

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

AS A PICTURE OF THE HEART OF THE CHILD OF GOD.

It is my present desire, in the strength of God, to illustrate that portion of Scripture which we are accustomed to call the Lord's Prayer. I desire to be enabled to set forth what is taught us by the prayer which our Lord gave to His disciples, concerning the true character of those who are the people of God.

Before proceeding to the prayer itself, I would ask you to consider what it is to pray. You, of course, know that to offer up petitions that are mere words, is not to pray; that to speak anything with the lips, while the heart goes not along with the thing spoken, is not prayer; and you of course know, that in order to be prayer at all, it must be a thing in which the person is in earnest; and unless that be really felt which is expressed, it is not prayer at all. Prayer is offering up requests to God, because we desire the things we request, otherwise we mock God. Prayer is the offering up requests to God, because God has taught us that it is from Him that we are to expect everything which it is right for us to desire, and because He has warranted us to expect from Him whatever we can trust Him for, in regard that it is truly good. Prayer, then, is offering up our desires to God because of this encouragement which God has given us to approach Him, and it is offering them up in the expectation that God will answer them; for it is quite clear that if I honestly desire a thing, and honestly ask for a thing, there can be no reason why I should not expect it, unless I do not believe the willingness of the being from whom I ask it to bestow it, or else I *doubt his power*. We do not doubt the power of God; we do not doubt that He can and may if He chooses, give us what we ask. The willingness of God is the great thing of which we are ignorant. But prayer implies not merely the wish to get what we ask, however honest that wish may be, but an expectation of getting it because we not only see that God is God, but that God has warranted us to ask it of Him.

It is more especially with the honest desire that is in prayer that I at present engage your attention, because I wish you to see the Lord's Prayer just as a picture of the heart of the child of God; because I wish you to see it as the breathing of the spirit of Christ in a man, and because, if you come to see it in this way, you will feel that unless you have been taught by the Spirit to pray the Lord's Prayer, you are not Christians at all. There are two things here, the desires themselves, and the order in which they are presented; and both are instructive as to what is the state in which God desires to see us, and from both we learn who can be recognised to be the children of God.

If I am coming to one who I know is willing to give me anything I wish for, that which I most desire I shall, of course, first ask,—that which is nearest my heart should be first on my lips. Therefore, if in coming to pray to God my prayer is a real, honest prayer, the first thing I ask will be that very thing I most desire; and so with all my requests.

There is much taught us in regard to this by this prayer. It shows us the place which the

things here asked are to have in our hearts, and I wish you to come with me to the study of this prayer with the feeling, that to be in a right state in the sight of God, it is needful that your hearts should be moved after the tone and manner of this prayer, and should be longing for the things here spoken of, and should be expecting them from God; for these two things are needful to our having the true character of God's people, that we should choose right things, and that we should trust God regarding them, and expect them from God.

Now, the first thing that meets us in this prayer is the remarkable words, "Our Father." You see Christ teaches men to cry, "Abba, Father!" Christ does not teach men to pray to God that He may become their Father. He does not teach men a prayer which they are to offer up while they are in preparation to become children, and some request which they are to make *before* they will venture to look on God as their Father; but the prayer He gave men begins thus: "Our Father who art in heaven." *Our Father.* My dear readers, I feel that the gospel was preached by our Lord when He taught men to pray, and to say, Our Father. I feel that when the Son of God came to the rebellious children of men in the state of alienation from the God that made them, of rebellion against His will, and when He taught them in this state to pray and say, "Our Father," that then He preached to them the gospel of the grace of God; that then He made to them the important discovery, that God continued to have the interest of a Father in them, although they grieved Him by being rebellious children; that He declares to them that their having sinned against God did not now cause them to be excluded from the high privilege of calling God, Father; and that in very truth the forgiveness of their sins, the fact that God made them welcome to approach Him and dwell with Him as dear children, was preached in their being taught to say "Our Father."

