

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

24 The Holy Spirit In Prayer And Worship

How Do You Describe It?

Last week we looked at some of the ways the Holy Spirit influences the life and experience of every believer. Tonight we are going to think about two very important aspects of our Christian lives and how the Holy Spirit helps us with them. We are going to consider the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer and worship.

Pray In The Spirit

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”

Ephesians 6:18

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

Jude 20 – 21

The fact that Paul and Jude command us to pray in the Holy Spirit implies that:

- Praying in the Holy Spirit is something over which we exercise control. We can choose to obey the command or ignore it.
- Praying in the Holy Spirit is something to be applied every time we pray: Paul said, “Pray always... in the Spirit.”
- Praying in the Holy Spirit must surely make a noticeable difference to our prayers. It is not purely an exercise of the mind, as some would have us believe, there is an element of experience involved.

The lack of an explanation to accompany Paul’s command implies that praying in the Holy Spirit was the common experience of early believers: they would have known what he meant but how does it work? What is the difference that should be noticeable? What do we have to do? Paul gives a big clue to help us answer these questions in Romans 8.

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”

Romans 8:26 – 27

The Spirit Helps

The fact is that we are weak: so weak that we cannot even pray right without help and the Holy Spirit is the one who helps us. He helps us by interceding for us but he does not intercede in the same way other people do when they pray for us or even in the same way the ascended Lord Jesus does when he intercedes on our behalf before the Father’s throne. The Holy Spirit exerts an influence on us to enable us to pray properly.

Question: How does the Holy Spirit help us in our praying? Here are some suggestions.

- He convicts us of our sin.
- He convinces us of our needs.
- He awakens and directs the desires of our hearts.
- He promotes desires that are in harmony with God’s will.
- He exposes selfish desires.
- He brings our motives into line with those things that cause God to be glorified.
- He opens our eyes to the promises of God.
- He strengthens our faith to enable us to claim those promises.
- He gives stability to our desires, enabling us to persevere in prayer with assurance.
- He influences the manner of our prayers, so that we pray with sincerity, reverence and joy.
- He gives us clarity of thought and expression.

As we are praying God’s Spirit works in the background so that to a greater or lesser degree we experience freedom, fluency, clarity, effectiveness: a sense of God at work. Through the years God’s people have

described the experience of praying in the Spirit in various terms. They have talked, for example, about praying with liberty, "praying through," or experiencing a sense of power in their praying.

"The soul is the well from which the water of prayer is poured; but the Spirit is that spring that feeds this well, and the hand that helps to pour it forth. The well would have no water without the spring; neither could it deliver itself of it without one to draw it."

William Gurnall

Worship In Spirit and Truth

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

John 4:23

"For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

Philippians 3:3

True believers worship God in the Spirit. That includes all kinds of worship: everything from public worship shared with brothers and sisters in the Lord to day to day acts of service. The presence and influence of God's Spirit is essential to them all. Never the less the Holy Spirit is especially present when God's people come together to worship Him.

The Holy Spirit is everywhere; He even dwells within us, so how then can we say that He is especially present when we meet for worship? It is helpful here to think about what Scripture means when it talks about the Lord "coming down." It does not mean that He descends from heaven to a location where He is not ordinarily present. Rather, it seems that what is in mind is the specific purpose for which He is present at that time and place. So, when we say that the Holy Spirit comes among His children who are gathered to worship Him what we are saying is not that He is more present there than He is in other places. We are bringing into focus His purpose in being there. We are emphasising that when we meet to worship the Holy Spirit is there especially to bless, guide, control and influence our worship.

Question: How does the Holy Spirit guide, control and influence our worship? Again, here are some ideas to stimulate your thinking.

- He enables us to offer service to the Son who, as our High Priest offers it to the Father. He is, as it were, our first point of contact with God. He meets us to prepare and enable us to approach the Father.
- He brings our hearts into a proper frame.
- He impresses upon us an appropriate sense of occasion which shows in our demeanour and dress.
- He gives clarity of thought and focus of mind.
- He leads us to expect the Lord's blessing.
- He guides and energises our worship by stirring up appropriate feeling in our hearts.
- He brings joy and gladness to our worship.

One clear implication of this is that we ought to allocate time for the Holy Spirit to prepare us for worship before we arrive at our meeting place and as we wait for the service to commence.

Question: In the light of these things, how ought we to prepare ourselves for worship?

There are those who take the view that to worship in the Spirit means that any and everyone can take the lead when moved by the Spirit in whatever way he or she feels led to do it but the influence of the Holy Spirit will never go contrary to His own written principles. The Bible is the only unquestionable guide for acceptable worship. Never the less even acts which God Himself has appointed are powerless and meaningless unless they are made effective by the Holy Spirit.

Question: How can we enjoy more of the Holy Spirit's influence in our worship?

Next Week

Next week we will begin to consider the gifts of the Holy Spirit.