

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Matthew 6:9-13

Verses 9,10

Therefore, pray like this.

Our Father in heaven.

Hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All the verbs are imperative, third person singulars. The old-fashioned way of translating this would employ the “let” form, e.g., let your name be kept holy.

Our Father in heaven. Jesus taught his disciples to call on God and address him as Father (1P1:17). This is the gospel. The expression arose from Jesus’ own prayers and way of speaking about God. It began at a young age (Lk 2:49). There are 21 instances of Jesus referred to God as his Father in Matthew. A selection is:

10:32 I will acknowledge him before my Father...

11:25 I praise you Father...

16:17 Revealed to you by my Father in heaven.

16:27 Son shall come in the glory of his Father

26:29 When I drink it new...in my Father’s kingdom

26:42 Father, let this cup pass from me

28:19 Baptising them in the name of the Father...

Clearly, these passages describe the relationship of Jesus to the Father, that he is his Son, equal to him in as God. In the Old Testament, God was likened to a father and Israel likened to a son through the choosing of the Hebrews from the nations and establishing a covenant with them (Isa 63:16,17; 64:8,9; Jer 31:20). These are analogies and metaphors and are rare in the OT.

Our Father πᾶτερ ἡμῶν is the more formal expression as opposed to Abba, the Aramaic used once by Jesus (Mk 14:6) and used by Paul to describe the Spirit’s role in the inner yearning and supplication by Christians in prayer (Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6). Christ deliberately transfers his relationship with his Father to his disciples so that they can use the personal possessive pronoun **our** and address him in the familiar, intimate and family term, **Father**. Later, this right was given in the sacrament of baptism (28:19) and understood as adoption. Baptismal sonship and daughtership indicate a break with the earthly family, the granting of rights as heirs to the estate of eternal life and the erasure of the old life (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5).

Thus, we have some significant passages in Matthew regarding this new relationship with the Father:

5:45 that you be children of your Father

6:6 pray to your Father in secret

6:32 your heavenly Father knows you need them

10:29 not one [sparrow] will fall outside of your Father’s care

13:43 righteous shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father

18:14 not your Father’s will that any of these little ones perish

The references mostly speak of the gospel, how the disciples are valued above sparrows, that the Father listens to their prayers, that he knows the details of their lives, he cares for their material needs, he grants them life in his kingdom, forgives their sins, will be honoured in heaven, answers their prayers (18:19) and wishes them to be saved.

Matthew can use heaven and kingdom, though his favourite term is **heaven**, literally **the heavens** οὐρανοῖς (5:45 et al). In summary, though there is a judgement, a demand for holiness and his will being done, having great power and glory, for the Father is Lord of heaven and earth (11:25), overwhelmingly the tone and emphasis is on the relationship of love, grace and redemption the

Father has with his world and particularly his children. The expression **in heaven** (23:9) has to do with this rule of salvation which is so utterly distinct to what happens on earth. On earth, relationships and life are characterized by power, immorality, death, temptation and the devil's sway. God is righteous, holy, willing to suffer for his world and give himself to it. Thus, to speak of the Father being in heaven is to refer to him as being someone transcending the ugliness of earth yet totally available to it and whose nature is far above the tawdry considerations of ordinary human beings.

Verses 11-13

Give to us each day our daily bread.

And forgive our debts as we also forgive our debtors.

Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

Each day επιούσιον can mean the future, our future bread, but here it means each day. Luther was right in talking about everything needed for daily life, including a good government. The fourth petition includes our physical needs because Christ considered our physical condition next to our need for his Father's kingdom. He fed the 5,000 (Matt 14:18-21) when they had no bread. The needs of our body were finally met in the resurrection; however, he did not consider them absolute. He directed us **to not live by bread alone** (4:4). Therefore, daily bread is prayed for, just as the Israelites could only collect manna for each day's use (Ex 16:17-19). Though work and technology put money in the bank and food on the table, our Lord includes this petition to help us realize his goodness, that we are to rely on him and be free of anxiety about our needs (6:25-34).

Matthew's version of the fifth petition is better theologically than Luke's because he uses the word **as** ὡς, in: **as we also forgive our debtors** rather than **for** γὰρ, as we ourselves forgive everyone (Luke's version). Christ reveals that God's forgiveness is not conditional on our act of forgiving but the opposite, that God's gracious removal of guilt (and eventual removal of sin at the resurrection) motivates believers. Sin is not mentioned but **debt** τα ὀφειλήματα and **debtors**. The parable of the unmerciful servant (18:23-35) is a perfect example of what our Lord meant here. Even though the kingdom has come to us in Christ, he invites us to seek his Father's forgiveness and renewal for the on-going sins we commit. The fifth petition indicates the mercy that led Jesus to the cross and to defeat death, sin and the devil through his resurrection. The power to forgive is firmly based in the gospel, not in an attempt to be perfect in love.

When struggling against a sin, such as nagging, the believer must not plead with God to do better etc. This gives power to sin and to our enemy the Devil. Rather pray to God that he will fill you with his peace, to banish anxiety and perfectionism with his grace, to fill with the security of his love. We must not pray according to the old covenant, as though we need to achieve a higher spiritual and moral state. That cannot be done. Rather, we pray according to the New Testament gospel, that we are already holy, good, perfect, faithful, obedient children have met all the standards of God, a new creation in Christ etc. Thus, we ask for the power of grace, for the gift of God to be renewed in us. Rather than dwelling on your inadequacy, we focus on what we have by faith, the gift of Christ himself.

Of course, Jesus points his followers to the higher way of his love, to forgive enemies, turn the other cheek etc. (5:9,24,38-48). But to reach these levels a believer does not turn to internal strength or more intense prayer, but to the gospel, to the filling of Christ's love and redemption.

Do not lead us not into temptation must not be seen as an admission that God leads people into sin but rather, that our Father wishes us to conquer our temptations through the victory of Christ in his cross and resurrection. Testing or temptation is a reality of our situation in the world and its alluring sins, the devil and his power, and our sinful natures. Christ was **led by the Spirit into the wilderness** but he was not led into temptation by his Father (4:1). Each day is a spiritual wilderness for the saints and their preservation comes not from natural powers but the word of God.

Though **deliver** ποσσαι **us from evil** naturally follows the sixth petition, evil stands not only for Satan but all the evil to mind, body and spirit followers of Christ are required to endure by faith. **Deliverance** is ultimately the deliverance of the resurrection but also the deliverance from persecution when faith is under pressure and all troubles that will naturally attack a Christian's assurance. Deliver can also be translated as save and rescue, and reflects Christ's understanding of what will happen to his followers (chs 24,25). In John 17:11,15, the Lord has in mind the devil's work against his children as he acts through the world and its leaders. 16:33 reminds us that **Christ has overcome the world**.

So, the final petitions deal with existence, forgiveness, temptation and evil and show a direction the Lord gives to our lives after we pray for the Father's name, kingdom and will: we need to live, we encounter difficult relationships and fail ourselves, there is the danger we lose our faith and the world has little room or love for us. The Lord's Prayer perfectly encapsulates our entire existence under the Lord.