

Hermeneutics of προσευχη(prayer) in luke 11:1-4 in relation to Christ apostolic church, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Prayer serves as a means of connecting with God through worship. Since God is holy, sin disrupts the fellowship that makes prayer pleasing to Him; however, through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, this fellowship is restored. Jesus Himself engaged in prayer to commune with His Father in heaven. The core of Jesus' prayer life, the significance of prayer within the Church, and various theological perspectives shape Luke's view and his expectations regarding the fulfillment of God's mission. This study examines the interpretation of προσευχη (prayer) in Luke 11:1-4, particularly within the context of the Christ Apostolic Church in Ibadan, aiming to assess how closely the Church follows Jesus' command. Using hermeneutical and exegetical methods, the study investigates the biblical understanding of prayer and its application in the Church, employing a survey-based descriptive approach. The findings revealed that prayer is the only legitimate means of communion with God. The study concluded that prayer is a crucial aspect of the liturgy, promoting fellowship with God, and recommended that Church leadership ensure complete adherence to the prayer principles taught by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

Keywords: προσευχη (Proseuche), Prayer, Fellowship, Faith, Salvation

1 Introduction

An examination of the Old and New Testaments, along with the writings of the early Church fathers, reveals certain fundamental beliefs or assumptions that form the basis of Christian prayer. This is not to suggest that the understanding of prayer remained static; rather, its development is more evident in the Old Testament than in the New Testament or early Church writings. Abogunrin (2009) argues that the consistency in the latter is demonstrated by the close alignment between Jesus' prayer life and the prayer practices of the early Church. The early Church Fathers' understanding of prayer was deeply influenced and constrained by the Lord's Prayer, particularly through the interrelated exegetical writings, its devotional and liturgical usage, and the catechetical traditions that incorporated it. It is essential to understand that prayer includes praise, confession, and

thanksgiving; however, the primary focus of Christian prayer is petition. Cadoux (2004) suggests that the straightforward petitions found in New Testament prayers are fully expressed in the Psalms the liturgical tradition of early Christians and throughout other Scriptures of the Church. The petitions in these texts ask for rain, fire, deliverance from famine and plague, and even risen from the dead (1 Kings 8:35-40). The main Hebrew terms for prayer in the Old Hebrew scripture emphasize petition, with prayer often acting as a form of supplication.

2. The Text: Gospel of Luke chapter 11 verses 1-4

1.Καί ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτόν ἐν τόπῳ τινί προσευχομένον ὡς ἔπαυστο εἶπέν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν κύριε δίδαξον ἡμᾶς

προσευχῆσθαι καθὼς καὶ Ἰωάννης ἐδίδαξεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ.

2. Εἶπεν δὲ αὐτοῖς Ὃταν προσεύχησθε λέγετε Πατερ, ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου

3. Τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν

4. Καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίομεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν.

1. He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him 'Lord teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'.

2. And He said to them 'when you pray, say: 'father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.' 3. Give us each day our daily bread, 4. And forgive us our sin, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation.

3. Exegesis of Προσευχή in Luke 11:1-4

The brevity of this episode of teaching on prayer is deceptive, for within this narrative unit are amassed numerous motifs important to the Lukan message: The importance of prayer in Jesus' life, the role of His disciples as learners in the Gospel, the significance of prayer in the early Church as depicted in Acts, and several theological factors such as Luke's theocentric view, the expectation of God's work, His eschatological provision for His chosen people, forgiveness, and the proper attitude in times of testing. The significance of prayer in Jesus' life, the role of His disciples as students in the Gospel, the importance of prayer in the early Church as shown in Acts, and various theological aspects including Luke's focus on God, the anticipation of God's action, His eschatological provision for His chosen people, forgiveness, and the correct mindset during times of trial.

In the Jewish tradition, prayer has affinities especially to the Qaddish and the Eighteen Benedictions. The former begins in a manner analogous to Jesus' model prayer. According to Alana (2008), it states 'exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which he created

according to his will. "May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime, in your days, and in the days of the household of Israel, swiftly and soon."

