

## Does John 14:14 Teach Christians to Pray to Jesus?

Jason Patrick Hilburn

John 14:14 is used by some to teach that Christians may pray to Jesus today. The verse records Jesus saying, *“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”* (Jn. 14:14). At first glance, perhaps one might get the impression that this teaches Christians to pray to Jesus. There are some verses in the Bible that may initially appear to teach something that their own context contradicts. At first glance, Matthew 7:1 may seem to teach that Christians must never make judgments of any kind. The truth is only found by examining the greater context in which the statement is found (cf. Mt. 6; 7; Jn. 7:24, etc.). At a first glance of John 3:16, the doctrine of “faith only salvation” might be considered valid by some. Advocates of the faith only doctrine will argue that the “unbiased reader” will simply accept what the verse at first may seem to teach. However, one must dig deeper into the verse, the surrounding context, and/or the greater context of the remainder of the New Testament and find the harmony of all the Scriptures. Like Matthew 7:1, John 3:16 and many other verses, John 14:14 is a verse which could possibly be misunderstood if not kept in its proper context.

### *A Closer Look at the Context*

John 14:14 is a part of a larger context which actually began in chapter 13, in which Jesus was preparing His disciples for the time when He would be leaving them. The disciples had depended on Jesus greatly while He was with them on earth, but after Jesus’ ascension, the Holy Spirit and the Father would have a more active role in the disciples’ lives. In John 14-16, Jesus was putting great emphasis on their addressing the Father for the things they needed, because Jesus would no longer be with them. God the Father is mentioned no less than 24 times in the 31 verses of John 14. In the following table, please notice some examples of how Jesus emphasized the Father, and notice how Jesus continues to elaborate on what He said about prayer until He finally speaks with extreme clarity in John 16:

JOHN 14	JOHN 15	JOHN 16
<p>John 14:6b, 12-16a, 26b, 28b –            (6) <u>...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.</u> (12) <u>...greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.</u> (13) <u>And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.</u> (14) <u>If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.</u> (15) <u>If ye love me, keep my commandments.</u> (16) <u>And I will pray the Father...</u> (26) <u>...the Father will send in my name...</u> (28) <u>...my Father is greater than I.</u></p>	<p>John 15:7-8a, 16b -            (7) <u>If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.</u> (8) <u>Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit...</u> (16) <u>...go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.</u></p>	<p>John 16:23-24, 26-27, 29 -            (23). <u>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.</u> (24) <u>Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full...</u> (26) <u>At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: (27) For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that</u></p>

		<i>I came out from God... (29) His disciples said unto him, Lo, <u>now</u> speakest thou plainly, and <u>speakest no proverb.</u></i>
<p>Notice in John 14 above how Jesus was repeatedly emphasizing the Father. Verse 6 clarifies that Jesus was talking about coming to the Father by Jesus, not coming to Jesus by Jesus! (cf. vv. 13-14). Brother Jerry Martin noted, "Jesus claimed to be the only way to the Father; praying in His name acknowledges Him as such (Jn. 14:6)." Verse 16 refers to praying to the Father. Jesus would be active in fulfilling requests made to the Father in His name, and Jesus would be interceding (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25, etc.).</p>	<p>Notice the similarities between what Jesus said in John 15 and what He had said in John 14. Both passages mention the Father being "glorified" (14:13; 15:8) and asking "whatsoever" in Jesus' name (14:13-14; 15:7, 16), yet here in John 15 Jesus makes it clear that He has been talking about going to the Father in Jesus' name.</p>	<p>Notice that at the end of this discussion, Jesus clarified what He had been saying, to the point that His disciples said He had spoken "plainly." Jesus even used the term "Verily, verily," which is an indicator to listen closely. They would ask Him nothing in prayer, but pray to the Father.</p>

### ***Men Making "Me" Mandatory***

Some modern translations such as the New International Version and English Standard Version have added the word "me" into John 14:14 so that it reads, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." The United Bible Societies have tried to justify the inclusion of "me" because it is found in some manuscripts, and they say they think it makes the verse clearer. Lee Moses wrote, "So 'me' should be included because they believe it makes the passage clearer? This is not consistent textual philosophy, since the United Bible Societies generally favor the more difficult reading if all other factors are equal." Brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr. noted that the translators of the American Standard Version knew about manuscripts which included the word "me," but chose to leave the "me" out. Apparently this was because of its absence in other manuscripts, and they did not consider such to be a valid translation of the passage. The "me" is also not found in the King James or New King James translations, even though those who translated the New King James translation knew about the existence of "me" in some manuscripts. Brother Gary Workman wrote:

