

The Lord's Prayer

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

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

It is probable that this part of the Lord's prayer is the least understood of any. The sentence, "Your will be done," is thought by most people to be applicable only in cases of sickness or other trial, to indicate that the sufferer is willing to endure patiently. But this is but a very limited view of the expression. As a matter of fact there is no more comprehensive sentence in the Bible, or that can be uttered by man, than the simple words, "Your will be done." It all depends on what the will of the Lord is, which point we must investigate.

The second chapter of Romans has reference especially to the Jews, to show that they, as well as the Gentiles, are sinners, and the apostle speaks to them directly, in these words: "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law" (Rom. 2:17, 18). How does Paul say the Jew knew the will of God? Because he was instructed out of the law. The obvious conclusion, then, is that the will of God may be known only by a study of the law, which makes necessary the further conclusion that the law of God is His will.

This conclusion is verified most plainly by the words which the psalmist utters prophetically in behalf of Christ. In Psalms 40:7, 8, we read: "Then I said, 'Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.'" It is first stated that Christ delighted to do the will of the Father; and then to make this statement emphatic, it is added, "Your law is within my heart." Out of the heart are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23); as a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7); that is, a man's actions correspond to that which is in his heart; he does just what is in his heart. Therefore if the law of God being in a man's heart leads him to delight to do the will of God, it follows that the law of God is the will of God.

In Rev. 22:14 we read that they who keep the commandments shall have right to the tree of life, and enter in through the gates into the city; and in Matt. 7:21 we read that only those who do the will of God, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Here again we see the identity of the will of God and the commandments. If there is any doubt in anyone's mind as to what law it is that is the will of God, it may be settled by reading Rom. 2:21, 22 in connection with verses 17-20, the first two of which have been quoted. The Ten Commandments are the will of God.

Therefore when we pray, "Your will be done," we in reality pray that the commandments of God may be kept by us and by all others who dwell on the earth. We pray that they may be kept even as they are kept in heaven, where the angels "do His word, heeding the voice of His word" (Ps. 103:20). It follows, therefore, that whoever utters the Lord's prayer or a prayer modeled after it, and does not in his heart "consent unto the law that it is good," and honestly desires to conform to all its requirements, is guilty of mockery

before God. Such an one cannot hope to have his petition regarded; and so we may understand the words of the psalmist: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear" (Ps. 66:18); and of Solomon: "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Prov. 28:9).

When will this petition be granted? When shall the will of God be done in earth as it is now done in heaven? The preceding clause, upon which we commented in our last article, answers this question. It is when the kingdom of God is established upon the earth; for in the new heavens and the new earth, righteousness alone shall dwell. (2 Peter 3:13). "Also your people shall all be righteous; They shall inherit the land forever" (Isa. 60:21). The law of God, His holy will, is righteousness (Ps. 119:172), and the keeping of it constitutes the righteousness of God's people. (Deut. 6:25). The Lord's prayer, therefore teaches us to long for the coming and kingdom of our Lord, when the law of God shall be in the hearts of all men, even as it was in the heart of the Son of God when He was on earth.

But the coming of the Lord, and the establishment of His kingdom, will not bring about this state of things. When Christ comes, the only change which is wrought in men is the change from mortality to immortality. He does not change men's characters from sinfulness to righteousness, for just before He comes the decree goes forth: "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:11). Men will be ushered into eternity with just the same characters that they have when probation closes. Those who inhabit the new earth will all be righteous, simply because the transgressors will have been rooted out of it (Prov. 2:22), and the perfect will be permitted to remain in it, just because they are perfect in the midst of unrighteousness, even as Noah was.

This being the case, it follows that to utter the Lord's prayer with honesty of heart, is to pray that God will work in us that which is good; it indicates a willingness to submit ourselves in all things to the will of God, that we may become like Him. Certainly no one who knows what the will of God is, and who knows how it will come to pass that the will of God shall be done on earth as it is in heaven, could utter that prayer and not really desire to have that law written in his heart.

Although God's ways are as much higher than our ways as the heavens are higher than the earth, we have the assurance that every petition offered in humility and sincerity will be answered, and we may attain to this high standard. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

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