

Pinnacles of Prayer

"This, then, is how you should pray: " (See Matt 6:9-13)

"Our Father..." In coming before God, the first thing HE wants US to remember is that He is our Father. This is NOT a reminder for Him but for us. He is a true, a loving, a faithful Father and ever will be. Although the world has indeed corrupted the image of fatherhood in its moral meltdown, God is unchanged – He's compassionate, capable and purely interested in your good.

"...Who art in heaven..." There is a heaven and there is a hell. We are in neither place as yet, but ALL of us one day will be. God is in heaven, what the scriptures refer to as the "third heaven" – the sky and the cosmos being the first and second respectively. That is, God is above all, above all the mess of a sinful and cursed creation. He Himself is untouched by sin nor can He be. Perfectly pure and forever holy, holy, holy, His character is not like ours – He is loving to the uttermost, all-knowing, all-powerful and all-present. Yes, even though He is in heaven, He is also in the midst of His creation everywhere – there is nowhere you can go that He will not be with you. How does He do that??

"...hallowed be Thy name." Gayle Erwin wrote a wonderful work entitled "The YHWH Style" in which he reminds us that from a biblical standpoint that "name" is synonymous with "nature". Now, hallowed comes from the Greek word pronounced 'hagios' meaning 'a most holy thing'. Therefore, here we are reminded that in addition to remembering He is our Father, we are to ponder that His nature/name is most holy. In a day in which the concept of holiness is so

poorly understood, one might ask, 'Why is this so important?'

Being separate, special, above all – these attributes are a part of holiness certainly, but by no means do they constitute even the 'tip of the iceberg' so to speak. In the Bible, we note that the quality which moves all of heaven, even the highest created beings, to worship God is His holiness. Describing it with mere words is like trying to impress an ant with the Mona Lisa. Suffice it to say that this prayer leads us as believers to esteem His very nature as infinitely higher than our own and expresses the desire for the whole world to have the same awe.

"Thy kingdom come..." Someone once told me that this really says. "Come, Thy kingdom." Now, His kingdom has come in a measure through the spread of the church, but it is indeed in a limited measure. One day, God's ways will fill all creation and there will be a day in which sin and its rotten fruit are long gone -- no more devil, no more demonic activity, no more sickness, pain, suffering or death. We'll know pleasures forevermore, glorious reunions, justice and truth, grace and mercy, overflowing joy, perfect peace, endless love – these wonderful things will no longer be the topic of sermons but revealed in God to us as He reigns.

"Thy will be done..." We sometimes need to be reminded that God's will applies not only to the means but to the end as well. God's will was the cross of Calvary (the means) as well as universal reconciliation (the 'end'). Tough 'medicine' for a tough situation but yielding the most tender of outcomes. Submitting to God's will for the means means trusting that His will for the outcome is always worth it. And it is. Jesus submitted to the cross because of the joy set before Him on the other side. So, is His will as to 'the

means' always a hard pill to swallow? No, but don't be surprised or even disappointed when it is.

"...on earth as it is in heaven." Did you know, heaven is coming to earth? For some radical and unfathomable reason, God will establish His very throne in our proximity. His heavenly city will descend close to earth and not only will He rule and reign our own once wayward planet but all of creation as well – from here! Heaven is perfect because of God. His presence makes it heaven and one day, earth will be a part of it. What better way for Him to demonstrate who He is than to turn the devil's own stomping grounds into His paradise. Only He can do such a thing. Only God can clean up this mess – and that's exactly what He's going to do. Earth will be as heaven! Wow!

"Give us this day our daily bread..." This request applies to all our daily necessity. We must never look to our Father as grudgingly coughing up some scraps of stale crackers as we beg. Remember, He's the One who is giving us this model prayer in the first place. If He has told us to ask, you can be sure it is because He loves to give. Note, however, the daily part – 'oh, if we could just get ahead a little – you know, put aside a little stash so we didn't have to DAILY come to Him.' That's exactly what the sin nature wants because every day you don't depend on God, you'll drift from Him. This 'daily' business is more important than the provision itself. Those who are in the greatest sense of material security, if they depart from the daily seeking of God, are rather in the greatest spiritual peril. Yet, we tend to see it the other way – we just want the stuff. We want to be stuffed with the stuff. Like a bunch of 'turkeys' we

gobble, gobble, gobble and then want to kick back and check in with God next week or when the 'pantry' gets low. This applies to both material and spiritual needs. But daily-ness is the recipe. Daily dependence on God leads to godliness.

"And forgive us our debts..." We owe God big time! We are in HUGE debt. Frankly we owe Him everything everywhere forever. And yet we are bankrupt. We can never pay for the forgiveness, the redemption, the eternal life He has provided. We can never ever EVER compensate Him for His Son. Every sincere Christian acknowledges this – our sin has been paid for in full, by Christ's blood. You can't sincerely ask God to cancel your debt if you don't first accept that it exists. When I came to Christ, it was as the result of a 'search for meaning and truth'. God, however, loved me too much to leave me in that ignorance. It was after years of wallowing in the gutters of lust and misguided depravity (as a 'Christian') that I realized how desperately I needed His forgiveness and redemption. It wasn't until then that I really knew I had a debt and a Redeemer. There is no humility without humiliation. And here's the kicker... Jesus said, *"to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."* (Luke 7:47) It wasn't until I began to fathom the extent of my forgiveness that I began to truly love my Lord. True, love is the driver behind obedience (John 14:15) but love is driven itself by the appreciation of mercy and grace.

