

Addressing the Godhead in Prayer (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit?)

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Should Christians always address God the Father in their time of prayer? Is it wrong to pray to Jesus since Jesus requested that His disciples should pray to the Father? Many Christians have asked me this question over the years. In this study, I would like to investigate this matter so we can be sure that our praying is on Biblical ground and find the reassurance we need in our time of praying. This study will reveal that the believer can pray to God acknowledging Him as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There should be a growing awareness of the Godhead in our personal lives and through our prayer time. We need to pray understanding the relationship that God shares with us as a Father, Husband, and Teacher. The better we understand the roles of the Godhead in relationship to the believer's life the better we can develop a deepening relationship with God through our time of prayer.

There are three members of the Godhead that can be addressed in our time of prayer.

a. The Father (a child-father relationship)

Matthew 6:9

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.”

In this verse, Jesus taught His disciples to pray recognizing their fatherly relationship with God. Their prayer life and communication with God would be comparable to a child-father relationship. It's an intimate and close relationship. This special relationship should result in God's people depending on God as their Father and experiencing His fatherly love, provision, and special care over our lives, even as a daddy would care for his beloved children. We look to God as our Heavenly Father even as a child would look to their earthly father for his loving embrace, care, and provision. Understanding this role of God the Father in our lives will help us to develop a deepening relationship with Him as our loving Father.

This pattern of prayer established by Jesus has been used by some as the final answer to whom we should address in our prayer life. Since Jesus declared that His disciples should speak to the Father in their time of prayer, it's assumed that this is the only person of the Trinity that should be addressed. However, we should not be so quick to arrive at this conclusion based upon what Jesus said to His disciples. What Jesus taught here should not be the sole determining factor and final answer about addressing God in prayer.

There were three reasons the disciples prayed to the Father.

- a. Jesus had not returned to the Father.

Jesus told the disciples to pray to the father while He was still on earth (Matt. 6:9) and prior to His return and glorification with the Father.

This is WHEN Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father.
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The timing of Christ's teaching regarding prayer to the Father is very important to understand.

Although there is no Scripture that says, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Jesus which art in heaven" one must remember that this was impossible to do while Jesus was still living on earth. Therefore, Jesus would not inform His disciples to pray to Him. Naturally the disciples could NOT pray to Jesus prior to His glorification and ascension back to the Father. In fact, they would have to wait until Jesus was glorified before they could possess a new awareness of His abiding presence within them (John 14:19-20). Only then would it be proper for the disciples to communicate with the heavenly Christ through prayer. This will be brought out later in our study.

In John 17:5 Jesus anticipated His return to the Father and said:

"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

In other words, Jesus would eventually return to the Father and be glorified with Him. This would open a new pathway to God (Heb. 4:16) and also a new

opportunity for the disciples to communicate with the Son and experience a new dynamic relationship with Him (John 14:19-20). However, none of this could exist until Jesus returned to the Father. Until this time would come the disciples were to pray to the Father and deepen their relationship with Him.

b. Jesus wanted to glorify the Father.

This is WHY Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father. While Jesus was on earth, He wanted to glorify the Father.

Jesus taught in Matthew 5:16:

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

John 12:27-28

“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

In His humanity and submission to the Father Christ addressed the Father in His own time of praying. In addition, He always wanted to glorify and promote the Father’s glory prior to His ascension and return to the Father. Naturally, since Jesus was still on earth, He wanted to promote the Father and His glory; therefore, He request that His own disciples pray to the Father. However, with Jesus now in Heaven the Father also wants to glorify the Son.

Hebrews 1:3 declares:

“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

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.”

Today in Heaven, the glorified Christ shares equal glory with the Father as He sits the throne of the universe (Rev. 3:21). Therefore, the request Jesus made while He

was living on earth, regarding prayer to the Father, does not have the same significance after His departure and glorification in Heaven with the Father. In other words, since Jesus is equally glorified with the Father, it opens the door for the believer to address the Son during his prayer life as well. Since both the Father and Son share the same glory, and since both are in Heaven, and since we have a relationship with both the Father and the Son (2 John 1:3), it is not improper to pray to the Son.

