

"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY YE."

– JAN. 30. – MATT. 6:5-15. –

"Pray to thy Father which is in secret."

PRAYER is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed," says the poet: and he says truly, for the Scriptures inform us that God is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;" and again, that in the case of the saints the spirit or intention is accepted by the Lord when we approach him in seasons of distress, when we can find no language in which to clothe our feelings and desires, – when we come to him with spirit-groanings which we cannot utter in words. (Rom. 8:26.) Nevertheless both by words and example our Lord instructed us that our prayers should be uttered, formulated, and, if possible, not be left merely to incoherent feelings and groanings. It was to this end that he gave the instructions of the present lesson, in answer to the request of the apostles, "Lord, teach us to pray." – Luke 11:1.

While certain rules should govern all prayers, all approaches to God for communion, namely, that we should approach with humility and simplicity and reverence and in the name of Jesus, yet circumstances may govern in certain particulars: –

(1) The prayer of the sinner, the alien and stranger from God, should differ from that of the *child* of God who has received pardon and reconciliation along the divinely appointed lines. For instance, the prayer of the publican, approved by our Lord, did not address Jehovah as "Father" but as God – "God be merciful to me a sinner." On the contrary, those who come into relationship with God under the terms of his covenant in Christ have the privilege not only of recognizing God as the Creator and Ruler, but also as their "Heavenly Father," and of addressing him as such.

(2) Amongst those who approach God in prayer as his children, different circumstances and conditions may have a bearing as respects the manner of worship: at times they may properly go aside and hold communion with the Father in secret, – where no earthly eye will see and no earthly ear will hear. Our Lord's own example should be an illustration of this privilege: we remember how it is written of him frequently that he went apart from his disciples and prayed alone, and how sometimes he spent the entire night in solitary prayer.

(3) Prayer at other times may properly and profitably be offered in the presence of fellow-believers and audibly, as the prayer of all and in which all are interested and join. An illustration of this may also be drawn from our Lord's example: for instance, his prayers recorded in John 11:41,42; 17; Matt. 11:25,26; Luke 10:21; 11:1. These prayers could not have been recorded if they had not been heard by the apostles: and the very object of their utterances in *their presence* was evidently for their benefit and blessing, as well as for the benefit and blessing of all the household of faith since then. The prayers of Moses and Solomon, David and Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are also recorded, and hence were made publicly, at least before the Lord's people. The record respecting the early Church seems to imply that they met together as one family and that their prayers as well as their hymns and song-prayers were general, in common, for the benefit of the whole company present. This is implied in the account given in Acts 1:14 where it is declared, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." Again, the words of one of their prayers are quoted in Acts 1:24; evidently this prayer was uttered audibly and in common. Again in 1 Cor. 14:16 [R2251 : page 28] the Apostle shows the thanksgiving of the congregation was and should be presented before the Lord not only audibly but in a language heard and understood by the worshipers, so that all might be able to say "Amen" to the thanksgiving and petition.

(4) At times it may not be improper to give thanks to God in the presence of a mixed company – believers and unbelievers. Illustration of this course is found [R2252 : page 28] in our Lord's own conduct. His prayer at his baptism in Jordan was witnessed evidently by the multitudes. (Luke 3:21.) Again our Lord prayed in public, in the hearing of the mixed gathering, at the grave of Lazarus. Again at the close of our Lord's ministry, when he prayed, "Father, save me from this hour," "Father, glorify thy name," the multitudes surrounding evidently heard or in some manner knew of the prayer, as is shown by the statement of John 12:29. Again our Lord's last prayer, on the cross, was audibly heard even by his enemies. – Matt. 27:46,50.

We have gone into details of proof respecting this subject because some of God's dear people have fallen into the error of supposing from this very lesson which we are about to consider, that it is wrong, sinful, to pray with or in the presence of others, either the Church or the world; they evidently put more stress upon our Lord's words, "Enter into thy closet, etc.," than our Lord intended, as we have shown from his own course of conduct, which certainly is the best illustration of the spirit of his teachings, – for "In him was no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." We remark incidentally, however, that we have no sympathy whatever with a practice which seems to be very common with the majority of Christians, namely, that of preaching at transgressors and scoring them, in prayers ostensibly offered to God. That this general disposition is recognized by others, is well illustrated by the following statement which appeared in a Boston secular journal, in a favorable comment upon the discourse of a very popular minister in that city. It said: "His prayer was generally acknowledged to be one of the finest ever offered to a Boston audience." There are indeed strong reasons for believing that many of the prayers offered are offered more to the congregations who hear than to the Almighty. This is a gross perversion of the wonderful privilege of prayer granted to God's children, and is of a piece with the hypocrisies of our Lord's day against which he warned his disciples, saying that those who thus pray are

hypocrites and have their reward in being heard of men; for that is the reward they seek.

