

# **THE PATTERN OF PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

**James W. Garrett**

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# **THE PATTERN OF PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

As has been demonstrated in previous papers, prayer was the breath of life to the Apostolic Church. Not only was prayer the instinctive response to every problem, but New Testament Church life was a life of prayer. The Holy Spirit is re-emphasizing to our generation the importance of prayer in the life of the Church. "Pray more, do less," is a motto that expresses what the Spirit is saying in many quarters.

Churches seeking to be New Testament Churches, will respond to this call by not only experiencing a renewed commitment to prayer, but they also will look to the Apostolic Church for guidance in matters relating to prayer. The Apostolic Church modeled consistent patterns of prayer; the epistles shed light on the model through elaboration and instruction. This model is the standard for church-life in all succeeding generations.

Acts through Jude will be the focus of our study. This is the portion of Scripture that deals with the Church and Church-life after the ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the giving of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The Gospels also will be referenced. Our Lord made many statements to His disciples concerning prayer that are modeled in the Post-Pentecostal Church. Scripture quotes are from the New American Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

## **SECTION ONE: NEW TESTAMENT PRAYER IS ADDRESSED TO THE FATHER**

Both John the Baptist and Jesus were known for their prayer life. Both taught their disciples how to pray. Jesus repeated His teachings, as He spoke to various audiences in different places. He usually tailored the emphasis of a particular teaching to fit the need of the audience. Because of this, the four Gospels record similar, but slightly different, lessons taught by Jesus in various settings and at different times in His ministry.

### **Jesus teaching to His disciples**

There are two records of the model prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. The first is in Matthew, during the early Galilean ministry, as a part of the Sermon on the Mount. Here, Jesus presented the model prayer in contrast to the prayer patterns of the Pharisees.

*And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for*

*your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name... (Matthew 6:5-9)*

Two years later, during his later Judean ministry, Jesus taught the model prayer to another group. Luke began his report of this incident by stating that after Jesus had finished a season of prayer, one of His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. This request may have been inspired by Jesus' lengthy communion with the Father, something that they were unable to achieve. If so, the terse model that Jesus presented to them becomes all the more impressive. Quality rather than quantity is the measure. Here is Luke's record of this event:

*And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come... (Luke 11:1-2 NAS)*

We must not conclude that Jesus taught the disciples to pray this way because He was then on the earth, and the Father was in heaven. Jesus clearly stated that even after his ascension, the Father, not Jesus, was to be the object of prayer. In response to their queries about Jesus' statements concerning His pending departure, and their sorrow as they contemplated it, Jesus painted a picture of how things would be after His departure. He told them that their privileges and endowments would be better than having Him with them in the flesh. One thing that they would have was an open avenue of prayer to the Father.

*"And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name." "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father. (John 16:23-27)*

*"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. (John 15:16 )*

This pattern is consistent in all of the teaching that Our Lord gave concerning prayer. Prayer is to be addressed to the Father.

### **The Post-ascension Church**

The New Testament record of the post-ascension Church describes prayer as being offered to the Father. Interestingly, the Holy Spirit never is addressed or worshipped in the New Testament. Contemporary prayers, such as, "Come Holy Spirit," or "Holy Spirit, You are welcome in this place," have no precedent in the New Testament and to a degree violate the New Testament

teaching on the Holy Spirit. Worship songs that include worship of the Holy Spirit certainly are outside of the role of the Spirit as displayed in the New Testament.

In the New Testament record, Jesus is spoken to, after His ascension, only when He appears in a vision (technically termed, an "epiphany"). There are five such episodes.

