

Does Revelation 5 Teach Prayer to Jesus?

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On several occasions, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. He taught them how to pray before His death (Mt. 6:9-13; 7:7-11; Lk. 11:1-4), and He taught them how they should pray after His death, burial, and resurrection (Jn. 14-16). On every occasion, Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father, not to Jesus or the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus explicitly told His disciples not to address Him in prayer after He left them in the Father's care: *"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"* (Jn. 16:23). After Jesus explained this so clearly, His disciples understood, and *"His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb"* (Jn. 16:29).

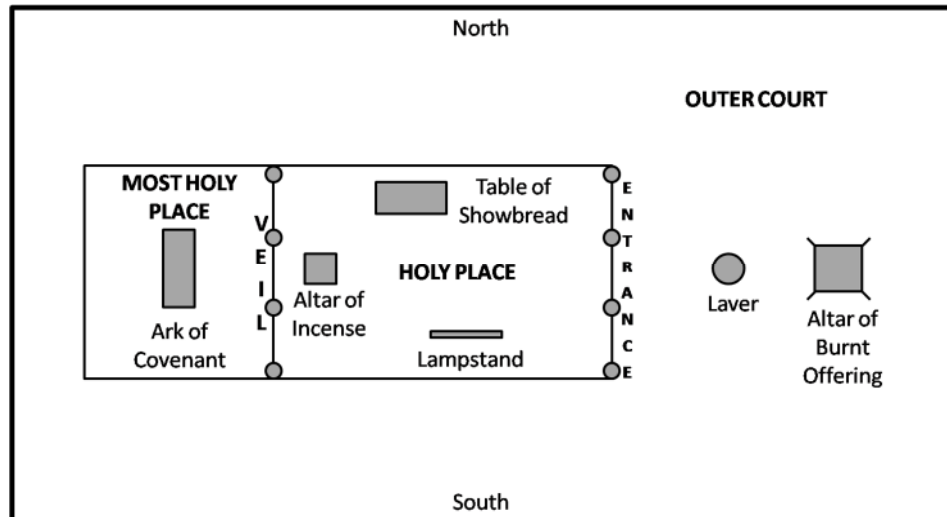
With such plain teaching from Christ, it is a shame that some have ignored these and other clear passages, taking positions regarding prayer that contradict Christ. The Book of Revelation has been misunderstood and misused many times to teach many false doctrines, and some have used Revelation chapter five to teach that prayer to Jesus is authorized. They use this passage: *"And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"* (Rev. 5:8, 9).

Many Scriptures may seem to teach a certain doctrine when given a cursory glance, but with deeper study, one learns the true meaning. Take, for example, John 3:16 or Matthew 7:1. Context is the key! The context of Revelation 5 takes place in the presence of the throne of God. The Lamb was next to the throne, and there was someone next to Him, sitting on the throne: God the Father. *"...Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever"* (Rev. 5:13). In the previous chapter, these same elders were worshiping God the Father, the one who sat on the throne: *"The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever..."* (Rev. 4:10).

As will be shown, these prayers of chapter five were not being offered to Christ, but they would later be offered to God the Father in chapter eight. Even so, when Christians pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, Jesus is present and active on the right hand of God as Mediator, Advocate, High Priest, and Intercessor (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1, 2). Prayers go up to God through faith in Christ and His teachings and with the understanding that Christ is also pleading to God on the Christian's behalf; therefore, Christ is not excluded. He has His own unique and active role in Christians' prayers, even though they are addressed to the Father.

