

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:
ITS SPIRIT AND ITS TEACHING.**

BY

OCTAVIUS WINSLOW, D.D.

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“IN THIS AGE WE BEGIN TO THINK MEANLY OF THE LORD'S PRAYER:
OH, HOW BASELY MAY THE LORD THINK OF OUR PRAYERS!”

—THOMAS FULLER.

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PREFACE.



THE author is indebted to an esteemed clergyman for the idea of a treatise on the *spirit* of the Lord's Prayer. He, therefore, claims to himself no credit for novelty of conception in the leading feature of his work, which he is not aware has appeared in any similar publication. This must plead his apology for adding yet another to the already numerous volumes expository of this portion of God's Word. France and Germany, England and Scotland, and more recently America, have contributed some of their most eminent writers, of varied shades of religious thought, and of marked diversity of intellectual power, who have selected this brief but comprehensive part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount as the theme of able and useful disquisitions. Of the many expositions of the Lord's Prayer, however, whether in separate form, or, as contained in systems of divinity, there, probably, is no treatise less known, and yet of such surpassing merit, as that for which we are indebted to an American divine, yet living:—I allude to a volume from the pen of the Rev. William R. Williams, D.D., New York.* I can scarcely trust myself to refer to this masterly work, lest my admiration of its singular excellence,—its masculine thought, its varied learning, and its elegant diction, seamed as the work is throughout with a rich vein of spirituality,—should be considered as overstepping the bounds of just criticism. It is much to be regretted that Dr Williams's treatise has not been reprinted

* Lectures on the Lord's Prayer, by William R. Williams. Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1851.

in this country; in default of this, however, I have ventured to enrich these pages with one or two quotations, which, though strikingly beautiful, yet, severed from their connexion, convey but an imperfect idea of the unrivalled excellence of the work in its completeness.

Opinions in the Church of God are divided on the utility of prescribed forms of prayer in general, and of the use of the Lord's Prayer in particular. The question, however, is an open one, the decision of which must be left to the conscience and the circumstances of each individual. I can myself see no serious objection to their occasional use as *aids* to a yet more unfettered outpouring of the heart, provided the sentiments are evangelical, the tone devout, and the individual using them "worships God *in the spirit*." All prayer—as, indeed, all praise—must, necessarily, be, to a certain extent, a fixed vehicle of thought and feeling. The service of *song* in non-episcopal assemblies, is as much a prescribed form as, in the Church of England, is the service of *prayer*; and yet who will deny that both may be a "*spiritual* sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." The argument against a form of prayer, will thus apply with equal force to a form of praise. Toplady, in his somewhat *brusquerie* style of reasoning, thus puts the case—

"We may pray spiritually by a form, and we may pray formally and coldly without one. Suppose I was to say to a converted Dissenter, 'Sir, you do not sing the praises of God spiritually.' He would ask, 'Why not?' Was I to answer, 'Because you sing by a form. Dr Watts's Psalms and Hymns are all pre-composed; they are forms in the strictest use of the word.' The good man would reply, 'True, they are pre-composed forms, but I can sing them very spiritually for all that.' I should rejoin, 'And I can pray in the words of the Liturgy as spiritually as you can sing in the words of Dr Watts.'"

The words of the apostle, "with all prayer," — *πάσῃ προσευχῇ*, "all manner of prayer,"—I think, determine the question. "All manner of prayer and supplication *in the Spirit*," must include both extempore prayer, and prayer offered through the medium of a liturgical form. Thomas Fuller, the witty yet pious prebend of Salisbury, who flourished in the reign of Charles II., thus pithily delivers his judgment on this vexed question:—

“Set prayers are prescript forms of our own or others’ composing; such are lawful for any, and needful for some to use.

“Lawful for any. Otherwise God would not have appointed the priests (presumed of themselves best able to pray) a form of blessing the people. Nor would our Saviour have set us His prayer, which (as the town-bushel is the standard both to measure corn and other bushels by) is both a prayer in itself and a pattern or platform prayer. Such as accuse set forms to be pinioning the wings of the dove, will by the next return affirm that girdles and garters, made to strengthen and adorn, are so many shackles and fetters which hurt and hinder men’s free motion.

