

SEMINAR ON PRAYER (PART 3)

THE LORD'S PRAYER—Matthew 6:9-15

INTRODUCTION -- This is called the Lord's Prayer because the Lord taught this prayer to His disciples. Our Lord did not pray this prayer because he does not sin. This Lord's Prayer contains the element of asking the Lord to forgive us of our sins. Having said this, the title "the Lord's Prayer" is not a misnomer. It is most appropriate and teaches how every believer ought to pray. From the perspective of the Teacher teaching His students how to pray, it is indeed the Lord's Prayer.

Many pray and almost all religions teach some form of prayer in one way or another. Prayer is a person's acknowledgement that he needs help from someone whom he admits is more powerful than he is and able to help him in time of need. In teaching the Lord's Prayer, the Lord presumes that all His children will pray. He also assumes that we do not know how to pray in such a manner that will obtain an affirmative answer from Him. He wants every believer to pray rightly because before Christ taught this prayer, He said in verse 8 that "for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." If our heavenly Father already knows what we need before we ask Him, then we need to know the needs that are best for us so that when we do ask, the answer from the Lord will always be a resounding "yes"!

Avoid the popular theology on prayer which is to pray whatever comes to mind, it is okay, because the Lord's answer will either be "yes", "no" or "wait"! This is not biblical. The reason is that the emphasis on prayer is shifted from man to God. If man were to pray in accordance with God's holy will for his life, then the answer will always be "yes". But if the pray-er is told that he can pray any way he wants because the answer is up to God to reject or accept, then the pray-er will pray without due consideration and care. He opens his mouth and whatever he feels like praying, he simply prays! This is not what prayer should be - it must be carefully thought through and the motives and requests are carefully considered to see if they are biblical or not.

The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray biblically so that all our prayers will be in the affirmative and our hearts are encouraged to see the Lord answering all our prayers the way He did in the time of many of the saints in both the Old and New Testaments. The Lord began by saying, "after this manner pray ye." The word "pray ye" is in the present tense, which means that the believer is to pray this way continuously and not depart from it. It is in the middle voice which means that he must do it himself and personally. The imperative means that it is a command and not a choice for the believer to take it or leave it. This makes the understanding of the Lord's Prayer very needful, urgent and indispensable in the believer's life. Every believer is to pray without ceasing and to pray everywhere.

I. GOD'S GLORY BE PURPOSED – 6:9 -- The first thing to note in prayer is that God must be glorified. There is no basis for any prayers to be answered by God beyond this reason. For the believer to cry to God for help based on any reason other than the glory of God is not only wrong but foolishness. Christ stated that the best basis is God's glory!

Pray to our heavenly Father -- We are taught that prayer is an intimate fellowship time with our heavenly Father. This is very true because Jesus teaches us to address God as "our" heavenly Father. Just as God is Christ's heavenly father, so God is also our heavenly Father. This term of endearment is to be cherished by every believer. This is the highest and most intimate promotion in terms of fellowship that sinful man could ever dream of. He can cry to God and call Him "Abba, Father". In every Jewish home, this is the most intimate and personal way to address the master of the house. This term can only be used by the master's family and is not allowed to be used by the servants and slaves. Regardless of how hard you serve the master, you will never be allowed to call him "Abba" unless he adopts you into his family. The privilege of using this term can never be earned or bought. But the believer in Christ is given this honour because of adoption through Jesus Christ and he must never abuse this privilege!

Pray with reverence -- To ensure that this privilege is not abused, the Lord reminds us that our heavenly Father is in heaven and not on earth. He is and will always be the majestic heavenly Father whom we are to reverently adore. The awesome nature of God must not be diminished by our approaching God without reverence and presumptuously. The proper address of God's Name is paramount to accomplish this reverential approach. Address God in the manner that He has revealed Himself in Holy Scriptures. God did not say we should address Him with the term "dear", especially when this word is commonly used in letter writing. Biblical terminologies ought to be used to address God in our prayers. Terms like Heavenly Father or Almighty God are biblical terms that we find in Holy Scriptures. Just as we introduce ourselves to the people we speak with by certain names and titles to ensure that we are addressed rightly, we ought all the more to address God properly. We need to approach God in a biblical and reverential manner rather than sentimental. We must teach our children to pray reverentially and biblically as early as possible. "Dear God" is not the right way to address God. Being reverential is not a subjective feeling of respect but an objective and biblical address that is Bible based.

