***God’s Good Will***

**The Lord’s Prayer, Summer 2023: Matthew 6:10 July 23, 2023**

***This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be you name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’***

**Matthew 6:9-10**

**God’s will**

*“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven . . . .*

*“This, then is how you should pray: “ ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,*

*10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

*11 Give us today our daily bread.*

*12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’*

Matthew 6

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Romans 12

1. The verb here is again a passive imperative, but praying for God’s will to be done is entirely active – it is to “reject our own wills and to obey [God’s] will without any back talk.” (see Lord’s Day 49)

2. God’s will has these parts

1. what he decrees (Genesis 1:3)

2. what he commands, both positive and negative (see the example in Romans 13:8-14)

3. what he allows (for an example, see Job 1:6-8)

3. Praying this prayer means we believe that God’s will is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Heidelberg Catechism, Part III: Gratitude**

#### Lord’s Day 49

Q 124. What does the third petition mean?

A. “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” means: Help us and all people to reject our own wills  
and to obey your will without any back talk. Your will alone is good.1

Help us one and all to carry out the work we are called to,2 as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.3

1 [Matt. 7:21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt.%207:21&version=nrsv); [16:24-26](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt.%2016:24-26&version=nrsv); [Luke 22:42](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2022:42&version=nrsv); [Rom. 12:1-2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom.%2012:1-2&version=nrsv); [Tit. 2:11-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Tit.%202:11-12&version=nrsv)  
2 [1 Cor. 7:17-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Cor.%207:17-24&version=nrsv); [Eph. 6:5-9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Eph.%206:5-9&version=nrsv) 3 [Ps. 103:20-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps.%20103:20-21&version=nrsv)

**God’s will for me**

*15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

Ephesians 5

*9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

2 Peter 3

*40 For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

John 6

1. God’s will for me begins with repentance

2. God desires that I really know his will (see Romans 12-13 for a summary of God’s will)

**Yes, we have an example of how “on earth as it is in heaven” works**

*36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

*39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

Matthew 26

1. Jesus understood the cost on earth of God’s will in heaven

2. “If it is possible” is how Jesus submits to the Father’s will

**The “highest charity”**

The fourth sentence is ***a petition concerning God's will****--*"May your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." We here pray that God's laws may be obeyed by men as perfectly, readily, and unceasingly, as they are by angels in heaven. We ask that those who now obey not His laws, may be taught to obey them, and that those who do obey them, may obey them better. Our truest happiness is perfect submission to God's will, and it is the highest charity to pray that all mankind may know it, obey it, and submit to it.

J. C. Ryle

1. Living into what is good (and ultimately for the common good) when the will of God is painful

*11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

Titus 2

For another thing, let us each lay ourselves out more heartily to do some good in the world. It is a melancholy fact, that the increase of almsgiving in England of late bears no proportion whatever to the increase of wealth. The trade and commerce of the country have probably doubled within the last twenty-five years. Yet the incomes of most of our large religious societies are almost at a standstill. If English people will not remember that their gold and silver is only a loan from God, and intended to be used for Him — they cannot be surprised if God reminds them of it by such visitations as the cattle plague. The hand that gives a nation wealth — is the hand that can take it away!

J. C. Ryle, “This Is the Finger of God” during the Great Cattle Plague, 1865-1867

2. When the will of God is the pathway to blessing

*11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*

Ephesians 1 (see Romans 8:28-39 for a longer discussion of God’s plan)

**Resources for further study**

The poster for Matthew does a good job of showing the 5 Parts of the gospel, reflecting a “new Torah”, can be found at [*https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/*](https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/)

Ryle has a commentary of Matthew 6 at [*https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/m06.htm*](https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/m06.htm)

J. C. Ryle also has a wonderful study of how believers should respond to the disciplining work of God at [*https://www.monergism.com/finger-god*](https://www.monergism.com/finger-god)

Here are some of our growing number of prayer resources:

I appreciated this perspective on praying “if it be your will” at [*https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/should-we-qualify-our-prayers-if-it-be-your-will*](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/should-we-qualify-our-prayers-if-it-be-your-will)

The CRCNA’s Prayer Guide illustrates how to use the Lord’s Prayer as a guide to corporate prayer at

[https://www.crcna.org]( https://www.crcna.org › files › the_lords_prayer) *[› files › the\_lords\_prayer]( https://www.crcna.org › files › the_lords_prayer)*

Kevin DeYoung’s article at [*https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-does-it-mean-to-pray-your-kingdom-come/*](https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-does-it-mean-to-pray-your-kingdom-come/)

Lora Copely’s “Extraordinary Prayer” article at <https://www.abideproject.org/articles/extraordinary-prayer>

Becket Cook’s story of his mother’s prayer at [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFWl9eWkmWg*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFWl9eWkmWg)

Sproul has a helpful and short discussion of God’s will at [*https://www.monergism.com/discerning-god%E2%80%99s-will-three-wills-god*](https://www.monergism.com/discerning-god%E2%80%99s-will-three-wills-god)

Jonathan Edwards has a short response concerning the two elements of the will of God at [*http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4xMjo0OjE6NTQud2plbw==*](http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4xMjo0OjE6NTQud2plbw==)

Dissenter John Gill has an extensive study at [*https://www.monergism.com/will-god-and-sovereignty-it*](https://www.monergism.com/will-god-and-sovereignty-it)

Reformation Theology has a good study of God’s will at [*https://www.monergism.com/reformation-theology/blog/gods-desire-all-be-saved-1-timothy-24-ezekiel-1823*](https://www.monergism.com/reformation-theology/blog/gods-desire-all-be-saved-1-timothy-24-ezekiel-1823)

Kim Riddlebarger has a good study, even if it is a bit harsh on those who disagree with him, at [*https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/thykingdom.html*](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/thykingdom.html)

Larry Stockstill has a good summary of the pattern of the Lord’s Prayer at [*https://larrystockstill.com/blog/prayer-template*](https://larrystockstill.com/blog/prayer-template)

Keller has a good listen at [*https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-upside-down-kingdom-5106/*](https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-upside-down-kingdom-5106/)or the .pdf version at [*https://www.scribd.com/document/258555474/Upside-Down-Kingdom-Tim-Keller*](https://www.scribd.com/document/258555474/Upside-Down-Kingdom-Tim-Keller)

Keller also has an 8-part series on the Lord’s Prayer on .mp3 at [*https://www.monergism.com/lords-prayer-8-part-mp3-sermon-series*](https://www.monergism.com/lords-prayer-8-part-mp3-sermon-series)

[*Monergism.com*](file:///I:\Summer%202023\monergism.com) has many resources on the Sermon on the Mount at [*https://www.monergism.  
com/topics/sermon-manuscripts-mp3s-scripture/matthew/sermon-mount-ch-5-7*](https://www.monergism.com/topics/sermon-manuscripts-mp3s-scripture/matthew/sermon-mount-ch-5-7)

Bob Deffinbaugh has a sermon on this passage at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/fatal-failures-religion-3-externalism-matthew-61-18*](https://bible.org/seriespage/fatal-failures-religion-3-externalism-matthew-61-18)

Spurgeon has an interesting prayer take is at [*https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-secret-of-power-in-prayer/#flipbook/*](https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-secret-of-power-in-prayer/%23flipbook/)

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**Matthew chapter 6**

[J.C. Ryle](https://www.gracegems.org/23/ryle_sermons.htm), 1856 at [*https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/m06.htm*](https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/m06.htm)

*"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.  Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.  But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,  that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.*

*"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.  But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.  And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.  Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.* [Matthew 6:1-8](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%206.1-8)

In this part of the sermon on the mount the Lord Jesus gives us instruction on two subjects. One is that of giving alms. The other is that of prayer. Both were subjects to which the Jews attached great importance. Both in themselves deserve the serious attention of all professing Christians.

Observe that our Lord takes it for granted, *that* ***all who call themselves His disciples will GIVE ALMS.*** He assumes as a matter of course, that they will think it a solemn duty to give, according to their means, to relieve the needs of others. The only point He handles is the *manner* in which the duty should be done. This is a weighty lesson. It condemns the selfish stinginess of many in the matter of giving money. How many are "rich towards themselves," but poor towards God! How many never give a farthing to do good to the bodies and souls of men! And have such people any right to be called Christians, in their present state of mind? It may be well doubted. A giving Savior should have giving disciples.

