

GOD-CENTRED PRAYING

Zac Poonen

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For further details, please contact:

Zac Poonen

*16 DaCosta Square,
Bangalore - 560084. India.*

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Our Father Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory,
forever.

Amen.

THIS BOOK AND YOU

There are two essentials to effective prayer.

The first is that we must have a God-given BURDEN. Prayer is like a circle that begins and ends in God. The first half of that circle is God giving us a burden in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The second half of the circle is our praying that God-inspired prayer back to our Father. Thus the circle is complete. This is what it means to 'pray in the Spirit'.

The second essential is FAITH. God expects us to trust Him. We dishonour Him by unbelief - because unbelief implies that God is less considerate towards us than earthly fathers are towards their children.

Prayer is not really prayer in God's ears, if our petitions originate only in our minds or on our tongues. It is only when they are the deepest longings of our hearts, that they become true prayer.

Prayer is essentially a matter of life. And the effectiveness of our prayers will depend upon the righteousness of our life. True righteousness makes a man God-centred. That means that he begins to "look at things from God's viewpoint" (Col. 1:9 - Paraphrase). He is no longer looking at people or things or circumstances from a human viewpoint (2 Cor. 5:16). All these may remain unchanged around him. But the God-centred man has moved up to the heavenlies, and now looks at everyone and everything the way God looks at them.

Only such a man can pray according to the mind of God.

God meant prayer to be to our spirits what breathing is to our bodies. Breathing is an effortless activity that we are engaged in all the time. We don't need books to teach us how to breathe! In fact, when breathing becomes difficult for us, it's a sign of some sickness!

That doesn't mean prayer is not strenuous work. Jesus prayed "with loud crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7). The apostles "laboured earnestly in their prayers" (Col. 4:12). All wholehearted Christians will find prayer to be the same, for "our struggle is against spiritual forces of wickedness" (Eph. 6:12). But when prayer becomes a dreary ritual, it's a sure sign that the patient has 'spiritual asthma'!

Such believers are sick. And they need to realise it. What they need to be cured is not more teaching on how to pray but some teaching on re-orienting their priorities in life.

That's what this book is all about.

When we are centred in God and have our priorities right, we'll be healed of this 'asthma'. Prayer will still be mingled with loud crying and tears, and there will still be travail and struggle, but it won't be a ritual any longer. It will be a delight and a joy.

If you want such a life, read on.....

Zac Poonen

CHAPTER ONE

HOW NOT TO PRAY

"When you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.

Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:5-15).

This is the only prayer that Jesus ever taught His disciples. It must certainly be profitable for us then to understand it properly.

Jesus said that whenever we pray we were to pray in this way (v.9). That doesn't mean that we have to repeat this prayer each time we pray. But it does mean that all our praying should follow this pattern.

There's no harm in praying this prayer if we mean every sentence of it. But that's not easy, as we shall soon see.

Before Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He first taught them how NOT to pray.

Not As The Hypocrites

The first thing that Jesus said in relation to how NOT to pray was that we were not to pray as the hypocrites do (v.5,6).

As you read through the gospels you find that Jesus had a lot to say about hypocrisy. He condemned the Pharisees in no uncertain terms, because they were hypocrites. The Pharisees had many good points about them. They prayed every day. They fasted twice every week. They tithed not only their money, but the dill and cummin that grew in their kitchen garden as well. They were extremely careful in following the little details of what they understood to be the laws of God. Externally they were very moral and upright. They would never miss a Sabbath service in the synagogue. They were deeply taught in the Scriptures. Yet Jesus condemned them because what they did was primarily in order to obtain honour from their fellow men. "They loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (Jn. 12:43).

The descendants of the Pharisees - those who love the praise of their leaders and other men, more than the praise of God - now live in the midst of every church and fellowship in the world.

The word "hypocrite" comes from a Greek word which means an actor. Think of a man who acts as John the Baptist in a Hollywood movie. In real life he may be a drunkard and a debaucher, having divorced two or three wives. But in the movie, he plays his part as a holy prophet of God. That's what a hypocrite is - one who acts a part before men, but who is actually something quite different in real life.

A hypocrite may act his part as a wholehearted Christian before other believers. But if you saw the way he treated his wife at home, or how he deals with people in his office, you'd find he's a different person altogether. Why? He is not acting there. At home and at work he is the person that he really is. He is a religious man, not a spiritual man.

An actor wants his audience to appreciate how he acts. So does every hypocrite. So did the Pharisees in the first century; and so do the Pharisees in the twentieth century. Whatever they do, even if it be a sacred activity such as praying, they want to be appreciated by men. They may pray beautifully - but it is for people to notice them.

If we are honest, we will have to confess that many a time, we have all prayed as hypocrites - more conscious that people were listening to us, than God. Maybe we need to confess to the Lord that when we pray in public we don't pray in the same way as we do when we're alone. Perhaps we use flowery or fervent language in our public prayer to impress people. Jesus warned us to beware of praying like that, for that type of prayer doesn't reach God at all.

If we want to be delivered from hypocrisy, whether in our preaching, or our living, or our praying, we need to ask God to give us such a fear of Him that we care more for His praise than for the praise of men. Until we learn to fear God aright, we shall continue to be actors playing our part before men, in every area of our lives.

Jesus condemned hypocrisy more than any other sin.

Not Giving False Impressions

The first sin that we read of in the early church was hypocrisy. In Acts 5, you read of Ananias and Sapphira.

What was their sin?

Was it that they didn't bring all the money which they got from the sale of their property and give it to God? No. That was not their sin. If you sell your property for 100,000 rupees and decide to give only 50,000 rupees to God, that is not a sin. If you decide to give nothing to God that is not a sin either. That is really your own business as to how much you give to Him. God loves a cheerful giver; and if you don't give cheerfully, you might as well give nothing. He doesn't need your money. He has more than enough of silver and gold!

Why then did Ananias and Sapphira die? The reason was this: Ananias pretended that what he was laying at the apostles' feet was the whole of the sale-money. With a holy, pious look on his face, Ananias looked just as consecrated as the others. He was an actor, a hypocrite.

But Peter was a man of God and he wasn't fooled. God gave him discernment to see through the hollowness of Ananias' consecration. And he said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:3).

What lie did Ananias say? He hadn't opened his mouth.

What does it mean to tell a lie? It means to give a false impression; and you can give a false impression without even opening your mouth.

That's what Ananias did. He wanted to get the acclaim of others that he was also a wholehearted disciple. But he was not. He had kept something back for himself. Now, as I said, that was not a sin. If only he had said, "Brother Peter, I have sold my land. But I don't feel I should give all the sale proceeds to God, like the others are doing. Here is a part of the money" - if he had said that, he would not have died. That would have been honesty, and God would have appreciated it.

But he pretended. That was his sin and that's why he died. A little later his wife came in and she acted her part beautifully too! She also pretended that she was giving everything. And she died as well.

That hypocrisy was like a little leaven that had got into the early church; and God knew that if it wasn't taken out immediately, the whole church would soon be corrupted. That's why He slew them at once.

If you don't beware of hypocrisy in every area of your life, you will never be able to overcome hypocrisy in your prayer-life. If you pray in order that other people may appreciate you, then Jesus says, "You've already got your reward" (Matt. 6:2). Your desire then is not that God should be glorified through your prayer but that other people should know how well you can pray. Then you'll get that reward.

But that's all you'll get. That's what you wanted, and that's what you'll get.

This is a principle in the Christian life that we get what we long for in the depths of our hearts, and not what we ask for with our lips. Seek and you will find what you are really seeking for!

When we stand at the judgment seat of Christ, we will stand stripped of all our outward veneer. There we shall be seen no longer as actors but as we really are. That's why the Bible says that we have to be careful how we walk today, lest we stand there stripped, naked and ashamed one day.

1 John 2:28 reads, "Now little children abide in Christ so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink away." The people who are going to be ashamed in that day are those who lived their life on earth as actors.

I'm speaking now to believers. To whom was the "sermon on the mount" preached? If you'll turn to Matthew 5:1-2, you'll find that Jesus spoke those words to His disciples. It was to His disciples that He said, "Beware of practising your righteousness before men" (Matt. 6:1). It was to his disciples that he said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." (Luke 12:1).

Walking In The Light

The Bible says in 1 John 1:7 that we cannot have fellowship with God if we do not walk in the light. If we walk in the light we certainly can't hide anything, for the light exposes everything. The man who walks in darkness is the one who has something to hide in his life. If we walk in the light, our life is an open book. We can then invite people to examine our private life, our account books and everything. There is nothing we want to hide. It doesn't mean that we're perfect. No, it only means that we are honest.

The first thing that God requires from all of us is honesty - absolute honesty. If we are willing to be honest first, many of our other problems will be solved very quickly. We will progress in leaps and bounds in our spiritual life if we live by this fundamental rule of honesty before God and men.

But you'll find that this is a battle. You may say, "I'm really going to take that exhortation seriously. I'm going to be honest from now on." But you'll find before the week is out that you're tempted to be an actor again, and to seek for the praise of men rather than the praise of God. So you have to determine to fight that battle and win.

It is a great grief to God that there are so many Christians today who have been born again for twenty, thirty or forty years, but who haven't progressed spiritually because they have not learned this fundamental lesson of being honest. We can't progress if there is hypocrisy in our life. Our prayers will not be heard. We can have all-night prayer meetings; but we are wasting our time. Our prayers will not be heard if we do not get rid of hypocrisy first.

We must recognize that our true spiritual worth is what we are before God and nothing more than that. Our spiritual state is not determined by our knowledge of the Bible, nor by how much we pray, nor by how many meetings we attend, nor by what the elders or others in the church think of us. On the contrary, ask yourself, "What does God, Who can see into every area of my life, think of me?" The answer to that is the real measure of how spiritual you are. We need to remind ourselves of this daily, or else we may find ourselves becoming actors again.

I love those words that Jesus said about Nathaniel, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47). If Jesus could say that about you and me, that would be a greater commendation than almost anything else. Nathaniel was not perfect. He was imperfect. But he was honest about his imperfections. He didn't pretend to be something that he wasn't. That's where he was different from Ananias and Sapphira.

Not With Meaningless Repetition

A second thing that Jesus warned us against was the use of meaningless repetition in prayer, as the Gentiles do when they pray.

It is not the number of words that we use that God sees as much as the longings of our heart. Real prayer is the longing of the heart. That longing is what ascends to God and gets an answer.

Repetition of words is all right, if you mean what you say. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed three times using the same words (Mt. 26:44). But His words were not empty repetition. Each time He prayed, the words came with a burden from His heart. You can pray with the same words ten times a day, and God will hear you, if you pray sincerely from your heart each time.

Christians are guilty of telling more lies to God on Sundays than on any other day. You know why? Because it is on Sundays that they sing so many hymns - such as, "All to Jesus I surrender", "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold", etc.,

You may sing those words because they're in the hymnbook. But you don't mean them. And you don't realize that you're speaking directly to God when you sing such hymns. Maybe you are more conscious of the tune than of the words. That's when you tell lies to God.

Jesus said that we would have to give an account to God in the day of judgment for every careless word that we spoke (Mt. 12:36). It's because we live in a generation of Christians who do not fear God that such warnings of our Lord are not taken seriously.

Vain repetition is the mark of the heathen who come into God's presence carelessly and say things that they don't mean. That should never be found in our praying or our singing.

Not Trusting In Long Prayers

Jesus also said that the heathen thought that they would be heard because of their many words.

Some believers feel that if they have an all-night prayer meeting, God is bound to answer them, just because they prayed for so long. That type of praying is characteristic of the heathen.

You remember the time on Mount Carmel when Elijah stood on one side and 450 prophets of the heathen God, Baal, stood on the other side and they both tried to bring fire down from heaven to find out who was the true God. The prophets of Baal had a long prayer meeting. They prayed and prayed and prayed; and then they jumped and danced and shouted. But there was no fire. God saw their hearts and He wasn't impressed by their emotional outbursts or their noise (1 Kings 18:20-29).

There are Christians who pray like that too! They think God will hear them because of all their emotion and their shouting.

And then Elijah prayed. His prayer was over in less than a minute but it brought the fire. That's the test - not whether you pray for a minute or all night, but whether God answers or not!

"Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16). James goes on to refer to Elijah's example there. Elijah's prayer was answered, not because he shouted for so many hours but because he was a righteous man. It's the life behind the prayer that makes the prayer effective. Let's never forget that.

These are some of the fundamental lessons that Jesus taught His disciples, before He taught them how they should pray. We can never learn to pray aright if we don't first learn how not to pray.

