



## The Theology of Prayer in the New Testament

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### 1. PREAMBLE

The value and importance of prayer to the life of the Christian is, of course, a well-known thing. Theology has been called the queen of the sciences, and prayer, which is experiential theology, is called the queen of the experiences. W. Graham Scroggie was an outstanding Scottish minister of the word of God once said, "A prayerful life is a powerful life. A prayer less life is always a powerless life." Most Christians will testify to the truthfulness of that also. To these testimonies of the importance and value of prayer, we may add the testimony of John Calvin, the apostle of predestination. For he said, "The principal exercise which the children of God have is to pray, for in this way they give a true proof of their faith."

The Bible does indicate to us that the idea of prayer is associated with our difficulties and our trials and our persecutions and our problems, Johnson (n. d: 14) suggest "our prayers should be replaced by praise when we are not in those circumstances. So our communion with God should not be hindered by the experiences that we have." So we probably should speak of prayer in a specific sense; that is, the sense of asking, request and the general sense by which we would include communion with God, adoration, praise, thanksgiving and other aspects of communion with God. Johnson (n. d:14) quoted Clement of Alexandria, who lived back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century after the time of the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Prayer is intercourse or communion with God." Strong (1945:14) agree with Johnson, "now people who do not see reason why they must pray unless taught by some commanding example or forced by some eye-opening discipline. We might wonder that so many pray. And how we need to ask, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.'" For the benefit of this research, effort would be made to define prayer, look into the types of prayer as contain in the Scriptures, the object of prayer and the grounds of prayer accordingly.

### 2. DEFINITION OF PRAYER

According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Fifth Edition)* (1947:779), one important fact to note about prayer is that, prayer has a very vital part to play in our lives. Therefore, prayer can be define in the following ways. "First, it is considered to be an act, practice, or an instance of praying; entreaty; and making an earnest request to God." Blaiklock (1964:9) gives second reason, "prayer is the pathway to tranquility and strength of soul. It is woven with all worship. Calm in life's strife, poise, devotion, self-control, all depend upon its exercise. To fail in prayer is to fail in all else." Third, prayer is learning to speak with God. In its highest form, prayer is deep meditation alone with God, Watt (n. d.:6). Forth, Engstrom (1955:17) added his voice as saying, "prayer is fellowshiping with God: an expression of need, a confession of trust, the voicing of thanksgiving, and the petition for forgiveness. Fifth, prayer is the anchor of the soul; prayer anchors us to God. In temptation the anchor holds us firm; in hardship it gives us support; in daily growth it gives us strength." As Christians, White (1976:22) refresh our memory that, "we were designed for fellowship with God, and without that fellowship we ache in emptiness. He himself planted the longing there, a longing all of us share." Therefore, the word "prayer" really means "a wish directed towards," that is, towards God. The implication of this is that, all that true prayer seeks is God Himself, for with Him we get all we need. Sixth, Christian (n. d.:51-53) stress prayer is simply "the turning of the soul to God." David describes

it as the lifting up of the living soul to the living God. "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul" (Psalm 25:1). It is observed that when man prays, it is God's opportunity. The poet says: Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed, the motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast.

This is why "Prayer," says an old Jewish mystic, Christian (n. d.:51-53) "is the moment when heaven and earth kiss each other." Prayer is, however, much more than merely asking God for something, although that is a very valuable part of prayer if only because it reminds us of our utter dependence upon God. Seventh, it is also communion with God—intercourse with God—talking with (not only to) God." Because Clement of Alexandria has earlier observed that, "Prayer is intercourse or communion with God," it seems to be the kind of definition that is more in harmony with the prayers of the Bible. Prayer is communion with God and when we get down upon our knees and offer a word of thanksgiving to God we are praying. When we get down upon our knees and we praise him we are praying. When we get down upon our knees and make a request, we are praying. As a matter of fact, we don't even have to get down on our knees. Johnson (n. d.:25) simply says, "If we rise up on our feet and offer a petition to God, we are praying. If we are just having communion with God while we are riding the bus or in our automobile, we are praying according to the biblical sense." Finally, Strong (1945:14) concluded, "prayer means time, detachment, and emancipation from environment and habit."