Observe again that our Lord takes it for granted, *that* ***all who call themselves His disciples will PRAY.***He assumes this also as a matter of course. He only gives directions as to the best way of praying. This is another lesson which deserves to be continually remembered. It teaches plainly that prayerless people are not genuine Christians. It is not enough to join in the prayers of the congregation on Sundays, or attend the prayer of a family on week-days. There must be private prayer also. Without this we may be outward members of Christ's church, but we are not living members of Christ.

But what are the rules laid down for our guidance about almsgiving and praying? They are few and simple. But they contain much matter for thought.

In GIVING, ***everything like ostentation is to be abhorred and avoided.***We are not to give as if we wished everybody to see how liberal and charitable we are, and desired the praise of our fellow men. We are to shun everything like *display*. We are to give quietly, and make as little noise as possible about our charities. We are to aim at the spirit of the proverbial saying, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand does."

In PRAYING, *the principal object to be sought, is to be alone with God.* We should endeavor to find some place where no mortal eye sees us, and where we can pour out our hearts with the feeling that no one is looking at us but God. This is a rule which many find it very difficult to follow. The poor man and the servant often find it almost impossible to be really alone. But it is a rule which we must all make great efforts to obey. Necessity, in such cases, is often the mother of invention. When a person has a real desire to find some place, where he can be in secret with his God, he will generally find a way.

In all our duties, whether giving, or praying, the great thing to be kept in mind is, *that* ***we have to do with a heart-searching and all-knowing God.*** Everything like formality, affectation, or mere bodily service, is abominable and worthless in God's sight. He takes no account of the quantity of money we give, or the quantity of words we use. The one thing at which His all-seeing eye looks is the nature of our motives, and the state of our hearts. "Our Father sees in secret."

May we all remember these things. Here lies a rock, on which many are continually making spiritual shipwreck. They flatter themselves that all must be right with their souls, if they only perform a certain amount of "religious duties." They forget that God does not regard the quantity, but the quality of our service. His favor is not to be bought, as many seem to suppose, by the formal repetition of a number of words, or the self-righteous payment of a sum of money to a charitable institution. Where are our hearts? Are we doing all, whether we give or pray, "as to the Lord, and not to men?" Do we realize the eye of God? Do we simply and solely desire to please Him, who "sees in secret," and by whom "actions are weighed?" ([1 Sam. 2:3](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Sam.%202.3).) Are we sincere? These are the sort of questions, with which we should daily ply our souls.

**MATTHEW 6:9-15**

*In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.  Your kingdom come. Your 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 do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.  "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.  But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* [Matthew 6:9-15](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%206.9-15)

Perhaps no part of Scripture is so well known as this. Its words are familiar, wherever Christianity is found. Thousands, and tens of thousands, who never saw a Bible, or heard the pure Gospel, are acquainted with "Our Father," and "Paternoster." Happy would it be for the world, if this prayer was as well known in the spirit, as it is in the letter!

Perhaps no part of Scripture is so *full*, and so *simple* at the same time, as this. It is the first prayer which we learn to offer up, when we are little children. Here is its simplicity. It contains the germ of everything which the most advanced saint can desire. Here is its fullness. The more we ponder every word it contains, the more we shall feel, "this prayer is of God."

The Lord's prayer consists of ten parts or sentences. There is one declaration of the Being to whom we pray. There are three prayers respecting His name, His kingdom, and His will. There are four prayers respecting our daily needs, our sins, our weakness, and our dangers. There is one profession of our feeling towards others. There is one concluding ascription of praise. In all these parts we are taught to say "we," and "our." We are to remember others, as well as ourselves. On each of these parts a volume might be written. We must content ourselves at present with taking up sentence by sentence, and marking out the direction in which each sentence points.

The first sentence declares ***to whom we are to pray****--*"Our *Father* who is in heaven." We are not to cry to saints and angels, but to the everlasting Father, the Father of spirits, the Lord of heaven and earth. We call Him Father, in the lowest sense, as our Creator; as Paul told the Athenians, "in him we live, and move, and have our being--we are also his offspring." ([Acts 17:28](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%2017.28).) We call Him Father in the highest sense, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, reconciling us to Himself, through the death of His Son. ([Col. 1:20-22](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Col.%201.20-22).) We profess that which the Old Testament saints only saw dimly, if at all--we profess to be His children by faith in Christ, and to have "the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." ([Rom. 8:15](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom.%208.15).) This, we must never forget, is the sonship that we must desire, if we would be saved. Without faith in Christ's blood, and union with Him, it is vain to talk of trusting in the Fatherhood of God.

The second sentence is ***a petition respecting God's name****--*"May your name be kept holy." By the "name" of God we mean all those attributes under which He is revealed to us--His power, wisdom, holiness, justice, mercy, and truth. By asking that they may be "holy," we mean that they may be made known and glorified. The glory of God is the first thing that God's children should desire. It is the object of one of our Lord's own prayers--"Father, glorify your name." ([John 12:28](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2012.28).) It is the purpose for which the world was created. It is the end for which the saints are called and converted. It is the chief thing we should seek, that "in all things God may be glorified." ([1 Peter 4:11](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Pet%204.11).)

The third sentence is ***a petition concerning God's kingdom****--*"May your kingdom come." By His kingdom we mean first, the kingdom of *grace* which God sets up and maintains in the hearts of all living members of Christ, by His Spirit and word. But we mean chiefly, the kingdom of *glory* which shall one day be set up, when Jesus shall come the second time, and "all men shall know Him from the least to the greatest." This is the time when sin, and sorrow, and Satan shall be cast out of the world. It is the time when the Jews shall be converted, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, ([Rom. 11:25](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom.%2011.25),) and a time that is above all things to be desired. It therefore fills a foremost place in the Lord's prayer. We ask that which is expressed in the words of the Burial service, "that it may please you to hasten your kingdom."

The fourth sentence is ***a petition concerning God's will****--*"May your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." We here pray that God's laws may be obeyed by men as perfectly, readily, and unceasingly, as they are by angels in heaven. We ask that those who now obey not His laws, may be taught to obey them, and that those who do obey them, may obey them better. Our truest happiness is perfect submission to God's will, and it is the highest charity to pray that all mankind may know it, obey it, and submit to it.

The fifth sentence is***a petition respecting our own daily needs****--*"give us this day our daily bread." We are here taught to acknowledge our entire dependence on God, for the supply of our daily necessities. As Israel required daily manna, so we require daily "bread." We confess that we are poor, weak, needy creatures, and beseech Him who is our Maker to take care of us. We ask for "bread," as the simplest of our needs, and in that word we include all that our bodies require.

The sixth sentence is ***a petition respecting our sins****--*"Forgive us our debts." We confess that we are sinners, and need daily grants of pardon and forgiveness. This is a part of the Lord's prayer which deserves especially to be remembered. It condemns all self-righteousness and self-justifying. We are instructed here to keep up a continual habit of confession at the throne of grace, and a continual habit of seeking mercy and remission. Let this never be forgotten. We need daily to "wash our feet." ([John 13:10](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2013.10).)

The seventh sentence is ***a profession respecting our own feelings towards others****--*we ask our Father to "forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." This is the only profession in the whole prayer, and the only part on which our Lord comments and dwells, when He has concluded the prayer. The plain object of it is, to remind us that we must not expect our prayers for forgiveness to be heard, if we pray with malice and spite in our hearts towards others. To pray in such a frame of mind is mere formality and hypocrisy. It is even worse than hypocrisy. It is as much as saying, "Do not forgive me at all." Our prayer is nothing without charity. We must not expect to be forgiven, if we cannot forgive.

The eighth sentence is ***a petition respecting our weakness****--*"Bring us not into temptation." It teaches us that we are liable, at all times, to be led astray, and fall. It instructs us to confess our infirmity, and beseech God to hold us up, and not allow us to run into sin. We ask Him, who orders all things in heaven and earth, to restrain us from going into that which would injure our souls, and never to allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. ([1 Cor. 10:13](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Cor.%2010.13).)

The ninth sentence is ***a petition respecting our dangers****--*"deliver us from evil." We are here taught to ask God to deliver us from the evil that is in the world, the evil that is within our own hearts, and not least from that evil one, the devil. We confess that, so long as we are in the body, we are constantly seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of evil. It is about us, and within us, and around us on every side. And we entreat Him, who alone can preserve us, to be continually delivering as from its power. ([John 17:15](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/John%2017.15).)

