

“PRAYER” IN THE BIBLE, #1

Prayer in general can refer to a desire and/or petition. In the Bible, we learn that early in the Patriarchal period men began to “call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 21:33). This expression in the New Testament describes the action of obeying God to enjoy salvation (Acts 2:21; 22:16), but this term in the Old Testament is believed to refer to their “prayers”. Prayer in the Old Testament record is often associated with sacrifice to God (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 26:25, leading us to the conclusion that their “calling upon the name of the Lord” **was indeed** their entire submission to God, in “prayer and sacrifice.”

In the Mosaical Period

In the early period of man, very little information is given about prayer. In the Mosaical age, prayer became a common practice of the prophets who often communed with God in seeking advice and guidance, and particularly in the confession of the sins of the people. Moses prayed to God after God's threat to remove Israel from His book because of their sins, as he was able to speak “face to face” with God (Exo. 32:11-13). Samuel prayed to God for Israel at Mizpah, in the confession of their sins and thankfulness for their victory over their enemy (1 Sam. 7:5-13; 12:19-23). David prayed in connection with God's revelation of the future “house” of God (2 Sam. 7:27). Ezra prayed for a “safe journey” in his return to Jerusalem from captivity (Ezra 8:23). Nehemiah prayed before he approached king Artaxerxes, to receive permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall and the city (Neh. 2:4), and prayed in regards to their opposition (4:14). Daniel prayed in the face of opposition (as he had “been doing before”) in the effort to destroy him (Dan. 6:10), and confessed the sins of the people (7:4-19). Isaiah prayed and confessed the sins of the people, and sought God's help (Isa. 63:7-64:12). A prominent feature of the prophets was to confess sin with a longing for communion with God Himself, especially in the prayers of David (Psa. 42:2; 63:1; 84:2).

In the Gospel Age

In the New Testament period, we first look at Jesus and the last days of Moses' law, as Jesus came to prepare people for the kingdom. Jesus set an example of prayer, in the many occasions he prayed, as recorded by the gospel writers. Jesus' own “habit” of prayer shows the benefit of such. When He was baptized, only Luke records the fact that He prayed (Luke 3:21). He once spent all night in prayer (Luke 6:12). Before He fed the multitude, He “blessed” the food in prayer (Luke 9:16). Once, after Jesus had been praying, the disciples asked to be taught to pray, as John had been teaching his disciples (Luke 11:1). This is when He gave the “model” or “disciples'” prayer, as recorded in Matt. 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4). This followed some instructions on prayer in Matt. 6:1-8. Jesus taught that men should always pray (Luke 18:1), and this was followed by the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in their prayers to God (18:10-14).

In the later days of Jesus' life on earth, He prayed for Peter that he might be faithful (Luke 22:32-34). Nearing the end, He prayed the **real** “Lord's prayer”, as He first prayed for Himself in His imminent return to heaven; then for the apostles; and finally for all who would ultimately believe on Him through the **word** of the apostles (John 17:1-26). He gave thanks for the bread and fruit of the vine as He was instituting the “Lord's Supper” (Matt. 26:26-29). This was followed by His own prayers in the mount of Olives, as He prayed when He was exceedingly sorrowful before His arrest (Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46).

On the cross, Jesus did not neglect to pray to the Father. He prayed in regards to His being "forsaken", as per Psa. 22 from the words of David (Matt. 27:46). He prayed for His enemies who were killing him, as He prayed for their forgiveness (Luke 23:34). This prayer was not answered there and then, but at the time when the Jews who at that time "knew not what they were doing", were later **told** what they had done, in crucifying the Son of God, who had become Lord and Christ (Acts 2:23, 36). Upon learning and realizing what they had done, they were pricked in their hearts, and asked what they needed to do. They were at that time given God's remedy for their pardon, and they responded, and upon being baptized, they were "saved" and "added to the church" by the Lord (Acts 2:40, 41, 47). Thus, the prayer of the Lord was answered on the day of Pentecost. On the cross, he prayed to the Father as He gave up His spirit to God's care while His body would rest in the tomb for three days. After the cross and the resurrection, we find that He "blessed" the bread with some disciples in Emmaus, and just before He was parted from the disciples in His ascension to heaven, He "blessed" them (Luke 24:30, 51), which is suggestive of prayer, as seen from the events of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and the occasions where He would bless the food in prayer as He multiplied the food to feed the multitudes.

The church began where there had been prayer (Acts 1:14). The early church prayed (Acts 2:42; 6:4, 6; 12:5). Paul often spoke of his own prayers (Rom. 1:9; 10:1; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3, 9; 1 Thess. 1:2). He often exhorted others to pray (Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-2).

More to Follow.

Don Tarbet, <donwtarbet@cableone.net>

"PRAYER" IN THE BIBLE, #2

In a previous article, we made a general study of prayer as revealed in the Bible, from the Patriarchal period, the Mosaical period, and the gospel age. Surely, much more could be said from the scripture about prayer, especially in reference to our worshiping God in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Prayer is a very essential element in our worship to God, as we commune with God in prayer. God speaks to us through His word (the Bible, the scripture), and we speak to Him in prayer. He wants us to commune with Him in this manner, as well as we commune with the Lord in His supper.

