

# **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**By**

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## Introduction

The Lord's Prayer – from now on for simplicity I'm going to call it the "Prayer" with a capital "P" on the screen – is the Prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples and left as a heritage for all Christians. That's why it's called the Lord's Prayer. It has become perhaps the Prayer most cherished by Christians. It's incorporated into the gospels and so, uniquely amongst prayers we use regularly, has canonical status. Actually the title we usually give to the Prayer – The Lord's Prayer – was first introduced by Cyprian of Carthage in the third century. It has been incorporated into the liturgies of the church – at Holy Trinity we say it every Sunday as part of our worship – and it continues to enrich the life of the church generally.

Some of you may have been surprised that I'm devoting a whole teaching morning to one fairly short prayer, but as we look at the Prayer in detail you'll find that it is full of depth, richness and meaning which fully justifies our spending the time to study it in detail.

This morning we're going to firstly look at exactly what the Prayer is, secondly to take an overview of its importance, thirdly we're going to look at the origins of the prayer in Jewish liturgy and thought, fourthly we'll briefly look at the Prayer in the light of the Exodus tradition, fifthly we'll take a detailed look at the Prayer in the light of modern Christian thought and finally we'll look at how we should use the Prayer in our daily lives.

So, let's start by finding out exactly what the Prayer is.

## The Text of the Prayer in Scripture

There are some textual variations of the Prayer in scripture. There are two places where it is recorded Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. It may be that the variations exist because the two gospels are referring to two different occasions. In Matthew the Prayer was taught by Jesus in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, whereas in Luke it's a more private setting where Jesus is teaching the disciples.

In Matthew's version we have:

"..... "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:9-13 NIV)

The version in Luke is a bit different, although there are some Greek manuscripts of Luke's gospel that are more similar to Matthew – the NIV version reads:

"..... "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation." (Luke 11:2-4 NIV)

Luke's version is a bit more compressed than Matthews and it omits some key words and petitions found in Matthew. So God is simply addressed as "Father" rather than "Our Father in heaven"; the petition about "God's will" is missing in Luke and so is the phrase about deliverance from evil.

Because it's similar to Matthew's version, but rather truncated, the Lucan version has played a secondary role in the way the Prayer has been developed and used historically. However, some variations such as "each day" rather than "today" and "sins" rather than "debts" have provided material for debate and discussion.

However, we do have another text of the Prayer from the *Didache* (which means teaching) and which is sometimes called by its longer title *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. This text was quite widely used in the early church, although it was never seriously proposed for canonical status. It was probably written at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century AD quite soon after John's gospel and letters and so well before the Gnostic texts, such as the apocryphal gospels which were written one or two hundred years later. The *Didache* is a very early text which deserves to be taken seriously, although of course it doesn't have the full authority of scripture.

The text in the *Didache* is similar to that in Matthew except that:

- It adds a closing doxology: "for yours is the power and the glory forever." This closing doxology is also present in some manuscripts of Matthew's gospel.
- It uses the singular "debt" rather than "debts" in the petition for forgiveness.

Perhaps because it is the longer version, the text in the *Didache* has shaped the versions that have come into Christian liturgy. The most widely accepted modern version is:

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.

For many of you older listeners, the older form of the Prayer will still probably be the most familiar version:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

So having established what the Prayer is for us today, we're going first of all to briefly look at the importance of the Prayer, then to look at its origins in Jewish prayer, then to look its parallels in the OT with Emphasis on the theme of the Exodus.

### **The Importance of the Prayer**

The Prayer continues to exert great influence in the life of the church and also in the lives of individual Christians. It's important doctrinally, liturgically and devotionally. Let's look at each of those three aspects in turn

## **Doctrinal Importance**

The early church regarded the Prayer as enormously significant. Tertullian, a church father in the second century, wrote that although the Prayer is brief “it is comprehensive in meaning”. For him the whole discourse of Jesus is included in the Prayer, it’s a complete record of his instruction so that “a summary of the whole gospel is to be found in the Prayer.”

The Prayer addresses the nature and character of God, his kingdom and his sovereign will, his providence and our dependence on him, his power and his glory, the forgiveness of sins that is made available to us through Christ, the call to imitate Jesus, the nature of sin and temptation and our need for protection from sin and the devil.

So the Prayer deals with who God is and what we have been called to become. It also looks forward to the fulfilment of God’s promises in the coming kingdom.

Many famous preachers preached frequently on the Prayer, such as Chrysostom and Martin Luther, Helmut Thielicke, F D Maurice, John Wesley and many others.

## **Liturgical Importance**

The Prayer has a long history of use in the church. The early church used it in baptism. Chrysostom indicates how new believers recited the prayer just before baptism and this practice seems to have been continued even up to Thomas Cranmer’s second Anglican Prayer Book of 1552.

Apart from its use in baptism, the Prayer was used in monastic daily offices and today, as I said at the beginning, it forms part of all our services here at Holy Trinity.

## **Devotional Importance**

Apart from its liturgical uses, the Prayer is a part of private devotions for many people. The Reformers tried to restrict its use, because in mediaeval times it was associated with the rosary, and used as part of penance. Nevertheless it continues to be of importance in private devotions. I think it brings us to focus on our relationship with God. Also Jesus is interceding for us in heaven. As Cyprian of Carthage said when we pray the Prayer the words our Lord has taught us will mingle perfectly with the words he is using in those intercessions.