Let me add one last word here, lest I be misunderstood.

Having an all-night prayer meeting is certainly not wrong. Jesus Himself prayed all night on one occasion (Lk. 6:12). What Jesus condemned was not much praying, but trusting in many words. There is a lot of difference between many words and much praying. If our praying is only many words then it is a waste of time. Jesus could spend a whole night in prayer effectively because His heart was right and He had a God-given burden.

However, it's not the length of time spent in prayer that determines whether God answers or not. It's the life of the man who prays that determines that.

CHAPTER TWO

GOD WHO IS OUR FATHER

"Our Father Who art in heaven"

Children usually pray to the Lord Jesus and there is nothing wrong with that. But it is good to remember that in the only prayer Jesus ever taught His disciples, He taught them to address their prayers to God the Father. We pray IN the Spirit THROUGH the Son TO the Father.

Not everyone can address God as Father though. On earth, it's only the man through whom you were born whom you can call your father. We must recognize this when we pray to God as well. It is only when a person turns from his sins, yielding himself to Jesus Christ as Lord of his life that he is born again as a child of God. Only then can he call God "Father".

Our New Testament Privilege

The Israelites could never call God their Father. That title was introduced for the first time by Jesus. It was the title that Jesus Himself used constantly in His own communication with His heavenly Father. We don't realise what a privilege it is to call God our Father.

In the Old Testament, God taught the Jews His unapproachable holiness by putting a veil in the temple, behind which was the most holy place, where He dwelt. Into this place no man could enter, except the high priest once a year. If you had gone to those Jews 2500 years ago and told them that one day, God was going to open a way for anyone to enter His presence freely, they would have considered it impossible.

Yet this is the privilege that is offered us today under the new covenant. The veil has now been rent so that we have freedom of access right into the Father's presence; and we can call Him "Father." We've got to read the Old Testament if we want to appreciate our new covenant privileges sufficiently.

It's wonderful to see the father-heart of God in the parable of the prodigal son. The son comes back after having wasted his father's property and ruined his father's name. As soon as the father sees him, he runs to embrace him. There we see a picture of God the Father. It's the only place in the Bible where God is pictured as running - and it is to embrace a repentant sinner (Lk. 15:20)!

That was how Jesus portrayed God to the people. He wanted to eradicate from their minds the wrong concepts of God that the teachings of the scribes and the Pharisees had given them.

After the resurrection, when Mary Magdalene met Jesus outside the tomb, Jesus said to her, "I ascend to My Father and your Father" (Jn. 20:17). Through the death and resurrection of Christ, His disciples had come into a relationship with God that had never existed before. They could now call God their own Father. As a child can sit on his father's lap, man could now be just as intimate with God.

A Loving Father

Many have the wrong idea that God the Father is a very strict Person and that it is only Jesus Who loves them. This is a Satanic distortion of the truth. It was the love of the Father that sent Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus told His disciples, "The Father Himself loves you" (Jn. 16:27). He also told them that if their Heavenly Father fed the birds and clothed the flowers, He would certainly take care

of them. There was no need for them to be anxious then, for their Heavenly Father knew all their needs (Matt. 6:26-34).

He also told them that if earthly fathers knew how to give good gifts to their children, their heavenly Father would certainly give good things to His children too (Matt. 7:11).

You may say that all this is very elementary. Yet many times when we come to God in prayer we don't really believe that God is going to grant us our request, because we are not sure of His tender, loving, fatherly care for us. Thus we limit God by our unbelief. Do you really believe that when you pray, you are speaking to a loving Father Who delights to hear you and Who cares for you?

Some may have the feeling that God will hear them only if they are mature saints. How is it with an earthly father? If he has a number of children, does he listen to his 20-year-old son more than to his 3-year-old daughter? Does he tell his little daughter, "You are too young to talk to me. I can't listen to you?" Certainly not. In fact, the father is more likely to listen to his youngest child than to His older children. It's even so with God.

He says, "All shall know Me (as Father), from the least (youngest) to the greatest (oldest)" (Heb. 8:11). Notice that the youngest are mentioned first!

Even if you were born again but yesterday, you can come to God boldly saying, "O God, You are my Father, I am Your child, and therefore I have a right to talk to You." That's the way Jesus encouraged His disciples to go to God in prayer.

Every time we pray, we must approach God as a Father who loves and cares, and who is interested in us. Only thus can faith be generated; and without faith it is no use praying at all.

God is a good God. He delights to give good gifts to His children. The Bible says in Psalm 84:11, "No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly." In Psalm 37:4 it says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." These promises in the Old Testament are endorsed and confirmed and amplified by Jesus in the New Testament along with many more promises.

This is the foundation for our faith - the conscious acknowledgement of God as our loving Father.

A Holy God

We are to address God as our Father WHO IS IN HEAVEN. He's not only our Father, He's also the Almighty God. We need to keep both these facts in mind when we come to Him in prayer.

We approach Him with reverence because He is a God Who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

Many Christians think of God as a grandfather!! You know how grandfathers are - always lenient with their grandchildren, ignoring whatever evil they do. Many Christians think that God is like that, not taking their sins seriously. That idea is totally wrong. God is a Father.

But He is also God. He is the One before whom the seraphs of heaven cover their faces and cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Isa. 6:3). Those seraphs have never sinned. Yet, when they approach God, they have to cover their faces, for they cannot bear to look upon the holiness of God. This tells us something about the infinite purity of God that our finite minds can never comprehend.

Consider the effect of the vision of God on some of the great men in the Bible. Isaiah felt he was a terrible sinner when he saw the glory of God (Isa. 6:5). Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God (Exod. 3:6). Daniel felt drained of all his strength (Dan. 10:8), and the apostle John fell down as a dead man (Rev. 1:17).

Since most Christians do not know God in this way, their lives remain shallow and superficial.

There are two extremes that people go to in approaching God. There are those who feel that God is unapproachable; and knowing nothing of His love, they live in constant dread of Him, trying to appease Him in various ways. At the other extreme, are some Christians who have developed such an unholy familiarity with God, that they don't fear Him any longer as a consuming fire.

One who approaches God without reverence does not know God at all. The more we know Him, the more we'll fear Him and reverence Him when we come to Him in prayer. We come to Him with boldness, because He is our Father. But we come to Him with reverence too, because He is God.

Have you noticed that in the thirteen epistles of Paul (from Romans through to Philemon), he always begins with this greeting, "Grace and peace from GOD OUR FATHER." Paul knew Him as God and as a Father; and he wanted others to know Him in the same way too.

A Sovereign Ruler

"Who art in heaven," also reminds us that the One we are praying to is One Who is Sovereign and Almighty, ruling in the heavens.

Even in the Old Testament, God sought to impress His sovereignty upon His people. He told them, "Relax and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psa.46:10 - NASB margin). He rules over all the earth as Supreme Sovereign and that's why we can relax!

Perhaps the greatest truth that the Church needs to recognize in this day is the truth of the sovereignty of God and the total authority of Jesus Christ over all nations and powers.

Consider something that has taken place in the lifetime of many of us. We all know that one of Israel's greatest enemies today is Soviet Russia. Russia would be delighted if Israel could be wiped out of existence. Yet in May 1948, when Great Britain failed to keep its promise to the Jews to give them the land of Palestine, it was the Russian vote in favour of Israel that enabled the United Nations to accept the establishment of the state of Israel. Of course, Russia's aim was to get the British out of Palestine. But nevertheless, it goes to show how God in His sovereignty, could use even an atheistic nation to fulfil His word and help bring the Jews back to their land, when a so-called 'Christian' nation backed out on its promise.

God is on the throne and He is in total control of the affairs of the world. It is only as our faith is rooted and grounded on this truth that our hearts can be at rest, no matter what may happen around us in the days to come.

The Bible tells us to pray for the government (1 Tim. 2:1,2). It's no use doing that unless we believe that our prayers are going to change existing situations. I, for one, wouldn't waste my time praying for those in authority, if I didn't believe that God was sovereign enough to influence government decisions and even voting patterns at election-time, in answer to prayer. We have prayed for our

country in past days and seen that our prayers have brought miraculous results - for the furtherance of God's purposes in our land!

"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). God can make the greatest ruler in the world change his decisions, if we pray.

If the Prime Minister of India were your father, what a difference that would make in your attitude to problems and difficulties that you face in your life. If your landlord threatens you, or your boss makes life difficult for you, or somebody is unjust towards you, or you need something done urgently, would you have any worries? No. You'd just have to ring up your Dad and ask him to solve your problem.

Isn't the Lord greater than the Prime Minister of India ? What do we do then when we face some problem in our life? Do we say, "Well, I'll just tell my heavenly Father about it. He rules the universe, and He can surely sort out this problem"? Or do we say, "I wish I knew some influential cabinet minister or Police Officer, who can help me now"? Which is our first reaction?

Many Christians are atheists when it comes to the practical matters of daily life. They talk about faith in God in the meetings and even in their homes. But when it comes to earthly matters, they are full of fear and anxiety just like any atheist.

There has never been as much fear as in our day. Jesus said that in the last days men's hearts would faint from fear wondering what was going to happen next (Luke 21:26). But it is at just such a time, that we are exhorted to lift up our heads fearlessly and to look for Christ's return (Luke 21:28).

Perfect Security

We have an Almighty Father and so we're certainly not orphans. Let's not behave like orphans then. When you're fearful or anxious, you're insulting your heavenly Father - for you are thereby saying that you have no confidence in Him, that you feel He can't do anything for you in your difficult situation, either because He is powerless or because He doesn't care! That is the testimony of an unbelieving heart.

If you really believed that God loved you and cared for you and was Almighty, why would you ever need to be anxious? There's a poem about a two birds that has often challenged me:

Said the robin to the sparrow, "I would really like to know Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so." Said the sparrow to the robin, "Friend, I think that it must be That they have no heavenly father such as cares for you and me."

Jesus said "Fear not, you are of more value than many sparrows." (Matt. 10:31). If Jesus is Lord of our life, and we have no ambition on earth, but to do the will of God, then we can be sure that "all things WILL work together for our good," whatever may happen to us or around us (Rom. 8:28).

God wants us to live in perfect security in His Fatherly love and care for us. We must be convinced that His care for us began even before we were born. He was the One Who determined who our parents should be, what our temperament should be, how much education we would receive, where we would live etc., Once we are convinced of this, we will find that we live in perfect rest, without a single complaint against our circumstances or our parents or anyone else (Psa. 139:16).

God can make even the anger of man to praise Him (Psa. 76:10). One of the clearest examples of this is found in the life of Joseph. If you read Genesis chapters 37 to 50, you'll see how God's sovereign

power made all the evil things that different people did to Joseph, to work together for his good, just because he was faithful to his God.

God promised the Israelites that those who honoured their parents would live long on the earth (Eph. 6:2,3). How could God promise that unless He was able to keep each such person from being murdered by an enemy and from dying of cancer or an accident etc., God is well able to do that - even today. It's only our unbelief that prevents us from enjoying the benefits of God's sovereign power.

The Father of a Family

Finally, remember that Jesus said that we were to call God, "OUR Father" and not "My Father". There's an important point here. This is a family-prayer. My heavenly Father has many children, and I must recognize this fact when I come to Him. I am only one among many of His children. No one in this family is more privileged than another. All are equal. He is OUR Father.

I cannot therefore have a proper vertical relationship with God, if my horizontal relationship with my fellow believers in this family is not proper. There are two arms to the cross - a vertical arm and a horizontal arm. Fellowship too has a vertical arm and a horizontal one. In other words, if my relationship with my brothers and sisters in the family of God is not proper, if I'm not on speaking terms with some of them, if I've a grudge against one of them or if I am angry with someone or haven't forgiven someone, then I cannot come to God and say, "OUR Father." Isn't He also the Father of that other person whom I haven't forgiven?

We cannot come to God if we despise anyone in the Body of Christ. You remember how the Pharisee prayed, "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not like other people or even like this tax-gatherer" (Lk. 18:11). With such an attitude we can never come to God in prayer. You cannot pray this prayer if you are not willing to come down to the level of all your fellow-believers, recognizing that as far as God is concerned, your social status and your education and even your spirituality do not exalt you above them in any way. We are all members of one family.

God intended the fellowship of each local church to have the atmosphere of a home, where brothers and sisters are like family members and where strangers coming in would feel that they were coming into a home. Where this is not so, it is because God's children there have failed to recognise what Jesus taught in this prayer.

