**Appendix 13. Can We Pray to Jesus?**

There is a debate among some Christian groups as to whether or not people can pray to Jesus. As we will see from the evidence below, Scripture testifies that it is permissible to pray to Jesus. Before we explore the issue of prayer to Jesus, it is important to understand that the basic meaning of “pray” is “ask.” While any given prayer may have some praise in it, or some general communication of our thoughts and feelings, the word “prayer” fundamentally refers to asking for something. In contrast, “praise” is fundamentally related to thanksgiving. Saying we can pray to Jesus is simply saying we can ask him for things.

The bulk of what we understand about prayer to Jesus comes from the Last Supper and the New Testament from Acts to Revelation. Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper marked a tidal shift in his relationship with his disciples, and so it makes sense that some of the pieces of evidence below come from Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. All four Gospels record the Last Supper, but only the Gospel of John records Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke spend less than half a chapter on the Last Supper, the Gospel of John spends 5 chapters on it (chapters 13-17—almost one-quarter of the Gospel). At the Last Supper, Jesus spent much time telling his disciples about the new relationship he would have with them after his resurrection and ascension (cf. John 14:1-4, 18, 28; 16:5-7, 16). For example, he told them they could ask him for things, that he would not leave them as orphans, and he would now call them “friends,” not servants. The body of the Appendix below gives biblical reasons supporting the fact that Christians can pray to Jesus.

***1. Ask me.*** One of the clearest points of Scripture that supports prayer to Jesus is John 14:14, which occurs at the Last Supper. Since a major part of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper was about his relationship with the disciples after his resurrection and then ascension, it fits with the general theme that John 14:14 is about asking Jesus for things after he ascends into heaven. Jesus said, “If you ask me anything in my name, I will do *it*.” After Jesus was given all authority and ascended into heaven, believers can pray to both him and God.

The manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being in the original text. Modern textual scholars have concluded that some of the scribes copying the Greek text either thought that the wording, “ask me anything in my name” seemed strange, or they wanted to avoid what they thought was a contradiction with John 16:23, so they omitted the word “me” from the manuscripts they were copying (or in a couple of manuscripts, scribes changed “me” to “the Father”). This explains why “me” is not in the King James Version—the manuscripts used in making the King James did not have the “me.” However, the weight of the manuscript evidence supports the word “me” being original, which is why almost all modern versions include it.

The “me” occurs in the earliest manuscripts such as p66, a wide representation of Greek manuscripts, Syriac (Aramaic), Latin, and Gothic manuscripts, and a number of lectionaries. (Cf. Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* and *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Society, 3rd edition). Further textual evidence that the “me” is original is that often, scribes took what they considered difficult passages and changed them to be simpler and more easily understood. Omitting the word “me,” would certainly do that, especially in light of John 16:23, but there is no good reason why any scribe would add the word “me” if it was not in the original text because that would create a more difficult reading and the very apparent contradiction some scribes were apparently trying to avoid.

Also, since it was the tendency of the scribes to simplify the text to avoid apparent contradictions, it makes more sense that they would change “me” to “the Father” in a few manuscripts to avoid a contradiction, than that many scribes would add the word “me” while a few others added the phrase “the Father.”

Jesus telling his disciples that they could ask him for anything after his resurrection certainly fits with the scope of Scripture, since Jesus knew that he was about to be given great authority as the Son of God. That Jesus told his disciples that they could ask him for things after his resurrection and ascension is no doubt the reason that the early Church did indeed ask Jesus for things, as evidenced by both Acts and the Epistles, and also from early historical evidence about Christianity.

Acts and the Epistles show that the early Christians did indeed ask Jesus for things, which is what the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord Jesus” refers to (1 Cor. 1:2; see point 5 below; calling on the name of Jesus).

[For more information on John 14:14 not contradicting John 16:23 see commentary on John 16:23. Also, see commentary on John 14:14.]

***2. Jesus is “Lord.”*** Another point of Scripture and logic that supports us praying to Jesus is that he is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12), and the very essence of “lordship” is being in charge and running things. That is why the Greek word for “Lord” was used of rulers, landowners, and heads of households. Jesus is Lord because he is God’s “right-hand man” and is directly in charge of the Church. To be able to do that job, God gave him all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). In order for Jesus to be our “Lord” in any meaningful sense of the word, we have to be able to communicate with him and ask him for help. Hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people asked Jesus for things when he was on earth, and if Jesus is truly functioning as “Lord,” then we must be able to ask him for things.