## **The Jewish Origins of the Prayer**

We usually think of the Prayer as a Christian prayer, but we should never forget that Jesus was a Jew, and so, as we might expect, many of the concepts and phrases used in the Prayer have their origins in Jewish prayer. Carmine di Sante in *Jewish Prayer: The Origins of Christian Liturgy* makes the case for this very strongly. We can see this by looking in more detail at some aspects of the Prayer from the perspective of Jewish liturgy and thought.

## **Our Father**

The description of God as a “father” recurs in Jewish prayer. This description is used several times in the Bible (e.g. Deuteronomy 32:6 and Isaiah 63:16), where God is called the father

of Israel and the Israelites are called his children. However, the name “father” is attested above all in the Jewish liturgy.

In the *‘Amidah*, or Eighteen Benedictions, for example, the title occurs twice: “Cause us to return, O our Father, unto thy Torah; draw us near, O our King, unto thy service . . . ” (fifth benediction); “Forgive us, O our Father, for we have sinned; pardon us, O our King, for we have transgressed” (sixth benediction).

The name “Father” is also widely used in the liturgy of the celebrations of the New Year and of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), where the phrases “Father of mercy” and “O our Father” are used quite frequently. “Father” emphasizes the trust of the people in the mercy of God, while the plural “our” emphasises the solidarity of the community that is gathered for prayer.

I think we need to take these similarities seriously and if we do so then the stark opposition which some theologians like to see between the Jewish and Christian conceptions of God becomes more questionable. Although Jesus and the early Christians addressed God as *‘Abba’*, the difference between *‘ab’* (father) and *‘abba’* (papa or daddy), whilst real, shouldn’t be overly exaggerated. Although, as I shall argue later, our reconciliation to the Father through Christ, has created a new level of intimacy which is both different and more intimate.

It’s not that the Israelites weren’t given the idea of God as their father, it’s rather that they rejected it. Listen to God’s pleadings conveyed through the prophet Jeremiah: “‘I myself said, “How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.’ I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me.” (Jeremiah 3:19 NIV)

### **Who Art in Heaven**

This expression also occurs frequently in the Jewish liturgy. It occurs in the morning service: “Thou are the Lord our God in heaven and on earth.” In the treatise, *‘Avot*, the oldest and one of the most important in the Mishnah, one passage reads: “Be courageous and do the will of your Father who is in heaven” (*‘Avot*. 5, 23). The words are obviously meant to be metaphorical, not geographical. They express God’s transcendence, his “otherness” in relation to human beings. If the word *Father* expresses God’s closeness to humanity, the expression “who is in heaven” reminds us of the difference between God and humanity.

### **Hallowed Be Thy Name**

The expression immediately reminds us of the *qaddish*, one of the oldest Jewish prayers, used at the end of the reading and study of the Torah and, later, in the synagogue service. “Magnified and sanctified be his great Name in the world which he hath created according to his will.” The expression also occurs in the *qf dushah*, the third benediction of the *Tffillah*: “We will sanctify thy Name in the world even as they sanctify it in the highest heaven.”

The parallel between these texts of the Jewish liturgy and the Prayer becomes even more startling in light of the meaning of the words “sanctify the name of God.” The Jewish teachers ask: “How can human beings sanctify the name of God?” They answer: “By their words but above all by their lives.” Those who are faithful to God’s will and prefer it to their

own “sanctify his Name.” The true “sanctification of the Name” (*qiddush hashshem*) consists in the gift of one’s life to God.

We can now understand better what Jesus is referring to when he says “hallowed be thy name”; the words express his conception of God, but above all they express the gift of his life, which is “sacrificed” for all (Matthew. 26:24; Luke 22:19). By his death on the cross in obedience to the Father’s will, Jesus “sanctified the Name.”

### **Thy Kingdom Come**

These words are also found in the *qaddish*: “May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days and during the life of all the house of Israel.” This is clearly a kingdom to be established not in some heavenly realm but in this world. The kingdom of God is to become a reality in this world and not just in the next. When Jesus calls for the coming of the kingdom of God he is thinking of a transformed world in which human beings can live in fruitful peace as brothers and sisters as well of our eternal life to come in heaven.

### **Thy Will Be Done**

These words occur in 1 Maccabees:

“It is better for us to die in battle than to see the misfortunes of our nation and of the sanctuary. But as his will in heaven may be, so he will do” (1 Maccabees 3:59–60).

The same attitude of abandonment to God’s will finds expression in the prayer which Jews utter as they feel death drawing near: “May it be thy will to send me a perfect healing. Yet if my death be fully determined by thee, I will in love to accept it at thy hand.”

### **Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread**

The phrases we’ve been looking at focused on God; this and the following phrases focus on human needs. The petition for “bread” is part of the ninth benediction of the *tffillah*: “Bless this year unto us, O Lord our God, together with every kind of the produce thereof, for our welfare; give a blessing upon the face of the earth. Oh satisfy us with thy goodness, and bless our year like other good years. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who blesses the years.”

Some Jewish commentators like to see in this Jewish blessing an allusion to the manna in the wilderness. Some Christian commentators like to see in the “daily bread” of the Prayer an allusion to the Eucharist. The idea of an allusion to ‘manna’ may also shed light on the difficult Greek adjective *epiousion* (translated in Matthew 6:11 as “daily bread”). Just as the Israelites were to gather the manna, each one “as much as he needed” (Exodus 16:21) because any surplus gathered “was full of maggots and began to smell” (Exodus 16:20), so the bread we ask God for is bread that is enough for each day and this frees us of any worry about the future and any hoarding.