### 1. Stephen

*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse. And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him, and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And having said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:54-60)*

### 2. Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus

Acts 9 contains the historical record Saul's Damascus road encounter with Jesus. Acts 22 records Paul's speech from the staircase of the Tower of Antonio, in which he recounted his Damascus Road conversation with the Glorified Lord. Acts 26 records Paul's speech before Agrippa, in which he also describes the conversation, with some extra details. Here is the Acts 9 account:

*And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." (Acts 9:3-6)*

*But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. (Acts 9:27)*

### 3. Paul's vision in the Temple

As Paul continued his speech before the Jerusalem mob, recorded in Acts 22, he also stated that Jesus appeared to him in a vision in the temple and a conversation ensued:

*"And it came about when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of*

*Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee. 'And when the blood of Thy witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the cloaks of those who were slaying him.' "And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 22:17-21)*

#### 4. Ananias

In conjunction with Saul's Damascus road vision, a disciple living in Damascus also had a vision in which he talked with Jesus.

*Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, here am I, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight. " But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name. " But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake. " (Acts 9:10-16)*

#### 5. Peter and the vision of clean and unclean animals.

Although we do not have the heavenly speaker identified, in Peter's vision of the clean and unclean animals, the speaker could have been Jesus Christ. We do not know whether the , "Lord," who spoke was Jesus or God the Father, although the visionary pattern of the New Testament would lean toward the speakers' being Jesus Christ.

*And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; 11 and he \*beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, 12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." 15 And again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." 16 And this happened three times; and immediately the object was taken up into the sky. (Acts 10:10-16)*

In the many visions contained in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John describes visionary scenes that contain praise and petitions to Jesus. For example, the paean of praise in Revelation 5:8-9. This, however, is outside of the historical life of the Church.

### What about Acts 4:24-29?

Because the powerful prayer of Acts 4:24-29 is addressed to the "Lord" (vs 24 & 29), many assume that it is a prayer to Jesus. A careful reading of the prayer makes it clear that the term, "Lord," in this prayer, refers to God the Father.

*And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.' "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. " (Acts 4:24-30)*

Note the language of verse 26, "against the Lord and His Christ;" verse 27, "Thy holy Servant, Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint;" verse 30, "and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy Servant Jesus." This language makes it clear that the term, "Lord," is applied to God the Father, in this prayer.

It is important to note that the title, "Lord," (Greek, κύριος) is a generic term of respect. It is equivalent to the English, "mister," which is a contemporary variant of "master." The Spanish term, *senor*, enjoys the same usage in that language. So, "lord," may be used as a courteous expression of respect for any individual, human or divine. When the term, "Lord," is used for a member of the Godhead, the context must be examined to determine whether the one to which the term refers is God the Father or God the Son. The term is used generously for both of them throughout the New Testament. However, after Pentecost, the term always is used in the third person, when applied to Jesus (the exceptions being noted above, i.e., when Jesus appears in a vision). With reference to God the Father, "Lord," is used in both the second and third person. (NOTE: another Greek term, *despotes* (δεσπότης), meaning, "one who owns slaves," often is loosely translated, "lord." Δεσπότης, is the "lord" of verse 24. Κύριος, is the term translated, "lord," in the rest of the passage).

### The only exception

The only exception to the pattern of addressing prayer to the Father, is Paul's statement in I Timothy 1:12.

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service;*

In this passage Paul expresses his gratitude to "Christ Jesus Our Lord" for putting him into the ministry. We would expect Paul to direct his gratitude to Christ Jesus, because it was Christ Jesus who appeared to him in a vision on the Damascus road. Through that vision, through the vision to Ananias, through the vision that Saul had in the Temple, and probably through other unrecorded visions that Saul experienced in Arabia, Saul of Tarsus became Paul, "An apostle of Jesus Christ." Since there is this one exception to the pattern, we must say that it is not wrong to thank Jesus, when He clearly is the expression of the Godhead that it is appropriate to thank. However, praying to Jesus is the rarest of exceptions (only this one instance) It is not the pattern of New Testament prayer.

