



Conducted by
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"In Luke 11:1-4, it is recorded that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Was this just for them, or do we need teaching also"?

The Lord taught them a prayer which is known throughout Christendom as *The Lord's Prayer*. During my years in the Church I have heard many preachers and teachers say that

the true Lord's Prayer is to be found in John 17, and that the prayer given to the disciples is no longer applicable.

So what I propose to do is to analyse the Lord's Prayer in brief detail, and then see if we today need any teaching on how we should pray.

THE LORD'S PRAYER - AN ANALYSIS

"Our Father who art in heaven". Well, there is no doubt that the Father is in Heaven; that is His dwelling-place. I believe that in the first instance, Jesus is indicating to His disciples what the focal point of all prayer should be. Christians throughout history have appreciated this cardinal truth, and so do we today.

"Hallowed be thy name". The verb *'to hallow'* means 'to make holy' (from HAGIOS, holy). It is used here to signify that God is holy of Himself. The word is set over against *KOINOS* which means 'common'. Therefore, the Holy God gives salvation to all who will receive it; these then share a 'common' salvation. The Christian's elevation cannot be compared with the great and Holy God. There is nothing here which Christians could not endorse in prayer.

"Thy Kingdom come". The Kingdom has come, so it is pointless to pray for something which has been fulfilled. If, however, the kingdom is the Church, then there is a sense in which the Kingdom is always 'coming' to someone because of the gospel which is taken to them, and their belief in it. Surely we can pray for the success of the Gospel, and even though we know that the Kingdom has been established, we realise that the Kingdom, the Church, can always apprehend those who believe and accept the gospel.

"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven". We cannot conceive of anyone in Heaven not doing God's will. Satan and his host must at one time have been 'angels of light', but they were banished from the presence of God because, presumably, they rebelled against God's will. We today must not just confine ourselves to **praying** that God's will be done on earth; we must do it.

"Give us day by day our daily bread". I have heard many Christians say that because of the Welfare State there is no need for a prayer such as this. What they fail to understand is that there may be many Christians living in lands where war is raging, and they may be destitute, with no shelter and no food. When a person is hungry and there is not the slightest indication as to where the next food is to come from, is it wrong to mention this to God? I wonder.

"Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil". I believe these words to have been grossly misunderstood. The inevitability of 'trials' in the lives of Christians is well understood and accepted; God will not allow that which we are beyond bearing. God will never lead us into temptations which result in evil, but there are forces at work on our lives, even when ostensibly we are following God and Christ, which will result in evil if allowed to take over; the prayer is that we shall be delivered from such evil. We must always listen to the Eternal Spirit within us which will guide us into the right paths; the paths of doing God's will.

This is a beautiful prayer, and it fell from the gracious lips of the Lord Himself. I am not saying that we should repeat it in our churches as many do, but we must not forget that it is in the Canon of Holy Writ, and that we can learn something from it.

WHAT ABOUT US?

There is no doubt that we must pray. The injunction in 1 Thess. 5:17 is **"Pray without ceasing"**. That means, of course, that the Christian life should always include prayer to the Father. We pray corporately in what we call 'the prayers of the Church' at the Breaking of Bread service, and we have our private prayers also. Primarily, I would like to consider *the prayers of the Church*.

The prayers from some brothers take the form of *mini-sermons*. God knows who He is, and what He is: He also knows what He has done for us. What God wants is our thanks, and also our dedication to His work here on earth; I believe pious rhetoric wearies Him. And what of the content of some of our other prayers? What are our expectations? I have heard

prayers for the success of young people when they are about to sit examinations. Do we expect God to put the right answers into their minds in a miraculous way, or guide their pens so that their hands write the correct words? It seems to me that if students, Christian or otherwise, haven't subjected themselves to the learning discipline, and absorbed the lessons as they have been taught, then success is in their own hands. **Why ask God to do something which we can patently do for ourselves?** I can understand the Christian student wanting to feel that he/she is not alone at this trying time; perhaps that is the greater help. Then we constantly hear prayers for 'journeying mercies'. If, after being prayed for, the brother or sister has an accident - through rank bad driving on their part, or someone else's - do we expect God to compensate for that? And what if that brother or sister breaks the law of the land by speeding, etc., are we asking God to condone that? The prayer may be well-intentioned; the ramifications not what we would have desired.

We have to pray for the sick, but when we do, are we expecting complete restoration, or perhaps praying for them to have the strength to bear what may have to be borne? We pray for the lonely and the destitute, but here again the solution may be in our own hands by visitation and giving. Many - least of all me - would want to curb the out-pouring of the sincere soul in prayer to the Father, but sometimes in our prayer sessions we get what I call 'pregnant silences'; if these go on for longer than some think they should, then perhaps a brother will start to pray **just to fill the silence**; such a prayer may not always be from the heart. What if, in the 'prayers of the Church', **nothing is said audibly**; does it really matter?

JOY AMID SORROW

I often get the impression that some of us believe that God is the Director of some vast, universal Accident and Emergency unit in the sky. What about the prayers of joy, when the heart seems to be bursting as it contemplates the great love of the Father? I know that at the Breaking of Bread we remember with sadness the death of the Lord, but it is also a celebration of events with which our minds sometimes cannot grapple. Can there be joy amid sorrow? If that were not so, then our Christian lives would be very depressing indeed. Even when a saint who is near and dear to us on earth, dies, our hearts are heavy with sadness, but the sadness is tempered with joy that Christ has been vindicated in the life lived.

I trust no one will be offended by the things I have said; I love prayer-time as much as the next saint. But I believe that we today can learn something from the profundity (and brevity) of the prayer which the Lord taught His disciples. But let us not despair in our own inadequacy to pray correctly, but rather listen to the words of our brother Paul, "**Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit, Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (in a language we cannot understand). And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.**" (Rom. 8:26, 27). Does this remind you of anything? "**God's will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven**". But then, how could the Saviour be wrong?

I have mentioned our private prayers and these, of course, are always on-going. Perhaps the corporate prayer-time is not the right time to voice things which are of a highly personal and family significance; it might be as well to confine prayers such as this to our personal prayers. Perhaps one of our prayers should be, "**Lord, teach us how to pray**".

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