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## "LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY."

– LUKE 11:1-13. – JULY 22. –

MANY are the unscriptural views respecting prayer. It is well that we notice that our Lord never taught the multitudes to pray, nor intimated that they should pray – even though the multitudes with whom he was in contact were nominally people of God. Even with his consecrated disciples the Lord waited until they asked him for instruction on the subject. Our Lord's declaration to the woman of Samaria was, "God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Any other worship, any other prayer, is a mockery which God not only does not invite but especially reprimands, saying to those who are not desirous of doing his will, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee." (Psa. 50:16,17.) And again, "Forasmuch as this people draw nigh me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me...Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder." – Isa. 29:13,14.

From this standpoint the privilege of prayer is a very wonderful one: it implies that the suppliant is on terms of intimate acquaintance with the great Creator of the universe, so that he is welcomed into the divine presence and heart. In accord with this the symbolical representation is that the prayers of the saints of God ascend before him as a sweet incense – the heavenly Father is pleased to receive the humblest worship and reverent petitions of his child adopted into his family through Jesus Christ. [R3805 : page 204]

## OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Only those who have become God's children by forsaking sin and laying hold upon Christ as their Savior are accorded the privilege of approaching the throne of grace that "they may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16.) In the world, therefore, only those who are accepted in the Beloved are privileged to call Jehovah God by the endearing name, "Our Father who art in heaven." The attempt to thus approach God implies (1) a faith in the divine being; (2) a realization of dependence upon him; (3) a faith that a way of reconciliation with the Father has been effected through the Redeemer; (4) a realization that the great Creator no longer condemns the suppliant, but accepts him as his son. More than this, it implies that the suppliant recognizes the fact that there are other sons of God who, like himself, have fled from sin and been adopted into God's family – the petition is not "My Father," but "Our Father in heaven." Therefore, whoever thus prays intelligently must have interest in and concern for all the interests of the family of God. Whatever of selfishness he might have had formerly he must divest himself of when he comes to the Father, and must realize himself as merely one of the favored class of sons thus privileged. It is in harmony with this thought that all of the Lord's truly consecrated people have special pleasure when permitted to approach the throne of grace together, whether but two or three or in larger numbers.

In proportion as the Lord's people grow in grace, in knowledge and in love, they will grow in appreciation of the great privilege of prayer. Not that prayer will take the place of the study of the divine Word, but that realizing more and more from the Word something of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of divine mercy and provision, the true children of God have comfort of heart and joy in going to the throne of grace to give thanks unto the Lord for all his mercies, to commune with

him respecting their trials and difficulties, and to assure him of their loving confidence in the gracious promises of his Word, in the exceeding riches of his grace, and in his wisdom, love and power to fulfil toward them and in them all his gracious promises.

The more the Lord's people advance in knowledge of him the more they will appreciate the fact that the divine arrangement is broader and deeper and higher than anything they could suggest, so that such are granted liberty to ask what they will with the assurance that it will be done. The Lord well knows that this class will ask that his will be done; hence the promise is made only to those who abide in Christ and who have his Word of promise abiding richly in them. All such learn, before attaining this station and liberty, that as the heavens are higher than the earth so are the [R3806 : page 204] Lord's ways and provisions higher than our conceptions and every way to be preferred. Hence, while praying to the best of their ability in harmony with the promises of the Word, these would always include the sentiment expressed by our Redeemer, "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

### **"PRAY WITHOUT CEASING"**

"Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks." (I Thess. 5:17,18.) The advanced Christian is to be so fully in accord with the Father and the Son and the divine program, The Plan of the Ages, that his entire life will be a prayer and a song in respect to every affair of life. He will have in his mind primarily, What is the will of God in this matter? "whether we eat or drink or whatsoever we do let us do all to the glory of God." The heart that is thus continually in all of life's affairs looking for divine direction is thus continuously in a prayer attitude, and no other condition is proper to the Christian – "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths;" "Delight thyself

also in the Lord and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."  
– Prov. 3:6; Psa. 37:4.

