

Prayer Addressed to Jesus

It is common to find praying to Jesus being practiced in the denominational world. One even observes prayer to the Holy Spirit, Mary, and to various "saints," in some circles. There is no doubt about the efficacy of prayer (Phili. 4: 6, 7, I Jn. 3: 20-22). However, does it matter to whom prayer is addressed and is there any relevant teaching to guide the Christian in the matter of how to direct prayer? (We must have Bible authority for all practiced, I Pet. 4: 11, 2 Jn. 9-11.) It is an incontrovertible Bible fact that the Godhead is actively involved in prayer. God the Father is seen as being addressed; God the Son is presented as the advocate for the praying Christian; and God the Holy Spirit is observed as making intercession for the Christian and assisting in the articulation of prayer (Matt. 6: 9-15, Eph. 3: 14; I Jn. 2: 1, 1: 9; Rom. 8: 26). To be plain, prayer to Mary, Peter, or certain saints is not even hinted at in the scriptures. Hence, such practices are without Bible authority and should be rejected. After a similar fashion, there is no teaching in the Bible pertaining to prayer to the Holy Spirit. The Christian does not pray to the Holy Spirit because a special work of intercession is assigned to the Spirit in the assisting and approaching the Father relative to the prayers of the Christian and because we are told that the Father is addressed as opposed to the Holy Spirit. Prayer is to the Father and through Jesus (Rom. 1: 8, 7: 25). The fact that the Holy Spirit is deity is irrelevant. The Bible presents a pattern in prayer and role for each member of the Godhead. However, we are told that while the Bible does not teach prayer to Mary or different saints, prayer to Jesus is taught. The proponents of prayer to Jesus tell us that authority for praying to Jesus is established in three ways: the examples of prayer to Jesus; arguments that authorize prayer to Jesus, and by express teaching.

Alleged examples of prayer addressed to Jesus. There are numerous claimed examples of praying to Jesus. Let us examine some of the most often used.

The two blind men. When Jesus and his disciples departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed them, among them were two blind men who besought the Lord thus:

"And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David...What will ye that I shall do unto you? They said unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened..." (Matt. 20: 30, 32, 33).

Those who advocate prayer to Jesus usually have a very broad definition for prayer. As seen in the above alleged example of prayer to Jesus, they classify an actual conversation as prayer. Perhaps it must be stipulated that by "prayer to Jesus," we mean Jesus presently (since his ascension) being addressed in the climate of petition, beseeching, or thanksgiving, what we commonly think of as prayer. There are admittedly many such examples of people asking Jesus for different favors while Jesus was here on earth. However, such examples do not constitute what we think of as praying to Jesus today. Using this rationale, one can justify prayer to Peter (Acts 10: 22, 23).

The case of Stephen. Stephen is one of the most often used examples of one who prayed to Jesus. Consider the account:

"54: When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 55: But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56: And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57: Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58: And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59: And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60: And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7).

Beloved, we must point out that there are a number of special and unusual aspects in the case of Stephen. In the first place, Stephen actually "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (vs. 55, 56). Upon seeing Jesus in this miraculous revealing, Stephen then proceeds to talk to Jesus (vs. 59, 60). Hence, the example of Stephen is not a normal circumstance and does not lend itself to what we commonly think of as prayer, as such.

The example of Paul in his experience in the third heaven or paradise. We are told that Paul prayed to Jesus and that such an example is for the Christian to mimic today. "...I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me," we are told regarding Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12: 8, 7). It does appear that "Lord" refers particularly to Jesus in the setting (vs. 9, 10). Again, though, we have special and unusual conditions. Paul has been "caught up into paradise" and appears to have actually talked with Jesus (2 Cor. 12: 1-10).

The example of the early church. Still another offered example is the church in Jerusalem. Based on the persecution of the apostles and their resolve to continue preaching the word, the church offered a prayer "to the Lord" (Acts 4: 23-31). We are told that "Lord" (kurios) peculiarly refers to Jesus, beginning in Acts 2. I do agree that kurios often refers to Jesus (see Acts 2: 36; 4: 33, 5: 14, 7: 60, 9: 13, 2 Cor. 12: 8ff.). However, kurios does not always and without exception identify Jesus. It is evident that the one particularly addressed as "Lord" by the church in Jerusalem is not Jesus. I say this based on verses 26, 27, 30 of Acts chapter 4. The Father is clearly shown to be the one addressed as "Lord" in the prayer.

Some arguments used in an attempt to authorize prayer to Jesus. There are several arguments that are considered as definitive proof for praying to Jesus.

"Cannot we talk to our advocate, Jesus Christ, to assist him in presenting our case to the Father," it is reasoned, "certainly we may!" For the most part, the movement within churches of Christ that promotes prayer to Jesus maintains prayer is not to be offered to the Holy Spirit. Hence, the argument that the Christian must pray to Jesus

in order to explain his case is strange when we realize that the Holy Spirit is presented with a similar role as Jesus. The Holy Spirit is also an Intercessor, who also assists the Christian before the Father (Rom. 8: 26, cp. 34). Beloved, the argument that since Jesus is an advocate and intercessor for the Christian means the Christian is to also pray to Jesus is human reasoning that involves unnecessary inferences that are not based on scripture.

