

It's Not the Model Prayer for Us

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Many call the prayer of Matthew 6:9-13 "The Lord's Prayer." Members of the church of Christ generally call it "The Model Prayer," while referring to the prayer of John 17 as "The Lord's Prayer." This is because the words of John 17 are an actual prayer of the Lord to His Father, and the prayer of Matthew 6 was a model for Jesus' disciples.

If we call Matthew 6:9-13 "The Model Prayer," do we understand that it is no longer the pattern for Christians today? While there are some things in the prayer still applicable to us, some things pertained only to the time before Jesus' death on the cross.

The Kingdom Has Already Come

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, as recorded in Matthew 6 (and a similar pattern in Luke 11:1-4), this was before His kingdom was established. John, Jesus, the twelve apostles, and the seventy disciples were all preaching that the kingdom was "*at hand*" (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Luke 10:9). They were anticipating the imminent coming of the kingdom and praying for it to come. That kingdom came into existence on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension back to Heaven (Acts 2).

Daniel had prophesied that the kingdom would come during the kings of the fourth world empire from Daniel's time, which was Rome (Daniel 2:34-45). Isaiah had prophesied that this peaceful kingdom/house it would begin in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:1-4; cf. John 18:36; 1 Timothy 3:16). Jesus said the kingdom would come with power in His generation (Mark 9:1); that the power would come in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49), and that the power would come from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6-8). All these criteria were met on the day of Pentecost, the day the Lord's church/kingdom was established, as recorded in Acts 2 (cf. Matthew 16:18, 19, 28).

After the events of Acts 2, Paul told the Colossians that the kingdom had already come: "*Giving thanks unto the Father...who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*" (Colossians 1:12, 13). When writing Revelation, John said he was already "*in the kingdom*" (Revelation 1:9). Since the kingdom has already come, should we still be praying for it to come? Those praying for some future kingdom in which Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years are not praying according to God's will (1 John 5:14). They will be sorely disappointed one day, because the Bible does not teach such.

They Were Not Praying in Jesus' Name

Have you ever noticed that "The Model Prayer" of Matthew 6 simply ends with "Amen"? There is no mention of praying in the name of Jesus in that context, nor in Luke 11. That is because God's people were not praying in the name of Jesus at all before His death on the cross. John 13-16 records Jesus preparing His disciples for the time after His death, when He would go back to His Father (13:1; 16:28). In this context, Jesus taught His disciples a different way to pray. After His death and ascension, they would pray to the Father in Jesus' name. Jesus said, "*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*" (John 16:23-24; cf. 14:13, 14; 15:16).

Why do Christ's followers now pray in the name of Jesus? After Jesus' death He became High Priest, having entered the Most Holy Place after offering His blood (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25; 9:11-12). Although there can be many intercessors who plead to God on behalf of someone else, Jesus is the only Mediator between God and men, because He alone gave Himself as "*a ransom*

for all" (1 Timothy 2:1-6; Hebrews 2:9; 9:15; James 5:16). Because of Christ's sacrifice, the veil into the Most Holy Place of Heaven has been ripped open (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19-22). Christians now have access to Heaven and can boldly approach God's throne by the authority of their High Priest, knowing that their sins are actually washed away, and that Christ is on the right hand of God interceding for them (Romans 8:34; Ephesians 3:12-14; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25; 8:12; 9:24; 10:1-22; 1 John 1:6-2:2; 3:21). Those living during the events of Matthew 6 and Luke 11 did not have those blessings, and they were following a pattern for prayer that was later changed by Christ Himself! (John 16:23, 24).

Someone may wonder, what exactly does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? It does not simply mean to pray according to His instructions, or simply in the way He authorized. His disciples had already been praying according to His instructions before His death, but they had not been praying in His name (John 16:24). Note that people were casting out demons "in His name" before His death, but they were not praying in His name (Mark 9:38-39; Luke 9:49-50). If they could cast out demons in His name, why were they not praying in His name? He was not yet "*the mediator of the new testament...by means of death*" (Hebrews 9:15).

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 (Philippians 2:6-9; Matthew 28:18). The only exception to this authority is the Father, who is still "*the Head of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:3; cf. 15:27-28; John 14:28; Ephesians 4:4-6). Now everything one does must be done in the name of Christ, or by His authority (Colossians 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 (Isaiah 53; Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:16-18; Colossians 1:21-22; 1 Peter 3:18). Christians now access God "*through Jesus Christ*" (Romans 1:8; Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 7:25).

Should we say "in Jesus' name," "in the name of Jesus," or a similar phrase when praying? Everything we do or say must be by Jesus' authority (Colossians 3:17), but the New Testament does not repeatedly and explicitly instruct us to "eat in His name," "give in His name," "sing in His name," "take the Lord's Supper in His name," like it does abundantly regarding prayer (almost to the point of redundancy). This implies that there is something else meant about prayer when it repeatedly says it must be done in Jesus' name.

It has already been shown that praying in Jesus' name does not simply mean to pray according to His instructions, or simply in the way He authorized, and we know God's people were already approaching God in prayer before the cross, without Jesus as their Mediator. It seems that in John 14-16 Jesus was clearly instructing His followers to verbally offer prayers differently "*in that day*" than they had in the past. If not, why would Jesus have repeatedly said, "*Ask in my name,*" and "*Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name*"? If this had nothing to do with an actual change in the way they asked, repeatedly saying "*ask in my name*" seems rather meaningless. Apparently, Jesus was literally teaching them a different way to ask.

Saying "in Jesus' name" in prayer (or a similar phrase) acknowledges that Jesus has truly reconciled us to the Father by His death. It should also continually remind us of that fact, similarly to the Lord's Supper. God obviously and understandably does not want the sacrifice of His Son to be forgotten or taken for granted. It seems that God wants us to verbally acknowledge this when we pray. Verbally acknowledging things God already knows is an important part of prayer. God already knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8), but we are told to ask anyway. Verbalizing our requests shows that we acknowledge our dependence on the Father (James 1:17). In a similar way, verbalizing "in the name of Jesus" (or a similar phrase) shows that we

acknowledge Christ as our High Priest and Mediator by means of His death. That is how and why we approach God “*by Him*” (Hebrews 7:25; cf. John 14:6).

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.

Conclusion

Although some parts of “The Model Prayer” do not directly apply to us today, most parts are still applicable, such as asking our Father for our daily necessities or forgiveness. Let us be thankful the kingdom has come, because Christ is the Savior of that one body, and He will deliver up the kingdom to God when He returns (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 15:23, 24). For now, we can boldly approach God’s throne by the authority of our High Priest, having the hope of one day going past the veil into the Most Holy Place of Heaven!

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