

THE
LORD'S
PRAYER

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SIR ROBERT ANDERSON



WHITAKER
HOUSE

All Scripture quotations are taken from the
King James Version of the Holy Bible.

Boldface type in the Scripture quotations indicates the author's emphasis.

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“He who gave us the gift of life, taught us also the way of prayer. What prayer can be more spiritual than that which was given us by Christ, by whom the Holy Spirit was sent to us? What form of prayer can be more true in the sight of the Father than that which was delivered by the lips of His Son, who is Himself the Truth.”

—*St. Cyprian* (200–258)
Bishop of Carthage

“We have received from the Lord a Rule of Prayer, which we must not transgress, either by adding to it or by leaving out any part of it. If you examine the words of all the prayers used by the saints, you will find nothing which the Lord’s Prayer does not contain and bring within its compass. It is therefore at your choice to pray in different words from time to time, while you yet offer the same petitions in your prayers, but it must not be at your choice to offer different petitions. If we pray aright and agreeably to God’s Word, we say nothing else than that which is included in the Lord’s Prayer.”

—*St. Augustine* (354–430)

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PREFACE

Our Lord has left this divine prayer with His church, not only as a model of all prayers, but also as an express form of words to be used by all the people of God as often as they approach the throne of grace. In obedience, therefore, to our Lord's command, the Church of England has introduced this prayer into all her services, both stated and occasional. It is placed, moreover, in the Church Catechism, accompanied by a paraphrase, which explains to children what they desire of God in this prayer. By our daily use of it, we realize, in its fullest sense, the communion of saints, seeing that the words of this prayer have been daily repeated by God's people in every age of the Christian church. Upon all these accounts, it is hoped that a plain, practical exposition of the Lord's Prayer

will be regarded as a fit subject for a volume of the believer's library.

I will only add that I have endeavored to write this exposition in very simple language, such as may easily be understood by all classes of readers; and that, with the same view, I have occasionally made some verbal alterations in the various passages which I have extracted from the works of different authors, both ancient and modern, on the subject of the Lord's Prayer.

—*Sir Robert Anderson*
Brighton, England (1840)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE CHURCH CATECHISM

Question:

My good Child, know this; that thou art not able to do these things of thyself, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve Him, without His special grace; which thou must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer. Let me hear, therefore, if thou canst say the Lord's Prayer.

Answer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Question:

What desirest thou of God in this Prayer?

Answer:

I desire my Lord God, our heavenly Father, who is the giver of all goodness, to send His grace unto me, and to all people; that we may worship Him, serve Him, and obey Him, as we ought to do.

And I pray unto God that he will send us all things that are needful both for our souls and bodies; and that He will be merciful unto us, and forgive us our sins; and that it will please Him to save and defend us in all dangers both of soul and body; and that He will keep us from all sin and wickedness, and from our spiritual enemy, and from everlasting death. And this I trust He will do of his mercy and goodness, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore I say, Amen, So be it.¹

CHAPTER ONE

THE PETITION TO OUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN, FOR THE HALLOWING OF HIS NAME

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which
art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*

—Matthew 6:9

*And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father
which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*

—Luke 11:2

In the Lord's Prayer, we are furnished with a heavenly model of prayer² according to which all our devotions should be framed. For when Jesus Christ first delivered this prayer in His Sermon on the Mount, He said to His disciples, "*After this manner...pray ye*" (Matthew 6:9). But we are sure that our Lord intended it, not only as a pattern by which we are to regulate all our other prayers, but as an actual form of words, to be used exactly as they are here set down for our guidance in all our exercises of devotion; seeing that, when He delivered this prayer the second time, He introduced it with these words: "*When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*" (Luke 11:2). And this conclusion is fully supported by the circumstances which accompanied this second delivery of the prayer. For our Lord's disciples had just referred to a form of prayer, with which John the Baptist's disciples had been provided; and it was in answer to their request that He would teach them "*to pray, as John also taught his disciples*" (Luke 11:1) that Jesus left with His church this divine form of prayer, to be used by Christians in every age as the badge of their discipleship. Accordingly, we find it spoken of as "*the daily prayer*" by Saint Cyprian and others of the early fathers; and all the liturgies of the early Christian churches have it in every one of their services.

