

**FROM A JUDEO-CHRISTIAN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE:  
WHAT ABOUT STUDENT-LED, STUDENT-INITIATED VOCAL PRAYER  
IN AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS?**

**I.  
INTRODUCTION**

Have our hearts become so hardened that we have accepted the atheists' world view that public schools are to be "religion free zones" and that school boards are to insure that public vocal religious expression does not creep into the schools? While courts have rejected these notions, many people continue to believe that this is just the way things are and that nothing can be done about it. Students across America are ready to change that perception and believe that they have a solid constitutional basis for doing so.

**II.  
BIG PROBLEMS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS. WHY?**

"Our schools are turning into killing fields." NBC Nightly News, April 20, 1999. Why all the problems in public schools? Some have suggested that the separating of our public schools from religious principles, which began in 1962 with the Engel v. Vitale case, has played a role. In Engel v. Vitale, the Court held that government required prayers are unconstitutional--and since most all prayers at the time were government required, when prayers were no longer led by school officials, vocal public prayer was dramatically decreased or stopped altogether in many of America's schools.

Problems in the school-age youth population have escalated to the point that in a single 17 month period (from October 1, 1997 through April 20, 1999), students gunned down 101 fellow students and teachers, leaving 30 dead--all in public schools; all during regular school hours. Some have suggested a spiritual connection. But, how could anyone contend that the absence of simple prayers would have an impact on schools and youth (after all, weren't most schools simply having students recite a rote prayer--which many students probably recited without much thought.) Perhaps it was something deeper.

**A.  
A SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT?**

Arguing in favor of the existence of God, the supernatural, and miracles, Dr. M. Scott Beck, in his best selling book "The Road Less Traveled," noted:

[P]ut it together with all the other instances: times I just missed being hit by cars while on foot, on a bicycle or driving; times when I was driving a car and almost struck pedestrians or barely missed bike riders in the dark; times when I jammed on the brakes, coming to a stop no more than an inch or two from another vehicle; times when I narrowly missed skiing into trees, almost fell out of windows; times when a swinging golf club brushed through my hair, and so on. What is this? Do I lead a charmed existence? If readers examine their own lives at this point, I suspect the

majority will find in their own personal experiences similar patterns of repeated narrowly averted disasters, a number of accidents that almost happened that is many times greater than the number of accidents that actually did happen...not the result of any process of conscious decision-making....Could it really be that the line in the song is true: "Tis grace hath brought me safe this far"? (p. 240)

[P]eople not infrequently walk unharmed out of vehicles crushed beyond recognition, and it seemed ridiculous to speculate that the machinery instinctively crumpled in a configuration to protect the rider or that the rider crumpled instinctively in a form to fit the machinery....[S]uch implausible conjunctions of events in time occur more frequently than would be predicted by chance alone. (p.255)

The very night that Kelly Coghlan was drafting this portion of this document, his sister was involved in a horrific auto accident. She was driving a pick-up truck at about 60 m.p.h., swerved to miss an animal and lost control. The truck rolled two complete times on its side and then flipped end-over-end landing crushed upside down in the oncoming lane of traffic. At the time of the accident, the truck was transporting a large load of lumber, a cat in the front seat and a dog chained to a large toolbox in the truck's back bed. The cat, dog, and driver escaped from the accident virtually unscathed. When the truck landed upside down, the roof collapsed in every place except where the driver was seated. The next day, Kelly's family was discussing details of the accident and discovered that each of them had independently prayed, just hours before the accident, for the protection and safety of Kelly's sister. Yes, people die in accidents, but implausible events of protection and rescue occur more frequently than would be predicted by mere chance.

Over the past several years, there have been a number of scientific studies conducted on the effects of prayer. On May 20, 1999, a report broadcast on 20/20 entitled "Adopt A Sister," began as follows: "You may remember a small, but astonishing, study in 1998 that showed that AIDs patients who did not know that they were being remembered in the prayers of others were healthier a few months later than a control group of AIDs patients who had received no prayers. [T]he medical community is coming to realize the role of spirituality in human healing...."

Is it possible that while God was officially recognized and honored in our public school system (prior to 1962/63) that God provided an undetectable covering of protection over the institution? If God exists, and if God can silently move behind the scenes to protect and bless individuals, can He do the same for entire institutions? And, if people can individually take themselves from under God's blessings, can institutions? Could it be that when the Supreme Court (being the highest level of government in America's political system) officially ceased government's recognition of God in public schools, the Court inadvertently moved the schools out from under much of God's protection and blessing by breaching a basic spiritual law?

