

Major Bible Themes

52 Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained

Adapted from the book *Major Bible Themes*
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The Church: Her Worship in Prayer and Thanksgiving

- Introduction
 - In the present age worship is not a matter of form or circumstance, but as Christ explained, “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”
 - Accordingly, worship is not confined to sacred services in great cathedrals, but is the adoration of the heart of the Christian as he expresses his prayer and praise to his Heavenly Father in the name of Christ – prayer and praise are principal elements of worship as man has direct communion with God.
 - The study of praise and prayer in the Old and New Testaments reveal a progressive revelation and increasing privilege.
- Prayer Before the First Advent of Christ
 - Though individual and private prayer has been offered by godly men in all ages, it is evident that prayer, in the main, was offered by the patriarch on behalf of the household (Job 1:5).
 - From the time of Moses to Christ, rulers and priests offered prayers on behalf of the people.
 - Throughout these centuries the ground of prayer consisted in pleading the covenants of Jehovah (1 Kgs 8:22-26; Neh 9:32; Dan 9:4) and His holy character (Gen 18:25; Ex 32:11-14), and it followed the sacrificial shedding of blood (Heb 9:7).
- Prayer in Expectation of the Kingdom
 - The Messianic claim of Jesus and the acceptance of the kingdom at His hand were rejected by the nation of Israel, but during the early days of His preaching while the kingdom was being offered to Israel, He taught His disciples to pray for the kingdom to be setup on the earth.
 - When Jesus taught the disciples to pray (Matt 6:9-13) He included the petition, “Your kingdom come.” and concluded, “Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”
 - This prayer has in view the realization of the Millennial Kingdom when Christ reigns supreme on earth.
 - Because this prayer also includes other items which are suitable for all ages and circumstances – the adoration of the Father, petition for daily bread, and deliverance from temptation – it has often been taken as a model prayer.
 - It is unlikely that Christ was instructing us to pray this prayer today as members of the Church.
 - However, it is not improper for believers today to anticipate the coming of the kingdom provided that they understand that it does not occur through human effort, but awaits the glorious return of Christ when He sets up the kingdom on earth.

- The Prayer of Christ
 - The true Lord's Prayer is found in John 17 and it reveals the utmost freedom in communion between Father and Son.
 - In this prayer Christ is exercising His office as High Priest and His prayer is not based upon promises or covenants.
 - Instead, the theme of His prayer is the need of believers in the age to come following Pentecost.
 - While Christ prayed often while on earth (Matt 14:23) in some cases praying all night (Luke 6:12), His prayer in John 17 is a preview of His intercessory work at the right hand of the Father during this present dispensation.
- Prayer under the Relationship of Grace
 - Prayer, like all other human responsibilities, is adapted to the various dispensations.
 - Today, we offer prayer to the Father in the name of Christ in the full revelation of His sacrifice on the cross.
 - In the Upper Room Discourse (John 13:31-17:26) Jesus taught three important passages on prayer (John 14:12-14; 15:7; 16:23-24).
 - This form of prayer is based upon the heavenly standing we possess today as members of the Church and will be considered under four aspects.
 - The function of prayer includes not only praise, but the believer presenting his own needs to the Lord and interceding on behalf of others.
 - ✦ Some argue that prayer is unreasonable because an omniscient God already knows what is required better than the one who prays.
 - ✦ God, nevertheless, has sovereignly ordained prayer as a means of accomplishing His will in the world and has instructed those who believe in Him to present their petitions.
 - ✦ John 14:13-14 elevates the importance of prayer such that, within God's sovereign authority, a limited scope of divine actions are conditioned upon the faithful prayer of the believer.
 - ✦ Although we do not fully understand all that is involved, we do know that in the ministry of prayer the child of God is brought into vital partnership with the work of God.
 - ✦ This responsibility in partnership is not extended to the believer as a special concession – it is the normal function of one for whom the sacrificial blood has been shed (Heb 10:19-20).
 - ✦ It is not unreasonable that one who is a living part of Christ (Eph 5:30) should share both in His service and His glory (John 14:12).
 - The privilege of praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which under grace is extended to every child of God, lends to prayer a characteristic which lifts it to an infinite degree above every other form of prayer.
 - ✦ Previous dispensations did not have the privilege of offering prayer in the name of Christ (John 16:24).

