

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XI. 1-4.

1 And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

2 And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hal-

lowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

3 Give us day by day our daily bread.

4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

THESE verses contain the prayer commonly called the Lord's Prayer. Few passages of Scripture perhaps are so well known as this. The most benighted Roman Catholic can tell us that there is a prayer called "Pater Noster." The most ignorant English child has heard something about "Our Father."

The importance of the Lord's Prayer appears in the simple fact, that our Lord Jesus Christ delivered it twice with very slight variations. He who never spake a word without good reason, has thought fit to teach us this prayer upon two distinct occasions. Twice the Lord God wrote the ten commandments on tables of stone. (Deut. ix. 10; x. 4.) Twice the Lord Jesus delivered the Lord's Prayer.

The occasion of the Lord's Prayer being delivered a second time, in the verses before us, is full of interest. It appears that "one of the disciples" said, "Lord, teach us to pray." The answer to that request was the well-known prayer which we are now considering. Who this "disciple" "was we do not know. What he did will be remembered as long as the world stands. Happy are those who partake of his feelings, and often cry, "Lord, teach me to pray."

The substance of the Lord's Prayer is a mine of spiritual treasure. To expound it fully in a work like this, is manifestly impossible. The prayer, on which volumes have been written, does not admit of being handled properly in a few pages. For the present it must suffice us to notice its leading divisions, and to mark the leading trains of thought which it should suggest to us for private meditation.

The first division of the Lord's Prayer *respects the God whom we worship*. We are taught to approach him as our Father in heaven,—our Father no doubt as our Creator, but specially as our Father reconciled to us in Christ Jesus,—our Father whose dwelling is "in heaven," and whom no temple on earth can contain. We then make mention of three great things,—our Father's name, our Father's kingdom, and our Father's will.

We are taught to pray that the name of God may be sanctified: "Hallowed be thy name." In using these words, we do not mean that God's name admits of degrees of holiness, or that any prayers of ours can make it more holy than it is. But we declare our hearty desire that God's character, and attributes, and perfections, may be more known, and honoured, and glorified,

by all His intelligent creatures. In fact it is the very petition which the Lord Jesus Himself puts up on another occasion, “Father, glorify thy name.” (John xii. 28.)

We are next taught to pray that God’s kingdom may come: “Thy kingdom come.” In so saying, we declare our desire that the usurped power of Satan may speedily be cast down, that all mankind may acknowledge God as their lawful King, and that the kingdoms of this world may become in fact, as they are in promise, the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. ‘The final setting up of this kingdom has been long predicted, even from the day of Adam’s fall. The whole creation groans in expectation of it. The last prayer in the Bible points to it. The canon of Scripture almost closes with the words, “Come Lord Jesus.” (Rev. xi. 15; Gen. iii. 15; Rom. viii. 22; Rev. xxii. 20.)

We are taught, thirdly, to pray that God’s will may be done: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In so saying, we express our longing desire that the number of God’s converted and obedient people on earth may greatly increase, that His enemies who hate His laws, may be diminished and brought low, and that the time may speedily arrive when all men shall do their willing service to God on earth, even as all the angels do in heaven. (Hab. ii. 14; Heb. viii. 11.)

Such is the first division of the Lord’s Prayer. Its marvellous fulness and deep importance cannot be overrated. Blessed indeed are those Christians who have learned that God’s name is far more honourable than that of any earthly potentate,—God’s kingdom the only kingdom that shall stand for ever,—and God’s law the rule to which all laws ought to be conformed! The more these things are understood and believed in a land, the happier that land will be. The days when all acknowledge these things will be the “days of heaven upon earth.”

The second division of the Lord’s Prayer *respects our own daily wants.* We are taught to make mention of two things which we need every day. These two things are, one of them temporal, and the other spiritual. One of them is “bread.” The other is “forgiveness of sins.”

We are taught to ask for bread: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Under this word “bread,” no doubt, is included everything which our bodies can require. We acknowledge our entire dependence upon God for life, and breath, and all things. We ask Him to take charge of us, and provide for us in all that concerns this world. It is the prayer of Solomon under another form, “Feed me with food convenient for me.” (Prov. xxx. 8.)

We are taught to ask, in the next place, for forgiveness: “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” In so saying, we confess that we are fallen, guilty, and corrupt creatures, and in many things offend daily. We make no excuse for ourselves. We plead nothing in our

own behalf. We simply ask for the free, full, gracious mercy of our Father in Christ Jesus. And we accompany the petition by the only profession which the whole Lord's Prayer contains. We profess that we "forgive every one that is indebted to us."

