

Hallmarks of Christian Prayer in Contemporary Society

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the hallmarks of Christian prayer in contemporary society. Prayer is seen as the process of addressing a superhuman being for purposes of praise, adoration, thanksgiving, petition, penitence, and so on. Prayer is a part of every culture and does not belong to any particular religious tradition. The foundation for prayer, however, differs according to the understanding of God's relationship in human beings and to the world in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Prayer is based on the belief that God is both transcendent and personal, an active agent in human history. Prayer may be communal, as in public or private worship; it may be vocalized by individuals or groups; it could be mental as in meditation and contemplation. Prayer is a necessity to mankind because man is inherently religious. In every religion, prayer is a duty which the devotee must be involved in if one wants to remain faithful in the tenets of the religion. Therefore, prayer is seen as a universal phenomenon, even though it is not exclusively Christian. Prayer is most real in Christianity because the Christian life is a life of fellowship with God. In biblical religion, prayer is understood as both a gift and a task. In the Bible, prayer offered in private and public places is an essential component that enhances worship in spirit and in truth. Biblical prayer is crying to God out of the depths; it is the pouring out of the soul before God.

Key Words: Prayer, Christian, Paise, Adoration, Thanksgiving, Petition

Introduction

Prayer is the process of addressing a superhuman being for purpose of praise, adoration, thanksgiving, petition, penitence, and so on. Prayer is a part of every culture and does not belong to any particular religious tradition. The foundation for prayer, however, differs according to the understanding of God's relationship in human beings and to the world in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Prayer is based on the belief that God is both transcendent and personal, an active agent in human history. In Christian belief, God's concern for humanity is manifested in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Prayer may be communal, as in public or private worship; it may be vocalized by individuals or groups; it could be mental as in meditation and contemplation. Popular forms of prayer include litanies and immemorial prayers. Jesus taught His disciples the popularly known "Lord's Prayer".

Prayer is a necessity to mankind because man is inherently religious. Karl Marx says that "religion is the opium of the people" but this is however, contradicted by Milton Yinger who says that "opium is the religion of the people" (Yinger, 1970: 163). In every religion, prayer is a duty which the ardent devotee must be involved in if one wants to remain faithful in the tenets of the religion. Therefore, prayer is seen as a universal phenomenon, even though it is not

exclusively Christian. Prayer is most real in Christianity because the Christian life is a life of fellowship with God. In no other religion do people find such prayer as are found uttered by men like Moses, David and Paul.

Providence and Prayer

Erickson (1998) observes that one problem that has concerned thoughtful Christians when considering the nature of providence is the role of prayer. This dilemma stems from the question of what prayer accomplishes. On the other hand, if prayer has any effect on what happens, then it seems that God's plan was not completely fixed in the first place. He, therefore opines that, "providence in some sense depends on or is altered by whether or how much someone prays. On the other hand, if God's plans are established and He will do what He is going to do, then does it matter whether we pray?" (Eriksson, 1998: 430). Thus, Erikson notes that: (1) Scripture teaches that God's plan is definite and fixed-it is not subject to revision and (2) we are commanded to pray and taught that prayer has value (James 5:16). The problem here is how these two facts relate to each other. The solution to this problem as seen in many Scripture passages in many cases is that God works in a sort of partnership with humans. What follows from this is that God does not act if humans do not play their part; the act of faith is required for God to act, and if such faith is lacking in any person, God would not act. The various examples of Jesus' performance of miracles of healing attest to this fact of Scriptures. According to Erikson (1998: 431), "when He wills the end in these cases, healing. He also wills the means, which includes a request to be healed, which in turn presupposes faith". Thus, prayer does not change what God has proposed to do. It is simply the means by which He accomplishes His end. Accordingly, "it is vital, then, that a prayer be uttered, for without it the desired result will not come to pass" (Erickson, 1998: 31). This means that prayer is more than self-stimulation. It is in large part a matter of creating in ourselves a right attitude with respect to God's will. In the Lord's Prayer, we observe that the imperatives of Luke 11: 9 and the participles in 11:10 are in the present tense, which can be interpreted as "keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking". This means that persistent prayer makes it apparent that our petition is important to us, as it is to God.