This prayer, a key element of Jewish tradition, includes phrases such as: "You are holy, and Your name is holy..." (3), "Forgive us, our Father, as we have sinned..." (6), and the petition, "Reign over us..." (11). According to Luke, the prayer Jesus teaches His disciples is essential to their integration into the society of the time, as it teaches prayer, importance would be placed on the infusion of a global view centered on the merciful God. Total dependence on God, and imitation of God, all must be understood against an eschatological horizon in which the coming God figures prominently. Luke emphasizes two key aspects in this opening scene. The first is the connection between Jesus' regular practice of prayer and the similar practice of His disciples. Cadoux (2003) suggests that the second focus is the disciples' role as true learners (modeled after Mary in 10:39), who address Jesus as 'Lord' and seek His guidance.

2b The disciples' ability to recognize and address God as Πατερ, 'Father', is primarily grounded in revelation, since Jesus had recently stated that knowledge of the Πατερ, Father, could only be known through the Son's revelation. Barclay (2005) supports Jesus' decision to reveal the identity of the Πατερ, Father, to his disciples, noting that they have been chosen to receive this understanding. In doing so, Jesus invites these disciples—who have already begun to trust and obey God—to view God as their Father and themselves as His children. Furthermore, although addressing God as Πατερ "Father" is rarely found in Jewish prayer, this concept is rooted in the Old Testament and Jewish culture, tradition, and literature, especially in the covenantal election of Israel and eschatological promises. As seen in verses such as "Is not the [Lord] your father who created you, who made you and established you?" (Deut 32:6), and "You, O Lord, are our father; our redeemer from of old is your name," the identification of God as Father is deeply embedded in these texts.

Calvin (2017) emphasizes that the concept of Fatherhood in contexts like these, where Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, focuses not on God as a biological progenitor, but on adoption and

relationship—specifically, a redefinition of one's relationship within a "family" or household with God the Father as its head. Moreover, the idea that true children reflect their father's character means the father-child relationship can be understood as applying to specific groups of the righteous, a concept already present in Luke's narrative. While the term "Father" often carries connotations of authority and obedience, in this context, it also highlights other qualities such as love, nurture, mercy, and delight.

Dunn (2010) elaborates that in the opening address of the model prayer, προσεύχη, the first line is linked to the command to honor God's name (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:11). These and other scriptural references imply that a name is more than just an identifier; it holds profound meaning, reflecting the true nature of the person it represents. The prayer also reflects Ezek 36:16-32, as Galen (1996) observes, where God pledges to bring about eschatological justice and renewal for the honor of His name: "I will sanctify my great name... and the nations will acknowledge that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when I make my holiness known through you in their presence."

This perspective from Ezekiel is important not only for establishing the eschatological edge of the opening of this prayer of Jesus, but also for the way it summons those who pray this prayer to behave. Why must God sanctify his name? Because it has been profaned by God's own people (Lev.22:32; Isa52:5-6; Ezek 36:20-21). God's eschatological work to reestablish the holiness of his name, then, invokes shame on the part of his people and invites them to embrace practices that honor him.

Regarding the second petition, "Your kingdom come," Bloesch (2014) suggests that in God's coming kingdom, only He can defeat the forces at work in the world and establish His reign, as exemplified by figures like Simeon and Anna, who eagerly awaited divine intervention. Similarly, with the arrival of Jesus Christ, the kingdom is already becoming present, requiring lives focused on participating in God's divine plan and engaging in restorative practices that advance the new order He is establishing.

Hobart (2013) argues that after establishing a theocentric worldview with an eschatological focus, which calls for human partnership in God's

purpose, the prayer Jesus teaches His followers moves toward understanding life both before God and within the community of His people. This doesn't mean the eschatological vision is no longer relevant; rather, it is by maintaining an awareness of God's eschatological mission that faithful living in the present must align with the principles presented in verses 3-4.

Green (2017) points out that disciples are to rely on God for their daily needs. This dependence is further elaborated in the missionary instructions to the twelve and seventy-two in Luke 9:1-6 and 10:1-11, with God's faithfulness demonstrated in the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:12-27.