The combined simplicity and richness of the second division of the Lord's Prayer can never be sufficiently admired. How soon the words are spoken. And yet how much the words take in! Daily bread and daily mercy are by far the first and principal things that mortal man wants. He is the rich man who possesses them. He is the wise man who is not ashamed to pray for them every day. The child of God, no doubt, is fully justified before God, and all things are working for his good. But it is the life of true faith to apply daily for fresh supplies of all our wants. Though the promises are all ours, our Father likes His children to remind Him of them. Though washed, we need daily to wash our feet. (John xii. 10.)

The third division of the Lord's Prayer *respects our daily dangers*. We are taught to make mention of two things which we ought to fear every day, and which we must expect to meet with as long as we are in this world. One of these things is "temptation." The other is "evil."

We are taught to pray against temptation: "Lead us not into temptation." We do not mean by this expression that God is the author of evil, or that He tempts man to sin. (James i. 13.) But we entreat Him who orders all things in heaven and earth, and without whom nothing can happen, so to order the course of our lives, that we may not be tempted above what we can bear. We confess our weakness and readiness to fall. We entreat our Father to preserve us from trials, or else to make a way for us to escape. We ask that our feet may be kept, and that we may not bring discredit on our profession and misery on our souls.

We are taught, lastly, to pray against evil: "Deliver us from evil." We include under the word evil, everything that can hurt us, either in body or soul, and especially every weapon of that great author of evil, the devil. We confess that ever since the fall the world "lieth in the wicked one." (1 John v. 19.) We confess that evil is in us, and about us, and near us, and on every side, and that we have no power to deliver ourselves from it. We apply to the strong for strength. We cast ourselves on Him for protection. In short, we ask what our Saviour Himself asked for us, when He said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John xvii. 15.)

Such is the last division of the Lord's Prayer. In real importance it is not a whit inferior to the two other divisions, which we have already considered. It leaves man precisely in the position which he ought to occupy. It puts in his mouth the language of humility. The most dangerous state in which we can be, is not to know and feel our spiritual danger.

And now let us use the Lord's Prayer for the trial of our own state before God. Its words have probably passed over our lips thousands of times. But have we really felt it? —Do we really desire its petitions to be granted?—Is God really our Father?—Are we born again, and made His children by faith in Christ?—Do we care much for His name and will?—Do we really wish the kingdom of God to come?—Do we feel our need of daily temporal mercies, and of daily pardon of sin?—Do we fear falling into temptation? Do we dread evil above all things?—These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

Let us strive to make the Lord's Prayer our model and pattern in all our approaches to God. Let it suggest to us the sort of things which we should pray for and pray against. Let it teach us the relative place and proportion which we should give to each subject in our prayers. The more we ponder and examine the Lord's Prayer, the more instructive and suggestive shall we find it to be.

NOTES. LUKE XI. 1-4

1.—[As *He was praying.*] We see in this place another instance of our Lord's diligence in private prayer. In this respect He has left a pattern which all Christians ought to copy.

[*Teach us to pray.*] Quesnel calls attention to the benefit which this man's request has obtained for the whole Church of Christ:—"One single person, moved and edified by the good example of our Lord praying, conceives a love for prayer, desires to know how to pray, is sensible that of himself he is not capable of doing it, addresses himself to Christ, obtains from Him this divine pattern, procures this treasure for the rest of the disciples, and for the whole Church, and becomes the occasion of the infinite good which the prayer has produced, and will produce to the end of the world."

2.—[When *ye pray, say.*] Let it be carefully noted that the Lord's Prayer was twice delivered by our Lord, upon two distinct occasions. This accounts for the slight variations in its form, which appear on comparison.—Mede remarks, "As Joseph said to Pharaoh, the dream is doubled unto Pharaoh, because the thing is established, so the delivery of this prayer was doubled, that we may know the more certainly that our Saviour intended and commanded it for a set form of prayer to His Church."

[*Our Father.*] Chrysostom and Augustine both remark, that to address God as "Father," is peculiar to the New Testament dispensation, and that the Old Testament saints never use the expression.—The remark is undoubtedly true, but requires fencing with cautions.—We must be careful not to suppose that the Old Testament saints were destitute of the Holy Ghost as some say, and were not born again. Their light was undoubtedly far less than ours. The way into the holiest was not made manifest. The precise manner in which God would be just and yet justify the ungodly, was not clearly understood by them. They could not therefore look up to God with that boldness and freedom which the Christian believer can, as to a reconciled Father. But to say that God was in no sense the Father of Old Testament believers would be going much too far. He is the Father of all who are saved by Christ, and without Christ no man was ever saved.

