

The Lord's Prayer

Do you know the Lord's Prayer? If you are a professing Christian, of course you know the Lord's Prayer, and perhaps the very question may, to you, seem condescending and demeaning. Please believe that it is asked only in the spirit of love and concern, and in having been strongly persuaded that I should share my experiences, along with the thoughts and understanding, which have been revealed to me in these latter years since I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

I "learned" the Lord's Prayer in my earlier years, during which time I was forced to go through the motions of being a Catholic. Of course, I also learned the Hail Mary prayer and memorized the catechism. During those years I recited both prayers many thousands of times. I would recite them whenever I was in fear or in want. They became so ingrained in my mind, that I could then say, with some amount of pride, that I could think through the Hail Mary at the same time I spoke aloud the Lord's Prayer. Did God hear these prayers? Of course not! First because, they were simply meaningless rote, and second because the Holy Spirit was not in my heart as He must be if one is a redeemed child of God. And this comes only through that grace through faith in the blood of Christ, as the completed means of salvation. Had I been persuaded to read the Scripture or thought to do so on my own, I might have discovered the futility of such prayer well over a half-century earlier. For in looking up the prayer in Matthew 6, I could not have missed Jesus' admonitions in verse 7 where He says "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Where prayer is concerned, talk from the head, which isn't "born" in the heart, simply doesn't count with God.

Although today, I pray a great deal, I seldom recite the "Lord's prayer." When I do, it is only during Sunday services, when the pastor asks us to do so, and as he rightly refers to it as the prayer Jesus taught the apostles. So it isn't really the Lord's Prayer but a

beautiful and suggestive outline of how one should approach and speak to God. Jesus Himself couldn't pray it, for it includes forgiveness of sin of which He had none. A genuine Lord's Prayer may be found in John 17 where our Lord Himself is praying to the Father. This, of course, is not a prayer any of us could pray. It is a God-to-God prayer. However, as with all Scripture, it is there for our learning and, therefore, it contains a number of elements we would do well to incorporate in our own prayers of worship.

Because the prayer He taught the Apostles is so deeply etched in my mind, it's difficult and almost impossible to say it with the reverence and deep conviction deserving of being called a real prayer, or conversation with our Creator. To say it by rote is to say it without heart-felt reverence, especially when recited at the speed customary during services. For it, or any recitation of a previously composed prayer to be meaningful and acceptable to God, and for it to be spiritually nourishing to the one praying, it can not be simply gulped down, but it must be carefully chewed, phrase by phrase, both in the mind and in the heart, so that all of its intended meaning and purpose can be extracted, digested and assimilated. None of this is to in any way diminish the value of this prayer, which we call the Lord's Prayer. My purpose is to suggest that the Lord's Prayer value as an element of worship can only come from sincere and deep thought, understanding and reverence for each of its components as they flow from our lips. Having said all of this, let us examine it phrase by phrase from the KJV of Matthew 6 and Luke 11, in order to see what this divine example of earth-to-heaven communication is telling us.

Our Father

Right from the first words, we have a potential issue. Scripture makes it very clear, that this prayer is only for the redeemed, the born-again, those who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and have thereby become sons and daughters of God by adoption. The world speaks of the "brotherhood of man" and most who believe in a god or believe that there is a God, believe that "we are all children of God." Not so! According to Scripture, Jesus gave this to His apostles as an example of how believers should pray. Only the redeemed are children of God, and Scripture refers to them mutually as

“brethren” Therefore, this prayer is relevant only to Christian brethren, for only they have a right to call Him, ‘Father.’”

Who art in Heaven

It is the Father to whom Jesus taught the apostles to pray. He is the one person of the trinity whom Scripture indicates “stays at home” in heaven, while the personages of Jesus and the Holy Spirit also inhabit or visit the world of time / space.