Satan has prevailed with many to teach men to make a distinction which the Bible nowhere recognises as just, and to feel as if the words, "Our Father," should have a right meaning in the lips of persons who did not know that they were partakers in the adoption which is *in Christ Jesus*. I ask you who taught the prayer? Was it not Christ Jesus? I ask you what was to be inferred from His teaching them so to pray and say, "Our Father," but that He was teaching them just to come to God in the full spirit of adoption? And I ask what right any man can have to say, that the word "Father," as applied to God, is to have any lower meaning than that I feel that I am His child, and that I feel that He has a Father's heart to me, and that I feel that I can put confidence in Him as my Father? If there was anything needful to prove that our Lord intended them to have all the confidence in saying, "Our Father," which He himself had in saying, "My Father," it is contained in the petition which follows; for observe, our Lord, teaching men at once to cry "Abba, Father," expects that they are hereby put in a condition to have their supreme interest awakened by the glory of God. What I refer to here is this, that it is natural for you and natural for me; that it is a sinless instinct of our being that we should

desire our own preservation from evil; that we should desire to escape misery and to be partakers in happiness; that it is a natural thing for us, when we feel that we have broken God's law, if we think seriously of God at all, to wish to win God's favour, that we may be safe; that it would be a piece of hypocrisy in any of us, while we do not know whether we have forgiveness or not—while we do not know whether we have the place of children or not—while we do not know whether we have ground of peace before God or not—to pretend to say that the thing uppermost in our hearts was, that God's name should be hallowed, or that God's kingdom should come, or that God's will should be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I know that it is a very common thing with people to pray, much as they speak or write to their fellow-men, that is, with one thing in their heart and another thing on their lips. You know that it is not an uncommon thing, if a person come to call on another in order to ask some favour of him, that the last thing he speaks of is that which induced him to come, and that he tries to prepare the way for getting a favourable answer by that kind of conversation which is likely to dispose the person to whom he comes for the favour to grant it. This is a piece of hypocrisy, for all the time the person is thinking of the favour he is going to ask; but he is speaking to men who know not what is in the heart, and he speaks under the protection of this ignorance, which is in one man regarding every other man. It is strange that men should deal in this way with God; but it is the fact that people do the very same thing who come to God, telling God that He is holy, telling God that He is good, confessing in His sight that he is worthy of all praise, not because they value His holiness, not because they delight in His goodness, not because their hearts are praising Him, but because they hope by this to get the forgiveness of their sins. Now, this is real downright hypocrisy; for this is speaking of one thing while they mean another thing; and the prayer, "Hallowed be thy name: thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," in the lips of a person who is only praying because he wishes to get safety for himself; not because he wishes that God's name may be hallowed, and thinks that his prayer can lead to the hallowing of the name of the Lord; not because he longs for the coming of God's kingdom, and thinks that his prayer can lead to the coming of the kingdom of God; not because he truly desires that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven, and expects that his prayer may be the means of hastening this change,—but because he thinks that it is a right thing in him to pray, and that it is a thing to please God and to save his own soul. But is it not quite clear, that if it is to save my own soul that I pray, it is impossible for me truly to say, "Hallowed be thy name?" It is quite clear that our Lord, when He puts these words into the lips of his disciples, and when He thus taught that this desire was to be uppermost in their hearts, well knew that this could not be so if they felt that the matter of their own salvation was uncertain. It is quite clear, that when He taught them to say "Our Father," He was teaching them to believe that about God which was to

take away the temptation to be thinking first about themselves when they approach God.