A Note on Disliking Prescribed Forms of Prayer

Now, if any of us have been accustomed to undervalue or dislike prescribed forms of prayer, as being apt, in our opinion, to degenerate into coldness or formality, we should remember that we have here a form of prayer actually prescribed by our

Lord Himself; and we should consider, therefore, whether the coldness and formality of which we complain may not be owing entirely to our own want of affection in spiritual things. For if we are always desiring variety in prayer, what is it but the want of a spiritual mind that makes this needful? In order that our affections may be lively in that holy exercise, we find it necessary that they should be continually stirred up by new expressions; whereas the soul that is really in earnest in the thing itself, for itself, panting ardently after the grace of God and the pardon of sin, regards not in what terms utterance shall be given to its petitions, whether new or old. Nay, though these petitions may be in the words which have been heard and uttered a thousand times, yet still they will be new to a spiritual mind. And, surely, the devotion that continues in lively exercise while pursuing this regular and constant path has more evidence of sincerity and true vigor in it than that which depends upon new notions and new words to move it, and which cannot, as it were, stir a step without them.

To borrow the language of the good Archbishop Leighton:

We may well doubt whether that can be any other than a false flash of temporary devotion, which comes only by the power of some moving strain of prayer that is altogether new. But when confession of sin and requests for pardon, though uttered in accustomed terms, are found to carry the heart along with them heavenward, it is then far more certain that the Spirit of God dwelling in us, and the sense of the things themselves, such as the esteem of the blood of Christ, and the favour of God, really move the heart, since there is no novelty of words to help it.³

Let us not err, then, in a point of such importance as this; but let us rest assured that when the Holy Spirit teaches God's people to pray, He exercises His blessed influences not so much on the understanding as on the affections. Let us not suppose, therefore, that when He pours upon us the spirit of grace and supplication, His work consists, wholly or chiefly, in furnishing new supplies of thoughts and words; but let us consider it, rather, as His peculiar province to excite the heart anew at times of prayer, that so it may break forth in ardent desires to the Lord God of our salvation.

Following the guidance of Christian antiquity, the Church of England has introduced this divine prayer into all the various services in the prayer book, whether stated or occasional;⁴ that so, by its perfection, it may, as it were, supply the defects of our own services, and may compensate for our own ignorance or blindness, in approaching the throne of grace. And, indeed, "though men should speak with the tongues of angels, yet words so pleasing to the ears of God, as these which the Son of God Himself hath composed, were not possible for men to frame."⁵

He therefore which made us to live, hath also taught us to pray, to the end that speaking unto the Father in his Son's own prescript form...we may be sure that we utter nothing which God will either disallow or deny. Other prayers we use many besides this, but this oftener than any other....The causeless dislike thereof which others have conceived, is no sufficient reason for us as much as once to forbear, in any place, a thing which uttered with true devotion and zeal of heart, affordeth to God himself that glory, that aid to the

weakest sort of men, to the most perfect that solid comfort which is unspeakable.⁶

The Perfection of the Lord's Prayer

And, assuredly, the more we enter into the depth and fullness of this divine prayer, the more we shall feel disposed to doubt whether it can be too frequently repeated in the assemblies of the church. Our ignorance in asking is too gross to be denied; and it is too certain, moreover, that if our hearts do not accompany the words which we utter, our prayers will only be as mockery in God's sight. What, then, can be more wise or just or holy than, at short and frequent intervals, to recall to our minds both for what, and in what manner, we ought to pray, by the insertion of the Lord's Prayer, every clause of which is suited to recall the wandering heart, and whose fullness will supply every defect, since it tacitly implies, though it does not positively express, our desire for everything which man can wish or ought to ask? Superior⁷ this prayer is in excellence, comprehensive in brevity, holy in substance, solemn in manner, and simple in expression; it is, at once, so short, that the meanest may learn it; so plain, that the most ignorant may understand it; and yet so full, that it comprehends all our wants and intimates all our duty, sheaving not only what is fit to be asked but what manner of persons we that ask ought to be. And well, therefore, might Tertullian speak of it as "the epitome of the gospel"; since it contains our persuasion of God's love, our desire of His honor, our subjection to His authority, our submission to His will, our dependence on His providence; together with our earnest supplication for mercy to deliver us from the guilt and for grace to

deliver us from the power of sin; concluding with acts of faith and praise and adoration.