The same thought is expressed in Proverbs 30:8:

“ ..... ; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.” (Proverbs 30:8 NIV)

## **Forgive Us Our Sins As We Forgive Those Who Sin Against Us**

The idea of forgiveness finds expression in the sixth benediction of the *Tffillah*: “Forgive us, O our Father, for we have sinned; pardon us, O our King, for we have transgressed; for thou dost pardon and forgive. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who are gracious, and dost abundantly forgive.”

Even the thought in “as we forgive those who sin against us” has its origin in the synagogue and the Old Testament. We find it in the Yom Kippur liturgy and the Old Testament apocryphal book of Sirach: “Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray” (28:2 RSV). The same doctrine is expressed by the majority of the rabbis, who teach that “if you forgive your neighbour, the One will forgive you; but if you do not forgive your neighbour, no one will have mercy on you” (Midrash *Tanhuma Genesis*).

## **Lead Us Not into Temptation But Deliver Us from Evil**

This idea of deliverance (redemption) is found in the seventh benediction of the *tffillah*: “Look upon our affliction and plead our cause, and redeem us speedily for thy Name’s sake; for thou art a mighty Redeemer. Blessed art thou, O Lord, the Redeemer of Israel.”

There is an even closer resemblance in the Talmud, b. Ber. 50b: “Do not abandon me to the power of sin or to the power of guilt or to the power of temptation or to the power of shame.” Of course, it’s true that the Talmud was composed in written form centuries after Christ, but many of its materials go back to an age prior to the time of Christ.

In conclusion we can say that Jesus called on the same God as did his Jewish brothers and sisters and used the same turns of phrase they did. His originality and indeed uniqueness consisted in bringing to fulfilment what the biblical and liturgical texts proclaimed and expressed: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Matt. 5:17).

In the same way, the prayer Jesus gave us is not opposed to the prayers of the Jews but brings them to fulfilment.

## **The Prayer as an Expression of a New Exodus Tradition**

We can see a new Exodus tradition embodied in the Prayer.

Here, we can see the Prayer as designed to encapsulate and celebrate, in the presence of God, the liberation of humankind that had already begun to take place and that had yet to be completed – but which would be completed in Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection. The Prayer was designed to enable Jesus’ followers to beseech the Father that they would be enabled to remain loyal to his freedom purposes through all the tribulations that lay ahead. This can be seen more particularly as we look again at each of the clauses of the Prayer from a New Exodus perspective. This is a really interesting subject, and those who are interested can look at my lecture notes on my website where there is a more extensive treatment of the topic, but for reasons of time I’m going to be brief this morning.

## **Our Father**

In thinking about echoes from the Exodus tradition in the Prayer, we must begin with “Our Father”:

“Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, “Let my son go, so that he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’” (Exodus 4:22-23 NIV)

and:

“When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (Hosea 11:1 NIV).

Calling God “Father” not only evokes all kinds of associations of family life and intimacy; more importantly, it speaks to all subsequent generations of God as the God of the Exodus, the God who rescues Israel precisely because Israel is God’s firstborn son.

Jesus’ own sense of vocation, that of accomplishing the New Exodus, was marked principally by his awareness of God as Father (cf. R N Longenecker, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, chapter 13). In the Prayer Jesus invites his followers to consider themselves Exodus people. Their cry for redemption will be heard and answered.

## **Hallowed Be Your Name**

God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush, giving Moses his name and giving his name as the main reason why he could be trusted to bring the children of Israel out of captivity (cf. Exodus 3:13–16). It was the honour and reputation of Yahweh’s name that Moses would subsequently use as the main point of his great prayer for Israel’s forgiveness after the episode of the golden calf. This theme was also picked up by Joshua after the defeat of the Israelite army at Ai (cf. Exodus 32:11–14; Joshua 7–9).

The sanctifying of God’s name is not merely connected with God’s own reputation in, as it were, a private capacity, but with the fact that he is committed to and in covenant with the people of Israel. Therefore to pray that God’s name be hallowed is to pray that the Exodus may not only happen, but that the Exodus be followed through to its proper conclusion – that is, that Israel be redeemed not only from the original slavery of Egypt, but also from the sin and rebellion that keeps her from arriving and safely settling in the Promised Land.

As we’ve already noted, Jesus sanctifies God’s name by his death on the cross in obedience to the Father’s will.

## **Your Kingdom Come**

The sovereign rule of the one true God is, of course, the main subtext of the battle between Moses and Pharaoh. As with Elijah and the prophets of Baal, the story of the Exodus is a story about which God is the stronger. It is in deliberate evocation of the Exodus theme that Isaiah writes of the great return:

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”



Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.” (Isaiah 52:7-10 NIV)

The Exodus is the background; the great return of YHWH the foreground; the kingdom of YHWH the main theme. This is the context of Jesus’ own kingdom announcement, the setting that gives meaning to the kingdom phrase in the Prayer.

### **Your Will Be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven**

The doing of Yahweh’s will on earth as in heaven is part of the whole biblical theme in which heavenly truths and events become embodied in their earthly counterparts. Part of the point of the whole Sinai meeting of God with man – the central part of the Exodus story – was the meeting of heaven and earth, with Moses as the intermediary who went to and fro between the two spheres, so that laws and instructions made in heaven could be carried out on earth.