The last sentence is ***an ascription of praise****--*"yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory." We declare in these words our belief, that the kingdoms of this world are the rightful property of our Father--that to Him alone belongs all "power,"--and that He alone deserves to receive all "glory." And we conclude by offering to Him the profession of our hearts, that we give Him all honor and praise, and rejoice that He is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

And now let us all examine ourselves, and see whether we really desire to have the things which we are taught to ask for in the Lord's Prayer. Thousands, it may be feared, repeat these words daily as a form, but never consider what they are saying. They care nothing for the "glory," the "kingdom," or the "will" of God. They have no sense of dependence, sinfulness, weakness, or danger. They have no love or charity towards their enemies. And yet they repeat the Lord's Prayer! These things ought not to be so. May we resolve that, by God's help, our hearts shall go together with our lips! Happy is he who can really call God his Father through Jesus Christ his Savior, and can therefore say a heart felt "Amen" to all that the Lord's Prayer contains.

**MATTHEW 6:16-24**

*"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.  But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,  so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.  "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;  but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.  For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.  "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.  But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!  "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.* [Matthew 6:16-24](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Matt%206.16-24)

There are three subjects brought before us in this part of our Lord's sermon on the mount. These three are fasting, worldliness, and singleness of purpose in religion.

***Fasting****,* or occasional abstinence from food, in order to bring the body into subjection to the spirit, is a practice frequently mentioned in the Bible, and generally in connection with prayer. David fasted, when his child was sick. Daniel fasted, when he sought special light from God. Paul and Barnabas fasted, when they appointed elders. Esther fasted, before going in to Ahasuerus. It is a subject about which we find no direct command in the New Testament. It seems to be left to every one's discretion, whether he will fast or not. There is great wisdom in this. Many a poor man never has enough to eat, and it would be an insult to tell him to fast. Many a sickly person can hardly be kept well with the closest attention to diet, and could not fast without bringing on illness. It is a matter in which every one must be persuaded in his own mind, and not be hasty to condemn others, who do not agree with him. One thing only must never be forgotten. Those who fast should do it *quietly, secretly, and without ostentation*. Let them not "appear to men" to fast. Let them not fast to man, but to God.

***Worldliness***is one of the greatest dangers that beset man's soul. It is no wonder that we find our Lord speaking strongly about it. It is an treacherous, harmful, enticing, and powerful enemy. It seems so innocent to pay close attention to our business! It seems so harmless to seek our happiness in this world, so long as we keep clear of open sins! Yet here is a rock on which many make shipwreck to all eternity. They "lay up treasure on earth," and forget to "lay up treasure in heaven." May we all remember this! Where are our hearts? What do we love best? Are our chief affections on things in earth, or things in heaven? Life or death depends on the answer we can give to these questions. If our treasure is earthly, our hearts will be earthly also. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be."

***Singleness of purpose***is one great secret of spiritual prosperity. If our eyes do not see distinctly, we cannot walk without stumbling and falling. If we attempt to work for two different masters, we are sure to give satisfaction to neither. It is just the same with respect to our souls. We cannot serve Christ and the world at the same time. It is vain to attempt it. The thing cannot be done. The ark and Dagon will never stand together. God must be king over our hearts. His law, His will, His precepts must receive our first attention. Then, and not until then, everything in our inward man will fall into its right place. Unless our hearts are so ordered, everything will be in confusion. "Your whole body will be full of darkness."

Let us learn from our Lord's instruction about fasting, ***the great importance of cheerfulness in our religion.*** Those words, "anoint your head, and wash your face," are full of deep meaning. They should teach us to aim at letting men see, that we find Christianity makes us happy. Never let us forget that there is no religion in looking melancholy and gloomy. Are we dissatisfied with Christ's wages, and Christ's service? Surely not! Then let us not look as if we were.

Let us learn from our Lord's caution about worldliness ***what immense need we all have to watch and pray against an earthly spirit.*** What are the vast majority of professing Christians round us doing? They are "laying up treasure on earth." There can be no mistake about it. Their tastes, their ways, their habits tell a fearful tale. They are not "laying up treasure in heaven." Oh! let us all beware that we do not sink into hell by paying excessive attention to lawful things. Open transgression of God's law slays its thousands, but worldliness its tens of thousands.

Let us learn from our Lord's words about the "single eye," ***the true secret of the failures****,* which so many Christians seem to make in their religion. There are failures in all quarters. There are thousands in our churches uncomfortable, ill at ease, and dissatisfied with themselves, and they hardly know why. The reason is revealed here. They are trying to keep in with both sides. They are endeavoring to please God and please man, to serve Christ and serve the world at the same time. Let us not commit this mistake. Let us be decided, thorough-going, uncompromising followers of Christ. Let out motto be that of Paul, "One thing I do." ([Phil. 3:13](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Phil.%203.13).) Then we shall be happy Christians. We shall feel the sun shining on our faces. Heart, head, and conscience will all be full of light. *Decision* is the secret of happiness in religion. Be decided for Christ, and "your whole body will be full of light."

# Discerning God’s Will: The Three Wills of God

### by R. C. Sproul at [*https://www.monergism.com/discerning-god%E2%80%99s-will-three-wills-god*](https://www.monergism.com/discerning-god%E2%80%99s-will-three-wills-god)

“It is the will of God.”

How easily these words fall from the lips or flow from the pen. How difficult it is to penetrate exactly what they mean. Few concepts in theology generate more confusion than the will of God.

One problem we face is rooted in the multifaceted way in which the term “will” functions in biblical expressions. The Bible uses the expression “will of God” in various ways. We encounter two different Greek words in the New Testament (boulē and thēlema), both of which are capable of several nuances. They encompass such ideas as the counsel of God, the plan of God, the decrees of God, the disposition or attitude of God, as well as other nuances. Further distinctions in historical theology add to the labyrinth of meanings attached to the simple formula “the will of God.”

Augustine once remarked, “In some sense, God wills everything that happens.” The immediate question raised by this comment is, In what sense? How does God “will” the presence of evil and suffering? Is He the immediate cause of evil? Does He do evil? God forbid. Yet evil is a part of His creation. If He is sovereign over the whole of His creation, we must face the conundrum, How is evil related to the divine will?

Questions like this one make distinctions necessary—sometimes fine distinctions, even technical distinctions—with respect to will of God. Some of those distinctions made by theologians include the following:

**(1) The Decretive Will of God**

This is sometimes described as the sovereign efficacious will, by which God brings to pass whatever He pleases by His divine decree. An example of this may be seen in God’s work of creation. When God said, “Let there be light,” He issued a divine imperative. He exercised His sovereign efficacious will. It was impossible for the light not to appear. It appeared by the sheer necessity of consequence. That is, the decretive will can have no other effect, no other consequence than what God sovereignly commands. He did not request the light to shine. Nor did He coax, cajole, or woo it into existence. It was a matter of the authority and power vainly sought by the king of Siam when he said to Anna (to no avail), “So let it be said; so let it be done.” No creature enjoys this power of will. No man’s will is that efficacious. Men issue decrees and then hope they will bring about their desired effects. God alone can decree with the necessity of consequence.

**(2) The Preceptive Will of God**

The preceptive will of God relates to the revealed commandments of God’s published law. When God commands us not to steal, this “decree” does not carry with it the immediate necessity of consequence. Where it was not possible for the light to refuse to shine in creation, it is possible for us to refuse to obey this command. In a word, we steal.

We must be careful not to make too much of this distinction. We must not be lulled into thinking that the preceptive will of God is divorced from His decretive will. It is not as though the preceptive will has no effect or no necessity of consequence. We may have the power to disobey the precept. We do not have the power to disobey it with impunity. Nor can we annul it by our disregard. His law remains intact whether we obey it or disobey it. Even this law cannot ultimately be frustrated. There will come a time when no one will steal. The sinner in hell will be forcibly restrained from stealing. The saint in heaven, in the glorified state of perfected sanctification, will be totally disinclined to theft.

In one sense the preceptive will is part of the decretive will. God sovereignly and efficaciously decrees that His law be established. It is established and nothing can disestablish it. His law exists as surely as the light by which we read it.

Yet we still observe the acute difference between the light’s obedience to God’s creative decree and our disobedience to God’s moral, preceptive decree. How do we account for this?

A common way to resolve this conundrum is by appeal to a distinction between the sovereign will of God and His permissive will.

**(3) The Permissive Will of God**

The distinction between the sovereign will of God and the permissive will of God is fraught with peril, and it tends to generate untold confusion.

In ordinary language the term permission suggests some sort of positive sanction. To say that God “allows” or “permits” evil does not mean that He sanctions it in the sense that He grants approval to it. It is easy to discern that God never permits sin in the sense that He sanctions it in His creatures.

