

## SHOULD WE PRAY TO SAINTS

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Tonight I'm going to give you a teaching, a short message, a vital message. This is a personal message, a selfish message. I never in setting down my preaching agenda for the year would have chosen to speak on this particular subject which is "Should We Pray to the Saints in Heaven?" Every Protestant knows the answer to that, right? No. We don't even think about it. We don't consider it.

I have a friend, a charismatic out of the Catholic tradition. When we were talking some months ago he presented to me a notion of praying to the saints in heaven that I'd never heard before. It intrigued me and made me go back to the scripture. It made me realize how much I really do disagree with him even though he is my brother in the Lord. He said when we pray to the saints in heaven, we are not praying to the saints, as you would think of praying to God. That's not the idea at all. He said praying to the saints in church tradition is somewhat equivalent to me going to you and saying, "George, I have a real special prayer need and I'd like for you to intercede with me about that need. I believe there is power in your prayer and where two of us agree as touching anything it shall be done." When I've gone to you to ask you to share with me in that prayer request I haven't prayed to you. I've simply come to you and asked you to pray with me. And together we go to the Father. And the Father likes it when we come together. He has told us that wherever two or three of us gather together it shall be done. So there is merit or power of coming together with other saints.

If this is true on earth, he says, think how much more it's true when we come into the heavenly realms and we see ourselves surrounded by the crowd of heavenly witnesses. We must recognize that in Christian theology there is no such thing as death. That those who die in Christ go on living. To die is gain. To be absent with the body is to be present with the Lord. Therefore we have a view in Christian theology that those who die aren't really dead. They go on living. If their prayers have been mighty and powerful on earth they also can be mighty and powerful in heaven. Therefore when a saint is prayed to you're simply asking them to pray with you about that need. Especially persons who have been greatly used of the Lord it's a comfort to realize that they in that moment are joining with you and you're not left simply on earth with your prayers. But you have intercessors in the heavens. A prayer group in the heavens if you will who can join in prayer for you. And their direct contact with the Lord means something very special.

I'd never heard that before. All this time I thought it was idolatry. That's my Protestant mentality. I better re-examine this whole thing. Should we call upon the saints in heaven and enlist them to pray along with us?

I've been chewing on that for about four months. And I'm ready now to give you my opinion as Paul says, this is my own opinion as one who has been found trustworthy in the Lord.

We ought to recognize first of all that it is totally wrong to pray to a saint. No human being ever receives worship. I'll make the distinction right off of praying to a saint and praying with a saint.

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Something about praying to a saint: in Acts 14 when Paul and Barnabus have done a mighty miracle on the first missionary journey at Lystra the people in the town want to bow down and worship them and offer sacrifice because they have been instrumental in healing a man crippled from birth. They steadfastly tear their clothes and refuse worship. John in the book of Revelation, an angel comes along and reveals things to him and John starts to bow down to the angel and the angel refuses worship and tells him to worship God only. Revelation 19:10. Scripture is very clear you shall worship the Lord only. He alone is God and it is inappropriate to pray to anyone who is not God.

But we're talking about a different matter than praying to someone. We're talking about calling on someone in the heavens and praying with them. I'd like to give you 7 reasons, a perfect and complete argument on this subject.

First reason that we should not it seems to me pray with the saints in heaven is that Jesus never prayed with a saint in heaven. His whole example of prayer is always direct. Never once does he pray to Abraham. Never once does he pray to Moses. Never once does he pray to any of the prophets. Yet they are all in the company. The only time that Jesus talks to a personage from the Old Testament is when, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Elijah and Moses appeared to him and they are there physically, one on one. They're there with Peter, James and John. Jesus talks with them. He's not even in a praying context. He is talking to them about his exodus, which he is going to accomplish in Jerusalem.

It seems to me in such a vital matter of prayer if the Lord had wanted us to have the saints in heaven available to us to carry on our prayer request in the heaven then he would have given us some teaching on the matter. So that ought to be number one. Jesus left no teaching and no example on the subject at all.

Second reason why I do not feel like praying with the saints in heaven is open to us in scripture is that the apostle Paul to use the chief teaching example out of the New Testament, Paul writes thirteen of the New Testament letters, and is responsible for the great body of teaching in the New Testament. Paul never gives us such teaching in his letters. Or in his own person example.

And there were devout Christian persons who had preceded Paul into death. For example Stephen who had died at Paul's own hands. Yet we never find Paul saying in any of his letters, "I've been talking with Stephen and I feel great that I'm able to reestablish contact with him and that Stephen is praying with me on the success of my missionary journeys. He wishes he could be along but he understands."

Paul never does anything like that. He never in teaching or example gives to us a pattern or explicit direction or even implicit direction that we ought to pray with the saints.

Third, all the apostles of the New Testament never prayed to a saint in heaven. No example in the New Testament at all of any apostle ever praying with a saint in heaven.

Furthermore we have no teaching from any apostle that says "When I am gone into heaven I want you to call upon me and I'll intercede for you. I'll go right to the Father. I'll be right there. You feel free to come to me and I'm going to pray for you. Just call on me. Don't forget; I'm still living."