Someone might say, “Well, when Jesus was physically present on earth people could ask him for things, but now that he is not physically present we cannot ask him for things.” We would respond that the Lord said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the Age” (Matt. 28:20), and we trust that his being with us now is every bit as real and vital as his being with people when he physically lived on earth. Jesus may not be with us physically, but he is still “with” us.

***3. Fellowship with Jesus.*** Another reason we believe Scripture supports prayer to Jesus is that it says we are to have “fellowship” with him. 1 John 1:3 says, “…and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” The word “fellowship” in the Greek is *koinōnia* (#2842 κοινωνία, pronounced koy-no-'nee-ä), and it is used in several different ways in the New Testament. Fundamentally, it refers to a close association involving mutual interests and sharing; a close relationship characterized by involvement and sharing (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3). From that fundamental definition, it developed a second definition and also came to refer to the love or good will that comes with a close relationship; thus “generosity, sharing, participation” (2 Cor. 9:13). *Koinōnia* also came to have a third definition, referring to the result of close association, which is “a gift, a contribution” (Rom. 15:26).

When it comes to the fellowship that people have with one another, *koinōnia* has sometimes been defined as “full sharing,” which has been more fully explained as “intimate joint participation.” In the Scriptures where people “fellowship” with each other, we can sometimes clearly see that there is intimate joint participation. For example, in Acts 2:42, the people were meeting together, eating together, praying together, giving their possessions to one another, and following the apostles’ teaching. In a similar vein, Galatians 2:9 says that James, Peter, and John extended the “right hand of fellowship” to Barnabas and Paul, meaning they jointly and fully shared things among themselves. Also, 1 John 1:3 shows that John told the disciples all about Jesus so they could have “fellowship,” intimate joint participation, with John and the other apostles who had seen the Lord. In contrast, light has no “fellowship” with darkness because there is no intimate joint participation (2 Cor. 6:14).

The use of “fellowship” in 1 John clarifies what our fellowship with Jesus is supposed to be. 1 John 1:3 uses “fellowship” to refer to the fellowship we have with other believers, with God, and with Christ. Logic would dictate that the meaning of “fellowship” is the same for all three: believers, God, and Christ. Our fellowship with God is an intimate joint participation: we expect Him to hear us and to hear from Him. The same is true of our “fellowship” with other believers. It would be unusual if, in that same context, our “fellowship” with Jesus was fundamentally different. That we have fellowship with God and Jesus fits with what Jesus said at the Last Supper about revealing himself to those who love him and keep his commandments. Jesus promised: “Whoever has my commandments, and is keeping them, that is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him” (John 14:21).

If we obey Christ and follow his ways, we will have fellowship with him and he will reveal himself to us, just as he promised. Our asking Jesus for things (praying to him) is just a natural part of that fellowship.

[For more information on “fellowship” with Jesus, see commentary on 1 John 1:3.]

***4. Head of the Body.*** Another reason we believe Scripture supports prayer to Jesus is that he is the “Head” of the “Body of Christ” (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). The Greeks, indeed, most cultures, used the word “head” in many ways, for example, the literal head of the body; a leader or someone of superior rank in a group; the top, start, or extremity of something (we speak of the “head” of a line and a “head” of foam on top of the beer), and more. The Bible follows the cultural use of “head” and uses it in different ways too. For example, it calls the “cornerstone,” the stone that sets fundamental lines and levels of the building (1 Pet. 2:7), “the head of the corner.” Given the different uses of “head,” we must discover its meaning in any given verse by the context and way it is used. When it uses “head” in the context of Jesus being “the head of the body of Christ,” then we know that God is making a comparison between the way Christ works with his body and the way the human head works with the human body.

The “Body of Christ” is a spiritual reality, and every individual Christian is an individual part of the Body. Just as the human head is in intimate and immediate contact with every part of the human body, and the body in contact with the head, so too Jesus is in contact and communication with his Body, the Church, and the members of the Church are in contact with him. As the Head of the Body, the Lord Jesus is actively involved in guiding and sustaining each Christian, and each Christian should be in contact with Jesus, requesting his help and guidance. It would be at least confusing, and perhaps even disingenuous, to say Jesus is the “Head” of the Body of Christ but not in direct communication with the Body.