What is usually meant by divine permission is that God simply lets it happen. That is, He does not directly intervene to prevent its happening. Here is where grave danger lurks. Some theologies view this drama as if God were impotent to do anything about human sin. This view makes man sovereign, not God. God is reduced to the roll of spectator or cheerleader, by which God’s exercise in providence is that of a helpless Father who having done all He can do, must now sit back and simply hope for the best. He permits what He cannot help but permit because He has no sovereign power over it. This ghastly view is not merely a defective view of theism; it is unvarnished atheism.

Obviously the motive behind this specious theology is virtuous. It is fueled by a desire to exonerate God from any culpability for the presence of evil in the world. I am sure God is pleased by the sentiment but repulsed by a theory that would strip Him of His very deity. Calvin said of this:

“Hence the distinction was devised between doing and permitting because to many this difficulty seemed inexplicable, that Satan and all the impious are so under God’s hand and power that He directs their malice to whatever end seems good to Him, and uses their wicked deeds to carry out His judgments. And perhaps the moderation of those whom the appearance of absurdity alarms would be excusable, except that they wrongly try to clear God’s justice of every sinister mark by upholding a falsehood” (Institutes I.xviii.1).

Calvin locates the scurrilous untruth in the faulty distinction between willing and permitting:

“It seems absurd to them for man, who will soon be punished for his blindness, to be blinded by God’s will and command. Therefore they escape by the shift that this is done only with God’s permission, not also by His will; but He, openly declaring that He is the doer, repudiates that evasion. However, that men can accomplish nothing … except what He has already decreed with Himself and determines by His secret direction, is proved by innumerable and clear testimonies” (Ibid.).

Calvin goes on to enumerate several passages that support his thesis, looking to Job, Satan and the Sabeans, the role of Pilate and Judas in the execution of Christ, the role of Absalom in Jewish history, etc.

The key phrase is this: “Therefore they escape by the shift that this is done only with God’s permission, not also by His will.”

Here the operative word is only. If we are in any just way to speak of God’s permissive will, we must be careful to notice not only the word permissive but also the word will. Whatever God “permits” He sovereignly and efficaciously wills to permit. If I have a choice to sin or not sin, God also has a choice in the matter. He always has the ability and the authority to stop me from exercising my will. He has absolute power to restrain me. He can vaporize me instantly if it is His pleasure. Or He can keep me on a long leash and let me do my worst. He will only permit me to do my worst if my worst coincides with His perfect providential plan.

In the treachery perpetrated by Joseph’s brothers, it was said, “You meant it for evil; God meant it for good.” God’s good will was served through the bad will of Joseph’s brothers. This does not mean that since they were only doing the will of God the acts of the brothers were virtues in disguise. Their acts are judged together with their intentions, and they were rightly judged by God to be evil. That God brings good out of evil only underscores the power and the excellence of His sovereign decretive will.

We sometimes get at this same problem by distinguishing between God’s active will and His passive will. Again we face difficulties. When God is “passive,” He is, in a sense, actively passive. I do not mean to speak nonsense but merely to show that God is never totally passive. When He seems to be passive, He is actively choosing not to intercede directly.

Augustine addressed the problem this way: “Man sometimes with a good will wishes something which God does not will, as when a good son wishes his father to live, while God wishes him to die. Again it may happen that man with a bad will wishes what God wills righteously, as when a bad son wishes his father to die, and God also wills it.… For the things which God rightly wills, He accomplishes by the evil wills of bad men.”

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The article above was adapted from Ligonier Ministries [Tabletalk](https://tabletalkmagazine.com/" \t "_blank) magazine – August, 1993.

# Jesus on Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15) Bob Deffinbaugh at [*https://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-prayer-matthew-65-15*](https://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-prayer-matthew-65-15)

### Introduction[189](https://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-prayer-matthew-65-15" \l "P1838_637121)

[Matthew 5](javascript:%7b%7d) – 7 contains the well-known Sermon on the Mount. The sermon is about righteousness that comes from the heart. Religion tends to be about external forms and obedience to rules, but here Jesus challenges us to evaluate ourselves by an inner standard. This contrasts with the prevailing wisdom of the time. The “teachers of the law” strove to fence the Law by a stringent oral law. Thus a “Sabbath day’s journey” encoded how far one could travel and not break the command to not labor on the Sabbath. It might well be that one could journey more without breaking the commandment, but if you kept the oral standard, you were so far from breaking the Law that you were “safe.” So the Law was fenced by obedience to an even stricter standard.

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount also fenced the Law, but did so by looking at the heart. For example, He says,

“You have heard that it was said to an older generation, ‘Do not murder,’ and ‘whoever murders will be subjected to judgment.’ But I say to you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subjected to judgment. And whoever insults a brother will be brought before the council, and whoever says ‘Fool’ will be sent to fiery hell” ([Matthew 5:21-22](javascript:%7b%7d)).[190](https://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-prayer-matthew-65-15" \l "P1843_638577)

Murder is an external sin. It is obvious and visible. It is easy to condemn the murderer. But Jesus tells us to take care less we even have a seething anger against another. Our anger can be visible or invisible. It matters not; we have the seeds of murder in our heart, and we had best uproot them by the Father’s grace. And so Jesus teaches about a life lived and judged by attitudes in the heart. There is nothing here by which we can judge others. We can only take His words, and by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, judge our own lives and move to change.[191](https://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-prayer-matthew-65-15" \l "P1845_640027)

So Jesus’ instruction on prayer is in the broad context of a sermon about the heart as the real source of good and evil in us. It also has a more immediate context expressed in the opening lines of [Matthew 6](javascript:%7b%7d):

Be careful about not living righteously merely to be seen by people. Otherwise you have no reward with your Father in heaven ([Matthew 6:1](javascript:%7b%7d)).

With these words, Jesus speaks of outward versus inward religious practices. Giving, prayer, and fasting are most often associated with religion and, in the following section of the sermon, Jesus speaks again of the inner heart versus outward forms. In [Matthew 6:2-4](javascript:%7b%7d), He speaks of giving. In [Matthew 6:5-15](javascript:%7b%7d), He speaks of prayer, and in 6:16-18, He speaks of fasting. His treatment of all three topics is the same: if you have the outward form only or if the outward form focuses attention on you, the public acclaim that you receive—real or imagined—is all the benefit you will derive.

Of course, a visible spiritual life is not of itself bad. Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said:

I am not writing these things to shame you, but to correct you as my dear children. For though you may have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, because I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I encourage you, then, be imitators of me ([1 Corinthians 4:14-16](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Paul said, “Be imitators of me. What you see me do, do yourselves.” Godly men and women are often the first models of godly living that a new believer has. I certainly benefited, over 30 years ago now, from men decades old in their faith. Now I hope to be the same to those younger than me. The difference for Paul to the Corinthians is that he did not derive his self-image from the attention. He was a bondservant of Jesus Christ and spent himself for the church and her people. Men and women like that are worth emulating.

But it is different for those who give to be recognized for their giving, or who entertain with great prayers or fast in agony for the admiration of others. They have erected outward forms only. They have confused the approval of others with approval of the Father.

In this lesson, we will look into what Jesus said about prayer as He discusses its outward forms and instructs concerning the inner reality.

### Putting Prayer in Its Place

Jesus’ instruction on prayer in Matthew begins this way: “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” ([Matthew 6:5-6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus develops two basic kinds of prayer. The first is “showcase prayer” by which the person praying actually draws attention to himself. He wants to be known as spiritual and holy. His religion gives him status, and by public prayer, he maintains and feeds it. The second kind of prayer is “relational prayer.” This is prayer that seeks time with the Father. Jesus, for teaching purposes, draws a distinct line between the two, but we must acknowledge that most people will fall somewhere between the two extremes. It is also important to understand that no one can read the mind and intentions of another heart. What might seem to be the height of arrogance may only reflect upbringing. Or gentle, quiet prayers may come from one who has no private prayer life at all. Jesus’ instructions are for us to know and personally apply His words and to let the Holy Spirit guide and train our hearts in these matters.

There are, however, some warning signs to which we might want to pay attention.