Throughout Church History, there have been those who prayed to Jesus. Some of the Mystics of Roman Catholicism, for example, prayed to Jesus. Many of the revival songs written in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century are addressed to Jesus. Prayers in the "Jesus Only" wing of the Pentecostal Movement would be addressed to Jesus. The "Jesus Movement" (late 1960's and early 1970's) and the "conversational prayer" movement, led by Rosalind Rinker (early 1970's), modeled prayer to Jesus. These last two movements had great impact on the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches. Thus, prayers addressed to Jesus have become a general custom. "Dear Lord Jesus, we just ask you...and we just ask you...and we just ask you..." is heard often in our present day prayer meetings. This is not the biblical model, as recorded for us by the Holy Spirit.

### **The New Testament formula for prayer**

A careful reading of the New Testament, reveals a pattern that is formulated in Romans 1:8.

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all,...*

Jesus, Our Great High Priest, is the one through whom we pray, but the destiny and object of the prayer is God the Father.

For a note concerning the use of the terminology, "Abba, Father," see Addenda A

## **SECTION TWO: THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN OF PRAYER IS PRAYING TO GOD THE FATHER IN JESUS' NAME.**

The main activity of Jesus today, seems to be intercession.

*Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Romans 8:34)*

*Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)*

In addition to the blessing of Jesus' intercession, our own personal prayers go directly to the Father because of the completed work of Jesus. We again look at John's record of Jesus discourse on the benefits that the disciples would have after the ascension.

*You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. (John 15:16)*

*And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father. (John 16:23-24, 26-27)*

This does not mean that we should tack on the end of our prayers the customary incantation, "In Jesus Name, Amen." Certainly, there is nothing wrong with closing our prayers in this manner and it is very meaningful when spoken in the right spirit. However, adding these words at the close of a prayer does not mean that the prayer has been offered in Jesus Name.

We recall the seven sons of Sceva who used the expression, "in the name of Jesus."

*And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. (Acts 19:11-16)*

This episode teaches us that it could be dangerous to use the Name of Jesus as an incantation. One has the authority to do something, "in Jesus Name," only when he is in Christ and Christ is in him.

*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7)*

*If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. (John 15:10)*

Thus, when we are in Christ, and His word is in us, producing a Christ-like life, we can approach the Father in prayer. We have no right to come to the Father apart from our standing in Christ.

When we are in Christ and He is in us, we have taken His Name upon us. His Name upon us gives us the same access to the Father that Jesus has, because we wear His Name. Over the years, this truth has been illustrated by a check written on a bank account. If I write you a check, and sign it, you can take it to the bank and cash it, because I have money in that bank and because my signature is on the check. My signature gives you the same authority that I have over a portion of my assets. The bank is responsible to make certain that I have assets in the bank, that the signature is genuine, and that you are who you say you are. Although all analogies break down when pressed on every detail, this is a good illustration of the proper use of Jesus Name by those who are His.

### **SECTION THREE: THE FATHER IS ADDRESSED IN JESUS NAME AS WE "PRAY IN THE SPIRIT"**

It is important that we recognize the difference between "praying *in* the Spirit," and "praying *with* the spirit." First, we note Paul's language in I Corinthians 14:14-16.

*For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.*

Notice that Paul speaks here of the human spirit and the human mind (i.e., *my spirit, my mind*). He states that when he prays in a tongue, that his human spirit is praying. When he prays in a language that his mind understands, his mind is involved in the prayer. Notice that there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in these verses. The key terminology here is, "with." Paul prays *with* his spirit and *with* his mind. He makes the same statement about singing. In the next verse [16] speaks of blessing "in spirit." Since the definite article is missing, and this is in the context of the previous two verses, it is obvious that Paul is speaking of a prayer of blessing in tongues.

Next, we notice the terminology in Jude 17 -21.

*But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they were saying to you, "In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts." These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.*

Jude contrasts those who are devoid of the Holy Spirit and those are not devoid of the Holy Spirit. Jude then states that praying in the Holy Spirit is one of the activities related to our remaining strong and faithful in the faith. The terminology here, clearly refers to "praying *in* the Holy Spirit. The human spirit is not referenced here.