### 3. THE TYPES OF PRAYER

There are many types of prayer, of course, in the Bible. Here are some of them. Johnson (n. d.:25) narrates, first of all, there is inward silent prayer. In the Bible, in 1 Samuel chapter 1, verse 13; 2 Samuel chapter 7, verse 27, there is evidence that it is possible for us to pray without saying a thing. Some chose to pray audibly; it is their choice. This would make them to be awake and not to feel sleepy. While some also chose to be silent. In as much as you are concentrating in your communing with God, I think your aim of praying will be achieved. Second, there is outward, audible prayer. And just a couple of texts to support this point, Psalm 3:4, Psalm 5, verses 2 and 3. Third, there is private prayer. Now, as you can see, this is not quite logical because it's obvious private prayer may be audible or may be silent, but what is important to note is that prayer in which a person withdraws by himself and prays by himself is what is most important here. Now that is specifically recognized in the Bible. In the case of our Lord, for example, in Matthew chapter 6, verse 6, he speaks about withdrawing within your closet. Gaebelien (1929:91) further stated, "Nights and days were spent by Christ in desert places, on mountains tops and the hillside of Olivet to hold communion with the Father. We are to follow His blessed example. Many of the great men of God had their prayer training in secret." Johnson (n. d.:28) agrees with Gaebelien, that, "there is social prayer in which the saints meet and pray together. Acts chapter 20, verse 36 -- Jude verse 20 is thought by some to be a reference to that." Gaebelien (1929:92) affirms also that, all the great leaders like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Ezra and Nehemiah called the people together to call upon the name of the Lord (2 Chronicles xx: 13). Fifth, family prayer. Johnson (n. d.:28) asserts that family prayer may be silent, may be audible; probably it was audible so the references here are not again specifically harmonious logically. Here are some references, Acts chapter 10, verse 2 and verse 30. I think also there's probably a reference to family prayer in Joshua chapter 24, he says to the Israelites, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." He probably has referenced to the family prayers that he as a father held in his own family. In the Old Testament, it was the responsibility of the father to carry on the spiritual education of his family. It was the father who gathered the family together, who taught the law of God. It was the father who sat the children upon his knee and taught them the Law of Moses. It was the father who taught them to offer the first prayers to God.

### 4. THE OBJECT OF PRAYER

One does not pray to images. One does not pray to pictures, even the picture of Jesus, that you have in your bedroom by your bed. One does not pray to the saints. St. Christopher cannot help us. One does not even pray to the angels. When John fell down before the angels in the book of Revelation he said, "Get up. Don't do that. Worship God." We are not supposed to pray to the angels not even St. Michael and all the angels. The question is; to whom do you pray? Well, we are encouraged to pray to God only. David said my prayer shall be unto the God of my life. But now our God is a God who subsists in three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. So how shall we pray to the Father, to the Son and to the Spirit? Needless to say, the Scriptures do not teach prayer in any other name. Gaebelien(1929:80)

stress, “Prayers addressed to God in the name of the Virgin Mary, Joseph, in the name of the Apostles, or different saints, generally man-made, are not only unscriptural, but they are an abomination in the sight of God; for they detract from the glory of His ever blessed Son. Johnson (n. d.:29), added, first of all, prayer is to the Father. “The New Testament does, so far as its overall teaching, suggests that our petitions should be addressed to the Father, but are there not petitions that are addressed to Jesus Christ?” Yes, there are. For example, John said at the end of the Bible in Revelation chapter 20, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” Steven said Lord receive my spirit.

Johnson (n. d.:29), affirms, the apostles prayed to our Lord in some other places. Again here are a couple of references in addition, Acts chapter 9, verse 14; 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and verse 2. In these verses, it is said to be a universal experience. Men called upon the Lord in every place and the Lord there is the Lord Jesus Christ. But those are the exceptions in the New Testament. The normal petition of the New Testament is addressed to the Father, and so the researcher feels it is probably wise for us to follow the normal pattern of the New Testament. And while we may get up in our meeting or in our home and say, “Oh Lord Jesus,” and we are quite sure that he hears us still since the pattern of the New Testament is to address our prayer to the Father then that is probably what we should do. Johnson (n. d.:67-69), alludes that, we are children and therefore, we come to a heavenly Father. And we recognize that he is a Father. He’s not a governor, a school master, an advisor, an employer. He is our Father and it is the purpose of Our Lord in his saving work in the New Testament to bring us into touch with the Father. After all, it was he who said in his model prayer that we were to pray, “Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.”

