

The Meaning of Prayer

Many know by memory the Master's Model Prayer. Yet, do they think of what they are really asking when they repeat His words? Here is a lesson about prayer that bears repeating.

It has always been man's innate desire to reach out beyond himself, to tap the unseen powers beyond his own sphere, in an effort to achieve results outside his reach.

Even primitive, pagan man acknowledged unseen powers or beings beyond himself. Because he was not able to see or prove the existence of such supernatural powers, he created icons of these imagined forces. With them he hoped to get a physical handle on powers of the invisible spirit world.

Some pagan practices involved carving a talisman or totem pole from wood or stone and then inviting a spirit deity to inhabit that humanly created object. Other objects might include a "good luck" bracelet, ring or brooch to ward away evil spirits.

The Bible tells us not to rely on icons, images or figures made by man for our worship or protection, neither are we to bow down to them. Yahweh is the only true Creator and Heavenly Father.

To Whom Do We Pray?

As far back as Adam, many Biblical examples reveal that man was able to converse with his Creator and He would respond.

We are not to take up the ways of the heathen, but to follow examples of righteous men given us in the Bible.

Our Savior told the woman at the well in John 4:24, "*Yahweh is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*" Yahshua was obviously alluding to the fact that He would soon die for the sins of the world and shortly thereafter the Temple would be destroyed. Yahweh's ways had become so corrupted that Yahweh allowed Jerusalem to be conquered by the Roman armies in 70 C.E. For almost two thousand years there has been no sacrificial animal offerings carried on in Jerusalem.

Since the destruction of the Temple, the priesthood is no longer functioning and sacrifices are now in abeyance. Anciently an offering had to be brought by the worshiper. Now, however, it is possible for repentant sinners to approach the Mighty One of the universe directly in prayer at all times. By accepting the sacrifice of the Savior, we acknowledge our sins and can approach the throne of Almighty Yahweh.

The question before us as believers in the Bible is, to Whom are we to direct our prayers and worship? Who will answer our prayers? Christianity teaches a Trinity, that is, three persons make up one G-d. This Trinity supposedly consists of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all of whom are said to be equal.

If they are all equal and able to answer prayer, to which of the three should we preferably direct our prayers of praise and thanks?

Do we pray to the Father? To the Son? To the Holy Spirit? What does the Bible teach on prayer? To which member of the heavenly Majesty do we address our prayers? Your Bible had the sure answers, Acts 17:11.

Giver of Perfect Gifts

The Old Testament clearly shows that worship and prayer were made and directed to Yahweh the Heavenly Father. He is the one who established Covenants with those He selected. He began

with Abram, Genesis 15:18, continued with Isaac, Genesis 26:2-4, then Jacob, Hosea 12:4-5. Later this Covenant was written and codified, and given to all Israel, Exodus 24:3-10.

Paul shows that we as modern Israel are grafted into the olive tree of Abrahamic promise, Romans 11:17-19. Thus, the very promises first made to Abraham are ours if we accept Yahshua as the salvation Yahweh has sent to this earth.

Paul clearly reveals this in Galatians 3:29, "And if you be Messiah's, then you are Abraham's seed according to the promise."

Paul emphasizes those who "*have been immersed into Messiah have put on Messiah,*" Galatians 3:27. Thus through faith in the Messiah and baptism into His Name we become sons of Yahweh (Gal. 3:26).

While we pray to the Father, our prayers are through the Savior and it is only through Him that we have access to our Heavenly Father:

"Yahshua said unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

When asked about prayer, the Savior told us to address our prayers to the Heavenly Father, even calling Him "Our Father," Matthew 6:9. Note that He is the giver of every perfect gift:

"For every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning." James 1:17.

We Still MUST Ask

Even though Yahweh knows our needs, we still must ask. We must be persistent in prayer. We are to learn patience, for He answers in a way that is for our own good. Yahweh does not always give us whatever we ask for. At times the answer may be slow in coming to make us reconsider our petition that we do not ask amiss.

"Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask him." (Mat. 6:8)

We are encouraged to ask and persist in prayer. If every prayer were answered immediately, we would soon become spoiled children, lacking discipline, thinking only of ourselves and seeking our own pleasure.

"Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his sons ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" (Mat. 7:7-11)

Prayer that stops at the Ceiling

The following verses show that Yahweh is attentive to those of a humble mind and those who are striving to be obedient to Him:

"Then Peter opened [His] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that Yahweh is not respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with Him." (Acts 10:34-35)

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." (1John 3:22)

Those who disregard Yahweh's law and are in rebellion against Him do not have a favorable hearing. Willful disobedience together with an arrogant, presumptuous attitude can make one's very prayer become sin.

"He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer [shall be] abomination," (Prov. 28:9)

The Bible is clear that Yahweh does not hear sinners, but he listens to those who have turned to Him through Yahshua. Note the words of the man born blind in John 9:31, *"Now we know that Elohim hears not sinners; but if any man be a worshiper of Elohim and does His will, him He hears."*

Peter wrote in 1Peter 3:12, *"For those the eyes of Yahweh are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of Yahweh is against them that do evil,"* taken from Psalm 34:15-16.

"They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love. Set a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin." (Ps. 109:3-7)

If at times we feel our prayer are getting no higher than the ceiling, we might remember the words found in Lamentation telling us that Yahweh has blocked Himself with a cloud mass:

"Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Yahweh. Let us lift up our hearts with [our] hands unto Elohim in the heavens. We have transgressed and have rebelled: You have not pardoned. You have covered with anger, and persecuted us. You have slain, You have not pitied. You have covered yourself with a cloud, that [our] prayer should not pass through." (Lam. 3:40-44)

Pray in This Manner

Prayer has been described as the act of petitioning, prayer, giving thanks, or confessing to Elohim. Prayer can be individual or in a group. Prayer can be either audible or silent. The Mighty One of the Bible is a personal being who hears the prayers of His people, 1Kings 9:3, Psalm 34:15, Matthew 7:11, 1John 5:14-15.

