

THE LORD'S PRAYER Chapter 1 The Address

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Transcript

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Chapter 1

The Address

"Our Father which art in heaven"

Matthew 6:9

This opening clause is a suitable preface to all that follows. It presents to us the great Object to whom we pray, teaches us the covenant office that He sustains to us, and denotes the obligation imposed upon us, namely, that of maintaining toward Him a filial spirit, with all that that entails. All real prayer ought to begin with a devout contemplation and to express an acknowledgment of the name of God and of His blessed perfections. We should draw near unto the Throne of Grace with suitable apprehensions of God's sovereign majesty and power, yet with a holy confidence in His fatherly goodness. In these opening words we are plainly instructed to preface our petitions by expressing the sense we have of the essential and relative glories of the One whom we address. The Psalms abound in examples of this. See Psalm 8:1 as a case in point. "Our Father which art in heaven." Let us first endeavor to ascertain the general principle that is embodied in this introductory clause. It informs us in the simplest possible manner that the great God is most graciously ready to grant us an audience. By directing us to address Him as our Father, it definitely assures us of His love and power. This precious title is designed to raise our affections, to excite us to reverent attention, and to confirm our confidence in the efficacy of prayer. Three things are essential to acceptable and effectual prayer: fervency, reverence, and confidence. This opening clause is designed to stir up each of these essential elements within us. Fervency is the effect of our affections being called into exercise; reverence will be promoted by an apprehension of the fact that we are addressing the heavenly throne; confidence will be deepened by viewing the Object of prayer as our Father. In coming to God in acts of worship, we must "believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). What is more calculated to deepen our confidence and to draw forth the strongest love and earnest hopes of our hearts toward God, than Christ's presenting Him to us in His most tender aspect and endearing relation? How we are here encouraged to use holy boldness and to pour out our souls before Him! We could not suitably invoke an impersonal First Cause; still less could we adore or supplicate a great abstraction. No, it is to a person, a Divine Person, One who has our best interests at heart, that we are invited to draw near, even to our Father. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon

us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). God is the Father of all men naturally, being their Creator. "Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us?" (Mal. 2:10). "But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou our Potter; and we all are the work of Thy hand" (Isa. 64:8). The fact that such verses have been grossly perverted by some holding erroneous views on "the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man," must not cause us to utterly repudiate them. It is our privilege to assure the most ungodly and abandoned that, if they will but throw down the weapons of their warfare and do as the prodigal did, there is a loving Father ready to welcome them. If He hears the cries of the ravens (Ps. 147:9), will He turn a deaf ear to the requests of a rational creature? Simon Magus, while still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," was directed by an apostle to repent of his wickedness and to pray to God (Acts 8:22, 23). But the depth and full import of this invocation can be entered into only by the believing Christian, for there is a higher relation between him and God than that which is merely of nature. First, God is his Father spiritually. Second, God is the Father of His elect because He is the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3). Thus Christ expressly announced, "I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). Third, God is the Father of His elect by eternal decree: "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5). Fourth, He is the Father of His elect by regeneration, wherein they are born again and become "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). It is written, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). These words "Our Father" not only signify the office that God sustains to us by virtue of the everlasting covenant, but they also clearly imply our obligation. They teach us both how we ought to dispose ourselves toward God when we pray to Him, and the conduct that is becoming to us by virtue of this relationship. As His children we must "honor" Him (even more than our human parents; see Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-3), be in subjection to Him, delight in Him, and strive in all things to please Him. Again, the phrase "Our Father" not only teaches us our personal interest in God Himself, who by grace is our Father, but it also instructs us of our interest in our fellow Christians, who in Christ are our brethren. It is not merely to "my Father" to whom I pray, but to "our Father." We must express our love to our brethren by praying for them; we are to be as much concerned about their needs as we are over our own. How much is included in these two words! "Which art in heaven." What a blessed balance this gives to the previous phrase. If that tells us of God's goodness and grace, this speaks of His greatness and majesty. If that teaches us of the nearness and dearness of His relationship to us, this announces His infinite elevation above us. If the words "Our Father" inspire confidence and love, then the words "which art in heaven" should fill us with humility and awe. These are the two things that should ever occupy our minds and engage our hearts: the first without the second tends toward unholy familiarity; the second without the first produces coldness and dread. By combining them together, we are preserved from both evils; and a suitable equipoise is wrought and maintained in the soul as we duly contemplate both the mercy and might of God, His unfathomable love and His immeasurable loftiness. Note how the same blessed balance was preserved by the Apostle Paul, when he employed the following words to describe God the Father: "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (Eph. 1:17). The words "which art in heaven" are not used because He is confined there. We are reminded of the words of King Solomon: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27). God is infinite and omnipresent. There is a particular sense, though, in which the Father is "in heaven," for that is the place in which His majesty and glory are most eminently manifested. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool" (Isa. 66:1). The realization of this should fill us with the deepest reverence and awe. The words "which art in heaven" call attention to His providence, declaring the fact that He is directing all things from on high.

These words proclaim His ability to undertake for us, for our Father is the Almighty. "But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). Yet though the Almighty, He is "our Father." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:13). "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). Finally, these blessed words remind us that we are journeying thither, for heaven is our home.

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