

Scriptures and Doctrine :: THE STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/6/9 4:43

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

Alexander Maclaren

'After this manner therefore pray ye.—MATT. vi. 9.

'After this manner' may or may not imply that Christ meant this prayer to be a form, but He certainly meant it for a model. And they who drink in its spirit, and pray, seeking God's glory before their own satisfaction, and, while trustfully asking from His hand their daily bread, rise quickly to implore the supply of their spiritual hunger, do pray after this manner, whether they use these words or no.

All begins with the recognition of the Fatherhood of God. The clear and fixed contemplation of God is the beginning of all true prayer, and that contemplation does not fasten on His remote and partially intelligible attributes, nor strive to climb to behold Him as in Himself, but grasps Him as related to us. The Fatherhood of God implies His communication of life, His tenderness, and our kindred.

This is the prayer of the children of the kingdom, and can only be truly offered by those who, by faith in the Son, have received the adoption of sons.

It gathers all such into a family, so delivering their prayer from selfish absorption in their own joys or needs. As our Father 'in Heaven,' He is lifted clear above earth's limitations, changes, and imperfections. So childlike familiarity is sublimed into reverence, our hearts are drawn upward, and freed from the oppressive and narrowing attachment to earth and sense.

The perfect sevenfold petitions of the prayer fall into two halves, corresponding roughly to the first and second tables of the decalogue.

The first half consists of three petitions, which refer to God and His kingdom. They are three, in accordance with the symbolism of numbers which, in the Old Testament, always regards three as the sacred number of completeness and of divinity.

The second half consists of four petitions, which refer to ourselves. They are four—the number which symbolises the creature. The lessons taught by the order in which these two halves occur do not need to be dwelt upon. God first and man second, His glory before our wants—that is the true order. For how few of us is it the spontaneous order! Do we first rise to God, and only secondly descend to ourselves?

Note, too, the sequence in each of these halves. In the first we may say that we begin from above and come down, or from within and come outwards. In the second, the process is the opposite. We begin on the lowest level with our external needs, and go upwards and inwards to removal of sin, exemption from temptation, and complete deliverance from evil. The first half gives us the beginning, middle, and end of God's purposes for the world. The recognition of His name is the basis of His kingdom, and His kingdom is the sphere in which alone His will is done. The second half, in like manner, gives us the beginning, middle, and end of His dealings with the individual, the common mercies of daily bread, forgiveness, guidance, protection in conflict, and final deliverance.

The 'name' of God is His revealed character. He hallows it when He so acts as to make His holiness manifest. We hallow it when we regard it as the holy thing which it is. That petition is first, because the knowledge of God as He is self-revealed is the deepest want of men, and the spread of that knowledge and reverence is the way by which His kingdom comes.

God's kingdom is His rule over men's hearts. Christ began His ministry by proclaiming its near approach, and in effect brought it to earth. But it spreads slowly in the individual heart, and in the world. Therefore, this second petition is ever in place, until the consummation. God's rule is established through the hallowing of His name; for it is a rule which works on men through their understandings, and seeks no ignorant submission.

The sum of this first half is, 'Thy will be done, as in Heaven, so on earth.' Obedience to that will is the end of God's self-revelation. It makes all the difference whether we begin with the thought of the name or of the will. In the latter case, religion will be slavish and submission sullen. There is no more horrible and paralysing conception of God than that of mere sovereign will. But if we think of Him as desiring that we should know His name, and as gathering all its syllables into the one perfect 'Word of God'; then we are sure that His will must be intelligible and good. Obedience becomes delight, and the surrender of our wills to His the glad expression of love. He who begins with 'Thy will be done' is a slave, and never really does the will at all; he who begins with 'Our Father, hallowed be Thy name,' is a son, and his will, gladly yielding, is free in surrender, strong in self-abnegation, and restful in putting the reins into God's hands.

The two halves make a whole. The second, which deals with our needs, starts with the cry for bread, and climbs up slowly through the ills of life, from bodily hunger to trespasses and human unkindness and personal weakness, and a world of temptation, and the double evil of sin and of sorrow, and so regains at last the starting-point of the first half, Heaven and God. The probable meaning of the difficult word rendered 'daily' seems to be 'sufficient for our need.' The lessons of the petition are that God's children have a claim for the supply of their wants, since He is bound, as a faithful Creator, not to send mouths without sending meat to fill them, but that our desires should be limited to our actual necessities, and our cravings, as well as our efforts for the bread that perishes, made into prayers. Such a prayer rightly used would put an end to much wicked luxury among Christians, and to many questionable ways of getting wealth. 'Bless my cheating, my sharp practice, my half lies!' If we dare not pray this prayer over what we do in 'earning our living,' we had better ask ourselves whether we are not rather earning our death.