Synopsis of Types of Prayers

Heiler (1997) compiled one of the most comprehensive Christian studies into the phenomenology of prayer. He makes a convincing case that prayer takes quite divergent forms depending on the kind of religion or spirituality in which it is found. He sees seven types of prayer, namely: secular spirituality, political prayer, primitive ritual, Greek cultural prayer, philosophical, mystical and prophetic prayers.

In secular spirituality (Erickson, 1998: 431), the most detached prayer form in Christianity is that of worldly mysticism in which the one praying seeks to converse with a deity by immersing his/her life with the world. In other words, it signifies this-worldly mysticism where the emphasis is not on detachment from the world but immersion in the world. Bloesch (1998: 76) confirms this when he says that this secular prayer may also simply be a type of inward meditation instead of outward communication. In societies that recognize a sentient God, prayers progress outward.

While expatiating more on secular spirituality, Robinson (1950) describes secular prayer as the penetration through the word of God. The liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo defines prayer as reflection on and openness to what God is doing in history (Segundo, 2001, Retrieved

April 15th 2009 from the World Wide Web [Intp/en.wikipedia.org/wiki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki)). Wieman (1946: 283), the religious naturalist, sees prayer as an attitude toward life which places self in contact with the creative process in nature. Dorothy Solle (1974) speaks of political prayer as that which is oriented toward praxis rather than either adoration or petition.

In primitive prayer, the most basic petitions are directed to higher beings. Accordingly, these are derived from felt needs and fear. The basics of these prayers focus on deliverance from misfortune and danger. This type of prayer can be found in all facets of life, from primitive cultures to superstitious industrialized cultures. When such prayer seems to be heard, and even answered, the culture is likely to progress into ritualistic prayer (Erickson, 1998: 431).

Ritual prayer generally comes from the heart, and once it is recognized for producing results; efforts are made to replicate the effects. Ritualistic prayer derives from such pragmatism in which superstition leads to formulas and litany. In this case, the form, instead of the content, is thought to produce results. Accordingly, many Christians fall into superstition by ending of prayers “in Jesus name”. Contrarily, when Christ Himself ended His lesson in prayer, he did not use such formula, instead He said, “for yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, amen” (Matt. 6:13.RSV). Let me opine here that we should take cognizance of biblical texts as John. 14:13-14, which put responsibility on Christians to pray in Jesus’ name as follows: “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son, if you ask anything in my name. Therefore, I want to emphasize here that it is not mere superstition on the part of Christians to pray in Jesus’ name.

Greek cultural prayer places more emphasis on moral needs than physical needs. In other words, the refined primitive prayer sought intercession from gods for cultural needs instead of individual needs (Jerome, 2007: 11). This type of prayer was often the duty of the philosophical elite (Parker, 2006: 81-82).

In philosophical prayer, the progression from cultural prayer by the philosophical elite leads into contemplative examination of the relationship between creation and creator. At this point, the person praying recognizes that native and realistic prayers may not affect the divine order of the universe. On this level is where the question first is introduced, ‘Why pray’. Communicative prayer is no longer for petition, as it seems the immutability of God precludes his intercession, and prayers turn only to thanksgiving. Up until this level, these five types of prayers seek what man can receive from prayer, from the most basic of necessities to transcendent knowledge. At this point is derived the two forms of higher prayer which seek an audience with God-mystical and prophetic prayer.