The expression "Our" in the beginning of the Lord's prayer, should not be overlooked. It teaches believers that in all their prayers they should think of others as well as themselves. They should remember all the members of Christ's mystical body as their brethren and sis-

ters in the Lord.

[*Thy name.*] To see the full meaning of this expression, we should note the many places in which it is used in the Psalms. Such, for instance, as these, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren.” Psalm xxii. 21.—“They that know thy name will trust in thee.” Psalm ix. 22.—“I will wait on thy name.” Psalm lii. 9.—“Unto thy name give the glory.” Psalm cxv. 1.—The righteous shall give thanks to thy name.” Psalm cxi. 13.—In all these cases, and many more, the idea is evidently that of “God’s revealed character and attributes.”

[*Thy kingdom.*] The plainest and simplest sense of this word is the promised kingdom which God is one day to take to Himself over all the world, foretold by Daniel and the other prophets, when Satan shall cease to be “prince of this world,” and the millennium shall begin.

[*Thy will be done, as in heaven so in earth.*] To see the full beauty of this prayer, we should read the description of angels, in Psalm ciii. 20, 21. Heaven is the only place now where God’s will is done perfectly, constantly, unhesitatingly, cheerfully, immediately, and without asking any questions.

3.—[*Give us day by day our daily bread.*] The English translation of the Greek words in this verse admits of some question. The literal sense appears to be, “Give us for the day, or day by day, the bread which is sufficient for our subsistence.”

The Greek word which we have rendered “daily,” is only found in this place, and in Matt. vi. 11.

Some think that the words should be translated, “our supersubstantial bread,” understanding by it, the bread in the Lord’s Supper. This is a most unlikely and improbable sense. Even Stella, the Spanish Commentator, remarks that the Eucharist is not bread for every day.

Some think that the words should be rendered, “Give us day by day our tomorrow’s bread: a future bread.” This seems a very harsh and awkward sense.

The true meaning appears to be that which has been already given,—“the bread which is convenient, or sufficient, for our daily subsistence.” This is the interpretation maintained by Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Suidas, and ably defended by Parkhurst.

4.—[*Forgive us our sins.*] Let this expression be carefully noted. It provides an answer to those who say that the believer ought never to ask for pardon of sins. One text like this is worth a hundred arguments. The Lord Jesus bids us do it, and therefore it ought to be done.

The justification of every believer no doubt is a finished and perfect work, and one admitting of no degrees, no increase and no diminution. The moment a man believes on Christ, he is as much justified as St. Paul or St. John, and cannot be more justified if he lives to the age of Methuselah. But all this is no reason why he should not daily confess his sins, and daily seek fresh application of Christ’s blood to his conscience. In fact, it is the life of faith to do so. The words of our Lord, in another place, are very teaching: “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet.” (John xiii. 10.)

[*Indebted to us.*] Whitby and Hammond both remark that this expression has a sense much stronger than it appears, at first sight, to bear. Hammond says, that in the Syriac language, which our Lord very probably spoke, a sinner is called “a debtor.”

Let it not be forgotten that every unforgiving and implacable man, who uses the Lord’s Prayer, is practically praying that his own sin may not be forgiven at all. He is professing a lie.

[*Lead us.*] The Greek word rendered “lead” is only used seven times in the New Testament. Excepting in the Lord’s Prayer, our translators have always rendered it “bring into.”

(Luke v. 18, 19; Acts xvii. 20; 1 Tim. vi. 7; Heb. xiii. 11.)

[*From evil.*] The words so translated might have been rendered, with equal correctness, “the evil one;” that is, “the devil.” They are so rendered in Matt. xiii. 19, and xiii. 38, and 1 John ii. 13, 14, and 1 John iii. 12, and v. 18.

I cannot leave the subject of the Lord’s Prayer without remarking that those who profess to believe in an “unanimous consent of the Fathers” in the interpretation of Scripture, would do well to observe the exceedingly various senses which the Fathers attach to the several clauses of the Lord’s Prayer. No man can investigate this point without discovering that the Fathers are no more agreed among themselves as to the meaning of Scripture, than Gill and A. Clarke, or Thomas Scott and Mant. A summary of various interpretations of the Lord’s Prayer by the Fathers will be found in Cumming’s Lectures for the Times. (Edit. 1845, p. 174.)