Sin is debt incurred to God. So Christ taught in the previous chapter by His parable of agreeing with the adversary; and in the other parables of the two debtors (Luke vii. 41) and of the unmerciful servant (Matt. xviii. 23). As universal as the need for bread is the need for pardon. It is the first want of the spiritual nature, but it is a constantly recurring want, as this petition teaches us. Forgiveness is the cancelling of a debt; but we must not forget that it is a Father's forgiveness, and therefore does not merely, or even chiefly, imply the removal of penalty, but much rather the unimpeded flow of the Father's love, and consequently the removal of the miserable consciousness of separation from Him. The appended comparison 'as we have forgiven' does not mean that our forgiveness is the reason for God's forgiveness of us. The ground of our pardon is Christ's work, the condition of it our faith; but, as we saw in considering the Beatitudes, the condition on which the children of the kingdom can retain the blessing of the divine pardon is their imitation of it.

The next petition is the expression of conscious weakness. The forgiven man, though in his deepest soul hating sin, is still surrounded with sparks which may fire the combustibles in his heart. If we ask not to be led into temptation, because we want a smooth and easy road, we are wrong. If we do so from self-distrust and fear lest we fall, then it is allowable. But perhaps we may draw a distinction between being tempted and being led into temptation. The former may mean the presentation of an inducement to do evil which we cannot hope to escape, and which it is not well that we should escape. The latter may mean the further step of embracing or being entangled in it by consenting to it. We do not need to dread the entrance into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for if the Lord be with us we shall pass through it. Our prayer may mean, lead us, not into, but through, the trial. It is the plaint of conscious weakness, the recognition of God as ordering our path, the cry of a heart which desires holiness most of all, and which trusts in God's upholding hand in the hour of trial.

'Deliver us from evil' is a petition which, in its width, fits the close of the prayer better than does the translation of the Revised Version. There seems an echo of the words in Paul's noble confidence while the headsman's axe was so near, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work.' Entire exemption from evil of every sort, whether sin or sorrow, is the true end of our prayers, as it is the crown of God's purpose. Nothing less can satisfy our yearnings; nothing less can fulfil the divine desire for us. Nothing less should be the goal of our faith and hope. To the height of meek assurance, and the reaching out of our souls in desire which is the pledge of its own fulfilment, Christ would have us attain on the wings of prayer. They can have no narrower bonds to the horizon of their hopes, nor any lesser blessing for the satisfaction of their longings, whose prayer begins with 'Our Father which art in heaven'; for where the Father is, the child must wish to be, and some day will be, to go out no more.

Alexander Maclaren

Re: THE STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER - posted by Christinyou (), on: 2008/6/10 2:45

I know everybody will flip out at this, but the Lords Prayer this is not. This is the disciples prayer speaking on how we should pray to His Father, not Christ praying for us.

The Lords Prayer is in John 17:9-26 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

In Christ: Phillip

Re: - posted by enid, on: 2008/6/10 7:25

You know everyone will flip out at this? Why?

Did you read the article?

I found it interesting and showed me a view of the Lord's Prayer that I had not seen before.

I have never aligned it with the Decalogue before, but it is presented in this way in this article.

Thanks for the article.

Re: - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/6/10 17:29

Quote:

enid wrote:

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Thanks for the article.

Hi Enid,

You are welcome and thank you for reading the article by Brother Maclaren.

It has been rather disappointing to see such a lack of interest in this series on the Sermon on the Mount. I realize this is old school teaching and written in such a way that one must apply some concentration while reading; but what a blessing is in store to those who take the time and make the effort.

I thank you and pray the remaining articles will be a blessing.

In His Love
pastorfrin

Re: - posted by enid, on: 2008/6/11 2:18

Pastorfrin,

Don't be disappointed at the lack of interest.

People are more interested in controversy than they are godly teaching.

Hence the popularity of some threads above other.

I find the writings of Alexander Maclaren exceptional and thought provoking.

Consider this from Ezra 7v10, which is also one of my favourite scriptures.

'For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.'

I believe that is what you are involved in.

Even if others don't listen, you do your part, God will do the rest.

God bless.

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2008/6/11 2:27

I would estimate the threads of most value for "feeding our souls" are 80% with none to about two or three reply max, this is my experience.

Re: - posted by HeartSong, on: 2008/6/11 2:53

Quote:

----- . . . you do your part, God will do the rest.

Thank you Pastorfrin. Many times you have posted just exactly the right thing that I needed to see - forgive me for forgetting to be gracious.

Re: - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/6/11 17:30

Hi Enid, hmmhmm,and HeartSong.

I thank each one of you for your replies and kind words of encouragement. I have been blessed and grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ in reading your post as well.

It is not the lack of replies that causes my heart to ache, but the number who view a particular thread. For instance, 'Solitary Prayer' had a mere 25 views and the question is asked, why does the Lord not send revival? When there is no interest in reading about prayer, it is more than evident how lacking prayer must be.

I believe the Sermon on the Mount is one of the richest teachings in the Word of God. I have been asked many times over the years what I thought about this or that and I have always pointed the inquirer to Christ Sermon. Study the words of Jesus Christ if you want to know the truth.

John 8:31-32

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

So yes, when I see such a lack of interest in the teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, it causes my heart to ache.

May the Lord bless and keep each one of you and yours as you labor in His Love.

In His Love
pastorfrin