Mysticism in the Christian context represents a synthesis of Neoplatonic and biblical motifs. It is also a universal religious phenomenon. Here the aim is union with God, who is generally portrayed in supra-personal terms. The anthropomorphic god of primitive religion is now transformed into a God that transcends personality, one that is best described as the absolute, the infinite abyss, or the infinite ground and depth of all being. Mysticism sees prayer as the elevation of the mind and spirit to God. Revelation is an interior illumination rather than the intervention of God in history (as in biblical faith). Mystics often speak of a ladder of prayer or stages of prayer and petition is always considered the lowest stage. The highest form of prayer is contemplation, which often culminates in ecstasy (Heiler, 1997: 205).

Prophetic prayer signifies both a re-appropriation and a transformation of the insight of primitive man. Here, prayer is based not only on need but also on love. It is neither an incantation nor a mediator but a spontaneous outburst of emotion. Indeed, heartfelt supplication is the essence of true prayer. Prophetic prayers involve importunity, begging and even

complaining (imprecatory). In this category of prophetic religion, is placed value not only on the biblical prophets and apostles, but also on the Reformers, especially Luther and the Puritans, a group the Baptist people belong, Judaism and Islam at their best also mirror prophetic religion, though mysticism is present in these movements as well.

Hallmarks of Christian Prayer

In biblical religion, prayer is understood as both a gift and a task. God takes the initiative (cf. Ps. 2: 1-2, Psa. 50:3-4,) but man must respond. This kind of prayer is personal and dialogical. It entails revealing our innermost selves to God and God's revelation of His desires to us (cf. Prov1:23). Thus, prayer in the biblical perspective is spontaneous, though it may take structured forms. But the forms themselves must always be held tentatively and placed aside when they become barriers to the conversation of the heart with the living God. True prayer, in the prophetic or biblical sense, bursts through all forms and techniques. This is because it has its basics in the Spirit of God, who cannot be encased in a sacramental box or a ritualistic formula.

In the Bible, prayer offered in private and public places is an essential component that enhances worship in spirit and in truth. Worship-leaders should lead the congregation in extempore prayer rather than pray for or over them. They should bear in mind the nine aspects of prayers namely: adoration, invocation, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, and commemoration of the faithful departed, illumination, and oblation, which are the climax of corporate prayer. These prayers in the various forms they appear should be ordered to give full meaning to the congregation (Abba, 1957: 90). It is observed that in human history, the petitionary element is present in all these forms of prayer. Biblical prayer is crying to God out of the depths; it is the pouring out of the soul before God (Ps. 88:1-2; cf 1 Sam. 1:15, 130:1-2; 142:1-2; Lam. 2:19; Mat. 7:7-8; Phi. 46; Heb.5:7). It often takes the form of importunity, passionate, pleading of God, even wrestling with Him.

Such an attitude presupposes that God's ultimate will is unchanging, but the way in which He chooses to realize this will is dependent on the prayers of His children. He wants us as covenant partners, not as automations or slaves. In this restricted sense, prayer may be said to tap on the will of God that which He has proposed to do or happen from the foundation of the world. But more fundamentally, it is sharing with God our needs and desires so that we might be more fully conformed to His ultimate will and purpose.

Meditation and contemplation have a role in biblical religion, though not, however as higher stages of prayer (as in mysticism) but as supplements to prayer. The focus of our meditation must not be on the essence of God or the infinite depth of all being but on God's redemptive deeds in biblical history culminating in Jesus Christ. The aim is not greater detachment from the world of turmoil and confusion but a greater attachment to God and to our fellow human beings.

In biblical religion, the relationship between God and man is genuinely interpersonal. Prayer has the potency of causing to come to existence that which has been obscure to man, which God has willed aforetime when he (man) prayed fervently and genuinely (cf. 1Tim. 2:1-4). Prayer is essentially a communion. Two parties are involved in prayers: the deity of deities, God, gods, on one hand, and man, on the other hand, God desires man's fellowship, and man needs the friendship of God.

