

Tech Talk
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Electronic mail (email) is a standard method of communication today. If people haven't emailed someone they probably know someone who uses email to communicate. It certainly has taken the place of writing letters.

Two primary components in an email message are the header and the body. The header includes fields such as "To", "From", "Subject" and a "Date". Information in the header is used to deliver the email. The text of the email is the body.

When setting up an email program such as Microsoft Outlook Express we are asked for something called an SMTP server. This is commonly referred to as our "outgoing" mail server. SMTP is an acronym for Simple Mail Transport Protocol, the series of messages by which email is delivered. When we press the "Send", our email program formats our message and stores it in this SMTP machine. The SMTP machine then forwards (delivers) the message.

The SMTP server looks at the addresses in the message and finds the machines to which the message should be delivered. This is done by looking for "Mail Exchange" or MX records for the portion of the email address following the "at" sign. Once a MX server is determined, the SMTP server connects to it and prepares to send the message. If the account to whom the message should be sent is valid, the message is copied to that account's mailbox. The message is retrieved when the person successfully connects to their mailbox by entering their valid username and password in a program designed to process email.

Options can be added when sending an email. If you indicate you want delivery confirmation, you receive a message stating your message was stored in the recipient's mailbox. This only means the message was delivered, not necessarily retrieve. Another confirmation is a read receipt. This is sent when the message is displayed on the recipient's screen. Despite the name, this does not mean the recipient actually read the message; it only means they saw it in their mailbox.

Email can be a simple and efficient method of communicating with others. We don't use email to communicate with God. He gave us prayer for that purpose. With prayer, however, we don't need a connection to the Internet. In fact, our Lord Jesus states in Matthew 6:6 that we should, "Go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret." This does not mean we cannot pray when stuck in traffic. Rather, we should consider how God hears not only our prayer but sees the condition of our heart. He wants us to take prayer seriously. After all we are speaking with the Almighty God!

It seems email can be complicated. There are many machines involved. As with all methods of communication, there are "rules" to email. For instance, when a person types everything in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS that is called "flaming" someone; it means they are yelling at them. In Matthew 6:9-13 our Lord gives us a model of prayer. He didn't intend for us to say these exact words. Rather, He wanted us to think of the privilege it is to speak with the Father. The Lord Jesus wants us to remember

that we need to approach God with a heart of humility, recognizing how much we need Him.

Does it seem that we need a "delivery confirmation" or "read receipt" on our prayer? Rest assured, all our prayers are "delivered" and "read". We must, however, seek the Lord our God in all matters of our life. We cannot hold an aspect of our life from Him. The instances in the Bible where it speaks of the Lord not listening or not answering a prayer also include references to the heart of the person praying. The Lord God reveals His plan to His people when they earnestly seek Him (Jeremiah 29:12-13). Our prayer should be for the desires of His heart. Then we will see the desires of our own heart transformed into His. Growing closer to our God is better than a simple "read receipt". It is a reply from the Almighty God spoken in beauty beyond words.

How can we communicate with God? Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." Surrounding these words are "Rejoice always" (verse 16) and "In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." In other words, don't treat prayer as you may treat email: you hit the Send button and it is gone forever. Consider prayer as a conversation with the Almighty, Holy God. Rejoice in the fact that you can speak with Him. Humble yourself in His presence. Worship Him. Glorify Him. Be honored that we serve a God eager to hear from us and work in our lives. Remember, God really does answer all "knee mail."