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No. No apostle ever says anything like that. All the teaching of the apostles is we have direct access. I think if we were using a key scripture for this message it would be 1 Timothy 2:5 *“There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.”* The apostles never give us any instructions that we’re to pray with the saints.

Fourth, I want to point out practically that praying with a saint on earth differs from praying with a saint in heaven. My friend says, It’s just like praying with a saint on earth. I pointed out to him and I believe this much more strongly now that it’s much different. When I’m praying with a saint on earth, I’m praying with someone who is in two way contact with me. I’m going to get either on the phone or face to face and it’s going to be a two-way communication. I can talk to him and he can talk to me. One of the difficulties about praying to the saint in heaven is you don’t have any two way contact.

You also have this phenomenon. A saint on earth or in heaven is not God. They still have the uniqueness that is human nature, which means that saints are not omnipresent and saints are not all knowledgeable. Therefore if you pray to a saint in heaven you don’t know if they’re already tied up with somebody else. We know that God can listen to many conversations at once because he is everywhere present. It’s a mystery to me how God can listen to everybody’s prayers at the same time. But if I start praying to Thomas and somebody else has him tied up and poor Thomas has to listen to two people, or ten people. That’s assuming something about his nature that isn’t true.

I said to my friend, teasing, I really feel sorry for Mary. Since the third century she hasn’t had a moment’s rest. Everybody all the time is on the line. Trying to get through to Mary. And Mary would like to enjoy the presence of her Son for a while and then enjoy heaven. So I wish people for 24 hours would just leave her alone. If you’re from a Catholic tradition, forgive me. I love Mary and I think all believers ought to love Mary. But it seems to me to make Mary the mediator of prayer or any saint the mediator of prayer is to mean that a lot of people are coming at the same time and God didn’t make them to be in that kind of an order. To listen to a lot of people at the same time.

When I’m praying with you we have a two-way communication. When I’m praying with a saint in heaven there is no communication at all because saints can only listen because of the nature of our humanness and our mortality even in our resurrected body, we can listen to one conversation at a time.

I think a fifth reason why I would not pray with a saint in heaven is that praying with a saint in heaven demeans our own confidence with God.

The way this works is I can go to “Frank” and say, Pray for me. But Frank really hasn’t got through the battle yet so I’m not sure how powerful his prayers are really going to be. But I know Peter has pull with God. Frank, yeah. But if I go to Peter he really has pull with God. He’s the cornerstone upon which Jesus said he’d build the church. So we begin relying upon the ability of someone who is close in to do something for us. And we begin to have a diminished view of our own confidence with God in prayer. And Hebrews says let us boldly, all of us, you and me, the people who aren’t very well known, the nobodies of this world, let us boldly approach the throne of grace. That means we can get right on in ourselves.

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I've always had the view that if you can go to the top in of an organization you ought to go straight to the top. Not waste time with anybody else. If you can get to the top, go to the top. And we can all get right straight to the top.

I love Peter. Peter's one of my two favorite people of the New Testament but I would no more think of going to Peter to ask him to pray for me because the Lord has put me in this life. I've come to the kingdom for such a time as this. God regards my prayer as seriously as he regards Peter's. So I rather hear what Jesus said, Wherever two or three of you agree on earth. Not wherever two or three of you agree, some of you in heaven and some on earth. But wherever two or three of you agree on earth as touching anything in my name it will be done. There's confidence we can have as we come to the Lord in prayer.

A sixth reason for not praying to a saint in heaven is that praying with a saint in heaven subtly creates an intermediary between me and God. In the model of relationships we've been given in scripture as believers is that the Father is our father and we are his children. His sons or his daughters. We're also given the model in terms of Christ being the husband and we are bride. Someone else involved in the circle short circuits the close relationship that God intends to model. God wants us to have the confidence to come to him as a child or as a marital spouse. When I talk to God I can come to him directly without an intermediary between me and him.

I think a seventh reason that praying with a saint gradually can lead away from a direct relationship with God himself. That is why when you go into some circles in the world what started out as so called good theology... and I pointed this out to my charismatic friend. I said I'm sure you mean well by praying with the saints but the fact is most people don't understand your subtle distinction. They want to pray to the saints. In many parts of the world I'll show you people who are praying *to* saints. They have no idea they're praying *with* a saint. They've lost the sense of direct intermediary nature with God.

No personal attack on Mary or whatever I think if anything Protestants have underestimated and demeaned the mother of the Lord. But here is a case of one who has moved away from the idea of coming directly to the Lord himself and relied on someone else in heaven who is looking out for his interests. We ought never to make the mistake that a saint is more interested in us and fighting more for us than the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

I would simply say that praying with a saint gradually can lead to a distance of relationship between ourselves and the Lord.

So having looked at all of these reasons I've decided that I'm not going to pray with saints. And that's all I wanted to tell you tonight. Just a little teaching that helped me get my head straight. I like to be challenged periodically by persons who come along with a different viewpoint. I haven't read my friend out of the kingdom. I haven't said "You heathen. You need to be re-baptized." I don't doubt at all his genuine experience with the Lord. But it's just that he is not as up in that area as he should be. And need some more growth in grace. So I'm doing my best to help him. And he's doing his best to help me. And I'm going to send him a tape of this service to further spur him on.

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