



The Doctrine of Prayer

What Is Prayer's Past, Present, and Future?

I. WHAT IS PRAYER'S PAST?

A. Prior to prayer's beginning

1. When God created man, there was no need for prayer.
 - a. Adam was able to speak directly to God during times when the voice of the LORD God would walk in the garden (Genesis 3:8).
 - b. This truth is further confirmed when God calls out to Adam asking "Where art thou?" (Genesis 3:9) This question indicates that in times past Adam would meet the voice of God and walk together but instead this time when God came to walk and talk, Adam was hiding.
2. The account of Cain also gives us a second example of pre-prayer communication with God (Genesis 4:6-15).
 - a. Initially it was God only that spoke and addressed Cain, "And the LORD said unto Cain" (Genesis 4:6).
 - b. There is no recorded response from Cain back to God in this first exchange.
 - c. After Cain kills Abel, God again approaches Cain and engages in a communication, "And the LORD said unto Cain" (Genesis 4:9).
 - d. This time there is an exchange between God and Cain. The first recorded words of Cain to God were a lie: "I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?".
 - e. God goes on to pronounce judgment upon Cain to which Cain says "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13) to which God responds with a level of mercy.
 - f. This is the last recorded communication between man and God prior to when the scripture says prayer began.

B. Prayer's beginning

1. It is in Genesis 4:26 where scripture identifies the beginning of prayer, "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: **then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.**"
2. Something had clearly changed. God no longer spoke to man as he had before.



3. God began to remove himself from man after the fall and he separated his physical presence upon the murder of Abel.
4. From this point on, things would be different in man's communication with God. Man would now have to "call upon the name of the LORD" in order to speak with God.
5. Note: It is also possible that the meaning of this verse is that since Adam, men had not been calling upon the LORD. Maybe man had become so wicked that they had no desire to commune with God and it was not until Seth's son, Enos, that men began desiring the LORD and to speak with him again.

C. Prayer's history

1. God would commune with man audibly
 - a. There is a very large difference between God's communication unto man in our present time and historically.
 - b. A great change from the way it was historically is that God no longer has conversations with us in prayer.
 - c. All throughout the Old Testament, and even in the New Testament, we see man speaking to God and God responding in an audible way.
 - d. Have you ever stopped to consider why it was so common for God to respond to man historically but no longer responds to us audibly?
 - e. The change occurred around the time of the giving of the Holy Ghost unto Christians and the completed canon of scriptures.
 - f. Prior to this, man did not have all the counsel of God. They did not have answers to their questions and they did not have the leading of the Holy Ghost to help them know all the mind of God.
 - g. Today, we have the Spirit of God in us who knows all the mind of God the Father (Romans 8:27).
 - h. Old Testament saints also did not have the completed scriptures that they could turn to for learning the will of God, for guidance, and for direction.
 - i. For these reasons, God would respond to saints to give them the help, direction, and instruction they needed, for how else were they to know.
 - j. A few examples of God and man speaking one to another are:
 - (1) God and Abram directly communicated one with another.



- a) In the exchange recorded in Genesis 15, it was God who began the dialogue through a vision, “After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision” (Genesis 15:1).
 - b) God spoke to Abram first which caused Abram to reply with a question and objection.
 - c) God answered directly in a way that Abram could hear and know the exact words of God, “And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying” (Genesis 15:4).
 - d) This communication was a back and forth where Abram heard God, responded to God, and God responded to him.
 - e) It is interesting to consider that since Cain spoke to God, there is no recorded communication of a man to God until Abram speaks to God in Genesis 15. Cain spoke to God in Genesis 4 and there is plenty of communication from God to man but none of man to God till Genesis 15.
- (2) God would speak to Moses and directly respond to him when Moses prayed. Moses prayed in Numbers 14:13-19 and God directly responded, “And the LORD said”.
 - (3) Job spoke to God and God audibly answered him, “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said” (Job 38:1).
 - (4) David would pray to God and God would answer him (1 Samuel 23:11-12, 2 Samuel 21:1).
 - (5) Solomon prayed (1 Kings 8:23-54) and “the LORD appeared to Solomon” and “the LORD said unto him” (1 Kings 9:2-3).
 - (6) Elijah spoke to God and God responded to Elijah, “And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said” (1 Kings 19:13).
 - (7) Jesus prayed to God and God responded, “Then came there a voice from heaven, saying” (John 12:28).
 - (8) Paul prayed for God to remove his thorn in the flesh and God responded by speaking to Paul, “And he said unto me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).
2. Prayer was commonly made by a priest or prophet on behalf of others
 - a. The Israelites set quite a precedent when they requested Moses to speak with God on their behalf instead of God speaking directly with the people (Exodus 20:19). It would be very common for a certain man of God to speak to God for the people.



