

Prayers Addressed to Jesus

To whom do we address our prayers has been in controversy for who knows how long. It appears to have been a problem even in the first century as Jesus instructed His disciples that they were to pray, “*Our Father who art in heaven*” (Matthew 6:9). Today we hear individuals in public prayer addressing Jesus, or switching between the Father and the Son, while even going so far as to pray to the Holy Spirit Himself. The argument is often given that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all God therefore any one of the three can be addressed.

Before we look into this matter in greater detail, let us first define what we are speaking of, because I believe this will help in our understanding of this subject. When we speak of ‘prayer’ in general, we are speaking of the Bible examples of prayer, or petitions with an unseen deity. The words, ‘pray, prayed, praying, prayer,’ denote the making of a request or petition to God, whether in the form of a ‘wanting supplication’ (Luke 1:13; Romans 10:1), a longed for ‘beseeching’ for assistance (Acts 4:31), a ‘thanksgiving’ for God’s boundless blessings (Ephesians 1:16), or an ‘interceding’ on the part of others (Romans 11:2-4).

When we speak of ‘prayer,’ we are not talking about a personal face-to-face conversation between two or more individuals as was the case between Stephen and the glorified Christ (Acts 7:59). If this particular example is to be used as the authority for ‘praying’ then to be consistent, one would have to argue that every conversation is a prayer. Before we allow our emotions to run away with us to the point of losing all rational thought, let’s look briefly into what the Bible has to say about this important subject.

Lord Teach Us to Pray

Prayer should be the life blood of the Christian that ever connects him/her to God. Unlike many societies today who spend special time in prayer, Americans tend not to devote as

much time to prayer. The Jews had specific times three times per day to pray as do Muslims today. Apparently Jesus’ disciples expected Him to teach them how to pray, like John did his disciples (Luke 11:1). Jesus’ example in Luke 11:1-13 and Matthew 6:9-15 are not to be considered a specific prayer that is to be prayed, or sung, as is common with some religious groups, but rather a simple format or blueprint that shows what prayers should include. Please notice what is incorporated in these two examples that instruct our prayers to be addressed to; “*Our Father.*” No where do we find Jesus instructing His disciples to pray to Himself, the Holy Spirit, Allah, Buddha, Mary His mother or to deceased saints. Yet, men and women are insisting that because the Bible does not specifically instruct them ‘not to,’ then we are free to do so.

Calling on the Name

There are those who will argue that we find examples where men are ‘praying’ to Jesus or where Jesus Himself instructs others to ‘pray’ to Him because the phrase, “calling on the name” is found. Context must always be maintained when considering any Bible subject and the phrase “calling on the name” is no different. This phrase has been used from justifying the ‘sinner’s prayer’ to praying to Jesus. While it is true that the word ‘calling’ is used some 32 times in the New Testament, this word has nothing to do with a ‘sinners’ prayer, let alone praying to Jesus or even the Holy Spirit. ‘Calling on the name’ is used no less than ten times to refer to the process of salvation (Acts 22:16; 9:14, 21; Romans 10:13, et al), while other times it is reference to Christ’s authority.

Irrational Interpretation

Think about it rationally for a moment, why would Jesus, who said He was the “Way, the Truth and the Life,” tell us we are to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9), and then confuse the issue by inserting words that appear to teach

otherwise? Would that not make Him the author of confusion; which of course He is not (1 Corinthians 14:33)? The only rational answer can be that it is MEN who are confusing the issue. It was understood as much as two centuries past the establishing of Christianity, that men were to pray to the Father alone. Third Century martyr Origen wrote, “*Now if we are to take prayer in its most exact sense, perhaps we should not pray to anyone begotten, not even to Christ Himself, but only to the God and Father of all, to whom even our Savior Himself prayed ... and to whom He taught us to pray.*” While Origen believed that Jesus was both God and man, he held the belief that prayer should only be directed toward God the Father.

Yet men continue to be irrational in their interpretation of Scripture by the mere insertion that a particular thing refers to praying to Jesus. Whether they point to the use of the word “Maranatha,” or the idea that because we sing songs of praise to Jesus, that means we may then pray to Him is dishonesty gone to seed. There is no denying that we are authorized, even encouraged to give praise to Jesus (Revelation 5:12-13), however worship of the Christ which we have Bible authority for, is far different from praying to Him, which there is no authority to do; unless we pull verses out of context or assert that one thing is justifying another. Remember, our discussion is focused on ‘prayer’ given directly to Jesus, as prayer is defined in Scripture, and NOT face-to-face conversations – these are two totally different things.

The claim (assertion really) is made that Acts 7:59 is proof that one may pray directly to Jesus because the text states that as the Jews were stoning Stephen he “called” on God saying, “*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*” Advocates of Jesus prayer opine that “called” means ‘prayed’ (NIV translation), because Stephen used the words “Lord Jesus,” meaning he was praying directly to Jesus. The fact is, Stephen being the type of man he was in boldly standing for the truth, would not have done anything that was contrary to words of his Lord – namely, praying

to Him rather than the Father. Therefore, the only conclusion that is consistent with proper Bible interpretation is that Luke is recording personal conversation between Stephen and the Christ which is quite different than prayer. Remember, this was a supernatural appearing, just like that with Paul (Acts 9:3-5), that does not occur today.

