

Rightly Dividing the Gospels

—Installment 37—

The Sermon on the Mount

—Part 11—

The Model Prayer

(usually called “The Lord’s Prayer”)

~ 28 A.D., after Passover

Near Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee

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I. Brief Review of Overview of the Sermon on the Mount

- A. We are treating Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount conjointly with Luke’s Sermon on the Plain
- B. Audience
 - 1. His disciples, whom he particularly addressed in a public setting among multitudes
 - a. That is, those whom he was preparing to receive and enter his kingdom
- C. Theme
 - 1. The kingdom and its distinctive qualities

II. Covered so far

- A. Beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3–12; Luke 6: 20–26)
- B. Salt and light..... (Matt. 5: 13–16)
- C. Relationship of Jesus’ Doctrine to OT and Traditional Doctrine (Matt. 5: 17–48; Luke 6: 27–36)
 - 1. We considered the meaning of Jesus’ declared purpose to fulfill the OT
 - a. Fulfillment of the OT means satisfying its objective—leading to Christ and the NT
 - 2. We showed that he meant for his commands in this sermon to be applied to Christians vv. 19–20
 - a. These commandments pertain to the subjects of the kingdom, i.e. Christians
 - b. Those given in this instructional phase could be obeyed without abrogating the OT law
- D. The Distinctive Doctrines of Jesus Matt. 5: 21–48
 - 1. In this section we saw Jesus modify existing OT doctrines in characteristic ways
 - a. Expanding their scope by spiritual application
 - b. Restricting their permissions in light of underlying spiritual principles

- c. These modifications make NT law considerably higher than OT law
 - i. Condemns sin in the heart even when unexpressed
 - ii. Interested in lowest roots and causation of sin
 - (i) Interested in morally suspect conditions even when legal
 - iii. Less detailed, but much harder to obey
 - (i) More emphasis on principle, less on code
 - (ii) Godlike standards
 - 1. Some are all but impossible to fully obey
 - 2. This illuminates the weakness of human flesh
 - a. Which promotes humility
 - 3. And thus the need for grace
 - a. Which promotes thankfulness

III. Simplicity and Purity in Service Matt. 6: 1–18

- A. As the previous section showed Jesus' concern with the roots and causation of sin, this section shows him concerned about the roots and motives of Godly service
- B. He covers three aspects of devotional service
 - 1. Almsgiving
 - 2. Prayer
 - 3. Fasting
- C. This section provides detail for understanding the surprising statement earlier in the sermon that the disciples' righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5: 20)
- D. Rightly dividing the word
 - 1. Unlike the six commands of the previous section, Jesus' purpose here is NOT to modify the OT commands
 - a. He does not say "ye have heard that it hath been said, but I say unto you..."
 - b. We see that he carries the OT commands intact into the NT, but with a new characteristic focus akin to that he brought to those commands he did modify
 - i. Interested in the spiritual roots (motive and manner) underpinning the acts
- E. Spiritual character of the acts
 - 1. Manner: Sincerity vs. ostentation (i.e. displayed as spectacle)
 - 2. Motive: Seeking God's praise, not man's
- F. "They have their reward"
 - 1. Suggests that God will not further reward an act whose motive is the praise of men
 - 2. God's reward is described as recompense
 - a. Salvation is not earned in this way: it is a gift of grace

- b. But other lesser rewards are described as recompense.....(Matt. 10: 42; Heb. 11: 26)

G. Secrecy

1. The command to secrecy is a spiritual principle meant for judicious application
 - a. It is not always necessary, desirable or even possible to conceal good works; but when it is appropriate to do so, we should do them in secret and thereby avoid the temptation to seek the praise of men

H. Problematic prayer

1. Vain repetition
 - a. Jesus' command does not forbid repetition
 - i. Vain repetition is characteristic of prayers to false gods
2. Much speaking
 - a. Likewise, it is not long length *per se* that Jesus criticizes, but the foolish idea that length correlates with merit
 - i. He himself often prayed at very great length
 - b. "Your father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him"
 - i. Prayer does not serve to inform God; he knows our needs earlier and better than we
 - ii. Prayer serves rather to establish certain needful conditions in the petitioner's heart:
 - (i) Communion with God
 - (ii) A posture of humble supplication

- I. Prayer is, quite literally, the act of *asking* – of seeking favor. It is not an act of meritorious service apart from the asking.

