

DAILY DOSE OF DOCTRINE

February 4-8, 2008



February 4, 2008

Prayer: Keep it Simple

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”¹

In Matthew, Jesus’ preamble to the Lord’s Prayer is a call to simplicity: Don’t think that you can impress God with much speaking, multiple repetitions or huge ‘content’. We cannot wear God down or talk him into anything that is not in His will. Jesus’ model prayer is thoughtful, straightforward and from the heart.

The common practice of lobbying many to pray for individual prayer concerns should be examined in this light. While, as we shall see, all believers should be praying for some things and while it is appropriate for the whole fellowship to support those going through a time of crisis, many requests for prayer seem to reflect the idea that ‘if we all gang up on God, he will answer more quickly and more positively’. If Jesus’ hearer were influenced by paganism, our approach to prayer can reflect the culture of a political lobby group.

This observation does not negate our responsibility to be personally persistent in prayer. Jesus also said *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.”²*

God is not slow to answer prayer because he is deaf, preoccupied or uncaring. He may want us personally to persist because he is using our prayers to build child-like trust in him and compassion for those persons or situations. Prayer changes things. The first thing that it may change is us.

¹ Matthew 6:7-8 (TNIV)

² Luke 11:9-10

February 5, 2008 **The Disciples' Prayer**

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."¹

In response to this request, Jesus reiterated the prayer he had earlier taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Tradition labels it 'The Lord's Prayer', but it might more appropriately be called "The Disciples' Prayer" because it is given to teach us how to pray.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus prefaces it with, "After this manner, therefore, pray ye..."² The old translation emphasizes that we are not just to repeat these words by rote. Saying it verbatim is acceptable, but its main purpose is to serve as a pattern and "we are to build our prayer life according to this pattern."³

The Lord's Prayer is not only for beginners who are just learning the essentials of prayer. In the Middle Ages, when building a cathedral, the architect's scale model guided the construction for generations. One master builder after another would study it daily to ensure that the work was going according to plan. To neglect the model was to invite frustrating errors that would waste resources and delay the results.

So whether we are new disciples or ancient saints it is good for us to carefully and repeatedly study "the special rule of direction...which Christ taught his disciples".⁴

Lord, teach us to pray!

¹ Luke 11:1 (TNIV)

² Matthew 6:9 (KJV)

³ G.I. Williamson, The Shorter Catechism, Vol. II, p. 116

⁴ Shorter Catechism, Question 99

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?... If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"²

The opening statement of the Lord's Prayer conveys a number of truths. First, it reinforces that we can only approach God through Christ. God is open to the prayers of his children. We can be children of God if we are born again – if we put our trust in God's forgiveness extended because of Christ's death for us and in so doing accept the new relationship with God that is offered to us.³

Second, it encourages us to approach God with the confidence of children approaching a loving Father. While some stumble at 'Father' because of wounding in their earthly relationships, the principle is what is important. God loves us and wants us to approach him confidently, readily and at any time.

Third, 'in heaven' reminds us that God is not just a benevolent old dad whom we can manipulate or patronize. He is still GOD; holy and lifted up and to be approached with reverence and awe.

Fourth, prayer is a community activity. The 'our' declares that true prayer cannot be about me and my needs. Even when physically alone, when we enter the throne room of God, we enter the company of believers and that affects how we pray.

¹ "The preface of the Lord's Prayer...teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others." Short. Cat., Q. 100

² Matthew 7:9-11 (TNIV)

³ John 1:12-13; 3:1-20

February 7, 2008 **“Hallowed be Thy Name”**⁵

*“May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face shine on us—
so that your ways may be known on earth,
your salvation among all nations.
May the peoples praise you, God;
may all the peoples praise you.”*²

This statement is a petition, not just an expression of praise. It asks that God’s reputation be made known and enhanced in the eyes of all. It places the primacy on God being glorified.

Often our prayers are an attempt to get God to do what we want. We want him to conform his will to ours. And we are prepared to give him lots of good advice about why this would be the best course of action for him to take.

Our other petitions need to be prefaced by a genuine desire is for God’s will to prevail and so for God to be glorified. This is what Jesus prayed on the night before his crucifixion: *“Father, glorify your name! Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.’”*³

This petition says, in effect “Lord, your honour comes first – and I want you to do whatever will bring honour to your name – and I ask only that which is to this end.”⁴

¹ “In the first petition, which is, *Hallowed be thy name*, we pray that God would enable us, and others, to glorify him in all that whereby he maketh himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory.” *Sh. Cat.*, Q. 101

² Psalm 67:1-3 (TNIV)

³ John 12:28 (TNIV)

⁴ G.I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism*, Vol. II, p. 128. He notes Biblical examples in Gen. 18-23-32; Ex. 32:11-13

*“May all kings bow down to him
and all nations serve him.”*²

Christians need to be wary of dualistic thinking: the idea that good and evil, God and Satan are locked in an equal struggle for mastery of the universe. The Bible clearly teaches that God has never lost control of this world. Evil and the evil one exist, but God is still ruler of all. The prince of this world has less power than a gnat in comparison to that of God and he is only permitted to do as he does.³

While God rules over all, his desire is to have sinful human beings embrace his rule from the heart. He wants us to transfer our allegiance from following our own will to following him. As do this and transfer our loyalty to the kingdom of God, outward life should also be transformed. Righteousness should prevail over sin, healing over pain, love over indifference, and so on.

Ultimately, we are praying for the full manifestation of the rule of God when Jesus returns and God does away with sin and death. Until then ‘thy kingdom come’ represents our specific prayers for the word of God to flourish and for people to experience the life transforming power of God. We seek to make presently real and we look forward to the future when *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”*⁴

¹ “In the second petition... we pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.” Sh. Cat. Q. 102

² Psalm 72:11 (TNIV)

³ See Job 1:12

⁴ Rev. 11:15 (TNIV)