

## PRAYER A GREAT PRIVILEGE

– JUNE 2. – MATTHEW 6:1-18. –

*"Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven."*

– Matt. 6:1. (R.V.)

THE MASTER in today's lesson tells of proper and improper giving of charity. He extends the subject and explains proper and improper prayers and finally proper and improper fasting. In all these He denounces hypocrisy, theatrical display. His followers are to be actuated solely by a desire to please the Heavenly Father and have His approval. There may be times and places where the giving of charity in the presence of others would be perfectly proper, or praying in the presence of others would be entirely right, and where fasting might come to the knowledge of others without reproach.

The point which the Great Teacher makes is the motive actuating us. If we are actuated by a selfish motive, if we are seeking show and applause or earthly gain, the procedure cannot bring Divine approval or blessing – "Blessed are the pure in heart." We may be *seen* to do good or to pray or to fast, but we are not to do our charities, our praying and our fasting *to be seen*. Of such the Lord says, "They *have received* their reward" – nothing more is coming to them; they get the publicity sought.

## THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

Prayer is a privilege. Jesus did not command His disciples to pray, nor did He even give them a form of prayer until they requested it. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed." The Lord's people must feel their need of Divine grace and help in order to appreciate the privilege of approaching the throne of heavenly grace. The trials and difficulties, the sorrows and temptations of life

frequently impel God's children to prayer. It marks a better, a higher Christian development when they love to come to the Throne of grace, not only in their sorrows, but also in their joys, to give thanks, to praise, to worship, to adore.

It will be noticed that our Lord did not tell about how the world should pray, but merely taught His disciples: "when *ye* pray." As a matter of fact, the Gentiles, the world of mankind in general, have no access to the Throne of grace. Only those in covenant relationship with God (Jews and Christians) ever had any Divine assurance that their petitions would be accepted by Him. This may cause surprise to some, so general is the custom of encouraging and exhorting everybody to pray. A brief glance at the situation, however, shows us the fixed principle underlying the matter. Let us note it. The world in general, the race of Adam, was alienated from God through wicked works. Adam was under a covenant with God by which he enjoyed the privileges of a son of God. This included fellowship, communion, prayer and Divine supervision and care even to the extent of everlasting life. But Adam's disobedience broke that covenant, abolished that covenant-relationship and all its privileges. (Hos. 6:7, R.V.) The only ones who now enjoy the privilege of prayer are those who have been accepted of God back into covenant-relationship. The natural Israelite was so accepted under the Law Covenant; hence the Temple at Jerusalem was called the House of Prayer. It was specifically for the Jewish nation, but all nationalities had the privilege of becoming Jewish Proselytes and thus of being received into all the privileges of Jews, which included the privilege of prayer.

Our Lord, on the basis of His better sacrifice for sins, made holy and acceptable to still higher privileges of prayer such as became His disciples, His footstep followers. These, from Pentecost onward, were called sons of God and enjoyed the begetting of the Holy Spirit. At first these were only Jewish believers, but in due time **[R5021 : page 150]** the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was broken down, and all Gentile believers, from the time of Cornelius

onward, were accepted as spirit begotten sons and granted all the privileges of prayer. – Acts 10.

These Gentiles did not come into relationship with God through the Mosaic Law Covenant, but through the Covenant of sacrifice, under which they were called and accepted as joint-sacrificers with Christ: "Gather together My saints unto Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." (Psa. 50:5.) Only such Gentiles as accept Christ and enter with Him into this covenant of sacrifice can, during this Age, become sons of God and enjoy the privileges of sonship, of which prayer is one. The habit of inviting people out of covenant-relationship with God to pray is both unscriptural and unreasonable. God heareth not sinners (John 9:31); those who come to Him through Christ are acceptable only because Jesus is their Advocate. It is plain to be seen, then, that those who approach God in their own names – without having accepted the Advocate and His terms of discipleship – such can have no standing with the Father and their prayers are unacceptable.

Instead of exhorting our friends and neighbors to pray to God and to trust for the fulfilment of their prayers, we should give them the Scriptural counsel, to repent of sin and by faith to accept the forgiveness of their sins, according to the testimony of God's Word, by making a full consecration of themselves to be the footstep followers of Jesus. Then, as sons of God, they would have all the privileges of sonship in this present time as well as the glorious prospects hereafter.