Granted, the word "me" is found there in certain Greek manuscripts and ancient versions. Nevertheless, this doubtful reading has been rejected by most translations, including the KJV, ASV, and even the RSV and NEB. It has historically been regarded as an unwarranted insertion, and the inclusion of the

word results in the absurdity of praying to Jesus in Jesus' name. Jesus said to "ask of the Father" (Jn. 15:16; 16:23,24).

One may wonder how textual scholars determine which variant is more likely to be the original wording. Several criteria are generally taken into consideration, including these: (1) The shorter reading is generally favored; (2) The more difficult meaning is generally preferred; (3) A determination is made regarding which reading likely gave rise to the other readings; and (4) A determination is made regarding which reading is more appropriate in the context. It just so happens that the wording of John 14:14 without the "me" meets all of those criteria!

Brother Gary Summers wrote the following:

Generally, it is not a good idea to base an argument on a textual variation—and especially one with so little authority behind it...Second (and more important), however, is the fact that adding me to the sentence makes it, at the very least, redundant, and possibly nonsensical. Why would the disciples ask Jesus something in the name of Jesus?! The hypothetical situation thus created is almost humorous. The disciples ask of Jesus a certain thing, and He answers: "By whose authority do you ask this blessing?" The disciples answer, "Uh, by your authority, Lord." Hmm. Without the me, the verse is consistent with all the other verses. This addition of me leaves the impression that such may have been done in order to justify the practice of praying to Jesus.

F. F. Bruce wrote, "...the logic and the thought here favour its omission [the word "me," JPH], which indeed seems to be demanded by the clear sense of 16:23a."

It is noteworthy that apparently there is no manuscript evidence indicating there was ever a "me" in John 14:13: "*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" This is further evidence that the alleged "me" of John 14:14 should not be there. As noted above, John 16:23 rules out the possibility of inserting a "me," and the rest of the New Testament teaches prayer to the Father for "*whatsoever*" Christians need, not to Jesus (Mt. 6:9-13, 30-32; 7:11; 18:19-20; Mk. 11:24-26; Lk. 11:1ff; Jn. 15:16; 16:23-29; Acts 8:22; 12:5; Rom. 1:8-10; 10:1; 15:30; 2 Cor. 13:7; Eph. 1:16-17; 3:11-16, 20; 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2-3; 1 Thess. 3:9-10; 2 Thess. 1:11-12; cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-5; James 1:5, 17; 1 Pet. 5:6-7; 1 Jn. 1:7-10; 3:21-24; Rev. 8:3-4, etc.). Advocates of praying to Jesus have neither proven that the word "me" should be present in John 14:14, nor have they explained away all the clear passages that contradict such a rendering.

### ***Avoiding Absurdity***

As already noted briefly, praying to Jesus in Jesus' name would neither be logical nor Scriptural. Brother Lee Moses wrote,

Why would Jesus command prayer to Jesus in Jesus' name, effectively saying, "Use my commendation to approach Me in prayer." This would be akin to an automobile salesman telling an acquaintance, "Come visit me at my dealership. I'll give you a great bargain on a new Chevrolet!" and then adding, "And tell me that I sent you!"

What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? After Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name, giving Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth (Phil. 2:6-9; Mt. 28:18). The only exception to this authority is the Father, Who is still "*the head of Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:3; cf. 15:27-28; Jn. 14:28; Eph. 4:4-6). Now everything one does must be done in the name of Christ, or by His authority (Col. 3:17). Although the authority of Christ is involved when praying in Jesus' name, it is more than a simple matter of authority—Christ has reconciled Christians to God by His death (Isa. 53; Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:16-18; Col. 1:21-22; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; Heb. 9:14).

