

Spiritual Perspectives
Praying To Jesus (Response to Christian Courier)
Gary W. Summers

Periodically, brethren ask the question, “Is it all right for church members to pray to Jesus?” The question arises in Open Forums and is also discussed in print. Usually, brethren are assured that we should pray to the Father through Christ, and that settles the issue, but of late the subject seems to have become more popular, and some have specifically requested an article on this subject.

The procedure followed herein will be to examine the arguments of brother Wayne Jackson which he wrote on July 1st, 2005, in an article titled, “May a Christian Address Christ in Praise or Prayer?” Most brethren have the highest regard for brother Jackson, including this writer, and his *Christian Courier* website is outstanding. This disagreement, therefore, is not a personal one against our esteemed brother, but we would be less than honest not to express disagreement with the material he presented on this topic—especially since some are confused as to what constitutes proper conduct in prayer.

Preliminaries

It would not be possible to reply to everything in one article that brother Jackson writes, but the gist of it will be covered, along with some specifics. No reference will be made to the church “fathers,” for example, because although what they did is of interest (especially when they followed the New Testament pattern), their actions and practices do not carry with them the weight of New Testament authority. This article will examine only the Scriptures.

Also, no objection will be offered here with reference to offering up praise to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit. All members of the Godhead are worthy of praise and worship. Against this fact, there can really be no argument, for the Scriptures themselves do this very thing. Our sole question is, “Whom shall we address prayer?”

Matthew 6:9: “Our Father...”

Before making His case, brother Jackson asks if Jesus taught in Matthew 6:9 that prayer may be addressed to the Father *alone*. His answer is that Jesus was not “covering **all** aspects of the theme,” which is true. More information is found elsewhere on the subject of prayer, but nevertheless in this brief model Jesus did not authorize His disciples (either then or now) to pray to Him or to the Holy Spirit. It can scarcely be discounted that Jesus taught His disciples to address the Father—especially when He followed this pattern Himself. The amount of times Jesus mentions the Father in His ministry numbers in the hundreds. Consider Jesus’ own prayers: Matthew 11:25-26: “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”

Matthew 26:39: “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will, but as You will.”

Matthew 26:42: “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.”

Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Luke 23:45: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.”

John 11:41-42: “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.”

John 12:28: “Father, glorify Your name.”

John 17:1: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may also glorify You...”

John 17:21: “...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

After Jesus ascended to Heaven, the apostles used the term *Father* dozens of times, just as Jesus had taught them to do. So, while the model prayer does not deal comprehensively with this issue, it should not be discounted, either.

John 16:23

Brother Jackson says that the context of this verse involves the disciples’ not knowing where He was going, which is true, but then Jesus says, “I will see you again and your heart will rejoice...” (John 16:22). The text also says: “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever You ask the Father in My name, He will give you.” Jackson’s explanation does not diminish the fact that they would ask the Father in Jesus’ name. He repeats: “In that day you will ask in My name...” (John 16:26). Why does Jesus keep repeating this phrase, if He is not establishing a precedent?

Justifications?

The first argument that brother Jackson uses to establish his case is based on a textual variation found in John 14:14. Generally, it is not a good idea to base an argument on a textual variation—and especially one with so little authority behind it that neither the King James nor the New King James put it in the text (although the New King James mentions it in a footnote). Below is the text as found in the New King James:

“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14).

Notice, as per what has already been presented, that 1) Jesus uses the term *Father*, and 2) He expects them to ask the Father in His name. So how do some translations differ? They add the word *me*. Jackson quotes from the ESV: “If you ask *me* anything in my name, I will do it” (emph, GWS). First, this writer prefers to capitalize pronouns that refer to Deity, which the ESV fails to do. Second (and more important), however, is the fact that adding *me* to the sentence makes it, at the very least, redundant, and possibly nonsensical. Why would the disciples ask Jesus something in the name of Jesus?! The hypothetical situation thus created is almost humorous. The disciples ask of Jesus a certain thing, and He answers: “By whose authority do you ask this blessing?” The disciples answer, “Uh, by your authority, Lord.” Hmm. Without the *me*, the verse is consistent with all the other verses. This addition of *me* leaves the impression that such may have been done in order to justify the practice of praying to Jesus. (See previous article on NIV’s addition of “Me.”)

Acts 1:24-25

The disciples are selecting a replacement for Judas, and two men fit their qualifications. They pray:

“You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:24-25).

The question is, “To Whom does the word *Lord* refer—to the Father or to Jesus?” Brother Jackson argues that the most reasonable answer is that it refers to Jesus, and he reports that “a great host of respectable scholars” so say. His rationale is that, since Jesus chose the other apostles, why would He not choose the one to replace Judas?

While that explanation does have merit, other points should also be considered. Why did Jesus not select someone to replace him while He was with the disciples for 40 days? If the prayer is addressed to Jesus, why do they not describe Judas as “the one who betrayed **You**”? The point is that we need to be careful about drawing conclusions based on what a text does *not* say.

He also argues that *Lord* is a term commonly used of Jesus, which is true; however, *Lord* is also used of the Father. But how is the term used in prayer? Acts 4 provides a nearby example for everyone to consider, although brother Jackson made no reference to it. It occurs after the apostles had been threatened by the elders and chief priests. The prayer begins, “Lord, you are God, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them” (Acts 4:24). The prayer goes on to quote from David (Acts 4:25-26). We might wonder who is the “Lord” addressed here, but in this case we have an answer in Acts 4:27-30.

“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. Now Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

No one can successfully deny that the term *Lord* here is referring to the Father; the text is more than sufficient to make that point clear. So, how should we view one that is ambiguous, as in the preceding example? Actually, this is not a difficult problem: If the text clearly defines the Father or the Son, that clarification settles the matter. If the text does not contain enough information, then should we not avoid using such a text upon which to build an argument? The only thing we do learn from Acts 1 and Acts 4 is that it is appropriate to address a prayer to the Lord.

Stephen

Those who advocate praying to Jesus invariably appeal to the case of Stephen, although it is not really germane to the issue at all. As the Jews reacted unfavorably to Stephen’s sermon, they gnashed at him with their teeth (Acts 7:54). He gazed up into Heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at His right hand, which he declared to those present (Acts 7:55-56). The mob cast him out of the city and began to stone him. He cried out, “Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). He also said, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” These are petitions—requests which easily fall in the category of prayer, but there is an additional consideration: They are also direct address. Whenever someone sees Jesus personally, he should feel free to speak to Him in this manner, but under normal circumstances (and Stephen’s death was not a normal situation),

we ought to pray to the Father through the Son. During His public ministry, many people “prayed” to Jesus in the way Stephen did, and Jesus granted many of those petitions, and why not? He was God in the flesh.

Maranatha

The fourth argument follows this same type of thought. Paul said, “Maranatha,” in 1 Corinthians 16:22, which is translated, “O Lord, come!” in the New King James. Does it not seem like a stretch to take a two-word expression and say that it authorizes praying to Jesus? *The Pulpit Commentary* reasons thus:

Maran-atha ; two words, *the Lord cometh* ; like the Jewish *shem atha*, “the Name cometh,” or, “the Lord comes.” It seems to be an appeal to the judgment of Christ... (19:552).

