

Bending the Knee

Commentary for June 14, 2020 — ... in Scripture It Means Submission

Bending the knee or the act of kneeling — performed as a public act of contrition or submission — has been in the news lately around the world. It is new to politics in the United States. Let us examine kneeling in the Bible. In Scripture the inferior subject bends the knee to a superior. The first example in the Bible is Joseph (the son of the Patriarch Jacob) who was sold into slavery and later raised to rule second only to the Egyptian Pharaoh:

“And he [Pharaoh] made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, ‘Bow the knee’: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.”

• *Genesis 41:43*

The Psalmist urged the people of Israel to **“bow down”** and kneel before their God:

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before YHWH our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand ...”

• *Psalms 95:6–7*

YHWH spoke through His agent, the prophet Isaiah:

“Look unto me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return [empty], That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”

• *Isaiah 45:22–23*

In Babylon, the prophet Daniel knelt in prayer facing Jerusalem, and his life was endangered for doing so (Daniel chapter 6). Note verse 10, he **“kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime”** (Daniel 6:10).

During the ministry of Jesus people came and bowed to Him (Matthew 17:14 and Mark 1:40, 10:17). Roman soldiers later **“bowed the knee”** to Jesus, mocking and scourging Him:

“Then the soldiers of the governor ... stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted [wove] a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.”

• *Matthew 27:27, 29–30*

Jesus knelt to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane in Luke 22:41. The apostle Peter knelt before praying to God to raise up the young girl Tabitha (Acts 9:40). In his article, [“The Essentials of Prayer,”](#) Dr. Ernest Martin wrote:

“Now that does not mean that you are kneeling before God in prayer all the time. In fact, the physical attitude that you have, whether kneeling, walking, standing, lying on the ground face down like many people did in ancient times, that is not

what I am referring to in these essentials of prayer.”

The apostle Paul referenced Isaiah 45:22–23 (see above) two times in his epistles:

“For it is written, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee shall bow [the knee] to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

• Romans 14:11–12

“Wherefore God also has highly exalted him [Christ Jesus, verse 5], and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus ‘every knee should bow,’ of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that ‘every tongue should confess’ that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

• Philippians 2:9–11

Paul wrote in Romans and Philippians that the prophecy of Isaiah was still to be fulfilled in his future.¹ At Ephesus, **“when [Paul] had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all”** (Acts 20:36), and later, **“I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Ephesians 3:14). Luke wrote, **“we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed”** (Acts 21:5).

In his article, [“The Way of Salvation in the Christian Gospel,”](#) Dr. Martin explained what the Romans and Philippians passages tell us:

“... a voluntary and willing submission and confession to Jesus Christ to the glory of God. This is true because the apostle Paul showed that such confession is inspired by the actions of the Holy Spirit on such individuals (1 Corinthians 12:3).”²

If one will check every occasion in the Old or New Testaments where the word ‘to confess’ or its cognates are used, it will be seen that it is always placed in a context of persons using their ‘free will’ and with heartfelt contrition. This scripture thus shows that all things in heaven, on earth and under the earth (the angels who are kept in chains in the bowels of the earth) will one day proclaim the Lordship of Christ to the glory of God the Father.”

Recent political acts of bending the knee and confessing wrongdoing for historical or personal wrongdoing can set an evil precedent for the future. Forced confessions and bending the knee can quickly turn into a requirement to kneel to government or a religious individual. They are not from God or Christ. See the following for more information:

[“Our Greatest Weapon”](#)

[“The Essentials of Prayer”](#)

[“How You Can Influence God”](#)

[“Prayers and Supplications”](#)

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¹ That fulfillment is still future to us. It will begin when Christ returns. It will be totally fulfilled at the end of the great white throne judgment period some 2,000 years after Christ’s return..

² First Corinthians 12:3:

“Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost [Spirit].”