Pray for God's glory -- The purpose of our prayers is that God's Name be hallowed. The word for "hallowed" literally means "to make holy" or "to sanctify." We need to understand that if God were to answer our requests, it is to make holy the Name of God and not for any anthropocentric reason! The only way we can make holy the Name of God is to do all things to His glory according to Holy Scriptures. This means

that when we pray in accordance with God's Holy Scriptures, this will glorify God and make the Name of God holy.

II. GOD'S WILL BE DONE – 6:10 – Having ensured that the motives for our requests are for the glory of our heavenly Father, we must next make certain to seek the will of God and not our own. Prayer is not twisting the arm of God to conform to OUR will; we are to find out what God's will is and pray accordingly. The teaching that we are to fast until we get what we want from God is not only bad theology but most unbiblical and hurtful. Such false teachings turn the blessed gift of prayer into blackmail!

Pray for God's Kingdom – Jesus taught us to pray for God's Kingdom to come. The coming of God's Kingdom means the second coming of Christ. The word "come" is in the imperative with an emphasis on the action rather than the time. The focus is not when it will come but the act of coming.

Praying for God's Kingdom to come means that the pray-er has a desire to see God's rule and reign to be on earth and not only in the hearts and lives of His children now. This means that the believer who prays this way has a conscious knowledge that he is a citizen of God's Kingdom and not part of the kingdoms of man right now. The kingdoms of man will perish and will be replaced by the Kingdom of God. The believer cannot be comfortable on this earth. Everything around him is temporal and he longs for none of these carnal things. His heavenly Father's Kingdom will one day dominate and saturate this whole earth for eternity. Man's rule will be over permanently and forever. Christ's reign will begin from then to eternity! Evil men and their deeds of wickedness will be no more. Death will become a distant memory and a thing of the past never to occur again in God's Kingdom! Satan and his hosts of demons will also be permanently removed forever and they will never deceive and tempt God's children again.

When God's Kingdom comes, the believer's glorification is included. This is the only way for him to dwell in God's Kingdom for all eternity. Life will be perfect. Worship and praise to Almighty God will be his constant activity with no disruption by the affairs of this life. It will be like a church camp with no need to break camp! It will also be free to all who belong to Christ.

Pray for God's will – The obvious result of praying for God's Kingdom is for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is also in the imperative with an emphasis on the action like the previous clause. The focus is on the intense desire of the believer who cries for God's will to be done on earth. The word "will" has the idea of "what one wishes or determines to be done." The pray-er cries to God fervently for His will to be done on earth. Of course, God's will cannot be thwarted by man no matter what man tries to do. Even the wrath of man can be turned around by God to

praise Him. **Psalm 76:10** (KJV) reveals, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” If God’s will is always done, then why pray? The believer needs to pray for the desiderative will of God to be done rather than God’s punitive will.

God’s will is always done in heaven unlike on earth. Those who do not do the will of God in heaven have been cast out of heaven long ago, i.e. the fall of Satan and his demons. When believers pray for God’s will to be done on earth, it also means that their lives must be lived in accordance with God’s revealed will which is the Bible!

III. GOD’S GIFT OF DAILY BREAD – 6:11 – The focus on life and mortality is next. This is something that we cannot forget. As long as we are in this mortal flesh we need food to survive. However, we must not forget that God is the one who keeps us alive. God can use food and water to do it, but He is not bound by these. Moses is a case in point. Moses fasted on four occasions for forty days and forty nights without food and water as He communed with God. At the end of the forty days and nights, he was healthy and there was no sign of weakness in him. It is said that a person cannot survive without water for one week, let alone without food and water for forty days and nights! God kept Moses alive without using food and water to do so. This was also true of Christ when He went into the wilderness to be tested and He did not eat or drink for forty days and nights, after which Satan himself came to tempt Christ!

