

Classics

Commentary On The Lord's Prayer

The prayer that “contains all we can reasonably pray for.”

By John Wesley



Artwork courtesy of Billy Graham Center Museum

The preface [of this divine prayer], “Our Father which art in Heaven,” lays a general foundation for prayer; comprising what we must first know of God, before we can pray in confidence of being heard. . . .

Our Father. If He is a Father then He is good, then He is loving to His children. And here is the first and great reason for prayer: God is willing to bless; let us ask for a blessing. . . .

Which art in Heaven. High and lifted up, God over all, blessed forever; who, sitting on the circle of the heavens, beholdeth all things both in Heaven and earth. . . . Therefore should we think, speak, and act as continually under the eye, in the immediate presence of the Lord, the King.

Hallowed be Thy name. The name of God is God Himself; the nature of God, so far as it can be discovered to man. It means, therefore, together with His existence, all His attributes or perfections—His eternity . . . His fullness of being . . . His omnipresence, His omnipotence . . . His wisdom . . . His Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity . . . His essential purity and holiness . . . and above all, His love, which is the very brightness of His glory.

In praying that God, or His name, be hallowed or glorified, we pray that He may be known, such as He is, by all that are capable thereof . . . that He may be duly honored and feared, and loved, by all in Heaven above and in the earth beneath. . . .

Thy Kingdom come. In order that the name of God might be hallowed, we pray that His Kingdom, the Kingdom of Christ, may come. This Kingdom then comes to a particular person when he “repents and believes the gospel.” . . . And it is meet for all those who love His appearing, to pray that . . . His Kingdom, the Kingdom of grace, may come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth; that all mankind, receiving Him for their King, truly believing in His name, may be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy, with holiness and

happiness. . . .

We [also] pray for the coming of His everlasting Kingdom, the Kingdom of glory in Heaven . . . the final renovation of all things, by God's putting an end to misery and sin, to infirmity and death, taking all things into His own hands, and setting up the Kingdom which endureth throughout all ages. . . .

Thy will be done in earth as it is in Heaven. It is probable [that] many, perhaps the generality of men, at the first view of these words, are apt to imagine they are only a . . . petition for resignation, for a willingness to suffer the will of God, whatsoever it be concerning us. And this is unquestionably a divine and excellent [attitude], a most precious gift of God. But . . . in this petition . . . we pray, not so much for a passive, but for an active, conformity to the will of God in saying, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven."

How is it done by the angels of God in Heaven? . . . The angels of God do all the will of God. And they do nothing else, nothing but what they are absolutely assured is His will. . . . They do all the will of God as He willeth, in the manner which pleases Him, and no other. Yea, and they do this only because it is His will; for this end, and no other reason. . . .

Give us this day our daily bread. We are to take no thought for the morrow. For this very end has our wise Creator divided life into these little portions of time, so clearly separated from each other, that we might look on every day as a fresh gift of God, another life, which we may devote to His glory; and that every evening may be as the close of life, beyond which we are to see nothing but eternity.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. All our trespasses are forgiven us if we forgive, and as we forgive, others. This is a point of the utmost importance. . . . If we do not clearly, fully, and from the heart, forgive all men their trespasses, we so far cut short the forgiveness of our own. . . .

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. We beseech God . . . (seeing God tempteth no man) not to suffer us to be led into [temptation] . . . from the evil one . . . the prince and god of this world, who works with mighty power in the children of disobedience. But all those who are the children of God by faith are delivered out of [the devil's] hands. He may fight against them; and so he will. But he cannot conquer unless they betray their own souls. He may torment for a time, but he cannot destroy. . . .

The conclusion of this divine prayer, commonly called "the doxology," is a solemn thanksgiving, a compendious acknowledgment of the attributes and works of God. "For Thine is the Kingdom"—the sovereign right [over] all things that are, or ever were, created. . . . "The power"—the executive power whereby Thou governest all things in Thy everlasting Kingdom. . . . "And the glory"—the praise due from every creature, for Thy power, and the mightiness of Thy Kingdom, and for all Thy wondrous works which Thou workest from everlasting and shalt do, world without end, "forever and ever. Amen!" So be it!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

JOHN WESLEY (1703–1791) was the founder of Methodism, a church renewal movement that transformed the spiritual and social life of England, spread to America and beyond, and eventually gave birth to several new denominations. A tireless preacher, Wesley for a time averaged 8,000 miles a year on horseback, crisscrossing the British Isles to proclaim a gospel of personal holiness and social concern. This excerpt is from his sermon “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount.”