Our final thoughts in this study have to do with the **address**, and by whose **authority** prayer is to be in the gospel age. It is not necessarily the case that we are speaking of prayer in the assembly, but out of the assembly as well, when praying privately, or in our homes and family devotionals. It appears clear that prayer is to be addressed **to the Father** in heaven. Jesus indicated such as He was with the apostles just before He went into heaven. In the model prayer, they were to "pray to the Father" (Matt. 6:6), and pray "Our Father which are in heaven" (v. 9). "Giving thanks always for all things **unto God and the Father** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks **to God and the Father** by him" (Col. 3:17). "We give thanks to God always for you all", who is "God and our Father" (1 Thess. 1:2, 3). Nowhere is it even suggested that prayers are to be to the Holy Spirit, angels, or departed spirits, or even to Jesus Christ.

Many denominationalists pray **TO JESUS**, rather than to God the Father. I have never been able to understand **why** anyone would even think about praying to Jesus instead of God the Father. The religious hymns they have written through the years is evidence of the idea of praying to Jesus. Many of the songs in our hymnals are worded in such a way as to say that our prayers are to Jesus. One such song speaks of praying to Jesus, as **"his children."** Actually, we are not "children of Jesus" in any sense of the word. We are "children of God" (by faith in Christ Jesus, Gal. 3:26, 27). Paul says Christ is not ashamed to call the sanctified ones as His "brethren" (Heb. 2:11). We are brethren of Jesus—not children of Jesus. Matter of fact, we look to Him as our "elder brother." He was begotten of God by means of the Spirit causing Mary to conceive, making Him the "only begotten Son of God", or the only One who was ever or will be begotten in this manner. His brethren today are those who are begotten through the word of God, and are then baptized in water to complete the "new birth" of John 3:5. Then, in Heb. 2:12, Jesus is quoted from the Psalms as saying those in the "church" are His "brethren." Again, in verse 13, He goes on to refer to the brethren as the "children which God hath given unto me" (Jesus). This means that God's children are the spiritual brethren of Jesus, and not children of Jesus.

If you are ever in a denominational worship service, or are watching such on Television, you will be able to see for yourself that their prayers (even the "sinner's prayer") are usually addressed to Jesus. The usual so-called "Sinner's Prayer" (which is supposed to be the prayer that saves an alien sinner---making him a saint) begins with "Jesus" and then closes with the term "In Jesus' name", making the prayer being addressed to Jesus, and telling Him that Jesus authorized him to pray to Himself. Absurd! We need to be careful about the hymns we use, or some of the verses in the songs that we have, and avoid their use in our worship. The influence of denominations in praying to Jesus is evident, as some brethren now advocate that it is scriptural to pray to Jesus.

In John 14-16, when Jesus was **"yet present with you"** (the disciples), he spoke of His departure from them in returning to heaven, but with the assurance He would come again (John 14:25). During the time He was "present with" them, they could ask him questions. He was going to leave them in "a little while" (John 16:16), and then they would not see Him because he was going "to the Father." In the meantime, He would send the Holy Spirit to take His place with them (John 14:25, 26). In speaking of the day He would "go to the Father", He said, **"And in that day** ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall **ask the Father** in my name, he will give it you." Previous to that, they had **not** asked anything "in my name," as He was "present with them" and they did not need to use His name in prayer. However, **"At that day"** (when he has gone to the Father), He said they would "ask in my name", for He was leaving the world and going to the Father (v. 28), so any petition they might have would be **"to the Father"**, but it was to be done "in the name" of Jesus Christ.

It is sometimes "argued" that Stephen spoke to Jesus in prayer in Acts 7:59, who "calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Now, it **could be** that he was addressing "God" (as the Father), with the term "Lord Jesus" as his way of doing it "in the name of the Lord Jesus." However, it more likely, that since he was **seeing** Jesus, he actually addressed **Him** in his petition. Jesus had said that disciples could ask Him things when **"he was present with them"** (John 14:25), but when He was **not** with them (after His departure), they should ask the Father. **Now, in Acts 7, Jesus is WITH one disciple in a special appearance, so naturally Stephen could address Jesus.** Stephen's actions are **not an example for us to pray to Jesus in worship,**

for He is not present with us as He was with the disciples, nor with Stephen when he was being stoned. Jesus is “God” (John 1:1-2), but He is **not** “God the Father” and we are not to address Him in our prayers, but to pray in His name, or by His authority. It is good and proper to “say” something relative to the name of Jesus as we are making our petition, for the benefit of others praying with us, as well as a reminder to God who hears us. Jesus sometimes said things for the benefit of others, and so should we (John 11:42). If we are sent on a special mission to a leader in the world, we would want to acknowledge the one who sent or authorized us to go, so our requests would be granted.

In 1 Tim. 2, Paul enjoins upon Timothy the necessity of praying for “all men”, and especially for those in authority. After this brief paragraph on prayer, he begins in verse 5 by using the word “For” (which is from the Greek word *gar*, which reminds that Paul is making comment in some manner about what had just been said. Two things are obvious here. First, this reminds us of the one **addressed**, God. Second, it reminds us of the one in whose “name” we are to pray (who stands between man and God), namely, or the one who **authorizes** us to pray, “the man Christ Jesus” (verse 5). It is always wise to do everything as God reveals His will to us. Even in the following verses of this chapter, Paul specifies that the males are to do the praying in any gathering where both men and women are present, as well as the males doing the praying when women are not present. This does not mean that a Christian woman can never utter a prayer if no man is present, but it does mean that when men are present, they (the men) are to do the praying—the wording of the prayers.

When mailing a letter in the postal service, we want to properly **address** the letter, and put the required postage stamp on the envelop, which is our **authority** to address and send the letter. If we don't pay the postage, we cannot expect the letter to be delivered. If we do pay the postage, but fail to address the letter, it will not be delivered. So it is in prayer. Let's pray by Jesus' authority, and address it to the God the Father in heaven.

Don Tarbet, <donwtarbet@cableone.net>