see if it is full of love and earnestness in prayer to God. There are times when the desires of a man's heart are so great, that all the words, tears, and groans that can come from the heart, cannot be uttered by his mouth: It is then that "The Spirit helps us in our weakness-and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

We must pray with the Spirit, or else our prayers will fail. Prayer is a mandate from God, that must continue with a soul so long as it is on this side of glory. But, as I said before, it is not possible for a man to turn his heart to God in prayer; likewise it is just as difficult to keep it there, without the assistance of the Spirit. Therefore, for a man to continually be in prayer with God, it must of necessity be with the Spirit.

III. WHAT IT IS TO PRAY WITH MY SPIRIT, AND WITH MY MIND.

The apostle makes a clear distinction between praying with our spirit, and praying with our minds: therefore when he said, "I will pray with my spirit," he also adds, but I will also pray with my mind." This distinction was made because the Corinthians did not realize that it was their duty, when they spoke in tongues, to edify others and not to simply edify themselves. It appears that many of them had extraordinary gifts, one being the ability to speak in different known languages, but they focused on these mighty gifts, edifying themselves, rather than edifying the church; which caused Paul to write to them, to make them understand, that though extraordinary gifts were excellent, yet it was more important to edify the church.

For, the apostle said, "If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind [and the minds of those listening] is unfruitful" (1 Corinthians 14:3, 4, 12, 19, 24, 25. Read the scope of the whole chapter). Therefore, "What shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind" (1 Corinthians 14:15).

It is necessary then that the mind should be involved in prayer, as well as the heart and mouth. That which is done with the mind, is done more effectually, sensibly, and heartily, than that which is done without it; which made the apostle pray for the Colossians, that God would fill them "with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9). And for the Ephesians, that God would give them "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that [they] may know him better" (Ephesians 1:17). And also for the Philippians, that God would make their love abound "more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" (Philippians 1:9). A suitable understanding is good in everything a man undertakes, either secular or spiritual; and therefore it must be desired by all Christians that they would be a praying people. I will now show you what it is to pray with your mind.

In order for God to accept our prayers, there must be a spiritual understanding in all those who pray to God.

1. To pray with our minds, is to be guided by the Holy Spirit to pray with an understanding of the need of those things which the soul is to pray for.

Though a man is desperately in need for forgiveness of sin, and deliverance from the wrath to come, yet if he does not understand this, he will either not pray these things at all, or else be so cold and lukewarm when he asks for forgiveness and deliverance, that God will detest the attitude of his heart when he asks for them. Thus it was with the church of the Laodiceans, they wanted knowledge or spiritual understanding; yet they did not know that they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

Because of their condition and all of their empty prayers, they were detestable to Christ, so much so that he threatens to spit them out of his mouth (Revelation 3:16, 17). Men who pray without their minds engaged may say the same words in prayer as others do; but there is a great difference in effectiveness of the prayers! The one speaking with his mind engaged brings understanding to his words, but the other person who prays without an understanding of what he is saying is only babbling words.

2. To pray with our minds will cause the heart of God to be ready and willing to give those things to the soul that it needs.

David prayed with his mind and therefore could surmise the very thoughts of God towards him (Psalm 40:5). And so it was with the Canaanite woman; by her faith and the understanding in her mind, she was able to discern, that although Christ was refusing her initial requests to help her demon-possessed daughter, there was a tenderness and willingness in his heart to save, which caused her to be vehement and earnest, yes, restless, until she received the mercy she needed for her daughter (Matthew 15:22-28).

A proper understanding in our minds, of the willingness of the heart of God to save sinners, will be the primary motive for the soul to seek after God, and to cry out for forgiveness. If a man should see a pearl worth thousands of dollars lying in a ditch, and yet did not understand the value of it, he would most likely pass it by: but if he knew in his mind its true value, then he would climb down into the filth of the ditch to acquire it.

So it is with souls concerning the things of God: once a man understands their value, then his heart, and the very strength of his soul, will run after them, and he will never stop praying for them until he has them. The two blind men in the gospel, clearly knew that Jesus, who was going by them, was both willing and able to heal their blindness: therefore they cried out, and the more they were rebuked, the more they cried out (Matthew 20:29-31).

3. To pray with our minds allows us to clearly see God's promises, which is a great encouragement to pray.

The enlightened understanding sees the magnitude of God's promises and is therefore encouraged to pray. It is like men who make great promises to do such and such to all that will come and ask for them, it is great encouragement to those that know what promises are made, to come and ask for them.

4. To pray with our minds enables us to present to God suitable arguments to justify our requests.

Once our minds are enlightened by the Spirit, then the way is made for the soul to come to God with suitable arguments, sometimes in a way of reasoning with God, as Jacob did in the 32nd chapter of Genesis (Genesis 32:9). Sometimes in the way we verbally petition God, yet not always in a verbal way only, but even from the heart there is forced by the Spirit, through the mind, effective arguments that move the heart of God. Our example is Ephraim who gets a clear understanding of his own sin towards the Lord, then he begins to express sorrow for his sins (Jeremiah 31:18-20).

And in his expression of sorrow, he used various arguments with the Lord, that affected his heart, draws out forgiveness, and makes Ephraim pleasant in his eyes through Jesus Christ our Lord: God said, "I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning [to me] saying, 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God.

After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth' " (Jeremiah 31:19). These are Ephraim's complaints and expressions of sorrow; at which the Lord breaks forth into these heart-melting expressions, saying, "Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him,' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 31:18-20).

5. To pray with our minds enables us to see our needs and therefore what type of prayer we should pray.

Praying with our mind enables us to be aware of the feelings, and pressures that lie heavy on our spirit, provoking us to groan out our request to the Lord. When David felt the "cords of death entangle [him], and the anguish of the grave coming upon [him]," he did not need a bishop dressed in a fancy robe to teach him to say, "O Lord, save me!" (Psalm 116:3, 4). Nor did he need to look into a book, to teach him a form of a prayer to pour out before God. It is the nature of the heart of sick men, in their pain and sickness, to express itself for comfort, by sorrowful groans and moanings to those who are near them. Thus it was with David, in Psalm 38:1-12. And thus, blessed be the Lord, it is with them that are endowed with the grace of God.

6. To pray with our minds will keep us praying continually.

It is necessary that there be an enlightened understanding in our minds for us to see the need to continue in prayer.

The people of God are not ignorant of the many schemes, tricks, and temptations the devil has to tempt a Christian, who is truly willing to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, yes, to tempt that very sincere soul to be weary of seeking the face of God, and to think that God is not willing to have mercy on such a person as he. "Yes," says Satan, "you may truly pray, but you will not prevail. You see your heart is hard, cold, dull, and fearful; you do not pray with the Spirit, you are not sincere in your prayers, your thoughts are running after other things, when you pretend to pray to God.