

Public Prayer Sanctioned

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(1Kings 8:22, 54; 9:3)

Public Prayer Disapproved
(Matthew 6:5-6)

God's leaders throughout the First Covenant period were in situations where they gave blessings on His behalf as well as leading the nation of Israel in singing psalms of praise and thanksgiving to Him for the many acts of mercy and generosity He had bestowed upon them (cf. Gen. 48:15-16; Ex. 15:20-21; 1Kgs. 8:54-61). In the case of King Solomon, he publicly dedicated the temple that was completed during his reign and praised God at the same time.

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven; ²³and he said: 'Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart (1Kgs. 8:22-23; cf. 8:54; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

Not only did God's leaders perform public blessings on His behalf and lead songs of praise to Him, they also communicated privately with His Angel, or messenger (see study: Who Did the Early Church Think Jesus Christ Was Prior to His Birth as a Man?).

And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he wanted to do, ²that the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared to him at

Gibeon. ³And the Lord said to him: 'I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have sanctified this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually' (1Kgs. 9:1-3).

Therefore, a hallmark of prayer that is approved by Almighty God includes a two-way communication in many instances. With this in mind, the final scripture that some use to claim that God contradicts Himself will be seen in conflict with what He regards as acceptable.

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites (pretenders). For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the street, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I (Christ) say to you, they have their reward (Mt. 6:5; Ed. notes in parentheses).

King Solomon was not a hypocrite who was attempting to be seen by men. It was his responsibility to interact with the public as King (leader) of Israel. Consequently his subjects would see him when he was making various proclamations, including prayers of dedication. However, Matthew 6:5 was addressing the common man who wished to elevate himself to a stature that God had not ordained for him. Instead, he was to pray privately as Christ commanded.

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt. 6:6).

The main point that Christ was emphasizing had to do with making a show of one's religion (cf. Lk. 18:10-12). This is the case today with many religious programs on television, and in movies, as well as musical productions. It seems to be a

human propensity to want to be seen by others and to appear righteous through various outward acts of piety. However, God is not impressed with hand waving, jumping up and down, or any other number of bodily gyrations as scripture confirms (1Kgs. 18:25- 28). Some public prayers are very repetitive including the so-called "Lord's prayer" that was never intended to be repeated verbatim. Instead, it was an outline of important subjects that God's followers were meant to consider and include when they pray to Him.

But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words (Mt. 6:7; see study: Prayer).

Those who claim to know Almighty God are not to act in this manner as Christ commanded. In fact, no public show is required because God already knows what His people need, both physically and spiritually speaking, before they even ask Him.

Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him (Mt. 6:8; cf. Ps.44:21).

In conclusion, there is no contradiction in scripture regarding the different examples of public prayer. Instead, there are clear differences with commands regarding those who wish to elevate themselves above others by a public show of religiosity. God expects substance and not show from those who claim to be His followers.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves (Jas. 1:22).

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