"...as we forgive our debtors..." Oh-oh, look out for that "as". That little conjunction in the Greek means "and" or "also" or "indeed". Forgiveness is not really optional for the believer. The sense of forgiveness we enjoy in this life is directly related to the

forgiveness we extend to others. Now, I don't believe this is a 'conditional addendum' on the contract of the cross so to speak. If you have truly accepted the gift of salvation provided for at Calvary, you are covered by Christ's own righteousness – in God's view, you are as righteous as Jesus Himself. Your place in heaven is secure.

However, your peace on earth or sense of rightness with God will be impacted by a hard heart toward others who frankly owe you immeasurably less than you owe God. And He does that purposefully – you cannot fully embody the love of God or a love for God if your heart is hardened by unforgiveness. Many of you know the story of Corrie ten Boom who was undoubtedly one of the dearest saints to preach the gospel. You remember how she shared her testimony of surviving Ravensbruck, a torturous prison camp in WWII where her sister was brutally treated and eventually died. One day after the war, as she spoke to a crowd about the Lord, she was approached by a man whose presence made her shake – the very prison guard who so harshly treated she and her dear sister. He had come to Christ himself and now asked for her forgiveness. Corrie recalled that she could not forgive him, she could not extend her hand to even touch his. However, she prayed for God's strength to do His will and slowly reached out her hand in greeting. As their hands were joined, she sensed a supernatural quality of divine forgiveness overflowing in her heart. Like her, you cannot escape it. Quit trying. Forgive that person. Do it now!

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” The word temptation literally means a test. This is interesting for although the Bible

clearly teaches that God tests our hearts (Psa 7:9; 11:5; Pro 17:3; 1 Thes 2:4) and that He will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13), Christ seems to teach us to pray 'Don't do it, Lord'. Why? He says it again in Matt 26:41. Is Jesus saying something contrary to what God desires for us? No way.

There are at least a couple of reasons – first, the humble, broken person is not necessarily afraid of God's tests but is absolutely aware of the seriousness of them. Jesus is affirming the posture of the humble servant. In the garden of Gethsemane, He told the sleepy Peter, James and John *“the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Next, there are unnecessary tests or trials that come to us when we are disobedient and sinful. Paul wrote, *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”* (1 Tim 6:9) Jesus told us to pray that God would lead us away from such circumstances. That is made evident when he completes the sentence with *“but deliver us from evil.”* God's tests may be difficult, but they are always for our good.

Also, it could be that there is an eschatological application in this phrase for Jesus said concerning the trying tribulation events of the last days, *“Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”* (Luke 21:36)

“For Thine is the kingdom,...” “Kingdom” here is “royal power” not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom. It may seem like Satan rules our world, but after Calvary that simply has not been the case. The devil has no more authority to rule.

When Christ rose from the dead, the devil's goose was cooked if you would. What he connived to obtain from Adam and Eve, he lost through the just redemption of our world. It was a traumatic thing in heaven you know, at least for John. He observed it as recorded in Revelation – *“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’ And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”* (Rev 5:1-7)

What is this scroll? I agree with those who claim that it's likely either the divine inheritance and/or the deed to the planet. In the days this scripture was written such scrolls were used for these purposes. They had seals and notations linked to obligations or liens. You'll note John cried at first for no man could redeem earth from Satan's brutal rule for if in the set time a redeemer could not be found, Jewish law passed the right of ownership permanently to the one temporarily possessing it. (e.g. Lev 25:30) Can you imagine a world ruled forever by

Satan?? Talk about hell on earth! But Christ's is the scroll, Christ's is the kingdom!! He alone has the right to rule our world.

“...and the power...” Christ is no powerless monarch. He not only has the right and authority to rule, He has the power – unmatched and limitless. Jesus said in prayer to the Father, *“... You have given him (the Son of God) power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as You have given him.”* (John 17:2) “And (after He had risen from the dead) *Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”* (Matt 28:18) Wow, just think – total power combined with infinite love, wisdom, a perfectly pure heart and the desire to do good!

“...and the glory...” Although, glory can mean a brightness or brilliance, it's probably more accurately understood here to mean a judgment, opinion or view. Because Christ has the right, authority and power to rule, His judgment or view is all that matters, really. Right? So why be hung up on man's opinions or what the devil tells you about yourself. In the NT, this word translated often as 'glory' always refers to *“a good opinion concerning one, resulting in praise, honour, and glory”* (Strong's). If you're His child, you can depend upon His judgment, His view of you as being good.

“...forever.” That's a long time. For nearly two thousand years, believers have lifted up this prayer and many, many like it. But two millennia is a comparatively non-existent wisp or vapor of time in the context of eternity. So let's pray it like we mean it! Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!