

HEBREWS: REPLACING MAN'S RITUALISM WITH CHRIST
"Part III: Trusting Christ's Effectual Intercession Over Ritual Prayers"
(Hebrews 2:17-3:6)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

In last week's message, I alluded to two "novenas" that had been published in the Foothills Trader last year. We learned that we are not to worship "saints", angels or "the Virgin Mary".

However, recalling those novenas, the *earnestness* to get **answers** from God by those making the **prayers** is seen in the great lengths to which they went to embellish the prayers with *rituals*:

(1) For example, the "Prayer to God" novena suggests one say 9 Hail Marys for 9 days, asking for 3 wishes in business, and then for the impossible, and to publish the novena on the ninth day.

(2) The other novena, the "Prayer to the Blessed Virgin" uses the expressive phrase "succor me in my necessity", a phrasing we just wouldn't use in everyday speech today! It also orders one to pray three times the phrase, ". . . pray for us who have recourse to thee" and three times "Holy Mary, I place this prayer in your hands."

Lest we be quick to judge others, here are some observations I've made of ritualistic efforts by **Evangelicals** to move God for results:

(1) While attending Bible School, I knew a student who fasted and prayed on his knees by his dorm bunk all day long, hoping thereby that God would grant him a request to qualify for the Olympic trials!

(2) Several years ago, some believers in our own body made it a point of going about from room to room in the Church, praying that God would give spiritual victory over the spiritual forces of evil in each classroom the coming Sunday! Their action implied that unless prayers were made in the rooms where the classes would be taught, there might not be spiritual victory available for the teachers!

(3) Many times I have heard people say, "Let's get everybody we know praying for this. That way God has **got** to answer!" The idea behind this statement is that God is more impressed by the **number** of people praying than He is by the **quality** of the prayer of a few!

Well, how far should a believer go to try to impress God to answer him in prayer?! WHY or why NOT?!

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

Need: "I was raised to think God answers prayer only if we strain at praying or practice self-denial or get many others to pray along with us! Is this so? If NOT, HOW may our prayers be ANSWERED?!"

- I. **Jesus Christ is FULLY ABLE and WILLING to intercede to the Father in behalf of us who believe in Him as Savior, Heb. 2:17-18.**
 - A. The word "brethren" in this section of Hebrews speaks of those who have believed in Christ as Savior from sin, Heb. 2:17 with 2:3, 14.
 - B. Accordingly, Jesus was so fully "incarnated" in human flesh that He can *empathize fully* with **every** area of mortal need, Hebrews 2:17.
 - C. Beyond being **made** so fully like us, Jesus *suffered* the duress of **temptation** to **SIN** on earth so that He **will** empathize with His believers in their similar trials through intercession to God, Heb. 2:18.
- II. **Additionally, GOD the FATHER is FULLY IMPRESSED with Jesus so that He is TOTALLY AGREEABLE to ALL that JESUS REQUESTS in behalf of His believers, Hebrews 3:1-6:**
 - A. The author of Hebrews asks fellow Christian readers to consider the greatness of their interceding High Priest and "sent-one" from God in regards to His **influence** with the Father, Hebrews 3:1:
 1. In the **context** of Christ's being viewed as the Christian's Intercessor to the Father (Heb. 2:17-18), the author of Hebrews urges believers to consider the High Priestly and Apostolic Office of Jesus, 3:1a.
 2. As High Priest, Jesus intercedes with the Father, and as the Apostle, or "sent-one" **from** that very **Father**, Jesus has **influence** in the Christian's behalf with that Father, Hebrews 3:1b.
 - B. As such, the **greatness** of Christ's *influence* with the **FATHER** is defined by contrasting the **superiority** of that influence with the influence the great **Moses** had with God long before, Hebrews 3:2-6:
 1. Jesus was a faithful, or **reliable** "Sent-One" from the Father, 3:2a, and that similar to the godly **Moses** of the Law period, Heb. 3:2b.
 2. The phrase in v. 2b making Moses "faithful **in all his house**" directly points to the similar expression of Numbers 12:7: there, Moses is **exalted above** his jealous siblings, Miriam and Aaron who did not like Moses' having a "favored status" in the tabernacle ministry with God over them, Numbers 12:1-2.