***5. Call upon Jesus.*** Another solid piece of evidence that people can pray to Jesus is the phrase, “call upon the name of the Lord.” Christians are to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, ask him for things they need. The phrase “call upon the name of” is a formula of petition, of prayer.

The record in 1 Kings 18:24-38 of Elijah standing against the prophets of Baal is a clear example of the phrase “call on” being used as a prayer formula. When Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, he said, “you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of Yahweh. The god who answers by fire—he is God” (1 Kings 18:24). What ensued after that was a “prayer contest.” The prophets of Baal “called on the name of Baal from morning till noon,” but no one answered their prayers, and they continued through the afternoon with still no result. Then Elijah stepped forward and said, “O Yahweh…let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command…then the fire of Yahweh fell” from the sky. So Elijah’s prayer—calling on the name of Yahweh—was answered while the prayers of the false prophets were not.

Throughout the Old Testament, when people “called upon the name of Yahweh,” it was to pray to, appeal to, or ask for help from God (cf. Gen. 12:8; 1 Sam. 12:17; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Ps. 99:6; Zech. 13:9). The New Testament continues the use of the phrase “call upon the name of the Lord,” but it often makes clear that the “Lord” being called upon is now Jesus. For example, 1 Corinthians 1:2 says, “all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.”

About the phrase “call upon the name of” the Lord, *Vincent’s Word Studies* says: “It is used of worship, and here implies prayer to Christ” (see his entry on 1 Cor. 1:2). Similarly, R. C. H. Lenski writes in *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians*, “‘To call on him’ means to praise, bless, thank, worship him, and to ask of him all that we need for body and for soul.” James Dunn writes:

“In common Greek, too, *epikaleisthai* is regularly used of calling upon a deity. So it is not surprising that the Septuagint uses the phrase frequently, *epikaleisthai to onoma kyriou* (“to call upon the name of the Lord”), that is in prayer. The same usage naturally reappears in the New Testament, where invocation of God is in view. More striking, however, is the fact that it is the Lord Jesus who is ‘called upon’ on several occasions. And even more striking is the fact that believers can be denoted simply as ‘those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:2). The defining feature of these early Christians (‘those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ’ is almost a definition, equivalent to ‘Christians’) marked them out from others who ‘called upon (the name of)’ some other deity or heavenly being” (James Dunn, *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* ebook 1.2, “Other Vocabulary”).

Dunn’s point in contrasting the Christians who “called upon Jesus” from the pagans who would have called upon another deity is an important one. Biblical culture, whether Christian, Jewish, or pagan, was very religious. The gods were everywhere. Temples abounded, and the gods were honored and their help invoked at every public event, play, or the public games, and even for such things as a ship taking sail out of harbor or a person being installed in office (hence the English word “inaugurate,” i.e., to install upon the approval of the “augur,” the priest). The gods were represented as statues and bas-reliefs and depicted on mosaics, paintings, and pottery. One Roman satirist claimed that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Given that almost every person called upon one god or another for assistance, an easy and clear way to distinguish Christians from the rest of religious society was to call them “those who called upon Jesus Christ,” a designation that worked because Christians were in fact calling upon Jesus for assistance and not asking help from the gods.

Prayer to Jesus must have been common among Christians, which is why Paul would write about “all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—theirs and ours.” Indeed, Bible verses showing that the early Christians called upon the name of the Lord Jesus include: Acts 7:59; 9:14, 21; Romans 10:12, 13; and 1 Corinthians 1:2. The scriptures in Acts are especially pertinent because they show that the first-century Christians did indeed pray to Christ.

[For more on calling on the name of the Lord, see commentary on 1 Cor. 1:2.]

***6. Know Jesus.*** Another piece of evidence that supports our praying to Jesus is that we are to “know” Jesus (Phil. 3:8, 10). In Philippians, Paul wrote about knowing Jesus, and there is a huge difference between “knowing about” Jesus and actually knowing him. Paul did not just want to “know about” Jesus. In fact, he said he counted any position he could claim in the world to be just dung compared to knowing Christ. Really knowing someone involves personally interacting with the person. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how we could really “know” Christ without personal interaction with him. Christians can personally interact with Jesus, which is often via the gift of holy spirit, and part of that interaction certainly includes feeling free to ask him for help when we need it.

[For more on knowing Jesus, see commentary on Phil. 3:8.]