To this day the traveler in the far East will see and hear prayers in every direction. Some of them may be results of misdirected energy and conscience, but many of them no doubt, as intimated by our Lord, are the results of spiritual pride and desire to be thought pious. A traveler in the East writes: "I was awakened in the early morning by a sound of prayer that was evidently intended to be heard of men whether God should hear it or not; it was a prolonged and energetic intoning, with an occasional rise in the voice that would be sure to start the soundest sleeper – it was the dragoman [guide], who after the morning greeting, added, 'Did you hear me pray this morning, my master?' Indeed I did, was my reply. And then he told me of his zeal and earnestness in prayer." The customs of Christendom differ; and yet in every direction we may find evidence of the same spirit, – ambition to be thought pious, effort to make an impression upon men and women, rather than to hold communion with the Heavenly Father. Such hypocrisies cannot be too strongly guarded against in all those who seek and enjoy communion with the Father and with our Lord Jesus Christ.

TO WHOM SHALL WE PRAY?

Our Lord's instruction is, "Pray to thy Father," "Pray, our Father which art in heaven." But this instruction is to be coupled with the further instruction, "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father *in my name* he will give it you." (John 15:16; 16:23.) "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6.) This excludes Jews, excludes Mohammedans, excludes the heathen, excludes all who have not a knowledge of Christ and a faith in him as the Redeemer. Only *believers* who *have* accepted Christ may approach God in prayer and call him "Father;" others may formulate petitions, but need expect no answers. It is only after we have accepted Christ and had our sins forgiven through faith in his blood that we may have the "boldness to

enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us." (Heb. 10:19,20.) These privileges which we enjoy under the New Covenant sealed and ratified by the blood of Jesus, had their correspondence and type in fleshly Israel and the Law Covenant sealed with the blood of bulls and goats; hence it was that the Jews as a people under their covenant were permitted to have access to God in prayer – tho not so directly and closely and intimately as we of the New Covenant.

"Use not vain repetitions as the heathen do." The natural tendency of the human mind in approaching the Creator seems to be to feel its own poverty of expression, and to attempt to make up for this by repetitions. Thus the Chinese have the "praying wheels" in which long prayers that the worshiper cannot remember to repeat are turned round and round by him as representing his will, his wish, his prayers. [R2252 : page 29] The same principle is used amongst Roman Catholics, who repeat the same prayers scores and hundreds of times, and are promised by their priests certain special rewards for "*saying*" these prayers, a certain number of times, – the omission of so many days or years of future purgatorial sufferings. The same influences seem to operate upon Protestants tho less grossly, and often leads to long prayers and improper details of instruction to the Almighty. The Lord wished his followers to pray intelligently and realize that they were approaching an intelligent and reasonable God who knows already, far better than we, what things we have need of; and who is more willing to give them to us than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children. Hence to repeat our petitions over and over is not only *vain*, in the sense that it will profit us nothing, but it indicates a low degree of spiritual development, very imperfect ideas respecting God, and a very imperfect relationship with him. The Christian neither needs to repeat certain prayers indefinitely, nor does he need to take up in prayer all the affairs of the world and the affairs of the Church, to tell God all about them and how they *ought* to be regulated. We have heard public prayers which implied that the worshiper had as much or more wisdom than the Almighty; because in them he undertook to tell the Almighty

how, when, where and what should be done the world over, at home and abroad; – how many should be converted at the meeting in which he was praying, and how the heathen everywhere, the world over, should be dealt with.

