Praying for Salvation of Souls

Says the psalmist, "Concerning the works of men, by the Word of Your lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psalm 17:4).

As a Catholic, I had never heard of praying for the salvation of someone yet alive on earth. The only praying for the salvation of souls I had heard of was that of praying for the dead that were presumably in a place called "Purgatory." Even there, a layperson could not pray for them with any efficacy. It was customary (and we were taught it necessary) to have a Mass, or several of them, conducted by a priest on behalf of those suffering, departed souls. It was also customary (and no doubt necessary in many cases, if not all) to pay the priest for those services.

Did the departed soul's sins have little bearing on the suffering?

Imagine that! Better still, think about it soberly and with rationality, and best of all - pray about it! Here we have people having died and presumably gone to a place called "Purgatory." I say, presumably, of course, because nobody in the Catholic Church really knew where the departed specifically went, whether to Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, or their supposed Limbo. (Purgatory was a place of great suffering to atone for one's sins on earth, provided those sins were not overly serious. The suffering would be in varying degrees, and could take a few years, a few centuries or longer, depending on how "bad" the person was, but also on how hard and faithfully any on earth might pray for his or her deliverance from that place of torment and purging.)

Could a sinner get out of Purgatory, assuming he was so fortunate as to not go straight to Hell forever, if enough money was paid for him and there were enough masses said? Was the length of term and intensity of suffering in Purgatory dependent on what friends, family and priests did on earth? Did the departed soul's sins have potentially little bearing on the suffering, if Catholic priests here decided differently?

In that case, could a wicked, howbeit wealthy, man arrange for great gobs of gold to be paid to several priests for many masses after his departure to ensure his speedy release from Purgatory (the place of literal fiery purging)? Don't laugh! I have heard and red that they do it! And, with this kind of antiChrist, antiBiblical doctrine, why would not unregenerate men come up with *all sorts* of angles and devices to eat their cake and have it, too?

Of course, if the souls originally went to Heaven, there was no need to pray for them.

Perhaps if they went to Heaven and were good or holy enough to be canonized saints by the Catholic Church, one could eventually pray **to** them. However, the process of canonization was so slow that those glorious RCC-proclaimed saints would be waiting perhaps several decades before any prayer came "up" to them that they could presumably answer. What a shameful waste! People might just have to settle for praying to God.

Now if the family's departed member were in Heaven, and there were no need of the Catholic Church to hold prayer vigils and Mass for him or her, there would be no money in it for the Church or the priest. With such potential disincentives in the mix, needless to say it was not advisable for the Church to have too many of their departing adherents going to Heaven. This led to the doctrine of, "Nobody's perfect" (contrary to the Lord's admonition of Matthew 5:48), or at least, almost nobody - they needed a few Church-proclaimed saints to exalt the organization and demonstrate the alleged power the priesthood had before God by glorifying and canonizing saints. They usurp temporal authority on earth by crowning kings, and spiritual authority in Heaven by canonizing saints.

This auspicious power would stir awe in the people, who would then believe the lie that priests could hold Mass and coerce or persuade God to overlook sin and flip a card: "Chance - Advance to Go; collect \$200." On the flip side of this insanity, imagine doing things fairly in this life, then God pulls a card of chance in the next realm, and now the soul has to pay double the utilities for the heat in Purgatory.

Is praying for the salvation of the living Biblically sound?

have severely digressed. As I thought on these things, I realized that the presumably Biblically-based evangelical Christian world has doctrines that are often identical or close cousins to those of the Catholic Church. The more I learn, the more I realize how all organized, formal, nominal Christian churches are alike (God told me so in 1975 and I have been learning it ever since).

Evangelicals for the most part do not believe in praying for the dead, and they are right; it is error. But is the teaching of praying for the salvation of those who are alive here on earth Biblically sound? Is it God's will? When I was converted to Christ in 1973, I was immediately taught by evangelicals that I ought to pray for people to be saved - my family, friends, associates, almost anyone with whom I had to do.