If to teach me to say "Father, forgive," is to teach me that God freely forgives the sin that I have committed; if to teach me to pray "Father, be kind," is to assure me that I have no need to make God kind, for He is kind already; if to teach me to say "My Father," is to teach me that I may at once begin with trusting; that because He is a Father I am to trust,—then I can conceive how, after being taught to say "Father" with that meaning in my heart, I should be expected to say from the heart, "Hallowed be thy name." For if I have this knowledge of God, in calling him "Father," then unquestionably is my heart bound to Him, and to all that concerns Him and His glory, with the interest of a child in the credit of his father,—an interest like that which an affectionate son feels in the good name of his earthly parent, whereby he would be made to grieve if he heard his father ill spoken of, and pleased if he saw him respected. A person who says to God, "Our Father," really feeling the meaning of that word, is a person who, in the world where the Father's name is not hallowed,—where the Father's glory is not acknowledged, where men are not giving Him the credit due to Him,—will have this desire uppermost in his heart, that the Father's name should be hallowed.

Do you not see that that prayer, "Hallowed be thy name," is intended to be the expression of a desire that God may receive the glory that is due to Him,—that God's name may be held in that esteem and respect in which it ought to be held? Now, this is the prayer of one who knows God's name, and who knows that that name is excellent and worthy of all praise, and who finds himself in a world where God's name is not hallowed, in a world where God's glory is not acknowledged.

I would ask your attention for a moment to the fact, that God's name is not hallowed; that men do not acknowledge God to be what He truly is. People are little aware how truly this is the case. People are not aware how true it is, that it is not merely that men are not what they ought to be in the sight of God; but that they do not think of God as they ought to think. It is a grievous sin to think wrong thoughts of God. It is a grievous thing to think hard thoughts of God, and to think God such a one as ourselves. It is not a matter of opinion,—it is not a subject on which one man may think one way, and another another; it is a grievous evil not to think of God aright, because this is to refuse to hallow God's name. This is one view of the question; and as to the feeling with which God regards man, and as to what God has done for man, it is most important. I never feel so moved to pray "hallowed be thy name," as when I hear men deny that God is love; that God loves all men; that God's ordinary providence and all God's actings are the expressions of real love,—as when I see them looking on the events of life as things that take place, as they say, in the course of providence, as if God had no feeling, no desire, no good-will in what He did,—as when I hear men treating God as if there was as little purpose to bless us in giving us the bread we eat, as there is in the bread itself. When I

see this the prevailing state of men's minds regarding God, then am I made to feel that God's name is not hallowed; then I am made to feel that God is not thought of and spoken of as God ought to be thought of and spoken of; and I see it a sin, crying to God for vengeance, that men should seek to cast discredit on God's character; that men should seek to disprove God's excellence, or to deny that He is the excellent living God that He claims to be. Now, the person who prays to God as his Father in heaven, because he sees God having a father's heart to the children of men, is the person who will be most alive to the dishonour done to God's name. If in saying "Father" to God, I am taking courage to do so because of something peculiar to myself, then I should not see much to complain of in that others were not saying "Father," unless I knew that they had something peculiar in their condition. But if I say Father because I see a father's heart to me and all men, then I cannot myself cherish towards Him the confidence of a child in a father, without feeling that the like confidence is due from all men around me; without feeling, therefore, that when they speak as if they had not this ground of confidence, when they will even allow me to have it, and not blame me for having it, and yet will not take it themselves, then they are dishonouring the name of my Father. The prayer, then, "Hallowed be thy name," is the cry of that heart that has believed that God has a father's heart to all men, and has felt that none can know God's glory except those who think of Him as a father; and therefore He is sorely grieved when men refuse to cry Abba, Father. It is a vain thing for men to multiply high-sounding words; it is idle for men to talk of God's glory and of God's sovereignty, and to think that they honour God by these words. The person who really loves God's name must feel that God's name is not hallowed so long as men are not treating God as a father; and he can derive no comfort from any expression of respect, or form of words which would give God a high place while that is wanting, for he knows that nothing really honours the love of God but a trust that corresponds with that love. You see, therefore, how a person who is taught to say "Father" to God, because he sees God's love to all men, and because he sees God's love to himself, is prepared thereby to be deeply grieved when men do not treat God as a father, and in consequence of this will be much moved to cry unto God that the spirit of adoption may be found in the hearts of men, and that they may be made to cry Abba, Father.