***7. Chief Shepherd.*** Another reason we know we can personally communicate with Jesus Christ is that he is the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4) and is “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). In fact, the Bible prophesied that Jesus would shepherd the people (Micah 5:4, quoted in Matt. 2:6), and refers to Jesus as the shepherd in a number of places (cf. Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; Rev. 7:17). Every good shepherd works hard to have a personal relationship with his sheep so that they know and trust him. This fact is well-known by anyone who works with sheep, and is clearly set forth in Scripture. A good shepherd knows each sheep by name (John 10:3). He leads them and they willingly follow because they know his voice (John 10:4). In fact, they will not follow a stranger because they do not know the stranger’s voice (John 10:5).

Referring to Jesus as a “shepherd” and we humans as sheep is metaphorical language, and metaphorical language only really works if the metaphor accurately represents many of the facts of the situation. In the biblical culture, the shepherd and sheep had a very close relationship; the shepherd communicated with the sheep, and the sheep were able to make their needs known to the shepherd. Jesus could not legitimately be called “the good shepherd” if we could not communicate with him and expect help from him. Jesus promised: “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20), and he is. No sheep would expect to tackle life without the shepherd’s personal attention and help, and similarly, we should not tackle life on our own without Jesus’ guidance and help. Let us regularly and diligently look to Jesus for help and guidance.

[For more on Jesus being the Chief Shepherd, see commentary on 1 Pet. 5:4.]

***8. Friend.*** Another piece of evidence that we can pray to Jesus is that he calls us “friends.” At the Last Supper, Jesus told his followers that they are his “friends” (*philos*) if they do what he commands (John 15:13-15). In fact, he shows his apostles what he means, and proves to them that they are indeed his friends, by telling them that he has told them what he heard from his Father—an intimate communication that he would only tell to his friends. He emphasizes his point by saying that slaves/servants do not know what the Lord does, but friends do. What Jesus said has huge implications for Christians, because Jesus is opening the door for us to be “friends” with him. And nothing could be of greater worth. No wonder Paul said that he counted all his worldly credentials as dung in comparison to “knowing” Jesus, that is, having a firsthand, experiential relationship, or “friendship,” with Christ (Phil. 3:8-10).

Actually, the concept of having a genuine friendship relationship with Jesus Christ is part of the very fabric of Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper. It is vital to understand Jesus’ teaching at the Last Supper because, for much of it, he was telling his disciples things that would define their roles and relationship after his resurrection and ascension. Jesus knew what his disciples did not know: that in a few hours he would be arrested, then crucified, and after his resurrection, his relationship with them would be on a different level. Even with Jesus gone, his disciples had to be confident that he would continue to be in close contact with them even though he would be in heaven and they would be on earth. Jesus built their confidence and calmed their fears by saying in a number of different ways that he would be with them. These different ways included: he said that he and the disciples would be “friends” (John 15:14, 15), they would “see” him (cf. John 14:19), they would be in union with Jesus and the Father (John 14:20), he would show himself to them (John 14:21), he and the Father would make their home in them (John 14:23; *monē* means “home,” “residence,” “dwelling place”), and they could ask him for what they needed (John 14:14).

One of the hallmarks of genuine friendship is that we can ask friends for things. It is quite inconceivable that Jesus would say that those disciples who followed him would be his “friends,” but could not be in touch with him. Regular and intimate communication is part of friendship.

[For more information on our friendship with Jesus, see the commentary on John 15:14, “friends.”]

***9. Not orphans.*** A very graphic way that Jesus, at the Last Supper, told his disciples he would still guide and direct them after his resurrection and ascension was when he said, “I will not leave you as orphans” (John 14:18). The Greek word translated “orphans” is *orphanos* (#3737 ὀρφανός), and it was an important word referring to what could happen in the teacher-disciple relationship. In the biblical culture, a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), the prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21).

In turn, just as a mentor was called a “father,” a disciple was called a “son” (*huios*, #5207 υἱός), or a “child” (*teknon*, #5043 τέκνον). Although *huios* means “son,” it is sometimes translated as the gender-neutral “child,” and although the Greek word *teknon* is gender-neutral and means “child,” if the context is clearly about males or females, it may legitimately be translated as “son” or “daughter.” A clear example of the word “son” being used for disciples occurs in the Old Testament when the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, he said, “If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? (Matt. 12:27). The “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. The apostle Paul referred to Timothy as his “child” (1 Tim. 1:2), and also Titus (Titus 1:4), and Onesimus (Phlm. 1:10). At the Last Supper, Jesus referred to the apostles as his “little children” (John 13:33; *teknion*, #5040 τεκνίον, the diminutive of *teknon*.)