Regardless of which translation is correct, it should be obvious that this expression does not in any way establish the concept of praying to Jesus.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:12-13

The fifth argument that brother Jackson makes is, perhaps, the best one he offers. He points out that Paul besought the Lord three times to remove his thorn in the flesh and that He told him, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Paul adds that he could boast that “the power of Christ” rested upon him. Therefore, *Lord* in this passage refers to Jesus.

One needs to consider, however, the immediate and remote contexts of this passage. Paul’s relationship with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit was different from what Christians have today. Paul was converted by Jesus Himself. In 2 Corinthians 12:2, Paul affirms that he was caught up to the third heaven. Were there ongoing conversations between Jesus and Paul? If so, we do not know how frequent these were or the subject of most of them, but Paul seems to be referring to one here. Notice that Paul pleaded with (not prayed to) the Lord three times, and He spoke to Paul. Is there any evidence that this was not a personal conversation between the two? This occurrence lies in the midst of an argument in which Paul is demonstrating His apostleship. Such a personal “conversation” fits the subject matter. Besides, Paul began this section by saying, “I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord” (2 Cor. 12:1). At the very least, the description of what occurred in verses 8-9 must be considered as possibly one of those. Could Paul be reporting on a two-way conversation rather than a prayer?

It is noted that Paul thanked Jesus for giving him strength, judging that he would be faithful, and appointing him to service (1 Tim. 1:12-13). Since Jesus personally selected Paul (Acts 9), there could scarcely be anything wrong in Paul’s thanking Him—but this fact does not in any way authorize Christians to pray to Jesus. What is the connection?

Praising Jesus

Brother Jackson cites several passages in which Jesus is praised, but these do not prove that we ought to pray to Jesus. We would be foolish to argue that we ought not praise the One who died for our sins (Luke 17:11-19). Furthermore, consider that Psalm 119 is an extended praise of the Word of God; the praise is thoroughly deserved, but no one would say that we should pray to the Word. Praising the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, or the Word is entirely in order, but we pray to the Father through Jesus.

Ephesians 5:18-19

The argument is made that every usage of the word *Lord* in Ephesians refers to Jesus rather than to Jehovah. The fact is that the vast majority of them do. Of the 25 times *Lord* is found, 8 times it is in the phrase, *the Lord Jesus Christ*. But how many have understood, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord," to be referring to Jesus (Eph. 6:1)? What about: "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10)? And how many of us have thought that "singing and making melody" in our hearts to the Lord referred only to Jesus (Eph. 6:19)? Consider the very next verse: "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 6:20). Where have we seen that pattern before (cf., Col. 3:17)?

1 Corinthians 1:2

The last argument refers to the introductory greeting of Paul to the Corinthians: "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). It seems odd that anyone would assume Paul is saying that these words mean that brethren were praying to Jesus when there is a more obvious meaning. Perhaps the reader immediately thought of Acts 2:21: "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (it is the same word in the Greek). Stephen used this word with respect to salvation as he was **calling** on Jesus while being stoned (Acts 7:59).

In fact, this phrase is used often (Acts 9:14, 21; Rom. 10:12-14). Ananias commanded Saul to be baptized, thereby "calling upon the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). We all call upon the name of Jesus in the sense that we are baptized in His name for the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 2:38). Once again, there is nothing in the use of this phrase that indicates brethren were praying directly to Jesus for salvation.

A Workable Solution

Surely, brethren can agree that the Scriptures teach it is appropriate to address a public prayer to *our Father*, the *Lord*, or *God*. If we use these terms, no one will be needlessly offended, whereas if some address a prayer directly to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit, most would find it objectionable. If someone has convinced himself that he has the authority to pray to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit, he can at least do so in private, where he will not disturb the faith of others. No one is unduly restricted (with this course of action), and all the church (all other things being equal) may say, "Amen."

[http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/Praying_To_Jesus_\(Response_To_Christian_Courier\).htm](http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/Praying_To_Jesus_(Response_To_Christian_Courier).htm)

Spiritual Perspectives
"Stephen's Final Prayer" (A Review)
Gary W. Summers

On July 1st, 2005, brother Wayne Jackson wrote an article, titled, "May a Christian Address Christ in Praise or Prayer?" On May 21st of the following year I wrote a response in *Spiritual Perspectives*. I made it clear that the disagreement was not one of a personal nature; many have benefited over the years from brother Jackson's *Christian Courier*. However, since he had taken the time to write on the subject, a refutation was in order. I closed my article by noting that brethren have always had no problems in addressing our prayers to "our Father," "God," or "Lord"—and that we would have no problems in our assemblies if we continue that practice. If someone wants to pray to Jesus privately, he is certainly able to do so, even if he is incorrect. But at least he will involve no one else in his practice.

In August of this year, the *Christian Courier* published a special issue with most of the articles advocating praying to Jesus. Let's begin with the final comments on page 32. We read that the publishers had decided to address "a brewing controversy" (32). One of the main articles within is titled, "The Praying to Jesus Controversy," in which it is asked: "What is the origin of this simmering division: emotion or scripture [sic]?" Brother Jackson laments that we do not need another issue over which to divide, and every sane brother would agree. However, the way to avoid strife has already been stated; apparently that approach does not work for those at the *Christian Courier*.

Division can be avoided if everyone will just agree with brother Jackson. Those who do not probably are not exercising "a moderate measure of common sense" or combining "Bible knowledge and a familial temperament" (16). By making statements such as these, it is easy to observe that those who hold the "praying to Jesus" view exercise common sense and have a familial temperament while those who hold the majority view are shrill, emotional, fanatical, and unable to reason themselves out of a paper bag.

Who Appeals to Emotion?

What is interesting about this implied charge against opponents is that it is brother Jackson who appeals to emotions. He includes an excerpt from something that Wendell Winkler taught at the *Polishing the Pulpit* program on September 27, 2004. His topic was "Lord Teach Us to Pray." He acknowledged that we usually pray to the Father through Jesus, but then he says that we need to be careful about telling someone they can not pray to Jesus. Using himself as an example, brother Winkler acknowledged that after the Lord's supper He thanked the Father for His unspeakable gift, and he also thanked Jesus for being willing to die for him. Then he asked, "Is there anything wrong with that?" (15). Are we now taking a different approach in studying the Bible? For years, we have been saying that we need authority for what we teach and practice (Col. 3:17). Are we going to abandon that in favor of requiring proof that something is wrong? A question was raised from the audience concerning praying to the Holy Spirit. Brother Winkler confessed that there were times during his illness that he did not know what to say, which is understandable. He asks: "Would I have sinned against God if I had said to the Holy Spirit: 'Intercede for me, please'? Do you think I've sinned if I make that statement?" (15). Well, what

person in the audience is going to jump up and say, "Yes." Most have marveled at brother Winkler's ability to present outstanding lessons from God's Word, and he did suffer a great deal from cancer. But these things do not mean that he was right or wrong in his thinking on this subject. How is this different than a denominational person (having endured similar health problems) saying, "I sometimes play the piano and sing hymns at home. Is anyone going to tell me that's wrong?" What about someone who says, "While I was sick, my daughter came in and led prayer for my family over me every day. Do you think I sinned in letting her do so?"

So why did brother Jackson include this text from brother Winkler? While it is true that he addressed the subject briefly, he made only one appeal to the Scripture, and even in that one he appealed to himself as an expert witness. He said concerning the words of the first martyr at his death, "Brethren have tried to explain that every way in the world, saying that wasn't a prayer. If that wasn't a prayer, I don't understand prayer" (15). If brother Jackson did not include this page for its emotional value it possesses, what was the purpose? It is not brimming with Bible knowledge, which brother Winkler usually possessed.