Jesus' disciples had been praying according to His instructions before His ascension, but Jesus said they had not been praying in His name (Mt. 6:9ff; Lk. 11:1ff; Jn. 16:24). Jesus repeatedly emphasized that they must ask in His name, which indicates that Jesus' followers should actually express that they are asking the Father in Jesus' name when praying (John 14-16; Eph. 5:20, etc.). Brother Roy Lanier, Sr. wrote the following about approaching the Father in the name of Jesus:

Now, whether we make this statement ["in Jesus' name" or a similar phrase, JPH] at the beginning of our prayer or at the close is of little importance. The prevailing custom is to make this statement at the close of the prayer. The important thing is that we approach God the Father through Jesus as our high priest and mediator. Jesus said no one can come to the Father except through him (John 14:6). And Paul said, "For through him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). And Jesus is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near to God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25). We never draw nearer to God than when we are praying to him. And this passage says we are to draw near to God through Jesus. Why? Because he is our high priest over the house of God (Heb. 10:21). If we attempt to draw near to God in our own name, in our own worthiness, we sidestep, even reject, Jesus as our high priest. Furthermore, when we draw near to God through Jesus he makes intercession for us; if we do not go through him we are deprived of his intercession in our behalf.

Praying in Jesus' name was not to be done until after Jesus had offered Himself as a sacrifice to reconcile men to the Father and had gone back to Heaven (Jn. 13:31-16:29). John 14:14 is referring to Christians approaching the Father in Jesus' name after Jesus became their High Priest, with His entering the Most Holy Place after offering His blood (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25; 9:11-12). Because of Christ's sacrifice, the veil into the Most Holy Place of Heaven has been ripped open (Mt. 27:51; Heb. 10:19-22). Christians can boldly approach God's throne by the authority of their High Priest, knowing that now their sins are actually washed away and remembered no more, and knowing that He is interceding for them (Eph. 3:12-14; Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25; 8:12; 9:24; 10:1-22; 1 Jn. 1:6-2:2; 3:21). Christians are not taught to approach their High Priest in prayer by the authority of their High Priest. They are taught to "*come unto God by Him*"; they do not "*come unto Him by Him*" (cf. Heb. 7:25; Jn. 14:6).

Regarding the idea of praying to Jesus in Jesus' name: Is Christ the Mediator "between Himself and men," or is He the Mediator "*between God and men*"? (1 Tim. 2:5). The very word "*Mediator*" implies that there are three parties involved: "*For there is one God, and*

one mediator *between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim. 2:5). It is no accident that the description of Christ as the Mediator between God and men is found in the context of prayer (1 Tim. 2:1ff). The reason why He is the Mediator in prayer is also in that same context: *"who gave himself a ransom for all..."* (1 Tim. 2:6; cf. Heb. 9:15).

Men were casting out demons in Jesus' name before Jesus' death (Mark 9:38-39; Luke 9:49-50), but they were not praying in Jesus' name before His death, because Jesus was not yet their Mediator (John 16:24; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 9:15). This indicates that praying "in Jesus' name" is about Christians approaching God the Father through the Mediator between God and men. Understanding all of this should help one understand why it is neither logical nor Scriptural to pray to the Mediator in the Mediator's name. Christ's role as Mediator is about Christ reconciling men to the Father; thus Christians pray to the Father in the name of their Mediator.

Some say they do not understand how Christ can be the Christian's Mediator if they never pray to Him; however, Christ is still Mediator and Intercessor, even if Christians do not address Him in prayer. If that were not the case, then Christians would have to address Jesus in every single prayer! That is not how the Bible teaches Christians to pray. Some seem to think that Christians are to take their requests to Jesus, who then takes those requests to the Father for them. However, if one had to give his requests to Christ to get them to the Father, he would never be addressing the Father in prayer! Again, this is obviously not how the Scriptures teach men to pray, and that is not how Christ functions as Mediator or Intercessor. Christ's roles as Mediator and Intercessor remain intact and meaningful when Christians "*come unto God by Him* [address the Father in the Mediator's name, JPH], *seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them* [Christ will intercede for Christians who address God in Jesus' name, JPH]" (Heb. 7:25). Let the reader also compare the phrase "*come unto God by Him*" in this context of prayer with "*cometh unto the Father...by me*" in the context of John 14 (Jn. 14:6; cf. 14:13-14; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:5).