3. Because Moses was **reliable**, God told Miriam and Aaron that, unlike God's more cryptic forms of communication like dreams and visions supplied to others, God spoke to Moses **face to face** and revealed to him more glory than others would see, Num. 12:6-8.
4. However, **Jesus is infinitely more honored to God than Moses:**
 - a. First, Jesus built the spiritual priestly ministry of God where Moses was merely a servant in the inanimate tabernacle structure that prefigured Christ's priestly ministry to come, Heb. 3:3-5.
 - b. Second, Moses was a mere *man*, but **Jesus is the "post-bar mitzvahed" SON of God**, being *equal* with the Father as **God**, Heb. 3:6a with John 5:18: (a) Moses was but a servant of God, but Jesus, though serving the interests of the Father, is the **Son** of God, Heb. 3:6a. (b) Now, the word for "Son" here is the Greek word, *huios* (UBS Greek N.T., p. 751), and for Jesus' claim to be the "*huios*" of the Father in John 5:18, onlooking Jews took up stones to kill Him as they felt He'd made himself "*equal with God*" as a **post-bar mitzvahed ADULT "son"!**

III. **Thus, IF the Christian does not REPLACE FUNCTIONING in CHRIST'S PRIESTLY order in resorting to ritualistic prayer to try impressing God to answer him, he enjoys uplifting intercession:**

- A. The phrase "if we hold fast" does not refer to a potential loss of salvation, but to a loss of blessing if one resorts to dead ritualism, cf. Hebrews 3:6b with Bible Knowledge Com., N.T., p. 786.
 1. As this epistle is to the "Hebrews" by way of its title and contents (see Ryrie St. Bib., KJV Intro. to Heb., p. 1729), its author tries to get his readers to avoid going back into Judaism's temple ritualism.
 2. Thus, he exalts the all-sufficient replacement Christ provides for practical godliness to all that the Judaistic temple rituals offered!
- B. Thus, if the Christian holds firmly to Christ instead of slipping back into dead religious rituals to "get through" to God for answers to prayer, He will be joyfully confident in living, Hebrews 3:6c.
- C. Also, Ps. 66:18 and 1 Jn. 5:14-15 respectively reveal we must pray (1) with our sins confessed and (2) within God's will to get answers to prayer. (3) Further, obeying Scripture leads to blessing, Jn. 14:21, 23.

Lesson Application: ALL the BEST POSSIBLE understanding and divine EMPATHY with our needs, and ALL the BEST influence POSSIBLE with GOD in prayer are found by our using CHRIST'S priestly intercession ministry instead of resorting to dead religious RITUALS. Thus, (1) believe on Christ to qualify for His priestly blessings (Jn. 3:16). (2) Then, confess our sins for cleansing (1 Jn. 1:9), (3) read Scripture so as to KNOW His will (1 Jn. 5:14f) and (4) OBEY Scripture (Jn. 14:21, 23). Then we can (4) pray with RESULTS! That will produce great confidence and joyful living!

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Ever since we purchased our Lincoln, I had noticed an oil fume odor coming in through the ventilation when the motor ran as the car was stopped. I had often checked under the hood for a reason and had seen nothing wrong. Yet, the fumes bothered Connie so much that I would shut off the vent every time we slowed the car down to the idle!

Then, on our way back from Baltimore the **second** time, what appeared to be a transmission problem got my attention, and my heart sank! I pulled off at the very next exit to get some help.

The mechanic at the transmission shop there test drove the car and concluded that its costly-to-replace torque converter was going bad and would eventually ruin the transmission along with it. Yet, he felt that it would be in our better interests to drive on to Connecticut and fix it there as he was sure I could make it home.

So, I drove off, transmission problems, oil fumes and all, prayerfully looking to the Lord to get home see our car problems fixed!

We made it home, and I called Don Ereminas. He found via a business associate that a rubber bushing by the carburetor was sticking, creating the transmission problems! Don fixed it with a silicone-based spray lubricant!

As he worked under the driver's side of the hood to fix the bushing, I had to cross over to the RIGHT side to give him room, a place I usually DON'T go. In the process, I found there a loose hose looped over the valve cover, a hose that connects the valve cover to the air cleaner! I hooked it up, and the oil fumes stopped!

For 7 thousand miles, that hose had lain loose on the valve cover, WAITING for God in GRACE to address the problem when I got BOTHERED enough to PRAY about the TRANSMISSION!

Jesus had **already cared** about our oil fume discomfort and was **effective** in addressing the Father about the need! All I had to do was to give a **simple** prayer with a clean heart and the problem would have been solved! When I hadn't prayed, God **prodded** me *royal* via a sticky rubber bushing! God wasn't impressed with the ritualism of any verbosity on my part, or in how many were praying, etc. -- just a **SIMPLE** prayer! I learned firsthand that we must abandon ritualism and **just pray** to our great all-seeing, all-caring, all-powerful God!