And so, each time we pray, we must approach God on this basis: - recognizing His Fatherhood and His loving care, and therefore coming to Him with boldness; - recognizing that He is a Holy God, and therefore coming to Him with reverence; - recognizing that He is the Sovereign Ruler in heaven, and therefore coming to Him with faith; and - recognizing that He is the Father of a large family, and therefore coming to Him, as a part of that family.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GLORY OF GOD'S NAME

"Hallowed be Thy Name"

Prayer is essentially a matter of our life, and that is why Jesus told us to pray always (Lk. 18:1). That does not mean that we are to be on our knees all the time. We do have seasons when we go on our knees for a time. But we must be in a spirit of prayer all the time. It must affect our whole life.

Right Priorities in Prayer

The prayer that Jesus taught His disciples reveals what the priorities of our life should be and what our greatest longings should be for. It has six petitions. The first three concern God: "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The next three concern us: "Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

There is something very important to notice here. Our primary requests in prayer should not be related to our own problems. We may have many problems, even spiritual ones perhaps, but they are not to come first in our praying. God's glory must be first.

If we were to examine our life and see what takes priority in our heart as we express its longings to God, we may find that we have seldom if ever followed this order. This shows that we haven't taken the teaching of Jesus seriously. For if we had read God's Word accurately and carefully, we would have realized that Jesus taught us to pray in only one way - with top priority given to God and His glory.

Centred in God

This is the way God created man. God Himself was to be the head and man was to be like the body in subjection to the head. In our body, the head is on top - not only physically, it also rules the body. As long as our head is in control of our bodily functions, we are all right. When a person's head (brain) is not functioning properly, it is unable to control his body and we would call such a person mentally deranged or insane. God never intended man to be that way.

The Lord desires that we 'walk erect' spiritually (Lev. 26:13). The problem with many believers is that their head is not in the proper place. They don't give God the place that He should have in their lives. If God had first place in our lives, in our longings, in our desires and in our ambitions, and if God and His glory were the consuming passion of our lives, that would express itself clearly every time we went to God in prayer.

The reason why many things in our lives don't fall into place, why there's confusion and chaos, is because God is not first. And even when we pray we desire the gifts more than the Giver. One mark of a spiritual man is that he desires the Giver more than the gift; and he loves the Giver even if he doesn't receive any gifts.

This is one of the tests by which we can assess whether we are spiritually-minded or not: Are we content and satisfied even when God doesn't answer our prayers as we expected Him to?

Why is it that so many believers grumble and complain when God doesn't answer their prayers? Because they only wanted His gifts. They were not so keen on the Giver. They are like the prodigal son, who when he got what he wanted from his father, went off to enjoy it on himself. He only wanted his father's gifts. He came back to his father only when he had exhausted the gifts and wanted some more (Lk. 15:11-24).

Notice, that fifty percent of this prayer is concerned with God and His glory. It's not that we just say as a matter of ritual, "Lord, first of all I want Your Name to be glorified" and then having said that spend the next hour giving Him a shopping list of all that we want. We're not talking about a certain form of prayer here, but rather of a changed attitude and a re-orientation of our mind so that God and His glory are primary in our thinking now.

Self-centredness - The Root of all Sin

God created everything in this universe to be centred in Him.

Consider the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars. They have no will of their own. They obey their Creator implicitly. The earth revolves around the sun without any question. And the stars have been moving in their appointed courses for thousands of years. They have steadfastly remained in the path that God ordained for them. But God does not delight in inanimate objects like these. He wants sons.

He created the angels first with a free will. Lucifer, the head of the angels, rebelled against God because he did not want to be centred in God. Sin originated, when a created being wanted to live a life centred in himself (Isa. 14:12-15).

It's very important for us to understand this. Because if we want to understand what sin is, we have to see how it originated. Then we'll recognize that sin is not just adultery, murder, anger or jealousy, etc., Sin finds its root in self-centredness.

It was self-centredness that made an angel into a devil in a moment; and self-centredness will turn people into devils today too.

It was self-centredness that turned Adam into a sinful, fallen man. The two trees in the garden of Eden - the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil - symbolized two principles of life by which Adam could live - one, a life centred in God, and the other a life centred in himself. Satan tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, saying, "Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God yourself. Then you can live in independence of God." Adam and Eve chose to live that life - centred in themselves and independent of God.

God does not ask us to be centred in Him because he wants something for Himself. No. It's for our own good that He asks us to put Him first in our lives. If we do not worship God, we will certainly end up worshipping something else - either ourselves or the devil or the world. And so it is to save us from destroying ourselves by false worship, for our own salvation and for our own good, that God says, "Learn to worship me. Learn to be centred in Me."

God created the earth to go around the sun. If the earth decided one day that it had had enough of going around the sun and now wanted the sun to revolve around it, what would happen? The earth would thereby disobey a law of God and there would be no change of seasons, and all life on earth would perish very soon. Disobeying God's laws always leads to death.

That was how spiritual death came into the world too. God created man to be centred in Him. Man refused to accept God as his Centre; and in that day he died. When we realise this, we'll understand that salvation means to be saved from being Self-centred.

The New Testament teaches that in order for a man to be saved, he needs to repent first. Repentance means turning from our old way of life. It means a whole lot more than just giving up some bad habits, like drinking and gambling, etc., Our old way of life is a self-centred life; and repentance means saying, "Lord, I'm tired of being centred in myself and I want to turn to You now and to be centred in You."

Salvation from Self-centredness

Jesus came to save us from sin. In other words, He came to save us from self-centredness.

Put the word "self-centredness" instead of the word 'sin' in the New Testament and you'll see what meaning comes up in many passages. "Sin shall not be master over you" becomes "Self-centredness will not be master over you" (Rom. 6:14). That's God's desire for His people.

And yet if we examine our lives, we'll find that even in our most sacred desires, there is self-centredness. To ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit can be a self-centred desire, if we want this power in order to be a great preacher, or a great healer etc., That's as self-centred a desire as wanting to be great in this world. Do you see how sin enters even into the most holy place?

That's why Jesus taught us to pray, first of all, not even that we might be filled with the Spirit, but that God's name might be hallowed.

Only a truly spiritual man can pray this prayer in sincerity. Anyone can repeat this prayer, of course. Even a parrot can do that. But to really mean it, from the depths of our hearts, will require a total devotion to God, where He is first in our lives, where we are centred in Him, and where we are not seeking His blessing as much as Himself. If He gives us His gifts, well and good; and if He does not give us any gifts that's all right with us too, because we long for God Himself, and not His gifts.

Why did God teach the Israelites to love Him with all their hearts and to love their neighbours as themselves? Only to deliver them from their self-centredness.

There is an acrostic on the word joy that says, "Put J - Jesus first, O - others next, and Y - yourself last. Then you can have joy."

God is perpetually full of joy. There is no sorrow or anxiety in heaven, because everything is centred in God. The angels are always rejoicing, because they are centred in God.

The reason we lack joy, peace, and so many other spiritual virtues is because we haven't found our proper centre. We tend to use God for our own ends. And even prayer becomes something like this, "Lord, please let my business prosper.....Help me to get a promotion in my job.....Please let me get a better house....." etc., We want God to become our servant, helping to make our earthly lives more comfortable - like the genie in the story of Aladdin and his lamp.

This is the type of God that so many believers pray to - one who is a means to their own advancement and profit in this world. But the God of the New Testament is not One Who helps you to win the 100 metres race in the Olympics or to outwit your competitor in a business deal.

Our prayers reveal how self-centred we are.

"Delight yourself in the Lord" the Bible says, "and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psa. 37:4). To delight ourselves in the Lord is to put God at the centre of our lives. And so it is only a God-centred person who can have all the desires of his heart.

"No good thing, will God withhold from those who walk uprightly (that is, from those who are walking with their head on top - who have God controlling their lives)" (Psalm 84:11).

"The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much" - and the righteous man is the God-centred man (James 5:16). On the contrary, the fervent prayer of the self-centred man, even if he prays all night is going to avail nothing. It is the type of life we live that gives value to the prayer we pray.

That's why the first three longings of our life should be : "Father, Your Name should be hallowed. Your kingdom should come. Your will should be done."

We may have many other requests such as, "Heal me of my backache, help me to find a better house to live in, help my son to get a job," etc. These are all good requests. But if you can say, "Father, even if you don't grant these requests, my primary desire is that Your Name will be glorified" - then you're a spiritual man.

The Name of God being Honoured

What does this first request "Hallowed be Thy Name" mean? The word "hallowed" comes from the same root from which we get many other words in the New Testament such as "sanctify", "holy", "saint" etc. It means "set apart" - that is, "set apart from all that is evil and unclean."

So the request is, "Father, let your name be feared and revered and honored and glorified." In other words, since this is the first petition, it implies that the greatest longing of our hearts is that God will be feared on the earth. Is that truly our greatest longing?

The guilt of man can be summed up in one sentence: "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES." (Rom. 3:18) "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 1:7). In other words, it is the alphabet of the Christian life. If you don't learn your ABC's you can't learn geometry, chemistry, physics, or anything else. In the same way if you don't learn the ABC of the Christian life, the fear of God, you can make no spiritual progress.

A good test of our spirituality is whether we are more concerned about God's Name than our own name. If you hear that someone is ruining your name how would you react? Vehemently perhaps? How do you react when you realize that the Name of Jesus is being dishonored ? The Name of God is blasphemed among the heathen today because of the behaviour of God's people (Rom.2:24). Does that grieve us?

As you see the Name of Jesus Christ being dishonoured in India, does it hurt you? Has it ever brought you down on your knees before God with a burden in your heart that the Lord's Name should be honoured in our land. That is one test of our spirituality.

In Acts 17:16 we read that Paul's spirit was stirred within him when he saw all the idols that the Athenians worshipped. He was furious with Satan. If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we'll be stirred with anger against Satan too when we see the idolatry in our land.

Jesus' spirit was stirred with anger when He saw people making money in the name of God in the temple. If we are in tune with God, we'll be angry too at the dishonour that is brought to the Lord's Name in our land today, through people making money in the Name of Christ.

Everything for God's Glory

Consider 2 Kings 17:33, "They feared the Lord and served their own gods." Applying this to ourselves it would mean that we symbolically worship God on Sundays but actually worship our own idols all the time.

We have all grown up considering certain activities to be holy such as reading the Bible, praying, giving out tracts, preaching, etc. Other activities like eating, drinking, sleeping, talking and buying things from the market, etc., we have considered to be secular.

The result of this type of thinking is that you may feel that your religious activities have to be done for God's glory. But having done that you can live another life in your home and in the world - backbiting and gossiping and quarreling with people etc., Then when you go to the meetings a few days later, you feel you must be holy once again. That is hypocrisy. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether, then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Every single activity in our life must be done for the glory of God.

Nicholas Herman (more commonly known as Brother Lawrence) was a cook in a monastery, many years ago. He used to say, "Whether I am washing the dishes with all the clatter of the plates around me or whether I'm working in the kitchen, I can preserve my soul with as much serenity in God's presence as when I am on my knees partaking of the bread and the cup." That is to live in the presence of God at all times - realising that all that we do is holy.

Right Motives in Prayer

Understanding this petition in this prayer aright, will affect the motives in our praying too. Very often our prayers are not answered because they are offered with wrong motives. But if a man really prays, "Hallowed be Thy Name" as his primary request, he cannot have a wrong motive in his prayers. His prayer is "Lord, no matter what my circumstances may be, whether You grant my request or not, let Your Name be glorified."

David once had a great longing to build a temple for God. That was a good desire. But we read in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, that God said, "No, I'm not going to use you to build the temple. I'm going to use Solomon." And when David heard that, he didn't become sour. He didn't complain. All that he said to God was, "May Thy Name may be magnified forever" (2 Sam.7:26). David was quite prepared to be set aside, if only God's Name was glorified. That's a good example for all of us to follow.

Can we pray like this, "Father, send a revival of holiness to our country; and if you decide to start the revival through some other church, that's perfectly OK by me. Send it at any cost. And if you decide not to use me but someone else, that's fine too. Just let Your Name be glorified."

It gets rid of a whole lot of selfish motives, when we can truly pray, "Father, hallowed be Thy Name - at any cost."

Glorifying the Father's Name

Remember the words of Jesus, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to fall into the ground like a grain of wheat, to be trampled under foot by men and to die. What shall I say? Shall I say 'Father save me from this hour?' No. 'Father, at any cost, even if it means My death, glorify Thy Name'" (Jn. 12:24,27,28 - paraphrase)

Jesus practiced what he preached. Even if it meant death, He wanted His Father's Name to be glorified.