1 John 1:3

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

When we fellowship with someone, we talk with them and since we are said to have fellowship with both the Father and Son, it stands to reason that we can pray to both of them. More on this later. For now, we want to see the importance of praying to our Father and having a wonderful prayer relationship with Him.

We must acknowledge by Jesus’ statement in Matthew 6:9 that we should develop a strong praying ministry directed toward the Father. We are to possess a personal relationship with God the Father. Perhaps our primary prayer life and ministry should address the Father. Scripture seems to impress this upon our minds.

Galatians 4:6 says:

“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

This verse reveals the personal and intimate relationship we are to have with the Father. Our closeness to the Father should cause us to express to Him in our time of praying, “Abba Father” which reverently means, “Daddy.” It’s wonderful to have a Father within the Godhead who cares for us and demonstrates His love to us. God is a loving, merciful, and caring Father to us.

Psalms 27:10

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”

In other words, the Lord will manifest His presence to us as our Heavenly Father and we can pray to Him and fellowship with Him (“fellowship one with another” - 1 John 1:7) as we would with an earthly father. Everyone needs a father and therefore we should pray to God as our Father and have an intimate awareness of His presence, love, and assistance that He gives to our lives.

c. Jesus wanted to teach His disciples about the Father.

John 16:23-24

“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. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”

This is WHAT Jesus taught His disciples regarding prayer to the Father.

Although Jesus was a Master Teacher and taught His disciples for three years by example and word, their perception of His revelation about the Father remained somewhat limited (John 14:9). What Jesus taught in this section of the Bible (“ask me nothing” – John 16:23) should not be misconstrued as meaning that a Christian could never address Christ in their daily prayer life. Christ was teaching the reality of His ascension back to the Father, His departure, and broken fellowship with the disciples. Naturally, since Christ would depart, they could no longer speak to Him and converse as they once did while He was on earth with them.

But there is much more to what Jesus was teaching. After Christ’s resurrection and ascension back to Heaven with the Father, Jesus taught that they were to address the Father “in my name.” He was conveying the truth that the disciples would experience a new *access* into the Father’s presence and a new *awareness* of the Father’s presence through Christ. The praying was to be done “in my name,” meaning to address Jesus’ name at some point in the prayer, acknowledging the new pathway Jesus opened into the Father’s presence (the throne room of Heaven) and the new intimate relationship they could now experience with the Father.

Hebrews 4:16 describes this intimate relationship:

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

In light of what Jesus taught in John 16:23-24, a Christian would have a new opportunity to address the “Father” in their time of prayer and experience a new intimate relationship with the Father that Christ opened to them, through His death on the cross, while experiencing the joy of His presence and answered prayer. Several things can be drawn from this verse. First, Christians will normally address the Father in their time of prayer sensing their new relationship with Him through Christ. Second, they should access the Father acknowledging Christ’s name (John 16:23-24, 26; James 5:14). No Christian could ever enter the throne room, or be invited to experience the wonder of the Father’s personal fellowship, without acknowledging that Christ justified them and opened up the pathway into the Father’s presence.

Romans 5:2

“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

For this reason, let us not forget to acknowledge the name of Jesus Christ in our time of prayer. Jesus is the only name that gives us acceptance in the heavenly throne room and provides us with this new loving relationship with the Father. Jesus, how sweet the name!

“How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
In a believer’s ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.
It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast.

By Thee my prayers acceptance gain,
Although with sin defiled;
Satan accuses me in vain,
And I am owned a child.”

All of these truths are very wonderful to contemplate. However, John 16:23-24 should not be seen as the final answer to what Person within the Godhead a Christian must address during his time of prayer. Since the disciples did not pray to Jesus while He was on earth, the comment Jesus made in light of His ascension to the Father (“ask me nothing” – vs. 23) has nothing to do with no longer addressing Jesus in prayer. Jesus was simply expressing the fact that they would no longer be able to talk to Him personally in the flesh after His ascension. This is because He would be living with the Father once again.

Jesus adds in John 16:26-27:

“At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.”

