

PRAYER

It is believed the practice of prayer first appears in the Old Testament when Seth and his wife gave birth to Enos. **"And to Seth, to him also there was born a son, and he called his name Enos [or Enosh]; then began men to call upon the name of the LORD."** Genesis 4:26. This verse says that men began in later times began worshipping God by prayer. Men before this time had offered sacrifices and offerings unto God. **"And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock [sheep or goat] and of the fat thereof..."** Genesis 4:3, 4a. There is no doubt that these brothers would have spoken some form of words with their offerings to God. To **"call upon the name"** shows a close personal relationship that mankind now enjoyed, in calling God by name or literally speaking directly to their "Father" by prayer. We should remember that the purpose of prayer is glorifying God and is also for asking, or requesting something in an earnest and a humble affectionate disposition.

James, the brother of Jesus wrote the following remarks concerning Elias and prayer. **"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth brought forth her fruit."** James 5:17, 18. We notice from James' writings that Elias had put sincere earnestness in his prayer to God. To pray earnestly is for one to do so in the belief that God will answer our prayers as He sees proper, which means God may not answer in the manner we desire our prayers to be answered. The individual's prayer should be in full earnestness, and made one-on-one to God; on the other hand, a mass prayer said in unison by repetitious words and numerous people is not said with self-expression from the bottom of one's heart, or in other words, by one's own spirit: **"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth."** John 4:23, 24.

It may be asked of a teacher of the faith: **"How do we pray?"** Jesus was asked this question **"And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray,... And he said unto them " When ye pray say Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."** Luke 11: 1a, 2 to 4. See also Matthew 6:9 to 13. What Jesus was teaching them by this prayer was that, when praying, first show one's love of God and our waiting of His kingdom of peace which is to come. We should not be concerned with those things not essential for our daily sustenance, but for the simple things of life which we need, such as our daily food, and a strong conscience that we will not be seeking those things in life which tempt us. Forgiveness should be asked from God for our sins, as we who were taught by His Christ should forgive those that are indebted to us. We are told we should ask for the forgiveness of our sins from God and not from man. Forgiveness can be granted through our intercessor Christ, who by the Spirit can keep us from temptations. **"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."** Romans 8:26, 27.

So mankind should continually pray to keep themselves from the temptations of sin, and have the love and compassion, and forgiveness which is one of the great commandments. We should always be giving thanks for our daily food and not taking for granted its availability to us. Many people in third world countries go hungry while we eat daily. As already expressed previously, it is important to pray to show our love and faithfulness towards the God of glory, and to reverence the Father, waiting patiently for His kingdom, when His will, shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. When Jesus taught us to pray, he showed us an unselfish attitude in praying, but it was not meant that these words were to be memorized word for word such that during the passage of time, the repetitious rhythm of words became meaningless. The "Lord's Prayer" was only meant as an example of how to pray. When praying, we should give glory to God and his kingdom, but also ask for God's Spirit to divert us from worldly lusts and temptations, from sin itself, and give us then the love for our neighbour.

We have discussed what to pray for but now some might ask how do we pray to our heavenly Father? That is, does it have to be in a symbolic, traditional manner as mankind does? The Catholics (Roman or Orthodox) and other churches make the sign of a cross over their chest, which is referred to as crossing one's heart. Some others still stand with outstretched arms. Then there are the Moslems who will prostrate themselves five times daily in repetitious prayer and, on rare occasions, will perform a personal prayer, but always facing towards the city of Mecca when praying. Most world religions use recited, repetitious prayers but what does the Bible say about it? **"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."** Matthew 6:7, 8. Many of our traditional religious practices with its physical postures which occurs even during our prayers, come from heathenism. One example is the lighting of candles for prayer rituals; this was a common practice among many heathen religions. Most physical prostrations can be traced back to heathenism.