Jesus is recorded in Scripture as having, on numerous occasions, visited earth and walked in an assumed physical form among people. He walked with Enoch (Genesis 5:22); He ate and conversed with Abraham (Genesis 18). He wrestled with Jacob at Peniel (Genesis 32); He met Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3); He met Joshua before the battle of Jericho (Job 5) etc. All of those earlier visitations were by Jesus prior to His incarnation as human born flesh and blood. They were all only temporary manifestations of God the Spirit taking on a physical human form in a manner similar to how angels are able to come and go out of space/time. Jesus, however, in this one-time event, became man in the natural manner of all mankind so that He would be true man in all physical respects, being of flesh, blood and bones, even though He was also God through His spiritual being. In John 14:10, he tells us that “he that has seen the Me has seen the Father.” Confusing? It shouldn’t be if you understand and believe in the Triune (Triune, three in a single unit) God. Here Jesus is telling us that He and the Father are ONE. If they are one, then, they are as we would say, one in the same. So when the Lord’s Prayer speaks to the Father who is in heaven it speaks also to Jesus (as well as the Holy Spirit), because they are all one with the Father in what we call collectively the Godhead. Because Jesus became man, in no way did it diminish the fact that He was also God. Thus He called Himself the “Son of Man” and He also called Himself “Son of God” (John 5:26). He had to be man in order to be our savior, our kinsman redeemer, and He had to be God in order to be our Lord and our avenger of blood. Thus He is our Lord and Savior!

Hallowed be thy name:

This is an expression of worship and adoration. God's name is Holy, and does He ever take it seriously! Scripture speaks very emphatically to us that God Himself attaches great value to His name and requires that His children do so also. For example, in Samuel 12:22 we are told that "God will not forsake His people for His great name sake." In Psalm 23:3 we hear, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name sake." We see, "For Thy name sake" in Psalm 25, 106, 109 and 143. In Isaiah 48:9 our Lord says, "For My name sake will defer my anger." In Jeremiah 14:7 and again in verse 21 we find "for Thy name sake." In Ezekiel 20:9 and again in verse 22, we see "I wrought for My name sake." And in Ezekiel 36:22 God says, for "My Holy name sake." This type of exhortation occurs as least 12 times in the Old Testament making it very clear how God feels about His name. Therefore, it should be no surprise that the third Commandment, right after the two about not having any other gods and not making idols, attests to the importance to Him of His name. The third Commandment reads: "Thou shall not take the name of thy Lord God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11).

Remember this! By having called Him Father, you have claimed that you have the right to do so by virtue of having been redeemed. Therefore, you have also claimed the right to call yourself by His name, "Christian," a member of Christ's (God's) family. In doing so you have an awesome responsibility. You are claiming His name, but when you fail to think and behave appropriately as one of His, you are defiling His Holy Name. When you say in prayer, "hallowed be thy name" you are acknowledging that holiness and your responsibility regarding it. If you have chosen to be called by His name, Christian, and are, therefore, in the family of Christ, you have a sacred duty and responsibility to uphold and represent your family name in the highest possibly manner. That is the meaning and purpose of the third commandment!

Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven:

Thy kingdom come:

This is God's kingdom as spoken of by John the Baptist in Mark 3:2. It is the kingdom that will soon banish Satan and take over from him the rule of the world that is when Jesus physically, as well as spiritually, returns after the tribulation to govern from the throne of David. This is when His will is to prevail here on earth as it is, and always has been, in heaven. For He will "rule all nations with a rod of iron." (Revelation 12:4, 19:15). Here on earth, self-will has prevailed ever since Adam and has caused untold misery. We know from Scripture that this kingdom is to surely take place, so here, in this prayer, we express our eagerness for its fulfillment. This is not the universal and eternal kingdom of God we are praying for, but the millennial, Messianic, Divine kingdom so clearly prophesied in Luke 1:31 and elsewhere, which will be established here on earth for a 1000 years. In essence, we pray for that great moment, the time of the rapture of which Paul spoke in 1Corinthians 15: 51, 52). "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." This is the pre-requisite to the 70th week of Daniel 9 and the second coming. At the time of the rapture, all of the redeemed, both those who have died and those who will be raptured, will be gathered together in heaven to celebrate, and to await the completion of that 70th week. That is when Jesus, along with all the redeemed, those who escaped the second death, will descend from heaven to the Mount of Olives and make the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Then Jesus will sit on David's throne, having cast Satan into the bottomless pit for 1000 years (Revelation 20:11). Those who descended from heaven with Him will be "priests of God and shall reign with Him (Revelation 20:6). This is what the sons and daughters of God pray for when they petition the Father, asking that "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Give us this day our daily bread (Matthew 6:1)