That's why He could say to His Father at the end of His earthly life, "I have glorified Thee on earth" (Jn. 17:4).

Most believers never rise up to this level in all their life. They know nothing of this wonderful God-centered life; and therefore they know nothing of what it means to be truly spiritual. Their spirit is completely foreign to the spirit of heaven.

In heaven, everyone's prayer is, "Lord, let your Name be glorified." If we don't partake of that spirit now, how will we dwell in heaven for all eternity? God wants us to partake of the spirit of heaven right now, on earth. That's why He has given us His Holy Spirit. When we sing, "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul", what we mean is that the desire of the inhabitants of heaven has now become our desire too.

Finally, let's look at Malachi 3:16: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and esteem His Name."

God has a list of names - of those who fear Him and who are concerned about the honour of His Name. And God says about these people that they are His own possession, His special treasure, His jewels (vs.17). God has a lot of earthenware pots in His house, but He's got some gold and silver vessels too! (2 Tim. 2:20,21).

All I can say is "I want my name to be in that book of remembrance that God has, of those who fear Him, who are concerned about His Name, and whose greatest longing is that the Lord's Name should be glorified AT ANY COST."

That phrase that comes at the end of the third petition - "on earth, as it is in heaven" - applies to all the first three petitions.

And so our prayer is, "Father, hallowed be Thy Name on earth as it is in heaven. Just like the angels fear You and cover their faces and worship You saying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy', I long with all my heart that my fellow-believers and I will fear and reverence You always. Amen."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

"Thy kingdom come"

True salvation should give us a longing to be delivered from self-centredness, so that God now becomes the centre of our lives and the centre of our petitions in prayer. We who were wrong side up at one time, have been straightened up by the Lord, so that we long to put God first in every area of our lives now.

One of the clearest evidences of true spirituality is that a man detests his self-centredness and longs to be totally centred in God.

The man who comes to God wanting to be centred in Him says, "Our Father, who art in heaven. The greatest longing in my heart is that Your Name will be glorified and revered throughout the earth." Then he realizes that God's Name is not being revered on earth and so he goes on to the next petition and says, "Father, I am longing for You to come and establish Your kingdom on earth so that all the earth will fear and reverence Your Name."

That's a prayer that all men and women of God have been praying for over 1900 years. The time has now drawn near for it to be answered.

A Kingdom of Righteousness

Only one who is disgusted with the evil in this world can pray this prayer. Peter says, "We are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

Look at the violence and immorality that there is in the world today. As we read the newspapers, one of the main prayers that should ascend from our hearts is, "Father, I long for Your kingdom to come. I am not asking this for my personal comfort. I long that your reign of righteousness will come soon, so that Your Name will be glorified on this earth which was created for Your glory."

Jesus said that the last days would be like the days of Noah. Noah was one righteous man in the midst of a corrupt and evil world. He was a preacher of righteousness and he must have been disgusted with what he saw around him. (2 Pet. 2:5). He longed for righteousness from the depth of his heart, and he preached it without compromise. And his prayer must have been a similar one, "Thy kingdom come."

All believers will acknowledge that Christ is coming back soon to establish His kingdom on earth. But what is the evidence that we really believe this? It says in 1 John 3:3, "And every one who has this hope fixed in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

The proof that we really believe in Christ's return is that we get ready, preparing ourselves as a bride for her bridegroom. This will mean a clean life, it will mean paying our debts, it will mean settling our quarrels - right now, because we are purifying ourselves as He is pure. Only such a man can pray this prayer, "Thy kingdom come."

To repeat this prayer without purifying ourselves to be ready for Christ's return, is to reduce this prayer to a ritual.

Perpetual Readiness for His Coming

Some denominations in Christendom have a prayer in their liturgy that says, "Lord, save me from sudden death." That prayer was obviously written by an unconverted man for unconverted people. Self-centred people naturally need some time before they die, in order to settle their quarrels and to pay their debts, etc., before they face their Maker. They have no intention of settling these matters as long as they are healthy. Such people have no fear of God, and can never be converted until they repent of their self-centredness.

A true Christian never needs to pray such a prayer, because he is always ready. His accounts are always up-to-date. And therefore he can always pray, "Thy kingdom come."

How can we know if we're really eager for the kingdom of God to come? Let's consider just one area - our home life.

Suppose one morning, as you looked out of your window, you saw the Lord Jesus Christ Himself walking towards your house. What would your reaction be? That's a fairly good test of whether you are ready for the coming of God's kingdom or not.

Would you have to run and hide some of those books in your library, because you don't want Jesus to see them. You'd probably have to hide your TV set too, if you have one.

As long as Jesus is staying with you, your conversation will no longer consist of the regular gossip that usually characterizes your meal-table fellowship.

Would you have to be specially careful to be kind and courteous during those days to your family-members and to your servants, avoiding the rude remarks that normally characterise your speech?

Would you be happy to let the Lord meet all your friends, or would you hope that some of them don't visit you while Jesus is with you?

Would you be glad to let Jesus stay on with you for ever and ever like that? Or would you heave a sigh of relief when at last His visit has come to an end and He is gone?

Be honest with yourself.

One way of knowing the answer to that question is by asking ourselves if our behaviour at home is any different when we have guests staying with us, whom we want to impress. If so, how much more different our behaviour would have to be if Jesus Himself came to stay with us for a few days!

It is meaningless to pray, "Thy kingdom come" if we don't want Jesus to live with us and be Lord of our homes everyday. After all, the kingdom of God is a place where Jesus is going to be present as Lord all the time - and not just for a few days. If it's going to be a strain having Him in our home for just a few days, how are we going to spend eternity with Him?

Treasures in Heaven

The man who prays, "Thy kingdom come" is one who has set his mind and his affection and his desires on things above. He's not one who has put on a dress of Christianity and holiness. His spirituality is not superficial. It goes right through to the very fibre of his being. He is more interested in laying up treasures in heaven than treasures on this earth.

A Christian's attitude to money is one of the clearest tests of his spiritual level, and of whether he is really longing for the kingdom of God to come or not.

I remember hearing a story of a farmer who told his wife one day, "Our cow has just given birth to two calves, one a white one and the other a brown one. And I thought that when they've grown up, we should give one of them to the Lord." His wife asked him, "Which one are you going to give to the Lord, the brown one or the white one?" He replied, "Well, we can decide that later when they grow up."

The calves grew up and they became fatter and fatter. One day the farmer came home with a sad face and told his wife, "I've got sad news for you. The Lord's calf just died." And his wife said, "But how did you know which was going to be the Lord's calf. You hadn't decided on that yet." He said, "Oh well, all along I had it in my mind to give the brown calf to the Lord; and it just died this morning."

It is like that with most believers. It's always the Lord's calf that dies! They give God what's left over after all their own needs have been met. And because they're not "rich towards God" they remain spiritually poor all their lives (Lk. 12:21).

In the Old Testament God had made a law that the Israelites had to give their "choice firstfruits" to the Lord (Exod. 23:19). This was the only way they could "honour the Lord" (Prov. 3:9). It's the same today. We cannot honour the Lord if we don't give Him our best.

What do we find in our life? Is there always some excuse why we cannot give the best to God. Then it shows where our heart really is. Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also.

But the man who prays, "Thy kingdom come," is a man who has been delivered from the love of money and material things. He lives for God and for eternity now.

The Absolute Rulership of God

The kingdom of God means the government of God, the absolute rulership of God. It means making Jesus Christ absolute Lord over every area of our life.

If we want the kingdom of God to come, it must first come in our hearts, in our homes, and in our churches. In these places we must give no place to Satan or to the flesh. Our longing should be that the kingdom of God should so fill our hearts, our homes and our churches that there will be no room there for anything else.

The Holy Spirit came to bring "the kingdom of God with power" to earth (Mark. 9:1). Our local churches should be a demonstration to the world today of what the kingdom of God is like - that which will one day cover the whole earth. Here is where we have failed the Lord.

When Jesus told us to seek God's kingdom first and not to be anxious about earthly things, what He meant was that if we really wanted to be anxious about something, we should be anxious that the kingdom of God should come on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:33). How many of us are burdened with that type of anxiety - for the purity of the church and the coming of God's kingdom?

May God find many among us who will seek His kingdom first.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WILL OF GOD

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

We can call Jesus Lord only when we are willing to do His will in our daily life. True conversion takes place, not when a man is stirred in his intellect and his emotions, but when he yields his will saying, "Lord, not my will but Thine be done in my life." If we maintain this attitude before the Lord consistently then we shall be sanctified increasingly.

The Secret of Holiness

Jesus Himself prayed saying, "Not My will but Thine," to His Father all through His earthly life (Jn.6:38). If it was necessary for even Jesus to live like that in order to please the Father, we can be certain that there is no other way for us to please God either. We won't make any progress in our walk with the Lord if this is not the consistent attitude of our lives.

We can spend hours praying and studying the Scriptures and attending hundred of meetings. But if all of that does not lead us to this point, where we say, "Thy will be done on earth (in our own life first of all) as it is in heaven," then we've wasted our time. Every means of grace must lead us to the point where we say from our heart, "Father, not my will but Thine be done."

The secret of true holiness lies here.

When Paul wrote to the Galatians about the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, he was referring to this conflict of man's will with God's will.

The flesh with all its lusts could be summed up in one word: SELF-WILL. Wherever you read of "the desires of the flesh" in the New Testament you could replace that phrase with "Self-will and self-centred desires." Then you'll understand what those verses mean.

For example, we're told that the Holy Spirit is in opposition to the flesh (Gal. 5:17). What that means is that the Spirit is always fighting against our self-will and our self-centred desires. The Spirit knows that without slaying our self-will and our self-centred desires first, He can never fit us for heaven or make us holy and Christ-like.

The way of holiness and sanctification is the way of death to self - saying 'No' to myself and 'Yes' to God. It means saying, "Father, I have no desires or plans or ambitions outside the circle of Your will for my life. I want nothing outside Your perfect will."

The Cross in the Daily Life

Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Lk. 9:23). We find our cross at that point where God's will crosses our will every day. To take up the cross is to say, "Father, not my will but Thine be done."

Only one who has said NO to his own will, his own plans, his own desires and his own ambitions, etc., and who has said, "Lord, I want to take up my cross, die to my own desires and follow You and do Your will alone" can truly pray this prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28). But He did not stop there. He went on to tell us how He would give us that rest.

He said, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls." (Mt. 11:29). In other words, you'll never know that rest until you take up the cross and say 'No' to your own will. All unrest comes from doing our own will. You cannot come to the Lord if you do not want to take up the cross.

Only a true disciple can pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus Himself prayed this prayer all through His life. He practiced what He preached. He lived as a man and his greatest longing was to do the will of His Father.

Why did Jesus come to earth? The answer is: To do the will of the Father. That was what He Himself said in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." He didn't come primarily to die for the sins of the world. No. He came to do His Father's will. He went to Calvary and died only because that was part of the Father's will for His life.

Jesus said in John 4:34, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work." Just like a hungry man cries out for food, the whole being of Jesus cried out to do the will of the Father. To follow Jesus is to have a similar longing to do the will of the Father in every area of our life.

The reason why there's so much happiness in heaven and no sorrow at all, is because the will of God is done completely there. God's will is something that makes people supremely happy and full of joy.

Peter writes, "Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for THE WILL OF GOD" (1 Peter 4:1,2).

John the apostle writes, "And the world is passing away and also its lusts; but the one who does THE WILL OF GOD abides forever" (1 Jn. 2:17).

The burden of the prayers of the apostles for the believers was, that they might "stand perfect and fully assured in all THE WILL OF GOD" (Col. 4:12). Those apostles knew that a salvation which consisted merely of the forgiveness of sins without leading a man to dedicate the rest of his life to do the will of God, was a false salvation. Forgiveness of sins is only meant to be a door by which we enter in to walk the narrow way of doing all the will of God.

How God's Will is Done in Heaven

We are to pray, "Thy will be done on earth AS IT IS IN HEAVEN." How is God's will done in heaven? Let me mention four things.

First of all, the angels are in a perpetual state of WAITING UPON GOD for His commands. They don't run around heaven trying to do 'something for God' according to their own ideas. No. They wait for God to speak first - and only then do they act.

God says, "I'm looking for one who will wait and watch For My beckoning hand, My eye - Who will work in My manner the work I give, And the work I give not, pass by. And oh the joy that is brought to Me When one such as this I can find - A man who will do ALL My will, Who is set to study his Master's mind"

So, when we pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," it means, first of all that we want to hear what God has to say to us.