While on the topic of physical postures, is it necessary to have one's eyes facing the ground or looking up to the heavens during prayer? Do we have to go to a specific location to pray? Just as an earthly father who loves his child, does not say to his child **"Before, you can ask any thing of me, you must put yourselves in a particular position and speak to me in a rehearsed rhythmic form,"** neither does God, the Creator, want this type of prayer from us. We are His children, in that He created all of us, and he loves each and everyone of us. God wants you and I to ask Him for our needs, because He loves us, and He does not lay any barrier in our approaching Him. Protocols related to praying is the work of men. If we are God's children, then we can freely approach God through him who laid all things before his heavenly Father, even his own life -- Jesus the Christ. He separated the veil for us that we may speak to God directly and not through another man.

Jesus taught us to pray in an earnest and direct way to God. Our prayers should be in regard to the welfare of the congregation of Christ's church, in praying for the sick, and in the fellowshiping of ourselves in love of each other. In Jesus' time, some of the Jewish

leaders prayed in the hopes that others would see them; these prayers were for show and vanity and not done out of a sincere, contrite heart. Let us look at some of the examples of Jesus' praying as taken from the Gospels: **"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee ... And he went a little farther, and fell on his face and prayed... He went away again the second time, and prayed ... And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time..."** Matthew 26:36, 37a, 39a, 42a, 44a. See also Mark 14:32 to 41; Luke 22:39 to 41. **"And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."** Luke 6:12. **"And in the morning rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."** Mark 1:35. **"And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed."** Luke 5:16. Notice Jesus' manner of praying was often to go to solitary places. This may have been because there would be no disturbances about him and that he would not be distracted from his prayer. Distractions and noise can take away from the earnest concentration of our thoughts during prayer. **"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret..."** Matthew 6:6a. Jesus might have been thinking of Elisha when that Old Testament prophet entered the house of the dead child. **"He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD."** II Kings 4:33. Jesus was not literally telling us to go into a closet to pray, but that we should be praying in solitude that we may fully concentrate upon our prayers to God without any distractions. A special place of prayer is not necessary; it does not have to be in a church, or in a designated room. Jesus prayed at any location because God will hear us wherever we are, if we are praying sincerely and earnestly. Note that one can pray in public without it being for vainglory such as when eating at a restaurant; it is not shameful to be grateful to God for our food, as long as we are not doing it for attention.

Public praying sometimes brings out the worse in individuals who have tendencies of self-conceit and who love to pray to attract the attention of others or in an environment of elaborate ceremonial dress, usually speaking only idle words to themselves. **"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward."** Matthew 6:5. **"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows houses, and for pretence make long prayer..."** Matthew 23:14a. Many ministers and priests have words prepared for them prior to prayer services. These prayers do not come from their heart after being repeated many times over, the citation of the words may sound beautiful to the newcomer, but to the ministering officiate it would lose its heartfelt meaning. Still others love to stand, straining their faces in all sorts of false distortions and motioning with their arms wildly through the air. This statement is not implying that all ministers in praying before others are so doing in a vainglorious way, because there are those ministers who are earnest and zealous in their love and demonstrate it in an emotional way. But what we are referring to are those types which Jesus spoke of who are self-absorbed, vain and steeped in traditionalism.

Remember that prayer should be selfless and should also touch on loving our neighbour, even when we are being mistreated or persecuted. Read Matthew 5:43, 44, 46 to 48. **"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ... For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute [ie. show honor toward] your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."** Although sometimes hard to do, we must pray for strength to continue to show love to our neighbour even when they show hate towards us.

We will now comment on "prayer beads" or "the rosary", a string of beads used by Catholics to make it easier to keep count of the Paternosters and Ave Marias recited by its members. Rosaries are made of large and small beads, and there are various patterns used. An ordinary rosary contains fifty-five beads, separated into 5 units of ten small beads for the Ave Maria separated by large beads to mark Paternosters. The custom of keeping count of recited prayers using strings of beads is a common practice in the East. The Hindus used beads very early on, followed by the Islamic religion adopting it, and finally, the Catholics introduced it during the time of the crusades. The beads are blessed for and used by the congregation, by bishops, superiors of orders and those having special powers for the purpose of blessing them. Even the Pope has blessed rosaries. Be aware that these types of traditional repetitious prayers have no benefit for the salvation of the person reciting them. **"...use not vain repetitions, as the heathens do..."** Matthew 6:7. A man does not need a particular time of day to pray, unlike the Jewish custom of praying three times a day which even King David followed. Read Psalm 55:17: **"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice."** We should pray any time of the day as we are moved by the spirit. We should be speaking to God directly in our own sincere words asking for our needs and for the welfare of neighbours and others, and above all, in praising God for the knowledge of understanding His Words leading towards eternal life through the Christ.