The third passage that is relevant to our study is Ephesians 6:18.

*With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,*

This is the concluding exhortation in Paul's discussion of the Christian armor. Paul states that all prayer and petition (all kinds of prayer) are to be prayed *in* the Spirit. This clearly refers to the Holy Spirit, because of the use of the definite article and the preposition, *in* (consistent with the exhortation of Jude). Since all prayer at all times is to be prayed in the Holy Spirit, and since Paul spoke of praying with the human spirit (in tongues) and praying with the mind (known language), then prayer *in* the Spirit may be in tongues (praying by the human spirit) or in one's natural language (praying by the human mind). The important thing, is that whether in tongues or English, our prayer should be in the Holy Spirit.

Charismatics and Pentecostals have elevated tongues, as if praying in a tongue were superior to praying in the language known to the speaker. They have pointed to I Corinthians 14:4,

*One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.*

The conclusion reached is that praying a tongue has some special edifying value that praying in a known language does not have. The point that Paul is making in this verse, however, is that uninterpreted tongue speaking has no value to the church. Only the tongue speaker is edified by this sort of activity. However, Jude speaks of "*building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit,*" which, as we just demonstrated, can be either with tongues or a known language. The key to building up one's self is praying *in* the spirit, not praying *with* the spirit. So, either tongues or non-tongues will build up the praying believer, if such prayer is *in* the Holy Spirit.

It is clear that at Corinth, because of their divisive behavior, the tongues speakers, were praying *with* the spirit, but not *in* the spirit. The Holy Spirit never would motivate someone to use a spiritual endowment to elevate pride-filled individuals and to thus divide the local church.

It is important that all of our prayers be prayed in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, even to the point of whether we should pray in tongues, or in English. In my own case, I have felt rebuked by the Holy Spirit, on occasion, when I was praying in tongues. I felt the spirit tell me to, "shut up," because I was praying a cheap prayer that took no involvement on my part. I knew that the Spirit wanted me to pray in English because He wanted all of me, including my mind and will, to be involved in the prayer.

It is interesting that Acts records tongues as occurring on only three occasions (Acts 2; Acts 10; and Acts 19) and the topic is discussed in only one instance in the epistles (the I Corinthian abuse of tongues). We must not devalue tongues, but, on the other hand, the elevation of tongues to some special level of spiritual power also is unwarranted.

Praying *in* The Spirit, however, is of vital importance.

**SECTION FOUR:  
PRAYER TO THE FATHER, IN JESUS NAME, IN THE SPIRIT,  
MUST BE PRAYED IN FAITH**

Hebrews 11:6 states clearly that faith is the *sine qua non* for those who would draw near to God and receive from Him.

*And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

The two elements defining, "faith," in this verse, are (1) belief in the existence of God; (2) belief that God will reward those who seek him. New Testament prayer, therefore, cannot be prayed with the attitude, "I'll pray, just in case someone up there is listening." New Testament prayer must be prayed out of conviction.

James addresses this in his discussion of asking God for wisdom.

*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)*

Even though our generous God gives to us, gracefully, His generous heart does not respond to doubting hearts.

The power of a believing heart was described by Jesus.

*And as they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots up. And being reminded, Peter \*said to Him, "Rabbi, behold, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." And Jesus \*answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you. "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. (Mark 11:20-25)*

We will not comment here on the way that this passage has been abused. We must acknowledge that the clear point of Jesus' statement is that faith or the lack thereof is a key to effective prayer, especially, prayers of petition.

Where does New Testament faith come from, how can it be resident in our hearts? Most of us are like the father of the demon possessed boy, who pled with Jesus to heal his son

at the bottom of the Mount of Transfiguration. The man said to Jesus, "If you can, do anything, take pity on us and help us." Jesus replied, "If you can! What do you mean, 'If you can.' Believe! All things are possible to him who believes!" The man responded, "I believe, Lord, but help Thou my unbelief" (Mark 9:22-24). All of us have been in this place. We believe, but we know that our faith still is lacking. In such situations, it is appropriate to ask God for a deeper faith, even to ask Him for the "gift of faith" (I Corinthians 12:9).