This anticipates the coming temple theology in which the sanctuary was considered to be quite literally the place where heaven and earth met. Torah, the Law, was to be the means by which, within Israel, God’s will was to be done on earth as in heaven, and the temple was the place where this was embodied in celebration and sacrifice. Thus to pray in the Prayer that this might happen anew was to pray not merely that certain things might occur within the earthly realm that would coincide with plans that God had made in the heavenly realm, but that a fresh integration of heaven and earth would take place in which all that temple and Torah had stood for would be realized afresh.

It was to pray both that God’s saving purpose for both Israel and the whole world would come about through God’s personal action, and that God’s people would find themselves not merely shaped by a law, however divine, or focused on a building, however God-given and ordained, but embraced by a saving personal love.

“Thy will be done on earth as in heaven” can, of course, carry all sorts of further overtones, such as prayers for wise political solutions to world-shaking crises, prayers for bread for the hungry, and prayers for justice for the oppressed. But at its heart lies a prayer for the appropriate integration of heaven and earth that the early Christians came to see as already accomplished in Jesus himself, and came to long for in God’s eventual future (cf. Revelation 21; and Romans 8:17–30).

### **Give Us Today Our Daily Bread**

We’ve already noted that the prayer for daily bread has a part of its historical background in the provision of manna in the wilderness. God’s daily gift, following the people’s grumbling, became the stuff of legend. Jesus’ actions in the feeding miracles alluded to the wilderness stories, as the gospel writers (especially John) suggest. In the context of the Prayer, this phrase aligns the followers of Jesus with the wilderness generation and their need to know God’s daily supply of not only literal bread but also of all that it symbolized.

Manna was not needed in Egypt. Nor would it be needed when the Israelites reached the Promised Land. It was food that was needed because the kingdom had already broken in and

yet was not fully arrived. The daily provision of bread signals that the New Exodus has begun, but also that we are not yet living in the promised land of God's heavenly kingdom.

### **Forgive Us Our Sins**

The story of the manna, however, was also the story of Israel's sin and lack of faith. The prayer for forgiveness, therefore, is quite appropriate in this context. In the light of the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 and Jesus' offer of forgiveness as the central blessing of the New Covenant, forgiveness is raised to a new height.

The Egypt from which the New Exodus is freeing God's people is the Egypt of sin and all that it produces, then the prayer "forgive us our sins" becomes precisely the prayer of those still in that Egypt: "Deliver us from the Pharaoh of sin!"

### **Lead Us Not into Temptation, but Deliver Us from the Evil One**

The Greek word used here, *peirasmos* and translated "temptation", means trial or test or temptation, so the word can be used in both the positive sense of trial and the negative sense of temptation. This is a subject about which scholars have expended many words, but to merely summarise what I think is the most reasonable conclusion I think that we are here talking about temptation generally and the temptation to put the Lord to the test is but one of many temptations we suffer.

In 1 Corinthians 10 verse 9 Paul condemns the idea of putting God to the test and yet a few verses later he is writing of temptation more generally. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is the clearest statement of what *peirasmos* had come to mean in the early church and of how, with its Exodus overtones, it was being reapplied:

No *peirasmos* has overtaken you but that which is normal to the human race. God is faithful: he will not allow you to be tested beyond your strength. He will make, with the *peirasmos*, also the way out, so that you are able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13).

This can only refer to much more general "temptation," within which the temptation to put God to the test is one, but only one.

What we see here is a reapplication of the Exodus tradition. Paul will not rest content with simply telling the Corinthians how to behave and chiding them if they go wrong. He will teach them to think of themselves as the people of the true Exodus, and within that framework show them how the moral struggles they face – including the temptation to devise tests to see how strong their Lord is – are the equivalent of the temptations which brought the wilderness generation to ruin. They must now succeed where their Israelite predecessors failed.

Who, then, is the author of this "temptation" of 1 Corinthians 10:13? Paul does not say directly, but the context strongly implies that it is the evil one. Despite the apostle's firm conviction regarding the sovereignty of God, such "testings" come from "the Satan" (1 Corinthians 7:5). The word *peirasmos* occurs in Paul's letters only in 1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 4:14; and 1 Timothy 6:9). 1 Corinthians 10, therefore, might in part be seen as a practical commentary on part of the Lord's Prayer.

What Paul, in effect, is saying is: You are the Exodus generation; therefore trust God to lead you out of your moment of testing without succumbing to it – that is, to deliver you from the evil one. Those who pray the Lord’s Prayer are designed by Jesus to be those who remain faithful to the God who intends to remain faithful to them—and who thereby constitute the New Israel, the people of the New Exodus – all of us Christians today.

### **Conclusions About the Prayer in the Light of the Exodus**

So what we can we learn from looking at the Prayer in the context of the Exodus. Firstly, we see that the Prayer is given by Jesus to constitute his followers as the true Exodus people. They are to succeed, not least by prayer, where the original wilderness generation of the Israelites failed. The Prayer moves from the disciples’ relation to God, through the honouring of God’s name and the doing of his will, to provisions for bodily needs and dealing with evil.

