

Prayers and Supplications

Commentary for June 1, 2019 — There Are Distinctions Between Them

This month's article by Dr. Ernest Martin is titled "The Essentials of Prayer" and it is introduced by the "[June 2019 Newsletter](#)" which gives background information about prayer.

In Scripture, the term "prayer" is often linked with the term "supplication." The two terms are used together 16 times in the Old Testament and 6 times in the New Testament.¹

Nearing the end of his life, the apostle Paul wrote a personal letter to his fellow-laborer Timothy. Paul gives four reasons to approach God. Supplications and Prayers are the first two of four reasons people communicated with God:

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, [1] supplications [petitions], [2] prayers, [3] intercessions [pleadings], and [4] giving of thanks [thanksgivings, plural], be made

- for all men;
- for kings, and
- for all that are in authority;

[Why do this?] **that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior ..."**

• 1 Timothy 2:1-3

What are the distinctions of the four terms?

[1] Supplications are requests made or asking for something, but done with humility. One petitions a superior for a favor that he or she is able to grant.

[2] Prayers are your thoughts and statements directed toward God. It is a religious act.

[3] Intercessions are requests on behalf of others, and not necessarily for yourself, pleading for relief or rescue.

[4] Giving of thanks, thanksgivings, is praising God for His past and future acts on behalf of you or others.

Following 1 Timothy 2:1-3, in verses 4-6 Paul teaches that it is God's will for all men to be

¹ "**Prayer(s) and supplication(s)**" occur together in the Old Testament several times, particularly in 1 Kings 8:28, 30, 33, 38, 45, 49, 54; and in 2 Chronicles 6:19, 24, 29, 35, 39, all of which involved the occasion of the dedication of the first Temple by Solomon. After that event, in 1 Kings 9:3 YHWH tells Solomon that He approved of his prayer and supplication (both singular) at the Temple dedication and Solomon's requests would be honored by YHWH. David in Psalm 6:9 also says YHWH heard a prayer and supplication (both singular). Psalms 55:1 and 143:1 request YHWH to hear and answer a prayer and supplication, both singular. In Psalm 86:6 the writer requests that YHWH hear his prayer (singular) and his supplications (plural). He asked for several things including physical salvation. Daniel 9:3, 17 have "prayer" singular and "supplications" as plural.

saved, and that Christ **“gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time”** (1 Timothy 2:6) — in accord with God’s timing and not our wishes.

The epistle of First Timothy is a personal letter to Timothy that Paul later thought useful to include in the body of works that would eventually make up the New Testament. Because of its personal nature, there is no reason to think the four approaches to God are in any particular hierarchal order. Paul was not writing a doctrinal statement, although what he wrote is true and has been extremely useful for the *ekklesia* and for us today. All four terms are plural in Greek indicating multiple occurrences over time.

The first two (**“supplications”** and **“prayers”**) are used in Ephesians chapter 6 at the end of Paul’s discussion about putting on the armor of God.²

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

• *Ephesians 6:18*

These two prepositional phrases (**“in the Spirit”** and **“for all saints”**) indicate how prayer can be used as a weapon as we pinpoint our supplications (our petitions) to God for the benefit of those of the *ekklesia*, and for those who are both preaching and teaching the Gospel.

Three of the four terms mentioned from 1 Timothy 2:1 are found in Philippians 4:6, which also has a promise for us today. If you pray and petition God with thanksgiving, you will receive a benefit, a blessing of God’s peace in your life here and now.

“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

• *Philippians 4:6–7*

Both terms are plural in 1 Timothy 5:5 which speaks of widows who can contribute by praying and petitioning God on behalf of others:

“Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusts in God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.”

The apostle Paul tells us the goal of prayer through the example of his prayers on behalf of one particular *ekklesia*:

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; [Why?] That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.”

• *Ephesians 1:15–17*

This remarkable statement should be the goal of all our prayers, for ourselves and for others.

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² I show in my June 2005 Commentary, [“Our Greatest Weapon”](#) is prayer and supplication to God.