Stephen's "Prayer"

The text in question is Acts 7:59: "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'"

Is it not interesting that a short sentence of five words (six in the Greek) should elicit such controversy? However, if these five words constitute a prayer, then what about Stephen's final words, which were, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." If verse 59 contains a prayer, why does not verse 60? However, brother Jackson discusses, verse 59 and calls it "Stephen's Final Prayer." Hmmm.

Jackson provides 5 reasons why Stephen's words constitute a prayer. The first of these contains no point of disagreement regarding the Greek verb meaning to make a request (30). Berry's Interlinear uses "invoking." No one disputes that Stephen is making a request. Jackson quotes Mounce as saying it is a prayer, but this begs the question. Mounce is giving an interpretation—that the request is a prayer. The text does not use the word *prayer*.

Second, Jackson claims: "The present tense suggests the petition was repeated" (31). While such might be a possibility, surely no one would want to argue that every present tense implies repetition.

Third, it is claimed that the middle voice indicates Stephen's intense personal need at this time (31); everyone can surely understand this point, but it does not advance the case for Stephen's words being a prayer.

Fourth, Jackson claims: "The term frequently is employed of an 'appeal to God in prayer' as here," and he appeals to Kittel & Friedrich (31). Of course, the reader sees the use of the term *frequently* implies that at other times the word is not used in connection with prayer. In fact, of the 32 times the word is used in the New Testament, at most one could claim 10 such instances, but most of these involved calling on the name of the Lord as it pertains to salvation (Acts 2:21; 22:16; Rom. 10:12, 13, 14). In those instances, calling on the name of the Lord refers to the salvation process and becoming a Christian. The Acts 7:59 text is the only recorded instance of

specific words being uttered in connection with calling upon God. Jackson's case on this point has been somewhat overstated.

The fifth point is as follows:

Several recent translations render the expression, "he was praying" (cf. NIV, Williams, Good-speed, Weymouth, McCord) (31).

This is a strange "evidence" for Jackson's case, since he already pointed out that the verb literally means "calling upon." He failed to mention the New Living Translation along with many of the other paraphrases he listed, which actually is recent (2007). Charles Williams' translation was 1937, although there is a newer Montreal edition (2005). Goodspeed's version was originally published in 1923. Weymouth's translation was also known as *The New Testament in Modern Speech* or *The Modern Speech New Testament*. Weymouth compiled it and used it in the 1800s; he died in 1902, according to Wikipedia. His version was edited and first published in America in 1903—just two years after the American Standard Version. Brother McCord's translation is dated from 1987.

Many of these are more paraphrases than translations, including the NIV, whose "dynamic equivalence" theory of translation makes it difficult to determine when it is accurate and when it is a paraphrase. [See "[A Review of the NIV](#),"] Hugo McCord's translation is well done for the most part, but it is not without flaws, and this is one of them.

Many other more recent translations than some of the versions cited keep the verse literal. Among them are the New American Standard Bible (1995 edition), and brother Jackson's favorite, The English Standard Version of 2001. Perhaps this "proof" was only mentioned as informative rather than convincing.

The final effort to sway the audience to Jackson's point of view is to furnish a few quotations. First cited is M. R. Vincent, who commented on Acts 7:59: "**An unquestionable prayer to Christ.**" However, this is an opinion—not part of the word study. He had previously dealt with identifying Jesus as the recipient of the request. A. T. Robertson made the same assessment, but as with Vincent, this is an assumption. Neither one made any effort to *prove* it was a prayer; that conclusion was simply their assessment.

Finally, H. Leo Boles is referenced as referring to what Stephen said as a prayer no less than five times, which is absolutely true. However, did Boles mean to say by what he wrote that Christians should pray to Jesus? Did Boles himself address his public prayers to Jesus? Now that would be information that was relevant. If Boles did hold that view, the important thing would not be his position on the topic, but the *reasons* that he had for having arrived at that view. In his *Gospel Advocate* commentary on Matthew, he does not speak about addressing Jesus in prayer; he only comments on how the addressing of God in the Christian era differs from approaching Him under the law.

Wrong and Sinful?

Some today are teaching that praying to Jesus is wrong and sinful, brother Jackson laments. However, a more fundamental question is, "Is praying to Jesus authorized for Christians today?" The question is not, "What happened while Jesus was upon the earth?" The Bible leaves no room

for doubt as to the way He was regarded. Jesus was worshipped (Matt. 8:2; 9:18). He made it clear that He was Deity and had the power to even forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12). He even identifies Himself as the I AM who spoke to Moses at the burning bush (John 8:58; Ex. 3:14).

Thus, this “controversy” does not involve who Jesus is or if He is worthy of praise or worship. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessings!” (Rev. 5:12). Those who reject praying to Jesus (and if we made a list, it would be quite lengthy) are attempting to show respect for what our Lord taught, when He said to address prayer to the Heavenly Father (Matt. 6:9; cf. John 16:23). Why should it matter to Christians if we pray to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? They are all Deity, and they have all played a part in our salvation. We have no vested interest in selecting one over the other—except that Jesus *said* to pray to the Father, and we want to do only what we are authorized to do.

Did Stephen pray to the Lord? Consider two other texts. In Matthew 14 Jesus came walking on the water to the boat, and Peter told Him to bid him to come to Him on the water, which Jesus did (v. 29). After Peter looked at the effects the wind was having on the water, he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink. He cried out, “Lord, save me!” The Lord rescued Peter. Would we classify this as a prayer? While Jesus was on the cross, the thief said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Are all of these prayers, direct address, or urgent requests?

And what about the blind man near Jericho? He first cried out for mercy (Luke 18:35-39). Jesus asked him what he wanted Him to do for him, and he answered, “Lord, that I may receive my sight” (Luke 18:40-41). Jesus granted his request. Was this a prayer or a conversation? All of these involve direct address, and a request, but none of these constitute prayers as we usually think of them. In fact, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* lists the following two definitions first for the word *pray*:

1. To utter or address a prayer to a deity or other object of worship.
2. To make a fervent request; plead; beg....

Of course, the important thing is that the same definitions and concepts were around in the first century as well as today (Luke 14:18-19, et al.). In torments the rich man looked up to see a great man of faith and the friend of God. He addressed him: “Father Abraham,” and asked for relief which was denied (Luke 16:23-24).

Was his request a prayer to Abraham? Many are likewise unconvinced that what Stephen said constitutes a prayer, but even if it could be so categorized, it furnishes no pattern for us—unless we also see Jesus and can talk directly to Him.

New Testament Prayers

What would be profitable would be to see what the early church did by way of addressing prayers. A brief prayer is found in Acts 1:24-25, which begins, “You, Lord....” Nothing stated shows conclusively whether the Father or the Son is being addressed. However, in Acts 4 is a recorded prayer, and we do know to whom it is addressed: “Lord, You are God, who made the

heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them” (Acts 4:24). If this were all, the point might yet be disputed, but Acts 4:27 removes any doubt: “For truly against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontus Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together....”

If anyone doubts that there is a heavy emphasis on the Father in the New Testament, he should simply look up and see how many passages contain that appellation. Ephesians contains 8; Colossians 6, 1 John 12, and most of the other books contain several. In addition to those instances, the thought of John 15:23 is repeated in Ephesians 5:20 (to be examined later). On two occasions, Paul mentions that by the Holy Spirit we cry out, “Abba, Father!” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Notice that we do not cry out, “Jesus!”