Christ reaffirms the new access and relationship they would have with the “Father” though prayer, as a result of His entrance into Glory and why they were to speak to the Father “in my name” (the name of Jesus – John 16:23, 24, 26). This new relationship with the “Father” and answered prayer would bring “joy” (vs. 24) into their hearts and lives.

Jesus was primarily teaching the REASON why His disciples could experience a new relationship with the Father (Christ would leave them and open the pathway to the Father and intimate relationship with Him). However, we must take note that Christ did not say they could NEVER address Him in their time of praying in the future. This is reading more into Christ’s teaching than He intended to reveal.

In fact, with Christ’s return at Pentecost the believers would also experience a new dynamic and living relationship with Christ (“ye in me, and I in you” - John 14:19-20). This would also indicate having a similar close relationship to the Son that would include intimate fellowship and praying. Jesus was not excluding Himself from having a personal relationship with the disciples in the future but He was teaching them to get to know the Father in a deeper and more intimate way, through prayer, in light of His return to Heaven.

In essence, our Lord’s teaching in the entire passage of John 16:23-27 refers to the newfound joy of praying to the Father, experiencing His love, and seeing the Father answer their prayers, through Jesus Christ. This section of Scripture is

reminding all of us how we too can possess a new, growing awareness of the Father's loving presence, through the pathway Christ has opened up for us and how the Father wants to answer our prayers. It was designed to provide encouragement and comfort to our hearts. Is your heart encouraged today when praying to the Father? Jesus expects us to pray to the Father and sense this new living and loving relationship with Him.

Let us not forget about our loving relationship with the Father and address Him as our personal Father in the time of prayer. We possess a relationship with the Father that is unique and precious. Our praying, reliance, and fellowship with Him is comparable to a fatherly relationship on earth but in a much deeper and more spiritual and profound way.

The great Scottish preacher John McNeill told that during his childhood he had to walk a long distance home every evening, and his route led through a forest with a large ravine. Reports said that wild animals and gangs of robbers were often seen in that area. Great fear would seize his heart as he made his way past the spooky- looking trees. He recalled, "One night it was especially dark, but I was aware that something or someone was moving slowly and quietly toward me. I was sure it was a robber. When a voice called out, its eerie tone struck my heart with fear. I thought I was finished. Then came a second call. This time I could hear the voice saying, 'John, is that you?' It was my father. He had known of my fear and had come out to meet me."

We have a heavenly Father such as this! He wants to come to our aid as we pray to Him, depend upon Him, and fellowship with Him.

2 Corinthians 6:18

"And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Paul spoke about addressing the Father in his time of praying (Ephesians 3:14). Peter also spoke about addressing the Father (1 Peter 1:17). Jesus also addressed the Father in His time of prayers (John 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25). These verses seem to indicate that believers would *normally* call upon God the Father in their time of prayer. It is the normal and natural response to pray to the Father.

“Children of the Heavenly Father
Safely in His bosom gather
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.”

As a child of the Heavenly Father, we will normally feel the urge to address God as our Father because of the new intimate awareness and relationship we have with Him. This is because Christ's intercessory work allows us to come into the very throne room of God and talk to the Father (Heb. 1:3; 7:25). And it's here we experience His wonderful companionship, care, and loving embrace! The better we understand the Father's role and relationship toward us, the better and more effectively we will pray to Him.

“The world's wealth and riches can be bought and sold,
But I possess a treasure far greater than gold.
Twas a gift passed down to me from heav'n above,
Twas the gift of my Father's love.

Safe and secure now in His love alone,
I find here my place of worth as One of His own.
And I don't need everything this world wants to give,
For I live in my Father's love.

And my Father's love is strong and true,
Always believing, always seeing me through,
So no matter what happens in His grand design
I'll be fine with my Father's love.”

2. The Son (a wife-husband relationship)

The Bible also reveals that we have an intimate relationship with God the Son that we should experience in our daily lives. This certainly must be considered in relationship to Whom we address in our prayer life.

Romans 7:4 declares:

“Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.”