Because the word “father” was used of a teacher/mentor, the Rabbis taught that if a great teacher died or left, his followers were “fatherless,” thus “orphans.” From John 13:33-14:6 Jesus very clearly told the disciples that he was going away. No doubt they were alarmed and concerned. They would be orphans, without their “father.” What would they do? Jesus calmed their fears by saying, “I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you” (John 14:18). In telling his disciples that he would not leave them as orphans, Jesus promised to continue to teach, guide, and direct them. He would do this personally, by coming to them and making a home in them (John 14:23), and also by sending an Advocate, the holy spirit.

Orphans were often taken advantage of in society, and so they needed an “advocate,” which is one of the primary meanings of the Greek word, *paraklētos* (#3875 παράκλητος). This advocate (*paraklētos*), the holy spirit, is known as the “Helper” (ESV, REV); “Comforter” (ASV, KJV); “Counselor” (HCSB, NIV84); and “Advocate” (NET, NIV2011). It is noteworthy that the only time the holy spirit is called an Advocate is at the Last Supper, when Jesus was trying to comfort the disciples by telling them they would not be left as orphans and by explaining to them how things would work after he was gone.

[For more on Jesus’ use of “orphans,” see commentary on John 14:18.]

***10. People praying to Jesus.*** Besides the general examples of Christians calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus, the Bible also contains examples of people who spoke to or prayed to Jesus, asking him for things. One such person was the first martyr of the Church, Stephen. The Bible says, “And as they were stoning Stephen, he was calling upon *the Lord* and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’” (Acts 7:59). The phrase “calling upon” is very specific, and is a prayer formula, as we saw above. Stephen asked Jesus to do something for him, which is a prayer. He asked, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And he kneeled down, and cried out another request with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” It is important that although Stephen saw both Jesus and God in his vision of heaven (Acts 7:56), he called upon Jesus to fulfill his request.

Paul also prayed to Jesus, and pleaded with him about his “thorn in the flesh.” 2 Corinthians 12:8 says, “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it might depart from me.” It is clear that the “Lord” Paul prayed to is Jesus, because Jesus answered him and said, “*my* power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9), so Paul stated that he would “boast all the more in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” That Paul also prayed to Jesus seems clear from 1 Timothy 1:12, which says, “I give thanks to the one who has empowered me, Christ Jesus our Lord.” That this was part of Paul’s prayer life can be seen from the fact that in 2 Timothy 1:3, Paul prays to God using the same opening formula: “I give thanks to God, whom I serve….”

Ananias was another disciple who spoke with the Lord, and when he spoke with Jesus the conversation was normal, casual, and comfortable, not strained or filled with surprise and anxiety. It seems clear from the record in Acts 9 that Ananias did not think that talking to Jesus was unusual.

[For more information on Ananias and Jesus, see commentary on Acts 9:10.]

It also seems clear that in Acts 1:24 the apostles prayed to Jesus to see whom he had chosen to replace Judas. Jesus chose the original apostles (Luke 6:13; and this is confirmed in Acts 1:2), and he places apostles in the Body (Eph. 4:11), so it seems most natural that the apostles would ask Jesus whom he had chosen to replace Judas [For more on the prayer in Acts 1, see commentary on Acts 1:24].

The apostle John also offered a short prayer request directly to Jesus in Revelation 22:20 when he prayed, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Had it been inappropriate for John to ask that directly of Jesus, we would expect the text to say, “Father, send the Lord Jesus.”

In summary, the New Testament tells us of Jesus’ personal interaction with Stephen (Acts 7:56); Saul/Paul (Acts 9:1-9; 16:7; 23:11; Gal. 1:12; 2 Cor. 12:9); Ananias (Acts 9:10-16); Peter (Acts 10:9-22; 2 Pet. 1:14); and John (Rev. 1:9-18). Some say “the Lord” Peter addressed in Acts 10 was God, but there are good reasons to believe it was Jesus. First, Peter was in the habit of calling Jesus “Lord.” Second, he had a history of arguing with Jesus, but never with God. Third, the voice came from “the Spirit” (verse 19), and in direct address after Pentecost, Jesus is called “the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 2:7; etc.).