The word mentioned in the RSV as 'daily' has opened serious discussion, but in light of the evidence of Acts, the meaning of Luke's phrase is most probably, 'the bread pertaining to the coming day'. This may connote nothing more than 'the bread needed for the rest of today' or like the divine promise of manna for Israel in the wilderness (Exod.16:9-21), 'enough bread for today and the promise of sufficient bread for tomorrow as well'. The latter emphasizes the disciples' freedom from the anxiety of future worries, supported by God's care. However, it may carry a deeper meaning, especially considering Luke's tendency to interpret present blessings as a reflection of eschatological salvation. In this case, "bread for the coming day" could represent the bread of the kingdom, and Jesus would be guiding His disciples to ask God to bring the blessings of the eschaton into the present. While Luke's phrase may seem open to multiple interpretations, its main point is clear: it highlights the dependence of Jesus' followers on God's provision for their daily needs. Hughes (2017) explains that in Jesus' mission and Luke's Gospel, the term "release" has been expanded to include freedom from demonic oppression, healing from various diseases, and forgiveness of sins. Given this, it's unsurprising that forgiveness of sins plays a central role in Luke's narrative. In fact, the connection between forgiveness and the relationship between creditors and debtors is emphasized in Luke 7:40-47.

To better understand forgiveness in this context, Lohmeyer (2016) suggests that one should not hastily blur the distinction between "sins" and "debts" in the two parts of the petition.

Furthermore, the forgiveness associated with the latter should not be seen as a prerequisite for the forgiveness described in the former.

A form of enslavement was built into the fabric of the Greco-Roman world, a pervasive ethic whereby favors done for others constituted a relationship characterized by a cycle of repayment and debt; this system condoned the widespread exercise of coercive power by some persons over others.

Bultmann (2014) emphasizes that the prayer Jesus teaches His followers reflects the urgency of giving without expecting anything in return. This challenges the patronage system by treating others as equals, or even as family, rather than as superior or inferior to oneself. The "for" in the petition does not imply a quid pro quo relationship between divine and human forgiveness, as if God's forgiveness depends on human actions. Rather, Jesus connects the disciples' request for divine forgiveness to their own acts of extending forgiveness to others. Palme (2014) argues that Jesus shapes human behavior to mirror divine behavior; the forgiveness practiced by His followers is both a reflection and a limitation of God's own character.

Owen (2015) suggests that the difficulty of the final petition arises from the ambiguity of the term for "testing" in Jewish literature. In the Lukan narrative, Old Testament references to God providing tests to "prove" and strengthen His people's faith may be relevant, but here, testing is consistently seen negatively as a hindrance to faith. For those following Jesus, opposition is an expected part of the journey. Therefore, Jesus advises His disciples to ask God for the grace to be spared from further testing, acknowledging their lack of heroic faith and their need for divine assistance.

4. Theological Analysis of Prayer

Jesus Christ began his public ministry in prayer (Lk.3:21). He prayed in solitude before dawn (Mk. 1:35), and marked the turning points of his ministry with periods of prayer (Lk.5:16; 6:12; 9:18). Before he went to the cross he agonized in prayer, submitting to his Father's will (Mt. 26:36-44). He who as the priest prayed for his people (Jn.17), became the sacrifice to die for them (Heb.9:24-26). As the heavenly High Priest, the risen Christ lives to make intercession for the saints (Rom.8:34; Heb. 7:24,25).

Only in the name of Jesus, and by that way which he has opened, do sinners have access to the Father (Jn.14:6). Marshall (1998) reveals that the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, unites Christians to Christ in saving Faith and gives them confidence to call God "Abba", Father, as Jesus did (Mk.14:36; Rom.8:14-17). One do not know the plan by which God wills all things to work together for good; no one know, how to pray according to that plan. Yet the Spirit aids their weakness: he prays for them with inarticulate groaning.

The Lord promises to hear and respond to prayers when they align with His will (1 John 5:14-15). To pray according to God's will means to let His word guide our prayers, desiring that His revealed will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Prayer is an act of faith, seeking God's will with the belief in His power to answer within His creation (Matthew 21:21-22). Barker (2005) suggests that faith is not a technique to alter consciousness but a way to address the living God. Additionally, prayer is not meaningless because of God's sovereign power; rather, our prayers and their answers are part of His divine plan. It is God's will and promise that prayer can bring change in His world.