Second, the prayer is in the name of the Son. This is an unknown thing in the Old Testament. You never hear in the Old Testament anybody pray in the name of the redeemer to come. You never, of course, hear anyone praying in the name of Jesus Christ. There is no record to show in the Old Testament of any individual who ever called God Father. So this idea of praying to a Father is unique. Now that’s why when Jesus said after this, men are, therefore, praying, “Our Father which art in heaven.” As they listened to our Lord some of the apostles as they listened and he said, “Our Father which art in heaven,” you know why they looked? No one had ever called God, Father. Now to us it’s so common with us we lose the sense of the uniqueness of it, but it was absolutely unique. There is no evidence. There is one reported source of evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but there is really no evidence of any individual praying to God as his own father. That was unique. And no one ever prayed in the name of Jesus Christ. So what we’re talking about is a new development in the redemptive program of God which comprehends the saving work of the Redeemer, who comes in the person of our Lord and makes it possible for men who believe in him to address the Father as their own Father.

Johnson (n. d.:75), further stated to come in the name of one who has infinite merit before God because to come in the name of someone means to come in their person. That is to come with their merit, to come with their authority. In the Old Testament, they prayed, “Oh God remember me; hear me because of your loving kindness.” In the New Testament, we say, “Oh God answer my prayer because I come in the name of the one who has consummated the covenant between us, the one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ.” And while the loving kindness of God shone in the Old Testament was great, this loving kindness now has blossomed out in all of the brightness of the saving work of Jesus Christ. Third, prayer is in the power of the Spirit. The two texts that set this forth are Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20, praying in the Spirit. So prayer then is to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Spirit. In Ephesians chapter 2, verse 18. Ephesians 2, verse 18, here Paul after discussing the way Jesus Christ has brought Jew and Gentile together, he says, “for through Him we both have our access,” that’s our access our communion with God. “In one Spirit to the Father.” Through the Son, to the Father, in the Spirit. So prayer then is to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Spirit.

### 5. THE GROUND OF PRAYER

Johnson (n. d.:85), stresses, if we were talking about the ground of prayer, we would say the reason we are able to pray is because Jesus Christ died for us and made it possible for us to enter into relationship with God. There is no prayer without redemption. But each of the presence of the Trinity has a specific place in the redemptive program. For example, in connection with the Father, he is the official representative of the Godhead. He is the seat of sovereignty in providence throughout the

world. He is the enforcer of the broken law. He's the source of adoption into his family. And so our prayer is directed to him first of all. In relation to the Son, Jesus Christ is the official mediator. If the Father is the official representative of the Godhead, he is the official mediator between men and God. He's the revealer of God. He's the Redeemer. He's the high priestly intercessor. And he's the king. So we come through the Son. And finally, prayer in relation to the Spirit. He too is an official. He's the official executive of God. And so he's the divine revealer in inspiration and illumination. He's the one who regenerates us. He's the one who intercedes through us on Earth. Our Lord is our heavenly intercessor. He's our earthly intercessor and he himself is the earnest of the glory which we shall have.

### 6. THE THEOLOGY OF PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Bharat (1976:43) lay the foundation of prayer. 'Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name . . .' from around the globe the Heavenly Father is addressed in the languages of earth. The prayer that Jesus taught begins where prayer must begin - with the true and living God. The Bible is God's Word; it is his story of his work in bringing rebellious men and women back to himself. It tells, not of man's seeking a lost God, but of God's seeking lost men. The Bible does not present an art of prayer; it presents the God of prayer, the God who calls before we answer and answers before we call (Isa. 65:24). In the biblical history, prayer is not introduced as a separate spiritual discipline: it rises as man's answer to God's address. The richness of later revelation about prayer never does prejudice to this simple reality: prayer is personal address to a personal God: 'Our Father, which art in heaven. . .'. Johnson (n. d:95) agree with Bharat, that, "Prayer seeks communion with God. To be sure, the praying Christian is transformed. Prayer plunges into agony and soars in ecstasy, but it does not seek the heights or depths of experience. It seeks the Lord. The delight found in his presence is offered to his praise."