Pray for giving – Knowing that it is God who keeps us alive, and that we need to pray for God’s will to be done on earth and also for the glory of God, praying in the imperative for God to “give” us our daily bread is the obvious conclusion.

All that we have are gifts from God. We may have been working hard in our offices, but bear in mind that the Master is Christ. This truth is often forgotten by God’s children. The Lord’s Prayer helps us to remember this. The strength of our hands and the power to generate wealth come from the Lord. This was also true in Old Testament times, for the Lord also reminded the people of Israel with the same truth. **Deuteronomy 8:18** (KJV), “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for *it is* he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as *it is* this day.” Therefore, all that we have are “gifts” from the Lord; we have nothing to be proud of or to boast about at all. We did not earn them because it is God who GAVE them to us, all of it!

With this understanding, the practical result is that freely we have received, freely we must give! The tithes and offerings that we give unto the Lord should be considered as “returns” to the Lord as a gesture of our faith, trust, devotion and love for Him. A

willing heart behind every giving is therefore the norm and not a battle of reluctance within.

Pray for daily bread – The frequency of our prayers for God to give to us is a day-by-day and not a month-by-month manner of life. The world’s monthly remuneration has surreptitiously influenced our thinking away from this truth of day-by-day provision into a month-by-month mentality. This has crippled our testimony in ways that we would not care to admit. Who can carry a problem on his shoulder the size of one gigantic month? Many of us get crushed by such a heavy load. The symptoms of such a heavy load include sleeplessness and unceasing worries. The trust level in our living God is strong when we realize that our loving heavenly Father does not want us to carry a monthly load but a daily one.

The nature of our problems is daily bread. Every believer can chew this “bite size” with ease as led by the Spirit of God. It is when we take a larger size bite that we stumble and fall. Do we have enough clothes to wear and food to eat for each day? I believe every Singaporean had enough to eat for today. All we need is our daily bread, not our monthly or yearly bread. The world has financial planners who plan for individuals and families so that they will have enough for their future and retirement. This kind of planning easily crosses over into faith in one’s plans from faith in one’s heavenly Father. Very soon the believer carries not a daily or even a monthly size bread but a bread the size of a lifetime! It is no wonder that we are crushed under such a load.

Our Lord has taught us to pray for our daily bread. This is what daily faith is all about. Remember the provision of manna for the people of Israel in Exodus 16? God deliberately provided the manna on a daily basis to teach daily trust and daily faith! This truth has not changed and applies today as well.

IV.GOD’S FORGIVENESS BE GIVEN – 6:12 – Forgiveness is the key ingredient to effective prayer when it comes to the heart condition of the believer. In life and ministry, there are many struggles and troubles which most of the time involve people. Hearts are hurt and relationships are strained and sometimes broken. Grudges remain and friends become enemies and cold war begins within the church and between brothers and sisters in Christ. In moments like these forgiveness is the key to unlock our hearts to remove all bitterness, animosity and anger and even hatred.

What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is to accept the wrong or hurt done to us and not bear a grudge against the one who has hurt us. The relationship will remain intact.

Pray for forgiveness – The believer sins daily. Even when we sin only against man, we sin against God at the same time. The reason is that man is made in God’s

image. Man sins directly against God when he worships idols or attacks God's Word or Christ's Name. But when he sins against his fellow man, he sins against God and man. To only seek man's forgiveness is not sufficient. He needs God's forgiveness as well.