* Do I have an “I am speaking to God” voice? This may be a matter of upbringing. Nevertheless, none is needed, and such a change in voice can draw attention to the one praying—unless one is in an environment that expects it, in which case not changing the voice can draw attention.
* Elegant words and lots of them. This may be a matter of gifting and natural oratory, but again none are needed.
* Personal agenda. It’s hard to excuse this one. You pray according to what you want done and what others need to do to help it along.
* Gossip. “Please God. Help Jane resist the temptation to keep seeing that guy.” Such public prayers are only fruitful if Jane is there and has asked for intercession on that subject.
* Public prayer of any kind without a private prayer life. It is a given that if you are not speaking to the Father when you are alone, there is no good speaking to Him publicly.

So Jesus advises us to go into our rooms and shut the door. This is the “normal” opposite of standing on a street corner. If He had used a phrase like “pray in private” or “pray alone,” all kinds of extreme ideas may have developed. How private do you need to be? Must we become hermits or monks to have a prayer life? Jesus simply meant that there are places and ways to pray that are between the Father and us. By entering such places, we demonstrate that we “**believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him**” ([Hebrews 11:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). In such a place:

* We can have an “I am speaking to God” voice if that helps us connect with Him and give Him honor.
* We can use elegant words as a way of offering Him our best.
* We can have a personal agenda, because it is now between the Father and us, and He can open and close doors as He sees fit.
* We can pray for Jane. Since it is just between the Father and us, we are more likely to be showing genuine concern for her welfare.
* And, of course, we now have a basis for praying in public.

We can be in our own rooms or in public and still pray privately. As Paul wrote, “**Pray without ceasing**” ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The private life is one measure of who we are. Too many times I have seen good public families suddenly come apart from within. It became apparent that the life behind the closed doors of the home was far different from the public family persona. If we believe that God exists and rewards those who seek Him, it will affect our most private of lives, because we will know that He is there. We then know that there is, in fact, no private life. Lest this cause you great fear, guilt, and concern, remember that Jesus says that, “… **your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you**.” Showcase prayer has the single reward of public acclaim. The rewards of relational prayer is that it can:

* Direct the heart
* Receive answers and close or open doors
* Strengthen the character and spirit
* Increase faith and spiritual gifting
* Bring a deeper sense of the Father’s presence and care

These are good things and worth having

### Putting Prayer in Perspective

Jesus’ instruction on prayer in Matthew continued with this admonition:

“When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles, because they think that by their many words they will be heard. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” ([Matthew 6:7-8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus contrasts prayer to the Father with the prayers of the Gentiles. He describes Gentile prayer as the repetitious babbling of many words. What might this mean, and how do we relate this to our prayers?

* “**Like the Gentiles**”. The Gentiles did not worship the true God.
* “Repetitious babble” connotes a lack of real content.
* “Many words to be heard” suggests rituals, incantations, and technique.

Gentile prayer is about the manipulation of spiritual forces and entities that do not generally care about you as an individual.

We can, of course, now give Jesus’ words a Christian spin:

* “**Like the Gentiles**”—Praying to God in Name, but not in knowledge. This is similar to what Paul wrote to the Romans about the Jews who did not accept Jesus as their Messiah, “**For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not in line with the truth**” ([Romans 10:2](javascript:%7b%7d)).
* Repetitious babbling—Praying without real content. Perhaps this would be like reciting liturgical prayers without connecting to their content.
* Many words to be heard—Praying with an attitude that God is not listening and must be manipulated to answer.

In answer to this, Jesus says that our Father knows what we need even before we ask. We are praying to our Father, which means that we are in a family relationship. We are part of His life, and He anticipates what we need. We can, therefore, come to Him as transparent people. We can come before Him glad, sad, or mad, and He will be there in full understanding. Manipulation is not required.

If our Father knows what we need before we ask, why should we pray? There are two reasons. The first is because of the rewards of prayer that go beyond just meeting our needs. The second is that there are many other things for which to pray such as the needs of others and the advancement of the Father’s Kingdom. We do not need such things, but they should have a place in our prayers.

So Jesus has given instructions about the place and manner of our prayers. We are to have a private life of prayer, and we are to pray to a real Person. This Person is interested in our needs and in us and does not need to be manipulated.

### Directing the Heart

So what makes for a good prayer? How are we to pray? During His sermon, Jesus began a model prayer for us with these words:

“So pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” ([Matthew 6:9-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus tells us to pray to “**Our Father in heaven**.” This should set our mental attitude as we come to a time of prayer. From the Old Testament and much of the New, we understand that we are praying to God, and that He is our Lord and King. We owe Him our lives and our service. But Jesus tells us that we can come to Him and call Him, “**Father**.” This connotes a more significant relationship than we would imagine. But Jesus is very serious about just this aspect. The entire sermon has many references to God as our Father. This relationship is our primary motivation for the lives that we should live.

God as Father is a two-way relationship. As Father, He loves us, and we honor Him. He protects, and we abide. He provides, and we give thanks. He instructs, and we emulate. He disciplines, and we mature. He touches, and we respond. He commands, and we obey. So much of the time we focus on command/obedience, and we forget all the other wonderful aspects of our walk with our Father. When we approach Him in prayer, He is all these things for us, and we need to be all these things to Him.

Jesus tells us to pray in first person plural, “***Our* Father … .**” Prayer, even in private, is to have a community focus. We can pray for our own needs, of course, but it must not stop there. We are to be intercessors. We pray “**Give us … ,**” and we are asking for the Father’s provision for family, friend, and foe. We pray “**Forgive us … ,** ” and we seek reconciliation with the Father and among ourselves. We pray “**Lead us …**” and “**Deliver us** **…**” because we all need proper guidance and protection.

We are to pray that the Father’s name “**be honored**.” This is both a request and an attitude. As a request, we are asking for the knowledge of the Father to fill the earth and for the earth to respond in honor. It is our chance to grieve over those things, in our lives and the lives of others, that bring dishonor to the name: hypocrisy, judgment that triumphs over mercy, mercy that triumphs over instruction and discipleship, those who hate God, etc. It is a time to recognize and put away our hypocrisy. As an attitude, we can begin our prayers with worship, praise, and thanksgiving. We worship who He is. We praise Him for His works, and we thank Him for His care and provision.

We ask for the Father’s kingdom to come. Along these lines, we pray for the spread of the gospel and the establishment of the rule and reign of the Father in the hearts of men and women. We pray for the welfare of the distressed and oppressed. We pray for physical healing, deliverance, change of hearts, broken relationships, and such things as would change with an acceptance of the Father and His ways. We also look forward to Jesus’ return to live and rule among us.

So we begin our prayers by focusing on the One to whom we pray. He is Father and King. Turning our hearts to Him helps us to become like Him.

### Sustaining the Heart

What we need as people occupies the next section of Jesus’ model prayer:

Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors ([Matthew 6:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The most literal understanding of “**daily bread**” is a loaf of bread in my hands to last me for the day. Some might say that is all that He means for us to ask for. I believe it is better to expand daily bread to include all that others and we need. I would, in fact, extend it beyond the material and into prayers for the needs of our bodies and our hearts:

* Food and Shelter—“**But if we have food and shelter, we will be satisfied with that. Those who long to be rich, however, stumble into temptation and a trap and many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction**” ([1 Timothy 6:8-9](javascript:%7b%7d)).
* Righteousness—“**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied**” ([Matthew 5:6](javascript:%7b%7d)).
* The Father’s presence—“**Whom do I have in heaven but you? I desire no one but you on earth … . But as for me, God’s presence is all I need. I have made the sovereign Lord my shelter, as I declare all the things you have done**” ([Psalm 73:25, 28](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Even though there is nothing in Jesus’ prayer for asking about anything but basic needs, there are two reasons to imagine that requests can go beyond this. The first is that Paul tells us to pray for everything. “**Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, tell your requests to God in your every prayer and petition—with thanksgiving**” ([Philippians 4:6](javascript:%7b%7d)). The second is the example of the wedding in Cana, where Jesus, in answer to His mother’s request, turned water into wine in a way that exceeded the needs of the party. We have a generous God. When Jesus boils prayer down to “**daily bread**,” He is encouraging thanksgiving. Ask for anything, expect the basics, and give thanks for everything.

The welfare of our souls and bodies also depends on two-way forgiveness. Guilt and bitterness eat away at us. Both are associated with personality troubles and physical ailments. We can make both a matter of prayer. “**Forgive us our debts**” takes care of our true moral guilt for the things that we do wrong. And because we have forgiveness, we can take honest assessments of ourselves, which hastens our sanctification. However, because bitterness is as bad or worse that unresolved guilt, Jesus tells us to link the two. “**Father, forgive us to the same degree that we forgive others.**” Jesus has more to say on this, and I will defer more comments until that time as well. Suffice it to say that it is unbalanced to ask to have our guilt removed so that we can stand comfortably in the Father’s presence, when there are people that we exclude from our lives because they wronged us. If it is good for us to receive forgiveness, it is even better that we give it. Plus, if we have a heart that carries no grudges, then we have confidence at this point in our prayer that we have received the Father’s forgiveness. That is an excellent thing.