***11. An early Christian prays to Jesus Christ*.** That early Christians prayed to Jesus is almost certainly supported by early Roman “art” as well as the Bible. A piece of Roman graffiti known as the Alexamenos graffito, most likely from around AD 200, shows a young man worshiping, likely praying to, a crucified man with a donkey head, and the inscription, written in Greek, says, roughly translated, “Alexamenos worships his god.” The Romans loved graffiti, and this graffiti was found on the wall of a room near the Palatine Hill in the city of Rome. The evidence that Alexamenos was praying is due to the fact that the artist referred to what he was doing as “worship,” but there was no sacrifice, incense, or any other thing that would be associated with common Roman worship practices. Also, since Romans were polytheistic, it was not generally their practice to demean the worship of others, but Christians were certainly an exception, and the Roman artist mocked Jesus as being a donkey. The Roman artist apparently understood that Alexamenos’ prayer to Jesus was worship.

***12. Singing to Jesus***. Although singing is not necessarily praying, many songs do contain requests, and most contain praise, and all songs “to” someone are communication with that individual. Ephesians 5:19 instructs Christians to be “singing and making music in your heart to the Lord,” that is, to the Lord Jesus. We can tell that the word “Lord” in this verse refers to Jesus because the end of the sentence, which is in Ephesians 5:20, makes a distinction between God, “the Father” and “our Lord Jesus Christ,” clearly referring to the Father as “God” and Jesus as “Lord.” In fact, the evidence suggests that every use of “Lord” in Ephesians refers to Jesus Christ.

The evidence in the Bible that we are to sing to Jesus is backed up by evidence from the Roman world. About AD 112, the Roman Pliny wrote to Emperor Trajan regarding Christians, and said, “…it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before the daylight and sing antiphonally a hymn to Christ as [to] a god” (Quoted in D. G. Dunn; *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* ebook, Chapter 2.2 “Hymns”). It would be unusual to assume that Christians would sing to Jesus but somehow carefully avoid any lyrics that were a request lest that be considered prayer. Many songs contain requests, and we can quite confidently assume that if the early Christians sang to Jesus, at least some of those songs contained prayers.

***13. Jesus’ involvement with the Church.*** As the Lord with all authority and Head of the Body of Christ, Jesus is actively involved with each member of his Body. In his role as Lord, what he does includes that he:

* Pours out the gift of holy spirit to believers (John 15:26; Acts 2:33).
* Gives us grace (Rom. 1:5; 16:20; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 8:9; 13:14; Gal. 1:6; 6:18; Eph. 4:7; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 1:12; 3:18).
* Gives us peace (2 Thess. 3:16).
* Gives us mercy (1 Cor. 7:25).
* Blesses us (Rom. 10:12; 15:29. In Rom. 10:12, the text is more literally, “being rich to,” i.e., “enriching” (NAB), “richly blesses” (NET, NIV)).
* Empowers us (Phil. 4:13).
* Nurtures and cares for the Church, holds it together, and causes it to grow (Eph. 5:29; Phil. 1:19; Col. 1:17; 2:19).
* Directs us (1 Cor. 16:7; 2 Thess. 3:5).
* Is interceding for us (Rom. 8:26, 35).
* Gives the equipping ministries to the Church (Eph. 1:1; 4:8, 11).
* Gives revelation (2 Cor. 12:1; Gal. 1:12. Cf. the number of times he appeared to people and gave revelation to them, e.g., Acts 9:10ff; 18:9; Rev. 1:11, 17ff).
* Will transform our bodies at his appearing (Phil. 3:21).
* Will judge, reward, and punish people, according to what they deserve (John 5:21, 22; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23-25; 1 Thess. 4:6; 2 Thess. 1:8).

It makes perfect sense that we can ask our Lord, Head, Shepherd, and Friend, for whatever we need.

***14. Honoring God.*** Something we should keep in mind when it comes to prayer to Jesus is that it does not dishonor God, it honors Him. God is the one who elevated Christ to His own right hand, made him Lord, gave him a name above every name, made him Head of the Body of Christ, entrusted all judgment to him (John 5:22), allowed him to be the one to give the ministries to the Church (Eph. 4:8, 11), and more. John 5:23 says, “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.” If we are going to follow these verses and honor the Son just as we honor the Father, we must ask ourselves, “How do we honor the Father?” Surely one way we honor Him is by our praise and thanksgiving to him, and by our prayers to Him. According to Scripture, we are to honor the Son in the same way.