### ***Deity's Distinctions***

Some claim that since Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine, Christians may pray to them. However, if that is the case, why did Jesus never pray to the Holy Spirit? Was not the Holy Spirit divine while Jesus was on earth? Why did Jesus never teach His disciples to pray to the Holy Spirit, but rather to the Father? Jesus taught His disciples two different ways to pray—one way to pray to the Father before Jesus' ascension (Mt. 6:9ff; Lk. 11:1ff), and one way to pray after Jesus' ascension (ask the Father in His name, Jn. 16:23-24; cf. chapters 14-16), but in every example prayers were to be addressed to the Father.

John 14-16 records Jesus saying many things about the Members of the Godhead and what Their roles would be in the lives of the disciples after Christ's ascension. This would have been the perfect place to teach His disciples to pray to the Holy Spirit, Who would guide them into all Truth, but Jesus clearly taught that prayers are to be addressed to the Father. These facts clearly refute the idea that one may pray to any Member of the Godhead simply because They are divine.

Although Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine (and can rightfully be called God), Jesus called the Father "*the only true God*" (Jn. 17:3; cf. 4:23-24), and Paul often referred specifically to the Father as the "*one God*" or "*true God*" separately from Jesus and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:6; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 1 Tim. 2:5; cf. Mal. 2:10; Jude 4). Although God the Father is

the “*true God*” compared to idols, He is also the God of Jesus Christ, His divine Son (John 20:17; 2 Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:3; Heb. 1:9). Passages such as these teach that God the Father is “*above all*” (Eph. 4:6), including Jesus and the Holy Spirit, Who had been mentioned in the previous verses of Ephesians 4 (Eph. 4:4-6; cf. Jn. 13:16; 14:28; 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:27-28). Note that a father and mother are both equally parents, but the father is the head of his wife, having God-given authority over her (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3). In a similar way, Members of the Godhead are all Deity (Mt. 28:19), but the Father is the Head, above all.

Although the term “God” is most often used of God the Father, both Jesus and God the Father are at times called “God” or “Lord.” However, the difference is that Jesus is never called “the God” of God the Father or the Head of God the Father. In contrast, God the Father is called the God of Jesus, the Head of Jesus, and the Father of Jesus, and is described as being “above all,” including Jesus and the Spirit (Jn. 20:17; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 4:4-6). Therefore, God the Father is truly God in the ultimate sense of the word, with Him truly being “God...of all” (Eph. 4:6). Although Jesus and the Holy Spirit are divine, neither of them possesses this distinction. Why then is it so difficult for some to believe that there could be an act of worship devoted to God the Father, who is truly above all? Advocates of praying to Jesus and the Holy Spirit tend to ignore such Scriptures as those mentioned above in their teachings, and the result is a blurring of the distinctions between Members of the Godhead.

Members of the Godhead had different roles in creation, revelation, and salvation, and it is critical to understand that They also have different roles when it comes to prayer. Christ is the Mediator (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 7:25), but the Father is not, and the Spirit is not. While Christ intercedes for Christians (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), the Father does not. It is noteworthy that even though Jesus has ascended to Heaven, He still “prays” to His Father (Heb. 7:25; cf. Jn. 14:16). The Holy Spirit was said to be an Intercessor (Rom. 8:26-27), but the Father is not. As stated, these differences are directly related to Their distinct roles in prayer, and to teach that Christians may pray to Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit requires one either to overlook or to misunderstand this vital information. Knowing that the Scriptures clearly teach Christians to pray to the Father, and the Members of the Godhead have different roles in prayer, should They All be treated the same when it comes to prayer? The Father has a unique role in prayer, being neither Mediator nor Intercessor, because prayers are addressed to Him “*always for all things*”! (Eph. 5:20; cf. Jn. 16:23; Phil. 4:6; Rev. 8:3-4, etc.).

