



## The Doctrine of Prayer

### *What Are Some Misrepresentations of Prayer?*

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. There are certain ideas about prayer that are commonly accepted and little questioned; however, this does not make them scriptural.
- B. These are misrepresentations of prayer that have been widely accepted.
- C. Not all of these misrepresentations are necessarily harmful but our purpose is to determine what is and is not scriptural in prayer.
- D. Some of the misrepresentations may be “best practices” to help us when praying while others come from false religions and misunderstanding scripture.
- E. Having an understanding of these misrepresentations will allow us to have better time in prayer.

#### II. REQUIRED POSTURES

- A. One of these misrepresentations of prayer is that God requires us to have a specific posture when we pray.
- B. Different people have differing opinions on “scriptural” postures for praying.
- C. Some believe we should always kneel, or be seated, or have our heads bowed.
- D. Is it right to pray while laying down, seated, standing, walking, with our hands raised?
- E. There are many recorded postures of men praying in the Bible.
  - 1. Praying while seated.
    - a. 2 Samuel 7:18 – “Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?”
      - (1) The Bible specifically states that David “sat before the LORD” and that he then spoke unto the Lord.
      - (2) The prayer David prayed exemplified his humility before a great God and it expressed his wonder for God’s workings in his life.



- b. Nehemiah 1:4 – “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,”
  - (1) Again, we see that the man of God sat down and then communed with God.
  - (2) The prayer that is recorded was one spoken in great anguish of spirit and expressed reverence for God and pleaded for forgiveness and mercy.
- 2. Praying while standing.
  - a. 2 Chronicles 20:5 – “And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court,”
    - (1) Verse 6 is the beginning of Jehoshaphat’s prayer and verse 5 clearly tells us that he was standing.
    - (2) It is interesting to consider that he was standing up for the people of Israel as their representative to God and he also physically stood while seeking God.
    - (3) Furthermore, it is worthy to note that verse 3 states, “And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. What entailed Jehoshaphat setting himself to seek the Lord?”
  - b. Nehemiah 9:4 – “Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God.”
    - (1) The verse clearly states that the Levites stood up upon the stairs and then they cried with a loud voice unto God.
    - (2) They even told all the people gathered to “Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever” (Nehemiah 9:5).
  - c. Job 30:20 – “I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thouregardest me not.”
    - (1) This was a statement made while speaking to God.
    - (2) This example of standing while praying is included here as it shows that sometimes the posture of standing while praying is indicative of trying to get God’s attention.



- d. Mark 11:25 – “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”
- (1) Jesus was speaking to his disciples in this passage and teaching them about faith.
  - (2) He clearly told them that standing and praying is an acceptable posture for talking to God.
3. Praying while prostrate.
- a. Matthew 26:39 – And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”
- (1) This is one of the only, if not the only, instance of laying prostrate while praying and it is the Lord Jesus that did so.
  - (2) In verse 28, Jesus told his disciples “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death”.
  - (3) Thus, lying prostrate seems to be a posture of someone with extreme inner turmoil that they need God’s help with.
4. Praying while kneeling.
- a. Daniel 6:10 – “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”
- (1) What Daniel prayed is not specifically recorded in this instance.
  - (2) But the verse tells us that his windows were open toward the chamber in Jerusalem.
  - (3) If we recall Solomon’s prayer, he asked God “that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place.” (1 Kings 8:29)
  - (4) Daniel’s posture of kneeling coupled with facing toward Jerusalem, possibly indicated an attitude of pleading with God (see 1 Kings 8:29, 30, 35).
  - (5) Daniel 6:10 also states that he gave thanks before God while kneeling.
- b. Acts 9:40 – “But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”



- (1) Again, it appears that kneeling expressed the attitude of pleading with God for him to intervene.
  - (2) Kneeling shows a submission to a higher power and authority.
  - c. Ephesians 3:14 – “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,”
    - (1) Paul was coming before God to make request for other believers.
    - (2) He submitted himself physically unto God by bowing his knees unto him in order to make his request.
5. Praying with lifted hands.
- a. 1 Kings 8:54 – “And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.”
    - (1) Solomon prayed a grand prayer unto God and here at the end we read of the particular posture with which he prayed.
    - (2) The scripture says that he both kneeled and had his hands spread up to heaven.
  - b. Psalm 141:2 – “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”
    - (1) Here the psalmist shows a posture he would have while praying which was with his hands lifted up.
    - (2) This posture he likened to the evening sacrifice.
  - c. 1 Timothy 2:8 – “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”
    - (1) The apostle Paul desired that men everywhere would pray but he also specified that they would do so with the lifting up of their hands.
    - (2) This posture seems to have been labeled “charismatic” in practice but it is in fact a very scriptural posture when we pray.
- F. The truth is that there is no required posture in order for us to pray.
- G. The postures identified in scripture indicate more about the attitude and urgency of the individual while praying.
- H. God receives our prayers in whatever posture we are in.



- I. There are certainly times where we want to show the Lord reverence while praying and thus, we may stand or we may want to show our agony and great need by laying prostrate but there is no requirement for any certain posture.