- b. There was nothing prohibiting any individual from talking to God in those days. In fact, there are still many instances of individuals talking to the Lord.
- c. There are also many instances where instead of an individual or group of people talking to God themselves, they requested the man of God to talk to the Lord on their behalf.
- d. These people had the same opportunity to talk to the Lord as the man of God yet for whatever reason they felt it necessary or more appropriate for another to go to God on their behalf.
- e. Possibly, the individuals did not have a close walk with the Lord and so speaking to him was foreign or fearful just like it was for those early Jews who left Egypt.
- f. These are some examples:
 - (1) Samuel prays for the people.
 - a) Israel wanted a king so they would be like the nations around them.
 - b) They all gathered in Gilgal and there Samuel made Saul the king. (1 Samuel 11:14-15)
 - c) Then Samuel proceeded to rebuke them for their rebellion against God (1 Samuel 12:7-15) which culminates with Samuel calling unto God to send thunder and rain down from heaven that day and this God did causing the people to greatly fear the Lord and Samuel. (1 Samuel 12:16-18)
 - d) At that point, “all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the LORD thy God” (Samuel 12:19).
 - e) In his response to their request, Samuel said “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Samuel 12:23).
 - (2) Jeremiah prays for the people.
 - a) Judah was taken captive by Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar had set up Gedaliah as the governor.
 - b) It came to pass that Ishmael slew Gedaliah and this caused the people to fear (Jeremiah 41:16-18).



- c) This caused the people to gather before Jeremiah and request him to “pray for us unto the LORD thy God, even for all this remnant” (Jeremiah 42:1-2).
 - d) To this request Jeremiah said “I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words” (Jeremiah 42:4). Note: It was the people’s words to God but it was Jeremiah that prayed and spoke them to God.
3. Prayer was a communal communication
- a. It was very common for prayer to be a communal communication unto the Lord.
 - b. Communal prayer is found frequently in the Old Testament where the people were unified as one body with one desire.
 - c. Often, there was one individual or a few that would pray to God audibly while all the people were gathered and in agreement with that individual’s prayer.
 - d. These prayers included confessing sins, making requests, seeking God’s leading, praising the Lord, giving thanks, etc.
 - e. These are some examples:
 - (1) Joshua prayed with the elders of Israel.
 - a) God had just given them victory of Jericho but Achan took of the accursed thing.
 - b) Upon the heels of this victory, they went up to overtake Ai but they were defeated due to Achan’s sin.
 - c) Because of this defeat, Joshua “rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide” (Joshua 7:6).
 - d) And with Joshua were the elders of Israel, “he and the elders of Israel” (Joshua 7:6).
 - e) These men were joined together and put dust upon their heads and Joshua prayed unto the Lord with the elders of Israel (Joshua 7:7-9)
 - (2) Judah gathered and prayed as one in the street.
 - a) All the people were assembled and fasting (Nehemiah 9:1).