All this is monstrously wrong. No man is in a fit condition of heart to approach God in prayer who has not first learned of his own ignorance and lack of wisdom, and learned also of the Lord's infinitely superior knowledge and wisdom and power and love. The Christian who is advanced in knowledge and experience in the heavenly way will on the contrary be so filled with a realization of his own ignorance and insufficiency that he will rather go to the Lord praying, Lord teach us thy will, show me what is thy way and plan of salvation for Christendom and for the heathen, and show me how I may best be a co-worker with thee in the accomplishment of thy great and wonderful, wise and good purposes. Indeed, as the Christian's experience grows he is apt to come more and more to the condition of heart where his prayers to God will be chiefly *thanks* for mercies and favors already received, expressions of confidence in the Lord's willingness and ability to fulfil all the gracious promises of his Word, temporal and spiritual, and request merely that the divine will be done.

"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." The Christian's prayer therefore is not for the purpose of giving information to God, nor for the purpose of calling attention to matters which he might overlook or forget; but on the contrary he is enjoined to pray and required to pray, because it will benefit himself: God withholds many of his blessings until we approach to ask them in prayer, in order that *we may realize our need* of his aid, and our dependence on him. Our prayers therefore are not to induce God to give us things which he desires to withhold from us, but are merely to secure the things which *he desires us to have* and has promised to us, and is more willing to give than to withhold. And how wise is this divine arrangement: how many of God's people have realized great benefit from this divine arrangement that we must ask if we would receive,

must seek if we would find, must "knock if it be opened unto us." And thus, in addition to the favors asked and received, the very necessity of prayer itself has brought us into close fellowship with the Lord – into the enjoyment of one of our greatest privileges and blessings.

"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY YE."

"Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name." This address of God as *our* Father, as we have just seen, does not imply the fatherhood of God to all mankind; for on the contrary we remember that our great Teacher declared to some, "Ye are of your father, the devil." And the Apostle declares that *we were* "children of wrath" even as others still are. We have "escaped the condemnation that is on the world," and have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son – out from amongst those who are children of wrath into the family of God; so that now, as sons of God, all who believe in Jesus may pray, "*Our Father*, which art in Heaven." This portion of the petition is an address of reverence, an acknowledgment of God's greatness, and implies our humility and littleness. It implies that the worshiper [R2253 : page 29] reverences God and is not undertaking to address him in a light or irreverent manner: even his very name is revered as holy by the true worshiper.

"Thy Kingdom come: thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." This petition is not in the nature of a demand, nor even an expression of impatience. Rather it is an acknowledgment on the part of the worshiper that he has *faith* in the divine promise that a Heavenly Kingdom shall in God's due time be established in the earth. It is an acknowledgment that the worshiper not only believes God's promise but that he is in sympathy with it and desires the Lord's Kingdom – longs for it. It thus implies that he is not in sympathy with sin, nor with the kingdoms of this world and the present order and its imperfect social, financial, political and ecclesiastical arrangements. It is an acknowledgment, [R2253 : page 30] furthermore, that the worshiper is longing for the condition in which no sin will be possible; – in which

God's will shall prevail on earth as well as in heaven. It thus implies that he is out of harmony with sin and in harmony with righteousness, truth, goodness. It is an acknowledgment, nevertheless that God's will is not done on earth, that his Kingdom has not come to earth as yet; for when his kingdom comes, when Christ, the appointed King, shall take unto himself his great power and reign, the result will speedily be as shown in the Scriptures, that Satan will be bound, evil in general restrained, and on the contrary knowledge, peace and blessing shall fill the whole earth. (Rev. 20:1-3; 21:1-5; 22:1-6.) There is no attempt here to tell the Lord, what must be done, and how and when his Kingdom must be established: the rightly instructed worshiper is supposed to know that he who made all things is thoroughly competent to govern and direct and overrule all things, and that he is "working all things according to the council of his own will." The worshiper, it is supposed, has gone to the divine Word for instruction and will continue to receive his instructions there respecting the divine purposes: in this petition he is merely expressing his full acquiescence to the divine arrangement and rejoicing therein.