- ✦ The name of Christ is equivalent to the person of Christ and this name is not given to believers merely as something with which to conjure up wishes as though God were a genie in a bottle.
- ✦ Praying in the name of Christ means recognizing oneself as a living part of Christ, baptized into union with Him by the Holy Spirit.
- ✦ We can be confident that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ commands the attention of the Father and that He will listen to our petitions and be inclined to do whatever is asked provided that His beloved Son will be glorified in so doing.
- ✦ Since such prayer is possible only on the grounds of the shed blood of Christ and the vital union of the believer with Christ, these prayers are not possible for the unbeliever.
- The words “anything” and “whatever” reveal the scope of prayer under grace, but not without reasonable limitations.
 - ✦ Since praying in the name of Christ is like signing His name to our petition, it is reasonable that these prayers would be limited to that which is in direct line with the purposes and glory of Christ.
 - ✦ Before true prayer can be offered, the heart of the believer must be conformed to the mind of Christ.
 - ✦ John 15:7 tells us that, if we abide in Christ *and* His words abide in us, we can whatever we wish.
 - ✦ Under such heart adjustment, the child of God will ask for those things which are in the sphere of God’s will.
 - ✦ Under grace, there is perfect liberty of action for the believer in whom God is working both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13).
 - ✦ Likewise, there is freedom of petition to the Spirit-filled believer who prays in the will of God.
 - ✦ The scope of prayer under grace is not narrow: it is as unbounded as the eternal interests of the One in whose name we are privileged to pray.
- The practice of prayer should be given careful attention by every believer.
 - ✦ Believers should have regular times of prayer.
 - ✦ Irreverent prayer or prayers that employ useless repetition should be avoided.
 - ✦ The divine order prescribed for prayer under grace should be followed...
 - Prayer is directed to God the Father (John 15:16; 16:23).
 - Prayer is offered in the name of the Son (John 15:16; 16:23).
 - Prayer is given in the power of the Holy Spirit (Jude 20).
- The Prayer of Thanksgiving
 - It is the privilege of believers today to offer the spiritual sacrifice of thanksgiving to God as was portrayed in the Old Testament offerings (Lev 7:11-12; Ps 107:22; 116:17) and prophesied about the coming Kingdom (Isa 51:3; Jer 30:19).

- Thanksgiving is extremely personal – there are certainly some obligations belonging to us which others may assume, but no one can offer for us our sacrifice of thanksgiving (Lev 22:29).
- True thanksgiving is the voluntary expression of heartfelt gratitude for a benefit received, but is in no way a payment for the benefit received.
- Since no payment can be made to God for His unmeasured and uncounted benefits, the believer's response to God's grace ought to be unqualified thankfulness to Him.
- If while offering the spiritual sacrifice of thanksgiving the motive should include the idea of compensation, the essential value of thanksgiving is destroyed.
- Thankfulness is a gracious acknowledgement of the fact that the one who has received the benefit is indebted to the giver.
- Another important feature of thanksgiving is the appreciation of God apart from His benefits (Ps 95:2; 100:1-5; 119:62).
- Though often neglected, the theme of thanksgiving is an important part of our praise of God (Ps 92:1).
- The theme of prayer is mentioned over forty times in the New Testament and this form of praise is offered for both spiritual and temporal blessings.
- Christ's unfailing practice of giving thanks for food should be an effective example for all believers (Matt 15:36; 26:27; Mark 8:6; 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; John 6:23; 1 Cor 11:24).
- The Apostle Paul was also faithful in this practice (Acts 27:35; Rom 14:6; 1 Tim 4:3-5).
- Paul declared "thanks be to God" for Jesus Christ as the indescribable gift (2 Cor 9:15), for the victory over the grave which was secured by the resurrection (1 Cor 15:57) and for the present triumph which is ours in Christ (2 Cor 2:14).
- Paul's thanksgiving to God for believers (1 Tim 1:2; 3:9) and for Titus in particular (2 Cor 8:16) along with his exhortation that thanks be given for all men (1 Tim 2:1) is an object lesson for all of the children of God.
- The abundant grace of God will abound to the glory of God through the giving of thanks of the many (2 Cor 4:15).
- Believers today are expected to offer thanks to God without ceasing (Heb 13:15; Eph 1:16; Col 1:3; 4:2).
- This feature of thanksgiving is also emphasized in the Old Testament (Ps 30:12; 79:13).
- Our spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving should be offered for all things (1 Thess 5:17-18; Col 3:17; Phil 4:6).
- *Always* giving thanks for *all* things in the name of the Lord (Eph 5:20) involves a heart attitude which is quite different from that which will give thanks for *some* things *sometimes*.
- When we understand the biblical truth that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28) then it makes sense that thanks should be rendered to God for all things.
- Such God honoring praise can be offered only by believers who are filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18-20).

- The very common sin of ingratitude (2 Tim 3:2) is taught in the event of the cleansing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19).
- Unbelievers may attempt to thank God for temporal benefits, but their rejection of Christ renders their thanks unacceptable.
- Questions
 - What importance would you attach to the fact that praise is one of the spiritual sacrifices of the believer-priest in the Church?
 - How is worship related to form and circumstance?
 - What characterized prayer before the first coming of Christ?
 - What was the purpose of the prayer made by Christ in Matt 6:9-13?
 - In what sense is it proper for us to pray for the coming kingdom?
 - Why should John 17 be regarded as the true "Lord's Prayer"?
 - What do we learn in Scripture concerning the prayer life of Christ and how does John 17 indicate the form of His petitions?
 - Why in the present dispensation of grace does the function of prayer include intercession given that God is omniscient?
 - What assurance does the believer have that God will answer prayers?
 - What is the full meaning of praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and how does that give us assurance?

- What is the scope of prayer under grace?

- How does the Holy Spirit relate to our petitions?

- What are some types of prayer that should be avoided?

- Why should prayer under grace be offered to the Father in the name of the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit?

- Why is thanksgiving to God such a personal matter?

- In what sense is thanksgiving a sacrifice?

- How does thanksgiving relate to the person of God as in contrast with His works?

- What are some of the outstanding illustrations of thanksgiving in the New Testament?

- What are two very important features of thanksgiving in the present dispensation?

- Why is failure to offer thanksgiving a sin?

- Why is thanksgiving properly offered only by believers?