But while thus in the prayer attitude continuously we must not neglect the privilege of a more formal approach to the throne of grace – on bended knee, privately and alone. Whoever does not embrace this privilege misses a portion of the great blessing which the Lord has arranged for his benefit and assistance in walking in the narrow way. Our Master spent seasons in prayer alone, and surely all of his disciples may well follow his example in this as well as in other matters to advantage. As our Lord sometimes prayed in the presence of his disciples, as is evidenced by their recording his words, so all of his followers are to realize that they have a special privilege of fellowship in prayer, praying to one another, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and in petitions to the throne of grace. – Eph. 5:19; I Cor. 14:14-17.

While family prayer is not specifically taught in the Scriptures we cannot doubt its appropriateness under some conditions. True, the natural family is separate and distinct from the family of the Lord, but where the natural family has been reared in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" it is scarcely supposable that the minor children would be so lacking of reverence as not to have pleasure in bowing with their parents for the worship of the Creator. Where the children are grown so that they have discretion for themselves, if they be not pleased to join in the worship, in our opinion the Lord will be all the better pleased that they be not coerced, for he seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth. Where the husband or wife is not a child of God, unbegotten of the Spirit, it would be inappropriate that he or she should lead in the worship, addressing the throne of grace. The more we recognize the divine limitations on this subject the more will we and those with whom we are in contact appreciate prayer as a great

privilege, which is accorded only to those who can with sincere hearts address Jehovah as our Father, and these can be only such as have accepted the Lord Jesus as their Savior, for "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." – John 14:6.

As in the type none but the priests offered incense before the Lord, the teaching would seem to be that only the Royal Priesthood, the members of the body of [R3806 : page 205] Christ, have this privilege in the present time. Nevertheless, we might reasonably suppose that the children of believers, who have not yet reached the deciding point of loyalty or disloyalty to the Lord, would properly enough be privileged to approach the throne of grace through the relationship of their consecrated parents. We might even suppose that justified believers, who have not reached the point of making a consecration of themselves to the Lord, would have the right, the privilege, of addressing the Redeemer in prayer: and yet we know of no Scripture that positively says or indirectly implies that an unconsecrated believer has any acceptance at the throne of grace, or any standing whatever before the Father as amongst those who may address him in the petition, "Our Father which art in heaven."

### **"HALLOWED BE THY NAME"**

The more it is recognized that the privilege of prayer is an exclusive one the more those enjoying the privilege will be inclined to use it in a most reverent manner. The kings of earth make resolutions respecting times, seasons, dress, etc., regulating those ushered into their presence; and all who have a proper appreciation of the majesty of the King Eternal, invisible, the only true God, will approach in a worshipful, reverent spirit, implied in the expression, "Hallowed be thy name." Holy and to be revered is our God; his name stands for everything that is just and wise and loving.

## **"THY KINGDOM COME"**

"Thy will be done, as in heaven so in earth." These words, not found in the older MS. in Luke, are found in the Matthew MS., and are, therefore, properly to be considered a part of the petition. Be it noted, however, that while this petition as it stands is appropriate enough as a prayer, it was evidently not the Lord's intention that it should be continually used as the only petition at the throne of grace, but rather he gave it as a sample. The various items of the Lord's prayer should therefore be to the Lord's people a suggestion of the general character of their petitions, and not be understood as binding their terms, their expressions, their words.

The thoughts of the true disciples are directed to the fact that the present condition of sin and death is not to be everlasting, that God has provided for and promised a glorious kingdom through his Son, and the Church his Bride, under which evil will be conquered and brought under complete subjection to righteousness. Those who are in proper relationship of heart to the Lord must recognize this fact, and be so separated from the spirit of this world that they will long for the installation of the reign of righteousness, even though they will know that this will imply the overthrow of present institutions. Their hearts are so in accord with the Lord that they are out of accord with every form and institution and vine not of the Father's right-hand planting. (Isa. 60:21.) Longing for the Kingdom that will bless the world, they also long for the promised privilege of being joint-heirs with their Redeemer as members of that Kingdom class which shall bless the world and uplift it out of sin-and-death conditions.

