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THE DISCIPLE'S PRAYER

Commonly called 'The Lord's Prayer.'

(Based upon a series of messages preached by Rev Ivan Foster, in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church in 1987 and presently being repeated in the Young People's Fellowship meetings in the church)

The Preface to the Prayer - "Our Father which art in heaven"

Matthew 6:9.

I think it profitable to point out that though this prayer is commonly called 'The Lord's Prayer', it is in truth a disciple's prayer. Our Saviour could never have prayed a prayer, at the heart of which was a confession of sin and a seeking of forgiveness. The Lord Jesus is our Great High Priest Who is "without sin," Hebrews 4:15.

This prayer was given of Him as a pattern for His disciples in all ages, upon which to base their praying. We are told in Luke 11:1 that the Saviour's help was sought by the disciples after they heard Him praying. "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." The Saviour readily acceded to their request. In Luke we have a different occasion from that recorded in Matthew 6:9. John Gill says of the passage in Luke: "The following directions concerning prayer, though they agree with those in Matthew 6:9 etc., yet were delivered at another time, and in another place, and upon another occasion: Christ was then in Galilee, now in Judea: he gave the former directions unasked for, these at the request of one of his disciples; the others were given as he was preaching, these immediately after he had been praying."

It is to be noted that there are differences in the two forms of this prayer given in Matthew's and Luke's accounts. That to me suggests that the repetition of this prayer was not what the Saviour was directing His disciples to do, but rather the form, the content of the prayer should form the basis of all our prayers.

You do not find this form of words taught by the apostles, though the contents of the prayer are to be found in every recorded prayer in the writings of the apostles. I cannot condemn the repetition of these words, though I believe that such repetition gives rise to error and generates amongst the unconverted, who are encouraged to repeat this prayer during public worship, the notion that they are truly the children of God.

The importance of prayer may be seen in the words of Christ as He cleansed the temple. "And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves," Matthew 21:13. Prayer was the central character of worship in the Old Testament and still is. From the dawn of time men gathered to worship God together in the prayer meeting. "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD," Genesis 4:26. These words take us back to the second generation of mankind. As soon as the number of the righteous permitted the forming of a congregation to pray, they did so!

It is interesting to note that the instruction given in Luke chapter 11 came about as a result of a request for teaching on this holy subject, a request prompted by hearing Christ pray. "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples," Luke 11:1.

What a glorious thing it was to have had the privilege of listening to the Saviour speak with His Father! What spiritual, mental and fleshly difficulties we encounter when we seek to pray! No such barriers and hindrances would have marred the fellowship and communion between the Father and the Son. What fervour, what freedom would have been evidenced to the disciples listening there to that hallowed conversation!

Doubtless, it was this that pressed upon the souls of the disciples the terrible truth that "we know not what we should pray for as we ought," Romans 8:26. But praise God, the Saviour is ever ready to help us by His instructive Word and His Holy Spirit. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what



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we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered," Romans 8:26.

As we come to our study of this preface to the prayer the Saviour taught, please note:

I. THE QUALIFICATION REQUIRED TO PRAY SUCH A PRAYER

"Our Father."

1. None can pray this prayer except those who stand in a special relationship to God. All men are related to God. He is the Creator of all men though so many reject that truth. He is the Judge of all men, though again this truth is denied by the vast majority of mankind.

However, He is the FATHER only of a relatively small number of men and women. They are called His elect, His people, His redeemed.

2. This relationship begins with a birth. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John 3:3.

The 'new birth' is a 'birth from above'. That is the meaning of the phrase 'born again.'

The Christian is someone who has a second birth, a spiritual birth, whereby they who were 'dead in trespasses and sin' are made alive spiritually by the mighty power of God. We become "partakers of the divine nature," 2 Peter 1:4.

Such a birth is confirmed to the Christian by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," Romans 8:16. "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts," 2 Corinthians 1:21-22. "Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest (pledge, down payment) of the Spirit," 2 Corinthians 5:5.

3. Our relationship with God is bonded by faith. Animal experts tell us that in the few moments after the birth of their offspring, many species of wild animal bond with their young so that in the midst of thousands, sometimes tens of thousands, of like creatures, an adult can tell its offspring by its unique smell or sound.

Upon our new birth, a bond is formed between us and God. It is the bond of faith.

The Shorter Catechism states this truth in answer to Question 30.

Q. 30. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

Faith is the first evidence of the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration within us. "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) . . . For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," Ephesians 2:5, 8-10. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God," Ephesians 3:17-19.

4. Such a relationship is legally based. As every birth in this land is recorded and the relationship between child and parents established, so the Christian's relationship with God is legally established. "But



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when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ," Galatians 4:4-7.

Our sonship can never be denied by the devil or any of his agents.

5. That such a relationship exists will manifest itself in the life of the true believer in a number of ways.

a. There will be a love and an honour shown toward God. We will love Him and honour His Word, His Name, His Day and His House. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name," Malachi 1:6. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man," Ecclesiastes 12:13. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king," 1 Peter 2:17.

b. There will be a likeness to our Father in our character. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children," Ephesians 5:1. The word 'follower' means 'imitator.' As we develop so many traits of our character from our parents through imitation even so we grow in likeness to our Heavenly Father by our following of His commands. There should be this constant growing likeness to God and to Christ throughout our life. We term it 'sanctification.'

Q. 35. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

We are commanded to grow in the likeness of God. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen," 2 Peter 3:18. This growth will be finalised when we rise from the grave at Christ's appearing, bearing the likeness of His glory for all eternity. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is," 1 John 3:1, 2.

c. We will have a love for all the children of God. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," John 13:34-35. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king," 1 Peter 2:17. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" 1 John 4:20.

Surely our Heavenly Father will look for such love in our hearts as we gather together to pray! "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift," Matthew 5:21-24.

Let us keep such matters in mind as we call upon the name of the Lord lest our prayers be hindered!

Ivan Foster, 16th October 2015.