Further, the Prayer takes its place alongside baptism and the Eucharist. Both baptism and the Eucharist are thought of in Exodus terms in the New Testament, not least in 1 Corinthians 10. It is, therefore, appropriate that praying the Prayer should take place corporately and publicly within the liturgies for both baptism and the Eucharist. These sacraments are precisely among those moments when both past and future, heaven and earth, are brought together in one unified act. The Prayer is the means by which the church celebrates what has been accomplished already in Christ and strains forward for what lies ahead. In the course of living between the present and the future, the church prays in the Prayer for grace and strength to remain faithful to its Lord and not to fall away from the amazing agenda of God’s kingdom announcement through Christ.

### **A Detailed Examination of the Prayer from a Christian Perspective**

#### **Our Father**

As we’ve already seen the Israelites called God “Father” and even “Our Father”. Yet there is no doubt that the salvific death and resurrection of Christ brought mankind into a new intimacy with God. By his blood shed for us Christ justified us, made us sinless in God’s sight, and redeemed us so that we were reconciled to God and brought into a new and intimate relationship with him as members of his family – God’s children.

Let’s take a few moments to look at that reconciliation with God. Reconciliation with God is the beginning, it well expresses the at-one-ment of the atonement, in which God and human beings come back together after having been alienated for so long. Although the Israelites called God “Father” they had become alienated from him by apostasy, sin and rebellion. That relationship was restored through Christ’s blood. Christ’s atoning death also extended this intimate relationship beyond the boundaries of the Israelite nation to the whole of mankind.

In fact, the word reconciliation only occurs four times in the NIV translation of the Bible. It is significant that in Romans 5:9-11, which is one of the great passages on reconciliation in the NT, to be reconciled and to be justified are parallels:

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved

through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:9-11).

Reconciliation and justification, although both effected by the cross, are not identical. Justification is our legal standing before God as our judge; reconciliation is our personal standing with our Father in His kingdom. When we are justified, we have peace with God, which is reconciliation (Romans 5:1)

Two other NT terms also confirm the fact that we are at peace with God, namely ‘adoption’ and ‘access’. As regards adoption, Jesus himself gave us permission to approach God as Abba, Father and Paul takes this up emphasising the privileges we have in being sons instead of slaves, and therefore God’s heirs as well (e.g. Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-29; 4:1-7). Access gives us active communion with God, especially in prayer. Twice Paul brings together ‘access to God’ and ‘peace with God’ (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:17-18). The writer to the Hebrews borrows from the Day of Atonement ritual in order to convey the closeness we can now have to God:

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Thus reconciliation, peace with God, adoption into His family and access into His presence all bear witness to the same new relationship with him into which God has brought us. Reconciliation also has a horizontal as well as a vertical aspect, for God has reconciled us to one another as well as to him. This is made clear by Ephesians 2:11-22 that focuses particularly on the healing of the breach between Jews and Gentiles. He reminds his Gentile Christian leaders that formerly they were both excluded from citizenship in Israel and alienated from God – but that they have now been brought near to God and near to Israel.

Let’s now look at how reconciliation has taken place and the respective roles played in it by God, Christ and ourselves. The passage that particularly informs us about these issues is 2 Corinthians 5:18-21:

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

This is probably the most important passage on reconciliation in the whole of the NT. The first truth it makes clear is that God was the author of the reconciliation with mankind. In this passage, everything flows from God – God reconciling, God giving, God appealing, and God making Christ to be sin for us. In William Temple’s memorable words “all is of God; the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.” Nor should we give the initiative to Christ. He went willingly to the cross, but he was doing the Father’s will as he confessed in his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). The reconciliation was entirely born out of the love of God – for He so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.

I've only got time to touch on the subject of our reconciliation to God this morning. If you want to know more about it download the notes of my Teaching Day on the Atonement from my website – that has quite a long section dealing with reconciliation.

But, in closing on this topic, we must also remember that reconciliation has a horizontal dimension to it. Jesus taught that 'if you are offering your gift at the altar' he said 'and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave the gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift' (Matthew 5:23-24). It is impossible to enter into the reconciliation that Christ died to accomplish and at the same time to nourish grudges against our fellow human beings. That is why we offer one another a sign of peace just before the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer in the service of Holy Communion. That's why a later phrase of the Prayer asks for forgiveness of our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

So, because we are reconciled to God through Christ, we are, as we've seen, adopted as God's sons and daughters, we are his heirs (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-29; 4:1-17) and most beautifully:

"Yet to all who received [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—" (John 1:12 NIV)

and as adopted children we can never be disinherited. That's why we can say 'Our Father' with confidence. This new relationship with God was signalled by Jesus in his encounter with Mary just after his resurrection:

"Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (John 20:17 NIV)

Jesus said "*my Father and your Father .. my God and your God.*" because he had now reconciled us to the Father through his death and resurrection.

Also the Holy Spirit plays a key role in enabling us to experience God as Father. He is called "Spirit of sonship" (Romans 8:15). We receive the Spirit when we repent and turn to Christ in faith and he helps us to experience being God's children and assures us of this relationship. As Paul says:

"because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:14-16 NIV)

This is why we can now call the Father "Abba", "Daddy" a new level of intimacy. He's our Father our loving Father. "Our Father" is a wonderful Trinitarian statement; it only makes sense in the context of the Triune God. We watch Jesus relating to Abba Father and are assisted by the Holy Spirit. Every time we say the Prayer we are introduced and re-introduced into a special relationship with God as Father – but what exactly does that mean?

Firstly, I think we can see our relationship with God as tripartite – God, parent and friend – mirroring the tripartite nature of God. The fact that we are made in God's image is neatly reflected in the tripartite nature of our relationship with our Trinitarian God and also in our own tripartite nature – body, soul and spirit.