IV. The Model Prayer Matt. 6: 9–13

- A. This beloved prayer, usually called "The Lord's Prayer," is commonly memorized and recited by rote
 1. The common title, though inoffensive, is mildly unsatisfactory
 - a. Jesus prayed many prayers that were uniquely his own; this one is not among them
 - i. It really isn't his prayer; it is an example prayer given to his disciples for their instruction
 - b. More accurately, we might call it The Disciples' Prayer or The Model Prayer
- B. The introductory command and purpose
 1. "After this manner therefore pray ye"
 - a. Jesus' discussion of prayer to this point had concentrated on problematic prayer — how not to pray (not as the hypocrites or the heathen do)
 - b. His introductory command establishes the prayer's purpose as a model for his disciples
 - c. He commands here the manner, not the exact wording or even the specific content
 - i. We look primarily for how he prays, and secondarily to what he prays
 - ii. Later prayers by the disciples follow the manner; none follow the words even approximately
- C. The address

1. “Our Father which art in heaven”
 - a. The correct object of prayer is God the Father in heaven
 - i. The record of scripture is consistent throughout the Bible on this point: whenever the object of prayer is identified, it is always God the Father
 - ii. It is not Jesus, or the Holy Spirit, or Mary, or some saint
 - (i) On at least one occasion, several of the saints and Mary were gathered together in continual prayer, but they evidently weren’t praying to each other Acts 1: 13–14
 - iii. We pray in the Spirit, aided by both Jesus and the HS, but unto God
 - b. The address appears only at the beginning
 - i. It is not necessary to repeat it throughout the prayer
 - ii. Jesus does repeat the address in lengthy prayers(John 17: 1, 5, 11, 21, 24, 25)
 - iii. Repeated address can run to “vain repetition” and “much speaking”
 2. “Hallowed be thy name”
 - a. This is a simple statement of reverence for God and his name, concluding the address and establishing the proper mood of subservience and supplication
 - b. It could be translated “Your name is holy”
- D. The requests
1. The body of this prayer is a series of six requests
 - a. They are given in the grammatical imperative mood, but as requests, not commands
 2. A good prayer is mostly requests
 - a. Paul’s instruction to the Ephesians has three variants of the same idea — praying, prayer, supplication (requests and petitions in other translations) — and several things he wanted them to pray for, both general and specific Eph. 6: 18–20
 - b. Declarative statements easily run afoul of Jesus’ teachings about problematic prayer
 - i. The Pharisee, unjustified in his prayer, didn’t even ask for anything..... Luke 18: 11–12
 - c. This model prayer has little in the way of praise or thanksgiving
 - i. We should give these “in everything” “continually” I Thess. 5: 18; Heb. 13:15
 - (i) Praise and thanksgiving are not really prayer
 1. They are sacrifices; works of service
 2. The Pharisee was unjustified because justification does not come by works
 3. Jesus asks directly and without fawning or obsequiousness
 - a. “Let us therefore come boldly” Heb. 4: 16
 - b. It is not necessary to burden the prayer with numerous “pleases” or “if you will”
 - i. He establishes the proper mood of supplication with a reverent address and one “thy will be done”
 4. “Thy kingdom come”