A pivotal factor in prayer is attitude. Posture, language, place or time do not matter. Man's heart must be in rapport with God. No rules are anywhere in Scriptures laid down for the

manner of prayer or attitude to be assumed by the suppliant. Few observations are noticed in Scriptures,

1. Mention is made of kneeling in prayer (1 King 8:54; 2Chron. 6:13; Psa. 95:6; Isa. 45:23; Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60; Eph. 3:14, etc).
2. Of bowing and falling prostrate (Gen. 24:26, 52; Exo. 4:31; 12:27; Mat 26:39; Mar.14:37, etc.);
3. Of spreading out the hands (1king 8:22, 38, 54; Psa. 28:2; 63:4; 88:9; 1Tim.2:8. etc);
4. And upstanding (1Sam. 1:26; 1King 8:14, 55:2; 2Chron. 20:9; Mar.11:25; Luk.18:11, 13).

If all the above observations are accepted by the “Lord Prayer” (Mat. 6:9-13, which is a model pattern of prayer than a set of prayer to be offered up, then there is no special form of prayer for general use given in Scriptures. However, prayer is frequently enjoined in Scriptures (Exodus 22:23, 27; 1Kings 3:5; 2Chron. 7:14; Psa. 27:4; Isa. 55:6; Joe.2:32; Eze 36:37, etc.), and there are very many testimonies that these prayers have been answered (Pss 3:4, 4:1; 6:8; 18:6; 28:6; 30:2; 34:4; 118 :5; cf. James 5:16-18, etc.). Thus, we find that Abraham servants prayed to God, and He directed him to the person who should be wife to his masters’ son and heir (Gen 24:10-20); Jacob prayed to God and He inclined the heart of his irritated brother, so that they met in peace and friendship (Gen 32:24-30; 33:1-4); Sampson prayed to God, and He showed him a well where he quenched his burning thirst, and so lived to judge Israel (Jud 15:18-20); David prayed, and God defeated a counsel of Ahithophel (2Sam. 15:31; 16:20-23; 17:14-23); Daniel prayed and God enabled him both to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and to give the interpretation of it (Dan 2:16-23; Nehemiah prayed, and God inclined the heart of the king of Persia to grant him leave of absence to visit and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 1:11; 2:1-6); Esther and Mordecai prayed and God defeated the purpose of Haman, and saved the Jews from destruction (Esther 4:15-17; 6:7, 8); The believers in Jerusalem prayed and God opened the prison doors and set Peter at liberty, when Herod had resolved upon his death (1 Acts 12:1-12); Paul prayed that the thorn in the flesh might be removed, and his prayer brought a large increase of spiritual strength, while the thorn remained (2Cor. 12; 7-10).

Biblical spirituality makes a place for silence, yet silence is not to go beyond the Word (*logos*), but to prepare one to hear the Word (*logos*). Against certain types of mysticism, faith-piety does not seek to transcend reason but to place reason in the service of God. There can be a prayer that consists only in groans or sighs or in shouts and cries of jubilation, yet it is not complete or full prayer until it takes the form of meaningful communication with the living God.

The Paradox of Prayer

Prayer in the Christian sense does not deny the mystical dimension; neither does it accept the ideas of a higher stage in prayer where petition is left behind. The progress that it sees in the spiritual life is from the prayer of rote to the prayer of the heart. Prayer in biblical or evangelical spirituality is noted in both the experience of God forsakenness, that is to say, His silence and in the sense of His presence. It must be inspired by both the felt need for God and gratitude for His work of reconciliation and redemption in Jesus Christ.

Biblical prayer includes the dimension of importunity and of submission. It is both a wrestling with God in the darkness and resting in the stillness. There is a time to argue and complain to God, but there is also time to submit. Biblical faith sees submission to the will of God coming after the attempt to discover His will through heartfelt supplication. Prayer is both a pleading with God that He will hear and act upon our request and a trusting surrender to God in

the confidence that He will act in His own time and way. But confidence comes only through the struggle.

