

Why Not Pray to Jesus?

Some brief thoughts by Jason Patrick Hilburn

Worship is something that man must be taught how to do properly, and every act of worship has its own set of instructions (Gen. 4:1ff; Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Prov. 16:25; Jer. 10:23; Matt. 6:6-ff; Luke 11:1-ff; John 4:23-24; Heb. 11:4; 1 John 3:12). Jesus is divine and should be worshiped, but only in ways that are Scripturally authorized. The New Testament teaches that Christians may sing to Jesus and God the Father (Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16-17). It also teaches that Christians are to focus on Jesus during the Lord's Supper after thanking the Father in prayer (Matt. 26:26-27; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). However, even though Jesus can be worshiped in some ways, the Scriptures teach that Christians should pray only to the Father:

1. Christ clearly and repeatedly taught His disciples to pray to the Father (Luke 11:1-2, 11-13; Matt. 6:6, 9; 7:11; John 15:16; 16:23-26, etc.). Christians must now do and teach what Christ taught (Matt. 28:18-20). Those who pray to Jesus may have good intentions, but *"to obey is better than sacrifice"* (1 Sam. 15:21-23; cf. John 4:23-24).
2. Christ taught His disciples that they would ask Him *"nothing"* in prayer after His ascension, but that they would be praying to the Father in His name: *"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"* (John 16:23). Christians do not dishonor Christ by praying always to the Father. It was Jesus Himself who commanded this! *"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* (Luke 6:46).
3. The Father is the ultimate Provider for His children, the Giver of *"every good gift and every perfect gift"* (James 1:17; Matt. 6:6-34; 7:11; 20:23; Luke 11:1-ff; Eph. 1:3, etc.). Understanding this should clarify why both requests and thanksgivings in prayer should be addressed to Him (Phil. 4:6).
4. Passages that seem rather unclear must be interpreted in light of very clear passages in God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15; cf. John 16:23-26; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6-7).
5. Passages allegedly justifying prayer to Jesus are often in the context of miraculous situations. The fact that some people spoke to Jesus or had two-way communication with Jesus in miraculous contexts after His ascension does not prove that Christians may speak to Jesus in such ways today. For example, some say that since Ananias spoke to Jesus (albeit in a miraculous context), there is nothing wrong with Christians today praying to Jesus. Using the same logic, since John made a request of an angel and did not sin in

doing so, Christians today can do the same! (cf. Rev. 10:9; Heb. 1:14). Should one expect the Holy Spirit to audibly speak to people like He did back then? (Acts 8:29; 10:19). Many things happened in miraculous contexts that were not meant to be patterns for the way Christians communicate with heavenly beings today. As brother Thomas B. Warren wrote, some things recorded in the Bible were “optional and temporary.” Christians should focus on obeying the instructions God has given for prayer instead of trying to follow the actions of people who were in the midst of unique or miraculous situations.

6. Even though Paul spoke to Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul prayed to the Father *“always for all things,”* and he repeatedly taught other Christians to do so (Eph. 5:20; cf. 1:16-17; 3:14; Rom. 1:8-10; 15:30; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Cor. 9:11-15; 13:7; Phil. 1:3-4; 4:6-7; Col. 1:3, 12; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:3, 11; 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:3; Phm. 4, etc.).
7. John recorded that *“the prayers of all saints”* ascend up before God the Father (Rev. 8:3-4; cf. John 16:23; 1 John 3:21-24).
8. The verse often used to teach that Christians should seek divine authority for everything done also references praying to the Father *“by”* Christ: *“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; cf. Eph. 5:20). It is also interesting that the Lord prayed for His followers to be *“one”* through the Word He had taught, and that prayer for unity is recorded immediately after He had spoken *“plainly”* about praying only to the Father (John 16:23-29; 17:1ff).
9. In almost every passage teaching prayer only to the Father, Jesus is actually present in the context as well. The fact that Jesus is repeatedly mentioned in the same context with instructions to pray always to the Father is strong evidence that one should not pray to Jesus (John 16:23; Eph. 3:14; 5:20; Phil. 4:6-7, etc.).
10. There are actually several “prayer passages” with all Three Members of the Godhead listed, but the prayers were always addressed to the Father only (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 1:13-17; 3:14-16; 5:18-20; 1 Thess. 2:2-5; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Jn. 3:21-24).
11. Surely if there were ever a time to pray to Jesus, it would be during the Lord’s (Jesus’) Supper. The fact that Christians are taught to follow the initial pattern of praying to the Father during the Lord’s Supper is powerful evidence that there is *never* an appropriate time to pray to Jesus! (Matt. 26:26-27; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; cf. Eph. 5:20).
12. If one could pray to Jesus simply because He is divine, then one could also pray to the Holy Spirit because He is divine. If that were the case, why did neither Jesus nor His disciples ever pray to the Holy Spirit, but only to the Father?

13. As children of God, Jesus is our divine Brother, and God is our Father (John 20:17; Heb. 2:11-12). God is the Father of Jesus, the Head of Jesus, and even the God of Jesus (John 14:28; 20:17; 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:27-28; 2 Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:3; Heb. 1:9). Why then would it be difficult to understand that a certain act of worship could be dedicated to the Head of all beings, the One who has the ultimate authority to grant requests? Jesus said, “...to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father” (Matt. 20:23; cf. John 16:23; Phil. 4:6; James 1:17). The fact that Jesus pleads to the Father indicates that the Father is the One with the ultimate authority to make the final decision (cf. Jn. 14:16, 28; cf. Mt. 20:23; James 1:17); therefore, Christians’ requests and thanksgivings in prayer are addressed to Him.
14. One must not apply everything to God the Son that would apply to God the Father. The members of the Godhead are all divine, but they have different roles in prayer. Christ is our Mediator and intercessory High Priest (1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25); the Holy Spirit was said to be an Intercessor (Rom. 8:26-27); but God the Father is neither a mediator nor an intercessor, because “the prayers of all saints” are “always” directed to Him “in every thing” (Rev. 8:3-4; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6-7; cf. John 16:23, etc.). The Godhead’s distinct roles in prayer must be recognized and respected.
15. The pattern for worship that Nadab and Abihu broke was symbolic of New Testament prayers (Lev. 10:1-3; Heb. 8:1-5; Rev. 8:3-4). The clear New Testament pattern of praying to the Father must be kept today, lest we become as presumptuous as Nadab and Abihu.

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