If the Father answers what we have prayed so far, we would have healthy bodies and souls fit for service in the Kingdom of God.

### Keeping the Heart

Jesus concludes His model prayer with these words: “**And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one**” ([Matthew 6:13](javascript:%7b%7d)).

What does Jesus mean by our asking, **“… do not lead us into temptation … ?”** Is it that we need to fear that the Father will lead us into temptation unless we pray? Will He set us up to see if we will fall? The letter of James tells us, “**Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires**” ([James 1:13-14](javascript:%7b%7d)). I think most would agree that we must understand Jesus’ words in light of our own propensity to sin.

The Father does not directly tempt us to evil, but He does bring us to moments of testing. And with testing, comes the temptation to quit and not press on. The famous example of Peter’s denial illustrates such a failure. The night before, Peter had confidently asserted that he would stick by Jesus no matter what. Only a few hours later, Peter denied in strong language that he even knew Jesus. When we pray to not be led into temptation, we are asking the Father’s help in avoiding such situations. We ask for doors to be closed that have difficult situations on the other side. We ask for our hearts to be strengthened and focused on good things. We ask for wisdom to recognize and avoid troubling circumstances.

Although we are morally culpable for our actions, it can also be said that even the first sin in our race was not committed in a vacuum. The serpent in Eden, later identified as Satan or the devil, tempted Eve and prevailed. The Lord had commanded that the man and woman not eat from a single tree in the center of Eden. Satan attacked at that point and helped bring forth the sin. And so we need to ask for protection from his schemes.

Satan seeks our failure and prays for it. In Job, we have the record of such a prayer: Then Satan answered the Lord, “Is it for nothing that Job fears God? Have you not made a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his cattle have increased in the land. But extend your hand and strike everything he has, and he will indeed curse you to your face!” ([Job 1:9-11](javascript:%7b%7d)).

It is interesting that before this, we have a record of Job making offerings on behalf of his children – just in case they sinned. We are not told that Job ever made an offering for himself. Like Peter, he was self-assured. Like Peter, Satan asked to sift Job like wheat. It is just such situations that we pray against in our prayers. We acknowledge our weakness and ask for strengthening. We ask to receive our lessons according to the way of wisdom and instruction.

There are other sources of temptation that we must guard against. The world values make constant appeal. Our inner natures are weak and would like to go along. Through prayer, we can become a different kind of person.

Ultimately, it gets down to character that flows from within. “When is a thief not a thief?” When I ask this question, I usually hear, “When he is not stealing.” That is not correct. A thief who is not stealing is a thief who is out of work. A thief is not a thief when he labors with his own hands in order to have something to give to someone in need ([Ephesians 4:28](javascript:%7b%7d)). Such is the goal of this prayer. To change us from thieves to givers, from adulterers to loving husbands and wives, from proud to humble, from hating to loving, from bitter to forgiving, and so on. For each negative, we need to find and nurture its opposite. Prayer can help us do that.

This ends Jesus’ prayer model according to the most reliable manuscripts. Some manuscripts tack on something like, “For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.” I have chosen to go with the more attested reading. In the first place, we can give honor to the Father at the beginning of the prayer. In the second place, if Jesus did not include the ending, there is questionable value in using it. It is a grand ending, but Jesus ended His model with a reminder of our humility. The prayer moves from the greatness and glory of God to our total dependence on Him. I think it is better left that way.

### An Important Condition

Anyone following Jesus’ instruction on prayer closely would have noticed that we are to prayerfully link our receiving forgiveness from the Father to our forgiving others. It is not a command from the Father to us. It is rather to be a request from us to the Father. This is, indeed, a strange thing and one that would prompt the question, “Did you really mean that my forgiveness is based on the degree to which I forgive?” Jesus answers this anticipated question this way: For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins ([Matthew 6:14-15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus states in very direct terms that what we are to pray is the way things are. There is actually incredibly good news here. There is no one who has done as much damage to me as I have done to the kingdom of God—or would do if given enough time for my self-centered attitudes and actions to propagate. So if I come before the Father bearing no grudges for anything done to me, then I can ask Him to bear no grudge against me. Jesus’ prayer assumes that I have forgiven others before coming before the Father.

There are two important parables that back up this reality. This first even raises the ante by saying that we must forgive from the heart: “For this reason, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his slaves. As he began settling his accounts, a man who owed ten thousand talents was brought to him. Because he was not able to repay, the lord ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, children and whatever he possessed, and repayment to be made. Then the slave threw himself to the ground before him, saying, ‘Be patient with me, and I will repay you everything.’ The lord had compassion on that slave and released him, and forgave him the debt.

“After he went out, that same slave found one of his fellow slaves who owed him one hundred silver coins; then he grabbed him by the throat and started to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe!’ Then his fellow slave threw himself down and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will repay you.’ But he refused. Instead, he went out and threw him in prison until he repaid the debt.

“When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were very upset and went and told their lord everything that had happened. Then his lord called the first slave and said to him, ‘Evil slave! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me! Should you not have shown mercy to your fellow slave, just as I showed it to you?’ And in anger his lord turned him over to the prison guards to torture him until he repaid all he owed.

“So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if each of you does not forgive your brother from your heart” ([Matthew 18:23-35](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The second is a story that includes a parable and shows that the degree to which we love the Lord can depend on the degree to which we have been forgiven.

Now one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table.

Then when a woman of that town, who was a sinner, learned that Jesus was dining at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfumed oil. As she stood behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfumed oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.”

So Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.”

He replied, “Say it, Teacher.”

“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

Simon answered, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.”

Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then, turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss of greeting, but from the time I entered she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfumed oil. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which were many, are forgiven, thus she loved much; but the one who is forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” ([Luke 7:36-50](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The issue of forgiving others comes down to two things. The first is gratitude. We have been forgiven an enormous debt. Even the smallest and most petty of our self-centered mischief does real damage to the kingdom of heaven. We need only to look at the fallout from Adam and Eve’s simple disobedience to know that the debt that we owe is our lives. Our forgiveness cost the Father the life of His Son in exchange. Our forgiving others is simple gratitude. How dare we not! The second is that by forgiving, we emulate the character of the Father. By this, we honor His name. Our Father is known for His mercy and forgiveness. When we show mercy and forgiveness, we strive to be like Him. In this way, we give honor to His name.

Someone might now be asking, “Am I saved if I do not forgive others?” Since this prayer model seems to be a daily prayer by inclusion of a request for daily bread, then this would seem to be a daily request for forgiveness of what we have done wrong that day. It is operational forgiveness. It is what Jesus meant when He told Peter, “**The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet**” ([John 13:10](javascript:%7b%7d)). But even placing this aside, salvation does not depend on us. Paul in Ephesians writes:

For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not of works, so that no one can boast. For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them ([Ephesians 2:8-10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Saved by grace that comes by faith that is the gift of God. We can contribute nothing to our salvation, which is all the more reason to gratefully forgive those who have wronged us—whether they seek that forgiveness or not.

Besides, we do not want to live unforgiving lives. It is like drinking poison and saying to our offender, “There! Take that!”

Along these lines, I recommend that you read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. In that book, you will find the depths to which we as Christians are able to forgive.

### The Lord’s Prayer and the Beatitudes

You can take each line in the model prayer and find at least two of the beatitudes that reinforce it. When you are done, all the beatitudes are mentioned at least once.

**“Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored.”**

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” ([Matthew 5:8](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God” ([Matthew 5:9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**“May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”**

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them” ([Matthew 5:3](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them” ([Matthew 5:10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**“Give us today our daily bread.”**

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied” ([Matthew 5:6](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” ([Matthew 5:5](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**“And forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors.”**

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” ([Matthew 5:4](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” ([Matthew 5:7](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God” ([Matthew 5:9](javascript:%7b%7d)).

**“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”**

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them” ([Matthew 5:10](javascript:%7b%7d)).

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things about you falsely on account of me. Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way” ([Matthew 5:11-12](javascript:%7b%7d)).

I am not inclined to add anything else. I find the pairings interesting and instructive. I hope you do as well.

### Some Final Thoughts

Let’s look at the entire text again:

“Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles, because they think that by their many words they will be heard. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So pray this way:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

“For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins” ([Matthew 6:5-15](javascript:%7b%7d)).