Secondly, I think we can see our relationship with God from four aspects, Identity, Authority, Intimacy and Community.

### Identity

Here, we firstly, we need to see that our relationship to God as his son or daughter is our identity and furthermore it's the only identity we have that really matters. It's the only identity which has a truly enduring nature, it's connected to our eternal God and will itself be eternal. Secondly, we need to see that it's an identity which is based in and focuses on relationship. It's not who we are or what we have done that matters but our unity with God through Christ which brings us salvation, true joy and peace. In his teaching of the Prayer Jesus constantly referred to God as "your Father" (Matthew 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 14, 15, 18). To say this with sincerity and truth brings us to an identity that is eternal and unshakeable. To be able to address God as "Abba" and "Father" is to find our true identity. We enter into this relationship through faith in Christ and become the children of God. The Prayer helps us both to remember and claim this identity. That's why "Our Father" are the first words of the Prayer.

### Authority

To address God as Abba and Father is to celebrate the truth that we belong to him. It is also to acknowledge him as the Authority in our lives. For many people today, perhaps for some of us here, authority has bad connotations. We think of angry and abusive parents or corrupt and abusive policemen or politicians. But God is quite different from these fallen human examples of authority. He has never abused us or treated us unjustly, but we have sinned against him and angered him. Nevertheless, he loves us and wants to forgive us and through Christ's blood he *has* forgiven us if will just accept his free pardon. We are all like the prodigal son, we just need to return to our Father and ask for forgiveness.

But, this turning to God needs to transform our lives. We need to submit to God's authority and do his will. To call God Father is to approach him with humility and a deep sense of obedience. Peter told persecuted Christians to submit to God even in the midst of their suffering:

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." (1 Peter 5:6 NIV).

This is what we acknowledge each time we pray Our Father.

Fallen and corrupt authority is not the only reason why we reject this concept; in our world today people are increasingly self centred and self indulgent. The modern atheistic world is the result of a rejection of the authority of God. Henri Nouwen said that we are a fatherless generation because we have rejected God's authority in our lives. As a consequence we are desperate. The only solution is to repent and return and address God as Abba and Father and to come under his Fatherly authority – an authority that does no diminish us but helps us to take hold of the "life that is truly life" (1 Timothy 6:19).

### Intimacy

As C S Lewis reminds us prayer needs to be grounded in an authentic relationship with God. Prayer should be a real meeting between real persons, conducted in total openness and honesty. When Jesus taught the Prayer to his disciples he was probably teaching them in

Aramaic. The Aramaic word for Abba is a profoundly personal term of endearment. Yet I don't believe we are to understand this in terms of children addressing their father. Jesus uses the terms as an adult and I think the way Jesus used the term is the best illustration of the way we should use it.

The prologue to John's gospel tells us that Jesus had been in an intimate relationship with God the Father from before the beginning of our universe. How deep their love and relationship must be is totally beyond our comprehension – and yet Jesus was always submissive to his Father's will. In Gethsemane he went to the cross praying not my will but yours be done (Luke 22:42).

For us this personal knowledge of being loved by God is the beginning of our spiritual journey. We know that God loved us and has arranged our forgiveness even when we were sinners (Romans 5:8) and enemies of God (Colossians 1:21; Romans 5:10). We should love God in turn, not only because of all that he has done for us, but because of who he is. We need to call God Abba not just from our lips but from the depths of our hearts.

Jesus was passionate to do the Father's will. He said: "I love the Father ... and do exactly what the Father has commanded me" (John 14:31). Jesus had a passionate desire to glorify the Father. He declared; "I honour the Father ... I am not seeking glory for myself" (John 8:49-50). He prayed: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4).

To call God Abba and to relate to him as our heavenly Father is to observe him and listen to him closely and to have his actions and words flow out from our lives. Like Jesus we show our love for the Father when we listen to him and do what he says. By that we show that God is truly our Abba.

When we address God as Abba Father, we must look at Jesus and see how he related to his Father and how he nourished a profoundly rich and intimate relationship with his Father. Jesus has shared his Father with us and invites us into the relationship he has with the Father and to live in its amazing reality.

When we approach God the Father and truly learn to make him our Abba, when we open our hearts to him without any pretence, when we look upon him and learn to lose ourselves in his presence, then we become freed from the prisons of ourselves. In moments of intimacy with God we find the greatest freedom – paradoxically, as we lose what we think of as ourselves we find our true selves as God sees us.

### Community

The word "Our" before "Father" is important. Although we need to experience Abba individually his Fatherhood also has implications of community. There is no such a thing as a solitary Christian. We are all part of the family of Father God and his Fatherhood means that we are called to the brotherhood of humankind. God is not just transforming us each individually; he is also making a new divine family, a divine community.

The Prayer helps us to break free from self-centeredness and to learn selflessness, first by turning to God the Father and then by turning to the brothers and sisters who join us in calling him Abba Father.

## In Heaven

We are introduced to heaven right at the beginning of scripture in the book of Genesis – “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. The word “heavens” is in the plural suggesting more than one heaven, there is no singular. Paul certainly speaks of many layers of heaven. For example he says he was “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2). There is mention of both the “heavens” and the “highest heavens” in the OT – although to be fair Hebrew has no expression for heaven in the singular, it’s always the plural *shamayim*.