Therefore, the Lord has taught us to pray for forgiveness as part of our prayers to our heavenly Father. We need to cry to Him to forgive our debts. The word "debt" literally means "something owed." However, when used in the moral sense, it means "a fault." Therefore, in the context of prayer it includes all manner of sin, iniquities and transgressions which result in a debt that we owe God which requires payment. The payment would also include the consequence of sin committed by us. When we pray to God to forgive us our debts, it implies that we acknowledge and admit that we have transgressed or sinned against Him. Repentance is also included here. Repentance and confession go hand in hand. One cannot exist without the other. Repentance and confession of sin to God is more than just feeling sorry for sins committed. It is a resolve with a contrite and broken heart never to sin that sin again and to cast oneself before God to accept whatever restitution is needed to demonstrate the sincerity of one's repentance and confession. This is an unconditional repentance with no blame casting on anyone for one's sin.

Pray to forgive – Since the believer has received God's forgiveness, it is now his duty to forgive others who have wronged him. Not only that, the Lord teaches here that the basis for seeking God's forgiveness is that he has also forgiven others who have sinned against him. This is a startling revelation as we are people prone to bear grudges rather than discard them by showing forgiveness. As believers, we must always forgive no matter what the sin against us might be. There is no justification for not forgiving another person because the sin committed is man to man. The cost is earthly. The sin that we sin against God is man to God. The cost that must be paid against our sins is the blood of Christ Jesus, the only begotten Son of God!

When we cry to God to forgive with an unforgiving heart, it is as good as asking God not to forgive us! We cannot mock God. God has set the rules for forgiveness. Not forgiving someone who has sinned against us is a sin in itself. And if we regard iniquity in our heart God will not hear our prayers, including the prayer asking for forgiveness (see Psalm 66:18)!

Whatever the fault against us might be, it is important that we do not let it destroy our fellowship with our heavenly Father. Not being able to pray at all is a very serious handicap in the believer's life. It shuts the door into the most Holy Place for the child of God until he learns to forgive. To forgive also means to forget. To forget means to never resurrect the matter again and to not charge it against the person. It does not mean to remove it from the memory. This is also how God forgives us when we repent. The following are some verses that teach this truth. **Jeremiah 31:34** (KJV)

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” **Hebrews 8:12** (KJV) “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” **Hebrews 10:17** (KJV) “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

V. GOD’S DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL – 6:13 – The concluding aspect of the Lord’s Prayer is never to sin again. This desire is an evidential testimony of one’s salvation. The cry is for God not to begin an action and in this case not to lead His children into temptation! This seems to be a strange request, as if our heavenly Father would ever lead us in the direction to be tempted! Yet this is clearly taught by Christ in the Lord’s Prayer. The theology of Christ is that God is sovereign over all things that take place on this earth. The sovereign and absolute control of God is not limited to only the affairs of His children but over all mankind; every blade of grass and the leaves on every tree cannot blow in any direction without God’s permission! In other words, this aspect of the Lord’s Prayer is based upon the omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence of God. Satan or evil men cannot do anything to us without our heavenly Father’s permission.

Pray for deliverance – God is not and will never be the author of sin. It is based upon this truth of God’s sovereignty over all things that this request is to be made. The plea is for God not to lead the believer into temptation. The word “lead” means “to bring.” The word “temptation” refers to “trials.” The prayer therefore means to ask God not to bring the believer into trials that will cause him to fall into sin; while the believer might face trials, he will be delivered from the evil. When the believer is confronted by temptations or trials, he has not sinned. However, when he succumbs to them or falls into sin while facing the trials, then it is sin. Once he has crossed this line, then it becomes evil. It is within this context that this plea is made and ought to be understood. The plea for deliverance is urgent and it also asks God to do it personally (middle voice). In short, the pray-er is taught to ask God not to allow trials that are too strong for him to endure that will cause him to sin. This teaching is affirmed by 1Corinthians 10:13.

Pray for Theocentric focus – In all the above aspects of prayer, the focus is once again on God. “Thine is the kingdom” refers to the fact that all things are within God’s absolute control. This world is God’s kingdom! It is true that Satan is called the prince of this world and that this world will do his bidding. But even Satan cannot do anything without God’s permission. Overall control will always be God’s as this universe is His kingdom. The authority of God is overall.