There is an overwhelming number of passages teaching Christians to pray to the Father, even though Jesus was present in the context of the said passages (cf. Mt. 6:6-15, 7:7-11; Mk. 11:24-26; Lk. 11:1-13; Jn. 14:6, 12-14, 15:16, 16:23-29; Acts 4:24-31; Phil. 1:2-4, 4:6-7; Rom. 1:7-10, 7:25, 14:6, 15:30; 1 Cor. 1:2-4, 1:13-14, 15:57; 2 Cor. 2:14, 4:14-15, 9:8-15, 13:5-7; Eph. 1:16-17, 3:14-21, 5:19-20; Col. 1:2-3, 1:12-13, 3:16-17, 4:2-3; 1 Th. 2:13-14, 3:9-11; 2 Th. 1:2-3, 1:11-12, 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:2-3; Phm. 3-4; Heb. 7:25; James 1:1-5; 1 Jn. 1:9-2:1, 3:20-24; Rev. 7:17-8:4). Did the Holy Spirit ignore, dishonor, or forget about Jesus in such passages, or *did He know exactly what He was doing*? There are actually several passages in which all three Members of the Godhead are mentioned, yet prayers are explicitly described as being directed to the Father, with no hint of prayers being directed to the Son or the Spirit (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 1:13-17; 3:14-16; 5:18-20; 1 Thess. 1:2-5; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Jn. 3:21-24).

Praying directly to Christ would also take something precious from the Father that belongs to Him—the prayers of His children. Jesus is our Brother (Mt. 28:10; Jn. 20:17; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:9-18), and God is our Father. There is a reason why God is called “Father,” and

prayer to Him is directly related to that concept of His being our Caregiver and Provider (Mt. 6; 7:7-11; 18:19-20; 20:23; Jn. 4:23-24; 16:23-27; Rom. 8:14-17; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 4:4-7; 5:20; Phil. 4:6; Jas. 1:17; 1 Pet. 5:6-7; 1 Jn. 3:1, etc.).

### *Exceptions, Not Examples*

Although it is not the main goal of this document to address such, there are some extraordinary events recorded in the New Testament involving a person making a request of Christ after His ascension, such as Stephen and John (Acts 7:55-60; Rev. 22:20). However, these inspired men were simply reacting to miraculous situations in which they found themselves—situations unlike anything men would experience today. Such events were not meant to be patterns for Christians today, any more than John making a request of an angel in the miraculous context of Revelation 10:9. Since John made a request of an angel and did not sin in doing so, do Christians have authority to make requests of angels today?

Although the word “pray” can sometimes have a general meaning of “asking for a favor” (Webster), simply making a request does not in and of itself constitute the act of worship called prayer, else John would have been guilty of worshiping an angel (Rev. 10:9), and men would be guilty of worshiping other men today by making requests of them. It is significant that the requests made by Stephen and John were not asked in Jesus’ name, because they were not “in prayer” to Jesus. They were speaking directly to Christ, Whom they actually saw, like John making a request of an angel, whom he actually saw. However, prayer is an act of worship directed to God the Father in Jesus’ name. In 1994 brother Wayne Jackson defined prayer as “...a communication between a child of God and his/her heavenly Father...” (“God’s Pattern of Worship”). To be more specific, according to the total teachings of the New Testament Scriptures, prayer under the New Testament is the non-musical expression of petitions and/or thanksgivings in a solemn address directed to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, often accompanied by praise, and sometimes including the confession of sins.

Passages such as those mentioned above do not prove that one should pray to Jesus today, any more than Revelation 10 proves that one should pray to angels today. Men should not try to make a pattern out of unique miraculous situations to the disregard of clear teachings on prayer found throughout the New Testament. As brother Thomas B. Warren wrote, some events recorded in the Scriptures were “optional and temporary.” Those in Bible times sometimes had options men do not have today because of situations unlike those which could be experienced today.

One must also be careful with so-called “examples” in the Bible, because sometimes people’s sinful actions were recorded that were neither condoned nor condemned in the Text, such as David’s eating the shewbread (1 Sam. 21:1-6). Although David’s actions were not explicitly condemned in the context of First Samuel, about one thousand years later Jesus said David’s actions were “*not lawful*” (Mt. 12:4). Perhaps people living under the Old Testament after the days of David could have argued that they could safely follow David’s “example” recorded in the Scriptures; however, they should have followed what God had clearly instructed them to do instead of following a fallible man’s actions. The conclusion of the matter is to fear God and keep His commandments regarding prayer, because “*to obey is better than sacrifice*” (Ecc. 12:13; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; cf. Lk. 6:46).

