

**Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew 6:9-15****J.C. Ryle:**

**THESE** verses are few in number, and soon read, but they are of immense importance. They contain that pattern of prayer with which the Lord Jesus has supplied His people, commonly called "The Lord's Prayer."

Perhaps no part of Scripture is so well known as this: its words are familiar, wherever Christianity is found; thousands and tens of thousands, who never saw a Bible, or heard the pure Gospel, are acquainted with "Our Father," or "Paternoster." Happy would it be for the world if this prayer was as well known in the spirit as it is in the letter.

No part of Scripture is so full, and so simple at the same time as this: it is the first prayer which we learn to offer up, when we are little children: here is its simplicity. It contains the germ of everything which the most advanced saint can desire: here is its fulness. The more we ponder every word it contains the more we shall feel "this prayer is of God."

The Lord's Prayer consists of ten parts or sentences. There is one declaration of the Being to whom we pray; there are three prayers respecting His name, His kingdom, and His will; there are four prayers respecting our daily wants, our sins, or weakness, and our dangers; there is one profession of our feeling towards others; there is one concluding ascription of praise.--In all these parts we are taught to say "we" and "our." We are to remember others, as well as ourselves.--On each of these parts a volume might be written. We must content ourselves at present with taking up sentence after sentence, and marking out the lessons which each sentence contains.

The first sentence declares to whom we are to pray: "Our Father which art in heaven."

We are not to pray to saints and angels, but to the everlasting Father, the Father of spirits, the Lord of heaven and earth. We call Him Father in the lowest sense, as our Creator: as St. Paul told the Athenians, "in Him we live, and move, and have our being,--we are also His offspring." (Acts 17:28.) We call Him Father in the highest sense, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, reconciling us to Himself through the death of His Son. (Coloss. 1:20-22.) We profess that which the old Testament saints only saw dimly and afar off,--we profess to be His children by faith in Christ, and to have "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Rom. 8:15.) This we must never forget, is the sonship that we must desire, if we would be saved. Without faith in Christ's blood and union with Him, it is useless to talk of trusting in the "Fatherhood" of God.

The second sentence is a petition respecting God's name: "Hallowed be Thy name."

By the "Name" of God we mean all those attributes under which He is revealed to us,--His power, wisdom, holiness, justice, mercy, and truth. By asking that they may be "hallowed," we mean that they may be made known and glorified. The glory of God is the first thing that God's children should desire. It is the object of one of our Lord's own prayers: "Father, glorify Thy name." (John 12:28.) It is the purpose for which the world was created; it is the end for which saints are called and converted: it is the chief thing we should seek,--that "God in all things may be glorified." (1 Peter 4:11.)

In the third sentence is a petition concerning God's kingdom: "Thy kingdom come."

By His kingdom we mean, first, the kingdom of grace which God sets up and maintains in the hearts of all living members of Christ, by His Spirit and Word. But we mean chiefly, the kingdom of glory which shall one day be set up, when Jesus shall come the second time, and "all shall know Him from the least to the greatest." (Heb. 8:11.) This is the time when sin, and sorrow, and Satan shall be cast out of the world. It is the time when the Jews shall be converted, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in (Rom. 11:25), and a time that is above all things to be desired. It therefore fills a foremost place in the Lord's Prayer. We ask that which is expressed in the words of the Burial Service: "that it may please God to hasten His kingdom."

The fourth sentence is a petition concerning God's will: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

We here pray that God's laws may be obeyed by men as perfectly, readily, and unceasingly as they are by angels in heaven. We ask that those who obey not His laws may be taught to obey them, and that those who do obey them may obey them better. Our truest happiness is perfect submission to God's will, and it is the highest charity to pray that all mankind may know it, obey it, and submit to it.

The fifth sentence is a petition respecting our own daily wants: "Give us this day our daily bread."

We are here taught to acknowledge our entire dependence on God for the supply of our daily necessities. As Israel required daily manna, so we require daily "bread." We confess that we are poor, weak, wanting creatures, and beseech Him who is our Maker to take care of us. We ask for "bread" as the simplest of our wants, and in the word we include all that our bodies require.

The sixth sentence is a petition respecting our sins: "Forgive us our debts."

We confess that we are sinners, and need daily grants of pardon and forgiveness. This is a part of the Lord's Prayer which deserves especially to be remembered. It condemns all self-righteousness and self-justifying. We are instructed here to keep up a continual habit of confession at the throne of grace, and a continual habit of seeking mercy and remission. Let this never be forgotten. We need daily to "wash our feet." (John 13:10.)

The seventh sentence is a profession respecting our own feelings towards others: we ask our Father to "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

This is the only profession in this whole prayer, and the only part on which our Lord comments and dwells, when He has concluded the prayer. The object of it is to remind us that we must not expect our prayers for forgiveness to be heard if we pray with malice and spite in our hearts towards others. To pray in such a frame of mind is mere formality and hypocrisy: it is even worse than hypocrisy; it is as much as saying, "Do not forgive me at all." Our prayers are nothing without charity. We must not expect to be forgiven, if we cannot forgive.

The eighth sentence is a petition respecting our weakness: "Lead us not into temptation."

It teaches us that we are liable, at all times, to be led astray and to fall: it instructs us to confess our infirmity, and beseech God to hold us up, and not allow us to run into sin. We ask Him, who orders all things in heaven and earth, to restrain us from going into that which would injure our souls, and never to suffer us to be "tempted above that which we are able to bear." (1 Cor. 10:13.)

The ninth sentence is a petition respecting our dangers: "Deliver us from evil."

We are here taught to ask God to deliver us from the evil that is in the world, the evil that is within our own hearts, and not least from that evil one the devil. We confess that, so long as we are in the body, we are constantly seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of evil. It is about us and within us, and around us on every side; and we entreat Him, who alone can preserve us, to be continually delivering us from its power. (John 17:15.)

The last sentence is an ascription of praise: "Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory."

We declare in these words our belief that the kingdoms of this world are the rightful property of our Father; that to Him alone belongs all "power;" and that He alone deserves to receive all "glory." And we conclude by offering to Him the profession of our hearts, that we give Him all honour and praise, and rejoice that He is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

And now let us examine ourselves, and see whether we really desire to have the things which we are taught to ask for in the Lord's Prayer. Thousands, it may be feared, repeat these words daily as a form, but never consider what they are saying. They care not for the "glory," the "kingdom," or the "will" of God: they have no sense of dependence, sinfulness, weakness, or danger; they have no love or charity towards their enemies: and yet they repeat the Lord's Prayer! These things ought not to be so. May we resolve that by God's help, our hearts shall always go together with our lips! Happy is he who can really call God his 'Father' through Jesus Christ his Saviour, and can therefore say a heartfelt "Amen" to all that the Lord's Prayer contains.