## **GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD**

"Give us day by day our daily bread," or "our needful bread" [Am. Rev.]. There is no attempt here to supplicate delicacies, but

merely an expression of trust in the Lord and confidence that he will provide, in harmony with his promises that our bread and water shall be sure. Indeed when we remember our Master's words, that the heathen have in mind what they shall eat, what they shall drink and wherewithal they shall be clothed, but the heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of, we perceive that to the Spirit-begotten and advanced Christian these words respecting daily bread imply more particularly the spiritual than the earthly food. Provision for all our necessities, both temporal and spiritual, according to divine wisdom, is briefly summed up in this expression.

To suppose that the Lord here is merely referring to the natural food would imply that the petitioners were merely natural men, whereas we have seen that the prayer was taught only to those who were reckonedly New Creatures in Christ by a covenant to walk in his steps in the narrow way. It must be understood, therefore, that it is the New Creature that is offering the petition, and this will imply that it is the nourishment of the New Creature that is chiefly under consideration – with whatever provision for temporal necessities the heavenly Father may see best. This is distinctly brought to our attention in the last verse of this lesson, wherein the heavenly Father is represented as dispensing the holy Spirit – the spiritual blessings and experiences which develop in his children his own holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Truth, the Spirit of the Lord.

### **GOD'S MERCY PROPORTIONATE TO OURS**

"Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us." The sins here referred to, or as in Matthew, "debts," are in no way related to original sin, which we are not to pray to have forgiven, but which the Father has already made provision to forgive unconditionally to those who accept Christ. Original sin is not forgivable, but God in his mercy provided a



Redeemer, and we read, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." He is a propitiation for our sins, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. This prayer relates not, therefore, to that sin whose forgiveness permits us to approach God, and by covenant through Jesus to call him our Father. The sins mentioned in this prayer, or the "debts," are those which are ours after we have become New Creatures in Christ, children of the Highest. Because of our imperfections we cannot do the things which we would, the things which we know to be the perfect will of our Father in heaven.

In a certain sense these are our debts or obligations to the Father from the time we start to walk in newness of life – not after the flesh but after the Spirit. Walking after the flesh we find that we cannot come up to the Spirit, hence the "debts." It is for the forgiveness of these that we are privileged to petition – matters **[R3807 : page 206]** of omission and commission not wilfully done, not intentionally omitted. In the divine arrangement the merit of Christ not only covered the sins that are past, but made provision for our weaknesses and blemishes en route for the Kingdom. God could indeed apply the merit of Christ to these debts and excuse us from them, and not require us to mention them at all, but for our advantage he has arranged it otherwise, that we must make application for the covering of these debts, for exoneration in the name of Jesus, and so doing we learn three lessons: **(1)** We learn to keep track of our blemishes, and are the better assisted, therefore, in the future in warring a good fight against them; **(2)** We are thus continually reminded of our dependence upon the merit of our Savior, the merit of the precious blood. **(3)** We are thereby assisted in being merciful, compassionate and generous toward others who may be our debtors in matters great or small.

How just and how wise is the divine arrangement which requires of us, in applying for mercy, to pledge ourselves to the



Lord that we also are merciful, forgiving to others, not attempting to exact justice from those with whom we have contact and who are under some obligation to us. This is a wise provision, in that it will assist us in the right direction, assist us in the development of character which the Lord can approve, and which would be meet for those who would be inheritors of the Kingdom. It will assist us in our endeavors to be copies of God's dear Son, and like unto our Father in heaven in the sentiments of our hearts at least. It is just, because it is not God's arrangement to simply show us favors above the remainder of mankind, except as we shall receive his mercies with proper appreciation, and with a desire to attain the condition which would be pleasing to him and which he would be pleased to reward with the everlasting life and the Kingdom glories.