Elwell (2016) argues that an awareness of God's presence shapes how we pray. In adoration, people praise God for His deeds and His nature. The petition "Hallowed be your name" asks that God be honored as God, seeking blessings not for people, but for Him. God's holiness calls for the confession of sins, and His grace invites requests for pardon. To seek His will involves bringing petitions for His guidance, provision, deliverance, and vindication. The act of prayer deepens faith and love for God, not only by drawing closer to Him but also by reaching out in intercession for fellow Christians and a lost world.

God hears and blesses both individual and corporate prayer (Mt.18:19). Since prayer look to God alone, faith is its key (Mt.21:22). By faith, prayers in Jesus' name are heard. In the communion of prayer one expresses love for God and offer to him the tribute of lives. Spear (2011) suggests that a deep awareness of God's love and understanding of His purpose inspire Christians to pray with fervent urgency for the spread of the gospel and the establishment of His kingdom of

righteousness, both now and at Christ's return. Prayer is reverent, yet bold and persistent not because God is unwilling to listen, but because people often struggle to ask in alignment with His will and are motivated by the eternal significance of the issues at hand. Greenberg (2013) states that prayer is the lifeblood of Christ's church. Through prayer, the church resists Satan's attacks (Matthew 26:41; Ephesians 6:13-20), receives new gifts of grace (Acts 4:31), seeks deliverance, healing, and restoration for the saints (Ephesians 6:18; James 5:15; 1 John 5:16), supports the gospel witness (Colossians 4:3-4), longs for the return of the Lord (Revelation 22:20), and, above all, worships God, from whom, through whom, and to whom all things exist.

Heiler (2006) argues that the practice, methods, and forms of prayer have been carefully considered throughout history. The church has used the Lord's Prayer, the psalms, and other structured prayers for unified worship. The "richly indwelling

5. The Practice of Prayer in Christ Apostolic Church

In Christ Apostolic Church the morning service begins at 9.00 am, the conduct of the services is similar in all respects. For instance, most members get to the church about half an hour before the scheduled time. On arrival, members get to their seats, kneel down with reverence, praying to God. Soon, the choristers begin to sing melodious and soul-inspiring choruses. The others then stop praying and join in singing choruses composed through spiritual inspiration by gifted members of the choir or workers of the assembly. For instance, D.O. Babajide (C.A.C. 2nd General Evangelist) is noted for singing extempore choruses, namely; 'Ngo korin, ngo korin, ngo korin;' I will sing (3ce). Alokun (2009) reiterates that the choristers, the assembly workers as well as the other members of the congregation including men, women and children cheerfully and willingly take part in the singing.

To aid the rhythm of the singing and dancing, musical instrument of various descriptions including base and side drums, guitar, 'sekere', 'samba', bugle, 'agogo' and violin are played. In assemblies where clapping of hands is allowed on a Sunday, stamping of feet may accompany the singing. Members of the congregation always like

such an atmosphere where the worship is lively, inspiring and all-embracing. Today, traditional tunes are being adapted for choruses sung in the C.A.C. hymns. The church uses some hymns picked from Pentecostal hymnal books compiled in America. Hymns so selected were interpreted into Yoruba by respected fathers of the church; namely, Pastors J.S.B. Odusona and A.A. Hanson. Olushey (2012) reports that hymns are numbers 1 to 100 in the Old Hymn Book of the church. Besides, there are certain workers or members of the church who are spiritually gifted in the composition of hymns. The hymns could deal with either biblical themes, or the psalms or contemporary events in the church.

As earlier observed, prayers during any service are not read. Members, by practice, must kneel down and close their eyes while the prayers are on. According to Ferguson and Wright (2019) everyone begins his or her prayer session with the phrase 'li oruko Jesu' (In the name of Jesus) thrice; and sometimes seven times depending on the leading of the Holy Spirit and it ends with the phrase 'li' oruko Jesu Kristi Oluwa waa, Amin (In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen), which serves as zeal on every prayer offered. The prayer is offered with concentration, faith and gestures of the hands and the head by the person praying and even by some of the other members of the congregation. One or up to three people could lead the other members in the opening or closing prayers. The most senior pastor or worker in the assembly ends the service with the benediction.

