

“Teach Us to Pray”

“Lord, teach us to pray.” **IN THE FOREGOING ARTI-**
—**Luke 11:1** *The Dawn*, we considered cle in this month’s issue of two parables given by Jesus which dealt with importuning in prayer. The first of these, found in Luke chapter 11, was predicated on the request of the disciples found in our opening text, “Lord, teach us to pray.” The Master’s response to their inquiry, just preceding the parable, was his giving of a model prayer to the disciples, and to us, which is known throughout the world as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Its words have no doubt been spoken untold millions of times during the past two thousand years. Unfortunately, over the centuries it has, for most, become a prayer merely committed to memory and uttered in a repetitious manner. Few have truly appreciated and understood the real meaning and power of its words.

To consecrated believers, however, The Lord’s Prayer has a depth of import which goes to the heart of our understanding of God’s great plan of the ages. As such, it is worthy of our consideration and review, so that we might be ever encouraged and strengthened by its words and teachings, and hence give glory and honor to our loving Heavenly Father, the only “true” and “living God.”—Jer. 10:10

MEN OF PRAYER

The servants of God in every age have been men of prayer. This was particularly true of Jesus, who was in the habit of communing often and long with his Heavenly Father. The Old Testament record discloses that the prophets and other outstanding servants of God had also learned the value and necessity of prayer. Jesus' disciples seemed to be greatly impressed with the prayer life of their Master. They probably noted to some extent the strength and encouragement which he received through prayer, and his peaceful demeanor even in difficult circumstances. For this reason, they perhaps felt that they too would benefit if they were able to follow his example. Hence the request, "Lord, teach us to pray."

It was in response to this request that Jesus gave a model for prayer that he knew would be of benefit to his disciples and footstep followers throughout the Christian age. We are not to suppose that he expected his followers always to use the exact words of this prayer. It is, rather, a compilation of the essential elements of acceptable Christian prayer. It deals with fundamentals which should be taken to the throne of heavenly grace, and presents them in an appropriate order to best benefit those who desire to engage in close, personal communion with God.

On the evening before his death, Jesus said to his disciples, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7) It is reasonable to believe that the "words" he said should "abide in you" included the outline given in the model prayer of our lesson. This means that only if our petitions

are in keeping with the fundamentals of prayer suggested by the Master may we expect them to be answered favorably.

“OUR FATHER”

The opening salutation of the prayer expresses a thought which was new to the disciples. It addresses God as Father: “Our Father which art in heaven.” (Luke 11:2) To the natural house of Israel the Creator was the great Jehovah God, the “I Am” of the universe, and they were merely his servants. True Christians, Israelites indeed, also are servants of God. However, in addition to this, they have received the spirit of sonship, and are privileged to address the Creator as “Abba, Father.”—Rom. 8:15

Truly this is an intimate relationship, and when in prayer we come to God as “our Father,” it conjures before our minds assuring thoughts of God’s tender love and genuine interest in us as children—members of his divine family. Nevertheless, we are not to presume upon the dignity of God simply because we have been invited to become members of his family. His name is to be cherished and revered at all times, especially in prayer. We are reminded of this in the further words of salutation in the model prayer: “Hallowed be thy name.”

The word “hallowed” means “holy.” The glory of God’s name is a direct reflection of his perfect holiness, and should be our uppermost thought in connection with all of our petitions. Whether in prayer, in word or deed, the Christian’s first consideration always should be the glory and holiness of God. If, in our prayers, we are seeking chiefly our own interests rather than the glory of God and

his holy will, there is little likelihood that our praying will receive serious consideration by him.

We find examples of prayer in the Old Testament in which the glory and holiness of God were made the point of chief consideration. One of Moses' appeals on behalf of Israel was a prayer in which he beseeched God not to blot his rebellious people out of existence, but to preserve them. His chief consideration in this prayer was not so much the salvation of Israel as it was the upholding of God's holy character. Moses' words were, "Lest the [inhabitants of the] land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness." (Deut. 9:28) As Moses viewed the matter, if God destroyed the Israelites after bringing them out of Egypt, it would reflect against the divine character and name. Thus in this prayer we find an application of the same principle later set forth in the words, "Hallowed be thy name."

