

Praying in the Spirit

By Rick McKinney, June 1, 2008

In reflecting upon Sacred Scripture I have found it helpful to ask at least two questions: 1) what does the passage say about God - His character, His actions, His desires; and 2) what does the passage say to us: what God desires within us and from us in our walk or in an example to follow or not follow. We have been studying Ephesians and near the end of that letter Paul writes:

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6: 18-20 NIV

Most of this passage appears to pertain to the second question. We are to pray in the Spirit, we are to be alert, we are to pray for Paul (i.e. our fellow brothers, missionaries, priests, and bishops) that he may fearlessly proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which he is an ambassador in chains. It seems we are especially to pray for those brothers that are in prison for their faith and we ourselves should consider their example and boldly proclaim the good news even in the face of ridicule or other unpleasantness or persecution. Twice Paul asks that his listeners pray that he be fearless in his proclamation.

In regards to “God” it is to be noted that only by God’s grace and through the power of His Spirit are we able to pray or proclaim or be fearless or believe. The mystery of the gospel, the good news that is proclaimed, is all about God and his love for we bent sons of Adam and we fallen daughters of Eve and how He delivered us through the death and resurrection of his beloved Son, Jesus.

However, what is intriguing to me about this passage is the command, “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” What does it mean to “pray in the Spirit?” And is it even possible to pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17) on all occasions and with all kinds of requests? Perhaps a clue can be found in the Paul’s letter to the Romans, the highly celebrated chapter eight.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. 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 NIV

Whatever praying in the Spirit is, it would seem that such a prayer would be with the mind and will of the Spirit not so much with our minds, our will, our desires. Of course, one way to do this is to pray softly or silently in tongues, no matter where you are, for all kinds of requests, in all kinds of occasions, in all kinds of thanks, in all kinds of praise, and in all kinds of service. Yet God has also revealed to us His mind and His will for us – how He loves each person as if that person were the apple of His eye, for indeed he or she is. In my old way of thinking I observe and I judge others with myself as the center, but God is showing me more and more that I can choose to look prayerfully at others with the wholeness and wholesomeness of His desires for their lives and that they would come to know His love more and more and be transformed by it. That to me is “praying in the Spirit.” As Paul wrote:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God. Ephesians 6: 17-19 NIV

Questions to ponder: What do think praying in the Spirit is? How do you pray in the Spirit? Who do pray for in the Spirit?