

# PRAYER IN THE NEW AGE

By

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One of the greatest deceptions of all time is the substitution of Eastern mysticism (New Age Religion) for Christian faith.

This was recently manifested in the highly-publicized event called “Earth Day,” in which many interpreted the universe in Buddhist concepts: the earth is sacred and man is servant of nature. It is embraced in the ecumenical movement: all religions are equally valid — all roads lead to God — all is one and God is in all. It is the basis of much of the psychology used by religious (Christian?) psychologists.

But some of its deepest inroads have been made in the realm of prayer. Here is advice I read recently from a prominent Charismatic preacher: “If the prayer language (praying in *tongues*) which is available to all Christians is not received and used by them, there is little hope for them to resist the flood of spiritual evil that is being released in the world.” This puts prayer in the category of mysticism, where, instead of following Christ’s instructions simply to “ask,” knowing full well what one is asking, one must bypass the intellect (as some Charismatic teachers say, “put your mind in neutral”) and try to engage in communications with God without knowing what is being asked or said!

The argument for this action is from Roman 8:26, in which Paul wrote that we are not able to pray as we ought, “but the spirit himself make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” This simply to say that God, through His spirit that abides in us, understands what we truly desire, even when we do not adequately express it. It specifically says that the desire (“groanings”) is not spoken in unknown tongues, for it “cannot be uttered.”

Praying in this manner may leave one with a sense of exhilaration and satisfaction as it does Muslims and Tibetan monks, but it is far removed from any kind of prayer taught in Scripture.

Much of modern teaching on prayer is designed to encourage confidence in one’s own power. The fast-growing movement of “Power Evangelism” promotes the belief that every Christian is to have all the power Jesus had. What one needs to do is to realize that he has that power and learn how to use it. With such power he can command spiritual forces, “bind Satan” at every turn, and use his power to overwhelm sinners into turning to Christ. One wonders why the apostle Paul used reason, argument and persuasion if he had the power to overwhelm the sinner into submission.

The claim to be able to imitate the power of Christ is carried even further by some Charismatic preachers like Paul Yonggi Cho, the Korean pastor who claims to pastor a church of 500,000, the largest church in the world. Cho is often featured at conferences in the U.S. and as a guest on religious TV shows, including Robert Schuller’s. Cho claims that Christians have the power to be creators, like God. This is only a step removed from Shirley MacLain’s “I am god” claim. It is straight out of New Age mysticism, which present its god as “the Force”, and “infinite intelligence.” Success in this religion is achieved when you tap into that “force” and begin to exercise its power. You become as God – judging for yourself all things and obeying your own desire. You are in command.

Prayer then becomes a magic formula to get what you want, whether it is winning the gold medal, a new car, or gaining some business advantage. The trick is to learn how to use this power through such things as positive thinking, visualization and faith. But the faith is not faith in a personal God Who has His own agenda to carry out, but faith in one's faith; not faith in the power of God, but faith in one's own power.

Note how closely this parallels the original sin, in which Eve was told, "you shall be as God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

The true object of faith is that we trust God to have His way with us, not that we use Him to get our own way. True faith is to believe God is sovereign and that, if we suffer from problems beyond our control, we may commit ourselves to Him with confidence that He will sustain us and fulfill His purpose in our lives in spite of, or even because of, those problems. This is exemplified in Paul, who found no relief from his affliction by prayer but accepted it as a means of strengthening his faith and dependence on God (II Cor. 12:8-10).

Recently I went to hear a noted evangelist who spent almost all his time reciting stories of things God had "told" him to do. For example, on one occasion God "said" to him to "blow" on a certain woman. He argued with God: "You must be kidding...they will think I'm crazy...I've never done anything like that..." But God kept "saying" for him to blow on the woman. His sermon, if it could be called that, was delivered to a large, Charismatic church, and apparently the preacher and people took him seriously.

This concept of direct revelation is one of the main pillars of "Power Evangelism". The general commission to preach and make disciples everywhere is not sufficient. In "Power Evangelism" there are supernatural revelations from God and "divine appointments" where God reveals the person, time and place for the encounter, and even the special message to be given. This is more like New Age religion than the "faith once delivered."

To live by faith is to live according to Christ's commandments and to trust that such a life is best because it is what God wants. New Age thinkers insist on having God show them each step of the way. Strange enough, in spite of their claim that God gives them personal instructions, they continually make serious mistakes, such as Oral Roberts and his bankrupt hospital, Jim Bakker's fiasco, and Pat Robertson's failure to gain the presidential nomination.

One perversion of prayer taught by the "health and wealth" evangelists is the use of "visualization". This requires that when you pray you must also visualize how the prayer is being answered.

Pastor Cho teaches that we must visualize the answer as being completed as we go to the Lord in prayer, that we should always try to visualize the end result as we pray. This false doctrine is echoed by many religious teachers. Visualization is nothing new. It has always been a part of occult literature and is used extensively by psychologists and teachers of success/motivation seminars. Athletes use it to get psyched up for a contest, and sales trainers encourage the salesperson to visualize the successful sales pitch. It may prove helpful in improving the golfer's swing or preparing a salesperson with a persuasive attitude, but it has nothing to do with prayer as taught in the Bible.

The very idea of power through visualization is based on the pagan concept that there is a *force* available to us if we only use the right keys to connect with it. Then the powers of this force become our own, and we can get whatever we want. This means that

prayer is a means of gaining our own ends through the power of our own thoughts and words, apart from the will of God.

Such visualization is contrary to the very purpose of prayer, which is to have God's will done. The answer must come as God visualizes it, not as I visualize it. There is not one example of Jesus or the apostles "visualizing" the answer as they prayed. Whether they realize it or not, teachers of this kind of "prayer power" are not teaching that God answers prayer, but that we can have power to bring things to pass by our own words and intensity of will. This is New Age shamanism and sorcery, not the practice of Christian faith.

The example of prayer given by Jesus is clearly opposed to these New Age concepts. We are all familiar with "The Lord's Prayer" as given in Matthew 6:9-13. Only five things are requested: 1) the kingdom come, 2) God's will to be done, 3) our daily bread, 4) forgiveness, and 5) deliverance from temptation. This is an example of what we are to pray for. Where is the part about personal power or special language or specific revelation or instruction, and where is there room for God performing according to our own visualization?

There are no special words or mental gymnastics necessary in talking to God and making our request know to Him. In fact, He already knows our needs. He answers prayer to accomplish His purpose in our lives and in the world, not to give us magical powers to accomplish anything we choose.

"In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

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