How many times or how long should I pray for them? The answer was, until they are saved, or until I had some kind of assurance that my prayers were answered, regardless of what I saw externally in the lives of those for whom I prayed.

My prayer list grew daily, and the longer I had to pray.

Theoretically, I might be praying for some, if not all, for the rest of my life (or theirs). I found my prayer list growing daily, and the longer it got, the longer I had to pray, unless I developed some kind of package deal as do televangelists, who could stack prayer letters of suck - ah, supplicants - three feet high, lay hands on the stack, shout loud and grimace enough to have God hear, and that was that; the job was done for hundreds, if not thousands, in one swift, efficient prayer strategy - something like laying a substantial quantity of explosives in the right spot and blowing up the enemy all at once instead of dragging it out with bullets, one at a time.

There are many books written on intercessory prayer (which is valid, if godly) and on praying for the salvation of others (for which I find no Scriptural support whatsoever).

I particularly recall the book about a missionary to India, *Praying Hyde*, and how he spent prodigious amounts of energy and time in daytime and all night vigils of agonizing prayer, so much so that, at his death, they discovered his heart organ had twisted in his body from the intensity of that prayer life.

It was either stay awake and pray or sleep. I could not do both.

I aspired to be another like him, not that I wanted to die or end with a heart attack, but I wanted to see souls falling at my feet in repentance, as he reportedly experienced oftentimes, allegedly because of his effectual prayer life. After an hour or so late in the evening, I could barely stay awake, and if I somehow managed to pray late, I was rendered somewhat incapacitated the next day for other duties. It was either stay awake and pray or sleep. I could not seem to do both in tandem. Nor was a single soul saved at that time, that I know of.

Was Hyde of God? Was his story a godly one? Perhaps it was his calling and not mine? Perhaps he prevailed while I failed? Perhaps things like that happened only in heathen lands? Perhaps he had faith and I did not, or I had sin in my life and he did not? Perhaps God loved him more? I honestly did not know the answers to any of these questions.

Let's take a look at Scripture on this matter of praying for the salvation of souls, our wonderful Source of authoritative, Godly counsel, by which we can answer our questions and be made free by the Truth.

Many years ago, I came to the conclusion that the counsel to pray living people into the Kingdom of Heaven is a close relative to praying for people in Catholic Purgatory. (I say, "Catholic," because it is their peculiar doctrine, not the Bible's, and, in truth, there is no such place as they conceive it, though there is a state or place of purging of one's sins, by spiritual fire, and not by a literal one, and here, presently, not in the next life only. Furthermore, no man can pray or buy a soul out of it.)

The Scriptures were illumined to us that we might know the truth.

If this teaching on praying souls into salvation is error, then are fulfilled the words Jesus spoke to the religious, those who teach such doctrine, saying:

"Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens grievous to be carried, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers" (Luke 11:46 MKJV).

Praying for others was an unbearable burden for me. Something was not right. Furthermore, I neither found nor heard of anyone else doing it frequently, fervently, or consistently. Then, when we received the Spirit of God on January 1, 1975, the Scriptures were illumined to us that we might know the truth on this matter, as on any that troubled us.

The Scriptures say:

"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16 ISV).

Do we know for whom we ought to pray?

If praying effectually and fervently for souls brings them to salvation, if it is that simple, why did Jesus say to the Father:

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world, but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours" (John 17:9 MKJV)?

Apparently, His prayer was selective. Do we know for whom we ought to pray?

"Jesus said to one man, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God'" (Luke $9:60\ EMTV$).

If Christ commands His followers to leave the spiritually dead behind, who are men to teach us to continue longing after them in prayer?

To defend the doctrine of praying for the salvation of others, proponents refer to Abraham's time of intercession for his nephew Lot and his family, who lived in Sodom, one of the cities under God's consideration for destruction (read Genesis 18:16-33).

Would the Lord destroy the righteous with the wicked?