### **"DELIVER US FROM EVIL"**

These words are not in the original in Luke's account of the prayer, but they are found in Matthew's account, and hence are properly a part of the prayer. "Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (R.V., Matt. 6:13.) This statement is a little confusing, for we have the assurance that "God tempteth no man." (Jas. 1:13.) The thought then seems to be that there is an evil one ever ready to attack the Lord's people to the extent that the Lord will grant the privilege, the opportunity, as in the case of Job.

We remember, too, that trials, testings and temptations are necessary for our development as New Creatures, and since these are necessary and of divine arrangement or permission, it would not be appropriate for us to pray that the Lord would spare us from all trials and temptations, for, says the Apostle, "If ye be without chastisements then are ye not sons." (Heb. 12:8.) We must, therefore, paraphrase this statement in our thoughts and suppose it to mean, "Bring us not into temptation that would be

too severe for us, or abandon us not in temptation; but deliver us from the evil one." This thought is in full accord with the entire testimony of the Word of God. The promise is, "He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape." (I Cor. 10:13.) The evil one would indeed utterly destroy the Lord's consecrated ones, but he will not be permitted so to do. Thus far he may go but no farther. If God be thus for us who or what power can prevail against us – nothing shall by any means separate us from the love of God in Christ.

### **"ASK AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN YOU"**

Although our Lord did not teach his disciples to pray until they requested instruction, this was evidently not because he was unwilling to assist them, but because he wished them to realize and desire further teaching. It may be argued by some that no one needs instruction in how to pray, but that thought is not borne out by this lesson. Evidently there are proper and improper prayers. We might as well say that no one needs instruction in singing or in playing music. We do sometimes say that singers and players are born with the talent, nevertheless the most talented musicians by instruction reach their proficiency.

And so with prayer. We have already seen that great mistakes have been made as to who may pray and as to what may be properly prayed for, and we have already considered the Lord's outline respecting a proper form of prayer, beginning with ascriptions of praise and thanks and proceeding to expressions of confidence in God and the promises of his Kingdom, continuing with acknowledgments of our dependence upon his provisions day by day, and ending with expressions of confidence in his power and goodness to protect us and ultimately to deliver us. This is the general form which our Lord commends to us as proper in approaching the throne of grace.

On the other hand, however, it is interesting for us to note that the Lord does not wait until we have become proficient in the use of language and in the form of expressing our petitions to him, but that so gracious and broad are his arrangements that we may come in imperfection and with stammering tongues to tell him of our devotion, our appreciation, our confidence, etc., in any manner that we please. The suggestion is, however, that in proportion as we appreciate the privilege of prayer, we will desire to use the privilege in the manner most acceptable to the great One whom we thus approach.

Why should the Lord wish us to ask before he would give his blessing? For a wise purpose, we may be sure! He would have us feel our need, he would have us appreciate the privilege, he would have us look for the response, and in all these experiences he would develop us as his sons of the New Creation. Therefore we are to ask and seek and knock if we would find the riches of God's grace, and have opened to us more and more the wonderful privileges and mercies and blessings which he is so willing to give to us as we develop in character and in preparation for his mercies. **[R3807 : page 207]**

It was to illustrate this that the Lord gave the parable of this lesson respecting the householder who was short of food for the entertainment of his visitors. He was represented as importunately urging upon his neighbor the necessities of the case, and ultimately thus succeeding. Our Lord instructs us that we should be so earnest in our desires for the Kingdom, for the honor of the Father's name, for the daily portion of the bread of life, for deliverance from the evil one, and for God's keeping power in every trouble, and in all of life's affairs his supervision, that we continually go to him day by day, hourly and momentarily, watching and praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks, accepting by faith the promises of his Word that all things shall work together for our good. To such

the blessings are on the way, sometimes coming in one form and sometimes in another, but generally in ways not anticipated and generally larger by far than anything we had asked.