Those who argue that John 14:13-14 proves acceptability of praying to Jesus, must use the NIV, ESV and NASB translations to do so. The KJV, ASV and NKJV have rightfully excluded the word ‘me’ from the text because it is not found in the leading manuscripts. Then we have a contextual problem in trying to make Jesus instruct His disciples to pray to Him. Going back to Chapter thirteen, verse 31, Jesus is preparing His disciples for His eventual departure. Philip asks the question, “*Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us*” (John 14:8). Jesus answers by telling them that since they had seen Him, they had seen the Father, and that His miracles prove He came from the Father, but that they would perform greater miracles than He did.

Then verse 13 begins with the copulate conjunction ‘kai’ (and) which means Jesus’ thoughts are being continued. That He will send the Comforter to the disciples who would teach them all things, and remind them of Jesus’ teachings. Not to mention that whatever they asked the Father in Jesus’ name, it would be done. Again, Jesus would not tell them at one time to pray to the Father and then another time to pray to Him; that is inconsistent and irrational.

Other irrational arguments assert that the church fathers spoke of praying to Jesus or that there are hymns such as “Just a Little talk with Jesus,” “I Must Tell Jesus,” and “Tell it To Jesus Alone,” that imply praying to Him. We must ask the question - Your point? Neither of these is authoritative as they come from men and not God. While the church ‘fathers’ may assist us in our studies when they are consistent with Bible truth, the fact is that they are prone to be in error and must be accepted in that light. As Paul said, “*Let God be true and every man a liar*” (Romans 3:4). God’s word is truth (John 17:17), and it

alone is profitable for doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16-17). So it matters not what men write, only what God has to say on any subject.

The Godhead

One area that seems to be overlooked when the subject of prayer comes up is the Godhead. While there are those who deny the doctrine of the 'trinity,' simply because the word is not found in the Bible, the principle is certainly taught. In the first chapter of Genesis we are introduced to the idea by one simple Hebrew word "Elohim." Used thirty-five times in the first two chapters, it is a word or a name that speaks not only to the creative and governing power of God, but to His sovereignty and omnipotence, as well as to His united oneness. Elohim is the plural form of the word "El" which is translated "God." Three distinct persons united in purpose to create the perfect environment to prepare mankind for eternity. While all three are united in purpose, will, nature and essence, each, played a distinct role in the creation of the universe.

God the Father whose mind it was that created the plan could be seen as the Great Architect, with God the Son (the Word) being the contractor who performed the creating, and God the Holy Spirit the laborer who move upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2; Hebrews 1:1-3). Concerning salvations gracious plan, it was God the Father who devised it (Ephesians 1:4-10); God the Son who implemented it (Philippians 2:5-9); and God the Holy Spirit who is given as our earnest (Ephesians 1:13-14). This three-fold involvement of the Godhead is also seen in our prayer life. Each person distinctly involved, however not on the same level. God the Father is the one we are commanded to address (Matthew 6:9); God the Son is our advocate as the one through whom we have been given authority to address the Father (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15), and the Holy Spirit who intercedes on our behalf (Romans 8:26-27).

Why is there not as much arguing for us to pray to the Holy Spirit as there is for praying to

Jesus, since the Scripture plainly tells us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us? While some have no problem in praying to the Holy Spirit, it appears that it is more important to them (subjectively) to pray to Jesus than to other members of the Godhead. Christianity to most has become a subjective religion, more than an objective one based upon Bible truth and authorization. Which is why there are thousands of denominations each teaching its own distinctive doctrine, rather than simply following the Words of the one to whom they want to pray to (John 17:20-21).

To Whom do we Address in Prayer?

So it comes down to answering the question, "To whom do we address in prayer?" Despite all the force feeding of the subject into passages of Scripture, or seeking out the opinions of men, it is the duty of every person to seek only what Saith the Lord (Acts 17:11). In the famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus while teaching the multitudes, instructs them that their prayers should not be repetitious or vain; and that they should be addressed to God the Father (Matthew 6:1-9). He gave no alternatives, no middle ground to whom we are to address our prayers!

The Apostle Paul understood the concept of praying to God the Father when he wrote to the Ephesians instructing them of the "giving of thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20); and again to the Colossians when he said, "and whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him" (Colossians 3:17). The term "in the name of" is equivalent to saying "by the authority of" as is the case of the Jewish leaders asking Peter "by what name" or "by what authority" have you done this? (Acts 4:7). The giving of thanks is always to be directed to God the Father – THROUGH or BY the Lord Jesus.

Paul said "giving thanks for ALL things" is unto God the Father – and "WHATSOEVER you

do in word or deed;" again refers to all things, not some things unto Jesus and some things unto the Father; ALL things are to be unto the Father, as Jesus directed the multitudes "Our Father."

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no authority from God whatsoever to pray directly to Jesus or anyone else. Secondly, the Word of God does not contradict itself. Thirdly there is a difference between one-on-one conversations with Jesus and prayer. If it is the case that we can use one example of conversation to make the case for prayer, then we must use all examples of conversation to do so which then opens the door to praying to just about anyone (which some now do). This subject, as with every subject must be looked at objectively, harmoniously, and rationally. All evidence must be drawn before conclusions are made, and we must make sure we are not reading into a verse, rather than drawing out its meaning.

There are three persons in the Godhead, each have a role to play. God the Father being the Great Architect deserves all glory and honor due His name. While we love and appreciate what Jesus has done, and praise is also due Him, it is to the Father alone that we are commanded to direct our prayers. As Paul said, "for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father" (Ephesians 3:14).

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