

Question (shayla): Is prayer to saints, to Mary or for the dead an accepted practice among the Ransomed?

Answer (meforshim): *For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, a man, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself--a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time.* - 1 Timothy 2:5-6 HCSB

The verse above was written right after an exhortation to pray. Paul taught that only one person could intervene on our behalf – God the Son.

People who turn to the spirits of the dead for help are cursed and on the edge of destruction.¹ The Bible is clear in stating that we should not fabricate objects upon which we focus veneration.² Offering sacrifices to the dead, like burning incense or candles, in order to appease them and get them to consider our requests, is also forbidden.³

The prohibition is wide ranging in its application. We should not pray to objects fashioned after something earthly, or after heavenly things. Prayer to things “under the earth”, a phrase used to indicate the dead, is also forbidden. Yet people routinely carry emblems, kneel before statues or icons, and hang statuettes of dead people in their cars.

The sin lies not just with the use of occult mediums and fortune tellers. Generally, any form of “inquiring of the dead” is wrong.⁴ Similarly, Isaiah proscribes consulting the dead on behalf of the living even if the activity is separate from overtly occult activity.⁵

Praying to dead people, asking them to intervene on our behalf, is divination whether it is identified correctly as an occult practice or is cloaked with “Christian” terms. It does not make a difference. Divination, regardless of its trappings, remains sinful.

We are clearly told that we are not to practice any form of divination⁶, or turn to anyone who does pray to or call on the dead.⁷ God says that anyone who does has spiritually prostituted himself and is cut off from any intimacy with God and the Ransomed.⁸

In fact, praying to the dead is so serious a sin that it was considered a capital crime under the Old Covenant!⁹ Obviously, because of the principle of “*dina d’malchuta dina*” (literally “the law of the land is law.”), the elders of our church do not advocate capital punishment for this sin. We are told to “render to Caesar what is due Caesar” and to “honor the magistrate.” In this society in which we temporarily reside, it is against the law to stone those who pray to or consult the dead. Therefore, *dina d’malchuta dina* applies. However, the seriousness of this sin remains clear.

King Saul, in attempting to pacify the Lord, tried to remove all those who consulted the dead from his kingdom, something he should have enacted from the beginning of his reign.¹⁰ However, in his desperation at not hearing from the Lord, he went to the witch of Endor and contravened his own law. He tried to address the spirit of Samuel, a righteous man who would be considered a saint. As a result, he had his kingdom removed.¹¹

Jesus loved us enough to die for us while we were yet sinners. Surely there is no need to seek any human help (whether living or dead) in approaching Him? Let God’s children approach His throne of grace boldly confident of their Father’s reception.¹² There is only one mediator between God and man – the man Christ Jesus.

¹ Isaiah 19:1-3

² Exodus 20:4-6

³ Psalm 106:28-29

⁴ Deuteronomy 18:9-14

⁵ Isaiah 8:19

⁶ Leviticus 19:26

⁷ Leviticus 19:31

⁸ Leviticus 20:6

⁹ Leviticus 20:27

¹⁰ 1 Samuel 28:3

¹¹ 1 Samuel 28:6-11; 16-17

¹² Hebrews 4:12