But, after all, who shall attempt to give dignity, by human praise, to that which proceeded from the Lord of all? It was He who spoke as never man spoke; it was Jesus, the wise, the holy, and the just, who gave this prayer for the use and imitation of His disciples; and, therefore, if we are not moved to adopt it by the reverence and gratitude which we feel for its Author, it were in vain to endeavor to influence the heart or the understanding by the weak applauses of a creature's tongue. They, and they only, whose hearts are touched with the flame of true devotion can value this prayer aright; and sure I am that no really devout worshipper of God will ever complain of the frequent repetition of such a prayer as this. For who, I would ask, ever finds it a wearisome task frequently to think or speak of that in which his heart is really engaged? Who does not find rather, that, in such case, the very recurrence of the term, which is expressive of the object so endeared to us, gives it the greater and more powerful access to his heart? Now, it is the heart, which is the only real seat of all true religion. It is upon this account that we are taught, by our church, to call upon the "Lord of all power and might," beseeching Him to "graft in our hearts the love of [His] Name."⁸ And who that offers up such a petition in spirit and in truth can ever be weary of saying, "*Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*" (Matthew 6:9)?

Praying "Our Father"

"Our Father," Not "My Father"

In teaching us to say not "my" but "*our Father*," Jesus emphatically reminds us, not only that the prayer is suited

as well for the purposes of public worship as for the daily use of every child of God, but also that our prayers, even when they are most private, should be charitably extended, so as to take in, with our own, the good of others; and that, when we are most earnest in offering prayers for ourselves at a throne of grace, we should not be unmindful of our brethren. Let the place and the performance of secret prayer be as private as may be; still we are here taught that the scope of our supplication should be public as well as personal. It follows, therefore, that the most private prayer of every true believer may be regarded as a public good; since the prayers which he pours forth may benefit others as well as himself. In like manner, every believer has a share in all the prayers of his brethren; and, in truth, though little considered by many of us, it is one of the many privileges belonging to that communion of saints that constitutes an article of our faith, that every believer participates in the prayers of the church at large. "He is a partner," says Archbishop Leighton, "in every ship of that kind that puts forth to sea; and he has a portion of all their gainful voyages." And, indeed, if the observation of Saint Ambrose be just, with regard to him "who prays for *himself alone*," namely, that he "stands *alone*, with no one else to pray for him," it is evident that even self-love may plead for this exercise of love to our brethren.

When engaged in the exercise of devotion, therefore, in our closets, let us not be unmindful of the church of God. Let us not forget to seek the good of Zion, seeing that it is not only our duty but that it may be our benefit so to do. For are we not all concerned in the good of Zion if we are, in truth, what we profess to be, parts of that mystical body of which Christ is the living Head? We find that David, even when lamenting his

own sinfulness and praying for the light of God's countenance upon himself, was not unmindful of the church of God. "Do good in thy good pleasure," he says, "unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem" (Psalm 51:18). And, assuredly, this should be the constant tenor of our prayers even in secret. "When thou prayest," says Jesus, in the passage immediately preceding the first delivery of this prayer, "shut thy door" (Matthew 6:6). We are to shut out, therefore, as much as we can, the sight and notice of others; but we are not to shut out the interest and the good of others. Let us remember the words of the prophet Malachi: "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10); and let us say, with overflowing hearts, "Our Father."

Yes; let this be the spirit in which we daily utter these words, regarding ourselves as intercessors, one for another, because we are bound together by the tie of "one Communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of...Christ";¹⁰ and then, how ardent will be our devotions when we assemble together on each returning Sabbath in the courts of the Lord's house! Having been accustomed, always, to regard ourselves and others as the members of that one mystical body, we shall never exhibit within the house of God, the listless countenance or the wandering eye, as if the exercise of public worship were nothing to us. But we shall rejoice at every new opportunity of entering the House of Common Prayer; and while, with a pure heart and humble voice, we repeat, each for himself and for all around him, the words "our Father,"¹¹ we shall experience something of that holy rapture which led the patriarch to exclaim, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17).