### *A Question Still Remains*

The question still remains as to why Jesus would teach His disciples to ask the Father in His (Jesus') name, but then say He (Jesus) would "do it" (Jn. 14:14). For one thing, when Christians make requests to the Father, Christ is interceding, pleading for their requests to be fulfilled (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). Let the reader also note that John 14:13-14 is in a context in which Jesus was promising miraculous power (cf. 14:12, 16-17, 26). Although Jesus was active in confirming the Word with miraculous power (Mark 16:20; Acts 9:34; 1 Cor. 1:4-8), the early church prayed to the Father for such miracles to be done in the name of Jesus! (Acts 4:23-30). The prayer in Acts 4 is an example of Christians praying to the Father for blessings which Jesus would have an active role in fulfilling, so Acts 4:23-30 is a picture of John 14:13-14 in action.

Luke 11:13 records Jesus teaching His hearers to ask the Father for the Holy Spirit, yet Jesus said He would be the one to send the Spirit (Jn. 15:26; 16:7; cf. Acts 8:15, 22). This would be an example of asking the Father for something, but in a sense, Jesus is the one "doing" the sending (cf. Jn. 14:13-14). John 14 also records Jesus saying that the Father would send the Spirit in Jesus' name (Jn. 14:26). Apparently this is because Christians would ask the Father in Jesus' name for the power of the Spirit (Jn. 14:13-14; Lk. 11:13; Acts 4:23-30; 8:15), and Christ would also "pray the Father" for the Spirit to be sent (Jn. 14:16). Christ would then send the Spirit from the Father with the Father's approval (Jn. 15:26; 16:7); therefore both Father and Son were said to send the Spirit (cf. Jn. 4:1-2; Acts 2:22; 17:30-31; Rom. 2:16; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 1:1, etc.). This sheds more light on the meaning of John 14:14 in its context of receiving the miraculous power of the Spirit. Both the Father and Son would be active in fulfilling such requests, but prayers were to be addressed to the Father in Jesus' name (Lk. 11:13; Jn. 14:12-16, 26; 15:16; 16:23-24; Acts 4:23-30; 8:15, 22).

The following Scriptures reveal more information regarding why Jesus would teach men to pray to the Father, but then say that He (Jesus) would fulfill the request. Please notice First Thessalonians 3:9-11:

*(9) For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; (10) Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? (11) Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*

In the above passage, Paul mentioned praying to God the Father, but both the Father and the Son would be active in fulfilling the request of prayers addressed to the Father (cf. Jn. 14:13-14). Again, this helps explain why Jesus said He would be active in fulfilling requests (Jn. 14:13-14), but also said the Father would fulfill requests (Jn. 14:16; 15:16; 16:23), although the requests would always be made to the Father.

Paul also wrote another passage teaching the same thing:

*(6) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. (7) And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (19) But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7, 19).*

Notice in this passage that Paul teaches Christians to go to God the Father in prayer for “*every thing*” they need; however, he also taught that God would supply those needs by Christ! That is the same teaching found in John 14:13-14. See also 1 Corinthians 1:4, which records Paul giving God the Father thanks for something Paul had received “*by Jesus Christ.*”

All of this follows the same pattern that can be seen from the creation of the world. Jesus actively fulfilled the Father’s will in creation: “God...created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:9; cf. 3:11; Jn. 4:1-2; Heb. 1:1; 1 Cor. 8:6); in revelation: “God...hath...spoken...by His Son” (Heb. 1:1-2; cf. Jn. 17:8); and in reconciliation: “God...reconciled us...by Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 5:18; cf. Eph. 1:5; 1 Th. 5:9). Jesus will fulfill the Father’s will in the resurrection: “He...shall raise up us also by Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:14); and in the judgment: “God shall judge...by Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16; Acts 10:42; 17:30). Following this same pattern, Jesus carries out the Father’s will by having an active role in fulfilling requests made to the Father (Jn. 14:13-14). Also, the fact that Jesus pleads to the Father indicates that the Father is the One with the ultimate authority to make the final decision (cf. Jn. 14:16, 28; cf. Mt. 20:23); therefore, Christians’ requests and thanksgivings in prayer are addressed to the Father.