The following parable which Jesus told had much meaning and is a good lesson for all. **"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."** Luke 18:9 to 14. In this parable, we should take notice that Jesus describes both persons praying directly to God individually. The Pharisee did not see himself as a sinner, but as a perfect individual. He obeyed the rules of the traditional law, but lacked the important qualities of humility, of loving thy neighbour and praying for them which have less; in other words, the Pharisee lacked the characteristics of **"doing unto others as you would have them do unto you"** and **"love thy neighbour"**. The publican, on the other hand, saw himself as not even worthy enough to gaze upon God's heaven. This parable by Jesus should also teach us something about prayer. **"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."** Matthew 5:44. These are two characteristics that many are sorrowfully lacking, that is, love and forgiveness, which is the fullness of Godliness. Living by the adage of **"an eye for an eye"** belongs to the law of Moses and is not of God's Law.

Many believe in the traditional practice that a woman should pray with her head covered. Meditate on this matter for a moment, considering what our God wants from you and me in prayer. Based on what has been shown up to this point in our study, do you believe it matters what we wear, whether we prostrate ourselves, or use repetitious prayers? What do such actions mean to God? Nothing! They are the vain imaginations of mankind. **"Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."** I Corinthians 11:13 to 16. So Paul is saying, if any man is contentious (ie. is in controversy or strives with another) in this matter, the churches of God uphold no such traditional custom. Notice that Paul says, **"judge in yourselves"** so if you are a Christian woman who wears a veil or a hat over your head, it is your choice to do so, but do not be critical of a fellow member who chooses not to, because her unveiled head will not contribute any less in terms of earnestness or sincerity in her prayer to God. Some churches, to justify their positions, will cite all sorts of customs and traditional views, but if we do our research thoroughly, we will find most of these traditions arose out of ancient heathenism. Wearing a veil means nothing to God, but the sincerity of a woman's heart can save her.

Since the renting of the veil to the holy of holies, the individual can now stand and speak directly to God without the need of a high priest to act as mediator. **"And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost [spirit]. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom."** Mark 15:37, 38; **"Having therefore, brethren, boldness [ie. liberty] to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh..."** Hebrews 10:19, 20; **"But their minds were blinded for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; [the Torah, books of the laws of Moses] which veil is done away in Christ."** II Corinthians 3:14; **"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."** John 4:23, 24. Every person has a spirit, so prayer is often done silently in a solitude manner between the individual and God.

The important things pertaining to our prayers is to have the faith of believing that what we ask for is capable of being given to us by God, if it is His Will. Everything we ask for in prayer is not necessarily needed or the best for our well being. The main point for having a prayer answered is belief and having no doubt that God can answer your prayers. If you have the least bit of doubt, then you do not have an earnest faith in God and His power. And your prayers may not be answered because of your unbelief in God's power. **"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have what soever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."** Mark 11:22 to 24; **"Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."** Matthew 21:21, 22; **"Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."** Matthew 17:19 to 21; **"And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"** Matthew 14:28 to 31. It is because of unbelief and lack of faith that we doubt, and it is because of doubt that so many of our prayers are not answered, and not always because of what we have asked for. We should learn to pray with the same strong and unshakable faith that Jesus had demonstrated in his earnestness of prayer at Gethsemane, when he suffered the agony of knowing his coming fate. **"And he went forward a little and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."** Mark 14:35, 36. See also Matthew 26:36 to 45 and Luke 22:39 to 46.

When we pray to God, let us always pray in sincerity and truth, praying only for our immediate needs, for the forgiveness of our sins and also for those who might do spiteful things against us. Prayers should also be for the wellbeing of others: **"And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."** James 5:15, 16. And let us not forget when asking all things of the Father in prayer that we ask for them in the name of the first begotten of God, Jesus of Nazareth. **"...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."** John 16:23b; **"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."** Matthew 7:7, 8.