Where is the example of anyone praying to Jesus in the New Testament? Stephen seems to be the only text that can be cited, and the problems in making such a claim have already been dealt with. Brother Jackson closes his comments about Stephen by trying to assert that a supernatural appearance does not make a sinful action all right and then rather peculiarly tries to parallel an incident concerning John and the angel to Stephen and Jesus.

When John fell down and worshipped the angel, he was rebuked for doing so—twice (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). The fact is, however, that such a practice had never been allowed, and no time ever existed when it was permissible. People made requests of Jesus constantly while He was on earth; so Stephen, upon seeing Jesus, did not do anything that had not already been done.

This “controversy” does not need to exist. Many of us over the decades have traveled the country over and have never heard anyone leading a prayer addressed to Jesus. Nor is there any reason for anyone to insist on this idea now. In fact, it would disturb most brethren in many congregations. As it was pointed out previously, no compelling reason exists for making such a change. Why is it that brethren are always desirous of introducing something that would wound someone’s conscience (weak or otherwise)? It is certainly not *necessary* to address public prayers to Jesus; so why insist that it be done? Who is the one causing “controversy”?

[http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/Stephens_Final_Prayer_\(A_Review\).htm](http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/Stephens_Final_Prayer_(A_Review).htm)

Praying To Jesus?

Gary W. Summers

Yet another question was raised on the fourth day of this year's Open Forum at Freed-Hardeman University, which merits further attention. The question seems to be multifaceted:

Is it proper to address worship to Jesus and the Holy Spirit specifically and individually? Is it Scriptural to pray to Jesus? Many leaders in the church direct their prayers toward Christ even though many verses in the Bible discourage it. There's one verse in the NIV which says Stephen prayed to Christ during his stoning. Does this make it okay?

These questions are not new or unique. They have been asked and answered many times. Ralph Gilmore's answer, however, was unusual in that it first disagreed and later sort of agreed with what most brethren teach.

Well, I would say, first of all, that we have customarily sung songs of worship to Jesus in the past. It's just that they have been kind of disguised, and we didn't think about them. "Worthy of praise is Christ our redeemer, worthy of glory, honor, and power." That's a direct song we have sung for years with no controversy. Why is there controversy now among some to worship Jesus when, if you look through some of the hymnody that we have been comfortable with for years, it's there already.

First of all, this defense is an *Argumentum ad Populum*. Just because we have been doing something that people enjoy does not mean that the practice is correct. How many years have some been observing "Easter" or using instruments of music in worship? The Lord condemned man-made traditions (Matt. 15:1-9).

Second, singing "Worthy of praise is Christ our redeemer" (see Revelation 5:12) is not the same as praying to Jesus. Preaching or singing about Jesus cannot be legitimately questioned since the New Testament records sermon after sermon about our Wonderful Savior. Surely there is no controversy over songs of praise; brethren have questioned songs that encourage *praying* to Jesus, but those objections are not new.

But now it seems as though, with some of the stresses of postmodernism on the church today, and the fact that, as some go further to the left, it isolates and crystallizes those to the right, and, as some go further to the right, it pushes some to the left, and as we seem to be in a process of fragmentation here, it seems that some things we have done in the past that were not controversial at all now are getting scrutiny from the brotherhood.

Wow! That is quite a sentence! Regardless of postmodernism, the right, and the left,

however, we, of all people, ought to be happy to reevaluate any practice that we have. Should we preach to others that everything we teach and practice must have Biblical authority (Col. 3:17) and then try to exempt ourselves because something we currently practice has not been questioned previously (not that brother Gilmore was advocating such)? We should always be willing to examine what we do by comparing our practices with the Scriptures. Only by doing so can we be confident that we continue to please God and not men. As careful as we have tried to be, we dare not think that Satan has not or cannot deceive us. We must ever be vigilant (1 Peter 5:8)--both as individuals and as the church.

The Case for Praying to Jesus

Brother Gilmore at last cites what he apparently thinks authorizes praying to Jesus.

In Acts 7:59, Stephen, as he is dying, calls on the name of the Lord Jesus. In Revelation 22:20, it is John the revelator who says: "Come quickly, Lord Jesus."

The passage in Acts 7:59 certainly authorizes speaking to Jesus: 1) when a person is being stoned; and 2) when he sees the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). Since this event is so early in the history of the church, it may be that Stephen knew Jesus while He was upon the earth; therefore, it would be entirely understandable if he spoke to Him. But if not, Jesus nevertheless is Lord, King, and Head of the church, which is His body, of which Stephen was a member. Since he was being put to death for preaching the Gospel of Christ, it is scarcely surprising that he addresses the One for whom he is giving his life.

The NIV does erroneously render the Greek verb in this passage "prayed." Imagine that, the NIV making one of its many "dynamic equivalence" blunders! The Greek verb, *epikaleomai*, is from the Greek verb, *kaleo*, meaning "call." With the preposition, *epi*, in front of it, it is translated in the King James as "surnamed," "call, calling, called" (Acts 2:21; 22:16), and "appealed" (Acts 25:11-12). Incidentally, the NIV never translates this verb as "pray" in the other 31 times it appears in the New Testament.

What about John's comment in Revelation 22:20 (Rev. 12, 16-17, 18-21)? The entire verse says, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" The next time Jesus speaks to one of us personally that He is coming quickly, we will undoubtedly be free to say "Amen" by way of response! But how does this exchange authorize praying to Jesus as a matter of common practice? Surely we can recognize the difference between a prayer offered to God and an enthusiastic response to a statement uttered by the Lord in the hearing of one of His servants! These two passages do not authorize praying to Jesus; they are personal, direct comments made to a visible and/or audible Savior.

Jesus was accustomed to worship even when He was a baby--when the wise men came and worshiped Him in Matthew 2:2. Jesus became accustomed to worship because He was above angels. Hebrews one, verses 8 and 9, clearly talks about Jesus being worthy of worship. Matthew 28:9--there it talks about the women who bowed down, and the Greek word *proskuneo*, they worshiped Jesus.

These references are correct; they prove His Deity.

In Revelation chapter 5, toward the end, the verse, you have the elders who are there on the throne scene of Revelation 4, worshiping God the Father --Revelation 5, worshiping Christ the Lamb. They are worshiping Him. So I'm gonna make a bold statement here. Not only is it okay to worship Jesus; I think it is very regrettable if we don't. He is worthy of worship.

At this point, Benjamin Apple came to the microphone to say that the question was not, "Can we worship Jesus?" Rather the question was "whether we're authorized by Scripture to pray directly to Jesus instead of in His name."

Well, in Acts 7 and Revelation 22, there are those two places.... Jesus says in John chapter 14 that, if you ask in My name, the Father will grant it. However, you have Acts chapter 7 and you also have Revelation 22, which indicate there are a couple of occasions when a prayer is addressed, although a short prayer, to Jesus. So, Ben, I think my answer would be, from an expedient point of view (and from a point of view that I feel most comfortable with), that you continue to pray to God the Father, as we have seen in Matthew chapter 6. And I don't see any reason to change that, but it's not worth a fight over. And I would just say that we continue to pray through our Mediator, Jesus Christ, who is there to help, and that we pray to God the Father.