Part of this mystery is solved when we see that Genesis refers to the atmosphere between the sea and the clouds as *shamayim* and also refers to outer space as *shamayim*. To distinguish those regions from the place where God abides the phrase *shamyi h’shamayim* (the “heaven of heavens” or “highest heaven” in the NIV) is used, for example in Deuteronomy 10:14: “To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.” (Deuteronomy 10:14 NIV)  
The same term is used in 1 Kings 8:27 and Genesis 28:12.

So when Paul talked about the place where he visited as the third heaven I think he was talking about the place where God resides, a spiritual realm completely different from the atmosphere or outer space. Indeed I believe it’s a place entirely outside our universe.

But what heaven was Jesus talking about when he taught his disciples the Prayer? The original Greek in Matthew’s gospel actually uses the plural form of the Greek for heaven, even though Greek does have a singular form for heaven. The answer lies in the fact that Jesus was probably teaching the disciples in Aramaic and must have used the plural form for heaven as was the practice amongst the Jews – so I believe he was referring to the spiritual realm in which the Father dwells. In my view this heavenly realm is entirely outside the space-time framework of our universe, although the book of Revelation teaches that at the end of this age, following the second coming of Christ, there will be an intersection of the heavenly and earthly realms (Revelation 21:1-2).

Heaven is God’s abode; he dwells there and rules creation from there. Isaiah says: “Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool” (Isaiah 66:1). For me this says that God is far bigger than anything visible or invisible. Jesus knew heaven well and yet he came down to earth, emptying himself and humbling himself to become a man and a servant. Jesus declared:

“For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” (John 6:38 NIV)

The Holy Spirit also came down from heaven:

“Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.” (John 1:32 NIV)

Jesus urged his listeners to seek the kingdom of heaven above everything else (Matthew 6:33). It is in heaven that we must lay up treasures for there they do not rot or rust (Matthew 6:19-21). Our true treasures and rewards are to be found in heaven. Jesus, the divine mediator between God and man, saw himself as the essential connection between earth and heaven and he kept pointing people’s attention to heaven. Heaven was always Paul’s goal, he was called heavenward in Christ and encouraged others to embark on the same journey



(Philippians 3:14, 20). According to Paul all our spiritual blessings have to do with the heavenly realms, even though we are presently living on earth (Ephesians 1:3-14). I've focused rather a lot this morning on the heavenly realms, largely because of my subject matter – the Prayer – but, I do just want to make it clear that the kingdom of God has a present aspect which is relevant in our lives here and now following Christ's inauguration of the kingdom of God in his incarnation on earth. The kingdom is both now and not yet. This is important, but I just don't have the time to do justice to that issue today, although we will be considering some aspects of that later when we look at "thy kingdom come".

At the end of his earthly existence Jesus returned to heaven (Acts 1:11) and one day he will return to earth from heaven to judge the world and truly bring in his kingdom.

So, when we pray to "Our Father in heaven" we are praying to God the Father in a realm that is very different from the one we inhabit. The Father is at the heart of the Trinity; he transcends space and time and yet has redemptively entered our space-time. In his grace he offers to lift us out of the darkness of this world and our sins and to bring us into the heavenly places. Jesus was raised from death and is now seated at God's right hand in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:20). All of us who believe in Christ can identify with this because God has also raised us and seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). We are lifted to a new sphere of existence in our redeemed lives.

When we address our Father in heaven we are expressing the fact that our citizenship is in heaven and that we are on a journey home there:

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3:1-4 NIV)

Life on earth will come to nothing if not lived in the light of heaven. That is why we need to pray to Our Father in heaven, always being reminded of that which is unseen and eternal, recognizing his reality and the reality of his spiritual realm. This will comfort us, as Thomas Moore's hymn reminds us

Earth has no sorrow  
That heaven cannot heal

As we pray to Our Father in heaven we are connected with the heart of reality, our creator and redeemer who loves us.

### **Hallowed be Your Name**

Hallowed means holy or sacred, and of course God's name *is* holy and sacred even if we don't acknowledge that fact. However, God wants us to praise, honour and exalt him, so it's fitting that we should honour his name in the Prayer.

God considers his name and his word to be of the utmost importance:

"I will bow down towards your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." (Psalm 138:2 NIV)

that's why we were commanded to respect God's name in the Ten Commandments:

““You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” (Exodus 20:7 NIV)

An alternative translation of the original Hebrew would be:

Do not carry the Name of the Lord your God disrespectfully. If you do, you will be guilty of the grave offence of desecrating God’s Holy Name.

As Christians we are each called to carry God’s divine name. This is expressed in baptism when we are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and also in our calling for service:

“But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.” (Acts 9:15 NIV)

So when we talk about the name of God we are dealing with something holy and we should treat it with respect. The Israelites held the name of God in such awe that they wouldn’t even pronounce God’s name “YHWH”, the Tetragrammaton, but instead used Adonai (Lord) and YHWH was only allowed to be written in sacred writings. Christians have no prohibition over YHWH, but have continued Jewish practice by writing “LORD” in small capitals (to distinguish it from other uses of Lord) as we see it in our Bibles today. When the Jewish scribes wrote the name of God *elohim* they would wipe their pens and when they wrote God’s personal name YHWH, they had to wash their whole bodies. Just imagine how much washing that involved because the name YHWH appears 6,961 times in the Hebrew OT.

