

Prayer Is—Is Not!

"One day Jesus was praying ... When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father ...'" (Luke 11:1-2). So, to whom do you pray, and how do you pray? The disciples were not praying to Jesus here; they were asking him how to pray to his Father; who was approached in such awesome terms as, "O God," and "O Lord" in the Old Testament. And Jesus was telling them that since they now knew about his relationship with the Lord God, they should address him in this less formal, but no less respectful way.

In spite of this clear-cut instruction to pray to the Father, it is almost unbelievably disregarded in many prayers offered in public these days, and presumably also in those offered in private! The underlying cause of this very common, regrettable error seems to be the dual use of the term "Lord" in the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament this word refers to the "Lord God"; but in the New Testament we are taught: "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). So we use "Lord" almost exclusively now to mean Jesus.

Though not intentionally intending to ignore our Lord's teaching, that is exactly what we are doing when we address Him in prayer! He didn't say, "When you pray, say 'Lord,'" he said, "When you pray, say, Father." Instead, many public prayers start out with a term that applies to the Father, often even using the word "Father"; but it soon becomes obvious that the Son, not the Father, is being addressed. Many other public prayers violate our Lord's instructions even more directly by starting out with "Lord," or "Dear Lord," or even "Dear Jesus," and continue to address him throughout the prayer.

The way public prayers are ended further complicates this issue. Speaking to his disciples, Jesus said several times in John, chapters 14, 15, and 16, that prayer is to be offered "in my name"; so most public prayers end in the phrase, "In 'Jesus' name," regardless of which person of the Godhead has been addressed. But to end a prayer that has obviously been addressed to Jesus with these words just isn't logical. It's like asking my brother Bill for something, then saying: "I am asking you to do this in Bill's name!" Much more importantly, however, is the fact that such non-biblical prayers are direct violations of our Lord's instructions!

Obeying our Lord in this matter of prayer, certainly doesn't mean that we can't "have a little talk with Jesus"; invite him into our hearts; thank him for his sacrificial death; or express our gratitude that he "is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34). In fact, it wouldn't hurt for us to express our thanks to the Father and to the Holy Spirit as well !!!

Romans 8:32 says: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" In reading this, we usually fail to realize that it had to be infinitely harder for the Father to allow his Son to die than to die himself; so our praise to him has vastly underestimated this marvelous sacrifice.

Also, Paul had just written: "... 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" (Romans 8:26). This he does while he is here to comfort us, to convey our prayers to the Father, to guide us into all truth, and be God's administrator — what a tremendous ministry! — so our praise to Him is long overdue!

Prayer is to be both praise and petition; but our prayers are far more often the latter—a petition for our own needs, than the former—praise to God.

So, to apply our Lord's words here, we "should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" (Matthew 23:23). Also, our failure to join the Son and the Holy Spirit in intercessory prayer

for others is no doubt greatly reducing our effectiveness in winning souls. Isaiah 66:8 reads:

Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children.

This failure to intercede for the lost may be the most serious failure in our prayer life—the one therefore needing our most immediate attention! It is Paul who brings to our attention the fact that our prayer life should be more than an occasional activity, by writing: “Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

This doesn't mean the impossible task of keeping our minds constantly, consciously focused on prayer; but that we are to “never give up,” which applies especially to intercession; for it is possible to constantly maintain a sub-conscious state of rejoicing, supplication, and thankfulness.

A passage that describes those who are glorifying God in this manner is found in 1 Peter 2:9:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

This writer can assure you from personal experience that it takes persistent discipline to change these unfortunate habits into which many of us have fallen. But change them we must, for souls are at stake! So we do urgently need to ask the Father to have the Holy Spirit teach us how to pray, what to pray for, and even more importantly, to pray! And may the God of Eternal Holy Love—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—enable us so to do! Amen!

Yours, "in Christ,"

Brother Jim

Founder, In Christ Fellowship

Website: www.InChristFellowship.org

Email: Support@InChristFellowship.org

Note: You can learn more about this ministry at www.InChristFellowship.org. We encourage you to contact us at Support@InChristFellowship.org if you have questions or need help in applying these truths in your own life. We do not maintain a "membership roll," nor do we solicit monetary contributions; yet, we also encourage you to contact us if you feel led of the Lord, to participate in our efforts in some way.

All Rights Reserved. Any ICF article, whether in digital or printed formats, may be freely distributed provided the distribution is done at no cost to recipients and the source of the article is clearly and visibly identified as www.InChristFellowship.org. Contact us at Support@InChristFellowship.org if you have any questions regarding distribution.

All articles are available in PDF format, and can be freely downloaded from www.InChristFellowship.org for personal use or for distribution as allowed above.