First, if Acts 7 and Revelation 22 constitute the sole authority for praying to Jesus, then we really have none, for the reasons already cited. Second, it is the correct conclusion to say that we should pray to the Father through Jesus Christ. Gilmore referenced Matthew 6:9, in which Jesus taught the multitudes to address the Father when they prayed: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name."

Third, is it worth a fight over? It is worth studying. Presumably those on both sides of the issue want to do what is right. We know that God (the entire Godhead) is to be worshiped, honored, and glorified. To do so properly means that we must do all things according to His Word. We know that we are plainly authorized to pray to the Father through Christ. Are we authorized to pray directly to Jesus? If so, where?

Hardeman Nichols made some pertinent comments on this subject:

And in the passage in John 16:23, Jesus is talking about the time that He'll be leaving the disciples, and He said, "And in that day"--after He goes back to Heaven--"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. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name. Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be made full." So Jesus' position in our praise and worship is not to address Him directly, but rather to address God through Him and acknowledge His priestly state.

An Example of Prayer

Sometimes, in addition to a principle, such as the one found in John 16:23-24, it is helpful to have an example; in this case we are blessed to have recorded for us a prayer offered by the disciples in Acts 4:24-30. It begins by addressing the Father as "Lord" and then adding, "You

are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them." We know that the Father is addressed by the use of the word *Lord*--not because Jesus is not also so designated at times, but because Acts 4:27-28 state:

For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

The disciples again address Him as Lord in Acts 4:29. Their request was that they might with all boldness "speak Your word" and that their preaching might be accompanied by "signs and wonders" (Acts 4:30). The unity of the Godhead is seen in this passage. The brethren speak of God's Word (while addressing the Father) although the Word is inspired of the Holy Spirit. Concerning the miraculous, they ask the Father to stretch out His hand to heal and for signs and wonders to be done "through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." The next verse says that they "were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

The Father is the One addressed in the prayer, but they petitioned Him that signs and wonders be done through the name of Jesus to accompany the bold preaching. Peter had preached that those on Pentecost should be baptized *in the name of Jesus Christ* (Acts 2:38). The lame man was made strong through Jesus' name, "through faith in His name" (Acts 3:16); signs and wonders were to be done "through the name of the holy Servant Jesus"; and (in fact) whatever we do "in word or deed" is to be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17).

All of these verses strengthen the concept of addressing prayer to the Father through Christ, our Mediator and High Priest.

Praying and Singing to Jesus

An anonymous individual from Alabama wrote on another person's Web site:

I have been a member of the traditional *Church of Christ* for 58 years and have been told all my life that I must pray to God--*not* to Jesus. ...why is it unreasonable to "talk" to my Savior who is my advocate and through whom I must go to reach the Father?

First, the New Testament does not speak of the **traditional** "Church of Christ." We either follow the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, or we do what we feel like doing (will worship). If this anonymous person has been taught to pray to the Father through Christ, it has probably been because of the principles cited in this article.

Second, theoretically, a person may speak or sing to Jesus all day long: "Worthy Art Thou." Third, why stop there? Why not also speak to the Holy Spirit and praise Him for giving us the inspired Word (without which we would have no knowledge of any of these matters) and for confirming it with signs and wonders?

Fourth, if Jesus is truly our Lord, then should we not do as He says? He taught us to pray,

"Our Father..." (Matt. 6:9). He told the apostles to ask the Father in His name (John 16:23). Fifth, the approach advocated by this anonymous writer degenerates into a subjective, touchy-feely testimonial: "I will never forget the closeness to Jesus I felt at my first talk with Him!" Well, that settles it! Such a *feeling* certainly proves the case! Next we will be asked to accept as brethren those who had this warm feeling throughout their bodies when they first believed in Christ, though none of them were baptized for the remission of sins, according to the Scriptures. God gave us His word so that we would have an *objective* basis for our beliefs rather than determining all things by our *subjective* feelings.

Concerning the songs we sing, there is nothing inappropriate about singing praises to God, whether of the Godhead, the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit. The anonymous brother from Alabama cited, "My Jesus, I Love Thee" as singing a prayer to Jesus. He is mistaken in thinking that every time we address someone, it constitutes a prayer. If a woman stands by the grave of her husband of fifty years and speaks to him, is that a prayer? She does not expect an answer, but she might say, "I am proud to have been your wife, and I still love you." She might honor and praise him--without the expectation of a reply. How much more appropriate to honor our Savior, who has *risen* from the dead. Such does not constitute praying.

There are some songs that do advocate praying to Jesus, and these are inappropriate and in conflict with what Jesus taught. If we violate what Jesus said to do (pray to the Father through Him), then how can we possibly honor Him? The most flagrant (but there are others) is "Just a Little Talk With Jesus." It teaches error with respect to salvation: "And then a little light from heaven filled my soul; It bathed my heart in love and wrote my name above." The talk with Jesus, however, is for the purpose of prayer: "He will hear our faintest cry and He will answer by and by." This approach is not one of glorifying Jesus for His great work; it advocates praying to Him instead of the Father through Him. We ought to be careful of what we sing.

Songleaders should be careful of the songs they choose. Since singing is for the purposes of praising God and edifying ourselves, it is a means of teaching. Certainly, we do not want to teach ourselves false doctrine. Not all songs are as blatant as "Just a Little Talk With Jesus" or "Tell It to Jesus Alone" (the very word *alone* prompts the question, "What of the Father?"). Many songs simply include a phrase which sets forth the idea. Whether in prayer or in song, let us all approach the Father through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

<http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/praytojesus.html>

Spiritual Perspective
May We Pray To Jesus: The Biblical Perspective (A Review, Part 1)
Gary W. Summers

Having already examined the quote by brother Wendell Winkler, the final comments, and the view concerning Stephen's "last prayer," the goal is now to comment on one of the larger articles from the August *Christian Courier* special issue. Before doing so, however, it might be interesting to note that those who produced this 32-page booklet seem fairly happy with themselves because they mention that, as a result of the original 2005 article, "many have written to *renounce* the idea they once entertained—that one cannot address Christ in prayer and song" (3). As Proverbs says: "The first one to plead his case seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him" (Pr. 18:17).

Brother Jackson begins by alleging that "a vocal minority" within the church opposes praying or singing to Jesus. He may be overstating the case since statistics are not cited; so this point remains an unproven assertion. Anecdotal evidence to the contrary includes the fact that some congregations avoid songs addressed to Jesus ("Tell It to Jesus," e.g.), although those that praise Him have always been acceptable. Many of those who have conducted gospel meetings or attended lectureships have never heard anyone address a prayer to Jesus.

Likewise, brother Jackson talks about a "leading advocate" of the "theory" that forbids praying to Jesus, but the reader does not know who that person is, and nothing is cited from this individual, such as a letter or published material on the subject. Of course, the reader has no way to verify the alleged positions of this nameless man. It is doubtful that many people would agree with some of the things the "leading advocate" says (as presented). To avoid future confusion, brother Jackson has permission to quote this review and use my name if he finds fault with the contents—even though I am far less than a "leading advocate." In this way, his audience will not have to wonder who wrote these words or where they have appeared.

Matthew 6:9

In light of the fact that brother Jackson has had five years to make the best case possible for his position, it is surprising that he offers so little concerning the two main passages that establish the "praying to the Father" idea. He rightly points out that the prayer Jesus presents is only a model prayer and that every subject is not dealt with specifically. He also relates that other Scriptures legitimately have a bearing on any given text. In this instance, Jesus is speaking of addressing God reverently. "Our Father" is appropriate. We find out from other passages that *God* or *Lord* also was used. But where is the passage that addresses a prayer to Jesus?