Jesus’ commentary about prayer is more than twice as long as His model prayer. The prayer, itself, is a marvel of simplicity and wisdom. It tells us to whom we are praying and for what we should pray. I believe that it also ranks what we pray about in priority order. This is significant, because we can focus on our Father and His kingdom and ask for daily provision before asking forgiveness! In this way, Jesus communicates the Father’s abundant mercy and grace. As Jesus has already said in this same sermon,

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” ([Matthew 5:44-45](javascript:%7b%7d)).

The application of this text, as with many others, must be personal and by the direction of the Holy Spirit. Typically we have no insight into the hearts and motivations of others. Suppose you come across someone loudly praying on a street corner. Do Jesus’ words above apply? You cannot tell. Jesus, for example, prayed in public ([John 11:41, 42](javascript:%7b%7d)). Daniel was in a situation where it would have been wrong to pray in secret ([Daniel 6:10](javascript:%7b%7d)). The one who retires into a secret place each day to pray may still have a hypocritical heart—he prays in secret and somehow lets everyone know he prays in secret.

So you need to read this passage concept by concept and bring your heart next to it.

* Are your prayers mostly about you and your circumstances? Consider interceding for others.
* How in tune are you to what the Father might be doing around you and the part you might play? Jesus said that He only did what He saw the Father doing. Prayer and connection with the Father is the key to our doing the same.
* Does “**forgive … as we have forgiven**” give you dread, or is it full of promise because your heart bears ill will to none? If you are not comfortable, do the hard work of letting go of your anger.
* Do you plead for your family, church, community, country, and enemies? Remember that the model prayer is in first person plural.
* Some people have memorized this prayer, and they use it as a guide in their private prayers. That is a good thing and a practice that I would recommend.

It is the nature of Jesus’ teaching that the bar He raises is higher than our grasp. But in the reaching, we reach higher all the time.

May the Father bless you and visit you in your times of prayer.

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[191](https://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-prayer-matthew-65-15" \l "P1845_640028) There is a modern parallel to the difference between an oral law that seeks to fence a written statute and an issue of the heart. Those who would outlaw private gun ownership are seeking to prevent murder through a stricter set of laws that outlaw weapons. As in Jesus’ time, such stricter codes are bound to fail, whereas an emphasis on the heart and character of men and women is better able to promote a peaceful and safe society.

J. C. Ryle’s “This Is The Finger of God” at [*https://www.monergism.com/finger-god*](https://www.monergism.com/finger-god)

Written during the Great Cattle Plague of England, 1865-1867

Look at the words which form the title of this booklet, and consider them well. They were spoken by heathen men more than three thousand years ago. They fell from the lips of Egyptian magicians when one of the famous plagues came on the land of Egypt. "Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh: This is the finger of God!" (Exodus 8:19). It would be well if all Englishmen were as wise as these Egyptians!

There is an evil among us that demands our serious attention. It forces itself on our notice, whether we like it or not. It has seized the nation by the throat, and will have a hearing. That evil is the Cattle Plague.

It is a heavy calamity. Myriads of cattle have already died. Myriads more seem likely to die. The loss of national wealth, and the injury of private interests are something fearful to contemplate. It is as bad as if gold and silver were snatched from us and thrown into the sea. A vast amount of property is clean gone and cannot be restored.

It is a wide-spread calamity. There is hardly a county in England which is not suffering. There is not a family which will not sooner or later suffer. The meat on the rich man's table, and the cheese in the cottage, the milk and butter which form so large a portion of our food, all will be affected by it. It will reach every home, and come home to all.

It is a perplexing calamity. No medicines, or remedies, or modes of treatment, appear to have any effect on the plague. After all the discoveries of science, after all that has been written by learned doctors, the skill of man is completely baffled. Even our statesmen and rulers seem at their wits' end. With all the accumulated wisdom of the nineteenth century, we have found no foe that entirely beats us. Yet now the curse of helplessness seems upon the land.

Now I wish to speak of the cattle plague as a minister of Christ. I wish to draw attention to one or two things which, amidst the anxieties of the crisis now upon us, appear likely to be forgotten. Let members of Parliament view the cattle plague from the political side. Let physicians and men of science propound their theories of prevention and cure. I only ask permission to offer a few thoughts on the whole subject as a believer of the Bible, and as a Christian.

**I. Let us consider, in the first place, from whence does the cattle plague come?**

I answer, unhesitatingly, that it comes from God! He who orders all things in Heaven and earth — He by whose wise providence everything is directed, and without whom nothing can happen — He it is who has sent this scourge upon us! It is the finger of God!

I shall not spend time in proving this point. I refer anyone who asks for proof to the whole tenor of God's Word. I ask him to mark how God is always spoken of as the governor and manager of all things here below, from the very least to the greatest.

Who sent the flood on the world in the days of Noah (Genesis 6:17)? It was God!

Who sent the famine in the days of Joseph (Genesis 41:25)? It was God!

Who sent the plague on Egypt, and especially the murrain on the cattle (Exodus 7:5; 9:3)? It was God!

Who sent disease on the Philistines, when the ark was among them (1 Samuel 5:7; 6:3-7)? It was God!

Who sent the pestilence in the days of David (2 Samuel 24:15)? It was God!

Who sent the famine in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 8:1)? It was God!

Who sent the stormy wind and tempest in the days of Jonah (Jonah 1:4)? It was God!

I count it mere waste of time to dwell much on this point. I cannot understand how anyone can be called a believer of the Bible, who denies God's providence over His world. For my own part, I believe thoroughly that God has not changed. I believe that He is governing all things on earth as much now as He was in the Old Testament days. I believe that wars, famines, pestilences, cattle plagues, are all His instruments for carrying on the government of this world. And therefore when I see a scourge like the cattle plague I have no doubt as to the hand that sends it. 'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it?' (Amos 3:6). It is the finger of God!

Can anyone give a better account of the cattle plague? If he can, let him speak out like a man, and tell us why it has come. To say that it originated in another land; that it is not a new but an old plague; that it has done great harm in days gone by — all this is evading the question. I ask to be told why it has come upon us now? How and in what way can the outbreak be accounted for at this particular period? What possible causes can be assigned for it that have not existed for hundreds of years? I believe these questions cannot be answered. I believe that the only cause that we must come to as last is, the finger of God!

Does anyone regard my assertion as absurd and unreasonable? I have no doubt that many do so. Many, I suspect, think that God never interferes with the affairs of this world, and that pestilences and cattle plagues are only the result of certain natural laws which are always producing certain effects. I pity the man who thinks so.

Is he an atheist? Does he believe that this wonderfully designed world came together by chance, and had no creator? If so, he is a very credulous person.

But if he does believe that God made the world, where, I ask, is the absurdity of believing that God governs the world? If he allows that God framed the universe, why not allow that God manages it? Away with this modern scepticism! It is offensive and revolting to common sense. They are not to be heard, who would shut out the Creator from His own creation. He who made the world at the beginning by the finger of creating wisdom, will never cease to govern the world by the finger of His providence, until Christ comes again. This cattle plague is the finger of God!

Does anyone pretend to say that God is too loving to send us such a scourge as this, and that it is wrong to suppose that anything evil can come from Him? I pity the man who can argue in that way. Has he children? Does he never correct them? If he is a wise and sensible man, I have no doubt that he does. But does he hate them because he chastises them? Does he not show the highest love by checking them when they do wrong? And shall not our Father in Heaven do the same? Yes, indeed! God does not hate us: He is a God of mercy and love, and therefore He keeps up His providential government of mankind. There is love even in this fell scourge which is now upon us. The cattle plague is the finger of a wise and loving God!

**II. Let us consider, in the second place, why has the cattle plague come upon us?**

I answer that question without hesitation. It has come upon us because of our national sins. God has a controversy with England, because of many things among us which are displeasing in His sight. He would gladly awaken us to a sense of our iniquities. This cattle plague is a message from Heaven.

The sins of individual men and women are often not reckoned for while they live; but this is because there is a judgement day yet to come. In that day, 'every one of us shall give account of himself to God' (Romans 14:12). For nations there can be no future judgement day. The sins of nations are reckoned for in time. Special sins and corruptions in a nation, call for special chastisements. I believe that this cattle plague is a special national chastisement on England, because of our special national sins.

