

## The Lord's Prayer

(Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13)

### **"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name"**

When Christ was on earth He prayed often, sometimes spending whole nights in prayer. Of course none of these prayers are recorded. We have, however, the record of several prayers which He offered in public, prominent among which are the prayer at the grave of Lazarus, and the one for His disciples, just before His betrayal and crucifixion. But neither of these is referred to by the term, "the Lord's prayer." That prayer is the brief petition which our Savior gave as a model for all prayers. And a model it is indeed. It comprehends everything that it is possible for man to desire from God. There are no circumstances or conditions in life that are not covered by this petition. Yet this must be understood as applying to followers of Christ, and not to unconverted persons, even though they be convicted of sin. This will appear in the course of our comments upon the prayer.

There is no other form of words ever devised which can be used as a prayer over and over again for years, and still retain its freshness. This is simply because this one was given by One who knew man's needs. But our Savior did not design that His disciples should simply repeat the words which He gave them. This is evident from the introduction: "After this manner pray / When you pray say." It was designed as we have said, as a comprehensive model. Let us consider it well, that we may henceforth pray with more of the Spirit and the understanding.

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#### "Our Father"

What tenderness is expressed in those words! What infinite condescension it reveals on the part of God to allow poor, frail mortals to address Him thus. His greatness is unsearchable and His ways past finding out. Before Him, "the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless" (Isa. 40:15–17). He walks "on the wings of the wind" (Ps. 104:3); he "has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nahum 1:3). And yet this awful God has the tenderness of a parent, and His ear is open to the supplications of those who whisper, even in faintest accents, "Our Father;" for we are told that "as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him" (Psalms 103:13). Although God is the "High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy," He has assured us that He dwells with him "who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15). Thus the first words of the Lord's prayer bring us into the most intimate relation with the great Creator.

Even in the first word alone there is a great truth conveyed. It shows the relation of those who can call God Father. They are brethren, having common hopes and needs. Even in his secret devotions, the Christian is not to make his petitions wholly personal. He is not to be shut up to his own needs, but is to remember that he is only one of a great family, whose welfare ought to be with him scarcely second to his own. Paul wrote to the Romans: "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9). It is possible for a person to be selfish even in his petitions for overcoming grace; but it will be found in that case, as in all others, that selfishness defeats itself. Every Christian will bear witness to the fact that the richest blessings have come to him when, even though almost overwhelmed with a sense of his own need, he has coupled his petition for pardon and strength, with a request for a blessing upon others besides himself. And so, even in the closet, we are to say, "Our Father."

It is not everybody, however, who can say, "Our Father." We hear much of the "Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," but the Bible says nothing about such a thing. All men are not sons of God. Paul reminds the Ephesians of the time before they were converted, saying, "that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). In the first verses he shows still more plainly that men are not by nature the children of God. He says: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others" (Eph. 2:1–3). Again the apostle warns the Ephesian brethren against the sins to which they had formerly been addicted, saying, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6; see also Col. 3:6). S

But the plainest statement of all, that men are not by nature the children of God, was given by our Savior himself. To the wicked Jews who said, "we have one Father—God," He said: "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. . . . You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:41–44). Putting these texts together, we learn that all who know not God are the children of wrath; they are the children, or recipients, of wrath, because they are children of disobedience because they are the children of the devil. Now a person cannot at the same time be a child of God and a child of Satan. Nor is it necessary that one should be as hardened as were the Jews to whom Christ spoke, in order that they may be called children of Satan. "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). If a person is a child of disobedience and of darkness, he is not a child of God. "All have sinned;" and therefore none are by nature children of God.

How do people become children of God? If they are not natural children, it must be by adoption. So Paul says: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of

God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:14–17). In like manner he writes to the Galatians: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal. 4:4–7).

In the above text it will be noticed that the Spirit is the pledge of our adoption. It is called the Spirit of adoption, because only those who have the Spirit are sons of God. Indeed, its reception constitutes us sons of God. If we are children, then we are heirs of God; and so Paul says that the Spirit "is the guarantee of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14).

If we are heirs of God, we are joint heirs with Christ. All that Christ has or is to have, we shall have also. He is the Son of God by birth; the only begotten Son of God. Angels are the sons of God (Job 38:7) by creation. Adam was a son of God in the same way, only a little lower than the angels. If he had not sinned against God, his descendants would like him have been sons of God. But he transferred his allegiance to Satan, and so no man from Adam down can be a son of God except by adoption. "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

From this brief study of the Scripture it is clearly evident that since the Lord's prayer begins, "Our Father," it cannot be used by one who is not a child of God. For those who are in a state of nature, and thus children of wrath, there is another prayer. It is, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." They cannot address the Creator as Father, but only as God, the Judge who, however, is able to save as well as to destroy. If they have once been adopted into the family of God, and have lost their heirship through sin, the same prayer is applicable. With David, under like circumstances, they may cry: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions" (Psalms 51:1). "Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities" (v. 9). "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit" (v. 12). But only those with whose spirits the Spirit of God bears witness that they are children of God, can with confidence repeat the tender words, "Our Father."

Yet not a long time must the sinner lie a suppliant at the throne of God, unable to utter those words. God is longing for the world to become reconciled to him. When the prodigal son, who had forfeited his right to a place in his father's house, said, "I will arise, and go to my father" (Luke 15:18), not as a son but as a servant seeking mercy, his father met him while he was yet a long way off. He met him not as a master, but as a father. The humble prodigal did not have time to call himself a servant before he was embraced as a son. And so, although no one in a state of nature can properly repeat the Lord's prayer, at the first sincere petition for mercy, which the repentant sinner puts up

to God, the Spirit of God is sent forth into his heart, and he becomes a son, and can confidently and joyfully say, Father, Father.

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### "In Heaven"

The fact that God is in Heaven is often used to indicate His power and majesty. The expression occurring in the model prayer indicates that whoever prays should recognize the greatness of the Being whom he addresses. "He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). We quote a few texts to show the comprehensiveness of the expression, "in Heaven."

"The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). "But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (Ps. 115:3). The same thing is found in 2 Chronicles 20:6: "O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" Whenever it is designed to indicate the power and majesty of God, His dwelling-place in heaven is mentioned.

"The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men" (Ps. 11:4). Here God's dwelling-place in heaven is mentioned to show His omniscience.

"Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?" says the Lord; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord" (Jer. 23:24). Here the omnipresence of God is indicated, as also in 1 Kings 8:27: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" And also, "Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?" (Isa. 66:1).

"Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few" (Eccl. 5:2). Here the fact that God is in heaven is given as a reason for sobriety and carefulness of speech.

Thus we find that the expression in the Lord's Prayer, "in heaven," stands for a recognition of the power, the majesty, the omnipotence, and the omniscience of God. All these things should be borne in mind when we approach the throne of grace. This thought will tend to produce reverence and awe. Multiplication of words and "vain repetitions," for which Christ condemned the heathen, arise from the fact that the petitioner thinks more of himself than he does of the One whom he is addressing. The heathen gods were so contemptible that the heathen worshiper could not help thinking more of himself than of his god; for heathen worship, in its inception, was self-worship. (See Rom. 1:21-23). But the God whom we worship sits upon the circle of the heavens,

and he who has a just sense of His greatness will come with reverence into His presence, and will confine his words to just the things which he needs.

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"Hallowed Be Your Name"

This follows as a natural consequence of that which precedes. The one who remembers the words, "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun (Jerusalem), who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds" (Deut. 33:26), will of necessity "fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD" (Deut. 28:58).

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**"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY" - "WHEN YOU PRAY, SAY"**