Another interesting example of considering the glory of God, shown by his holy character, is found in Joshua's prayer in connection with the defeat of the Israelites who attempted to capture the Canaanite city of Ai. Joshua asked God for direction and assistance in order that this defeat might in some way be turned into a victory. The important issue was the holy and glorious name of God: "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Josh. 7:9) To Joshua, it seemed inevitable that if God permitted the Israelites to be defeated after having brought them miraculously across Jordan into the land of promise, it would be a serious reflection

against the honor of his name—that he would lose esteem not only with the Israelites, but also with the Canaanites. Thus we see that in effect the spirit of Joshua’s petition to God on this occasion could well be summed up by the Master’s words, “Hallowed be thy name.”

“THY KINGDOM COME” —ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN

Having taught us that the first essentials of prayer are an appreciation of God as our Heavenly Father and the bestowing of proper reverence to his glorious and holy name, Jesus continues with his outline of prayer. He indicates that the next consideration in our supplications should be, not our own interests, but the welfare and blessing of others. This is set forth comprehensively in the expression, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2) When we pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done,” we are asking God to bless all mankind and teach them his will, that all might have the opportunity to obey and live. As a result, the very thought of this expression is calculated to enlarge our hearts, and cause us to be deeply concerned for the welfare of others, even at the present time.

When we ask for God’s kingdom to come, we may know for a certainty that our desires, thoughts, and longings, are in tune with the mind and will of our Heavenly Father. He has promised his kingdom of blessing not only once or twice, but by the mouth of all his holy prophets, by Jesus, and by the apostles. His kingdom and the blessings of life and joy it will bring to all mankind is the theme song of the

Word of God. Hence, to sincerely pray, “Thy kingdom come,” is to have that in mind which is close to the heart of God. He has planned and promised his kingdom throughout the ages, and it is the center of his interest in connection with his human creation.

In his prayer, Jesus makes mention of two phases of God’s kingdom—“in earth” and “in heaven.” Thus, when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” we are asking God to bestow the blessings of his kingdom upon the world in general—those “in earth” during his kingdom. In addition, by these words we are petitioning the Heavenly Father to provide to the heirs of the kingdom—those who are to reign with Christ “in heaven”—the necessary spiritual guidance and strength which will enable them to make their calling and election sure. In short, the request, “Thy kingdom come, . . . in earth” and “in heaven,” should be an expression of our being in harmony with the whole plan of God, and an evidence of our interest in that plan and our desire to cooperate in it. It means, also, that in praying for his kingdom to come and his will to be done, we are endeavoring in a personal way to have God’s will done in our own hearts and lives.

“OUR DAILY BREAD”

Only after having first ascribed glory to God, and then made clear our interest in the blessing of others by means of both the heavenly and earthly phases of God’s kingdom, may we properly think of prayer from the standpoint of seeking blessings for ourselves. Even in this respect our petitions should not be for more than the necessities of life—our “daily bread.” The request, “Give us this day our daily bread,” suggests a childlike dependence upon

the Heavenly Father for the needs of each day. (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3) It does not ask for the building up of reserves that will make us independent of God tomorrow, or at any future time. It is an expression of faith in God's ability and willingness to care for us today and in all the days as they come.

The question may be raised as to whether "our daily bread" in this prayer refers to material or spiritual food. There seems to be no scriptural reason why it should not include both. As spirit-begotten New Creatures at the present time, we have this "treasure in earthen vessels." (II Cor. 4:7) Thus, all matters pertaining to the body, the "earthen vessel," are related to our spiritual interests, and should have a place in our prayers. Nevertheless, our spiritual "daily bread" is vastly more important than material food.

The expression, "daily bread," might properly be thought of as including not only things we eat, but all of our needs—the daily portion which God allots to us, including our experiences of joy and sorrow, ease and pain, blessings and trials. All of these are in the "cup" which the Father pours for us, and it is well to have them all in mind when we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." When we take this broader view of our daily needs we should have no difficulty in discerning that God is continually answering our prayers.

Remembering that we have entered into a covenant of sacrifice which calls for the death of our humanity, we have no right to expect that God will necessarily preserve our health, or supply all the material food that may be essential for maintaining our bodies in a healthy, robust condition. The Apostle

Paul tells us that he had learned how to “suffer need.” (Phil. 4:12) If God, in his wisdom, permitted such a faithful one thus to suffer, we have no right to expect that he will deal differently with us.

