

An Attempt To Listen To God

Meditations on  
The Postures of His Praying

By

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## The Postures Of His Praying

Ofttimes when parents teach their children to pray it is with their hands clasped in front of them. It is, perhaps, based on the picture of the little child kneeling beside the bed, or an elderly man at the table giving thanks. Interestingly, of the varied postures in which people prayed in the scriptures, this not one of them. The following is a list of the postures and directions people faced that I have found in the scriptures. Some may be the same but stated in a different way. The reader can decide for themselves. They are:

- 1) Lying down (Psa. 4:4; 63:6)
- 2) Fell on the ground (Mk. 14:35)
- 3) Bow down on the bed (1 Kgs.1:47)
- 4) Bowing ones head (Gen. 24:26)
- 5) Sitting (Jud. 20:26)
- 6) Standing (Gen. 18:22; Job 30:20)
- 7) Kneeling (Mk. 1:40)
- 8) Kneeling and sitting on ones knees (2 Sam.7:18; 1 Chron. 17:16) (The careful reader will observe both “sat” before the Lord, with no reference to kneeling. I added “kneeling” for that is what the Hebrew would indicate regarding this position, much like the Muslims do to this day).
- 9) Head between the knees (1 Kgs. 18:42)
- 10) Lifting up hands (Psa. 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; Lam. 2:19; 3:41; 1 Tim. 2:8)
- 11) Looking upward (Jn. 17:1)
- 12) Bowing down (Psa. 95:6)
- 13) Beating on their breasts (Lk. 18:13)
- 14) Facing the temple (1 Kgs. 8:44-45; Dan. 6:10)
- 15) Kneeling on knees and spreading forth hands (1 Kgs. 8:54)

With this background, we consider the recorded postures of the Lord.  
He:

- 1) Looked up to Heaven (Matt. 14:19; Mk. 7:34)
- 2) Fell on His face (Matt. 26:39)
- 3) Fell on the ground (Mk. 14:35)
- 4) Kneeled down (Lk. 22:41), the only time recorded when the Lord kneels to pray. Others had knelt before Him (Matt. 17:14; Mk. 1:40; 10:17)
- 5) Lifted up His eyes to Heaven (Jn. 17:1)
- 6) Lifted up His eyes (Jn. 11:41)
- 7) Lifted up His hands (Lk. 24:50)

The matters to be pondered are:

- 1) On what occasions did the Lord assume these postures and what was the significance of them?
- 2) What were His emotions when these postures were assumed?

This meditation considers some of these questions.

Before answering some of these questions, due notice must be taken of the precise nature of the Greek language. In the English translations, differences in words cannot be perfectly translated and His “looking up” is one of those situations. There are three Greek words:

- 1) Looked up (anablepō eis) (also Matt. 14:19; Mk. 6:41, 7:34; Lk. 9:16)
- 2) Lifted up (epairo eis) (Jn. 17:1)
- 3) Lifted up (airo eis) (Jn. 11:41)

It must be remembered that the moral glory of the Lord radiated (effulgence, “Brightness of His glory” (Heb. 1:3), not only in the words of His prayers but also the postures. This being so, why is it recorded that He “anablepō eis” in some places and “epairo eis” or “airo eis” in others?

The first observation is the preposition “eis” is used in all three. It is a preposition which means: “motion to another with the goal of touching”. The emphasis seems to be on the object toward which the movement dictates. Thus, the expressions: “He looked up” and “lifted up His eyes” indicates the consciousness of fullness of fellowship. Christ was looking, as it were, to the very face of God and God into His. When an individual has done wrong to another they avoid eye contact. Christ never had shamed the Father’s name, dishonored His glory, denied His Godhood, or disobeyed His commands, thus was able to look without an inward conviction into the face of God.

The Lord lifts up His eyes to Heaven or God on several occasions:

- 1) At the feeding of the 5000: “And looking up to heaven, He blest, and brake.” (Matt. 14:19; Mk. 6:41)
- 2) At the opening of the ears of the deaf and dumb man: “And looking up to heaven.” (Mk. 7:34)
- 3) At the tomb of Lazarus: “Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said.” (Jn 11:41)
- 4) With His disciples: “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven.” (Jn. 17:1)

When combining the last thoughts, the Lord was looking to God more fully than:

- 1) Jacob who said: “I have seen God face to face.” (Gen. 32:30)
- 2) Moses to whom the Lord spoke face to face. (Ex. 33:11)
- 3) Israel at Sinai. (Deut. 5:4)
- 4) Gideon who saw the Angel of the Lord face to face. (Jud. 6:22)

The words of the Psalmist and record of Daniel give us indications of what this attitude means:

- 1) Lifting up eyes: “Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us.” (Psa. 123:1-2)
- 2) Setting ones face toward the Lord: “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.” (Dan. 9:3)

The expressions which are used to describe the Lord looking toward Heaven have the beautiful thoughts of “sole dependence on God” and “needs being supplied”, as the context shows. There is a startling contrast between the Lord and Daniel in Daniel chapter 9. Daniel asked for that which He knew the children of Israel had no right to, that being “mercy” (Dan. 9:4). That was something the Lord never needed. Our Lord is also set in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar who only lifted His eyes to God after the discipline of having spent years in the fields, living like an animal (Dan. 4:34). Considering the Lord, we see a man who never needed the discipline of God to be restored.