But let us consider certain words Abraham spoke to God at that time. He said:

"LORD, when You destroy the evil people, are You also going to destroy those who are good? Wouldn't You spare the city if there are only fifty good people in it? You surely wouldn't let them be killed when You destroy the evil ones. You are the judge of all the earth, and You do what is right" (Genesis 18:23-25 CEV).

"The LORD replied, If I find fifty good people in Sodom, I will save the city to keep them from being killed" (verse 26).

Now ask yourself: Would the Lord destroy the righteous with the wicked? Abraham, the friend of God, the father of all those in the faith, had learned the character and ways of God. He knew that, by nature, God is a just God Who would not destroy the righteous with the wicked. Abraham said so. Would God then have destroyed Lot and his family if Abraham had not communed with God? Would God have gone against His own nature with the absence of intercessory prayer? Be reasonable; the question is rhetorical.

If Abraham was such an effective "intercessory prayer warrior," and prayer can bring a soul to God, why did he not pray Hagar, Ishmael and others into the Kingdom? Why not his enemies whom he pursued to rescue Lot (Genesis 14)? God had a plan for all these, and blanket prayers are not valid at any time.

One, Abraham did not save Lot and his family; God did. Two, Abraham was not praying for the spiritual salvation of souls, but was concerned about a physical deliverance, which is quite different. Often have we prayed for the physical and spiritual welfare of people, but we do not pray willy-nilly for the salvation of souls, presuming that if we simply ask for their salvation often or hard enough, they will be saved - God will be moved, indeed coerced, to save them. If He were thus moved, we must be counted as highly irresponsible to not pray for anyone and everyone all the time, don't you think? There ought not to be a second spent on any other activity less worthy, and what is more worthy than a soul coming to Christ?

Moses is another prime example used of man interceding for others:

"And on the day after, Moses said to the people, Great has been your sin: but I will go up to the Lord, and see if I may get forgiveness for your sin. Then Moses went back to the Lord and said, This people has done a great sin, making themselves a god of gold; But now, if You will give them forgiveness--but if not, let my name be taken out of Your book. And the Lord said to Moses, Whoever has done evil against Me will be taken out of My book" (Exodus 32:30-33 BBE).

God was saying to Moses that He would not overlook evil.

As with Abraham's conversation with God about Lot, so the holy seeds of correction are in this conversation of Moses and the Lord against the belief that praying for others' salvation is valid before God. His will and His Word are established, even as Jesus said that not one jot or tittle of His Law would be altered, His Law being an expression of His nature. God has said, "I change not" (Malachi 3:6). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

What God was saying to Moses was that He would not overlook evil, no matter how much begging one may do before Him.

This notion of overriding another's will, whether man's or God's, is evil. We humans like to think we can overpower other men and sway God as we please, one way or another. Even if we think it is for good, who are we to know and to understand all things, that we can toy and tinker with men's souls? Is this not presumption and arrogance? We look through our telescope, see a star, and assume we understand the relationships of the universe (and all its components) to that star. How naïve and silly we are in our carnal wisdom and pride!

What about King David of Israel? He was a "man after God's heart" and Jesus came to be known as his son, the "Son of David." Why could David not pray all his sons, like Absalom, Adonijah and Amnon, into the Kingdom? Why were these all destroyed? You say, "That was the Old Testament; the Kingdom was not yet available." You are wrong if you say so. To where were Enoch and Elijah taken up? With whom and where did Jesus meet on the mount where he was transfigured? Was Moses not there? Was there no Heaven? Was God not on His throne? Did Isaiah not see Him there in vision? But if there was no Kingdom yet available, and prayer could powerfully influence the course of people, though these sons were not saved, could they not, at least, have been prayed into harmony with Solomon? But it does not work that way.

All men are appointed their times and places, for good or for evil.

A common example given of intercessory prayer would undoubtedly be that of Jesus. Besides the example already given of His prayer and words contradicting this burdensome doctrine, consider that He once said:

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest that He may send forth laborers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2 MKJV).