Bread and water for the faithful of Israel under the Law Covenant was sure. (Isa. 33:16) In fact, God promised to bless them abundantly in “thy basket and thy store.” (Deut. 28:5) Consecrated believers, however, are not under that covenant. We are under a covenant which calls for the sacrifice of earthly interests and material blessings. Therefore, if God deems it to be for our highest spiritual interest to accept our sacrifice by means of a somewhat meager food allowance, we can rejoice to know that this is still our “need” which he is supplying.

SPIRITUAL “DAILY BREAD”

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3) This great truth was first given to natural Israel. Jesus used it when declining Satan’s suggestion to turn stones into bread. It was true concerning Israel under the Law Covenant, and it will be true of mankind under the New Covenant in the next age. Material food is neither sufficient nor wholesome enough to provide everlasting life apart from obedience to the will of God—to “every word” of his mouth.

This is especially true of New Creatures in Christ Jesus at the present time. Our food is the Word of God. It is our daily “manna” from heaven. By feeding upon it we grow in stature and strength, from a spiritual babe to full maturity in Christ. Hence when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are

asking for that upon which our spiritual existence depends. Furthermore, we are asking for God's Holy Spirit, which is his power and influence provided to assist us with the gathering, understanding, and application of the benefits of his "every word." Indeed, Jesus went on record to assure us that God would give the Holy Spirit of truth to consecrated believers who ask him for it.—Luke 11:13

The Spirit or mind of God reaches us through daily "eating" and appropriating his Word. When we pray for daily spiritual bread, it is implied that we are willing to give up our own plans, desires, thoughts, and be filled with and controlled by the plan and will of God, as delineated in the Scriptures. If our lives are thus in harmony with our prayers, we may confidently expect that our "daily bread" will be abundantly supplied. God's table will be laden with rich spiritual food of which it will be our happy privilege to partake.

"AS WE FORGIVE"

The next point in our Lord's prayer has to do with our relationship to God in connection with our transgressions. Jesus makes it clear that God's forgiveness of us is dependent upon our forgiveness of others: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," to which he adds, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." (Matt. 6:12,14) Here again we are asking in prayer for that which God has promised to do. We are invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" to obtain mercy. (Heb. 4:16) We are assured that God is "faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9) He has

promised to remove our transgressions as far from us “as the east is from the west.”—Ps. 103:12

We cannot expect God to forgive us, however, if we are harboring resentment and bitterness in our hearts toward others. Inadvertently we may attach an incorrect meaning to this part of the Master’s model prayer. We may think of the trespasses as being merely misunderstandings. Some incident may occur which we at first decide is a trespass against us, but upon investigation we find that we were misinformed, or that the supposed trespasser did not intend the matter as we thought he had. Thus we are glad to forgive.

In such a case, though, there is no need for forgiveness, because in reality there has been no trespass, only a misunderstanding. Our trespasses against God are not just misunderstandings. Daily we come short of glorifying his name as we should—in thought, word, and deed. It is, likewise, genuine trespasses which we need to forgive in others. It is important to note, however, that God does not forgive willful sins. If we are willfully opposing him and misrepresenting his character, we will have no desire to ask forgiveness.

The key to this point is found in the word “as.” God will forgive us “as,” or upon the same conditions to the same degree, and in the same manner, as we forgive others. This means that if others ask our forgiveness, as we ask for God’s forgiveness, we will forgive. Beyond even this, it means that we will have the spirit of forgiveness in our hearts even before being asked to forgive. We are not justified in harboring bitterness in our hearts, even against our worst enemies. We are not to malign them, nor

do them harm, remembering that we are to hate all sin, but not the sinner. We are to be ready and anxious at all times to extend forgiveness to others as soon as they ask, for this is God's attitude toward us. God wants us to be like him.

GOD TEMPTETH NO MAN

The next request in the Lord's Prayer is, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4) The *Emphatic Diaglott* paraphrased translation of this request reads, "Abandon us not to trial." However, the word-for-word translation and numerous other renderings, use the word "bring." *Strong's Greek Dictionary* defines the meaning of the word as "to carry inward." The same Greek word is sometimes translated "bring" in the *King James Version*. It would seem, therefore, that the translation, "Lead us not into temptation," is essentially correct.