### **"YE BEING EVIL KNOW HOW"**

Choosing an illustration from life our Lord reminded the disciples that few if any earthly parents, if their children cried to them for blessings, would give them injurious things instead. What kind of a father if asked for bread would give his child a stone, if asked for fish would give him a serpent, if asked for an egg would give him a scorpion? Certainly such parents would be few, if any. The force of our Lord's language is seen if we remember that the bread of oriental countries very much resembles a stone, being about the size of a large hand and baked in an oven provided with stones and whitened with the ashes. Some kinds of serpents resemble certain kinds of fish, too. And there is a small white scorpion which rolls itself up in the shape of an egg. Basing his argument upon these illustrations, which would commend themselves to his hearers, our Lord proceeds to institute a comparison as between the dealings of earthly parents with their children and the dealings of God with his children. His words are, If ye being evil, being imperfect through the fall, more or less selfish in all of your thoughts and words and dealings, still would be disposed to give good gifts to your children, how much more would your heavenly Father give the good gift of all gifts, the holy Spirit, to them that ask him for it.

The clear intimation is that this should be the essence of our petitions to our heavenly Father, for more of his holy Spirit, and that we should look to the experiences of life, its trials, disappointments, discouragements, oppositions, not as being really injurious to us, not as being stones, scorpions and serpents, but as being blessings in disguise, if we receive them in the proper spirit. The Lord is able to make all things abound in the

interest of his children, the New Creatures in Christ Jesus. These know from experience that some of their severest trials and disappointments of an earthly kind have worked out for them development of character, elements of the holy Spirit, which they probably could not have so well received in any other manner. Hence, when we pray to the Lord for his blessings, we are with patience to wait for them, and to seek them and to find them in the various circumstances of life which his providences will permit. Remembering that the holy Spirit is the spirit [R3808 : page 207] of meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love, we may well ask ourselves how else could the Lord work out for us these elements of character which we desire did he not permit to come upon us the trials and difficulties of life necessary to their development.

We know not the author of the following, but consider it worthy of reproduction as an illustration of earthly kindness and a reminder of the gracious message from Jehovah: –

**"LIKE AS A FATHER PITIETH HIS CHILDREN,  
SO THE LORD PITIETH THEM THAT REVERENCE  
HIM." – PSA. 103:13**

The life of a beautiful girl was nearing its close. The busy father, active in legal and political life, made short visits to his office to perform the most necessary duties, and hurried home again day by day to be near her in her last days. He spent every possible moment in granting her every wish, and it was a comfort to him that his daughter was finding in her religion a source of strength that robbed approaching death of its terror. He was an upright man, but one from whose busy life religion had been crowded out.

One day as he sat by the bedside, his daughter asked him to read to her. He found a magazine, and read some bright bits of poetry and fiction. It pleased her, but she wanted something else.

"Father," she asked, "will you get my Bible and read from that?"

"Certainly, my dear," he answered, and was rather glad than otherwise.

He was a strong man with a clear voice and a good degree of self-control. He had mastered his own feelings in these days of patient and affectionate ministrations, that he might bring to the sick-room every element of cheer that was possible. And now he began, calmly and quietly, to read the Sermon on the Mount. He knew where to find it, and he knew that it was good, and he read it with a growing appreciation of its beauty and sublimity.

But the daughter grew more and more restless.

"Don't you like it?" he asked.

"O, father," she exclaimed, "it isn't that I want, about our righteousness exceeding that of the Scribes and Pharisees! Can't you find the place where it says, 'Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him?'"

His voice trembled a little, but he said, "I will find it," and he turned to the concordance in the back of the Bible. But when he found the place and began to read, 'Like as a father,' he could bear no more.

"O, my child," he cried, "if God cares for you as I do – "

He bent over the bed and wept.

"It is the verse we both need," she said softly, after a few minutes.

And he knelt beside the bed, and said:

"Yes, my dear – that is the verse we both need."

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