Perhaps this could be counted as praying for the salvation of souls. Still, it was not for specific souls, and nowhere did He teach that we could pray people into the Kingdom. Even if, in answer to prayer, workers were sent to preach, there was no guarantee that all that heard the truth would believe.

If prayer for others alone can save them, how is it Jesus failed with Judas? But Jesus did not fail. Judas was predestined to his role, as prophesied of in the Scriptures, as are all men. The point is that all men are appointed their times and places, whether for good or for evil, and none can overrule that which must take place.

Free Will? There is no such thing. Read Diabolical Doctrine 20) "Man has been given a free will" and see our "Free Will"? section. If the reader believes in free will and praying others into the Kingdom, is there not a contradiction? Yes, one may argue that we can pray for them, but it is up to them to decide. But if there is not free will, then God rules and decides what it will be for each, according to His mind and wisdom. Why then bother praying if it is not a prayer of the Spirit, Who does not guide to pray in vain? God does not regard presumptuous prayers of the flesh; they are abomination to Him. That is what He thinks of praying for the salvation of souls willy-nilly.

Were not Jesus' prayers good enough for God? What went wrong?

Consider also that, of all the multitudes to whom Jesus preached, approximately 500 souls came to believe by Pentecost. After Pentecost, thousands believed, but did all believe? The vast majority of Jews rejected the Good News. Were not Jesus' prayers good enough for God? What went wrong? Why, after the Perfect Life on earth, with much fasting, fervent prayer, miracles, and perfect wisdom, were the fruits apparently so sparse?

Is it not so that the Lord was not praying as men teach, but as He taught? He prayed for His own, to those given to Him, of whom He said:

"And this is the will of the Father sending Me, that of all that He has given Me, I shall not lose any of it, but shall raise it up in the last day" (John 6:39 LITV).

"I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:28-29 HNV)

There is a great deal of difference between saints and proselytes.

We also have confirmation from Brother Paul that this was the very will of God, as he wrote:

"For I do not desire you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in ... For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now you were shown mercy through their disobedience, even so these now were disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also might be shown mercy. For God has shut up all to disobedience, that He might show mercy to all" (Romans 11:25, 30-32 EMTV).

If the Lord's perfect life brought forth so few converts at that time, what can we possibly expect of our own? Oh, yes, we may gain many proselytes, even as the Pharisees gained converts, but we are talking of souls saved and not souls snared. There is a great deal of difference between saints and proselytes, between God-made Christians and man-made Christians. Few are the former and many the latter; few take the narrow way but many the broad. Read Diabolical Doctrine 1) "Accept Jesus as your personal Saviour and you will be saved."

The point is that salvation is initiated by God's work and not ours. There was no thought or direction given of overriding anybody's will or causing him or her to be saved (receive Christ) through prayer. Do we know for whom we should pray or even how? On this matter the Scriptures are crystal clear:

"Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He searching the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27 MKJV).

Here we see mention of intercessory prayer, that it is up to God and not up to us, and even here as well, while there is mention of praying for the saints, there is no mention of praying for the salvation of sinners.

It is not in our personal power to save souls.

What about the stories we hear of how some mother prayed faithfully for years for a wayward son, who finally came to believe? There are at least three things to consider here: One, is the story true? Two, was the conversion a true or a spurious one, of which there are so many impressive ones? Three, even if a genuine conversion, can anyone honestly claim that it was the mother's prayers that accomplished the miracle? The point here is that while we can trust the faithful testimony of the Scriptures, we cannot trust our judgment and outward appearances. While we may have truly experienced events, our interpretations are faulty if not inspired by God and in agreement with the Word of God.

