

WAS STEPHEN PRAYING TO JESUS?

When the subject arises as to “whom” we should pray, the advocates of “prayer to Jesus” almost always and immediately bring up the so-called example of Stephen, as if Stephen could pray to Him, so can we. This is brought up in spite of the fact that nowhere in the scripture does it ever say that we can or should pray to Jesus. Too, this is brought up in spite of the fact that we **are** taught to pray to the Father, in the **name** of Jesus. Let's examine the words of Stephen in Acts 7:59. “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

First, we might keep in mind that **if** Stephen was praying to Jesus, it does not necessarily mean that **we** are authorized to do so. Did not the apostle Paul take a Jewish vow that we are not to take? Did not Peter make a mistake in respecting Jews over Gentiles in Gal. 1? Did not Peter at first refuse to “slay and eat” (not wanting the Gentiles to receive the gospel)? Did not John get rebuked for attempting worship to angels, in the book of Revelation? Peter was caught up in the moment on the mount of Transfiguration and said something without thinking it through. Though these men were inspired of God in their preaching and writing, they were not inspired in their “living” and in the “words” they uttered in life.

Let's look at the context of Stephen's prayer. The scene is not an **ordinary** situation. Here was a man of God, having just delivered an inspired sermon, being stoned to death because of it. The heaven being opened with a view of Jesus standing at the right hand of God was not ordinary, but very special indeed. Such never happens in our time of prayer and worship today. This was a **heavenly vision**. Where is any indication of a pattern or example for us today to address Jesus? Did not He Himself tell the apostles that when He went to the Father, they would no longer ask Him anything, but would ask the Father, in His (Jesus') name? See John 14, 16. Inspired men are not authorized to do things that un-inspired men are to do, though the Lord may lead them in a way that is not characteristic of un-inspired men in any age.

Now, the instructions of the inspired apostles to **us** today reveal the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37). Their message (1) Pray to the Father. (2) Pray always to the Father, Eph. 5:20. (3) Pray always in the name of Jesus, Eph. 5:20. (4) Lift up our voice to God, Acts 4:24. (5) The church is to pray “unto God” (not unto Jesus), Acts 12:5. (6) Even in prison, prayer is “unto God”, Acts 16:25. (7) Disciples gave thanks “to God”, Acts 27:35. True, Jesus is also “God”, but He is not “God the Father.” When Jesus addressed God in John 11 at the tomb of Lazarus, He was not addressing **Himself** as the Lord, but was addressing the Father (John 11:41). The Father and the Son have different roles in the scheme of redemption, as well as in the realm of worship.

One very important, and usually overlooked point of Acts 7 needs to be addressed. Luke, the inspired writer, said that Stephen “**called** upon God” (Acts 7:59). The Spirit moved Luke to use the Greek word “**epikaleo**”, which means “to submit to, or submit to the authority of.” This word is used fourteen (14) times in the New Testament, and is **never** used with reference to “prayer” a single time, nor does it refer to a prayer. Most of the time it is associated with the word “name”, suggesting a submission to authority, doing what is being authorized or commanded. In Acts 2:21, it is used **before** the word “saved”, and not referring to a prayer in connection with salvation. It is used again in Rom. 10:13-14, showing that it pertains to something done to be saved (and certainly not “prayer”). In Acts 22:16, Saul was told to “arise and be baptized, **calling** (Gr. **epikaleo**) on the name of the Lord.” We may speculate as to what was meant in Acts 7:59 about “calling”, but it certainly does not refer to a “prayer”. He was responding to the presence of Jesus who showed His concern about a beloved believer being stoned to death, and it was an appropriate response from a man to His Lord in such a situation. Anyone under an identical situation today might well do the same.

Let's do things the way the way they are authorized, and always be pleasing to God and to Jesus His beloved Son. Addressing Jesus in this manner was no more an example of prayer for us, than was the request of Saul to the Lord in Acts 9 a prayer, nor is the action of John addressing an angel in a vision an example for us to pray to angels today.

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