Give us day by day our daily bread (Luke 11:3)

Here the prayer is a petition to the Lord to feed us. It is the expression by the faithful, of their dependence upon the Father for all things including their daily necessities. This would seem to be a double entendre, a request which most, especially the sick and hungry throughout the ages, would consider as a request for bodily nourishment.

However, it is evident from many Scriptural applications of the word “bread,” that it means more surely a request for spiritual food that is nourishment for the soul and the spirit. Hunger for “The Word of God” is a super-naturally acquired characteristic of the redeemed Christian. And why not? Having been adopted into God’s family, into the body of Christ, how could one not hunger to learn all that is possible to know about one’s Holy Father, about Jesus with whom one is now “joint heir.” And what about the Holy Spirit, who now dwells in the Christian’s new heart? If you are a born-again Christian, there is someone, a Person in spirit form living in your heart! That is awesome!

Incredible! If He is living in me, I want to know all I can find out about Him!

As Christians, when we ask for our “daily bread,” we are asking for genuine communion with God, both personally and through His Word; we are asking for His guidance, and His fellowship; we are asking for Him to reveal the meaning of the different verses we encounter as we read daily His precious Word; and we ask for this “bread,” not to fill our stomachs, but to fill our hearts which hunger for these things. To hunger for the Word of God is to hunger for Christ Jesus because Jesus is the Word of God. (Revelation 19:13).

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtor (KJV Matthew 6:12)

And forgive us our Sins as we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us (KJV Luke 11:4)

And forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. (KJV Matthew 6:14, 15) (Not part of the sample prayer)

Have you noticed these variations of the prayer and wondered about them? Are there any serious differences between sins, debts, and trespasses worthy of concern here? Why are there differences, and is there one choice that best represents what Jesus actually said?

Let us see what we can find out from the Greek words:

Debts – debtors: deneion: a delinquent transgressor. (as against God, a sinner, under obligation)

Indebted – opheilo: idea of accruing, to owe, to be under obligation, to fail in duty.

Trespass – paraploma: sideslip, deviation, lapse, offense, sin

Trespass – hamartano: to sin, do wrong, contrary to God's will

Sin – hamartia (hamartano): sin, offense, wrongdoing, anything contrary to God's will & law, an absolute moral failure.

From these definitions it seems evident that no matter which variation of the prayer we choose, the petition to God is to forgive our sins as we forgive those who, for whatever reason, do some form of wrong toward us. It's probably of little significance whether we are forgiving debts or trespasses. However, I would submit that what we are to forgive is not sin, whether we choose “debtors,” “those indebted to us,” or “those who trespass against us.” To say that we forgive those who sin against us is to suggest that we have the power to forgive sin. Of course, only God can do that. In Psalms 51, David is lamenting over his sins regarding Bathsheba, which involved murder, lies, and on-going adultery. Yet in verse 4 he says to God, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” While David may have asked forgiveness of Nathan the prophet and others to the extent they were hurt by this harmful action, he acknowledges to have sinned only against God. So which of these words do we choose to use in this prayer? It appears to me that we should ask forgiveness of our sins as we forgive those who in

whatever way have hurt or wronged us or owe us in some way. We can't forgive their sins, but we must not hold on to condemning feelings against those who offend us. We must forgive hurtful offending words and actions at the physical earthly level, and leave it totally to the Lord to judge and to condemn or forgive the spiritual nature of the offence.