The second aspect is the power. The believer is weak and is not able to do anything to help himself; he cannot fight against the evil one with all his forces and followers.

Thus, Christ teaches believers to pray for God's power. This power is to make the believer strong. This is not physical strength but spiritual. The believer is taught to pray for God's spiritual strength to be given to him to endure, to hold on to his faith and trust in Christ even it means death! It is the inner spiritual strength that this word emphasizes.

The third aspect is the glory. If God is the one who empowers the believer to overcome trials, and He is also the one who allows only temptations that the believer can cope with, then when he experiences victory, all glory must be given to God. God did it all. The believer is merely an instrument. Just like the pen cannot claim the credit for the beautifully written poem, the believer cannot claim credit for any kind of work done or the blessings others received through his ministry and witness.

Glory is to be ascribed to God forever and not only for this life on earth. From now to eternity, the Lord must be praised and glorified. Every believer exists only by the grace of God. He has nothing to boast of except his weaknesses. It is God who has done it all for him. The Lord's Prayer teaches the believer to be humble and about God's glory in his life. With this focus, he will not backslide but will always lean on Christ to see him through every day with victory.

VI. GOD'S FORGIVENESS, OUR FORGIVENESS – 6:14-15 – Out of all the many aspects in the Lord's Prayer, the Lord deliberately highlights "forgiveness." It is perhaps the most difficult of all the aspects to obey.

Third class condition – Both verses begin with a third class condition which means that it is a condition of probability. The believer has not done it yet in his life but if he did the protasis (if clause) then the apodosis (then clause) follows. This is therefore a warning from Christ to every believer to take note of.

To forgive is to be forgiven – If the believer forgives men their trespasses, then his heavenly Father will also forgive him. If he does not begin to forgive the trespasses of others, then his heavenly Father will also not forgive him. The word "trespass" means "to side-slip and fall whether intentional or not." The believer lapses or deviates from the path of righteousness. This reciprocal aspect on forgiveness is very revealing. The basis for God forgiving our sins is also the basis for us forgiving the sins of others.

If we do not forgive others their sins, then our heavenly Father will also not forgive us. To forgive others of their sin, regardless of what sin it might be, is the evidence that we have received the forgiveness of God. Forgiveness not given to others is evidence that we have not received God's forgiveness.

Matthew 18 is a good passage to study to have a clearer picture on reciprocal forgiveness between the believer and his God and between the believer and others.

CONCLUSION – The Lord’s Prayer is THE prayer to follow. The observance of the Lord’s Prayer is not pure memorization. Such a wooden literal interpretation of the Bible is wrong and reflects a misunderstanding of the Lord’s Prayer. This was not what Christ asked the disciples to do. This is the template for all our prayers so that whenever we pray it must be for God’s glory.

When we pray, we must remember not to twist the arm of God to conform to our will. The pray-er must conform his will to the Lord’s will. This enables his prayer to be heard by God and the affirmative reply will always come from the heavenly Father.

A life of faith is a life of daily trusting in the Lord to provide all that we need to live. To do otherwise is sin for it reflects faithlessness. Praying for our daily bread is a conscious reminder of our daily trust and enables believers to have no worries and focus on our blessed testimony for Christ.

The believer must forgive all sinners of their sins against him. His ability to forgive is evidence of God having forgiven him. His failure to forgive is evidence that the heavenly Father has not forgiven him.

It is crucial for the believer to request the sovereign God not to allow any temptation or trials that would overwhelm to come upon him; he needs to pray that God would deliver him from evil. This assures the believer that all trials that come his way are allowed by his heavenly Father. Not only that, but these trials are all within the strength of his faith to cope, with God’s help. He has no reason to murmur or complain but to look up and persevere patiently for the will of God to be accomplished in his life. His goal is to remain faithful unto death. Amen.