

The Question of Praying to the Holy Spirit

By Jason Hilburn

Should Christians pray to the Holy Spirit? Considering the clarity with which the Scriptures teach men to pray exclusively to the Father, one may wonder why this question even needs asking. Sadly, some openly teach that Christians may address the Holy Spirit in prayer. What are the repercussions if Christians begin believing such a doctrine? In the future, will congregations all over the world be praying to the Holy Spirit in worship assemblies? This is a dangerous doctrine which needs to be answered.

Deity's Distinctions

Those who advocate praying to the Holy Spirit also advocate praying directly to Jesus. One of the foundational tenets of their doctrine is that Christians may pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit simply because They are Deity. This doctrine also alleges that to refuse to address one of God's "equal natures" in prayer is to dishonor Deity and go against the basic teachings of Christianity. It also implies that no significant distinctions can be made regarding the Members of the Godhead.

However, the truth is that there are divine instructions for prayer that must be obeyed (John 4:24; 16:23-29; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 3:17, etc.), and there are crucial distinctions between the Members of the Godhead that must be recognized and respected. Many of these distinctions are directly related to the roles of the Godhead in prayer. For example, Christ intercedes for Christians (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), but the Father does not. Christ is the Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5-6; John 14:6), but the Father is not, and the Spirit is not. The Holy Spirit was said to be an Intercessor (Rom. 8:26-27), but the Father is not. As stated, these distinctions are directly related to prayer, and those who teach that Christians may pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit seem to be overlooking or misunderstanding this vital information! Knowing that the Scriptures clearly teach Christians to pray to the Father, and that the Members of the Godhead have different roles in prayer, should They All be treated the same when it comes to prayer?

Dishonoring Deity

Although those who teach that Christians should only pray to the Father are at least implicitly accused of dishonoring Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the truth is that to honor Deity is to obey Deity (1 Sam. 15:22-23). All Christians need to realize that when a Christian addresses his prayer to the Father in the name of Jesus, no Person of the Godhead is excluded; both the Holy Spirit and Jesus are actively fulfilling Their roles in that prayer. The Christian should not presume to address Jesus or the Spirit directly to prompt Them to be active during his prayer to the Father. If such were necessary, Christians would be required to address all three Persons in every single prayer!

Obviously, this is not how the Scriptures teach men to pray. Christians should not assume that praying only to the Father dishonors Jesus or the Holy Spirit, because They All have Their own active, individual roles when it comes to prayer.

Regarding dishonoring the Holy Spirit, if one does not focus on the Holy Spirit while He is partaking of the bread and fruit of the vine, is he casting doubt upon the Holy Spirit's deity? Is he somehow dishonoring the Holy Spirit? No, he is simply obeying what he has been taught to do in worship. If the Spirit has revealed that Christians should not focus on Him during the Lord's Supper, they should not focus on Him. That is not questioning His deity; that is respecting His deity and His divine commands! The same principles apply with prayer. If the Holy Spirit or Jesus is not directly addressed in prayer, that has absolutely nothing to do with casting doubt upon the deity of either of Them. That is called obedience. It should go without saying that worship must be according to God's instructions (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 16:25; John 4:24; Col. 2:23, 3:17). Failure to do what has been instructed in prayer or any other act of worship, exactly the way it has been instructed, is a failure to honor and obey God. Christians are to direct their prayers to the Father, in the name of Jesus, according to the instructions of the Spirit. It cannot be wrong to pray this way, and it cannot be wrong to teach men to pray this way. Praying this way does not dishonor Christ or the Holy Spirit, but rather shows true respect for Them and the Father.

Inspired Instructions

Regarding what the Scriptures teach about prayer, will the advocate of praying to the Holy Spirit please explain the following? Explain why the Scriptures repeatedly contain clear, comprehensive words like "always" and "for all things" regarding praying to the Father (Eph. 5:20; cf. John 16:23-29; Rom. 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3-4; 4:6; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3, 11; Phm. 4; Rev. 8:3-4). Explain what words could have been used to communicate more clearly that men are to pray always to the Father than the following: "always," "for all things," "in every thing," "the prayers of all saints," and "nothing" (see references above). Explain why Paul mentioned all three Persons of the Godhead in Romans 15:30, yet he said that both he and the Romans prayed "to God." Explain why Paul mentioned all three Members of the Godhead in Ephesians 3:14-16, but said, "I bow my knees unto the Father" (see all Three mentioned in Ephesians 1:13-17; 5:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5; and 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 also, with prayers only to the Father). Explain why John mentioned all three Persons in 1 John 3:21-24, while teaching that Christians pray to the Father. Explain why we have no record of Jesus praying to the Holy Spirit. Explain why Jesus never taught His disciples to pray to the Holy Spirit, but to the Father. Explain why there is no record of anyone in the Scriptures addressing the Holy Spirit in prayer. Explain how Christians can know how to pray to the Spirit. For example,

should the Spirit be approached in the name of Christ? Is Christ the Mediator between “the Holy Spirit and men”? (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; John 14:6). How can men know how or when to pray to the Spirit when there are no Scriptural examples or instructions to do so? Why should one believe, practice, or teach something like this, which has no Scriptural authority? (Isa. 8:20; Col. 3:17; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Conclusion

There are now over seven billion people in the world, and all Christians need to be united in love and in the Truth to make a proper impact in this world for the cause of Christ (John 13:34-35; 17:17-23). The only way this worldwide brotherhood can “keep the unity of the Spirit” and “speak the same thing” regarding prayer is to pray “always” to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:10; 14:33; 2 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 4:3; 5:20; Phil. 3:16). Instead of presuming to speak to the Spirit in prayer, may all men listen to Him and obey the divine instructions He has revealed for prayer, because “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

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*For other materials on praying to Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit,
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