***15. Not forbidden****.* Another thing that is important to remember is that there is nothing in the Scripture that forbids us from praying to Jesus. We have to use this argument carefully, because there are thousands of things we should not do that the Scripture does not forbid. On the other hand, we should be aware that the Scripture specifically forbids many things, for example, eight of the Ten Commandments are specific prohibitions; “Thou shalt not…!”

Generally, God specifically forbids something when “logic” or emotion might lead us to do it. Thus, for example, “do not steal” and “do not commit adultery,” which one could argue God did not need to forbid, He did specifically forbid because of human weakness. Since Jesus said we could ask him for things, is our Lord, our friend, one we fellowship with, the Head of the Body, the Chief Shepherd, and “with us always, even to the end of the age,” logic would lead us—indeed, some would say compel us—to the conclusion that we should talk to him and ask him for things. Given that, it would be reasonable that if God did not want the Body speaking to the Head, or the sheep being in communication with the Shepherd, He would have forbidden it. However, no verse prohibits us from asking Jesus for what we need, a good indication that we can indeed be in intimate communication with him.

***16. Jesus’ power and authority.*** A common objection that Biblical Unitarians use to say that people cannot pray to Jesus is that since Jesus is still a man, he cannot possibly be in communication with everyone in the Body of Christ. The answer to that objection is that just because we cannot understand how Jesus could communicate with each member of his Body does not mean it does not happen. There are many ways that Jesus could answer prayers even though the Bible does not explain them. Also, Jesus has many powers we do not understand, such as how he gives holy spirit to each person who gets born again (Acts 2:33), how he will change our bodies to be like his body (Phil. 3:21), or how he gives ministries to all the different people in the Church (Eph. 1:1; 4:8, 11), but Scripture testifies he does those things. God has given Jesus “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18), so we should not be quick to say what he cannot do.

***When do we pray to Jesus?*** Once we realize we can pray to God and also to Jesus, the question arises, when do we pray to God and when to Jesus? The Bible never answers that question. God, Jesus, and Christians are a family, and just as each member of an earthly family has an individual relationship with the other members of the family, sharing differently with the different members, so it is with us and God and Jesus. Each Christian will develop his own individual relationship with God and with Jesus, and the specific communication between them will come naturally out of that relationship.

***How can Jesus hear and answer all the prayers of Christians?*** Biblical Unitarians believe that even after his ascension, Jesus Christ is still a fully human being. Jesus certainly was given authority by God to act on earth, and he certainly is powerful, but there is no evidence that Jesus is now somehow omniscient. In fact, there is biblical evidence that Jesus is not omniscient. For example, Philippians 3:21 says we will have a body like his body, and 1 John 3:2 says we will be like him, and also, it seems clear from Revelation 14:14-16 that Jesus had to hear from God the exact time to return and conquer the earth.

Given that Jesus is not omniscient, it is a reasonable question to ask how can Jesus hear and answer all the prayers that Christians pray. The Bible never addresses this question so at this point we do not know for sure. However, we can make some points and some logical assumptions. One of those assumptions is that God helps Jesus do the work that God assigned him to do. Thus, when it comes to prayer, it is logical to assume that God hears the prayers and communicates with Jesus the essence of what people are praying and the answers that he needs to give. It is also logical to assume that just as God uses angels to do his work on earth, Jesus also has an army of angels that does what he asks.

We should also note that there is no verse that actually says that Jesus hears all of our prayers, only that if we ask him in his name he will answer the prayer (John 14:14). But how he “hears” what we pray, and how he answers those prayers, is not stated in Scripture. He could hear them as God relates them to him, and he could answer them by giving general directions to Angel administrators who would carry out his will. Also, we should note that Jesus specifically said that if we asked the Father in his name, he would not tell those requests to the Father because the Father Himself would treat us as friends and therefore supposedly answer our requests (John 16:26-27).

We can be sure that if God wanted us to know the exact process by which Jesus hears and answers prayers He would tell us, and the fact that He does not should tell us that at this time it is enough for us just to know that we can pray to Jesus and that somehow those prayers get answered.

[For information on Jesus being a fully human being, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For information on the Holy Spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?” For information on singing to Jesus, see commentary on Eph. 5:19. For information on worshiping Jesus, see Word Study: “worship.”]