The reference to incense in Revelation 5:8 and 8:3, 4 (ASV 1901) is obviously a reference to worship in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Covenant. The tabernacle was a pattern of things which would come in the future, with practically every part having a spiritual meaning for the future (Heb. 8; 9). As mentioned here in Revelation, the altar of burnt incense represented the prayers of the saints. The veil represented the body of Christ (Heb. 10:19, 20; Mt. 27:51). The presence of God was in the Most Holy Place (Ex. 25:21, 22). The writer of Hebrews implied that

the altar of burnt incense was a "part" of the Most Holy Place, even though it was actually just outside of the Most Holy Place (Heb. 9:3, 4). What does all of this have to do with this discussion? Could the placement of these parts of the tabernacle be symbolic of the fact that the prayers of the saints (altar of incense) go through Christ (the veil) into the presence of God the Father (the Most Holy Place)? (see Romans 1:8). If the prayers stopped at the point of the veil (Christ), they would never enter the presence of God the Father. Of course, the veil was rent upon Christ's death, giving us access to the Father through our magnificent Mediator's sacrifice (Mt. 27:50, 51; Jn. 16:23, 24; Rom. 5:10; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 3:18).



The terms "thanks" and "thanksgiving" (from the Greek *eucharistia*) are most often used as references to prayer in the New Testament. These terms are found in Revelation 4:9 and 7:12 (regarding God the Father), but **not in chapter 5** (regarding the Lamb). Here are some passages where *eucharistia* refers to prayer: 1 Cor. 14:16; 2 Cor. 9:12; Eph. 5:4; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 3:9, 10; and 1 Tim. 2:1; 4:3, 4. See also prayer as *eucharisteo* in Mt. 15:36; 26:27; Acts 27:35; Rom. 1:8; 7:25; 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:4; 10:30; 11:24; 14:17; Eph. 1:16; 5:20; Php. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:2; Phm. 4; Rev. 11:17, and many others.

Notice the similarities between the following passages (from Rev. 4, 5, and 7), but the giving of thanks is conspicuously missing from chapter five regarding the Lamb:

*And when those beasts **give glory and honour and thanks** to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power... (Rev. 4:9-11, regarding God the Father, who was seated on the throne; cf. 5:13; 6:16; 7:10).*

Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing (Rev. 5:12, regarding the Lamb).

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen (Rev. 7:11-12, regarding God the Father; cf. 7:10; Rev. 11:15-17).

Again, *eucharistia/eucharisteo* (thanksgiving/prayer) is missing from chapter five regarding the Lamb. This coincides with Ephesians 5:20, which teaches that prayers are always to the Father, the giver of every good and perfect gift: *"Giving thanks [eucharisteo] always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Eph. 5:20; cf. Mt. 6:9; 7:11; 20:23; Jam. 1:17; Rev. 11:15-17).

Here is another point of interest: Revelation chapter seven indicates that the Lamb was still by God the Father's throne, yet the opening verses of chapter eight record the prayers of all saints being officially offered on an altar to God the Father—not the Lamb: *"And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with **the prayers of all saints** upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, **ascended up before God** out of the angel's hand"* (Rev. 8:2-4. See the term "God" used consistently for the Father in Revelation 1:1, 2, 6 ASV, 9; 2:18; 3:1, 2, 12, 14; 4:5, 8; 5:6, 9, 10; 7:10-17; 12:10; 14:4, 10, 12; 20:6; 21:22, 23; 22:1, 3, etc.

In chapter five they were merely holding the incense—not officially offering it up on the altar. The elders of chapter five were described as *"having...golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints,"* but here in chapter eight, the prayers of all saints are **actually offered** on the golden altar before the throne, ascending up to God the Father. Notice it does not say that some prayers of the saints went up before Christ, and some prayers of the saints went up before God. The prayers of **all saints** ascended up before God. Is that not the same teaching from the writer of Hebrews? He taught Christians to boldly approach God's throne in prayer, because Christ is their High Priest on the right hand of God (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25, 26; 8:1; 12:2; cf. Rom. 8:34). These passages describe what happens when Christians address the Father in Jesus' name (Jn. 16:23), and there is no authority from Revelation five or any other Scripture for praying to Jesus.

Even though chapter five does not say that the elders officially offered up the incense on the altar to the Lamb, it does say they sang to the Lamb. Let us sing to God and the Lamb (Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), but let *"the prayers of all saints"* *"always"* rise up as sweet smelling incense to God the Father *"for all things"!* (Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; Php. 1:3, 4; 4:6, 7).