Secondly, when God speaks, the angels obey IMMEDIATELY. They don't say "Lord, I'll wait a few days and think about it. I want to find out what my fellow angels think about this." There's no such thing in heaven. When God has spoken, that is final. Obedience is immediate.

Our prayer then should be, "Father, help me, that I don't delay when I hear Your voice. I don't want to rush ahead of Your time, but once You have spoken I want to obey immediately."

Then thirdly, when God commands something in heaven, it is done COMPLETELY. Those angels don't go out and obey God partially. Our prayer therefore should be, "Father, help me to do ALL your will in my life - to obey every commandment completely, whatever the cost."

And finally, the obedience of the angels is JOYFUL. They are not grudging and complaining in their obedience. No angel compares his task with another's and says, "Lord, why have You given me a more difficult task than You've given that angel" etc.,

We hear such complaints even among believers, "Why should I make all the sacrifices? What about him/her," etc., But we never hear such words from the angels in heaven. They consider it a privilege to do anything for God and they rejoice at every opportunity to obey Him.

And so when we pray this prayer, we are asking that God's will may be done in our lives like that - joyfully and without any complaints and without any comparisons with others.

No Regrets in Eternity

If you do the will of God like that on earth, you won't have any regrets when you get to heaven.

Bye and bye, when we see our Lord face to face, we'll wish we had given Him more of our lives and that we had obeyed Him more completely. Heaven will lose some of its sweetness for you if you get there without having obeyed all of God's commandments here on earth, immediately, completely and joyfully.

Sadhu Sundar Singh used to say, "You'll never get another chance to carry the cross for Christ once you leave this earth." If you want to prove your love for the Lord, now is the time to do it - not when you get to heaven.

Think of the three petitions that we have looked at. "Father, Let your Name be hallowed, Let your Kingdom come, Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Even before we ask for forgiveness of sins, which is so necessary, the Lord taught us to seek first the hallowing of the Father's Name, the coming of His kingdom and the fulfilling of His will in our lives.

May we learn what the Lord is trying to teach us.

CHAPTER SIX

OUR PHYSICAL NEEDS

"Give us this day our daily bread"

God is interested in meeting all our bodily needs. But these needs have to be met in such a way that we are not harmed thereby. Material prosperity and physical blessing have a way of ruining people spiritually if they don't know how to put God first in their lives.

Ten thousand rupees can be used very profitably by a mature, spiritual man; but it could ruin a wayward, irresponsible boy.

And so God wants to get us centred in Him first, before blessing us physically and materially.

Our Bodily Needs First

There are three petitions here in this prayer concerning our personal needs. The first one, amazingly enough, is not a prayer for our spiritual welfare! Isn't that interesting? The very first petition concerning ourselves is not, "Deliver us from spiritual evil," or "Give us victory over sin," or even "Fill us with the Holy Spirit." No. The first petition is, "Lord, take care of my bodily needs."

The Bible says that man is a three-fold being. He has a spirit, which enables him to contact God, a soul, which is his personality, (his intelligence, emotion and will) and his body (1 Thess. 5:23).

The three petitions here concern these three parts of our being. The first one deals with the needs of our body; the second deals with the guilt of sin that can plague our minds (soul); and the third concerns our spirit being delivered from spiritual evil. Our spirit is the most important part of our being. Yet the Lord taught us here to pray for our bodily needs first.

There are two extreme views that are found in Christendom concerning the body. Some have the ascetic view that teaches that unless the body is subdued and denied every comfort, we cannot be holy. But the body cannot be the cause of sin - for Satan who doesn't have a body is full of sin, while Jesus Who has a body never sinned.

The ascetic teaching considers even the marriage-relationship as sinful. But remember that it was God Who created sexual desire in man and He called it "Very Good" (Gen. 1:31). The desire for food, for rest and for sex, are all good and normal bodily desires created by God. We don't have to be ashamed of any of them. We only have to be careful that we don't satisfy any of them in ways that God has forbidden.

The other extreme view found among some Christians is that God wants us to be prosperous. This results in a pampering of the body.

But the teaching of Jesus was neither the extreme of asceticism, nor the extreme of indulgence and materialism. It was caring for the body's legitimate needs so that it could be fit for God's service.

God's Care for Our Bodies

It is because of the wrong idea that many believers hold that God is not interested in our bodies that they do not think of seeking God for healing when they are sick. Like Asa, their faith is in doctors and not in the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). God may use doctors and medicines and even surgery to heal us. We cannot dictate to Him how He should answer our prayers. But He certainly doesn't expect His children to trust in men. God is greatly interested in our bodies - that they should be healthy and fit to be used for His glory.

Here are three glorious truths that the Bible teaches concerning our bodies : (i) if "the body is for the Lord, the Lord is for the body"; (ii) our "bodies are members of Christ"; and (iii) our "body is a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor.6:13-19).

We can certainly claim God's power for our body then.

The physical is certainly not more important than the spiritual. We've already seen that God should be first in our lives and that everything else should be secondary. But if we have truly prayed "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," first, then it is right to say, "Give us this day our daily bread," next - for we are asking for bread only in order that we might glorify God by doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven.

Our spiritual state is dependent to some extent on our physical condition too. We read of Elijah that after he had called down fire and rain from heaven, he got discouraged and asked God to take away his life. This courageous man, who could stand against 850 false prophets, fled in fear at the threat of one woman, Jezebel (1 Kings 18,19).

How did that happen? For over three years he had lived all by himself. And now he was drained physically at the end of that strenuous day on Mount Carmel. And when he sat discouraged under a juniper tree, God didn't preach a sermon to him! No. God sent an angel to him with food and drink. Elijah ate and drank and slept. And when he woke up, God gave him some more food and drink (1 Kings 19:1-8). God knew that Elijah was tired and exhausted and that what he needed was nourishment, not exhortation. That's what we need at times too - not long sermons but some good food and rest.

Some Christians have a super-spiritual attitude towards their bodies and say, "I want to burn out for God." And they go about doing their 'service' for God, morning, noon and night, seven days of the week - every week. And then they get exhausted and depressed! Their activity was soulish activity. Their depression has a physical cause, not a spiritual one. The Lord has to tell such people, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile." (Mk. 6:31).

Once when Jesus was traveling in a boat, we read that He was sleeping. He was obviously tired and He was not ashamed to be seen sleeping. There were times when He was thirsty and hungry, and he admitted it. He was not ashamed of His bodily needs. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we must take care of it.

God is interested in providing us all that we need for our bodies. He knows that we need food, clothing and shelter for our life on earth. And if He hasn't seen it fit to allow you to own your own house, you can be certain that He's interested in enabling you to rent one. He Who sought out a "resting-place" for the Israelites in the wilderness can certainly find one for you too (Num. 10:33). Let's not think of these as unspiritual things that we shouldn't ever ask God for.

It was in order to correct the wrong understanding of God that people had, that Jesus put the request for physical needs first, among the last three petitions in this prayer.

God's Care for Our Earthly Necessities

All our physical needs are summed up in this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." Implied in that request is, "Give me a job. Give me a house to live in. Give me and my family clothes to wear. Give my children education, because one day they have to get their daily bread too." God is interested in all these matters. And if we learn to seek the kingdom of God first, these things will be added to us.

Do you know why we are so worried about all these earthly things - food, clothing, job, house, children's education, etc.? Because deep down in our heart we have a feeling that God is not really interested in helping us with these material things. We feel that God is interested only in our spiritual welfare.

If only the Holy Spirit could convince us once and for all, that God is interested in every part of us - spirit, soul and body! God wants us to ask Him for our earthly needs - and He doesn't ever want us to be worried. That's why the Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

An earthly father is not obliged to provide for the needs of everyone around him. But he is certainly obliged to provide for his own family. God is so good that He provides food even for the birds. How much more He will provide the needs of His own children!

Once when a Canaanite woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter, Jesus said, "Let the children be satisfied first" (Mk. 7:27). She replied that she would be happy with just the crumbs that fell from the table. And her daughter was completely delivered. Think of that. The crumbs were enough to bring freedom from demon-possession. Imagine then what a whole loaf of bread could do for us who are God's children! And remember that Jesus said, "Let the CHILDREN be satisfied FIRST." And so we pray with boldness, "Our Father, give us this day our daily bread."

Contentment with God's Provision

Notice here, that Jesus didn't teach us to ask for luxuries. We are not praying, "Father, give us this day our daily ice-cream," but "Give us this day our daily bread!" The promise is, "My God shall supply all your NEED" (Phil. 4:19) - not all that we WANT, but all that we NEED. There's a lot of difference between what we may want and what we need. You may want a car, but God may see that you don't need one and so He won't give you one. Somebody else may need one and He may give a car to him. You don't have to envy him and you don't have to grumble against God. Be satisfied with what you have. Don't ask for luxuries. If God gives us some luxuries we can receive them and use them for His glory. But if he doesn't give us any, we'll still praise the Lord.

Let's not compare ourselves with others. God knows what is best for us. If we ask Him for bread He won't give us a stone, and if we ask Him for a stone He won't give us a stone. He'll give us bread instead!

Be content with His provision. One of the secrets of Paul's life was that he was absolutely content. In Philippians 4:11 he says, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."

Daily Provision

The prayer is "Give us this day our DAILY bread." God may give us bread for many days at a time, but the petition here is only for one single day's physical necessities. Jesus told us not be anxious even about what was going to happen tomorrow. God doesn't want us to worry about the future. We are to be dependent upon Him, day by day.

The Lord taught this lesson to the Israelites in the wilderness in a wonderful way. They had to go out and collect the manna every morning. They couldn't collect it for a number of days at a time. They were to be dependent upon God day by day. They had to live like that for forty years. Do you think that was a strain? No. I'm sure it wasn't. It must have been exciting!

If God gave us too much at a time, our hearts would drift away from Him. And so God orders the circumstances of our lives in such a way that often some need arises in the physical realm - because the physical often touches us much more than the spiritual. God allows the needs to come so that we turn to Him again and again. Thus we learn the lesson of perpetual dependence on God.

Even though the manna dropped from heaven, God didn't drop it straight into their mouths! The Israelites had to go out early in the morning and collect it. The lazy person would have got nothing. And so, when we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," we're not asking God to do some miracle and supply us our needs without our doing any work. No. The Bible says that "if a man will not work he should not eat either" (2 Thess. 3:10). Jesus said that God feeds the birds. But He doesn't drop food into their mouths. They have to go out and search for their food. And so God expects us to be hard working too - and to trust Him. Faith is no substitute for hard work.

Health to do God's Will

This prayer is also connected with the previous petition: "Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." We're asking God for physical health and strength so that we can do His will.

When sick people have asked me to pray for their healing, I have often wondered, "Does he want health so that he can be strong enough to serve God? Or does he want it to live for himself? Should we ask God to heal him so that he can live for the world?" Jesus taught us to pray for our physical needs so that we may do God's will and not our own.

A Family Prayer

Notice also that the prayer is "Give US" and not "Give ME".

The one who puts God first in his life will find that he can't put himself second. We are members of a family sitting around our Father's table; and the Father doesn't want any selfish children at His table who grab all the dishes for themselves without considering whether others at the table have enough to eat. Such behaviour is bad manners even for the unconverted. How much more for a Christian!

Remember what Jesus said about the day of judgment. When He sits on His throne to judge the people, He will tell many of them, "You saw Me hungry, but you never fed Me. You saw Me naked but you never clothed Me. You knew I was sick but you never visited Me." And they will say, "Lord, when was this? We never saw You naked or hungry." And the Lord will reply, "I live in those who are born again; and when you saw that brother of Mine in need, you did not recognize that it was I who was in need. It was I who was hungry and thirsty" (Mt. 25:31-46 - paraphrase).

This is one of the fundamental differences between heaven and hell. Hell is full of sin, full of self-centredness. Each man lives for himself, with no room for God or for others. In heaven, it's the other way around. God is first and others are next.

I've heard a story of a man who had a dream which was a parable of hell and heaven. He first went to hell; and there he saw everyone sitting at a table with plenty of delicious food in front of them. But yet, they were all skinny and sick and miserable. He discovered that they couldn't eat the food that was set before them, because they all had four-foot long spoons attached to their hands. And of course when you have a four-foot spoon tied to your hand it's impossible to eat what's in front of you.