Now, my dear readers, before I proceed to illustrate the other verses, and while what I have already written is still in your minds, I would earnestly entreat of you to bear with me while I put to you that question, as to your own state, which is naturally suggested by what you have now read. You have all, no doubt, been taught to repeat this prayer. The question I now ask of you, and beg of you seriously to answer to God, is, Have you ever yet truly offered the Lord's prayer *to the Lord*? Have you ever yet prayed this prayer? Have you ever yet with the heart said "Father" to God? and has the Searcher of hearts ever yet had cause to

rejoice over you on account of the child-like confidence which He saw you putting in Him? I do not ask whether you have ever acknowledged that you ought to have this confidence; but I simply ask, "Do you know, certainly, that you have ever *prayed* this prayer? Do you know, certainly, that you have ever yet called God, Father, understanding it as I have now explained it? Do you know that you have ever put in Him the trust and confidence which is due from a child to a father? Ask yourselves this. My dear friends, if you have not done so, it is no light matter; it is no light matter if God has never heard from you the name of Father with that meaning in it which He desires it to have; it is no light matter if, while God has been revealing Himself as a father to you, and asking you to approach Him as your own God, you have never yet done it. You are doubtless aware that many feel unwilling, and it is more than probable that a great proportion of my readers are themselves more or less unwilling to admit that the spirit of a Christian is the spirit of an assured trust in God; that the spirit of a Christian is the spirit which cries Father with the *certainty* that he addresses a father. Now, I entreat of you to remark, with reference to this matter, the express and decided teaching of our Lord, who here teaches you to say Father to God, and who never intended that you should mock God with empty words; who never intended that you should say it without feeling it; who never intended that you should come to Him with the idle parade of using right and becoming forms of expression, while in your hearts you have not the spirit of children. Do you not see clearly that if a prayer is to be *really* a prayer; if prayer is to be nothing but the expression of the inward state and feelings of the heart; and if the prayer of our Lord begins, "Our Father," teaching us that God is our father, do you not see how this proves to you that you are not Christians; that you have not the mind of Christ; that you are not the children of God through faith in Christ unless you say "Father" to God, just in the spirit of adoption—really meaning, really feeling what you say.

(To be continued.)

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

AS A PICTURE OF THE HEART OF THE CHILD OF GOD.

(Continued from page 509.)

THE words, "in heaven," may require some explanation; before passing on to the other petitions, I shall very shortly notice them. "Our Father who art in heaven." You know that it is told us that a time is coming when the tabernacle of God shall be with men. We are constantly taught in the Bible that while God is everywhere, yet does he manifest his presence peculiarly in heaven. We are also taught that that peculiar presence of God which is now manifest in heaven, is hereafter to be manifested on earth, when the tabernacle of God is to be with men. But what is taught us by the expression, *Our Father who art in heaven*, is, that our Lord, while he teaches us to know God as our Father, would have us to recognise the difference between the things which are here around us, and that state of things which we connect with the word "heaven." "Our Father who art in heaven" is the cry of the children of God while not yet in heaven, and while in a strange country and far from their Father's house, and it is just saying, *Our Father who art in our Father's house*. "Our Father who art in heaven." The spirit thus expressed is the spirit of a son—of a son who is a pilgrim and sojourner in a strange land. It is the spirit of a son who, while knowing his adoption, does still feel that there is a presence of his father which is not enjoyed here; a presence not yet reached, but enjoyed elsewhere.

The contrast between heaven and earth comes out afterwards in the other petitions; but in the very commencement our Lord teaches us so to come to God as to a Father who yet is in heaven, who is there as He is not upon earth—who is there in a peculiar sense present and revealed; and that there is a difference between that presence of God and what is now known and enjoyed which is in the heart; that it is not to be a matter of indifference to me that I can only say, our Father who art in heaven; that it is not to be a matter of indifference to me that I am still in that place in which I speak to my God and Father as if he were elsewhere; but that the feeling in which I am to cry *Abba Father*, is the feeling of a son who is far from the presence and glory of God which is associated with heaven.

