

Summary: *Prayer is important. How we pray, why we pray, and what we pray all matter. Let us be people who pray not only with the heart, but also with the head; loving the Lord with soul and mind.*

“Father, thank You for dying on the cross for our sins.” How many times have you heard those words? How many times have you yourself prayed them? Did you mean it?

But the Father did not die on the cross. He sent His Son for that purpose. What you have just (hopefully accidentally) articulated is actually a heresy known as patripassionism, which is a form of modalism. Modalism recognizes the unity of the godhead (Father, Son, and Spirit) while denying the distinctions of the persons. It basically believes that the Father, Son, and Spirit are all the same person and that God merely appears in various modes (Father, Son, or Spirit), depending upon the context.

Orthodox Trinitarian belief, however, recognizes both the equality of persons and the distinctions. The Father is fully God, Jesus is fully God, the Spirit is fully God, but the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit; the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit; and the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.

“Jesus, thank You for dying on the cross” should be our prayer. The Son died, not the Father or the Spirit.

On some level, what we speak is a reflection of what we believe. True, there are times when we merely misspeak or get flustered, but by and large our speech is indicative of our thoughts and underlying beliefs. Our beliefs are critical because truth matters. We worship in the truth (John 4), are set free by the truth (John 8), and are sanctified in the truth (John 17). Jesus is the truth (John 14) and the suppression of the truth is the essence of man’s sinful rebellion (Romans 1). Truth is very important.

The expectation for God’s people is not that they pray with theologically articulate eloquence. If you cannot remember the Nicene Creed (where Trinitarian language was first universally articulated by the church), then do not fret. However, we are expected to pray in accordance with the revelation which has been given in the Scriptures. We all make mistakes, but it is important that we learn from them and not repeat them.

If you find yourself merely misspeaking in prayer, it would be prudent to slow down and think through your prayers. Are the words that you are speaking in accordance with what you truly believe? Is what you truly believe in accordance with what the Scripture reveals? Slow down and consider your words

carefully because our words carry weight, and prayer is sacred. Remember that the people who hear you pray have no way of knowing that you merely misspoke; for all they know you truly believe that the Father died on the cross.

If you find yourself giving thanks to the Father for dying on the cross because you are uninformed of why that is dangerous language, take some time to study the issue. Search through the Scriptures. Read through relevant sections of Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. Speak to a friend or pastor who is a bit more theologically informed. Ask for help.

Prayer involves more than the cognitive, but certainly not less. As Jesus says, we are to worship in both spirit and truth (John 4). In referencing praying in tongues, Paul commends the same spiritual and mindful prayer (1 Corinthians 14). We must not make the mistake of being driven to either extreme of heartless or mindless prayer. Be passionate, purposeful and precise in your prayer.

For a helpful overview of historic reflection upon our most foundational doctrines, you might check out “Our Legacy” by Dr. John Hannah.

For some insight into praying more biblical prayers, check out John Piper’s helpful hints at this [link](#).

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