Then in his dream this man went up to heaven and there he saw the same delicious food on the table; and the people sitting around the table in heaven also had these four-foot long spoons attached to their hands. But here they were all healthy and strong. And he asked one of them, "How are you all so healthy and strong?" And the man replied, "Well, you see, I realize that I can't feed myself. So I stretch out my hand and feed someone sitting further down the table, and someone else further up the table feeds me with his spoon; and in this way everyone of us gets enough to eat."

And so this man went back to hell, in his dream, and told the people there, "Here's the way for all of you to eat. Each of you should allow someone else to eat out of your plate and feed someone else further down the table." But they all gave him the same reply. "I won't let anyone eat from my plate," each of them said, "for how can I know that someone else will allow me to eat from his plate!"

It's that kind of 'dog in the manger' selfishness that is characteristic of hell and of all who finally go there. All they're interested in is their OWN daily bread.

If you don't have a concern for your brothers and sisters in Christ, you can't pray this prayer, for your daily bread.

There was a time in Abraham's life, when he had waited twenty-five years to get a son through Sarah and he still hadn't received that child. He had prayed and prayed. No answer had come. Then when he was in Gerar, He noticed that God had judged the people there, by making their wives barren. Abraham immediately prayed for those women that God would give them children (Gen. 20:17). Remember that Abraham's prayers for his own wife had still not been answered. God heard Abraham's prayer and gave children to those barren women. But did God stop there? No. He gave Sarah her promised son at that time too (Gen. 21:1). As Abraham prayed for other people, God met his own need as well!

Those who think of God first and others next, get God's best. "The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends," (Job 42:10). That is God's way.

This petition concerning our physical needs, is sandwiched between two other petitions. On one side is, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," and on the other, "Forgive us our sins just as we've forgiven others who've sinned against us." Are you eager to do the will of God and to forgive others who have harmed you? Or are you like the little child who when given a cream biscuit, wanted to eat only the cream between the two biscuits? Are you interested only in your material needs being met - "Give us our daily bread" - neglecting the petitions before and after it?

So we see Christians at two extremes. Some are so super-spiritual that they feel it's wrong to pray for material things. Others pray concerning their physical and material needs alone.

Blessed are those who understand the balance that Jesus taught.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

"Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors"

Sin is a debt to God - whether that sin be a coming short of God's standards or a trespassing and going beyond what God has permitted.

The Value of Conscience

Only man, of all created beings on this earth, feels the guilt of having done something wrong. This is one feature that distinguishes him from animals.

A dog doesn't feel guilty if it has done something wrong, unless it has been trained by its master to feel guilt. But with man, you can go to the jungles, among those who have never heard anything about religion, those who have never been taught by anyone, those who have never come across a Bible, and you will find people there feeling guilty. Their conscience tells them that they have grieved their Creator and so they try to appease Him in some way. But you'll never find a religious monkey or a religious dog anywhere!

Our conscience is one of God's greatest gifts to us. It warns us when something is wrong in our relationship with God - just like pain warns us that something is wrong in our body. We must be careful therefore to maintain a sensitive conscience at all times.

Honest Confession of Sin

There are many people who say, "Father forgive us our sins," who don't realise that we can't ask God to forgive us unless we have confessed our sins to Him first. We have to acknowledge our sins with absolute honesty.

God's Word says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper," (Prov. 28:13). One who conceals his sins may pray, "Forgive me, forgive me." But he won't be forgiven. The verse goes on to say, "..... but he who confesses and forsakes them will find mercy." The Bible also says, "If we confess our sins (that is our part) He (God) is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (that is God's part) (1 Jn. 1:9). If we do our part, we can be certain that God will be faithful to do His!

Ever since Adam fell into sin, man has had a tendency to cover up his sin rather than to confess it. When Adam and Eve sinned, what was their first reaction? Was it to run to God at once and to say, "Oh God, we have sinned, we have done what You told us not to do"? No. They didn't do that. They ran away from God and tried to hide from Him. What foolishness! Could Adam and Eve hide from Almighty God behind a tree? Sin certainly makes a man foolish.

A second characteristic of man is to put the blame for his sins on others. When God uncovered Adam's sin, He asked him, "Did you eat of this tree?" What was Adam's reply? Adam blamed his wife. And his wife blamed the serpent!

That nature has come down to all of us from Adam and Eve. We're always trying to justify ourselves, claiming that we're not responsible for the mistakes we've made. And when we are caught red -

handed, we say that we did it in a moment of weakness and pressure. We seek to cover up our sins instead of confessing them. And that's why we cannot get God's forgiveness.

Walking in the Light

When Jesus talked about coming into the light, He said, "Men loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does EVIL hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the TRUTH comes to the light" (Jn. 3:19-21).

Notice the difference there! On one side, Jesus said that everyone who does EVIL hates the light. The opposite of 'evil' being 'good', one would think that Jesus would go on to say that everyone who does GOOD comes to the light. But that's not what He said. He said that everyone who practises the TRUTH comes to the light.

Did you notice the difference? What Jesus asks us for is not goodness first, but truth - reality and honesty. In other words, Jesus said, "The man who is evil is dishonest. But the man who comes into the light although not perfect, is an honest man." If we could come into the light only when we are perfectly good, then none of us would ever be able to come into it. But God invites people to come to Him who are honest. These honest people will then become good progressively.

We can pray this prayer, "Forgive us our sins" only if we are willing to be honest. You may be imperfect but you can still come into God's light if you're honest about your imperfections. Everyone who does the truth, who is honest, can come into the light and acknowledge his sin and then that sin will be blotted out.

"If we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7).

There are many who go around claiming the last part of that verse, "The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin." But it's not correct to quote it like that. The blood of Jesus cleanses only those who fulfil the condition mentioned in the first part of that verse - those who walk in the light.

Let me use an illustration. Supposing it was dark all around me. To come into the light would mean that I expose myself. If my shirt is dirty, it will be seen. The light does not cleanse my shirt. The light only exposes the fact that my shirt is dirty. That's being honest about what I see within myself, instead of trying to hide it. That is the fundamental meaning of coming into the light.

We need to understand this clearly, because this applies not only to our relationship with God but also to our relationship with our fellow men.

In Christianity there is a vertical relationship with God and there is a horizontal relationship with our fellow-believers. You can't have one without the other. You can't have fellowship with God if you're not in fellowship with your fellow- believers.

"If someone says 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 Jn. 4:20). If you really love God, you'll love your brother too.

A Right Horizontal Relationship

Just as we have to confess to God the things that we have done that have wronged Him, we have also got to confess to our fellow-men the things that we have done that have wronged them. There is no forgiveness without such confession.

If we have cheated someone of money, we must return it. Otherwise, God cannot forgive us. The only way by which we show that we have truly repented is by confessing to the person whom we have wronged and by giving back that which we have taken wrongfully.

If you have traveled in the trains without a ticket, it's easy just to go to God and say, "I'm sorry, I've cheated the railways." But the costly way - the way you prove that you have really repented - is by going to the railway counter, buying a ticket for that journey and tearing up that ticket. Otherwise your repentance is just empty words.

Here lies the reason why many people don't enter into a deep fellowship with God. They repent only with their lips and not with their heart. They confess their sins to Him. But they don't confess to their fellowmen when they have sinned against them.

To say to someone, "I'm sorry, that was my mistake. Please forgive me," is one of the most difficult things to say. Why? Because it slays our ego. We are all basically proud people and we don't like to humble ourselves and admit that we've made a mistake!

Why is it that we feel so free to confess our sins to a holy God but find it difficult to confess our sin to an unholy brother? The reason could be that when we go into our room and claim to be confessing to God, we may be actually confessing only to ourselves! We are not confessing to God at all. We are fooling ourselves. The test of whether you have really humbled yourself before God is whether you are willing to apologise to any human being whom you've hurt.

In Indian culture, there is the idea that only wives have to ask forgiveness from their husbands - never vice-versa. It's as though the man belonged to some superior species!!

There is just no such thing as being superior or inferior, when it comes to asking forgiveness. Even if you are the director of an office, and you have wronged the junior-most person in that office, you must humble yourself and go to him and say, "I'm sorry. That was my mistake. Please forgive me." Nothing less than that is true Christianity.

There are people with broken relationships in many churches who don't go to one another to settle the matter. They have grudges against each other and won't visit one another. And yet they call themselves Christians! They're not Christians at all. If such people think that they are in the kingdom of God, they are only deceiving themselves.

If you're not willing to talk with or visit a brother and yet take part in the breaking of bread, that's blasphemy. We cannot have fellowship with God on those terms. You can't have a vertical relationship with God when your horizontal relationship with your fellow-believers is not right.

But when we have truly confessed to God and men, then God will cleanse us so thoroughly that the memory of our past will no longer be before Him. And if HE does not remember our past sins any more, why should we think about them (Heb. 8:12)?

Perfect Forgiveness

The Bible says that we are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:9). When God cleanses us He justifies us too. That word "justified" means, "Just as if I'd never sinned in my life and just as if I am perfectly righteous now." How wonderful!

We can picture our sins like many words written on a blackboard. Now that board has been wiped clean with a wet cloth. When you look at the blackboard now what do you see? Nothing. It is just as if nothing had ever been written on it at any time. That is how the blood of Jesus cleanses us - thoroughly and completely.

If we have truly confessed our sins to God, then having confessed them once is enough. God blots them out immediately. And His promise is, "I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." (Heb. 8:12). What rest comes into our heart when we realize that we've been truly forgiven and that we don't have to confess our sins again and again to the Lord.

Let me add that it is best when we pray "Forgive us our sins," to be specific. Many people pray in a general way, "Lord, I may have committed so many sins." That means they're not sure. It's no use confessing like that; because you're implying that perhaps you haven't sinned at all!

It is best to be specific, and to say, "Lord, this is the sin. I've had a grudge against that person. I haven't forgiven that person. I've been jealous of that person. My motive in doing that was utterly selfish. I did it for my own glory, etc." You have to be honest.

And after we have confessed all the sins that we know, we'll still have to pray like David, "Acquit me of hidden sins" - for we have all sinned in ways that we are not conscious of (Psa.19:12).

Forgiving Others

This petition for forgiveness is one of the most important petitions in this prayer because it is the only petition that Jesus repeated at the end of His prayer.

Have you noticed that?

Out of the six petitions in this prayer, Jesus emphasised one especially at the end. He said, "If you forgive men their trespasses your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses your Heavenly Father will also not forgive you" (Matt. 6:14,15).

Many Christians do not enjoy full and free fellowship with God because they have not taken this petition seriously.

Jesus taught a parable of a king who checked up the accounts of his servants one day and discovered that there was one who owed him 40 million rupees. And when that servant said, "I've got no money sir, please forgive me," the king forgave him completely. That man went out, and found another servant who owed him just 40 rupees; and he caught him by the throat and sued him and put him in jail. When the king heard that, he called the unmerciful servant and said, "I forgave you 40 million rupees so freely. Couldn't you forgive that man 40 rupees?" And he handed him over to the torturers. Then Jesus said, "So will My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Mt. 18:35). The torturers are evil spirits who are permitted to harass us until we learn to be merciful to others.

Jesus used this parable to illustrate how great the debt is that God has forgiven us, and how unmerciful and evil it is for us not to forgive someone who has hurt us.

Has someone done you some harm? Maybe someone has spread false stories about you. Maybe your neighbour, or your wife, or your father or your mother-in-law has done you some harm. Maybe they have ruined your life in some way. Maybe the doctor who operated on you made a mistake that has caused you untold suffering. But the Lord says that all those sins put together are so tiny compared to the debt you had to God and which God forgave you. So there is absolutely no reason why you should not be able to forgive all those people freely from your heart.

The important part of Matthew 18:35 is "from your heart." If you are not willing to forgive your fellow-man from your heart, don't waste your time coming to God and saying, "Forgive us our trespasses," for God won't listen to your prayer. If there is one single soul in the whole world whom you haven't forgiven, you cannot be forgiven yourself; and you'll be lost eternally - for no unforgiven soul can ever enter God's presence. This is far more serious than we realise.

The prayer is, "Forgive us AS WE HAVE forgiven others." God sees exactly how we have forgiven others. Jesus taught that God gives us in the SAME measure as we give to others. He said, "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down and shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For BY YOUR STANDARD OF MEASURE IT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU IN RETURN." (Lk. 6:38)

That means that if you use a small spoon to give to others, God will use that very same spoon when answering your prayers. So when we pray for something great and mighty from God and God takes a small spoon and gives us only a little bit, the reason usually is that we have used that same spoon to give to others. The larger the spoon we use to give to others, the larger the spoon God will use to give to us. This is an unchanging principle in God's dealings with us.