I have already illustrated the petition, "Hallowed be thy name." I wish now to consider what new desire of the heart follows in the expression, "Thy kingdom come."

There is no vain repetition in this prayer of our Lord, and every new request is really a request for an additional thing. Mark then the difference between the request that God's name may be honoured, that it may be hallowed or acknowledged, and the request that God's kingdom may come. The former is the desire that God's true character may be acknowledged, that the praise which is due to Him may be given to Him; it is as one knowing the excellent character of God, and grieved that God has not got the credit and honour due to Him, is made to cry unto God that this delusion which exists in men's minds concerning the

name of God shall cease, and that they shall be made to acknowledge Him as what he truly is, and that His name may be holy and sacred in their hearts; that His name may be hallowed by the devotion of the heart, that it may dwell there as in a sanctuary and a holy place, and that from the hearts of men it may receive that feeling which is due to it. Now this is a different request from "Thy kingdom come," which refers to God as a sovereign—as one who is entitled to reign over others—not merely as one who is to be admired by others, but as one who is to reign over others.

There is a great, an exceeding great glory to God in the fact, that all the evil of man's condition is connected with their not giving God his own place as God, and not serving him as God. There is an exceeding great glory to God in the fact, that while they think they would be made happy if they were their own masters, the fact is that they can only be made happy by receiving the Lord to reign over them.

Now the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," is just the prayer of one who is himself experiencing the rightness of God's sceptre, the righteousness of God's government; who is himself experiencing that it is good to cease from all controversy with God, that it is good to give God the place which is due to him of reigning in our hearts; who earnestly desires that He may prevail, and so prays, "Thy kingdom come."

The third petition is, "Thy will be done, as in heaven so in earth," and this also differs from the two preceding requests. The prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is a prayer which one is moved to offer by understanding the reward that there is in keeping of God's commands. It is important that we should never forget that what God requires is good in itself, that it is not good merely because God requires it, but that God who is good, requires it *because it is good*. It is important that we should always feel that it is not an arbitrary choice which God makes when He says choose this and reject that, but that God is making this choice for us under the influence of his own knowledge of good and evil. All who are taught to do God's will, find that God's will is good, that it is a blessed thing to do God's will.

Now these three petitions are unquestionably requests which, in putting up, I put up regarding myself and my brethren in Christ, and the world around me; but still all these prayers have a reference to the time when God's tabernacle shall be with men, and to the restitution of all things. In asking that God's name may be hallowed, I act not as one by whom His name has been fully hallowed, and therefore I ask, for myself, that I may be made fully to acknowledge His excellent glory. In praying that His kingdom may come, I do not pray as one who am myself perfectly in obedience to the will of God; and therefore I pray not only for others, but also for myself, that I may be more entirely and fully worshipping and honouring God as my Lord and my God. And in praying that God's will may be done in earth as it is in heaven, I do not except myself from the prayer; for I feel, that whatever blessedness I have tasted in the keeping of God's commandments, there was a full and deep meeting of God's requirements which

might have been in me, and which if it had been in me, I should have had more of this blessedness.

Now, my dear readers, I desire to direct your attention to the prayer which must ever be the cry of the heart of every one who feels himself called on to plead with God.

“Give us day by day our daily bread.” I believe that many are under the false conception that the daily bread here means our food—the food by which this body is sustained and nourished. If we would eat to the glory of God, we must ask and receive our daily food in that sense just as directly from God’s hand; but I feel that it is abundantly manifest from the context that the daily bread here spoken of is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit; for observe, after having concluded the prayer, our Lord Jesus obviously spoke with especial reference to this petition. You see, He says, “Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves,” in which He is obviously referring to His having taught them to seek for daily bread as if considering the dishonest hearts of men, as if considering that men would perhaps say, We may indeed put up petitions which concern God’s honour and glory, and we may expect that God will answer these, but this petition for daily bread for ourselves is a thing for ourselves, and how can we expect an answer to it?