Our first reaction to this thought is that surely God would not "bring" or "lead" his people into temptation, so why should we imply such a possibility in our prayer? However, God will not "abandon" us in temptation, either. We can be sure that God will neither bring nor lead us into temptation, nor will he abandon us therein. The principle involved in this part of the prayer is easily understood when we remember that the entire petition is an expression of what God has promised to do and promised not to do, and in offering it from our hearts we are but claiming God's promises.

We do not pray, "Thy kingdom come," with the thought that there is any possibility it will not come, nor are we asking God to do something he has not

already planned and promised to do. Prayer is not for this purpose. If we pray with the thought that we will thereby induce God to change his plans, either for us or for the world, we do not have the proper conception of what constitutes acceptable prayer. If our supplications are to be heard and answered, it will be because we are abiding in Christ and his words are abiding in us to direct our prayers in harmony with the will and plan of God.

Thus we pray, "Thy kingdom come," and we know that it will come because God has promised it. We pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and we know that all our needs will be supplied because this is what God has promised us he will do. We pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," and we know that God will forgive us in the same proportion that we forgive others, because he has promised to do so.

These are the blessings God has promised to bestow upon us as New Creatures, but there are also things which he has promised not to do. He has promised not to permit us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. (I Cor. 10:13) We are assured by his Word that God "tempteth" no man, meaning that he does not bring or lead his people into temptations. (James 1:13) It is therefore just as proper for us to claim these promises in our prayers as it is to claim those concerning the kingdom, our daily bread, and God's forgiveness.

Prayer is an expression to God of our interest in the fulfillment of his promises. God knows all that we have need of before we ask him, but he wants us to ask just the same. He is ready to forgive us before we ask, but he wants us to appreciate his

forgiveness the more by asking for it. We know that he will not lead us into temptation, but he wants us to be the more keenly aware of it by including the thought in our prayers. This will help us realize that when we yield to temptation it is because we have permitted ourselves to be drawn away because of the weakness of our fallen flesh, or by succumbing, if only momentarily, to the influences of Satan. Knowing that God does not lead us into temptation, in fact, should cause us, even the more quickly, to claim the promise of his forgiveness by humbly asking for it.

AN ADDITION MADE

The concluding sentence of the prayer is not in the original manuscripts. It reads, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." (Matt. 6:13) These words are a quote from I Chronicles 29:11, and evidently, on this account, the translator who added them to the Lord's prayer felt justified in so doing. However, when David spoke these words, he was referring to God's kingdom then operating in Israel. David was the king of Israel, but he sat upon "the throne of the LORD." (vs. 23) Hence in this expression of praise to God he acknowledged that he was not the real ruler of Israel in his own right, but merely a representative of God—that the kingdom belonged to him.

This typical kingdom of God came to an end when it was overthrown by the king of Babylon. At that time the prophetic declaration was, "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it [to] him." (Ezek. 21:27) Jesus is the rightful king, and while he came twenty centuries

ago, it was not as a reigning king. He came then in his humiliation. The exercise of his kingly power was not due until his Second Advent. Even then, until his kingdom is set up and manifested to the world, we should continue to pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

As long as we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” it would be inconsistent to say, “Thine is the kingdom.” It is true that God is the supreme ruler of the universe, and if we think of the expression, “Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory” from this standpoint, there is nothing particularly out of place with this expression. Nevertheless, these words were added by translators. They are words which originally referred to a kingdom which perished before the First Advent of Jesus. Therefore, we believe it more fitting for Christians not to use them in prayer today. Moreover, they are omitted in Luke’s gospel.

In summary, the model prayer which Jesus gave to his followers in response to the request, “Teach us to pray,” embodies the recognition of God as “our Father”; ascribes glory and holiness to his name; petitions him to fulfill his promises to establish both the heavenly and earthly phases of his kingdom; asks that he care for our daily material and spiritual needs; requests that he forgive our sins as we forgive others; and asks him not to lead us into nor to abandon us in temptation. It can be said that there is nothing which a footstep follower of Christ can properly make a matter of prayer which does not fall within these general principles. If we are guided by them it will not be said of us, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”—James 4:3 ■