

Prayer Pointers

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We all are subject to drifting into behavior and speech habits that convey unscriptural concepts. Sometimes such speech habits are manifested in the prayers in our assemblies. Such mistakes are doubtless made innocently, but they are mistakes, nonetheless. Every earnest saint is interested in praying according to that which the New Testament teaches and authorizes. With these thoughts in mind, please consider the following:

1. When we pray, we are to address **God**, our Heavenly **Father** (not His Son or the Holy Spirit), **in the name of His Son** (Mat. 6:9; John 14:13-14; 15:16b; 16:23-24; Eph 5:20; Col. 3:17; et al.). There is no Scriptural authority for addressing Jesus or the Holy Spirit in prayer.
2. Brethren sometimes close their prayers with the words, "In **Thy** name we pray." To do so is to address the prayer **to** the Father and then offer it **in the name** of the Father, instead of **in the name** of Christ. It is both contrary to Scripture (Col. 3:17) and nonsensical to pray **to** God in the **name** of God.
3. I have heard many prayers at the Lord's table on the following order: "**Father** we thank **Thee** for **Thy** table...," or "We thank **Thee** for this bread which represents **Thy** body...," or "We thank **Thee** for this fruit of the vine which symbolizes **Thy** blood." By such terminology the prayer leader (surely unwittingly) is either addressing Christ in his prayer, or He is implying that the table is the **Father's** instead of the **Son's** (i.e., the **Lord's** [Luke 22:30; 1 Cor. 10:21]) and that the **Father** rather than the **Son** sacrificed His body and blood.

In either case, the terminology (and the concept behind it) is unScriptural. Likely, leaders of such prayers have copied them from others without considering their implications. As noted above, we are not authorized to address the **Son**, but **the Father**, in prayer. Further, the **Son**, **not the Father**, sacrificed His body and blood (the **Father** never had flesh and blood). The Supper/Table belongs peculiarly to the **Son** as a memorial to **His death** (1 Cor. 11:23-26 – **not** His "death, burial, and resurrection," incidentally.) The wording of our prayers should keep these distinctions clear. The following (or similar) prayers at the table correctly convey these concepts: "**Father**, we thank **Thee** for this bread, which represents the body of **Thy Son**, sacrificed for our salvation," and **Father**, we thank **Thee** for this fruit of the vine which, symbolizes the blood of **Thy Son** poured out for our sins. In the name of **Christ** we pray, Amen." Further, if we follow the example of the Lord when He instituted His sacred memorial, prayers at His Table will always include thanksgivings for each symbolic element (Mat. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25).

4. Prayer leaders occasionally address fellow human beings in prayer. I have heard brethren leading a prayer before a "fellowship" dinner say, "We thank these ladies who have prepared this food." I've also heard brethren say in a closing prayer, "We thank brother _____ for his good sermon today." We should certainly be grateful for those who thus serve, but if we mention them in prayer, let us remember we are addressing **God**, not others whose efforts we may appreciate. Therefore, let us thank God **for** the ladies or the preacher (or for whomever we are grateful), rather than **thanking those people** directly in a prayer addressed to God. Then thank the ladies or the preacher in person, rather than addressing them in prayer.

5. It is not uncommon to hear a brother lapse into a personal prayer when leading a public prayer in a worship assembly. When one **leads** others in prayer (whether in an assembly, before a meal, or on other occasions), first person singular pronouns (*I, me, my*) are inappropriate. Each supplication, thanksgiving, and intercession is on behalf of **all** whom he is **leading** and should therefore always employ plural pronouns (*we, us, our*). Jesus' "teaching prayer" perfectly illustrates this principle. It is not "**My** Father..." "Give **me**...**my** daily bread..." or "Forgive **me my** debts..." and so forth, but "**Our** Father..." "Give **us**...**our** daily bread..." and "Forgive **us our** debts..." (Mat. 6:9-13). The Lord prefaced this prayer model with the clear instruction: "After this manner therefore pray ye" (v. 9), obviously having in mind a setting in which more than one person would be present. First person singular pronouns should be reserved for our personal and private prayers.

As in all things, including our prayers, we should seek to please God and our Mediator, His Son, including the wording of our prayers: "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17).

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