### III. EYES TO BE CLOSED

- A. An extremely common misrepresentation of prayer is that we must close our eyes.
- B. Practically speaking, this is not a bad practice since it helps to focus on God and limit distractions.
- C. However, there is no such requirement in the scripture.
- D. As Christians, our greatest example to model ourselves after is the Lord Jesus and when he prayed in John 17, he lifted up his eyes to heaven.
  - 1. John 17:1 – “These words spake Jesus, and **lifted up his eyes to heaven**, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:”
  - 2. Rather than close his eyes and bow his head to pray, Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and likely also his face in order to look to heaven.
  - 3. This means that Jesus had his eyes open and was looking up to God’s abode.
- E. The practice of closing our eyes to pray is not wicked and is helpful to limit distractions, particularly for children. Yet, it needs to be understood that praying with our eyes open is also not wicked but is scriptural.
- F. Often, a preacher will ask a congregation to bow their heads and close their eyes for a time of prayer but this is about offering privacy and respect to those who desire to come forward and pray and is not a requirement to speak to God.
- G. If we limit ourselves to only praying when we can close our eyes then we will restrict our time in prayer. We cannot close our eyes while driving, working, talking to others, etc. and these are all times we could use to speak to God.
- H. Obviously, if you are unable to focus and easily distracted then close your eyes but do not condemn another who may pray with their eyes open.

### IV. CLOSING WITH “IN JESUS’S NAME”

- A. Ending prayers with some form of “in Jesus’s name, amen” has become automatic.
- B. We are all so accustomed to closing our prayers this way that we do not even consider why we may say this.



- C. The scripture never directs us to add this little phrase to the end of our prayers.
- D. This practice likely started because of the Lord Jesus's own words to the disciples:
1. “**And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name**, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13)
  2. “If ye shall **ask any thing in my name**, I will do it.” (John 14:14)
  3. “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall **ask the Father in my name**, he will give it you.” (John 16:23)
  4. “At that day **ye shall ask in my name**: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:” (John 16:26)
- E. The point is that we are acting, speaking, or praying in the authority of Jesus and not upon our own apart from Jesus (consider Acts 16:18, 1 Corinthians 1:10).
- F. The scripture teaches us that the only reason we have access to the Father is because we are in Christ and come to the Father through him (Ephesians 2:18, Ephesians 3:12).
- G. Christians are “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20) which means we represent the Lord Jesus on this earth.
- H. We are acting and speaking on his behalf, therefore, we are representing his name (consider 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).
- I. Let us consider two passages regarding the name of Jesus Christ:
1. Ephesians 5:20 – “Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father **in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;**”
  2. Colossians 3:17 – “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, **do all in the name of our Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”
    - a. The Ephesians 5 passage is referring to when we speak to God and the Colossians 3 passage pertains to anything we do in word or deed.
    - b. Both passages say to do these things in the name of our Lord Jesus.
    - c. The question then is, does this literally mean that we are always to tell God that we are saying or doing whatever in the name of Jesus before we say or do it?
    - d. Could it be that saying or doing in the name of Jesus has more to do with our heart and intentions with understanding that we are to glorify the Lord Jesus with whatever we say or do?



- J. The truth is that we pray to God the Father and he is attentive because God “hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).
- K. So, when we pray it is in his name, because we are in him.
- L. The scripture does not plainly tell us that we should or shouldn’t always say something to God about the fact we are speaking to him in Jesus’s name but the way we add it to the end of our prayers has become more of a ritual than a heartfelt understanding.
- M. Our challenge in prayer should be to pray with the understanding that we are able to speak to God because we are in Jesus and if we say something like “in Jesus’s name” then let it be said with thought and understanding.
- N. Also, understand that this could be said at the beginning of our communication unto God. The fact that we always add it to the end of our prayer indicates that it is habitual rather than sincere and this is what we need to depart from.

#### V. PRAYING FOR THE DEAD

- A. A practice of certain false religions is to pray for their dead loved ones.
- B. Commonly, this is to help the deceased loved one reach their desired destination in the “afterlife” or to escape purgatory and enter heaven.
- C. This practice is totally unscriptural and is not something that Christian’s should participate in.
- D. An individual’s eternity is sealed immediately upon one’s death. There is no more use in praying for them.
- E. When an individual dies, their soul is immediately at its destination.
  - 1. For the Christian – When a Christian dies their soul is transported to heaven right away. The Bible says, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8)
  - 2. For the Unsaved – When a lost person dies their soul is transported to hell and eventually the lake of fire for all eternity. The Bible says, “And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments” (Luke 16:22-23a).
- F. There is no purgatory and therefore no need to pray to get someone out.
- G. Instead of praying for the dead, we should pray for the family and friends left behind. Pray that the Lord would comfort and draw their hearts and minds to him.



## VI. REPEATING THE LORD'S PRAYER

- A. A common misconception is that the Lord's prayer is a specific prayer that we are to pray.
- B. The Lord's prayer is recorded in both the gospel of Matthew and Luke.
  - 1. The disciples had asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.
  - 2. In Luke's gospel it says, "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say," (Luke 11:2a).
  - 3. Looking at this account alone could lead one to think that this is what we are supposed to say when we pray since Jesus plainly said, "When ye pray, say" and then gave the Lord's prayer.
  - 4. However, looking at Matthew's gospel we are given further clarity that the Lord's prayer was simply an outline of how to pray. Jesus said, "After this manner therefore pray ye" (Matthew 6:9a).
- C. Rather than continually repeating the Lord's prayer, we ought to consider the manner of prayer that the Lord put forth and be thoughtful when we do pray.
- D. The manner of the Lord's prayer involved:
  - 1. Praise/Worship – "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." (Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2)
  - 2. Requesting the Lord's will – "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2)
  - 3. Requesting for our needs - "Give us this day our daily bread." (Matthew 6:11, Luke 11:3)
  - 4. Seeking forgiveness – "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matthew 6:12, Luke 11:4)
  - 5. Seeking the Lord's favor – "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:" (Matthew 6:13, Luke 11:4)
  - 6. Praise/Worship – "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matthew 6:13)
- E. We can pray the Lord's prayer sometimes if it is sincere and thoughtful; however, only reciting the Lord's prayer is not what Jesus intended for us.
- F. But never should our time in prayer only be a recitation of the Lord's prayer for this is shallow and exemplifies our poor relationship with the Father.