If Jesus were addressed in prayer and such was approved, it would settle the matter, but He is not. The only time Jesus is asked something is the moment when someone is speaking to Him personally, as with the thief on the cross or Stephen. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find a prayer addressed to heaven that begins, "O Jesus, our Lord and risen Savior." If we did, then

we would all feel comfortable about doing the same thing, but no such example exists. The name of the Father is mentioned frequently and distinctly from Jesus numerous times in the epistles. Perhaps we should likewise keep that distinction clear.

Jackson's proof of his position comes in the form of a quotation from William Shedd (d. 1894), who was a Presbyterian, high Calvinist theologian (according to Wikipedia). Shedd claims that, in addressing the Father, we are not excluding the Son or the Holy Spirit. Does that hold true for Jesus? When Jesus prayed in the garden, He prayed to (John 17:9, 15, 20) and addressed the Father no less than six times (John 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25); was He also addressing Himself? Have we not always taught that the Father is the leader and originator of plans in the Godhead? We cannot fail to honor God if we pray to the Father, as Jesus taught us.

In the prayer in Acts 4, the disciples mentioned that all were gathered together against God's holy servant, Jesus (Acts 4:27). They did not say, "Jesus, we know how everyone was gathered together against You." In David's humble psalm of repentance, he did not pray, "O Holy Spirit, do not remove Yourself from me." He prayed to God, "And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). Nothing of what Jackson says or cites in this section on Matthew 6:9 establishes his view.

John 16:23

Jackson makes three arguments concerning this verse. The **first** is that Jesus is not dealing with the issue of whether or not to address Him in prayer. In this verse Jesus says: "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatsoever you ask the Father in My name He will give you." While Jesus may not be dealing with this issue per se, that fact does not mean that what He said has no bearing on the matter. Regardless of the context, He still says they would ask Him nothing but rather the Father in His name.

Second, Jackson says that this verse only pertains to questions that had been bothering the disciples "at the moment," and when they received the Holy Spirit, those matters would be cleared up (5). This is a strange explanation. *First*, from John 14:23 to 16:23 the disciples only had one question:

Then *some* of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

These verses do not fit Jackson's theory at all. *Second*, Jesus said He had things to say to them that they could not now bear, but the Holy Spirit would explain them later (John 14:25-26; 16:12-13). The *third* thing is that John 16:23 fits within the context of Jesus explaining what He meant by the words quoted above. They would have sorrow when He was crucified—but joy when He was raised from the dead (John 16:22). In that day, when He was resurrected and ascended to Heaven, they would ask Him nothing (since He would no longer be upon the earth). But what they asked the Father in His name (since He personally would be absent from the earth), He would give it to them. Jesus repeats, "In that day you will ask in My name..." (v. 26). (John 16:22-26)

The **third** argument Jackson uses is from W. E. Vine: "The Lord did not mean that no prayer must be offered to Him afterwards. They did address Him in prayer, Acts 1:24; 7:59; 9:13, etc."

The prayer in Acts 1:24 is addressed to the Lord, but nothing further in the context indicates that the Lord in this case refers to Jesus. The prayer beginning in Acts 4:24 is also addressed to the Lord, but it is clearly the Father (Acts 4:27). Stephen's "prayer" to Jesus was discussed previously. See articles Praying To Jesus or "Stephen's Final Prayer" (A Review).

The third verse Vine cited was Acts 9:13, and it is a conversation—not a prayer. Jesus commissioned Ananias to go lay his hands on Saul that he might receive his sight (10-12). Ananias **answered** (notice, answered, not prayed):

Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests, to bind all who call on Your name (Acts 9:13-14).

The Lord then reassured Ananias, and he accomplished the task he had been assigned. It is an extreme stretch to use this conversation as an example of prayer. Why not use the conversation between Jesus and Saul as well? When Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" (Acts 9:5), was he praying as well? How about when asked what the Lord wanted him to do (Acts 9:6)? One may as well try to claim that, when Peter was told to rise, kill, and eat, and he said, "Not so, Lord," that this was a prayer, also. If there were *any* passage that *clearly* exhorted brethren to pray to Jesus, it would be cited, and this controversy would be at an end. Instead proponents of "praying to Jesus" appeal to verses that do not say what they claim and try to obfuscate others.

Deity is Worshipped

Even though praising, honoring, and worshiping God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is a separate matter from Whom one should address in prayer, Jackson still insists upon confusing the two. He goes so far as to equate those who refuse to worship Jesus as being on a par with the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-9 (6). But these hysterics are totally beside the point. Do we not praise Jesus in our prayers? Yes. Do we not praise Him in song? Of course, we do! These are nothing but red herrings that Jackson uses to sway the reader over to his position and prejudice the case against those who follow what Jesus said to do by praying to the Father.

John 14:14

Jackson puts great stock in John 14:14 to support his case even though the verse only says: "If you ask [me] anything in My name, I will do it." The King James, the American Standard, and the New King James omit *me*, but the New American Standard and the English Standard Version have it. The disputed word is contained in some manuscripts but not others. Jackson tries to establish its legitimacy by saying that Bruce Metzger "cites some of the oldest and best manuscript witnesses" in its favor (6). Hmm. Is this the same Bruce Metzger who rejects Mark 16:9-20 as being inspired of God, and is he using those same "oldest and best manuscript witnesses" that the NIV references when they denounce Mark 16:9-20? Will brother Jackson stand with Metzger against Mark 16:9-20? The answer to this question is one that many brethren would probably like to know. (Thankfully brother Jackson does stand against Metzger on Mark 16.)

The fact is that the same two manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) that **omit** Mark 16:9-20 are the two leading authorities that **include** *me*. While Jackson lists certain scholars that think the

word belongs, other scholars reject its inclusion. Generally, brethren refrain from using a disputed text upon which to build a doctrine. Even if *me* did belong in the text, it would still not prove that Christians today are to pray to Jesus. There is no reason to think that verse 14 is doing anything more than just echoing verse 13, which has no *me*: “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father be glorified in the Son.”

Acts 1:24 and 7:59 Revisited

Brother Jackson presents a reasonable explanation for concluding that Jesus is intended by the term *Lord* in Acts 1:24. Perhaps his best reason is that Jesus chose the other apostles and would be the natural one to select a successor for Judas (6). It is true that Jesus is often designated as Lord, but so is the Father. In the Acts 4:24 prayer, the Father is originally addressed as *Despota*, but later He is called *kurie* (Acts 4:29), which is identical to the term in Acts 1:24. *Kurios* also clearly refers to the Father in Acts 4:26, because He is distinct from His Christ. The best that can be said of Acts 1:24 as “proof” for praying to Jesus is that it is a good circumstantial case, but Acts 4:26 and 29 make it less than compelling.

The only additional information concerning Stephen’s “prayer” to Jesus is what Jackson cites concerning comments that Guy N. Woods made in a question and answer session after a gospel meeting. While we all have a tremendous amount of respect for brother Woods’ ability, no human being is always correct. So if he concluded that Stephen “prayed,” he was entitled to think so, though many brethren disagree, but the point still is, “Did he ever address a public prayer to Jesus?” If he had, it would not prove that he was correct in doing so, but if he did not, one must wonder why.