Christian prayer is both corporate and individual. People find God in solitariness, but they never remain in that state. Instead, they seek to unite their sacrifices of praise, petitions and intercessions with those of the company of fellow believers. A man or woman of prayer may find God both in solitude and in fellowship. Even in solitude, people believe that the petitioner is not alone but is surrounded by a cloud of witnesses (cf. Heb. 12:1), the saints and angels in the Church triumphant.

Christians are called to present personal and individual needs to God, but at the same time they are urged to intercede for the whole company of the saints (cf. John 17:20-21; Eph.6:10 and also for the world at large (cf. 1Tim. 2:1-2). Biblical spirituality does not entail withdrawal from the turmoil of the world but rather the identification with the world in its shame and afflictions. Personal petition would become egocentric if it were held in balance with intercession, adoration, and thanksgiving.

The goal of prayer is not absorption into the being of God but the transformation of the world for and into the glory of God. People yearn for the blessed vision of God, but even more, they seek to bring their wills and the wills of all people into conformity with the purpose of God. They pray not simply for personal happiness or for protection (as in primitive prayer) but for the advancement and extension of the kingdom of God so that the kingdom of men shall become the kingdom of God.

Some Principles in Biblical Prayer

Biblical prayer is necessarily a paradigm of prayers. We have examples of Abraham's prayer in Genesis 18; Moses in Exodus 33; Isaiah in Isaiah 60; Nehemiah in Nehemiah 1:11; 2:1-6; Daniel in Daniel 9 and of course in the New Testament the prayer of Jesus, particularly, the Lord's prayer; those of Paul and many other ones. Prayers based on the scripture release the truth in God's word in an individual's life-space into existence. By praying (proclaiming) in such a way, one honours God by believing him and responding with action into his truth. Such action is an essential element to the life of faith because God loves those who act by faith.

In addition, one's life is strengthened over negative propensities and scripts that have driven one's life for years. What a simple antidote to destructive negativity. Proclaiming the truth of Scripture is a natural response to understanding what God has promised through Jesus Christ. Such prayer is a part of the exercise of a royal priesthood, exercising priesthood in one's behalf and that of family, friends, and all that concerns an individual. The exercise of priesthood in prayer is guarantee in growth of God's authority and dominion. This is not arrogance or presumption, but confidence in God's election. All like-minded persons who rely on scripture-guided prayer are knit together in synergy with one another and God's word, and they can say that his word will not return to him without accomplishing its desire effects (Isaiah. 55:10-11).

Prayer is a Response to God's Revelation

According to the bible, God is the one who has revealed himself both in general revelation as in creation (cf. Ps. 19:1; cf. Rom. 1:19, 20) and special revelation, as when speaking directly to the prophets and others in Jesus (cf. Heb. 1: 1, 2). As a response to God's revelation, we note three things. Firstly, prayer should begin with what God has revealed about himself. This means that at the beginning of our prayer we should remind ourselves of the one we are worshiping. Thus, it is right to start with the objective revelation, something that is

outside us, something factual, historic, real, and in the case of the Christian faith, infallible and unshakable no matter what the 'subjective' mood may be. This is in line with the pattern of the Lord's Prayer which begins: "our Father, who art in Heaven".

Secondly, prayer should reflect adoration, and thank God for the unfolding of the history of revelation and salvation. We may start with various deliverance of God as mentioned in Psalm 124:8 during a call to worship; we then move to the Old Testament history, remembering the God who dealt with Israel; and then we move on to the New Testament History especially the story of Jesus and what he means to the world. Thirdly, the scriptural response is to reverently approach God in prayer; it is true that Jesus swept aside many of the Pharisaical protocol of approach to God, allowing Christians to call him "Abba", meaning "Father". Nevertheless, a study of biblical prayers leads us to follow a certain order in prayers in what is called the "prayer of approach". Thus, it is appropriate to have a paradigm "prayers of approach" that begins with invocation, followed by adoration, confession of sin, intercession for others and supplication for the individual, thanksgiving and finally a prayer of blessing and benediction. This paradigm "prayer approach" helps worshipers to move nearer to God, as they listen and respond to his word.