"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy" (Matt.5:7). The more merciful you are to others, the more merciful God will be to you in the day of judgment. But "judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy." (James 2:13).

And so, if you forgive others in a mean, stingy way, God will forgive you in the same way too. But if you give those who have harmed you a warm, forgiving look, God will give you a warm, forgiving look too. God will treat you exactly as you treat others.

Setting Relationships Right

Jesus said that when you bring your gifts to the altar, when you come to pray to God, or to put money into the offering box, and there remember that you've hurt your brother, you should, "FIRST be reconciled to your brother and then come and present your offering" (Mt. 5:22-24). Otherwise God won't accept your money or your prayer.

The Old Covenant standard was just: "YOU shall not bear any grudge against your neighbour" (Lev. 19:18). That was easy to keep.

But the New Covenant standard is higher. Jesus said, "If YOUR BROTHER has a grudge against you, go and set it right." Of course, there will always be brothers who have something against us for no fault of ours. Jesus and the apostles had many enemies because they stood for the truth. But here, in the context, Jesus is referring to a brother who has a grudge against us because WE spoke to him rudely (Matt. 5:22). It's a grudge caused by something sinful that WE did. In such cases, we must go

to him first, confessing our sin and asking him for forgiveness. Only then can we bring our offering to God.

If we go to God and say, "Lord, I want the fullness of new-covenant power in my life", the Lord will say, "When I give you new-covenant power, it will bring with it new-covenant responsibilities." Many Christians do not enjoy new-covenant power, because they are living by old covenant standards. They remain powerless because they are unwilling to go and ask for forgiveness from someone.

Being Merciful

We all have a flesh and we are living among others who have a flesh. And so we are constantly liable to injure one another knowingly and unknowingly. The only place where we'll never get hurt by anyone is in heaven. And so we need to forgive one another as long as we live on this earth. To err is human, to forgive is divine.

One of the features of hell is that there is no mercy there. And in the measure in which you lack mercy in your heart towards others, in that measure you have got a little bit of hell right inside your heart. If you are unwilling to forgive someone, you've got a little bit of hell inside you. You may be considered very pious by others, because of all your religious activity. But you've got this little bit of hell right inside you all the time. And you can't go to heaven in that condition - because you can't take hell into heaven. You've got to get rid of it before you leave this earth.

That's why the Lord taught us to pray, "Forgive us in exactly the same way that we have forgiven others." When we don't forgive others, it can affect our bodies too. Disobedience to God's laws often brings physical suffering.

If you bear a grudge against someone in your heart or if you're jealous of someone, and thus violate God's law of love, it can finally begin to affect your body. There are Christians today suffering from arthritis, migraine, rheumatism and asthma etc., who can't be healed - just because they have a grudge against someone. They may take any number of pills but they're not going to be healed until they learn to forgive. The cause of such diseases is not organic. It's not in their body. It is in their soul.

If you have not forgiven your brother or sister, God will not listen to your prayer. The Bible says in Psalm 66:18: "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." It's not only that He doesn't answer, he doesn't even HEAR.

Let's not fool ourselves. True forgiveness follows brokenness and confession, and that involves a recognition of the rottenness of our flesh, a willingness to make any restitution and to ask anyone's forgiveness if necessary, if only our relationship with God can be straightened out.

Finally, remember that the petition is "Forgive US." We want our brothers to be forgiven too. Sometimes, it's possible to have a secret hope that a brother will be judged by God for the way he has treated us. Such an attitude is Satanic - for it's only the devil who wants people to be punished by God.

Jesus said, "I have washed your feet and you must wash one another's feet" (Jn. 13:14). That means that when you see dirt on your brother's feet (spiritually speaking), you must long for him to be cleansed too.

"Forgive US" means, "Father, I won't be satisfied if you just forgive me my sins. There are other brothers and sisters around me. I want you to forgive them their sins too. Amen."

CHAPTER EIGHT

FREEDOM FROM EVIL

"Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil"

There are two sides to this petition - one, asking God to protect us, and the other, asking Him to deliver us.

Having prayed for deliverance from the guilt of sin in the previous petition, we now pray for deliverance from the power of sin. If we desire only forgiveness and not freedom from sin, it would indicate that our repentance has not been proper. Forgiveness of sins, is meant to be a gateway that leads on to a holy life, and not to a taking advantage of the grace of God.

Happiness and Power

All Christians seek to be happy. But Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart." (Matt. 5:8). The word "blessed" also means happy. So what Jesus was saying was that true happiness flows from true holiness. If heaven is a place of infinite happiness, it's only because it's a place of perfect holiness as well.

Happiness without holiness is a counterfeit. We should actually pray that God would make us unhappy if we are unholy. For otherwise we would be deceived about our spiritual state.

Many Christians seek God for power in their lives. But again this should not be divorced from an equally great longing for holiness. Otherwise it can be dangerous. For God to give power into the hands of an unholy man can be more dangerous than a surgeon operating with an un-sterile instrument. That would bring death instead of life.

That's why God cannot give too much of His power to many Christians. It would ruin and destroy them. We need to thank God that He hasn't given us all the supernatural gifts that we asked Him for! There are many cases of believers who have been destroyed by the gifts that they received, because they were not humble and holy enough to use them aright. We should long for holiness and power in the same measure. Only then are we safe.

How God Uses Satan

True holiness is the result of a battle. It doesn't come to the armchair Christian who wants to sit back and 'be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease.' It is only as we fight the battle against our lusts and against Satan that we become holy.

We may then ask the question, "If the devil is such a hindrance to our holiness, why doesn't God destroy him?"

The answer to that is that the devil is, in a sense, necessary for our spiritual growth just as a furnace is necessary to purify gold. It's only when our muscles are subjected to resistance, that they become strong. Otherwise, we would remain fat and flabby. It's exactly the same in the spiritual realm. We need resistance if we are to be strong spiritually. And this is why God permits Satan to tempt us.

The man who has an easy way through life, will be spiritually weak, flabby and impoverished. He won't be able to do all that God wants him to do. But the one who has gone through trials and testing successfully, will be strong and capable of doing all the will of God.

That's one reason at least, why God hasn't destroyed Satan.

Why did God place one forbidden tree in the garden of Eden? Some may feel that if God hadn't kept that tree there, Adam would never have sinned. But that tree was necessary for Adam to become holy. There can be no holiness for man without temptation. That's why God permitted Satan to enter the garden of Eden.

Adam was innocent - but innocence is not holiness. Adam would have remained innocent all his life and never become holy if he had not been tested. Innocence is a state of neutrality, and from that state of neutrality to become positively holy, Adam had to exercise a choice. He had to say 'No' to temptation and 'Yes' to God. Only then would he become holy. And so he had to be tempted. Unfortunately, he said 'No' to God and therefore became a sinner.

Temptation and Sin

Jesus too was tempted in all things as we are (Heb. 4:15). But the difference between Him and Adam was that He always said 'Yes' to God. In order to be a perfect man, the type of man that God wanted all men to be like, Jesus had to learn obedience from the things which He suffered. He faced temptation and overcame, and thereby, was "made perfect" (Heb. 5:8,9).

That was why Jesus prayed for His disciples saying, "Father. I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from evil" (Jn. 17:15). Jesus knew that His disciples could never become holy if they were taken away from the pressures and trials and temptations that they would face in this world.

We need to distinguish between temptation and sin. If we are suddenly tempted by something that we see accidentally, that's not sin. But if we continue to look at what tempts us, or to think about it, then we sin. We can't avoid being tempted. But we can certainly choose to turn our eyes and our mind away from what tempts us. It's the way we exercise our will that determines whether we are holy or sinful.

God doesn't hold us guilty for being tempted. But He certainly wants us to resist temptation. As someone has said, "I can't prevent the birds from flying over my head, but I can prevent them from making a nest in my hair." You can't prevent temptation from coming to you but you can prevent it from settling down in your mind!

God's Word does not teach that we should face as many temptations as possible in order to show how strong we are. No. We are to run away from temptation. Paul tells Timothy to flee from the things that tempt him (2 Tim. 2:22). We must run away from the love of money, from flirtatious women and from anything that will lead us away from God.

Our attitude to temptation should be, "Let me keep myself as far away from it as possible". We are not to be like little children who try to find out how near the edge of a cliff they can go without falling down, or how close to the edge of the railway platform they can stand without the train knocking them over. That's not the advice any sensible parent will give his child. We tell our children to keep far away from such dangers. That's what God tells us too.

This petition really means, "Father, don't allow me to face temptation that is too strong for me." It is the cry of one who knows that his flesh is weak, and who realises that he can easily fall.

Being Prepared to Face Temptation

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter, James and John, "Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation" (Mt. 26:41). Jesus knew that there was temptation ahead of them and He sought to prepare them. But instead of praying, they went to sleep. As a result, when the temptation came, Peter chopped off a soldier's ear. He fell into sin, because he had not watched and prayed. Jesus however, conducted Himself in a pure and loving way because He had prayed.

God is always faithful to warn us in advance. All of us must have, at sometime or the other, heard the voice of the Spirit in our hearts saying, "Spend a few moments in prayer now." Did you recognize that as the voice of God seeking to prepare you for some temptation that lay ahead of you at that time?

What have you usually done at such times? Like the disciples you may have ignored that voice. And when the temptation came you fell. God had tried to prepare you for the temptation. But you had not listened.

Every Temptation Can be Overcome

God has given us a wonderful promise in His Word that He will never allow any trial or temptation to come to us that is too much for us to bear or overcome (1 Cor. 10:13). In other words, He will check each trial and temptation to see if we are capable of overcoming it. Only then will He permit it to come to us. A good teacher would never give a 9th-standard examination paper to a 2nd-standard student. He would only give a paper corresponding to the student's standard. So does God.

In the light of this verse, is it right then to feel that any temptation or trial that you face is too strong for you? No. It is obvious that God doesn't think so. Otherwise he wouldn't have allowed it to come to you. The very fact that God has allowed a temptation to come to you is proof that you are strong enough to overcome it.

So we need to look at temptation like this: "God has allowed this temptation to come to me. So that is an indication of His confidence in me. He knows that I can overcome even this; and He will certainly give me the power of His Spirit to overcome it." If we look at temptation and trial like that, we can overcome everything that comes to us.

God has also promised to write His laws upon our hearts and in our minds (Heb. 8:10). He works in us through His Spirit both TO WILL and TO DO His perfect will (Phil. 2:13). So we need never be defeated.

Deliverance from Sin's Power

Leading on from this prayer, "Do not lead us into temptation (which is too strong for us)" is the petition, "Deliver us from evil."

The word 'deliver' could be paraphrased as, "Draw us to Thyself." So the prayer is "Draw us to Thyself from evil." God and evil are pulling in two different directions. And we are saying, "Father, I feel this pull towards evil in my flesh. But don't let me go that way. I don't want to yield to it. Please pull me over Your way." This longing and hungering to be drawn towards God is an essential requirement for a life of victory over sin.

One reason why the promise in Romans 6:14 - "Sin shall not be master over you," is not fulfilled in the lives of many Christians is because deep down in their hearts there is not enough of a hunger for freedom from sin. They don't cry out, "Oh God, deliver me from sin at any cost." They are not thirsting for it. They would have cried out if they were seriously sick. But they don't feel that sinning is as bad as being sick! No wonder they remain defeated.

It says in Exodus 2:23-25, "The sons of Israel sighed because of their bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help rose up to God. So God heard their groaning...and God took notice of them." That's when God will begin to take notice of us too - when we begin to cry out in desperation for deliverance. God says, "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer. 29:13).

It is a principle in Scripture that for anything precious that we are to receive from God, we must hunger and thirst for it first. Only then do we learn to appreciate it sufficiently. And so God waits until we hunger and thirst; and then God gives us what we really long for.

The Christian life is a battle against Satan. And in this battle, Satan has one of his agents right inside us - our flesh. Since our flesh is on the enemy's side, it will do everything possible to prevent us from being effective in fighting Satan. Never forget that. That's why we need to long for total deliverance from the flesh, if we are to overcome Satan.

Deliverance From All Evil

There are many believers who pray, "Oh God, protect me from all the evil that the devil and other people are trying to do to me." But all the while they keep feeding their flesh (the enemy's agent) by giving it everything it wants. Then God cannot deliver them from all evil.

Let us long for deliverance from our fleshly lusts first. Then it will be an easy matter for us to overcome Satan. Then we will find that no evil from men or demons can touch us.