“O Lord, Come”

Has the reader noticed that many of the so-called prayers to Jesus are short? One is reminded of the Weird Al parody of George Harrison’s song, “Got My Mind Set on You” (the last number one song by any of the former Beatles) which he titled, “This Song’s Just Six Words Long.” That’s about the length of many of the alleged “prayers” to Jesus—except this one is even shorter. Does the Aramaic word, *maranatha*, mean, “O Lord, come”? Is this a **prayer** on the part of Paul (1 Cor. 16:21-23) (8)?

Much has been written concerning its meaning, but the text suggests that Weymouth (one of Jackson’s favorite paraphrasers) is right. Paul just finished saying that those who do not love Jesus are anathema. The most logical explanation is that he is providing a vivid reminder—especially to those who do not love the Lord—that He is coming. Weymouth renders it: “If any one is destitute of love to the Lord, let him be accursed. OUR LORD IS COMING” (1 Cor. 16:22).

However that verse is to be properly translated, Revelation 22:20 is clear: “Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!” Well, what do you know? This “prayer” is just six words long. Seriously, it is simply a rejoinder. It follows Jesus saying, “Surely I am coming quickly,” and many think that the Amen goes best with the Lord’s promise. All John is doing is responding to what Jesus said.

2 Corinthians 12:8

Paul does beseech the Lord three times to remove the thorn in his flesh, and it may well be that Paul made this request of Jesus rather than to the Father. But we have no evidence that this beseeching was not done in a personal way, just as Stephen's request was directly made of the Lord. The fact is that we have recorded instances of Jesus interacting with a few of His preachers after His resurrection. We have already noted the conversation with Peter in Acts 10, as well as the one with Saul in Acts 9.

Paul did not have the privilege of being with Jesus upon the earth, as the other apostles did; so Jesus spoke with him on various occasions. One of those times was in Corinth when the Lord told Paul that He had many people in that city (Acts 18:9-10). This occurred some 25 years after Jesus ascended into heaven. Paul did not receive the gospel that he preached from the other apostles; it came "through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:10-11).

In 2 Corinthians 12:1, Paul mentions that he had received "visions and revelations of the Lord." We do not know how often or how extensive these may have been. It is possible that Jesus and Paul conversed and that Paul beseeched Him personally concerning the thorn. That this occurred in a conversation is implied by what Paul records: "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly will I boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9). It could scarcely be considered wrong for Paul to ask Jesus for something when he was personally conversing with Him any more than it had been for the apostles to do so previously when face to face with the Lord.

1 Timothy 1:12-13

How pertinent to this topic is Paul's thanks to Jesus for His putting him in His service (1 Tim. 1:12-13)? Once again, this was an action that was personally done. In Acts 9, when Ananias protested to Jesus that Saul was a persecutor of Christians, the Lord revealed to him that He had personally chosen Saul and would reveal to him "how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (1 Tim. 1:15-16). Is it any wonder that Saul would thank Jesus continually for having given him the opportunity to serve (when he so little deserved it) and having counted him faithful as well? Who could fault Paul for thanking and praising Jesus for personally selecting him to be an apostle? These facts, however, in no way authorize Christians today to pray to Jesus—but to the Father in His name.

[http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/May-We-Pray-To-Jesus-The-Biblical-Perspective-\(A-Review,-Part-1\).htm](http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/May-We-Pray-To-Jesus-The-Biblical-Perspective-(A-Review,-Part-1).htm)

Spiritual Perspectives

May We Pray To Jesus: The Biblical Perspective (A Review, Part 2)

By Gary W. Summers

The article with the above title is a lengthy one that appeared in the August, 2010 *Christian Courier*. Brother Jackson's main proof for his position consumes 11 pages; therefore a lengthy response is required.

1 Thessalonians 3:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

The above verses are cited as evidence that Christians can pray to Jesus (instead of to the Father through Him). These verses are listed below.

Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

The fact that some commentaries (including some by brethren) have referred to these benedictions as prayers is pretty much irrelevant. The reader can decide for himself if he would classify these comments as prayers to the Father or to Jesus. Most are familiar with the song, May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You. All such sentiments are merely expressions of kindness extended towards others. In both Thessalonian letters, Paul completes sections of his letter with these fond spiritual blessings and then resumes his letter by saying, Finally (1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:1).

Revelation 5

John is describing the heavenly scene in which it is revealed that the Lamb is worthy to open the seals on the scroll. The scene records the four living creatures and the 24 elders falling down before the Lamb. They sang a new song and proclaimed that the Lamb was worthy to open the seals; they offered praise to Him.

On this much all can agree, but Jackson focuses on one comment about them having golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8). Jackson writes: Clearly, these prayers were ascending to Christ (10). How is that clear, brother? They were looking for someone to open the seals—not answer prayers. Nothing is said about them presenting the prayers to Jesus. These verses are silent about Him answering any of them. When they praise Jesus, it is for Him redeeming Christians—not for Him answering prayers. Such a comment smacks more of eisegesis than exegesis.

Hebrews 1

Brother Jackson correctly states that the purpose of Hebrews 1 is to show that Christ is exalted far above the angels and that certain psalms make mention of it. He then claims that the author

directly addresses Jesus in praise:

In Psalm 2 David praises the Anointed One with these words: You shall break them [Jehovah's enemies] with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps. 2:9; cf. Rev. 2:27; 19:15).

The only problem with this point is that, although David is the one recording these words, he is not the speaker in this text. David is the speaker until verse 6; consider the entire context:

Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, You *are* My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.

The Father, in verse 6, speaks of setting up His King in Zion (which would be Jesus). In verse 7 Jesus declares that the Lord told Him, You are My Son. Today I have begotten You. Verse 8-9 also contains the words which the Father spoke unto Him. So it is not David, after all, who is addressing Jesus; it is the Father. Furthermore, the Father is not praying to the Son; He is simply speaking to Him.

Hebrews 1 also cites Psalm 45:6-7, but even in Hebrews 1:5-6 and 8 it is clear that the Father is the speaker. Jackson does not claim otherwise for the Psalm 45 text, but it is a further example of what he claimed for the Psalm 2 text, which was that the author [meaning David], by divine inspiration, directly addresses the Messiah in praise (10). Although it is not obvious in Psalm 102:25-27 that the Father is speaking to the Son (as in the two previous instances), it is nevertheless claimed by the writer of Hebrews that such is the case (Heb. 1:8-13).

Ephesians 5:18-19

Virtually all brethren are familiar with Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, since we use these verses constantly to point out that God said to sing but did not authorize instruments of music. Both texts advocate that Christians sing with songs and hymns and spiritual songs to the Lord. Has the reader ever thought that the Lord refers specifically to Jesus? Jackson claims that this is so. In fact, he writes that not only is it permissible to sing to Jesus, it is absolutely required! (11). As already explained, no one has any problem with singing praises concerning the greatness of our Lord and Savior—only songs intended as prayers to Him. Jackson's comment, however, seems quite adamant. On what basis does he draw such a conclusion?

He cites some commentators that say that the term *Lord* occurs 26 times in Ephesians and always refers to Christ never to the Father. What does an examination of this claim reveal? A search of various words in the book of Ephesians yields the following. The name *Jesus* appears 21 times, *Christ* 46; *God* 32; *Father* 11; and *Lord* 26. Without question, all of these words are used several times, but now what about the term *Lord*? Does it always refer to Jesus in Ephesians? At least nine times, *Lord* is attached to *Jesus*; so there can be no question in those instances.