“Needful for all. Namely for such who as yet have not attained (what all should endeavour) to pray extempore by the Spirit. But as little children (to whom the plainest and evenest room at first is a labyrinth) are so ambitious of going alone, that they scorn to take the guidance of a form or bench to direct them, but will adventure by themselves, though often to the cost of a knock and a fall; so many confess their weakness in denying to confess it, who, refusing to be beholden to a set form of prayer, prefer to say nonsense rather than nothing in their extempore expressions. More modesty, and no less piety, it had been for such men to have prayed longer with set forms, that they might pray better without them. In extemporary prayer what men most admire God least regardeth, namely, the volubility of the tongue. Hence a Tertullus may equal, yea, exceed, St Paul himself, ‘whose speech was but mean.’ Oh, it is the heart keeping time and tune with the voice which God listeneth unto. Otherwise the nimblest tongue tires and the loudest voice grows dumb before it comes half way to heaven. ‘Make it (said God to Moses) in all things like the pattern in the Mount.’ Only the conformity of the words with the mind, mounted in heavenly thoughts, is acceptable to God. The gift of extemporary prayer and ready utterance may be bestowed on a reprobate, but the grace thereof (religious affection) is only given to God’s servants.”*

With regard to the stated employment of what is called the Lord’s Prayer,—but which I would venture to term THE DISCIPLES’ PRAYER, since it was a form of supplication given by the Lord to His disciples,

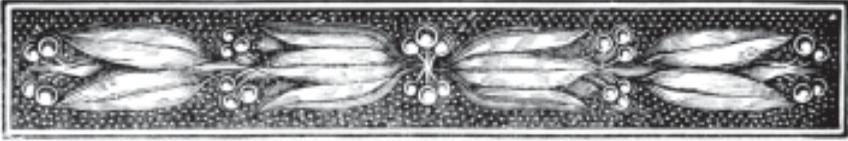
* The Wisdom of our Fathers. Selections from the Writings of Thomas Fuller. Religious Tract Society.

saying, “*After this manner, there fore, tray ye*”—I have met with no argument of sufficient weight to enforce its entire disuse. I admit, with regret, its too frequent repetition in the inimitably beautiful and comprehensive Liturgy of the English, and of the American, Episcopal Church;* yet more deeply do I deplore the superstitious attachment, the almost idolatrous homage, with which it is regarded by some Christians. But, nevertheless, as “a form of sound words” set us by Christ, and as a *résumé* of devout utterances at the Mercy-seat, ever fresh, always suitable, and never exhausted, let us believingly receive, and *prayerfully* use, at the throne of grace, this truly divine mould of heavenly thought, and exquisite model of spiritual prayer, grateful to Christ for so condescendingly, wisely, and simply teaching us *how* to pray. Above all, be it our earnest aim that, whether we pray with or without a fixed formula—and *free prayer* should be more sedulously cultivated, seeing that the Holy Ghost is promised and prepared to “*help our infirmities*”—we are found before God “*praying in the Holy Ghost,*” entwining each petition with the Name of Jesus, and bathing all in the fragrance of His atoning and intercessory merits. “*Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*”

As a lowly attempt to illustrate the *spirit* of each petition of the Lord’s Prayer, prepared amid many public interruptions, and falling much below the standard he had prescribed, the author, in earnest supplication for the accompanying blessing of the Triune-God, with unfeigned diffidence lays his work at the feet of Christ’s own and ONE Church, a small contribution to its sacred and devout literature. THINE, O LORD, IS THE GLORY! Amen.

BATH, *June* 1866

* It is an interesting and significant fact that, at the present moment, a competent committee, composed of clergymen of the Church of England and Non-Episcopal divines, are engaged upon a revision of the “Book of Common Prayer,” with a view to a more general assimilation of Christian worship among the different bodies of the Church of God. Such an idea, if practically carried out, will be an immense gain to the cause of Christian union.



