

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

February 18-22, 2008



February 18, 2008 **“...but Deliver us from Evil¹”**

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”².

The power of evil is very real and very great on planet earth, but it is contained by the power and sovereignty of God. The devil is like a shark in a large tank at the aquarium: menacing and very dangerous, but constrained in his ability to act.

Why God allows space for the existence of evil in his universe is a question that many philosophers and theologians have found very challenging. However the Bible teaches that God is master of all and uses evil for his own purposes.³

While God delegates a certain measure of authority to his followers⁴ we are to remember that it is his power that overcomes evil⁵. The petition, “deliver us from evil” seeks that victory in our daily struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil.

As Jesus underscored in Gethsemane⁶, prayer is key to overcoming temptation and the power of evil.

“Someone has well said that the battle is already half won if we really want to pray this petition with earnest sincerity of heart....if I really *want* to avoid temptation and overcome Satan enough to sincerely ask it of God.”⁷

¹ Or “the Evil One”

² 1 Peter 5:8 (TNIV)

³ E.g. Genesis 45:4-5

⁴ Mark 16:17

⁵ Jude 8-10

⁶ See Matthew 26:40-41

⁷ G.I. Williamson, The Shorter Catechism, Vol. 2, p. 154.

February 19, 2008 **“For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory...”¹**

“Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.”²

While this last phrase of the traditional Lord’s Prayer is not found in some of the most ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, it is in keeping with Scripture and provides a fitting conclusion. Ending prayer with adoration and praise is a paradigm one would expect from Christ.

It reaffirms the sovereignty of God and this is crucial in prayer. Repeatedly in the Psalms and other parts of the Bible, we see people coming to God in distress, anger or despair because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. As they look to God, acknowledging his power and authority over all things, their despair turns to hope, their mourning to joy, their bitterness to peace. Because God is great, glorious and powerful, we are able to leave our problems in his hands.

This concluding praise is also a sacrifice that is honouring to God. It gives him what he truly deserves. We stand in fellowship with the angels who surround his throne, declaring his praise. And it again affirms that as his followers we are committed to do the work of the King by his leading, grace and strength!

¹ “The conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer, which is, *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen*, teacheth us to take our encouragement in prayer from God only, and in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to him; and, in testimony of our desire, and assurance to be heard, we say, Amen.” Shorter Catechism, Q. 107

² 1 Chronicles 29:11 (TNIV)

February 20, 2008 **Prayer: Keep it Simple**

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”¹

One of the things Jesus was intentionally modeling with the Lord’s prayer was simplicity. His model prayer is brief, to the point and straight from the heart.

Some people find prayer daunting because they think it needs to be long and filled with a lot of flowery language – as historically prayer in church has been. Jesus’ emphasis is that prayer is simple. Any child can do it. In fact childlike directness and trust is highly desirable.

Sometimes well-meaning teaching on the subject of prayer can convey the notion that we have to cross all the i’s and dot all the t’s if we want God to take us seriously: first we must praise, then confess, then give thanks, then supplicate...etc. A method which someone found effective can become a formula that others feel compelled to follow step by step lest God ignore their prayers. This is the sort of magical thinking that Jesus was warning against.

God wants us to express our hearts to him. He cannot be shocked and he is capable of reading between the lines of our faltering phrases. He doesn’t care if we pray on our knees, standing or while walking about, driving the car or washing the dishes. The point is to come to God and grow in our relationship with Him as we communicate what is on our hearts and what is in line with his Kingdom agenda.

¹ Matthew 6:7 (KJV)

February 21, 2008 **A Paradigm for Prayer?**

“May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you....May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.”¹

The Bible contains many prayers. Some, particularly those of Christ himself, are appropriate in every respect. Others, even though they may be offered by great people of God, including Moses, Miriam, David, etc., require some discernment to determine what may be in line with God’s purposes and what may be honest, but human, expressions of their hearts.

In the Psalms, David frequently cries out to God in the midst of persecution and trial, asking God to deal severely with his enemies. These are honest expressions of David’s heart, but they are probably not great exemplars for us if we are having problems with our next door neighbour.

As we use the Bible devotionally and as we reflect on our own prayers, the Lord’s prayer may be a good screening device. Does this Biblical prayer reflect surrender to the will of God, forgiveness for one’s enemies, etc. as the Lord’s prayer teaches? Does it simply express personal needs? Are there other petitions or dimensions of prayer given in the Lord’s prayer that we need to add to make it more holistic?

This is not meant to suggest that we ought to ‘grade’ Biblical prayer or the prayers of others! The prayers of others should be respected as their honest expressions to God. However, God also wants us to grow in our practice of prayer and to discern our own motives and desires. The Lord’s Prayer is the one specified paradigm that God has given to us.

¹ Psalm 20:1, 4 (TNIV)

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”¹

It is popular these days for Christians to label prayer as ‘conversation with’ or ‘dialogue with’ God. In fact, the various Biblical words translated as ‘prayer’ or ‘to pray’ are all words that describe communication to God: asking, petitioning, seeking, praising, confessing, etc. The Lord’s Prayer also models this. It is an exemplar of the way we are to communicate to God.

While our role is to pray, God’s role is to answer prayer.

Sometimes that answer is ‘yes’, as in Jabez’ prayer for help and blessing.² When our prayers are in God’s will for ourselves and/or others, he grants that for which we ask. Our response should be one of thanksgiving, both for the benefit and for the guidance of the Spirit in prayer.

Sometimes the answer is ‘no’, as with Christ’s prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane³. At such times, God has another plan. Our response should be one of thanksgiving for his love and grace and petition to know and do his will.

Sometimes the answer is ‘wait’, as with Abraham’s prayer for an heir⁴. At such times God wants us to abide on his timing and not force matters in ways which may bring about negative consequences.

¹ Matthew 6:6 (TNIV)

² 1 Chronicles 4:10

³ Matthew 26; Mark 14

⁴ Genesis 15 and 16