The Father's Abhorrence of Sin

And now, as we pause for a while upon these words, "our Father," let us consider how forcibly they declare to us that, though love surpassing thought beams forth in every part of the great scheme of salvation, still it is a love in perfect consistency with a holiness which cannot look upon iniquity. It is, in short, the love of that almighty God, who has not exerted His omnipotence in silencing or overstepping the claims of justice, but in meeting them and fulfilling them. For before we can contemplate God as our Father, we must first regard Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who yet became the Son of man, that He might make us the sons of God. Yes, though we know that Jesus Christ is that well-beloved Son, in whom the Father is always well pleased; though we know that the Father possessed Him "*in the beginning of his way, before his works of old*" (Proverbs 8:22); yet such is the Father's abhorrence of sin, that this well-beloved Son must humble Himself unto death, even the death of the cross, before the sinner can be redeemed from the curse which sin has introduced. To all, therefore, who refuse to honor this Son as the one appointed Mediator between God and man, God is and must be a consuming fire!

Sons of the Heavenly Father

"*But as many as receive him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God*" (John 1:12). And O, what heart can conceive, or what tongue can declare, the blessedness of those who are made "*the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:26)! Having been admitted at holy baptism into the family of God, they have deemed it their highest privilege to approach Him day by day in the words of this divine prayer, which was

then repeated in their behalf as a pledge of their adoption into the congregation of Christ's flock. Under all the trials and amidst all the changes of this mortal life, they have known what it is to look to their heavenly Father for guidance and for help. And if they have ever wandered from their Father's house, they have deeply felt what an evil and bitter thing it is thus to turn away from Him, of whom they can say that, from their own experience, He is not, as the world ignorantly conceives, a hard and severe taskmaster but a loving and tender Father, sparing us when we deserve punishment, and, in the midst of judgment, thinking upon mercy. May we ever hear that Father saying to us, "*How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?*" (Jeremiah 3:19; see margin). And, with our hearts penetrated by a sense of such unutterable love, may we each of us have grace to say, "*My Father, thou art the guide of my youth*" (Jeremiah 3:4) and, "[I] *shalt not turn away from [You]*" (Jeremiah 3:19). For "*doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer*" (Isaiah 63:16).

Let us, then, only ponder in our hearts the full scope and signification of the words "*Our Father which art in heaven*" (Matthew 6:9), and we shall feel constrained to say blessed and comprehensive forms of words!¹² Almighty Father of all; Father of all that was and is and is to come; Father of everything that has, and everything that has not, within it the breath of life; Creator of the heavens and the earth; Creator of the angels, which excel in strength, and of all the host of heaven; Creator of all creatures that live and move and have their being upon the face of the earth; Creator of the fowls of the air and the fishes of the sea and the beasts of the field

and creeping things innumerable; Creator of man; Father of our souls and our bodies; great Source of all we are and have and hope for; to You, the eternal Parent of the universe, we lift our thoughts, in the humility of prayer, when we bid our tongues obey the commands of Your Son and address You as “our Father!” Our Father Thou art, because You have formed us out of the dust of the ground; our Father Thou art, because You have adopted us into the children of Your inheritance; our Father, because You have spiritually begotten us, that we might be called the sons of God; our Father, because we are the brethren, and Thou art the very Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In all these glorious attributes, and under all these varied forms of creation, we look up to You when we call on You as “our Father.” You have graciously imparted to us that spirit of adoption, whereby we cry “*Abba, Father*” (Romans 8:15); and what is there which You will not vouchsafe in answer to the prayers of Your children, seeing that You have not denied them this, the greatest privilege of all, namely, to call You “Father”?