- b) The Bible says “And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.” (Nehemiah 9:1-2)
 - c) They spent the day reading the law, confessing sins, and worshipping the Lord (Nehemiah 9:3).
 - d) Eventually, a group of men who were Levites stood up amongst the people and “cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God.” (Nehemiah 9:4)
 - e) These men went from addressing the people telling them to “Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever:” to in the same sentence speaking to God saying “and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.” (Nehemiah 9:5)
 - f) The rest of the chapter records the prayer that these Levites prayed in the ears of all the people and with all the people in agreement with the words of the prayer for it is ended with “And because of all this **we** make a covenant, and write it;” (Nehemiah 9:38).
4. Jesus taught his disciples how to pray
- a. Part of the history of prayer is the fact that Jesus had to help his disciples know how to pray.
 - b. It is interesting that these men were so unaccustomed to prayer that they were uncertain of how to pray.
 - c. Maybe, all they had known of prayer was what they saw of the Pharisees and how they would pray on the street corners to be seen of men.
 - d. Prayer had seemingly ceased from being a norm to where the society and people did not understand what prayer was and how to talk to God.
 - e. So, the disciples presented their request, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1)
 - f. To which the Lord gave them a pattern for when they prayed which included praise to God, requests for needs, asking forgiveness, and help to live godly (Luke 11:2).
5. Early Christians frequently prayed together as a body of believers
- a. There are several instances recorded in the scripture during the church’s infancy of believers joining together to pray.



- b. Prayer was not viewed as a private thing only between an individual and God.
- c. Prayer was a shared aspect of their Christian faith and something that united believer to believer and then to the Lord.
- d. These are some examples:
 - (1) A large group prayed in an upper room.
 - a) Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, Simon, and Judas, with the woman, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus's brethren were all gathered together in an upper room. (Acts 1:13-14)
 - b) The scripture says that "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14).
 - c) Furthermore, when they were selecting who would replace Judas Iscariot, they were still all gathered together and the scripture says "And **they** prayed" (Acts 1:24).
 - (2) Peter and John "went up together into the temple **at the hour of prayer**" (Acts 3:1).
 - (3) The church of God prayed together for Peter.
 - a) Peter had been cast into prison by Herod (Acts 12:4).
 - b) While Peter was being held in prison "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." (Acts 12:5)
 - c) The Lord miraculously brought Peter out of the prison and "he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; **where many were gathered together praying.**" (Acts 12:12)

II. WHAT IS PRAYER'S PRESENT?

- A. God no longer communes with us audibly – As previously stated, we have the completed word of God and the Holy Ghost to lead and guide us.
- B. All believers have access to God the Father through prayer
 - 1. In the Old Testament, it was common for the man of God to speak to God on behalf of the people.
 - 2. The man of God would act as a mediator between God and the people.



3. Today, the scripture clearly teaches that all Christians can come before God in prayer.
 - a. Hebrews 4:16 states, “Let **us** therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace”.
 - b. There is no need for a human mediator because every Christian has Jesus Christ as a mediator according to 1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus:”.
 - c. Jesus is the great high priest (Hebrews 4:15) for every Christian and this is the reason we are able to boldly come unto the throne of grace.
 - d. We do not need someone spiritual to talk to God on our behalf, although, we can have others pray with us.
 4. Every Christian has been given the wonderful privilege of praying to God at any moment.
- C. Prayer can still be a communal communication
1. Just like it was common for Old Testament saints to pray collectively as one body, so we today also can pray in such manner.
 2. While there are shifts in prayer between Old and New Testament, there is no shift requiring prayer to be a private matter only.
 3. Examples of Christians praying together are well known in the book of Acts but the principle is still found later on.
 - a. In Paul’s epistle to the saints in Rome, he specifically asked them to “strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;” (Romans 15:30).
 - (1) Paul was obviously absent from these Christians but he was going to be praying with these Roman saints even though separated by distance.
 - (2) Prayer unites Christians that are separated by distance.
 - (3) Also, these Roman Christians were asked to “strive together with me”. The statement “with me” is referring to them praying with Paul but the “strive together” statement is referring to the Christians there in Rome praying together for Paul.
 - b. When Paul wrote unto the “church of God which is at Corinth” (2 Corinthians 1:1), he stated of them that “Ye also helping together by prayer for us” (2 Corinthians 1:11).
 - (1) Paul was not addressing any one individual but was addressing the collective church that was there at Corinth.