Prayer is a Response to God's Presence

The announcement of the presence of the son of David (Jesus), who will sit on his throne forever, was an impetus that led people to pray. This is seen in the Gospel of Luke where Zachariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Simeon and Anna in anticipation for his advent actually responded in prayer for God's personal presence.

From Biblical revelation, God is omnipresence, which means that God is everywhere, since God is present everywhere, all deeds of mankind are bare before Him at all times. Ironically, however, mankind in his deed sometimes portray that nobody (no being) watches on his multiple nefarious activities: "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16). God reveals himself to those that seek him earnestly: "But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, if you search after him with all your soul" (Deut. 4:29). As always God desires that people should seek to come near him and when they do then he would reveal himself to them: "Draw near God and he will draw near you. Cleans your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you men of double mind" (James. 4:8). Thus the quest to perceive or be in God's presence orchestrates fervent prayer from worshipers worldwide in history. The psalmist prayed to always be in God's presence where he could have solace for his spirit being full of sin. He prays, "Cast me not away from thy presence, an take not the Holy spirit from me" (Psalm 52:11).

Prayer is Dialogue between God and his People

God speaks through his written word (*dabar*), and mankind is expected to respond appropriately in prayer. Here, praying outside the written word is classified as praying amiss. Encouraging the congregation to stay in tune with the one leading in prayer is commendable. This is encouraging the congregation to agree with one another and the written word as they chorus, Amen-so let it be-in unison.

Saint Ignatius Loyola underwent a series of intense mystical experiences and subsequently described such phenomena in terms of dialogical model. For him, prayer constitutes a movement of human interiority that seeks to "find god in all things", beginning with the created order. Hence while Ignatius says of prayer that God alone is its author, he also

describes prayer as a kind of “address” or manifestation of God’s unique self-communication in time and history (Andrew, 2005: 195). In the exercise, prayer thus poses a thorny problem. On the other hand, prayer is dialogical: it is constituted in a co-constitutive relationship between God and creature based on various levels of analogy, mutuality, and reciprocity. On the other hand, however, the first thing that prayer requires is an epistemological asymmetry that recognizes the absolute disunity between God and creature. Along with the character of response, prayer is recognition of possibility that seeks to express and communicate that which is accessible, mysterious and hidden.

Within the exercise, Ignatius describes many different ways by which a retreatant can depose himself or herself in order to actively discern the movement that, “in its first instance entailed turning to God in a new and more profound way” (Ricoeur, 1992: 203). Yet if prayer constitutes the condition of possibility of the appearing of a “nonappearance”, then in terms of given-ness of pure transcendence, the goal of the exercise might best be described not in terms of a traditional metaphysics of presence (Andrews, 2005: 204).

Prayer is primarily and essentially enabled through the Name of Jesus Christ and by the Power of His Holy Spirit

Praying in the name of Jesus is not just a magical incantation that is tacked on the end of prayers. The word “in” is a preposition of position and it carries with it doctrinal truth that all believers need to know. In Ephesians 1:1 and all through the book, the phrase “in Christ”, is a regular feature which constantly reminds Christians of their position in Christ. The book could be called the “position book” and the word “in” brings our position into focus. This doctrinal truth is called our “ascension privilege” and it is our position in Jesus Christ. Therefore, our standing before God rest in Jesus Christ and praying in the name of Jesus is the way our prayers are heard.

The Lord Jesus himself instruct his followers to ask, (that is, pray) in His name, and He will do it, (that is answer) so that the father may be glorified: “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name I will do it” (cf. John 14:13-14). Praying in Jesus name also means praying according to God’s will (cf. 1John 5:14-15).

In Romans 8:26 and its context teaches how the Holy Spirit help believers in prayer. We observe here that just as in the case of a handicapped person who can only grunt and make strange noises, the parent is usually able to interpret what he or she means in the other people around, likewise the Holy Spirit helps believers in their prayers.