It is contended that since Christ is sinned against on occasion by the Christian, the Christian must pray specifically to Jesus for forgiveness. It is true that Christ can be sinned against (I Cor. 8: 12 cp. Matt. 5: 23, 24). However, the Holy Spirit can also be sinned against (cf. Heb. 10: 29). Again, in view of many who use this argument while excluding the Holy Spirit as being the object of prayer, the argument proves too much. This argument is also an appeal to human reasoning and not to the explicit teaching of the scriptures regarding the order of prayer and the role of each entity comprising the Godhead.

The text that some consider to be explicit teaching authorizing prayer to Jesus. Out of all the examples and arguments used in an effort to justify prayer to Jesus, the most challenging of all is John 14: 13, 14. The verses read thus (I shall present the King James rendering, Received Text, and then a reading based on the Westcott/Hort text:

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (KJ). "And whatsoever ye ask in the name of me, this I will do, that may be glorified the Father in the Son. If anything ye ask me in the name of me, I will do" (Interlinear Greek-English New Testament, Nestle/Marshall, it will be observed that regardless of which Greek text is used, Jesus still says "I will do it;" albeit, the Westcott/Hort text which is used for most translations today makes Jesus' involvement plainer by saying, "If anything ye ask me...I will do").

It should first be pointed out that Jesus is speaking to the twelve apostles (see chapters 14 through 16). There is also the presence of special teaching that peculiarly applied to the twelve. In the immediate setting of the so called proof text, we find Jesus telling the twelve that they would do greater works (miracles) than even he did (vs. 12). We read of the special circumstance of the apostles being taught all things and having the Spirit bring to their remembrance what they had already been taught (Jn. 14: 26). The twelve were also promised to be miraculously led into all truth by the special guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16: 13). In fact, Jesus' promise that when he was asked, he would do it is part of the promise that the twelve would perform greater works than Jesus (Jn. 14: 12-14, notice that verse 13 begins with the copulative conjunction "and" (kai) which indicates continuity of thought. The apostles on another occasion constitute a special situation relative to prayer, Matt. 18: 19, 18).

Developing the deeper meaning of John 14: 13, 14. Much of the teaching found in this section of John 14 is in response to Philip's question. "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us," Philip requested of Jesus (Jn. 14: 8). The answer to Philip's question afforded Jesus an excellent opportunity to teach the oneness of the Godhead. "...he that

hath seen me hath seen the Father," Jesus taught (vs. 9). Jesus also taught oneness concerning the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them that the Spirit whom he names as the "comforter" would come (vs. 16, 17). To stress oneness, he then proclaimed, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (vs. 18). Jesus is not saying that he and the Father were one being (vs. 10, 11). Jesus also shows the separateness of him and the Spirit when he says "another comforter" (allon parakleton, a comforter of the same sort as Jesus, but different entity wise, vs. 16). I believe, therefore, that the statement Jesus made to the twelve "I will do" is a play, if you please, on the unison of the Godhead Jesus is stressing. When speaking out of the context of the oneness of the Godhead, Jesus makes it plain that, "whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (Jn. 15: 16, see also 16: 23).

Based on the immediately foregoing, some are heard saying, "does not this prove, then, that it does not matter whom you address in prayer, the Father or the Son?" No, this does not automatically follow. As we have seen, there is an established order (revisit the introduction). At this time, before "the end," the Sonship or subjection of Jesus to the Father remains in place (I Cor. 15: 24-27). However, at the end "shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15: 28). This contemplated subjection of the Son is new and involves the ending of the Son status, as far as position and "rank" in the Godhead is concerned. The wording, "That God may be all in all" means, "Consisting of the three persons, without respect to any peculiar office or kingdom" (Whitby and Hammond, referenced by Albert Barnes in his commentary, Notes on the New Testament, Vol. 5, pg. 302).

In conclusion, based on all that is taught about prayer, the one to whom prayer is addressed and the present role of each member of the Godhead is clearly set forth in the scriptures. Prayer is directed to the Father through Jesus, with the Holy Spirit assisting in intercession (Rom. 1: 8, 7: 25, Eph. 5: 20, Col. 3: 17, I Jn. 2: 1; Rom. 8: 26). There is no teaching found regarding prayer to Mary, saints, or to the apostle Peter; neither is there clear teaching regarding prayer addressed to Jesus. Man must learn, "not to think above that which is written" (I Cor. 4: 6, notice "of men" in the King James is supplied and not in the original). In the emphatic language and resolve of Paul, "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3: 14). (For a more detailed study of this subject, click on "[An Exchange on Prayer Addressed to Jesus.](#)")