We were once married to the law, possessing a relationship with legalism that condemned us to hell as a sinner. However, the believing sinner has died to this old relationship and has now been given a new relationship with Christ (“married to another” - Rom. 7:4). Our companionship with Christ is comparable to a marriage relationship where Christ is the Head of the marriage and the Church, as His people, is the Bride.

Ephesians 5:23

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”

Since the Scripture paints this wonderful relationship that we have with Christ as a marriage union, it is not unreasonable to assume that praying to the Son, the One to whom we are married, would be taboo or forbidden. In any marriage relationship there is communication and fellowship. The same would be true in the believer’s marriage relationship with the Son. We are open to talk to Him through prayer and live in close fellowship and communion with Him even as a bride would do with her husband.

Galatians 2:20 reveals:

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

1 Corinthians 1:9

“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Philippians 1:21

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Philippians 3:10

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”

All these verses reveal the intimate relationship that each child of God is to have with their Head and Husband, Jesus Christ, as they share a life of commitment and communion with Him.

1 John 1:3 reminds us once again that “truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” Paul’s desire was to know and fellowship with Jesus Christ. The believer is to possess an intimate union and relationship with the Son on a daily basis which is portrayed in Scripture as a marriage relationship.

“My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, ’tis now.”

Although we might sometimes think that we can separate worship from prayer it is impossible. Prayer is worship and worship is prayer. Yes, we often pray to Jesus and address Him in our time of worship. Why? It’s because we are married to Him and possess a relationship with Him on a level that is very unique and precious.

There is certainly prayer communication and companionship that we would naturally express to Christ on a daily basis. He lives within us; surely nothing that Christ taught during His earthly ministry about the Father would override the believer’s opportunity to experience His person and fellowship through worship and addressing Him in our time of praying. If we are joined to somebody in marriage we will naturally talk with them!

John 14:20

“At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”

John 15:5

“I am the vine, ye are the branches.”

The vine must communicate with the branches for there to be life, fruit, growth, and substance. Our relationship with Christ is not a sterile relationship. It is to be an open, personal, intimate, and dynamic relationship with Christ. This can only be experienced by communication with Him as our Head, marriage partner, and Lord. The portrayal of our marriage relationship to Christ (Eph. 5:23-25) would understandably necessitate the believer praying to Christ and relying upon Him for daily living and power. *A loving marriage means communication and the way we communicate to Christ is by talking to Him in prayer.* He is our loving spiritual

Husband, Savior, Master, and Lord. Certainly, we can pray to Him and know that we are addressing God.

It's only natural and expected to thank Jesus Christ for our salvation, for His daily companionship, abiding presence, power, and His loving embrace in our lives. How can one abide in Christ and experience their marriage relationship with Him without talking and communicating with Him? As we talk to the Lord and enjoy His presence, we will naturally address our dearest Friend, Jesus! The better we understand and experience Christ's personal relationship with us, as our marriage partner, the better it will enable us to pray effectively to Him.

Joseph M. Scriven wrote the words "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" in 1855. Scriven wrote this particular hymn to comfort his mother, who was across the sea from him in Ireland. The words beautifully portray the personal and praying relationship we can have with Christ as our Lord and God.

"What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there."

3. The Holy Spirit (a student - teacher relationship)

I once heard a very popular teacher and friend of mine, Dr. Lehman Strauss, during one of his prayers, ask the Holy Spirit to be our Divine Teacher and lead us in the truth for the study hour. This brings up a question. Is it appropriate to speak to the Holy Spirit during our time of praying? Of course, the Bible does not

say, "Thou shalt not pray to the Holy Spirit." There may also be an appropriate time when a Christian can pray to the Holy Spirit. I'm not advocating that our primary focus is to be upon the Holy Spirit and addressing Him during our time of prayer. This is because the ministry of the Holy Spirit was to draw our focus and attention upon Christ.

John 16:13

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come."

It's the desire and ministry of the Holy Spirit to point us to Christ's passion and our personal relationship with Him. His work is to point us to the One (Christ) who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20) and who supplies our every need in life.