1. Numbers 6:22-27 (from the Torah): "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, `Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel; You shall **say to them**: The Lord bless you, and keep you, the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.' So they shall **invoke my name** on the sons of Israel, and I **then** will bless them."

Lesson: Some ask, "Why the need for public vocal prayers when people can pray privately by themselves for the same things?" The principle from the above verse is that when God's name is invoked publicly and vocally over the people (i.e., "say to them"), God then will bless them." The public recognition of God releases something good. It is a supernatural law in which God essentially says, "You do this and I'll do that." The first commandment recorded in Exodus 20 states, "You shall have no other gods before Me...for I, the Lord God, am a jealous God..." As nations, individuals and institutions, a public and vocal reverence, recognition and honoring of God is essential to receiving the supernatural blessings that God can provide over such nations, individuals and institutions.

2. Psalms 35:18 (KJ): "I will give thee thanks **in the great congregation**: I will praise thee **among much people**."
3. Psalms 66:8 (KJ): "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise **to be heard**."
4. Psalms 127:1: "**Unless the Lord builds the [school] house, they labor in vain** who build it; unless the Lord guards the city [school], the watchman keeps awake in vain." If God is eliminated from the equation and man looks only to his own efforts, the endeavor will eventually fail (i.e., when this occurred in Europe, we got Fascism, Nazism and Communism--which all failed).
5. II Chronicles 7:14: "If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves and **pray**, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will **heal their land**."
6. Psalms 91: "**He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High** will abide in the shadow of the Almighty...For it is He who **delivers you** from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. He will **cover you** with His pinions...His faithfulness is a **shield**...You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow [bullet] that flies by day...No evil will befall you...For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to **guard you** in all your ways..." [i.e., God's invisible hand of protection].
7. Once God is taken out of an institution, there is nothing left but a reliance upon mankind--Jeremiah 17:5,7 ("Cursed is the man who **trusts in mankind** and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord"). How might this apply to modern day public schools?
8. II Chronicles 15:2-4: "[T]he Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; **but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you**. And for many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. But in their distress they turned to the Lord God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him."
9. Joshua 7:12: "**I will not be with you any more** unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst."

10. Isaiah 59:2: "But your iniquities have **made a separation between you and your God**. And your sins have hid His face from you, so that **He does not hear**."
11. Deuteronomy 8:10: "When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God....Beware **lest you forget the Lord your God**...."
12. Exodus 20:4,5: "You shall have no other gods before Me.... **I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God**...."
13. Proverbs 3:6: "In all your ways **acknowledge Him** [God] and He will make your paths straight."
14. Jeremiah 28:12: "Then you will call upon Me and **come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you**."
15. Malachi 3:7: "**'Return to Me, and I will return to you,' says the Lord of hosts**."
16. James 4:8: "**Draw near to God and He will draw near** to you."
17. Psalms 145:18: "**The Lord is near to all who call upon Him**."
18. Proverbs 16:6: "By the fear [reverence] of the Lord one keeps away from evil."
19. Psalms 111:9: "The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."
20. Joel 2:13,25: "Now **return to the Lord your God**...Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust, and the gnawing locust."

## **B. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S LOGIC**

In 1787, after the War for Independence from Britain had been won, as the founding fathers were holding meetings to draft a constitution, the delegates came to a hopeless deadlock after meeting for more than two months. Alexander Hamilton, the delegate from New York had already gone home in disgust. At that crucial moment, Benjamin Franklin, believing the scriptures, rose to his feet on the floor of the Constitutional Convention and called for the reinstatement of daily vocal public prayers, saying:

In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for Divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor....And have we now forgotten that powerful Friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need his assistance?

I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing

proofs I see of this truth--that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, sir, in the Sacred Writings, that "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel....

I therefore beg leave to move that, henceforth, prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business....

There are conflicting accounts as to whether a formal vote was taken on Franklin's motion (although there is evidence that public prayer took place thereafter in the Convention), but it is indisputable that, thereafter, the delegates found common ground and the Constitution was born. One year and nine months after Franklin's remarks, on April 7, 1789, one day after the Senate of the First Congress convened with a quorum, the Senate appointed a committee "to take under consideration the manner of electing chaplains." On April 25, 1789, the Senate elected its first chaplain. On May 1, 1789, the House elected its first chaplain. On September 22, 1789, Congress passed a statute providing for payment of chaplains. Three days later, on September 25, 1789, Congress reached final agreement on the language of the First Amendment (including the Establishment Clause). The First Congress obviously perceived no conflict between the Establishment Clause and vocal, public prayer in a government organized setting on government property.