Can a wife pray for an unbelieving husband's salvation or vice versa, with assurance that, one day, the spouse will be saved? Consider what Paul said:

"For what do you know, O wife, whether you shall save your husband? Or what do you know, O man, whether you shall save your wife?" (1 Corinthians 7:16 MKJV)

It is not in our personal power to save souls, which brings us to an important question: Why should we pray for our enemies and one another if not for salvation? The Bible says we ought to pray for all men (1 Timothy 2:1). The answer is that it is primarily about our relationship to God and our attitude towards others. The primary purpose of prayer for others is to bring us to see things and others as God sees, to develop attitudes and perspectives according to God's will and not our own. Prayer is as much for the pray-er as it is for those prayed for.

He calls on all those who would do His will to forsake family.

recall praying daily for my family when I was first converted. I wanted to see them all saved and brought into the joy, freedom, and life God had given me. But when we received the Spirit, God showed me that I was being very selfish. He made it known that if I were truly identified with Him, His priorities would be mine. He showed me that, having His Spirit and being His son, I would care for all souls as He did, and flesh and blood connections would not be the determining factor.

Indeed, He calls on all those who would do His will to forsake family, his or her nearest and dearest. How does one forsake and intensely, incessantly pray for their salvation at once? It does not happen. What does it mean to forsake? We cannot change the meaning of the word to suit our doctrine and desire. We cannot change the will of God.

We also cannot change the Scriptures to suit our fleshly notions and wills, yet men do it all the time, reading into Them that which is not there. The doctrine of praying souls into salvation is one of the greater burdens carried by evangelicals in church systems. It is a diabolical one designed to glorify those who teach it. Teaching others to pray in such a way suggests those teaching it do so as well, without blatantly boasting of it. The implication is, "See how spiritual, how Christlike I am when I teach you to pray for the salvation of others? I want you to believe that I do it all the time." Those who teach it seldom live up to their teaching. Again:

"Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens grievous to be carried, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers" (Luke 11:46 MKJV).

It is God's righteousness and not man's, His grace, not man's effort.

Of those that do as they teach, they glorify themselves in great works, but the works are not great before God. They will find all their works burned up. People praying for the salvation of unbelievers are in need of salvation themselves.

I recognize that if I am wrong in what I say, I would be responsible for discouraging people from praying for the salvation of others, which would be a grave matter indeed for God and man, but let others prove me wrong by the Spirit of God, by the Scriptures and by godly reason. Should they do so, I would hope for the grace of God to change. I do not believe myself to be wrong at all.

If you should search the Scriptures on this matter, you will find that God commands His people *not to pray* for certain sinners, because those people have abused the privileges He gave them:

Jeremiah 7:11-20 MKJV

- (11) Has this house, which is called by My Name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I also have seen, says the LORD.
- (12) But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My Name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel.
- (13) And now, because you have done all these works, says the LORD, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear; and I called you, but you did not answer; (14) therefore I will do to this house, which is called by My Name, in which you trust, and to
- (15) And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, the whole seed of Ephraim.

the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

- (16) Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up cry nor prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you.
- (17) Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?
- (18) The sons gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger.
- (19) Do they vex Me? says the LORD. Is it not themselves, to the shame of their own faces?
- (20) Therefore so says the LORD God; Behold, My anger and My fury shall be poured out on

this place, on man, and on animal, and on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be put out.

And don't let anyone tell you that is "Old Testament" and no longer applicable. Jesus cited this very same Scripture when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple, which Temple was destroyed in a generation, just as He prophesied. And we know that God doesn't send destruction on those in faith (the example of Sodom given earlier).

The apostles also told us that men would get worse, not better, rebelling against God and blaspheming the Name of the Son of God they presume to uphold, deceiving and being deceived. They didn't say to pray for these people, because God's judgment on them must run its course:

Ezekiel 9:9-10 MKJV

- (9) And He said to me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is great, and the land is full of blood, and the city is full of perversity. For they say, the LORD has forsaken the land; and, the LORD does not see.
- (10) And even I, My eye shall not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will put their way on their head.

At the root of what the Scriptures teach about prayer is the liberating truth that it is God's righteousness and not man's, God's grace and not man's effort.

Victor Hafichuk

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