### 7. PRAYER ADDRESSES THE PERSONAL GOD

God's glory is personally revealed. Speiser(1958:37) believe that, "Prayer, like all worship, is always a response to God's revelation of himself and his will. To call upon God's name one must first know his name; it is God who takes the initiative by making his name known. God reveals himself by his deeds; he also makes his name known directly by his words." In both, God is revealed as personal. In his words he both promises and proclaims his deeds. The wonder of both his words and his deeds evokes the response of adoration, Genesis 12: 1-3; 17: 17;18: 14; 21: 6; 28: 16-22; Exodus 3: 6,7,9,13, 16; 2Kings 6:17; Job 40:41; Psalm 19:1; 18; 33: 10,11; 57:5; 147; Luke 1:37. Prayer, in the biblical context, is always response to the God who has made him known.

- a.) Speiser (1958:37) added, the response of prayer is personal. The personal form of God's self-revelation requires a response that is supremely personal. Prayer is not a magical formula to be repeated, but the personal communication, awed and adoring, of the redeemed creature that stands in the presence of the Savior God.
- b.) According to Ferris (n. d:1), the response of prayer is effective. The pattern of prayer that is assumed and described in the Bible is grounded in God's own nature, his saving work and word, his gracious presence. This biblical theology of prayer gives answer to objections that are often raised against the practice of prayer. The assumptions of rationalism still underlie popular liberal thought.

### 8. PRAYER ADDRESSES THE COVENANT GOD

Reflection on the personal quality of prayer has already brought us to consider that God is personally present as Savior, not just as Creator. The fellowship between God and man that existed in the Garden of Eden was broken by human sin. The heart of the covenant that God made with Abraham was the relationship that God established. He would be *God* to Abraham: in that relationship was both God's claim and his promise. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you (Gen. 17:7). Abraham is called to walk before God, to keep the way of the Lord in righteousness and justice. His obedience is to manifest the relationship created by the Lord's taking knowledge of Him (Gen. 18:19), a relationship received by faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4). Larue (1975:410) affirms, "The relationship established by God provided the access of prayer. Moses, like

Abraham, prays on the basis of the covenant relationship God has established. Appearing to Moses at the burning bush, God identifies himself by his covenant with Abraham.”Jacob (1958:73-85) further stated, God's covenant was never exclusively individual. At Sinai, all the people redeemed from Egypt entered into covenant with the Lord. Indeed, it was God's covenant that formed a nation, a people of God, from the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt. God's words, mediated through Moses, were addressed to all the assembled people.

Herrmann (n. d:789) narrates, God's covenant was never exclusively individual. At Sinai, all the people redeemed from Egypt entered into covenant with the Lord. Indeed, it was God's covenant that formed a nation, a people of God, from the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt. God's words, mediated through Moses, were addressed to all the assembled people. In the new covenant as in the old, the people of God join in praise, confession, petition and thanksgiving. The revelation of God's full and final salvation in Christ binds those born of the Spirit in a fellowship of prayer. Individual prayer is not put above corporate prayer as more spiritual, more profound, or more pleasing to God.

### 9. GOD'S COVENANT LORDSHIP SHAPES PRAYER

Access to God in prayer implies that we seek to do the will of God. The covenant love of God for his people is a jealous love. God will tolerate no rivals. He will not be consigned to a polytheistic pantheon to be worshipped along with Baal and Astarte. To belong to God is to forsake the false gods (Exod. 20:5; 34:13; Deut. 4:23, 24). Charles (1879:26-38), affirm, “Solomon dedicated the temple of the Lord in prayer, but he later violated God's covenant by erecting a shrine to Chemosh, the god of the Moabites (1 Kings. 11:7; cf. Deut. 13:6-8). John reminds Christians of their loyalty to Jesus Christ: 'He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols' (1John 5:20, 21).”

### 10. PRAYER ADDRESSES THE TRIUNE GOD

#### 1. The renewal and fulfillment of prayer in Christ

B B (1979:28-38) believes that Christ ever lives to intercede; there can be no limit to his power to save. As he prayed for his own before his death, so he intercedes now with his Father (John 17). Jesus who prays for us in heaven also leads our worship on earth. In the midst of the congregation he sings his Father's praise (Heb. 2:12; Ps. 22:22). It is by the Spirit that Christ is present, and by the Spirit that he enables us to pray with him. On the one hand, therefore, we come in prayer and worship to where Jesus is in the midst of the heavenly assembly of the saints and the angels (Heb. 12:22-24). On the other hand, Jesus comes to pray with us as we gather to worship the Father in his name (Heb. 10:25).