### *Verily, Verily*

Passages which are more difficult to understand (John 14:14) must be understood in a way which does not contradict clear passages (John 15:16; 16:23). Jesus would not have taught His disciples something in John 14 that would so clearly contradict what He would go on to say in John 16, and Jesus’ disciples understood that the words recorded in John 16:23 could not have been much plainer (cf. Jn. 16:29). A careful study of John 16:23-26 reveals powerful evidence that Jesus was actually teaching His disciples not to pray to Him. To prove that John 14:14 is not teaching men to pray to Jesus, a closer examination of John 16:23 is in order.

Advocates of praying to Jesus claim that in the first part of John 16:23 Jesus is not referring to prayer, but asking questions for information. Although the phrase “*no question*” is found in the American Standard Version, this Greek word “*ouden*” is never translated as “*no question*” in any other passage in the ASV. Out of the 346 times it occurs, *ouden* is never translated as “*no question*” in the King James Version. In the NKJV and ESV translations of John 16:23, *ouden* is translated as “*nothing.*” It seems strange that the ASV translators translated it in this way when other translators did not see fit to do this, and that word is not translated in that way in any other passage, as far as this author can determine. Thayer says this word (from the root *oudeis*) means “*no one, nothing.*”

The key to understanding what Jesus is saying in the first part of verse 23 is to notice what Jesus goes on to say. Please notice the contrast He makes in verse 23, and the several similarities between verses 23 and 26. Also notice the use of the words stemming from the Greek roots *erotao* and *aiteo*:

John 16:23-29

(23) And **in that day ye shall ask [erotao] me nothing. Verily, verily,** I say unto you, **Whatsoever ye shall ask [aiteo] the Father in my name,** he will give [it] you.

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

(25) These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.

(26) **At that day ye shall ask [aiteo] in my name:** and I say not unto you, that I will **pray [erotao] the Father** for you:

(27) For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

(28) I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

(29) His disciples said unto him, Lo, **now speakest thou plainly**, and speakest no proverb.

The similarities between verses 23 and 26 are undeniable:

- 1) The phrase "*In that day*" is used in both verses (same words in Greek).
- 2) The words "*ask in my name*" are found in both verses.
- 3) The words *aiteo* and *erotao* are used in both verses.

Please notice that in verse 26 *aiteo* and *erotao* are clearly used interchangeably to mean the same thing! (make request in prayer). The word *erotao* is actually translated as "*pray*" in verse 26. If one is honest, surely he will concede that the two words (*erotao*, *aiteo*) must have the same meaning in verse 23 as well. The similarities between these two verses are extremely compelling, and this comparison is much more plausible than trying to pair verse 23 with earlier verses in the chapter that are dissimilar.

Jesus was saying, "You will not *erotao* me at all (v23a), because you will *erotao* the Father!" (v26b). Whatever it is that Jesus is saying they would be doing to the Father, Jesus is also saying they would not be doing that to Jesus. Obviously they would not be asking the Father for information, but making requests of Him in prayer (*erotao*, v26b). This means that they would not be going to Jesus in prayer! (*erotao*, v23a).

Let the reader note that Jesus went on to "*pray*" (from the Greek root *erotao*) to the Father several times, praying in the very next chapter (Jn. 17:9, 15, 20). This was after He told His disciples not to *erotao* (pray to) Him "*in that day*" after His ascension! (Jn. 16:23, 26). See also the use of *erotao* in John 4:31, 40, 47 and 14:16, in which it does not mean "asking a question for information."

When determining the meaning of this passage, close attention should be paid to the contrast Jesus was making. Even those who believe one may pray to Jesus would have to admit that the last half of John 16:23 is a reference to prayer. To say that the first part of John 16:23 is not a reference to prayer is to ignore the contrast Jesus was making. To ignore the contrast Jesus was making in verse 23 is to ignore what Jesus was really teaching.