Philippians 1:19

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

There is an interrelationship between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ within the Godhead ("the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ") in that the Holy Spirit reveals the power and loveliness of Christ's life to us and seeks to conform us to Christ's image or likeness (2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore, any Christian or movement that is constantly praying to the Holy Spirit is losing sight of the heart and ministry of the Holy Spirit which is to promote Jesus Christ. We should take note of this in light of the modern Charismatic Movement and the overemphasis on the Holy Spirit at the expense of developing one's personal relationship with the Father and Son.

This being said, when you come to the study of the Bible and your time of devotion, I see no reason why you cannot address the Holy Spirit in prayer, asking Him to guide you in the truth. It is the function or ministry of the Holy Spirit to teach the Christian the wonderful truths about the Bible and Christ (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:9-11). We can legitimately ask the Holy Spirit to be our personal teacher and revealer of Biblical truth since He is the Author of Scripture. We should long for His teaching ministry in our hearts and lives and pray that He would guide us in the truth that He has given to us. We might also address the

Holy Spirit and ask Him to reveal His power to our lives for witnessing which was promised to us (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit was also promised to be a comfort to our personal lives.

John 14:16-17

“And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”

“O spread the tidings ’round, wherever man is found,
Wherever human hearts and human woes abound;
Let ev’ry Christian tongue proclaim the joyful sound:
The Comforter has come!

The Comforter has come, the Comforter has come!
The Holy Ghost from Heav’n, the Father’s promise giv’n;
O spread the tidings ’round, wherever man is found—
The Comforter has come!”

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter (John 14:16-17), Convicter (John 16:8), and Counselor (John 16:13) teaching us the Word of God and bringing many things to our remembrance (John 14:26). The better we understand the Spirit’s role and ministry toward us will help us to effectively pray to Him. We can view Him as our divine Teacher and Guide to lead us through life and comfort our hearts in times of distress. We have earthly teachers that we look up to and we must look upon the Holy Spirit as our Director, Supplier, and Comforter in life. The Holy Spirit is with us and brings to us a new quality of life that consists of inner guidance, power, and encouragement.

“Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me,
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.”

This is a prayer of worship that we often sing and direct to the Holy Spirit!

In summary, there needs to be a balanced approach to our prayer life. This study has revealed that we should major on addressing the Father, which is our normal response to God as a result of the new awareness of His Fatherly presence through Christ's word (John 16:23-24). However, we will also address the Son in praise for His salvation, victory, and multitudes of blessings that He has brought into our lives and in view of our new spiritual union and abiding relationship with Him (John 14:20; 15:4). Furthermore, we can at certain times feel at home addressing the Holy Spirit for His empowering, comforting, and teaching ministry in our lives. I once heard Dr. Lehman Strauss end his prayer in this way: "And Holy Spirit, please grant us understanding of Your Word and be our teacher today. In Jesus' name, Amen."

As we get to know God and the roles that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to have in our lives, the better we will learn to address and pray to the Godhead. The Father's loving care as a daddy (Gal. 4:6) sparks a certain type of dependent and intimate prayer toward Him, the Son's relationship to us as our loving Husband and marriage partner (Rom. 7:4) brings before us another relational aspect of our prayer life, and the Holy Spirit's role as our Teacher and Comforter can also enable us to pray effectively to Him.

A balanced prayer approach with the Godhead is what is needed within our daily Christian lives. All the members of the Godhead are coequal and can be addressed in our time of prayer without ignoring what Jesus said about praying to the Father during His earthly ministry. We do not have to *generically* address "God" all the time in our prayers. We can become more specific and personal in our time of prayer realizing the roles and relationships that the Godhead has with every Christian. This makes prayer a new experience and exciting adventure and allows us to draw closer to the Lord. There are times we might address several different Persons within the Godhead during our prayer and be reassured that God hears us and wants us to express His fellowship, aid, and loving companionship.

My desire is that this study might help each one of us develop a deeper, more worshipful, meaningful, intimate, and committed prayer life with God. We need to become more dependent upon God and draw closer to Him as we experience the revelation of the Godhead in our lives.

“Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father’s throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief
And oft escaped the tempter’s snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!”