But what about Ephesians 6:10-17? We read that Christians are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God. (vv. 10-11), which is repeated in verse 13. One could argue that all three words refer to Jesus (and they could), but certainly such a conclusion is not warranted by any textual evidence. It could just as easily be the Father. What

about, Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right (Eph. 6:1). Do we know conclusively that Jesus is intended here? Whose will is intended in, "Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17)? Does not the Divine will usually refer to the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 1:1)?

Ephesians 5:20

No, brother Jackson did not discuss this verse, which is interesting, since it follows immediately after verses 18-19 (Eph. 5:18-19). It continues after singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. In fact, it is part of the same sentence: giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This phrase simply reiterates what we have set forth from the beginning—that we pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. This verse harmonizes with what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:9 and John 16:23. Colossians 3:16 ends with singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Verse 17 (Col. 3:17), however, begins with *and*. Notice the parallel to Ephesians 5:20. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Scripture is consistent with itself.

1 Corinthians 1:2

An appeal is made to 1 Corinthians 1:2 to authorize praying to Jesus. Jackson thinks that the phrase, *with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus*, since it is present tense, indicates that Christians are continually praying to Jesus. This might be a valid point if instances existed in which brethren actually did pray to Jesus. His assumption is not altogether a bad one, but it overlooks two important pieces of evidence.

First, the context of 1 Corinthians 1:1-31 is to emphasize the Christ as the One we all belong to so that there will be no division in His church. Toward that end, the name of Jesus, the title of Christ, or both are mentioned ten times in nine verses, leading up to Paul's admonition in verse 10 that brethren be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (including the matter of to whom we are to pray).

Second, Jackson overlooks how the phrase, *calling on the name of the Lord*, is usually used in the New Testament. We first see it in Acts 2:21, where Peter quotes Joel: And it shall come to pass that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. As Ananias was sent to Saul, he protested that Saul had authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name (Acts 9:14). Shortly thereafter, Saul of Tarsus was told: And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Undoubtedly, those words made a great impression on the persecutor of Christians who was then ready to be an apostle of Christ. As Peter had, he also cites Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13 and then adds: How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? (v. 14).

No evidence in 1 Corinthians indicates that Paul was declaring that all Christians were praying to Jesus. He is simply using the phrase in verse 2 the way it had always been used—to refer to those who call upon Jesus for salvation. He had just finished referring to those who were sanctified and called. This is merely expanded to **all** who call on His name.

About Versus To

It is a strange argument that tries to equate the two prepositions mentioned above. Basically, the argument is this: In Exodus 15:1-5 God is praised in the third person. Next He is addressed in the second person from verse 6-17 (Ex. 15:6-17). Then third person is used again (Ex. 15:18). The reader is supposed to conclude, therefore, that whether we address praise *to* God or utter praise *about* Him is insignificant. This conclusion is incorrect. Just because it makes no difference which preposition is used in one instance does not mean it never matters which one is used. If it never mattered, then why are there two different prepositions?

The difference between other prepositions, such as *in* and *into*, may not matter in some cases, but it would definitely cause a difference in interpretation in other passages. How about an example? If the postman delivered a letter *to* you, you would have it personally. If he delivered a letter *about* you, who knows who might end up receiving it? A more serious point would be that we are all comfortable singing praises about Jesus, since He is worthy, but many do not want to sing a prayer to Jesus any more than to pray to Him directly—again, not because it matters to us, but because it matters to the Father and the Son.

The Church Fathers

Jackson closes out his arguments for praying to Jesus with the *ad verecundiam* fallacy of logical faulty appeal to authority. He calls upon the church fathers following the close of the Divine testimony we have in the New Testament. Sometimes these men can be of legitimate value—to show what was done or not done in the first few centuries after the church was established. If what is quoted reflects a departure from what the New Testament teaches, then, although it shows what was done, it does not necessarily reflect God's approval. For example, if brethren began conducting worship on Tuesday afternoons, we would wonder why they changed it from Sundays (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Without anything to substantiate such a practice in the New Testament, we would have to conclude that the practice, though done early, was not authorized. On the other hand, if the church met on Sundays and history recorded that they continued to meet on Sunday, then it shows that they maintained the established tradition.

Brother Jackson quotes from Ignatius of Antioch, who asked the Christians in Ephesus to pray to Jesus on his behalf (13). Since Ignatius' life spanned from A.D. 35-107, this seems impressive at first glance. The fact is, however, that departures from the truth were also under way even at this time, and Ignatius was quite vocal in insisting on one of them. His name and letters can be found on the Internet. He wrote that brethren were to be subject to the bishop in his letters to the Ephesians, the Magnesians, and others. Philip Schaff writes: The subject of these epistles consists of earnest exhortations to obey the bishop and maintain the unity of the church (2:115-16). Schaff, in his *History of the Christian Church*, goes on to provide a summary of Ignatius' thinking:

The human bishop is the centre of unity for the single congregation, and stands in it as the vicar of Christ and even of God. The people, therefore, should unconditionally obey him,

and do nothing without his will. Apostasy from the bishop is apostasy from Christ, who acts in and through his bishops as his organs (2:116).

Clearly, at a very early time, the church had already entered into apostasy by elevating one bishop above his fellow presbyters. For this reason, Jackson should not have appealed to Ignatius and those who were of an even later time. They are not reliable unless they uphold what the Scriptures teach. Jackson cannot claim that they uphold the New Testament, since that is the very point at issue. We have nothing, despite Jackson's best efforts to find something—anything—to prove his point, in the entire New Testament that **clearly** teaches that Christians prayed to Jesus. If that passage existed, he would not need to search for another dozen questionable references to convince us all. One plain verse would end the discussion.

Conclusion

Jackson concludes with a reaffirmation of his thesis and a quotation from brother Thomas B. Warren, which is another faulty appeal to authority—not that brother Warren did not know the Scriptures. He is among those whom we admire the most as one who did great and lasting good for the Lord's church. But like brother Woods, we do not esteem him as infallible. The quote from brother Warren looks as though he agrees with brother Jackson: After brother Warren exhorted the readers of his book, *Jesus—The Lamb Who is a Lion*, to thank Jesus for teaching us how to pray, he adds:

O Jesus, Thou Lamb of God—how deeply grateful we are for Thy love which resulted in the gift of Thy life for us! Help us to pray as Thou taught us to pray (201-202).

It may be that brother Warren was projecting himself into the situation of having been taught personally by Jesus and thanking Him for it—just as the lepers also thanked the Lord for their healing (Luke 17:11-19). But if not, the key phrase is that we should pray as Jesus has taught us. These words appear in a chapter in which brother Warren analyzed the prayer beginning in Matthew 6:9. Notice what he said about, Our Father:

We are also taught by Jesus to pray as children to our *Father* (Matt. 7:7-11). If we human fathers respond with loving concern when our children need and ask for our help, we should never doubt for a moment that our loving heavenly Father will always react to our requests by blessing us! Let us pray as *children of God*! (191-92).

[http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/May-We-Pray-To-Jesus-The-Biblical-Perspective-\(A-Review,-Part-2\).htm](http://www.spiritualperspectives.org/articles/documents/May-We-Pray-To-Jesus-The-Biblical-Perspective-(A-Review,-Part-2).htm)