This passage plainly refutes the doctrine of praying to Jesus! May all Christians listen to what the Lord said and obey Him (Mt. 28:18-20; Lk. 6:46; 1 Tim. 6:15; 1 Sam. 15:22-23). For one to maintain that praying to Jesus is Scripturally authorized, he must: 1) Ignore the contrast Jesus made in John 16:23 regarding prayer, thus ignoring what Jesus was really teaching; 2) Ignore the similarities between John 16:23 and 16:26; 3) Ignore the fact that *erotao* and *aiteo* are used interchangeably in John 16:26; 4) Ignore the way Jesus used the Greek word *erotao* in the immediate context to mean "*pray*" (Jn. 16:26b); 5) Ignore the fact that Jesus went on to *erotao* (pray to) to the Father in the very next chapter (Jn. 17:9, 15, 20), after He told His disciples not to *erotao* (pray to) Him "*in that day*" after His ascension (Jn. 16:23, 26; cf. 4:31, 40, 47; 14:16); 6) Maintain that in His instructions for prayer in John 16:23ff, Jesus did not speak "*plainly.*" "*His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no*

proverb" (Jn. 16:29); 7) Explain why Jesus repeatedly said, "ask the Father in my name" if He were not plainly establishing a divine pattern for prayer.

### ***Not Practicing What They Preach***

The advocacy of praying directly to Jesus in Jesus' name has become more prominent in recent years, with several feeling confident enough about this to publish materials advocating such. This writer has had discussions with several who believe John 14:14 teaches Christians to pray to Jesus. After asking some rather direct questions, it has been surprising to discover that many who use John 14:13-14 to argue for praying to Jesus for "whatsoever" or "any thing" Christians need, actually do not feel comfortable doing so themselves! These are some of the same people who argue that one may pray to the Holy Spirit, yet when asked for examples of how or when *they* pray to the Holy Spirit, they cannot or will not give any. It seems strange that some are willing to cause divisions and defend vehemently something about which they do not feel strongly enough to practice themselves.

### ***Conclusion***

May all men let the Bible explain itself, and be careful with God's powerful Word. Just because a verse may **seem** to have a certain meaning when given a cursory glance, this does not mean that is actually what the verse teaches. Deeper study of more difficult verses in their context is essential to understand what God is teaching through His Word. Whether discussing John 14:14 or other passages, the evidence that one may pray to Jesus is weak, being based on speculation, passages taken out of context, or the interpreting of rather obscure passages without regarding the meaning of extremely clear passages. John 14:14 does not teach Christians to pray to Jesus in the name of Jesus, but rather teaches Christians to ask the Father in Jesus' name, and Jesus will have an active role in fulfilling those requests. This is the only interpretation which harmonizes perfectly with the immediate context and the remainder of the New Testament (cf. Rom. 1:8-10; 15:30; Eph. 3:12-14, 20; 5:20; Phil. 1:3-4; 4:6-7, 19; 1 Thess. 3:9-11; 1 Jn. 3:21-24; Rev. 8:3-4, etc.).

### **WORKS CITED**

- Bruce, F. F. The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983). p. 301.
- Jackson, Wayne. "God's Pattern of Worship." In Worship in Spirit and In Truth. 1994 Freed-Hardeman Lectures. Ed. David L. Lipe. Electronic file. p. 218.
- Lanier, Roy H., Sr. "Problems in Prayer." *Firm Foundation*. 1979. p. 298.
- Martin, Jerry. "God's Law Today Concerning Prayer." In Forever Settled in Heaven. Spiritual Sword Lectureship. Ed. Gary Colley. (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2012).
- Moses, Lee. *Back to Biblical Prayer, Part 1*. <http://www.fultoncountygospelnews.org>.
- Summers, Gary W. *Praying to Jesus (Response to Christian Courier)*. <http://www.spiritualperspectives.org>.
- Taylor, Robert R., Jr. Shall We Pray to Jesus?. (Taylor Publications, 2011).

Warren, Thomas B. When Is An "Example" Binding?. 1975. p. 134.

Webster, Noah. Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of American English. e-Sword software. (Franklin, TN: Rick Meyers. 2000-2013).

Workman, Gary. "Cults and Worship." In Worship in Spirit and In Truth. 1994 Freed-Hardeman Lectures. Ed. David L. Lipe. Electronic file. p. 479.

*For other materials on praying to Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit,  
please contact Jason Hilburn at this email address: [jasonhilburn@yahoo.com](mailto:jasonhilburn@yahoo.com)*

© 2015 Jason Patrick Hilburn (jasonhilburn@yahoo.com); Last modified September 18, 2015