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Our father
which 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 forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:

for thine is the Kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever.

Amen.

“OUR Heavenly Father, hear
The prayer we offer now;
Thy name be hallow'd far and near,
To Thee all nations bow;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will
On earth be done in love,
As saints and seraphim fulfil
Thy perfect law above.

“Our daily bread supply,
While by Thy word we live;
The guilt of our iniquity
Forgive, as we forgive;
From dark temptation's power,
From Satan's wiles defend;
Deliver in the evil hour,
And guide us to the end!

“Thine, then, for ever be
Glory and power divine;
The sceptre, throne, and majesty
Of heaven and earth are Thine.
—Thus humbly taught to pray,
By Thy beloved Son,
Through Him we come to Thee and say,
ALL FOR HIS SAKE BE DONE.”*

* James Montgomery.



CHAPTER I.

THE FILIAL SPIRIT OF THE LORDS PRAYER.

“FATHER.”—MATT. vi. 9.



WHEN our Lord Jesus sealed this Divinely Paternal Name upon the lips of His disciples, He was, as their Authorised Teacher, instructing them in the holy art of prayer. He alone was competent to the task. Himself the Object, as, mediatorially, the Medium of prayer, He was in every way fitted to lead them, in the spirit of filial worship, within the veil into the Holiest. In complying with their request, “*Lord, teach us to pray,*” His first lesson, obviously, was to unfold the PATERNAL relation in which God stood to them. This was a lost truth to our sinning and sinful race. In abjuring his own sonship, man had abjured the Fatherhood of God. In demanding his portion of the patrimony, and then turning his back upon his Father, he became an orphan and a fugitive upon the earth, the parental image as completely effaced from his soul, as the consciousness of his sonship was from his heart.

Such was the great truth our Lord presented to His disciples in instructing them to approach God in prayer. From no other teacher could they learn that God was their Father by adopting grace; and from no other source could they receive the Spirit whereby they should approach Him in filial love. Christ only could restore this lost truth, and supply the broken link which once united God and man in parental love and in filial worship. Thus

the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God in its relation to His Church is a doctrine of Divine revelation. It made its advent amid the holy scenes of Bethlehem; was uttered in sobs of woe in Gethsemane; was written in atoning blood on Calvary; and was ratified amid the resurrection splendours which encircled the tomb in Joseph's garden. We seek not, in thus vindicating the Divine revelation of this doctrine, to lessen the force of the fact that the relation of God to man as a Father by creation was a truth recognised by the pagan world. Paul, in his memorable address to the Athenians, quoting from one of their Gentile poets, attests this fact. "In Him we live and move and have our being, as certain of your own poets have said, *For we are His offspring.*" Thus the human race may trace its ancestry to Eden, and its origin to "the Father of spirits." But the Lord Jesus presented the Parental relation of God in a newer light, encircled with a diviner lustre, associated with holier obligations, and blended with a more transcendent glory—as the covenant God and Father of His people by electing love, most free and sovereign grace. And if, as we wander over earth's beauties, descend its vales and climb its steeps, expatiating amid the wonders and glories of God's creative power, we exultingly exclaim, "My Father made them all!" what must be the height of our admiration, what the depth of our love, as we stand before the cross of Jesus and exclaim, "In Thee I see my Father's image, in Thee I behold my Father's love!" We are as yet but upon the threshold of our great subject. Let it be distinctly kept in view that our main design in the present chapter is to unfold the *filial spirit* of worship which the Lord's Prayer inculcates. In a formula of devotion enjoined by Christ Himself, and as appertaining to the new or Christian dispensation, we could reasonably expect nothing less. Moses has retired, the legal economy is passed, the bond-servant is freed, the shadows are gone, the vail of the temple is rent in twain, for Christ is come, and we now enter into the Holiest, and approach the Holy One with "Abba, Father" breathing from our filial lips. But we have yet to learn in what way the Lord Jesus has made known to us the Father. To the revelation of Christ we are alone indebted for our spiritual