Franklin's words answer the question this paper poses: "Why public vocal prayer?" Franklin's experience showed him that God blesses institutions when God is publicly recognized, honored and sought. In excluding a public and vocal recognition and honoring of God in the public arena of schools, has our public school system, in some respects, become America's modern day Tower of Babel? There are 48,000,000 students attending public schools in America. And the number of secondary school-age students is on the rise: "The U.S. Census Department says the American teen population is on a growth spurt. From 31 million last year to an estimated 50 million by the year 2010." Dateline NBC (NBC television broadcast, July 7, 1999). If something does not change, the problems are likely to get worse as the teen population swells in this country over the next ten years. The time to do something is now.

### C.

#### **PRAYER HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN USED TO FORMALIZE AND MARK THE BEGINNING OF OCCASIONS**

Those against public vocal prayer are always quick to say that students can pray privately on school grounds. That misses the point. In this country, we have always begun public events with public, vocal formalizations to mark the beginning of events--whether it be by warm words of welcome, a thought, a song, a quote, a prayer or otherwise. But now, we single out prayer as the one means of vocal formalization that should no longer be welcomed? Such logic is an attack on the appropriateness of vocal public prayers, and yet the House and Senate open every day with a vocal public prayer over government owned public address systems; the Supreme Court and all other federal courts open each day with a public vocal prayer that states "God, save the United States and

this Honorable Court;" and many school boards open their meetings with public vocal prayer over government owned public address systems. Do we need God's blessing any less upon our public schools than upon our other government institutions that vocally and publicly seek God's blessings upon them?

Editorial Note: What the United States Supreme Court has said that school officials may not do, students acting on their own can do to have prayer in public schools, to return a recognition of God and a reverence for God to public schools, and to publicly seek God's blessings on public schools and on the forty eight million students who attend them. If students will rise up across America and recognize and honor God publicly in their schools and seek Him once again, there is no doubt that He will answer.

### III. WHY STUDENTS, PARENTS AND CLERGY SHOULD GET INVOLVED

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Edmund Burke.

1. Esther 4:14: "**For if you remain silent at this time**, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty **for such a time as this.**"
2. Psalms 71:18: "And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, **until I declare Thy strength to this generation**, Thy power to all who are to come."
3. Numbers 13:27-33, 14:3-10: "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey....Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great....And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once, and **possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.**" But the men who went up with him said, "We be not able to go up against the people: for they are stronger than we....And there we saw **the giants**...and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight....[W]ere it not better for us to return into Egypt....Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt....Then Moses and Aaron...Joshua and Caleb...spake...saying..."rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."

Lesson: Sure, any effort that might result in prayer in public schools will be met with opposition--even from well meaning individuals--but those who understand the importance of this must face the giants, fight the battles with God's help, and go forward with what is believed to be His will in this. The public school have already "wandered in the wilderness" for a long time (since 1962--almost thirty seven years). How much longer?

4. I Kings 18:20-40: "Then said Elijah...I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are 450.... And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God.... [T]he prophets of Baal...called

on the name of Baal from morning even until noon saying O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered...and when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer...Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God...that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

Lesson: As illustrated by the above, give the real God His ten minutes and He will reveal Himself and let all know who is the true God. Quantity of time is not a factor.

5. Micah 4:5: "Though all the peoples walk each in the name of his god, as for us, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever."
6. Jeremiah 2:11: "Has a nation changed gods, when they were not gods? "But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit."

#### IV. NEW TESTAMENT SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC, VOCAL PRAYER

1. Matthew 6:10: "Thy kingdom come. They will be done, **On earth as it is in heaven.**"

Is it God's will in heaven that He be proclaimed and honored on Earth? If so, should we attempt to carry out that part of His will everywhere, including public schools?

2. Matthew 5:13-14: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing any more, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. **You are the light of the world, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on the lamp-stand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**"

Lesson: We are told to be "salt" and "light" in our society "in such a way that they **may see...**" Jesus conducted his ministry in public, not in private, and not only in the synagogues. He healed, preached, and prayed in public. On the day of pentecost when 3,000 were saved, the preaching and prayers were done in public. The disciples did the same--publicly proclaiming the gospel, praying and healing in public. There is nothing unconstitutional about genuinely student initiated public vocal prayer. Prayerful speech must be afforded the same dignity and legal protection as is given similar secular speech.

3. II Corinthians 4:13: "But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, **'I Believed, Therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore also we speak...**"
4. Acts 1:8: "You shall be **my witnesses...**to the uttermost part of the earth."

5. Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes...."
6. Matthew 21:12-13: "And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, 'It is written, 'My House Shall Be Called A House Of **Prayer**;' but you are making it a robbers' den.'"

Lesson: It is interesting that the one time in scripture we see Jesus taking decisive physical adversarial action is in connection with a "prayer" issue; prayer was not taking place where it was supposed to be taking place--other worldly activities had crowded in.

7. Acts 4:17-20: "But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name. And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, '**Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge**; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard.'"

Note: This is one of the few clear examples in the Bible of permissible (and perhaps required) Christian civil disobedience. The authorities of the day told the Christians to not "speak or teach in the name of Jesus," but Peter and John said that they must "give heed...to God" rather than to the legal authorities when it came to speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. [Compare this to Romans 13:1-3: "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities...."].

8. 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "**Pray** without ceasing."
9. Ephesians 6:18: "With all prayer and petition, **Pray at all times** in the Spirit..."
10. Luke 18:1: "Now He was telling them a parable to show that **at all times they ought to pray** and not to lose heart...."
11. 1 Timothy 2:8: "Therefore, I want the men **in every place to pray**...."
12. Matthew 6:5-7: "And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, **in order to be seen by men**. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

Lesson: This verse must not be taken out of context. This is talking about private prayers, for immediately after Jesus spoke these words, he proceeded to give a publicly stated vocal prayer to the crowd (the Lord's Prayer). There is a distinction between private prayers and public blessing/prayers (See Numbers 6:22-27). In the historical context of the time, some

would stand on the corner and shout out their **private** prayers so that everyone would think them super religious (for at the time, it was a good thing to be thought of as extremely religious). People who prayed on a street corner were exalting themselves and raising their social status at the same time. Their motivation for praying was "in order to be seen by men." The same is not true today. In our society, one who would loudly pray on a street corner would generally be looked on as a fool. Today, if a student prays publicly (as in asking for God's blessing and protection over a group), it is not for the purpose of gaining "cool" status among peers. The student is as likely to be ridiculed as to be appreciated. Indeed, in our society, religious students have even been singled out for ridicule and death as in Columbine High School and the Ft. Worth church shootings.

13. Matthew 10:27: "What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, **proclaim upon the housetops.**"
14. Ephesians 6:12-14: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places...having done everything, **stand. Stand firm....**"
15. John 15:20: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."
16. Matthew 19:1: "But Jesus said, 'Let the children alone, and **do not hinder them** from coming to Me.'"

School board members should consider the application of this to them before voting to block, prevent, or stifle any effort by students that would permit constitutional public vocal student initiated prayers to occur in public schools.

17. Matthew 18:6: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea."
18. Matthew 10:32,33: "Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father, who is in heaven. But whoever shall **deny Me** before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

#### **A.**

#### **WHY CHRISTIANS END THEIR PRAYERS "IN JESUS' NAME"?**

The phrase, "in Jesus name," stated at the end of Christian prayers, is not a tag line intended to offend Jews, Moslems, atheists or others. Christians are merely obeying a basic commandment of their faith:

1. John 16:24,26: [Jesus said,] "Until now you have asked for nothing **in My name**. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be made full....In that day you will ask **in My name....**"
2. John 14:13,14: [Jesus said,] "And whatever you ask **in My name** that will I do, that the

Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything **in My name**, I will do it."

3. John 15:16: [Jesus said,] "... so that whatever you ask of the Father **in My name**, He may give it to you."
4. Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."
5. Acts 3:6: "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have, I give to you: **"In the name of Jesus Christ** the Nazarene--walk!"
6. Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other **name** under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
7. John 12:32: [Jesus said,] "If **I be lifted up**, I will draw all men to myself."

If someone prays in the name of "Allah" or "Jesus" or "The Lord God of Israel," and the listener is a non-adherent to the particular name, the listener may believe that the person has prayed to nothing. How can one logically be offended if they believe someone has spoken to the air? There are many children who believe in Santa Claus and tell others of their faith in and petitions to him. Does this offend anyone? A reasoned reaction might be amusement, but not insult. The same should be true concerning religious expression. Another's prayer should offend no one any more than a child's heart-felt proclamation: "Santa Claus is coming to town." A sincere prayer is not intended to offend but rather to honor God and seek protection and blessing for believers and non-believers alike. The idea of a person being offended by the expression of another's sincere prayer may simply be a euphemism for intolerance. Silencing prayer is not the answer; tolerance is the answer.