

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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IN SPIRIT

Those who have read my writings may have noticed that I often use two expressions, which are opposites in meaning: *in death* and *in spirit*. **For there is no mention of You in death; in Sheol who will give You thanks?** (Psalm 6.5 NASB; also John 11.4; Romans 5.21; 6.16; 1 John 3.14). *In death, the dead know nothing whatsoever* (Ecclesiastes 9.5); but *in spirit*, the living know life, for **the spirit gives life** (John 6.63; 2 Corinthians 3.6).

Now, this issue deals with the matter of *in spirit*, which I admit might be a bit esoteric for some.

In Scripture, the word *spirit* comes from the Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma*. *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 101 - The Usage of *Pneuma* in the New Testament states that *pneuma* appears about 385 times and is used in 14 different ways.

The phrase *in spirit* is generally not found in many English translations of Scripture; it is found mostly in ones that attempt to offer a more literal translation of the Greek. Most translations contain the expression *in the Spirit*, using the article *the* and capitalizing the word *Spirit*. However, in many cases, the Greek does not use the article *the* with the word *spirit* and does not differentiate between upper and lower case. Consequently, *interpretative bias* often determines the use of capitalization as well as the use of articles.

The following are some examples of *in spirit* taken from several translations. Notice how the *Analytical Literal Translation* (ALT) acknowledges that the word *the* is not in the Greek text, noted by its placement in brackets [].

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” (John 4.23 NASB)

Consequently, then, no longer are you guests and sojourners, but are fellow-citizens of the saints and belong to God’s family, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the capstone of the corner being Christ Jesus Himself, in Whom the entire building, being connected together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord: in Whom you, also, are being built together for God’s dwelling place, in spirit. (Ephesians 2.19-22 CV)

As it hath now been revealed by his holy apostles and prophets in Spirit;—that they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through means of the glad-message.... (Ephesians 3.5-6 REB)

During every prayer and petition be praying on every occasion (in spirit being vigilant also for it with all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints, and for me).... (Ephesians 6.18 CV)

Because for this [reason] the Gospel also was proclaimed to [the] dead, so that they shall be judged, on the one hand according to people in [the] flesh, on the other hand they shall live according to God in [the] spirit. (1 Peter 4.6 ALT)

I came to be in spirit [or, in [the] Spirit] on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a great voice, like a trumpet-blast.... (Revelation 1.10 ALT)

Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven (and One sitting on the throne).... (Revelation 4.2 EMTV)

And he carries me away, in spirit, into a wilderness. And I perceived.... (Revelation 17.3 CV)

And he carried me in spirit onto a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, holy Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God.... (Revelation 21.10 LITV)

I readily admit that I may be splitting hairs, but for me, there is a difference between the two expressions *in spirit* and *in the Spirit*, and it is helpful for us to know the difference if we are to have a proper understanding of the true nature of New Jerusalem, which I often state is what Paul saw as the dwelling of God *in spirit*.

As I see it, *in spirit* is a state of being or presence or essence. We have other expressions, such as *in life*, *in love*, *in anger*, or *in fear*. Each of these, and many more, describes a state of being. On the other hand, *in the Spirit* implies that one enters into a place or, in this case, into the Holy Spirit. But how could this be the case for all who have received an earnest of the spirit of God (2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5; Ephesians 1.14 CV)? After all, Paul tells believers that the spirit of God dwells in you (Romans 8.9, also John 14.17; Acts 2.38; Romans 8.11; 1 Corinthians 3.16; 2 Corinthians 1.22; Galatians 3.14; Ephesians 1.13). All who believe have this new life in them; it is spirit life.

Now, when it comes to God, spirit is His very essence. It describes His very nature and His realm. After all, Scripture tells us that God is spirit. Notice how the ALT puts it.

“God [is] Spirit [or, [is] as to His essence Spirit], and it is necessary [for] the ones prostrating themselves in worship before Him to be prostrating in worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4.24 ALT)

The word *is* is not found in the Greek manuscripts of Jesus’ words. It is worded as *God spirit*. His essence is spirit, and all who worship Him must worship *in spirit*. This verse and the preceding one are uniformly translated in most versions as *in spirit* and *in truth*, which captures the meaning that should be conveyed in many other verses that are usually translated as *in the Spirit*.

Consequently, one who is *in spirit* is one who has entered into the very presence of God and who He is, His very essence. It is being in His very nature. Another way to state this is that one is in His realm. Again, it is a state of being or presence or essence. In this state of being, one can see as God sees. Consider John, who, when he was *in spirit*, saw many things that few men have ever seen. He saw the Lord, he saw the throne set in heaven, and he saw New Jerusalem, the dwelling of God *in spirit*. It should go without saying that all who have seen as God sees or have visions related to God’s purpose and plan have been *in spirit*.

Some might argue that John was *in the Spirit*. I won’t quibble over capitalizing Spirit, since this is a matter of preference for those who desire to use capitalization to identify many things associated with God. I once followed this line of thinking but stopped when it became too confusing to me. But what does *in the spirit* mean? I realize that some will answer that he was in the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, Appendix 101 of *The Companion Bible* states that there are 52 incidents in the New Testament where the proper translation should be *in holy spirit* and not *in the holy spirit*, for *in holy spirit* refers to receiving a particular spiritual gift and does not refer to the Giver of the gift. John, like all of us who believe, had the spirit of God within him. Why would he have been caught up in the Holy Spirit? In order to see into the realm of spirit that transcends time, he had to be *in spirit*.

This is how I see it. *In spirit* means operating in the realm of spirit, the realm of God; existing there; living there. It is not merely entering into something, as if being placed in an entity or a person called the Holy Spirit, but being something. We have been given an earnest of the spirit as a down payment of our future inheritance of glorified, spiritual, celestial bodies, at which time we will be forever *in spirit*. We are to grow up in Christ until we are conformed to His image and live continually *in spirit*.

However, until that day, we experience a foretaste of what being *in spirit* is like. Daniel, Paul, John, Peter, and others had a foretaste of being *in spirit* in varying measures, and we are to have a foretaste of being *in spirit* in varying measures as well. Let us seek to be *in spirit*.