I have found no Scripture version, which asks forgiveness of our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, even though this is the way that this verse is often expressed. Perhaps as noted, it stems from Matthew 6:14, 15 immediately following the example prayer, when Jesus says, "For if ye forgive their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Also in the Epistles Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, we are told to forgive as we are forgiven. H.A. Ironside in his "Notes on Matthew" provides an eloquent closure to the issues regarding the significance of verse 12.

"In the government of God as Father over His own children our forgiveness of daily offenses depends upon our attitude toward those who offend against us. If we refuse to forgive our erring brethren, God will not grant us that restorative forgiveness for which we plead when conscious of sin and failure. This, of course, has nothing to do with that eternal forgiveness which the believing sinner receives when he comes to Christ. It is the Father's forgiveness of an erring child, which must of necessity take into account the attitude of the failed one toward other member of the family."

In this same vein, it is essential to realize that we do get punished here on earth for many, if not all, of our sins even though we are saved from eternal punishment by His grace through our faith. Isn't that the divine role of any loving, righteous, attentive father, to punish transgressions as well as to reward outstanding behavior and achievement?

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Lead us not into temptation? Why would Jesus suggest that we pray to our loving God not to lead us, into a place where we are certain that He would not, under any circumstances, want us to be? There are probably at least two ways in which the phrase may be understood. H.A. Ironside suggests, “It is a recognition of our own acknowledged weakness, a cry to God to preserve us from being placed in circumstances where we might be overpowered by the voice of the tempter.” This is certainly a very sound explanation of the meaning in that it is clearly in context with everything Scripture tells us about our Father.

And now, let us try a closer look at the Greek word for which the KJV translated as “lead.” This gives a precious nugget, which once again reveals God’s divine wisdom and love. It also demonstrates again, how when Scripture verses seem strange, difficult to understand, or in conflict with other messages, we should examine most closely the original language for the true meaning. There are no errors or conflicts in God’s Word as originally given to us. It’s only the limitations of the language translation and the fallibility of the translators where the conflicts arise. It is through diligent loving and faithful attendance to His Word that the Holy Spirit will, in His time, reveal the truth of all things.

The word “lead” comes from the Greek word “eisphero” which means to carry forward or lead into. However, reaching back to the root word from which it is derived, we find the word, “eis.” It defines a number of related action verbs and phrases, among which is to “set at one again!” How beautifully consistent is in this thought with what we know is our dear Lord’s desire and intent for His children! When we insert this expression instead of “lead,” we can convert this rather confusing petition into what I choose to believe is its actual intent. Instead of “lead us not into temptation,” I believe a more appropriate translation might be, “don’t let us be at one again with temptation” (as we were before, when we were hopelessly lost in sin.)

The next part of that verse, “but deliver us from evil,” requires no analysis. However, the word “evil” is a translation of the Greek word “poneros” which means evil, but can also mean both sin and the devil. Some versions of this phrase say, “but deliver us from the evil one.” It would appear that either ending is appropriate.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.

This is found in Matthew 6:13 but not in Luke 11:4. Research has indicated that it is also omitted in the most reliable manuscripts. It seems that it may have been added later as the prayer came into common usage as part of ritualistic services.

This prayer, as beautiful as it is and as it has to be, because it came directly from our Lords lips, is nevertheless a sample prayer. He clearly tells us so in its preface when He says, “After this manner therefore, we pray...” It was composed in order to instruct through example, what the components of a Christian prayer to God should be. There doesn't seem to be any valid reason to believe that it should have taken on the prominence it has as an often-repeated prayer in religious services. There is no mention of it as having been used in early Christian assemblies nor can it be found in the Book of Acts or in any of the Epistles. As a “pattern” prayer it would appear that it was not intended to take on the extensive usage it has among Christian faiths. Note that it predates the advent of the Holy Spirit. He came at Pentecost to dwell permanently among and in the redeemed. He also came to guide all believers in their worship, prayers and petitions. I believe that when we wish to converse with God, it is our own personally composed prayers, from our own hearts, which He wants to hear. It is prayers patterned after the example He gave us, rather than the rote repetition of the sample prayer itself, which He wants to hear.

