

The Christian's Prayer Life in Review:

Retrospect on the Lord's Family Prayer

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Introduction

It is time now to consider "The Christian's Prayer Life in Review: Retrospect on the Lord's Family Prayer (classically known as the Lord's Prayer; that it is a *Christian* guide is based on the historical-redemptive principle of the seed to full mustard plant). Our goal is to view the six petitions of this prayer pattern; we can view them together as an interwoven template for prayer. If we are going to look at them all as a unit, we need concision. You may have to fill in some gaps by further reflection in your private devotions. I direct you today to three things that capture the wholeness of the text (Mat.6.9-13): themes, petitions, and implications.

1A. Themes

We can list the major themes that open up before us when we meditate on the various petitions. Then we can gain some perspective by means of a few thought-provoking questions. The themes are:

God

Gospel

Sanctification

Earthly things

Justification

Temptation

Two questions immediately pop into my head. 1) What theme is the "odd man out" and what do we learn from its position here within the apex of Christian piety? 2) One theme is a person, God. What do we learn from this petition about the focus of true piety, religion, spirituality, and petitioning prayer (prayer as asking for things)?

Thought question: If we were to mix up the order of this list, could you associate each item with the correct petition? Trying to memorize and absorb the pattern helps embed it into your hearts as a resource for thoughtful prayer.

2A. Petitions

The Lord's guiding pattern instructs us to pray for six general things, which can be broken down into six clusters of specific petitions. We begin with the general.

1B. Generally, we are to pray for

The honor of God's name and thus the glory of God

The spread of the gospel

Growth in obedience

The necessities of life

Forgiveness

Deliverance from evil

2B. Specifically, we are to pray for a variety of things in clusters

Qualification: there is no formula (or exact pattern) to follow; it is a matter of meditation on these things and the implementation of them intuitively in *ad hoc* fashion.

1C. Hallowed be your name

We ask, we petition, we entreat, and we pray

- That God will sanctify Himself as king
- That His creation will see more and more of His radiant glory
- That He will make Himself known in His greatness and majesty
- That God will be revered and honored as the living and true God of Scripture, triune, independent, immutable, sovereign, just, holy, and good
- That understanding and acknowledgment of the doctrines of grace will increase and abound to the praise of God's name

2C. Your kingdom come

We ask for

- The well-being of our neighbors (especially their forgiveness by God; Mat. 5.43-44; Lk. 23.34)
- Laborers into the sure harvest (Mat. 9.38)
- An open door (Col. 4.3)
- Bold proclamation (Eph. 6.19-20)
- Clear proclamation (Col. 4.4)
- Universal spread of the apostolic gospel (1 Tim. 2.8)

3C. Your will be done

We ask God to give us

- Knowledge of His will
- Practical obedience to it
- Growth in grace
- Progress in sanctification

4C. Give us our daily breadWe petition our Father for

- Work
- Productive and useful work
- Responsible work in both attitude and action (toward the job and the people there)
- Contentment with regard to earthly things (this can be a particularly slippery slope)
- Enjoyment of life by the blessing of God (with our minds right; priorities in good order)

5C. Forgive us as we forgive othersWe ask for

- Pardon of an immeasurable debt that we cannot pay (hence we ask)
- Daily cleansing (we do not store up confession until communion Sunday)
- We seek forgiveness on condition that we give it (proportional to how we grant it)

6C. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evilFinally, we petition the Lord to give us

- Knowledge of Satan's devices
- Discernment in the face of deception from angels of light and deceitful philosophy
- Wisdom regarding earthly things (cf. the slippery slope again and the red flag of caution)
- Watchfulness
- Godly habits that are preventative (before the appearance of temptation and sin)

3A. Implications

To me, one of the amazing things about the Lord's Family Prayer is the way it cultivates a godly life. When we pray along these lines sincerely and regularly, we become more and more conscious of the outline of prayer as an outline of not only the life *of prayer* but also of the *life* of

prayer (life cultivated by prayer, by the content of your prayers). That is, we have a pattern of godly living impressed on our hearts in such a way that it begins to flow through the arteries and veins of our daily lives. We can think about each petition in that way for some edifying meditations. The six become hooks on which to hang the themes, the general petitions, the specific petitions, and the implications. Again, this is for *ad hoc* use.

1) The God-centered posture of life

The primary concern of prayer and of the Christian life is boldly and unmistakably before our eyes. The height of piety is prayer and the height of prayer is praying for God's honor and glory. This cultivates Creator-centeredness in contrast to creature-centeredness, God-centeredness instead of self-centeredness. It means nothing less than the cultivation of Calvinism. The reformed world and life view has its beginning here. Warfield is worth quoting in this connection:

The Calvinist is the man who is determined to preserve the attitude he takes in prayer in all his thinking, in all his feeling, in all his doing. That is to say, he is the man who is determined that religion in its purity shall come to its full rights in his thinking, and feeling, and living.

Other men are Calvinists on their knees; the Calvinist is the man who is determined that his intellect and heart, and will shall remain on their knees continually, and only from this attitude think, and feel, and act. Calvinism is, therefore, that type of thought in which there comes to its rights the truly religious attitude of utter dependence on God and humble trust in his mercy alone for salvation (*Shorter Writings*, I, 390).

2) Evangelistic concern

The Lord's Prayer gives us a direct example of evangelistic praying in which we are to pray for the spread of gospel everywhere with clarity (doctrine that we define). This cultivates neighborly love.

3) Discipleship

Praying for the doing of God's will involves prayer for understanding and it properly includes commitment to live under divine authority. This promotes intelligent, submissive obedience.

4) Gratitude, praise, and contentment

If I asked you to identify the "gratitude and praise" petition (besides the 1st), which would you cite? I am thinking of the daily bread petition. We have emphasized the fact that the fourth petition shatters the sacred/secular worldview. In the middle of the lofty requests, the Lord Jesus directs us to the Father in heaven for our daily bread. This teaches us that He is faithful and good and that there is an inherent good in all of created reality. For example, wine is good not evil and is to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim. 4.4). Finally, contentment is what puts great gain into godliness (note the warning here for which the test is a consideration of priorities: if we go without a good physical diet for whatever "good" reason because we need this and that in our work and sustenance, we will bring on various ailments as a law of sowing and reaping):

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment,⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we

will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Tim. 6.6-10)

On reflection, embracing the idea that the Lord directs us to the Father for our daily needs is a wonderful cause of gratitude, praise, and contentment.

5) Forgiving others

We cannot pray properly without cultivating this component of godly living. It is an essential of the Christian life that we practice forgiving grace as people forgiven by grace. Again, powerfully, we ask for forgiveness in proportion to how we grant it.

6) Christian warfare

We need to be aware of the lurking dangers of temptation and sin. The sixth petition continually reminds us that the Christian life takes place on a battlefield. We need to take up the means of our warfare diligently. We must do so or we ask to be knocked off our feet and trampled upon. This will be painful; it is difficult to get up at least much more difficult than standing our ground in hand-to-hand combat. Of course, we are to fight the good fight of faith in true humility acknowledging our weakness. Ahead of the times of crisis, the sixth petition helps us cultivate godly habits of life that furnish strength against temptation and sin.

Conclusion

Therefore, brother and sisters in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit I exhort you to pray and to live according to the pattern of the Lord's Family Prayer. Avail yourselves of opportunities for one-anothering prayer. Begin at home or with a close friend. Carry it through at church as part of the Christian family in Christ. This is a wonderful opportunity to taste "now" of the "not yet" of the Beatitudes and the coming of the kingdom.