#### 2. Prayer in the Spirit

The Spirit works to purify us so that individually and in the body of the church we may be a holy temple to the Lord (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19). Prayer therefore requires consecration. We must present our bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1, 2). The church, too, in order to pray to God acceptably, must strive to be holy, and not be defiled by sin (1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1). B B (1979:28-28) states, “The immediate presence of the Spirit of the Lord that requires holiness also offers fellowship. The Spirit opens heights and depths of the love of God that the saints can measure only together, clasping, as it were, their outstretched hands (Eph. 3:14-19). Paul prays that the church might be filled with the richness of God himself.”

In our need the Holy Spirit is our Helper. He prays for us, not at the right hand of God, but as the indwelling Spirit of Christ. His prayers are according to the will of God, for he knows that well perfectly. Yet he prays with us as well as for us. Spear (1979:24-27) narrates “He makes our groaning (cf. v.23) his groaning; by his presence in our hearts he brings his will to expression through the groans of our yearning. Although the groans of the Spirit are inexpressible in the depth of their yearning for us, they communicate effectually with God.”

#### 3. Prayer to the Father

Spear (1979:24-27) further states how Jesus taught his disciples to pray, 'Our Father'. The New Testament teaches prayer to the Son as well as to the Father. The worship of the whole creation is offered to the Lamb as well as to God in the heavenly scene (Rev. 5:13). To Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Phil. 2:9, 10; cf. Rom 14:11, where the same worship is ascribed to the

Father). The New Testament does not teach explicitly prayer to the Spirit, but the deity of the Spirit is affirmed, and the Spirit is said to function as our Advocate (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). That function in itself makes prayer appropriate: we address One who, like the Son of God, represents us and pleads our cause, our 'case'; to pray to the Spirit is to recognize both his deity and his work on our behalf. Prayer does not remove all the mystery. We cannot explain by analogy to human life how there can be one God while the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are equally God. In prayer, as in theology, we may misconceive the teaching of Scripture and think of the three Persons as three Gods. Bruce (1971:244) summarizes, "prayer, drawing us into communion with God, makes it easier, not harder, to confess the triune God. Calvin writes: 'I am exceedingly pleased with this observation of Gregory of Nazianzen: 'I cannot think of the *one*, but I am immediately surrounded with the splendor of the *three*; nor can I clearly discover the *three*, but I am suddenly carried back to the *one*.'"

### 11. CONCLUSION

#### My Theological Position

This research has afforded me knowledge about prayer based on the biblical point of view, 'The Theology of Prayer in the New Testament.' Prayer, in the biblical context, is always response to the God who has made himself known. Based on this paper, there is no recommendation as to the type of prayer Christian should adopt when praying. But this research has reminded the reader that before approaching God in prayer, human heart should be clean, our spirit, soul, and body should be sound mentally and spiritually so that we can concentrate and God should be the focus.

This research has brought out what can hinder our relationship in prayer with God which is sin. Therefore, because we want God to answer our prayers, we must avoid sin of any kind. The birth of Christ has opened the doors to heaven. Our coming to God in prayer is a request to God to fill our emptiness and to increase our faith in Him.

#### My Observation(s)

First, the concept of prayer has been misunderstood by some of us. Many a times, our prayers are directed not to God but to objects, or images placed in our homes and churches, this is probably the reason why some of our prayers to God are not answered by Him. Second, many Christians have exercised their faith in the so-called men of God instead of placing their faith, trust, and confidence in God. Over dependence on our pastors' rather than God. Third, a lot of Christians have been misled by some devotional books on prayer that are not biblically and theologically based on the Scriptures. How I wish such Christians would grasp books written by biblical scholars that would give them the theology of prayer as contained in the New Testament.

### 12. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the researcher is recommending this research document to every pastor, missionary and bible believing Christian to read and make it a working document for their Sunday school and bible studies material. Second, because there are new spiritual insights gained from this research, the researcher wishes to recommend that this research paper be recommended to the church. Third, there searcher wishes to recommend and suggest that this research work be treated at our conferences, symposiums, and retreats amongst our pastors', missionaries, fellowship leaders, and church workers so that every believer get to know what 'The Theology of Prayer in the New Testament' is all about. Not only that, but prayer cells should be establish and encouraged to adopt this document for their use. Also, and finally, at our prayer meetings, this document is recommended to be a source of re-orienting the concept of 'the theology of prayer' as contained in the New Testament.

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