

Did Paul Pray to All Three Members of the Godhead?

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Paul gave Christians some of the clearest instructions on prayer found in the New Testament, and he taught that Christians should always pray to the Father. Although some use the so-called “benedictions” of Paul as authority to pray to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, it is clear that Paul did not consider such to be prayers. Some people have cited Second Corinthians 13:14 as evidence that Paul allegedly prayed to all three Godhead Members. Paul concluded Second Corinthians with these words: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor. 13:14). It should first be stated that just because this verse ends with the word “Amen,” that does not mean these words comprise a prayer. This is simply the concluding word of the epistle, similar to the Gospel according to John: “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen” (Jn. 21:25). The pronoun “you” in Second Corinthians 13:14 reveals that it is the Corinthians who are being addressed—not the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. When one considers other verses in the same chapter, he will discover that when it came to an actual prayer, Paul approached the throne of God the Father: “...I pray to God...” (2 Cor. 13:7).

Second Corinthians 13:14 is in the context of Paul’s farewell salutations, in which it was customary for him to express well wishes to Christians for them to be blessed:

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with an holy kiss. All the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen (2 Cor. 13:11-14; cf. Col. 4:18; Titus 3:15).

None of the sentiments from the passage above are prayers. They are simply greetings, salutations, and well wishes—standard elements of practically any letter or inspired epistle.

Further evidence that Paul did not consider such “well wishes” in his epistles to be prayers can be seen in other epistles Paul wrote, such as his letter to the Philippians: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:2). Some would say that verse included a prayer to Jesus, but notice the verses which immediately follow: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy” (Phil. 1:3-4). Paul said he thanked God the Father always in every prayer! What he had written in the previous verse (Phil. 1:2) was not a prayer, but simply a greeting expressing well wishes to his readers (compare 2 Cor. 13:14). The reader will remember that the epistle to the Philippians also contains these words: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

The same pattern can be seen in Paul’s epistle to the Romans: “...Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for

you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you” (Rom. 1:7-10; cf. 7:25, 10:1, 14:6, 15:30). What about First Corinthians? “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3-4; cf. 1:14, 11:13, 14:18, 15:57; 2 Cor. 1:9-12, 2:14, 4:15, 8:16, 9:8-15, 13:7). What about the epistle to the Ephesians? “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ...I...Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:2, 15-17; cf. 3:14, 5:20). What about the epistle to the Colossians? “...Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Col. 1:2-3; cf. 1:12, 3:17, 4:2-3). What about the first epistle to the Thessalonians? “...Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers” (1 Thess. 1:1-2; cf. 2:13, 3:9-10). What about the second epistle to the Thessalonians? “Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren...Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling...” (2 Thess. 1:2-3, 11; cf. 2:13). What about Paul’s second epistle to Timothy? “To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day” (2 Tim. 1:2-3; cf. 1 Tim. 5:5). What about Paul’s epistle to Philemon? “Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers” (Phm. 3-4).

The absolutely overwhelming conclusion is that Paul always prayed to God the Father! Although Paul wished his brethren well and hoped they would continually be blessed, he did not pray to all three Godhead Members. Some also cite a so-called “benediction” from Revelation 1:4 as authority for prayer to the Holy Spirit, but the same principle applies there as well. Revelation 8:3-4 makes it clear that the “prayers of all saints” ascend to God the Father.

Second Corinthians 13:14 is recognized as one of the few verses in which all three Members of the Godhead are mentioned; but please notice another: “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Rom. 15:30). Even though all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned, Paul knew that both he and the Christians in Rome only prayed to God the Father! See also all three Godhead Members mentioned in the following passages, with prayer clearly directed to the Father only:

...ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise...Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (Eph. 1:13-17).

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom

the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3:14-16).

...be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; (Eph. 5:18-20).

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father...For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost... (1 Thess. 1:2-5).

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

...we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments...And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment....And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us (1 Jn. 3:21-24).

Whether one is considering the teachings of Paul, the Lord Jesus Christ, or any other inspired person, praying only to the Father is the unmistakable pattern for prayer in the New Testament. Although the apostle Paul sometimes spoke with Jesus in miraculous contexts, those two-way conversations were not prayers, and they were limited to that miraculous period. As the evidence above shows, prayers must be offered to the Father in the name of Jesus, according to the Holy Spirit's instructions. To do otherwise is to disregard Deity's divine directives and dishonor Deity (Lev. 10:1-3; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Lk. 6:46). God's instructions for prayer are so simple; there is no need to complicate the Truth. As the apostle Paul instructed, let us pray to God our Father "in every thing," giving Him thanks "always for all things...in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"!

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