The teaching of the Bible on this point is to my mind plain, distinct and unmistakable. Let anyone who doubts it read what God says about Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, Damascus, Moab, Edom, Ammon and Nineveh (Isaiah 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; Jeremiah 46:2; 48:1; 49:1-7 ;50:1; Nahum 3:1). Let him read such texts as these:

'The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful nation, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth' (Amos 9: 8). 'He makes nations great — and destroys them. He enlarges nations — and disperses them.' (Job 12:23).

Let them study such chapters as Daniel 4 and 5. Surely, if a man believes the Bible, these passages should set him thinking. The God of the Bible is still the same. He never changes.

Does anyone ask what the SPECIAL NATIONAL SINS of England are? I will mention some which appear to my eyes to stand out prominently in this country at the present time. I may be quite wrong. I only give my judgment as one who looks on attentively, and marks the signs of the times.

(1) The first national sin I will name is covetousness. The excessive love of money, and the desire to be rich in this world, are what I mean. Never, surely, was there such a race for riches as at the present day. To make money and die rich, seems to be thought the highest virtue, and the greatest wisdom. Yet God has said 'Covetousness is idolatry!' (Colossians 3:5) and 'The love of money is the root of all evil!' (1 Timothy 6:10).

(2) The second national sin I will name is luxury and love of pleasure. Never, surely, was there a time when people ran so greedily after excitement, amusement and gratification of their senses. The many are 'lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God' (2 Timothy 3:4).

(3) The third national sin I will name is neglect of the Lord's Day. That blessed day is rapidly becoming in many quarters the day for visiting and pleasure, and not the day of God. Yet Sabbath desecration was specially one of the sins which brought down God's judgments on the Jews: 'They have greatly polluted My sabbaths' (Ezekiel 20:13; Nehemiah 13:18).

(4) The fourth national sin I will name is drunkenness. The quantity of intoxicating drink consumed every year in England is something frightful. The number of ale-houses, gin-palaces and beer shops, in our large towns, is a standing proof that we are an intemperate people. There are more people, every Sunday night, in gin shops than there are in churches and chapels. We are worse in this respect than either France or Italy. Yet God has said, 'No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Corinthians 6:10).

(5) The fifth national sin I will name is immorality: 'You shall not commit adultery' (Exodus 20:14). In town and in country among rich and among poor, the tone of feeling about purity among the young, is at the lowest ebb. Yet God has said, 'Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things comes the wrath of God!' (Ephesians 5:6).

(6) The sixth national sin I will name is a growing tendency to look favorably on the Roman Catholic Church. The very Church which burned our martyrs three hundred years ago, withheld the Bible from our people, trampled on our liberties, and to this very day puts the Virgin Mary practically in the place of Christ — is favored and trifled with by thousands! A judicial blindness seems to be coming over us. The line between toleration and favor appears clean blotted out. The great desire of many is to 'go back to Egypt!'

(7) The last national sin I will name is the growing disposition to scepticism and infidelity. Little by little, men in high places are ceasing to honor God. Year after year the Bible is more openly impugned, and its authority impaired. To believe the Bible, was once a mark of a Christian. In the present day an English minister dares to call himself a Christian, and yet boasts that he thinks much of the Bible is not true. Nothing, I am thoroughly persuaded, is so offensive to God as to dishonor His written Word.

I believe firmly that these things are crying to God against England. They are an offence against the King of kings, for which He is punishing us at this very day. And the rod He is using is the cattle plague! The finger of God, I believe, is pointing at our seven great national sins.

To say that we are not so bad as some nations, and that the sins I have named are far more abundant in other countries than in England, is no argument at all. We have had more privileges than other countries, and therefore God may justly expect more at our hands. 'For unto whoever much is given, of them shall much be required' (Luke12:48). 'You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities' (Amos 3:2).

I might easily enlarge on the points that I have mentioned. I purposely abstain from doing so. I am anxious to make this booklet as short as possible. To effect this, I content myself with supplying little more than seeds of thought, which I hope may spring up and bear fruit in many minds. It only remains to offer a few practical conclusions.

**III. What does the cattle plague summon everyone to do?**

In answering that question, the reader will distinctly understand that I only write as a Christian minister. Let politicians make the best laws they can to meet the present emergency. Let medical men use every possible means to arrest the plague, and patiently try every remedy. Let practical agriculturists neglect nothing that may be available to prevent contagion, to diminish the liability to infection, and to stamp out the plague when it arises. But my standpoint is that of the Bible. In the light of that book, I raise my concluding question: What shall we all do?

For one thing, let us all consider our ways. It is an age of hurry, bustle, restlessness and fast living. Railways and telegraphs keep everyone in a state of unhealthy excitement. Now surely it would be well, when the hand of God is stretched out against us, if we were all to sit down and think a little. Are we not living too fast? Would it not be well if there was more Bible reading, more Sunday keeping, more calm quiet effort to serve God and honor Him? Happy is that man, and happy is that nation, that begins to think!

For another thing, let us all humble ourselves before God, and acknowledge His hand. Alas, we are a proud, self-conceited nation! We are apt to think that we English people are the wisest, and greatest, and richest, and bravest people in the world. We are sadly blind to our many faults and sins. Surely when God's hand is so plainly stretched out against us, it is high time to give up this boastful spirit. If there is anything that God hates, it is pride!

It is written:

'I hate pride and arrogance!' (Proverbs 8:13)

'Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall!' (Proverbs 16:18)

'I am against you, O you most proud' (Jeremiah 50:31)

'This was the iniquity of Sodom — pride and fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness!' (Ezekiel 16:49)

'Those who walk in pride, He is able to abase!' (Daniel 4:37)

'He who exalts himself shall be abased, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted!' (Matthew 23:12)

For another thing, let us each individually endeavor to break off our own besetting sins, and to amend our ways. It is easy work to find fault with the Government, and to blame others when we are in trouble. The better course is to look within at ourselves, and try to do our own part to make things better. The sins of a nation are made up of the sins of a great number of individuals. Now, if every individual tries to amend his own life, and to do better, the whole nation will soon improve. The city is soon clean — when every man sweeps by his own door.

For another thing, let us each use any influence we have to check sin in others. The power that parents, masters, mistresses and employers have in this respect is very great. If all such would exert themselves to check Sabbath breaking, excess of amusements, idleness, drunkenness and immorality — it would be an immense gain to the general condition of the nation. Influence over others, we must never forget, is a talent for which we must one day give account. There are thousands of parents and employers, I fear, who completely bury this talent in the ground. They allow those under them to run into sin and, like Eli, never reprove them. It is written: 'His sons made themselves vile — and he restrained them not!' (1 Samuel 3:13).

For another thing, let us each lay ourselves out more heartily to do some good in the world. It is a melancholy fact, that the increase of almsgiving in England of late bears no proportion whatever to the increase of wealth. The trade and commerce of the country have probably doubled within the last twenty-five years. Yet the incomes of most of our large religious societies are almost at a standstill. If English people will not remember that their gold and silver is only a loan from God, and intended to be used for Him — they cannot be surprised if God reminds them of it by such visitations as the cattle plague. The hand that gives a nation wealth — is the hand that can take it away!

Last of all, but not least, let us each resolve to offer special prayer to God for the removal of the judgement now upon us. Whatever else we do, let us pray. The Word of God encourages us to it:

'In everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God' (Philippians 4:6)

'Is any afflicted, let him pray' (James 5:13)

'If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways — then I will hear from Heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land!' (2 Chronicles 7:13-14).

The presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven at God's right hand invites us to it. He who died for sinners on the cross, is sitting there to be the sinners' Advocate and Friend. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and knows the trials of our earthly condition.

The examples of Scripture warrant us. The men of Nineveh humbled themselves, and cried mightily to God, and God heard their cry: 'And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also MUCH CATTLE?' (Jonah 4:11). The character of God Himself makes it folly not to pray: 'He does not afflict willingly' (Lamentations 3:33). He is the Lord God, 'merciful and gracious, showing mercy unto thousands' (Exodus 34:6). 'Call upon me,' He says, 'in the time of trouble, and I will deliver you' (Psalm 50:15).

LET US PRAY: "Almighty God, who order all things in Heaven and earth, and in whose hand is the life of man and beast, have pity on us miserable sinners, who are now visited with great sickness and mortality among our cattle. We have nothing to say for ourselves. We humbly confess that we deserve Your chastisement, because of our many national sins. But spare us, good Lord, according to Your many mercies. Deal not with us according to our sins. Withdraw from us this grievous plague, and restore health to our cattle. Above all, stir up among us true repentance, and increase true religion in the land. We ask all in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory. Amen."