

## Can We Pray to Jesus?

—or *Must We Pray to the Father Only?*

Some people (Jehovah's Witnesses for example) believe that we must pray only to the Heavenly Father and must not pray to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Is this true? There are several matters we need to consider. Let's just take these considerations one at a time...

### 1 *Jesus and the Holy Spirit*

**Hebrews 4:14-16 etc**

When we come to the Father, Jesus the Son is our advocate and great High Priest. Jesus, together with the Holy Spirit, provides us access to the Father and to the throne of grace (Romans 8:26-27,34, 1John 2:1, Hebrews 4:14-16).

When we correctly understand the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we realise something important. They need to hear our prayers to intercede and advocate for us. Therefore, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are all listening and responding when we pray. None of them is excluded from hearing and participating in our prayers.

After all, each of them is God. Therefore when we pray to God, we pray to them. The very idea of praying to the Father exclusively is akin to the idea of worshipping the Father exclusively, or believing and obeying the Father exclusively. You just cannot do that.

Whilst it is usual to address the Father in prayer, we know that we are praying not to the Father exclusively, but to Jesus and the Holy Spirit also. It is impossible to pray to the Father alone, for he is never alone. His Son and His Spirit are always one with him.

### 2 *Speaking through Jesus*

**Ephesians 2:18, Jude 1:20**

Paul says, "Through Christ we, both Jew and Gentile, have access to the Father in one Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18). It is argued that we approach and engage with the Father *through* Christ and therefore we do not pray *to* Christ, but only *through* him. There's a similar argument regarding the Holy Spirit. We pray "*in the Holy Spirit*" (Jude 1:20). So (the argument goes) we do not pray *to* the Spirit but only *in* him.

However this argument about prepositions misses the point we made earlier, that we come *to* the Father *through* Jesus because he is our advocate and great High Priest. It is in that capacity that Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, provides us access to the Father and to the throne of grace (Romans 8:26-27,34, 1John 2:1, Hebrews 4:14-16).

If Jesus and the Holy Spirit were not there with the Father, neither could we be. It is their presence with the Father that allows us to be invited there.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are God. We pray to God. To exclude the Son and Holy Spirit from our prayers is impossible. If you are comfortable starting your prayer with “Our Father...” by all means do so. But if you were to imagine that you speak to the Father alone, and exclude the presence of your Saviour Jesus and the Holy Spirit, you would be quite mistaken.

### 3 *Christ's Model Prayer*

#### **Matthew 6:9-13**

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he began his model prayer with "Our Father in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9). It is said that this model requires our prayers to be addressed to God our Father alone. However Jesus attributed other things to his Father, without excluding himself from those things.

When Jesus said to the Father, “Hallowed be your name”, that did not mean that only the Father’s name was to be hallowed. Likewise, when Jesus prayed to his Father, “Your kingdom come”, that did not mean that Jesus is excluded from the throne and kingship. Again, “Your will be done”, did not imply that the Son’s will is not also to be done.

In the same way, when he addressed his prayer to the Father, Jesus did not exclude himself from also being addressed in prayer.

### 4 *Stephen, Saul, and Ananias*

#### **Acts 7 to 9**

Stephen, Saul, and Ananias experienced visions of Jesus. He spoke to them and they spoke to him. These were real conversations and took place after Jesus had ascended to heaven. They are recorded in Acts chapters 7-9.

Some say that because these examples of men speaking to Jesus were about miraculous visions, they don't count as examples of normal prayer. However all prayer is miraculous. You are talking to God. That isn't a thing that takes place by natural laws.

Furthermore, why should a miraculous event make it right to speak to the risen Lord Jesus, if that is wrong when there is no vision? You may not have a vision or hear Jesus speak to you, but if you speak to him, you do only as Stephen, Saul, and Ananias did. If speaking to Jesus is wrong in general, what made it right specially for Stephen, Saul, and Ananias?

### 5 *Going Directly to the Father*

#### **John 16:1-28, cf John 14:14.**

Jesus told his disciples that in a little while they would not see him, then in a little while again they would see him, and then he would go to his Father. This puzzled them, and they wanted to ask him about it, but they were reticent. Jesus knew this so he answered their question without being asked (John 16:16-22).

Jesus said that when they saw him again they would rejoice. He also said, "In that day you will ask me nothing... in that day you will ask in my name but I do not say that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you because you have loved me" (John 16:23,26-27).

Some have taken this to mean that after the ascension, the disciples would be banned from asking anything of Jesus himself—prayer would be exclusively to the Father although in the name of Jesus. This interpretation distorts Jesus's words and intentions.

Jesus was making the point that in his kingdom, when he ascended to heaven, all their questions would be answered. The Holy Spirit would teach them everything they needed to know (John 16:13), so they would not need any more to ask questions of Jesus. That's what he meant when he said, "In that day you will ask me nothing" (John 16:23).

Lest the disciples should think there would be no need to pray, he told them that they could, and should, ask for anything they needed. As Jesus earlier said, "If you ask me anything in my name I will do it" (John 14:14).

Furthermore, they could ask the Father directly in Christ's name. They didn't have to pray to Jesus and have him ask the Father on their behalf (John 16:26-27). That's what Jesus meant when he said, "I do not say that I shall pray the Father for you" (John 16:26).

Nothing Jesus said should be interpreted as a ban on praying to him. We just should understand that in the name of Christ we have full and direct access to God, even to the Father. We can ask anything that is right. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

That's not a long drawn out bureaucratic procedure. You immediately enter the throne room, the Most Holy Place, where God dwells on high. Your prayer is heard with not the slightest delay. That's the message of encouragement Jesus was giving his disciples and still gives those who become his disciples today.

## 6 *The Prayer in Revelation*

### Revelation 4-5

In Revelation chapters 4 and 5, John was given a vision of a Lamb who took a scroll from the right hand of the Majesty on the throne in heaven. Then those who had been worshipping the Majesty fell down before the Lamb and worshipped him as well. They sang prayer songs to him, and ascribed the same power and honour and glory to the Lamb as to the Majesty on the throne.

Each worshipper had a harp and golden bowls full of incense which, we are told, "are the prayers of the saints". The golden bowls were brought before the Lamb just as they had been brought before the Majesty on the throne. Not a single prayer in those golden bowls was wrongly brought before the Lamb. This shows that the prayers of Christians can be brought to the Lamb who is Jesus Christ the Son of God, our Saviour and High Priest.

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## 7 The Prayer in Hebrews

### Hebrews 1:8-9

Hebrews 1:8-9 is quoted from Psalm 45:6-7. This is a prayer to Christ in ancient scripture. The Hebrew writer quotes it as the heavenly Father speaking to his Son. That is correct because the prayer is scripture and scripture is the word of God. Nevertheless the prayer, although inspired by God, was penned by a human being as a prayer to Christ.

Now imagine you repeated that prayer and said, “*Your throne O God is forever and ever*”. Would you add a disclaimer, “I say this not to Christ, but to the Father only”? The statement is true of both the Father and the Son, so why can you not say it to the Son as in fact the original author did?

If you can say that to Jesus the Son, why can't you say other things to him? Take for example the little prayer at the very end of the Bible, "**Even so, come Lord Jesus**" (Revelation 22:20). If you repeated that prayer, who would you be speaking to? The Lord Jesus of course. Would it not be strange if the Father, who shares his throne and divinity with Jesus, would not share the hearing of this little prayer?

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