Besides, prayers offered during services, the church teaches its members to practice holiness and pray without ceasing and with faith. It is therefore mandatory for a true C.A.C worker or member to pray at three hourly intervals from dawn to dusk as follows; Adura owuro (early morning prayer) which takes place between 5am and 6am, the second hourly prayer session starts by 9a.m, 12 noon, the third prayer session starts by 3p.m, the fourth prayer session is called Adura irole (evening prayer session) is scheduled for by 6p.m and the last prayer session known as Adura ale (Night prayer) takes place by 9 p.m before retiring to bed. Prayer of night vigils last from 9p.m to 6a.m. ordinarily, especially during the days, in Faith Homes, prayers were regularly said at 12 midnight and 3a.m. Venues of prayers include the church, the

home, the hill or the mount or the power house. The Christ Apostolic Church does not use the wilderness or the sea side as some other Aladura churches do.

According to Babajide (1998) the preacher during a sermon quotes at large from the Bible. The first member to find a bible passage reads it aloud while the preacher either recites it while the teacher; or he indicates his agreement by uttering, 'yes, yes, yes' or 'Hunhun' hunhun, hunhun'. By convention, the preacher should be able to deliver an impressive and spirit-filled sermon through divine inspiration and not just reading from a prepared address; otherwise he would be regarded as spiritually immature. However, notes are now-a-days jotted down by young and literate preachers so as to make the sermon short. While the sermon is on, at appropriate stage, choruses or hymn sermon could be raised by either the preacher himself or any inspired member of the congregation. This practice introduces life into the service and prevents a feeling of boredom or non-participation on the side of the members of the congregation (Babajide, 1998, 55).

This is employed to subdue the flesh and consequently to increase the spiritual strength of the members affected. The practice is based on the example of Jesus Christ who fasted for forty days and nights before he began His ministry on earth. Similarly, Joseph Babalola began his ministry with a series of fasts for 7 days along with prayers day and night. Thus the members of C.A.C, especially in section B, strictly observe the Lenten season when church workers and devout members go to the Mount to pray. Each year, the season ends with three days of unbroken prayers and fasting ('Biribiri') by frequent adherents of the church, men and women alike.

Fischer (2019) reports that a true and practicing C.A.C member fasts at least once or twice a week, usually on Wednesday or/ and Friday as applicable. The individual may decide to fast on his own or may fast through divine directive for half a day, a whole day, or 3,7,10,14,21 or 40 days. He may break, i.e. eat daily or in the alternative fast and pray for the required number of days in a stretch without eating food. The latter is called 'Biribiri'. Those who are not required to fast along with prayers are the sick or

the invalid and pregnant women. Others who are well should fast for the sick while pregnant women are only required to practice holiness, faith and brotherly love.

6. Conclusion

This Old Testament emphasis is not as clearly set forth in the New Testament, which may account, for example, for some disagreements about the intention of first three petitions in the Lord's prayer whether they are a call for God to act to alone (Lohmeyer, for example) or a call to God for help (Augustine, Luther). If the latter is true, as most believe, then why ask God to do for us what is our responsibility? It's not to avoid our duty, but to engage in a human-divine partnership, where people offer themselves to God, expecting and seeking his power to make their efforts fruitful. This brings up two key Judeo-Christian themes about prayer.

First, while prayer can be considered a form of work, the opposite is not necessarily true. One should be cautious of the oversimplified notion that "to work is to pray." It is important to understand that work cannot replace prayer, as the results of any effort are ultimately influenced by factors beyond human control. Reducing work to prayer may even indicate a tendency to justify oneself.

Second, both the Old and New Testaments stress that while prayer and service should not be viewed as the same, they should not be seen as separate either. This includes the understanding that only the prayers of the righteous are effective (Proverbs 15:29). This idea is especially emphasized in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, beginning with Samuel's intercession for Saul. It underscores that prayer should lead to obedience (1 Samuel 7:12, 15; 15:22-23). The eighth-century prophets particularly highlighted the importance of the moral integrity of the one praying. Prayer cannot replace righteousness. God sought more than mere ritual and ceremony, even though Israel was chosen. Genuine prayer can only be offered by those actively pursuing righteousness; insincere prayer cannot substitute for justice and responsible action.

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