The Savior is a perfect model and a wise instructor in all things. He prayed on many occasions, including His baptism, *"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Yahshua also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened."* (Note: this is understood as the opening of a heavenly or deeper understanding of events.)

He also prayed at the calling of His disciples, Luke 6:12; the transfiguration, Luke 9:29; His ordeal in Gethsemane, Luke 22:39-46; and His impalement, Luke 23:46. He was in an attitude of prayer at all times, and we also should be in this attitude.

Most Bible believers are quite aware of the prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, also known as "The Lord's Prayer." (See Luke 11:2-4 also). Note that we are to pray "in this manner." Not to memorize the prayer, but to follow the pattern. Yahshua prayed:

"Our Father Which art in heaven."

We acknowledge that He is our Father and as children we are to be obedient to Him. He resides in that third heaven, the spiritual realm that pervades His creation. He is always present and aware of us.

"Hallowed be Thy Name."

His Name is set apart for Himself. He alone has that Name, and it is His personal, memorial Name by which He wants to be remembered. We are to keep it holy by reverently calling upon His Name. We cannot keep the Sabbath holy if we don't observe it. Neither can we keep His Name holy if we don't call upon His Name Yahweh.

"The Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This is a request for the promised return of His Son Yahshua the Messiah and the establishment of the millennial Kingdom on this earth.

It is also a petition for the Son to rule with a rod of iron, Revelation 2:26-28. He will enforce all of Yahweh's commandments when He rules. The Sabbath and Feast days as well as the Ten Commandments will all be observed under Yahshua's rule.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

A simple petition that our needs of the day will be met. Not our wants, but our needs...

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

We are to forgive those who ask and freely pardon those who confess their error and turn from their wicked ways. Thus, we are forgiven in like manner if we also repent.

"For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

We acknowledge that Yahweh is omnipotent and everliving. These are the basic concepts that our Savior presented to His disciples, which also give a pattern for our drawing near to Him.

We must first acknowledge Yahweh as our Heavenly Father and regard His Name Yahweh as special, set apart or holy. We must then recognize that we are His faithful and obedient sons and daughters. This helps bring us into a proper attitude for addressing the Great King.

We learn from Matthew 6 that we should do good deeds privately, not for publicity's sake, which the Bible refers to as sounding a trumpet. Our Father knows our hearts and attitudes.

Prayer should be brief and not used to impress those who might hear. Personal prayer is best done in private. Our prayers are a private and confidential conversation with Yahweh and praying over commercial radio and TV is not in good taste.

Collective Prayer

Prayer is often given in the Assembly of believers where, as a body, the brethren unite in mind and heart. Paul urges the Corinthian brethren to speak intelligibly so that all understand, and not speak into the air, 1Corinthians 14:9. In verse 16 Paul alludes to a collective prayer of the congregation where those who hear can affirm "amen" or "may it be so."

For centuries Jewish worship has consisted of reading from a prayer book. While the congregation may all read the same prayer, the prayers were written by men. The Psalms are a better choice as these are inspired and when read together they unite the body in our prayers, petitions, praises, and thanks to Yahweh.

When brethren gather as a body in Yahshua's Name, there is more power there as they unite their common goals and wills. *"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matt. 18:19-20).

New Testament prayer is routinely addressed to none but the Heavenly Father. Some hold that Acts 7:59 shows Stephen praying to Yahshua as he was being stoned. In reality he is simply showing mercy in asking that those stoning him be forgiven. In this he followed Yahshua's plea for mercy for those killing Him, Luke 23:34.

Through the Messiah

In his letters Paul routinely mentions giving thanks to Yahweh "through Yahshua the Messiah."

Prayer is to be offered to Yahweh through the Name of the Messiah, John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23. This shows that we accept the Perfect sacrifice of His Son Yahshua. We no longer bring an animal sacrifice, but approach Yahweh and offer our sacrifice of praise to Yahweh continually, that is the "fruit (calves, Hosea 14:2) of our lips," Hebrews 13:15.

Notice that this verse specifically says we are to give thanks to Yahweh's Name. We are to call Him by name and invoke the memorial Name Yahweh, which He has revealed to us. Calling upon His Name Yahweh is a very important part of acknowledging Him. We thus recognize Yahweh as our Heavenly Father as we strive to become spiritual Israelites.

Yahshua is our High Priest Who makes intercession for us to Yahweh. We no longer must bring a sacrificial animal, for acceptance of the shed blood of the Savior allows us to approach Yahweh directly. We come through the shed blood of the Lamb, Hebrews 4:14-15.

We owe a tremendous debt to Yahshua, for He is "*the Mediator of a better Covenant which is established on better promises,*" Hebrew 8:6.

There is only one way open to us to approach the Heavenly Father and that, as we have already stated, is through His son, John 14:6. Our sins are washed away when we accept the sacrifice of our Savior and are immersed into His saving Name Yahshua. "*And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men, in which we must be saved,*" Acts 4:12, TSS.

Prayer is direct communication with Yahweh the King of the entire universe. It is made possible through the death and resurrection of His Son Yahshua. By accepting the shed blood of Yahshua and being baptized into His Name, our sins are washed away, and we become adopted sons and daughters of the Most High!

The Holy Spirit, which is the Power emanating from Yahweh and shared, by His Son, guides us into truths as we humbly accept Yahweh's call to become a part of His assembly. Prayer is a privilege and our clear responsibility.

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