In Romans 7:14-25, we read of Paul's longing for total deliverance from the lusts in his flesh. After that we read in Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good." Notice the sequence. One follows on from the other. Romans 8:28 can be true in our lives only if we first long for deliverance from the enemy's agent - the flesh.

What a wonderful promise Romans 8:28 is, that no evil can ever come into our lives. Do you really believe that ALL things - not just some things, or many things, or most things, not even 99% of things, but ALL things - will work together for your good?

When you look at these "things" individually they may look horrible. But all of them TOGETHER will work for good if you love God and are called according to His purpose. And His purpose is that you should be totally free from sin and conformed to the likeness of Christ, as it says in the very next verse (Rom. 8:29). And so if you have a longing to be free from sin, God promises to make EVERY SINGLE THING that ever befalls you to work together for your good. Hallelujah!

Think of Joseph. He tried to live a godly life, and sought to be delivered from evil according to the light that he had. He sought to please God, and God blessed him. But how did he get treated by other people? His ten brothers were so jealous of him that they sold him into Egypt. That looked like an evil thing. But we finally see that that was part of God's plan to make Joseph the second ruler in Egypt. The evil that his brothers did to him turned out to be for his good.

When he got to Egypt, he was sold as a servant into the house of Potiphar. There Potiphar's wife tempted him, but he refused to yield to her. He ran away from the scene of temptation. He was falsely accused by her and put into jail. That looked like an evil thing too. But it was God Who had planned Joseph's route to the throne via the jail - for it was in that very jail that Joseph met Pharaoh's cup-bearer and thus got an introduction to Pharaoh later on (Gen.39 to 41).

The evil that other people tried to do to Joseph out of malice and hatred, God in His sovereignty, made them all work together to fulfil His plan for Joseph's life.

It can be like that for us too - all things working together to fulfil what God has planned for our lives - to conform us to the likeness of Christ. But we must believe it - for we can receive God's promise only in proportion to our faith.

In the book of Esther, we read of Haman preparing a gallows to hang Mordecai on. But in the end, Haman himself is hung on that gallows (Esth. 7:10). God turned the tables on the enemy of His people. God does the same with Satan too. He turns the tables on him in such a way that instead of our hanging on the gallows, the devil has to hang on the very same gallows that he prepared for us! Hallelujah!

We Need One Another

Notice too in this petition, that our prayer is, not "Deliver ME" but "Deliver US." It is, "Deliver my brother and me from evil. Deliver my sister and me from evil. Deliver us, Father."

We need each other. We need fellowship with one another to be delivered from evil. "Two are better than one..... for if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up." (Eccl. 4:9,10).

That's why the devil tries to separate believers and to bring division between them. That's why he tries to divide a husband and a wife too. Satan is the one who brings little misunderstandings. He makes one person believe one thing and the other person something else; and without anything serious having happened, the devil separates them.

Satan knows that once he has separated believers from each other, it is easier for him to knock them down individually. As long as they are united he can't do that. So he divides them. And once he has succeeded in getting each believer to live for himself, without caring for the other, it won't be long before they have all lost their effectiveness for God.

We need to recognize that we have only ONE enemy - and that is Satan. Let's not fight each other then. Let's pray for one another.

Concern for a Fallen Brother

"Deliver US" also means that when I see my brother fall into sin, I don't rejoice over it. I don't scandalize him. On the contrary I feel grieved and pray for him and seek to restore him.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, there is a sharp contrast between the attitude of the priest and that of the Samaritan. The priest looked at the fallen man and probably said to himself, "Thank God I didn't fall like him," and walked on (Lk. 10:30-37). That's how some believers act when another believer has fallen into sin. They tell others, "See how he's fallen", indirectly implying, "See, how I haven't fallen!"

But what did the good Samaritan do? He didn't thank God for his own victory. He went down and lifted up that fallen man and carried him to where he could be healed. And Jesus says to us, "Go and do the same." (Lk. 10:37).

Is that your attitude to a brother in whom you see a weakness or perhaps who has fallen in some area? Do you lift him up in prayer and take him to Jesus for healing? That's a fairly good test of whether you are centred in God or not.

It's because of the self-centred desire to appear more spiritual than others, that we don't care when someone else falls into sin. It's an evil, Satanic spirit that urges us to show ourselves as superior to others. When we pray, "Father deliver US from evil," there can be no desire to show ourselves as more spiritual than another.

We are one body in Christ. If my left hand gets hurt, my right hand is ready at once to help in the healing of that injury. And not just my right hand, but my entire body-mechanism gets alerted to bring healing to that wound immediately. So must it be in the body of Christ.

The Two Greatest Commandments

Moses came down from Mount Sinai with two tablets of stone in his hand. On one were written the first four commandments that dealt with man's relationship with God. On the other were written the other six commandments that dealt with man's relationship with his fellow -men.

The Lord Jesus said that these two tablets could be summed up in two commandments. The first, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind;" and the second, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Matt. 22:37-39).

Jesus emphasised these two in the prayer that He taught as well. The first three petitions relate to the first commandment. And the next three petitions relate to the second commandment, as amplified by Jesus in the new commandment that He gave His disciples, when He said, "Love one another even as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34).

A true disciple of Jesus seeks to be perfectly centred in God in his conscious and unconscious being - with every desire of his, perfectly in tune with God; and with no desire, ambition or feeling outside the will of God for his life. At the same time he also seeks to love his brothers perfectly, as Jesus loved him.

He is however perpetually aware that his attitude is not as perfect as it should be in these two directions. But he keeps working towards that goal, always willing to pay any price in order to get there.

To love our brothers is to have a concern for them. We cannot have a concern for everybody in the world. Only God has that capacity. But according to our capacity, we should have a concern for our fellow-believers; and that capacity should keep increasing.

We don't start off like this. The first step is to love the members of our family at home as Jesus loved us. But we don't stop there. We move forward seeking to love our brothers and sisters in the family of God also as Jesus loved us.

Perfection is a goal to press on towards. But we should be determined to reach it. That's the direction in which Paul was going when he said, "One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching

forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13,14). The upward call of God is to become perfectly centred in God, to love God supremely and to love our fellow-believers as Jesus loved us and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

CHAPTER NINE

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

This prayer begins with God, "Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done", and it ends with God, "Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory."

God has said in His Word, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," (Rev. 1:8). God must be the very first thought and the very last thought in the life of every disciple of Jesus. God must be the centre as well as the circumference of our lives. We live and move in Him, within the circle that He has drawn for us. And within that circle we will always find Him (Acts 17:26,27).

The three final statements at the close of this prayer can be compared with the three final temptations that came to our Lord in the wilderness.

The Kingdom is God's

First of all, the statement, "Thine is the kingdom."

Compare that with the third temptation, where the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, and said "Bow down to me and take them." But Jesus said, "No. The kingdom belongs to the Father. He alone is King." And so Jesus refused to take the kingdom from Satan's hands.

That's why Jesus never wanted to be a king in the days of His flesh. When people tried to make Him a king He ran away (Jn. 6:15). He lived as a servant of all men.

This teaches us that we shouldn't seek to be kings over others either. The man who longs to be a leader, or to be known as a Christian leader, who wants to be exalted above his fellow believers in some way, is unfit to pray, "Father, Thou alone art worthy to be King." In God's church, God alone is to be the King. We are to be servants, not kings.

The Power is God's

The next statement is, "Thine is the power." Power belongs to God (Psa. 62:11). He gives us power as a temporary loan to use for His glory; but it belongs to Him. God doesn't give us power to use for our own selfish ends.

Compare this with the first temptation. The devil said to the Lord, "You've got power to turn stones into bread, and to satisfy your hunger. Use it now." Jesus said "No. All power belongs to the Father. And I won't use it until HE tells me to."

Many believers are unfaithful here. When God gives them a spiritual gift they begin to use it for their own selfish purposes.

Whatever gift you may have - spiritual or natural - whether it be the gift of prophecy or of healing, or of music, remember that power belongs to God. He never gives us a gift of power for us to exalt ourselves.

If we use God's gifts selfishly for our own personal ends, we'll end up like the moneychangers in the temple whom Jesus had to drive out. What were they doing there? They were making money for themselves in the name of religion. They were saying, "We are serving God" but they were actually serving themselves.

There are people like that today - making a name for themselves, making money for themselves and their family members, in the Name of Jesus Christ - using His Name for their selfish ends.

It is a great evil, to do something in the Name of Jesus Christ and to get some gain out of it for ourselves - whether that be money, fame, honour, position, comfort or whatever. Godliness must never become a means of gain for us (1 Tim. 6:5). Even today, God's prophets in the church need to drive out the moneychangers from God's Temple.

The Glory is God's

Thirdly, "Thine is the glory."

After we have prayed this spiritual prayer sincerely, and after we have attained to this spiritual life and after we have accomplished a wonderful ministry for the Lord, at the end of it all, we can only say, "We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done." (Lk. 17:10).

And we mean what we say. We're not saying words in false humility. like those who may say, "God has helped me," but who deep down in their hearts, take the credit to themselves.

Compare this statement with the second temptation that Jesus faced in the wilderness. Satan tempted Him to jump from a high pinnacle of the Temple, claiming God's protection, and thus to arrive unhurt at the bottom so that He could receive honour and acclaim from the people as their Messiah. But Jesus said, "No. All the glory must go to the Father alone."

God is a jealous God and He will not share His glory with us (Isa. 42:8). There will be nothing in heaven, in all eternity, for which any man gets the glory. All the glory will be God's.

And the man who has got the spirit of heaven in his heart, will have that attitude now. He will seek to be in the background, to be unseen and unknown, so that people's attention may be drawn to God and not to him or to his work. Thus all the glory will be God's alone.

Such a man will have no consciousness of what he has done for God, or of what he is spiritually. He has nothing that he has not received and so he cannot boast in anything (1 Cor. 4:7). He says with Paul, "May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

"Forgetting what lies behind" said Paul in Philippians 3:13. What was it that lay behind Paul? A victorious life and a mighty ministry for the Lord. He put all of that out of his mind because he gave all the glory to God for his life and his ministry.

Jesus spoke of two groups of people who would stand before Him in the day of judgment.

One group will say, "Lord, we have prophesied, cast out devils and done wonderful works in Your Name." They are so conscious of all that they have done for the Lord. And the Lord says to them, "Depart from me you who practice lawlessness." (Mt. 7:22,23).

To the other group, the Lord will say, "You fed Me when I was hungry, you clothed Me when I was naked, you visited Me when I was sick and in prison." But they have no consciousness of having done these things! Their reply is, "Lord, when did we do all that? We don't remember doing those things." Isn't that wonderful? And the Lord says, "You are blessed. You are fit to inherit my kingdom." (Mt. 25:31-40).

The righteous do good and forget about having done it! The unrighteous however, keep a mental record of all the good that they have done.

Are we conscious of all the good that we have done for the Lord and for others. Then we are in the wrong group!

For All Eternity

And then the prayer goes on to say, "Forever" - not for a few years, but for all eternity.

This is what we will be doing throughout eternity - praising God and giving Him the glory that is due unto His Name. And this is a wonderful way for all our prayers to end - giving all the praise and honour and glory to God so that no credit accrues to us to all.

We should always seek to turn the attention of people away from ourselves to God. At all times, we should aim to be hidden and in the background. Then God can accomplish so much more of His purposes - for us, in us and through us.

It Shall Be So

The final word is "Amen."

We don't want to leave out a single word of this wonderful prayer and certainly not the final 'Amen.'

What does 'Amen' mean? This has unfortunately become one of those idle words that Christians have accumulated in their religious vocabulary.

But have you ever thought what you mean every time you say 'Amen'?

Amen means, "It shall be so." It's the Hebrew word for 'believe' used in Genesis 15:6 where it says, "Abraham believed God." God told Abram, when he had no children, that he was going to have seed as great in number as the stars in the sky. And to that impossible thing - Abram said "Amen. It shall be so Lord, because You have said it."

That's what 'Amen' means. It is an affirmation of faith.

In other words, we end our prayer saying, "Father, I believe that all that I have asked for WILL be granted. Your name WILL be hallowed on earth as it is in heaven. Your kingdom WILL come on earth as it is in heaven. Your Will WILL be done on earth as it is in heaven. You WILL give us our daily bread. You WILL forgive us our sins. You WILL enable us to forgive others as You've forgiven us. You WILL NOT lead us into temptation that is too strong for us. You WILL deliver us from evil. The kingdom, the power and the glory WILL be Yours alone, forever. It shall be so, Father. I believe it with all my heart."

Amen and Amen!!