God is looking for worshippers who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Jesus Himself taught that the Spirit would assist the believer (John 3: 14, 16). Because the Spirit blows where He wills, it seems right that there is present the opportunity in worship to freely follow the leading of the spirit. The principle of “liberty” in worship led the Puritans and others to accept *ex tempore* prayer rather than being restricted to written liturgical forms. However, we should also bear in mind that the Spirit is the Spirit of truth whose function is to testify of Christ. That implies that prayer and “worship which is truly prompted by the Spirit will be subject to a theological constraint, it will be restricted as well as evoked by the Christian revelation” (Abba, 1957: 8).

Prayer is an Offering to God from the Heart and it is for Life

“Pray without ceasing” (Thesolanians5:17) is a clarion call that necessitates importunity, which engenders intercession, one of the forms of prayers. Nehemiah’s prayer (Neh. 2:4) is typical of an intercessory prayer. In intercessory prayer, we follow the Old Testament priestly function and the New Testament pattern of Jesus standing before God and between a righteous God and sinful mankind. In order to be effective in standing “between”, we must first stand “before” God to develop the intimacy necessary to fulfill this role. Numbers 14 is one of the greatest accounts of intercessory prayers. As recorded in the Bible, Moses was able to stand between God and sinful man because he had stood “before” Him and had developed intimacy of communication, hence in Numbers 12:8 it is recorded that God spoke with Moses as friend to friend and not through visions and dreams as He did with other prophets.

As New Testament believers, we no longer sacrifice animals as done in Old Testament times. We stand before the Lord to offer up spiritual praise (Heb. 13:15) and the sacrifice of our own lives (Rom.12:1). It is on the basis of this intimate relationship with God that we can then stand “between” Him and others, serving as an advocate and intercessor in their behalf. Peter uses two words to describe this priestly ministry: “Holy” and “royal”. Holiness is required to stand before the Lord (Heb. 12:14). We are able to do this only on the basis of the righteousness of Christ, not our own righteousness. Royalty is descriptive of the kingly authority that is delegated to us as members of the “royal family”, so to speak, with legitimate access to the throne of God.

The Biblical basis for the New Testament believer’s ministry of intercessory prayer is the calling as priests unto God. The word of God declares that we are a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), and a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:5). The background for understanding this calling to priestly intercession is found in the Old Testament example of the Levitical priesthood. The priest’s responsibility was to stand before and between. He stood before God to minister to Him with sacrifices and offerings. The priests also stood between a righteous God and sinful man bringing them together at the place of the blood sacrifice. Hebrews 7:11-19 explains the difference between the Old Testament ministries of the priest. The Old Testament Levitical priesthood was passed on from generation to generation through the descendants of the tribe of Levi. “The Melchizedek priesthood” spoken of in this passage is the “new order” of spiritual priests of whom the Lord Jesus is the High Priest. It is passed on to us through His blood and our spiritual birth as new creatures in Christ.

Conclusion

Prayer in the scriptures is the only right weapon the righteous have to fight and defend themselves from the onslaught of the wicked. It is never to be trivialized; through it success in life is guaranteed in Christ. Christ remains the epitome of the spirituality of prayers, leaving for His disciples examples that they may follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21). The following points should be noted when people think of prayers: Prayer is the highest exercise of man’s spiritual nature; it is natural to the soul even in perfect accord with God; It is not only the expression of need, the supply which is sought of God, but by the example of Christ, it is the highest expression of trust, submission and union with God; it is to be used both in solitude and in society; it is personal (supplicatory) and intercessory; and it may be accompanied by the plea of Christ’s name, and for Christ’s sake. These are the laws which should direct it; that is to say, it should be based upon the merit and the intercession of Christ, and should be addressed to God under the limitations of the kingdom of the Lord and His purposes for good, both for the interest of the suppliant and others, under the conditions of the interest of the whole kingdom.

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