### **VAIN REPETITIONS OF THE HEATHEN**

All are heathens or Gentiles – all of the world who have not left the world and come into covenant-relationship with God through Christ. Such outsiders, not understanding the Only Way, the Only Door of God's favor, vainly suppose that they will be heard for their much speaking, and therefore repeat their prayers. Some use **[R5022 : page 150]** praying wheels; others use beads; and still others repeat hundreds of times certain ejaculations.

None are heard except those of Jesus' followers, and Jesus counsels these not to think that the length of their prayers would make them acceptable with the Father. They have no need to offer long prayers, because, as Jesus said, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." Why then should we ask at all? Because this is the Divine arrangement, and evidently with the purpose of stimulating our faith and of giving us the greater and the more frequent blessings. God thus deals with us as with dear children whom He loves and whom He would educate into the practices of life most helpful to themselves. When Jesus had long prayers to offer they were never uttered in public; He went apart into the mountain. So with His followers; they are to go aside and have their communion with the Father chiefly in private, although fellowship in public prayer in gatherings of the Lord's people is distinctly approved.

### **A FORM OF SOUND WORDS**

Responding to the request of His disciples Jesus gave a sample of a proper prayer. We note its brevity, its simplicity, its directness, its orderliness.

(1) It opens with an ascription of praise and a plea that we are coming as children to a father: "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed [adored, honored] be Thy name." God's Name represents His character, His Kingdom, His personality. First of all, then, we ascribe honor, reverence, majesty, glory to our great Creator, who through His appointed way we delight to call our Father in Heaven.

(2) Next in order we acknowledge the Divine rule, authority. This means that our hearts are submissive to the will of God, for joy or sorrow, for pleasure or pain, for life or death, and we are continuing to express our confidence in the Divine power and promise that ultimately the Divine will shall be as fully and completely done in the earth as it is now done in Heaven: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven." In this we recognize the coming of Messiah's Kingdom and indirectly our own hopes connected with that

Kingdom – that we, if faithful, shall be associated with the Lord in His glorious Throne, in dispensing the blessings of Divine power and mercy to mankind, so as to effect the regeneration of all the willing and obedient of mankind.

(3) Our daily needs, our daily bread, is next the subject of request: "Give us this day our daily bread." How simple! God has promised that our bread and our water shall be *sure* in the sense that He will not forget us and our needs. In our petitions we merely suggest that we are waiting confidently upon the Lord, nothing doubting His willingness and ability to perform His promises. He has not promised, nor are we to ask for an abundance, wealth, riches, nor are we to specify fine food or luxuries. The thought is, Father, grant us daily such provisions for life's necessities as seemeth to Thee best for us. And should Divine Providence ever fail to make the provision, the believing soul is to recognize that it is neither from oversight nor from lack of power, but because Divine Wisdom sees best thus to deal with us.

(4) "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors." Here is emphasized the Master's teaching that only the merciful shall obtain mercy, that only the forgiving shall be forgiven. This has no reference whatever to the forgiveness of their original sins – they are past and gone forever to those who remain under the blood; they were covered when we accepted Christ and entered into covenant-relationship with Him. But we have daily shortcomings, weaknesses, imperfections, frailties, trespasses against the Divine Law. These we are to acknowledge, and Divine arrangement has been made for their forgiveness in harmony with our prayers, with but the one proviso, viz., that we appreciate the matter so deeply that we ourselves are acting upon the same principle in our dealings with others.

(5) "Lead us not into temptation [to abandon us there]." We feel our own weakness, imperfection; hence, while knowing that we must be brought in Divine providence into positions of trial and testing, we may well pray not to be abandoned there, not to be left to our own

strength, but that in harmony with the Lord's agreement His grace may be sufficient for us.

(6) The Bible assures us that there is an Evil One, and that he has great power and influence amongst men, that he is "the Prince of the power of the air," and "the god of this Age." How appropriate that we should request the Lord not to abandon us to the Devil's wiles!

The words, "For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen," are not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and are therefore properly omitted in the Revised Version as being no part of the Scriptures. The kingdom or rule of the present time are not of God. His Kingdom and power and glory are not in evidence. We await the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom for the overthrow of Satan's Empire, and the binding of the Adversary for a thousand years, and the ushering in then of the Divine Kingdom and power and glory, forever.

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