I trust you see that it is of the Holy Spirit He speaks in the prayer when He says, “Give us day by day our daily bread,” for at the conclusion of all, He says that God will give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him, showing us clearly that this was what He would have them to ask—that this was what He was encouraging them to ask.

I beseech you, mark; that we are here clearly taught that the experience of the spirit of adoption, the experience of present confidence towards God, and of power to worship God truly, does not give any one the feeling of independence of God, but on the contrary, such a one will feel that he is to look to God—that he is to ask of God, and to expect from God this Spirit which is to be to him as daily bread. Oh! it is a lesson most important to be taught that our strength is in our Head, and that it is ever to be received from Him.

“Forgive us our debts, for we forgive every one that is indebted to us.” I entreat of you, in coming to this petition, to remember the place that is given to it, and the persons who were to present it. I entreat of you to remember that it is a petition to be used only by those who know God as their Father; by those who feel interested in His glory and in His kingdom, and in the doing of His will, and who know the Holy Spirit, and trust God for the Spirit as their daily bread. I entreat of you to remember that it is a petition to be used in the full assurance of our own adoption into the family of God. It is not a petition asking admittance into God’s family; it is the prayer of a child of God. Now, that forgiveness of sin which men dispute about, that pardon which they desire to be allowed to be ignorant of, cannot be the thing here spoken of. I entreat of you to mark that when men say, “I cannot know whether my sins are forgiven or not;” they say, “I do not need to know whether I am really a

child of God or not.” They think that the forgiveness of which *they* are ignorant, the person is not ignorant of who knows that he is a child of God, and it is in regard to this, whatever it be, that they say that it is not a thing that belongs to all, and it is not a thing which a person ought to take for granted belongs to him. Now, I entreat of you to see that whatever is meant by the words, “Forgive us our trespasses or sins,” seeing that it is the prayer of a regenerated person, and spoken in the light, and offered up in the feeling that he is a child of God, it does not mean that which people speak of when they object to saying that the forgiveness of God is extended to all men, for the thing they object to is possessed now by believers. I trust that you are now giving heed to this, and seeing that the prayer “Forgive us our sins” is not the prayer “Give us the place of children,”—seeing that the prayer “Forgive us our sins” is not the prayer of one who is not yet feeling himself in the family of God, but who expects and wishes to be taken into it, but is obviously the prayer of one who feels himself in the family of God, and knows well the peculiar footing in which he stands; knows well that he is there not as a person against whom God has no charge, but that he is there as a person to whom God is not imputing sin, and therefore his prayer to God is always a prayer for forgiveness, because it is always an acknowledgment that to receive him is to forgive sin. And this is the kind of feeling that I am enabled of the Spirit of God to see one daily offending against me, while I am enabled to have my arms always open to receive him. I wish not to conceal from myself that God, in receiving me, receives me as I receive such a person. He receives me as one who has offended against Him. On the contrary, I come to God and ask him to receive me just as he is enabling me to receive those who offend against me. But while we are thus taught that it is not merely a past act of God in the shedding of the blood of Christ, and in the accepting of the sacrifice of Christ that is spoken of in Scripture as forgiveness, and that this word is used to express God’s continual receiving of his own children, who are dwelling in flesh and blood, and having no ground whereon to approach to God but pardoning mercy; yet it is manifest that the whole of this spirit within me which says “Father,” which says, “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, and thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,” and which trusts to God for daily bread, and which is conscious of forgiving others in a spirit that we receive through the faith of that mind in God which we thus cherish, and that all this in us is just the reflection back of that which came down to us from God unto us.

There is often a mystery in a thing when we look at it from a distance, which disappears when we come near to it, and have to do with it as a reality. And I assure you, whatever mystery you see in this forgiveness extended to all men, and revealed in Christ, that they may return to God, in point of experience, there is no perplexity about it; but if you believe in the forgiving love, you will find it an easy thing to know why you should be made to cry to God, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”