**SECTION FIVE:  
PRAYER TO THE FATHER, IN JESUS NAME, IN THE SPIRIT, IN FAITH  
REQUIRES A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL**

One cannot have faith about the specific outcome of a prayer, without a certainty of God's will. James, in an effort to encourage faith, cites Elijah, "a man of like passions like we are," as an example of faith.

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:13-18)*

What gave Elijah such faith in his prayer for a drought and then prayer for rain? Look at the record. Like a thunderbolt, bursting from the sky without warning on a clear day, Elijah burst on the scene in I Kings 17:1. There is no previous record of this man. Claiming as his credentials that he is a spokesman for the Living God, "before whom I stand," Elijah declared that from that moment forward it will not rain until he, Elijah, declares that it will rain. Indeed, it did not rain for three years. Reading the verses that immediately follow this announcement, it is clear that Elijah is not a man who just dreamed up things. He was not a man who persisted in "positive thinking" until he had convinced himself that something was certain and true. Elijah was led by specific words from God. I Kings 18:1 records what happened at the end of three years.

*Now it came about after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth."*

Before the rain came, Elijah, as God's prophet, defeated the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Then he and his servant went to the top of Mt. Carmel where Elijah prayed fervently for an extended period of time. He believed with all of his heart that rain was

coming, because God had told him that rain would come after he showed himself to Ahab. After the extended time of prayer a real gully washer came upon the land.

Since James presents this as a model of a prayer of faith, we conclude that a prayer of faith requires a knowledge of God's will. In my opinion, the greatest contribution that John Wimber gave to the church, was the emphasis on praying first for a knowledge of what the Father is doing. Only after that is done, are we free to pray for people to be healed, etc. Thus, John the apostle writes,

*And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (I John 5:14-15)*

The constant prayer urged by Paul (I Thessalonians 5:17) and persistent prayer described in the parable of the widow (Luke 18:1ff) are an expression of faith.

Although some have ridiculed those who pray, "Father, if it is your will....." such a prayer is exactly right. In the model prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done." When the clear will of God is not known, when God has not spoken, then the caveat, "if it is your will," whether spoken or just assumed, is not lack of faith.

#### **SECTION SIX: NEW TESTAMENT PRAYER IS HONEST PRAYER**

Philippians 4:6 urges us,

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God*

We must be honest with God about what is on our hearts. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that the Cup of Calvary might be delivered from Him, then prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done." Jesus was honest in Gethsemane. He knew the will of God the Father, but honestly said that he dreaded what was ahead and even asked if there were a way to save men apart from the cross ("if it be possible").

Three times, Paul asked God for the "thorn in the flesh" to be removed. He was willing for God's will to be done, but it didn't hurt to ask for relief.

*And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me-- to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)*

Effective prayer involves an honesty with ourselves and with God. When we lay our true feelings on the table, where we and God openly see them, the Father is able to work change in us, even while we pray. For example, if we are angry with God, we must not lie about it. God knows our heart, anyway. Denying our true feelings only results in a delay in dealing with issues.

**SECTION SEVEN:  
NEW TESTAMENT PRAYER REFLECTS A LIFE  
THAT HAS INCORPORATED TIME WITH GOD**

Brother Sterrett has written on this topic in his paper, so we will not labor the subject, except for a few comments that are in order.

When Jesus cast the demon out of the boy at the base of the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples were troubled. They had cast out demons before, but this one they were powerless to expel. They asked Jesus why He was able to cast out the demon, when they had not been able to do so. He replied,

*And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." (Mark 9:29)<sup>1</sup>*

Note that Jesus did not pray before casting out the demon. He spoke a word and the boy was delivered at once. Jesus must have been referring to His own constant prayer life. He arose early in the morning to pray. On some occasions, He prayed all night. He constantly was seeking an opportunity to withdraw from ministry to pray. It was his constant prayerful communion with the Father that enabled Him to cast out this demon that had resisted successfully the efforts of the disciples.