Seemingly, the Lord had left the upper room, and before His entrance into Gethsemane, at this point there is emphasized: “He lifted up His eyes to heaven” (Jn. 17:1). At the grave of Lazarus the Lord “lifted up His eyes” (Jn. 11:41), and in both cases the first word is “Father” (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). This is very precious for it is the only time in which the expression “lifted up His eyes to heaven”<sup>1</sup> occurs, thus emphasizing the trueness of fellowship between He and His Father.

His hands were always holy, yet in the postures of prayer we never read of Him lifting up His hands. (1 Tim. 2:8)

Two other expressions dealing with a similar posture are: “He fell on His face” (Matt. 26:39), and “He fell on the ground” (Mk. 14:35). The context of the Lord falling on His face is remarkable since, in Matthew, He is presented as the King. In the record of Holy Writ I find:

- 1) Joab fell to the ground and thanked King David for permission to have Absalom returned to Jerusalem. (2 Sam. 14:22-23).
- 2) The Shunammite woman came and fell at the feet of Elisha. (2 Kgs. 4:37)
- 3) I am aware of only one occasion when the intimation is that kings were on the ground, and that is when the five kings were brought out of the cave and David told his men of war to: “put your feet upon the necks of these kings”. (Josh. 10:24)

All this is set in contrast to the Lord who, in anguish due to that which lay ahead of Him, fell with His face to the ground. It is a stunning sight to behold, the King of Kings lying prostrate on the earth He had created crying with strong crying and tears. When we are going to go through trials the Lord prays for us, but he had no one to pray for Him and only after the conflict was over, an angel came and strengthened Him (Lk. 22:43). In the garden the Lord told the disciples to: “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Mk. 14:38), but we discover that they were never told to pray for Him, and never prayed with Him. He prayed with them but that is different. He spent the early part of the darkest night of His earthly sojourn, not in the company of sympathizers surrounding Him and feeling for Him, but alone with His Father, praying.

If we tread reverently, we observe that the Lord, whether in the business of His life or darkest hour, always resorted to prayer. This perfect man who was more responsible than any of us, resorted to prayer; who was more holy, and had more power in Himself by being a clean vessel in the hand of God, had time for prayer.

Jacob knew he had to face trouble on the morrow, and through the night by the Jabbok he wrestled and prayed (Gen. 32:24-25). The Lord was in a greater conflict having entered into the hour of the power of darkness (Lk. 22:53).

How plainly was the lesson the Lord taught about continuance in prayer, and the illustration of the inopportune widow. Now He was being tested on it, and He prayed the same prayer three times over. This was no time for standing, and while He began His praying bowing, in time He was on his face, prostrate, and using language that stirs the heart and soul. How plaintive was His cry: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me”, and then the most wonderful words: “Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39).

It causes one to bow in wonder and amazement when the sight is truly seen that this, the Son of God, was on His face weeping bitter tears. Stand in the wonder that tears have stained the face of Deity. Our blessed Lord knew there was a time to stand, a time to bow, and He fulfilled each in its season.

### **He Kneeled Down**

There are a number of references to saints kneeling in prayer:

- 1) Solomon (2 Chron. 6:13)
- 2) Daniel (Dan. 6:10)
- 3) Stephen (Acts 7:60)
- 4) Peter (Acts 9:40)
- 5) Paul (Acts 20:36)
- 6) Collective (note the “we”) (Acts 21:5)

What does it signify when one kneels before another? At times it indicates the recognition of superiority (Mk. 10:17) (although this never applies to the Lord when He prays to God, for they are equal); helplessness (Matt. 17:14; Mk. 1:40) and as an indication of the heart. As an indication of the heart's attitude toward God (for there is no merit in bowing the knees if the heart is in rebellion), it manifests the attitude of the Lord at the greatest approaching crisis of His life. Since this is the only time we read of the

Lord kneeling, it is eye catching. We never read of Him kneeling on the holy mount, or when the crowds clamored to make Him King, but only in Gethsemane.

Before going back to heaven the Lord led His own out to Bethany and “lifted up His hands and blessed them” (Lk. 24:50). Aaron lifted his hands and blessed the people (Lev. 9:22). It was a stupendous day in the life of Israel for God was going to “appear unto you” (Lev. 9:4), and “the glory of the Lord” was going to appear unto them (Lev. 9:6). He had offered sacrifices for sin, burnt and meat offerings (Lev. 9:15-17), and from the tabernacle came out with Moses. Now as priest, and with the sacrifices being over, Aaron lifts his hands and blesses the people. Aaron waved the breast and shoulder of the bullock or the ram before the Lord (Lev. 9:21). It was a beautiful foreshadowing of the Lord having offered Himself as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Now, in Lk. 24:50, He stands in priestly capacity and blesses the people. The breast signified love, and the shoulder power. The Lord in blessing lifted not animal parts but the fulness of His own love and power before God in His sacrifice and resurrection, and now blesses we, His people.

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

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