"Give us this day our daily bread." The words of Matthew here differ slightly from those of Luke. Literally translated Luke's statement is, "be giving continually our daily bread." Matthew says "this day," while Luke says "day by day." The thought is practically the same, however. It is not an appeal to God for superabundance and much goods laid up for many days; nor is it a request for luxuries: but merely asking, Lord, give us those things which are needful to us daily. Contentment is the very spirit of this petition. Whoever prays to the Lord after *this manner*, and from the heart, will surely be a very thankful and very contented person. And this petition is as broad as the divine promise respecting earthly things would warrant. "Thy bread and thy water shall be sure," leaves no room for requests for luxuries. Moreover, while this petition is the only one in the prayer of an earthly character, the only one taking hold upon earthly affairs and interests, it also may be understood as relating to spiritual things; indeed, we believe it will be so applied by all God's children, in proportion as

growth is made in grace and knowledge and spirituality. The spiritually minded will be asking for the spiritual food, the spiritual necessities, day by day and will more and more realize that as the Heavenly Father clothes the lilies and feeds the ravens, so, much more, he will care for the temporal interests of all who are seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, – the righteousness which it will enforce.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." What a thought! Who can offer a prayer "after *this manner*" and yet be under control of the evil spirit – filled with malice, anger, envy, hatred, strife, being unforgiving, unthankful, resentful, backbiters, slanderers? All these works of the flesh and the devil proceed from evil conditions – not one of them is prompted by true love, such as the Lord inculcates and his spirit inspires. The very essence of Christian principle is love, sympathy, forgiveness of the faults of others, even as we realize we have faults ourselves and that God has graciously forgiven us these for Christ's sake. Our Lord emphasizes the importance of this forgiving spirit before we can be children of our Father in Heaven, saying, in another place, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged;" and with what measure ye measure others, your own conduct shall be measured. (Matt. 7:2.) We remember, also, that he gave a parable illustrating the subject, representing his forgiven disciple as a servant who owed ten thousand talents, whose debt he had freely set aside, and did not press; but when that follower manifested so different a spirit that, finding a fellow servant who owed a few pence, he treated him unmercifully, then the Lord's mercy and generosity were likewise withdrawn from him. – See Matt. 18:23-35.

Let every Christian in approaching the throne of the heavenly grace, daily inquire of his own heart, whether or not he has forgiven those who are indebted to him, as he desires that God should freely forgive him for Christ's sake. This does not mean the forgiving of financial indebtedness and destruction of our account books, except that on the debtor willing but unable to pay, we should have mercy and patience, even as we hope for mercy of our Lord. Its special application

is to moral obligations, transgressions and indebtedness. Nor does this imply that we should pay no attention to the transgressions of others against ourselves – that we should not recognize offences. True, we should not be swift to take offense, we should be slow to anger, we should never take offense unless offense is most evidently *intended*. And then, while we may not forgive in the absolute sense until our forgiveness is asked, according to divine pattern on this subject, yet we should be always in a forgiving attitude of mind: that is to say, we should harbor no vindictive or malicious feelings, we should have no feelings except those of love and sympathy, and a desire to forgive the wrong that has been done us, as soon as possible, and an anxiety to make the way of reconciliation as smooth and easy as possible for the wrong-doer; and we should be on the alert to discover and prompt to rectify any missteps or wrong doings on our own parts. [R2253 : page 31]

And "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The thought here is slightly obscure; for we all remember that "God tempteth no man." Amplifying the sentence so as to give us what we believe is the literal translation of it, and adding in brackets some suggestive words to make more plain our conception of the Lord's full thought here, as it was understood by those who heard him, this passage reads thus: – "And bring us not into temptation [merely], but [also] deliver us from the Evil One." It is a part of the divine arrangement to bring us or permit us to be put into positions of trial or testing. We are not to rebel against the divine wisdom in this matter, but quite to the contrary to acquiesce in it, and to realize that trials are essential to our development. Hence, instead of praying to be kept from temptations, our prayer rather is that when our Lord in his providences brings us into places of testing, he will also stay with us during the trial, and let his grace be sufficient for us, and not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but with the temptation provide also a way of escape – delivering us from the Evil One, Satan.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen." These words, altho found in our Common Version and in some of the Greek manuscripts, are not found in the *oldest* Greek MSS., the Sinaitic and the Vatican. These would therefore seem to have been human words added to the words of our Lord. So far as this earth is concerned, these words have not been true throughout the Gospel age; the dominion of the earth has not been the Lord's; the power of earth has not been the Lord's; and the glory of the earth has not been the Lord's. On the contrary, Satan has been "the prince of this world" and has worked in the hearts of the children of disobedience, and has blinded the minds of them that believe not the gospel. And the kingdoms and powers of this world have been Satan's, and God's people are waiting for God's Kingdom to come, as represented in verse ten, to overthrow the kingdoms of this world, and to establish the Kingdom of righteousness: to bind Satan and to destroy the works of the flesh and the devil.