“*Our father,*” too, “*which art in heaven*” (Matthew 6:9)! And, therefore, as heavenly and not as earthly do we call upon You.¹³ Emboldened to address You as “*our father which art in heaven,*” we raise our thoughts from earth to heaven; we look up to that seat where Your host dwelt from eternity, enthroned in majesty above all height and clothed with light which no eye can bear to behold. To none upon earth do we call; for they, being earthly, could neither hear nor help us according to our wants. But You dwell above all as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords in the height and in the holiness of heaven; You are a Spirit and, therefore, the discerner of our spirits; You are holy and, therefore, a lover

and rewarder of the holy; You are high and above all and, therefore, are able to look into the very inmost chambers of the heart, knowing all our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking.

In teaching us to say "*our Father*," our Lord reminds us of the mercy of Him, on whom we call, in order that He may beget in us the confidence of faith; and in teaching us to say "*our Father which art in heaven*," He reminds us of His majesty, that He may beget in us humility and reverential fear. And it is in this mingled spirit of childlike confidence, deep humility, and holy fear that we should ever put forth our prayers to "our Father which is in heaven." For "most certain it is, that they who dare speak rashly to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ know not His greatness; and that they who dare not speak to Him, provided it be with filial reverence and fear, know not His goodness."¹⁴ Moreover, as often as the believer repeats the words "*our Father which art in heaven*," he regards them as sealing to him the blessed assurance that his portion is "*in heaven*"; that his inheritance lies there, where it cannot be lost or impaired. And, therefore, if the believer deems it his best privilege to call God "Father," it is because he knows that to be the son of God is not an empty title; but that He who makes us "sons" makes us "heirs" likewise; even "*heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ*" (Romans 8:17). For although earthly fathers, by reason of the limited nature of all worldly possessions, are compelled, for the most part, to restrict their inheritance to their elder children, it is not thus with the possession which God has in store for those that love Him. No, all who belong to the family of God are partakers of the same rich inheritance; and all who are made "*to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*" (Colossians 1:12) shall, as ages

roll along, still stand beside the ocean of the divine perfections and shall still exclaim, with adoring hearts, “*O the depth of the riches...of the wisdom*” (Romans 11:33) and power and love of our Father and our God!” It was to purchase this inheritance for us that the Son of God came from heaven to earth; and He is returned there to prepare it for us. “*I go,*” says Jesus to all true believers, “*to prepare a place for you....That where I am, there ye may be also*” (John 14:2–3).

Hallow His Name

Do we then desire to be “where He is”? If we do, let us show that we are continually mindful of our inheritance by “hallowing the name” of “our Father which is in heaven”; let us show that we are continually mindful of our inheritance, by walking as becomes the children of that Father who, while by making us “*joint-heirs with Christ,*” has given us a “*name better than of sons and of daughters*” (Isaiah 56:5), and has commanded us to show that we belong to His family by having our conversation daily in heaven. And let us consider, within ourselves, how certain it is that then only is God’s name really hallowed by His children, when they are “*holy in all manner of conversation*” (1 Peter 1:15). For though we may tell the world that God is holy, they know Him not; they can neither see Him nor His holiness. But when they see that there are men of the same sinful and polluted nature with themselves, who are yet so renewed in the spirit of their minds that they hate the defilements of the world and do indeed live as burning and shining lights in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation; this may, and this will, convince them that there is, in a land far off, a spring of holiness, in all its blessed fullness, and

from whence these drops have descended upon the children of men.¹⁵

And while we thus daily endeavor to hallow the name of our God in all our life and conversation, let our daily conviction of the weakness of our mortal nature, and of the imperfection of our best and holiest services, lead us daily to rejoice in the thought that there are purer services and praises given Him above; that there are multitudes of angels and glorified spirits hallowing and praising His great and glorious name, who “*rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come*” (Revelation 4:8). In this grand chorus, all the children of God, even though yet militant on earth, are permitted to take part. And we should therefore daily endeavor, by divine grace, so to live above the snares and temptations of this sinful world, that we may be able to add our joyful acclamation, saying, though in a lower key, in answer to the words of the heavenly worshippers, “*Even so Lord, ‘hallowed be thy name.’*”¹⁶