A sensitive reading of the New Testament reveals that the New Testament Christians lived to pray. Prayer is what they did and all else grew out of their prayers. Thus Paul urged the Thessalonians, *Pray without ceasing* (I Thessalonians. 5:17)

He wrote to the Colossians, *Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving* (Colossians 4:2)

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<sup>1</sup>"and fasting" included in the KJV of Mark 9:29 does not enjoy manuscript integrity. The same is true of Matthew 17:21, which seems to have been a late scribal addition (note that this verse is missing in the NIV)

**SECTION EIGHT:  
EFFECTIVE NEW TESTAMENT PRAYER  
COMES FROM A RIGHTEOUS HEART**

James states that effective prayer comes from righteous men

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*(James 5:16)

To the people of his day, Isaiah declared,

*But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.* (Isaiah 59:2)

Peter warned that the absence of a Christ-like spirit in marriage would hinder prayer.

*You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.* (I Peter 3:7)

Paul wrote to Timothy,

*Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.* (I Timothy 2:8)

Peter urged the church to exercise self control, be of sound judgement, and sober, for the purpose of prayer.

*The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.* (I Peter 4:7)

Prayer was so important to New Testament Christians, that they sought to do everything that could do to increase the effectiveness of their prayers. They also sought to remove from their lives anything that hindered their prayers.

NOTE: Our righteous standing before God, achieved through faith in the atonement, allows us into God's presence. The effective outworking of that station is determined to a major degree by how much our character has caught up with our legal position before God.

## CONCLUSION

The pattern of prayer in the New Testament Church is clear:

- Prayers are prayed to God the Father
- In the Name of Jesus, and thus, through Him
- At the leading, direction, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit
- In harmony with the Will of God
- In faith
- With honesty
- From a pure heart
- Out of a life lived intimately with God

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### EXCURSUS The Expression, "*Abba*, Father"

Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; and Galatians 4:6, contain the expression, "*Abba*, Father." Over the last twenty years, some have taught that, *Abba*, is the term of familiarity, like, "daddy," as contrasted with the more formal, "father." This is not true. The terms are synonymous, both being expressed by our English word, "father." In the original text, the terms are *Abba* ( ἁββα ) and *ho pater* ( ὁ πατήρ ). *Abba* is the Aramaic word for "father;" *Ho Pater* is Greek. Since there is no evidence for the claim that *Abba* is the familiar term and that *ho Pater* is the formal term, what is the explanation?

Jesus is recorded as using this repetitive terminology in Mark 14:36 (*abba, pater*, all things are possible to Thee). Paul repeated this terminology twice, identifying with the prayer of Jesus. The fact that both the Aramaic and Greek terms for "father," are used, brings home the fact that Christianity was born in a multilingual setting. Lightfoot (*Hor. Heb.* On Mark 14:36) argues that Jesus said, *Abba*, in the prayer and that Mark interpreted this in his Greek text by adding *ho Pater*. Likewise, Paul did the same thing in Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15 (the only places where this redundancy occurs).

I prefer the explanation of Sanday and Headlam in the *ICC* (Scribners, New York 1896), "The three passages are however all too emotional for this explanation: interpretation is out of place in a prayer. It seems better to suppose that our Lord Himself, using familiarly both languages, and concentrating into this, word of all words, such a depth of meaning, found Himself impelled spontaneously to repeat the word, and that some among His disciples caught and transmitted the same habit. It is significant, however, of the limited extent of Jewish Christianity that we find no other original examples of the use than these three."

To this explanation, I would add the following. The use of both terms, in the two languages that would have been languages with which Jesus' audience was conversant, emphasize that whatever term in our language that speaks of a paternal relationship is the one that we should use in prayer.

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