

John in the Spirit: Praying in the Spirit

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.” In this way the Apostle John introduces the vision of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ and his message to the church that makes up the last book of our Scriptures, Revelation. Though John was unique in his apostolic office and in his receiving of the Word of God, still each Christian can also pray “in the Spirit.” Indeed, praying in the Spirit is one of the highest privileges and honors the Christian has!

What does it mean to pray “in the Spirit”?

It is prayer that is accessible to all Christians. It is not prayer that is reserved for a special “elite” class of Christians or prayer that was only for the apostolic age. Every Christian – young to old – is able to pray in the Spirit. We might say that prayer “in the Spirit” is the distinguishing mark of Christian prayer. On what basis can we say this?

Notice in the Apostle John’s vision the things we share in common. John, speaking to the Church, to Christians, refers to himself as “your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (1:9). He emphasizes his solidarity with his Christian brothers and sisters. Furthermore, he says that he is “on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” John is not, so to speak, in some “holy place” where one experiences the presence of God. No! Rather he is in exile. He is suffering for his faith in Christ. There is no “magic place” or posture or special prayer language behind John’s being “in the Spirit.” Finally, when he says he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day,” he is referring to two things that we all have in common as Christians.

First, we have in common the worship of Jesus on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. Sunday is traditionally when Christians have slowed down from their busy lives to stop and worship Jesus. The second thing we have in common with John is the Spirit. On the cross, Jesus Christ purchased the

Spirit for His people. The Father and Son give the Spirit to their people as a gift. As St. Augustine put it, the Spirit’s name is The Gift.

We must be careful to not see “praying in the Spirit” as the special privilege of the Apostles or the spiritual language of Charismatic Christians. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of Christ with believers, and they are able to have fellowship/communion with the Spirit. It is the high honor and privilege of every Christian to be “in the Spirit” and to “pray in the Spirit.”

But let’s take this a step further. What is praying in the Spirit?

Praying in the Spirit is a fellowship or communion with the Spirit, a praying in and with the Spirit that illumines and magnifies and makes much of the glory, authority, grace, love, truth, etc. of Jesus.

In John 14-16, the Bible’s most extended teaching on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus promises the gift of the Spirit. He says that the Father and Son will give a Helper, the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ will dwell with His followers (14:15-20). Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will bring to the Disciples the remembrance of what Jesus has done and said, so that they can bear witness to Jesus (14:26, 15:26). He declares that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8-10); and that the Holy Spirit will magnify (make much of) the person and work of Jesus: “He will take what is mine and declare it to you” (16:14). And in a shocking statement he claims that it is for their advantage that Jesus leaves them so that the Holy Spirit will be with them (16:7).

Now, when we come to John’s vision of Jesus in Revelation 1, we have the fulfillment of John 14-16 taking place before our eyes. John is “in the Spirit” when he sees a vision of Jesus and receives from Jesus a message for the Church (Revelation 1:11ff). In his vision John sees the glory, beauty, authority of Jesus (1:12). And the message John receives is based on the Person and Work of Jesus: “fear not,” “I am the First and

Last,” “I am...the Living One, I died, and behold I am alive forevermore...and I have the keys to Death and Hades.” In short, John is given a glimpse of Jesus and His glory!

This is the work, the ministry, of the Spirit. The Spirit makes much of Jesus. The Spirit is like a spotlight, revealing to Christians the glory and salvation and sovereignty of Jesus. And while we will not receive a direct Revelation and Word of God like the Apostle John did, we can – and should! – expect the same ministry of the Spirit to us spotlighting Jesus’ great grace, salvation, glory and sovereignty.

What is the application of praying in the Spirit to our lives? First, we should make much of the fact that Jesus purchased the Holy Spirit for us on the Cross. We should glory in the gift God the Father and Son have given us, the Spirit. We should view praying in the Spirit as our high privilege. Making much of praying in the Spirit is how we make much of Jesus’ work on the cross and the Father’s gift of the Spirit. Apathy to fellowship with the Spirit is apathy to Jesus’ cross and the Father’s gift.

Second, we should see the great advantage that we have as New Testament Christians in prayer. We have the Spirit who spotlights the Person and Work of Jesus, who seeks to glorify and make much of Jesus. None of the Old Testament saints had the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the same degree that we do. Not Enoch, Moses, Miriam, Hannah, David, etc. Yet they were still mighty in prayer. How much more should we take advantage of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our prayer life!

Third and finally, we don’t have to be mighty Christians or great prayer warriors or holy Apostles to pray in the Spirit. In fact, we can be weak, broken, messed up, struggling Christians. The Holy Spirit wants to draw your attention away from you to Jesus! You can be weak in yourself, but with the help of the Holy Spirit glory in Jesus...and that will make you mighty in prayer!

Individual Prayer Guide

Take time this week to read through Revelation 1. Meditate on the Holy Spirit inspired vision of Jesus you see there. Ask the Holy Spirit to impart this vision of Jesus to your heart so that you pray in light of it. Ask him to give you courage in light of Jesus glory and authority so that you don’t fear. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you Jesus’ eternal life, his being the beginning and ending of all things. Ask the Spirit to make Jesus authority over Heaven and Hell real to you too. Commune with the Holy Spirit as you ask for more of a sight of the glory of Jesus. It is the Spirit’s joy to show you Jesus.

Community Group Discussion and Prayer

1. What strikes you about prayer in the Spirit in Revelation 1?
2. What are the characteristics of praying in the Spirit in Revelation 1?

Practicing Prayer in your Community Group

Take 20 (or so) minutes to pray. See if there is one person among you who would be willing to be prayed over:

- Ask that the Holy Spirit would give you a vision of Jesus in His glory, love, authority, power, etc.
 - Ask that the Holy Spirit would reveal more of the height, width, depth of the Love of Jesus Christ to each person.
 - Ask that the Holy Spirit would reveal to you new depths of the Person and Work of Jesus, and apply those to you personally.
3. What was hard/what was good about this time of “praying in the Spirit”?