- a. This first request might be reworded as “bring your kingdom” or “establish your kingdom”
 - b. This request has been fulfilled by the ascension of Jesus to his throne and the establishment of that body of people who call him their king — the church.
 - c. It is anachronistic for a Christian to pray for the coming of the kingdom: it has already come
 - d. If we pray for it now, we betray either ignorance of the kingdom, or ignorance of the fact that the model is in the manner, not the specific request
 - e. In the previous section, we saw how Jesus uses illustrative examples to establish principles
 - i. And some of his illustrative examples are drawn from obsolete OT subjects, even though they are intended to establish enduring NT principles (altar, council, Jerusalem)
 - ii. In this case, he gives a specific case of the general request, “thy will be done.”
5. “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”
- a. This is a profoundly important request, perhaps the most important request we can ever ask
 - i. Jesus asked it at least three times in Gethsemane, in his most urgent prayer
 - b. It is also a profoundly spiritual request
 - i. Minimally selfish
 - ii. Maximally submissive
6. “Give us this day our daily bread”
- a. This request tells us how to ask for physical blessings
 - i. It is not greedy
 - (i) It asks only for necessity (bread), not luxury (milk and honey)
 - ii. It is not faithless
 - (i) It asks only for what can be used today
7. “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”
- a. This request illustrates the point that this is not really “the Lord’s Prayer”, for he had no debts and needed no forgiveness
 - b. This is a spiritual request, but more focused than “thy will be done”
 - i. Like the bread request, it is neither greedy nor faithless
 - c. Jesus includes a little instruction in the request, to which he returns immediately after the prayer
 - i. Forgiveness requires more than just a request
 - d. Note that “debt” is broader than “trespass.” The former includes not only sins but other obligations of right.
 - i. We need to be careful, not only to forgive trespasses, but also to allow our rights and privileges to go unsatisfied
8. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”
- a. Another focused request for a fundamental spiritual need
 - i. Neither greedy nor faithless

- b. God does not tempt man..... (James 1:13)
 - i. But he does permit temptation Job 1, 2
 - ii. And even lead to it (via HS in this case)..... Matt. 4: 1
 - iii. And he controls it to keep it within the realm of bearable I Cor. 10: 13; II Peter 2: 9
- c. This request resembles Jesus' later request that the cup should pass from him
 - i. Temptation is useful and to be counted joy James 1: 2-3, 12
 - ii. But, even as Jesus' "cup" was useful and necessary, we pray with him that our trials might be few and small

V. The Doxology.....Matt. 6: 13b

- A. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."
 - 1. This closing statement is regarded, by nearly universal consent among Bible scholars, to be an inauthentic addition to the original scripture, probably borrowed from some ancient liturgy
 - 2. Although its assertions are true, it probably should not be considered authentic to Jesus or Matthew
 - 3. In that belief, I will not comment further on its meaning

VI. The Structure of the Prayer

- A. Without the inauthentic doxology, the prayer is extremely simple:
 - 1. Address
 - 2. Six requests
- B. These form an instructive arc of thought
 - 1. We advance in recognition of God's glory and authority
 - a. His name (He is holy God)
 - b. His kingdom (He rules a people by divine authority)
 - c. His will (His will is best and worthy of submission by love, in the manner of heaven's angels)
 - 2. His providence is comprehensive
 - a. Present, to the satisfaction of daily need
 - b. Past, to the forgiveness of debt
 - c. Future, to the avoidance of trial

VII. The Explanation Regarding Forgiveness..... Matt. 6: 14-15

- A. Jesus follows the prayer with further instruction about asking for forgiveness
 - 1. God will not forgive the unforgiving Matt. 18: 23-35

VIII. Problematic Use of the Prayer

- A. The rote repetition of this prayer, as commonly practiced, is problematic in several ways
 - 1. It ignores the context of instruction in which it appears, forbidding vain repetition

- a. As used in the Catholic Rosary and similar recitations, it takes the character of meritorious service, again in contradiction of the contextual instruction
 - i. One estimate says that, on Easter, two billion Christians recite this prayer
 - ii. Chanting is better suited to meritorious service than to sincere supplication
2. It is often recited publicly and in unison
 - a. While neither of these are expressly forbidden in scripture, we have no evidence of their practice in NT times
 - b. Indeed we have no evidence that anyone in the NT church ever recited this prayer at all
3. It ignorantly includes the anachronism (“thy kingdom come”), inappropriate for use by Christians
4. It commonly includes the Doxology, of doubtful authenticity