- (2) His expectation was that these Christians were praying for him and others as they were serving the Lord.
 - (3) Certainly, the individuals that made up the church at Corinth could have and probably did pray for Paul privately and separately.
 - (4) Yet, it also would seem that Paul expected the church as a whole to spend time praying “together”.
- c. The opening verse of the first epistle to the Thessalonians identifies Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus as the authors and the second verse clearly states “**We** give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in **our** prayers;” (1 Thessalonians 1:2).
- (1) It is possible that these men individually prayed for the Thessalonian believers and then told one another of this.
 - (2) But the more realistic and likely conclusion is that these men spent time joined together, praying out loud.
 - (3) This is how they could say “We give thanks” and “making mention of you in our prayers”.
4. While prayer should be had privately between an individual and God (Matthew 6:6), we should not forsake the blessing of joining together in communal times of prayer.
- D. Fasting and prayer work together
1. When matters were dire, Old Testament saints would supplement their prayers with fasting (2 Chronicles 20:3, Ezra 8:21, Joel 1:14, etc.).
 2. Fasting denies the flesh for the purpose of seeking the Lord.
 3. The example was set forth in the Old Testament for fasting and prayer to be together and this did not change for New Testament Christians.
 - a. Acts 14:23 affirmatively confirms that prayer and fasting go hand in hand stating “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting,”.
 - (1) The passage clearly states “prayed with fasting”. This passage is during the church age.
 - (2) It confirms that prayer and fasting are still for the Christian today even though fasting seems to be a largely abandoned discipline.
 - b. When speaking of the husband-and-wife relationship, 1 Corinthians 7:5 says “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer;”.



- (1) Again, fasting serves to supplement our prayers by denying our flesh and focusing on the spiritual.
- (2) This Bible verse proves the fact that fasting is a denying of the flesh.
- (3) It also proves that fasting is connected to prayer and is for the Christian today.

E. There is a proper adorning of our heads in prayer

1. There is an interesting direction given to Christians during the church age regarding prayer and their heads.
 2. A man is to pray with his head uncovered but a woman is to pray with her head covered.
 - a. Pertaining to the man and prayer, the Bible says “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.” (1 Corinthians 11:4).
 - b. 1 Corinthians 11:7 specifies “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God:”
 - c. Pertaining to the woman and prayer, the Bible says “But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.” (1 Corinthians 11:5)
 - d. Again, 1 Corinthians 11:7 specifies “but the woman is the glory of the man” and 1 Corinthians 11:10 states “For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.”
 3. All of this passage seems to be referring to an individual’s hair.
 - a. The clarity is given in 1 Corinthians 11:14 “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?”
 - b. And the next verse says “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.”
 4. So, according to the scriptures, there is to be proper hair length for the man and woman and that this impacts prayer.
- F. Healing still comes by way of God and prayer – The infirmed Christian today still receives healing, Lord willing, through the power of prayer according to James 5:15.



III. WHAT IS PRAYER'S FUTURE?

A. Prayer's future upon death or the blessed hope

1. Prayer ceases for the believer upon one's death or the blessed hope.
2. Communication with God does not cease but simply our current understanding of what prayer is and how we communicate with God.
3. We are currently separated from God, in the physical sense, and so our current communications unto him are a sort of long-distance situation.
4. This current situation of prayer will change upon our death or the blessed hope.
 - a. Upon our death we will be with the Lord for "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).
 - b. Also, upon the blessed hope we are assured that "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:17)
5. Thus, we will no longer have a physically long-distance communication with the Lord since we will be in his presence and so prayer in the current sense will cease and we will be able to commune with the Lord in his presence.

B. Prayer's future upon and after the second coming

1. After the Lord's second coming, during the millennial kingdom, people will physically go to Jerusalem to pray.
 - a. Zechariah 8:21 says "And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also."
 - b. And Zechariah 8:22 says "Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD."
 - c. So, during the millennial kingdom people and nations travel to Jerusalem to pray to the Lord. This is a stark difference from prayer to day where we can pray anywhere and anytime.
 - d. Also, they will be praying before the Lord..
2. Furthermore, during the millennial kingdom, the scripture states that people will communicate unto the Lord with a certain language.



- a. Zephaniah 3:9 states “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”
 - b. This verse indicates that in order for the people to call upon the Lord during this time that they will need a “pure language” to speak to the Lord.
 - c. God is going to change the language that people speak so that they can call upon the Lord.
- C. Prayer’s future after the millennial kingdom – All scripture will be complete and finished and eternity will have begun. Those in the lake of fire, will forever be unable to communicate unto the Lord and those with the Lord will forever be in his presence and able to communicate directly with him. Thus, prayer as we know it will eternally cease.