If writing God’s name came with such deep reverence, then uttering his name was even more serious. The use of God’s name was reserved solely for the benediction in the temple. At other times the word “Adonai” was used as a substitute. After the destruction of the temple in 70 AD the Tetragrammaton was no longer used in speech and its original pronunciation has been lost.

So what is commanded in the third commandment of the Decalogue is put into practice in the Lord’s prayer in “Hallowed be your name”.

Names were important in OT times, it was believed that a person’s name represented his character. That’s why the name of God is to be revered, because it represents the character of God. God’s name tells us who and what he is. So if we misuse his name we are guilty of distorting his character, an offence against God’s name is an offence against his person. The various names used for God in the Bible represent different aspects of his character, together they tell us about all the aspects of God’s character.

God’s name originally resided in the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 5:3-5), but that was destroyed. So God did a new thing. Through Jesus God built a new temple comprising his redeemed people – us and all believers in Christ. Thus, God has placed his holy name in the church, expecting that name to be revered and honoured. Every time we pray “Hallowed be your name” we are reminded that as a church we carry the name of Jesus, the name that has been lifted above every other name (Philippians 2:9).

We must worship God wholeheartedly and conduct our lives in such a way that we demonstrate that we do really hallow God’s name both in our lives and in our church. We must worship God in spirit and in truth, giving ourselves wholeheartedly to him, with no hidden idols lodged in the dark recesses our hearts. To hallow God’s name is to recognise the holiness, uniqueness and nature of God and to live in the light of that knowledge.

The Greek word *hagiazō* translated ‘hallowed’ is very rare in the NT and unknown in ordinary secular Greek. This shows that God is to be treated in a unique way reserved just for him. The place we give God cannot be shared with anything else.

To hallow God’s name is also to learn to pray so that we are totally dependant on God, relying not on our own strength but upon God’s mercy. To hallow God’s name is not only to say that the name of Jesus is raised above all other names as an objective fact, but to raise that name above all other names in our hearts.

When we pray “Hallowed be your name” all the implications of that phrase, some of which we’ve been examining give glorious weight to our prayers; a weight that comes from God’s unique, incomparable and awesome name.

### **Your Kingdom Come**

What did Jesus have in mind here? Firstly, the two terms used in the gospels “kingdom of God” and the “kingdom of heaven” seem to be used interchangeably, and so I believe they refer to the same reality.

Sinclair Fergusson defines God’s kingdom as follows: “The kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God, the expression of his gracious sovereign will. To belong to the kingdom of God then is to belong to the people among whom the reign of God has already begun.”

Jesus emphasised the importance of entering or receiving the kingdom of God. We enter this kingdom by the grace of God who regenerates us and justifies us, so making us acceptable to him, on the basis of the finished sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

We must enter the kingdom of God and come under the rule of God. Jesus came as the king of the kingdom and his teachings tell us, his subjects, how we ought to live within the kingdom. This is not only a matter of right actions, but of right attitudes as well. Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount begin and end with an emphasis on obedience, obedience is the main quality we need exhibit as kingdom people. As Jesus said: “Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practises and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:19 NIV)

Our entry into the kingdom begins by turning in faith to Jesus. That faith should manifest itself in a life of obedience to Jesus. As Jesus said:

“Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.” (Matthew 7:20 NIV)

When we turn to Jesus in faith the Holy Spirit enters into us and we are born again and thus enabled to enter the kingdom, for Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“..... ”I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:5 NIV)

When we pray for the kingdom to come, as Jesus taught, we need to bear in mind not just the benefits of the kingdom – going to be with our Father for all eternity – but the demands of the kingdom and our challenge to live as kingdom persons in total obedience to Jesus.

The kingdom is partly manifested now as, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit within us, we start to become true kingdom persons. But the kingdom will not be completely manifested until that day when Jesus returns in glory to judge the world and finally and completely establish his kingdom. The kingdom is both 'now' and 'not yet' as I said earlier. It is this truth that John saw on Patmos when he experienced his great vision that led him to write the book of Revelation.

Jesus is the glorious divine king spoken of in Psalm 93 whose throne was established "long ago" and who reigns from "all eternity" and will last forever. He is the "King of kings and Lord of lords" who will establish his kingdom forever (Revelation 19:16). It is this king whom we remember and whose kingdom we celebrate when we pray "Your kingdom come". We eagerly anticipate the coming of that king and his kingdom when we pray the Prayer. We know that this kingdom is not yet fully manifested, but it has already started to invade our souls and our society. The kingdom becomes visible when the king himself becomes visible in our hearts, in our lives and through our lives. Then our hearts will cry out to our king "Your kingdom come".

### **Your will be done**

We often pray "Your will be done" without giving much thought to the nature of God's will or what its implications for our lives are. Jesus should be our pattern here; he always sought his Father's will and earnestly set about carrying it out:

"For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." (John 6:38 NIV)

Jesus defined his whole life and purpose in terms of the will of the Father. This was not an obsession, but a deep and unshakeable commitment, born out of his love for the Father.

It was not always easy. Jesus struggled in the garden of Gethsemane when he prayed that he might not have to drink the cup of God's wrath:

"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 26:39 NIV)

this was a real struggle:

"And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." (Luke 22:44 NIV)

and yet Jesus surrendered to his Father's will.

This kind of surrender to God's will was prefigured in Abraham's experience of being called to sacrifice his son Isaac. In Jesus' case, though, no substitute sacrifice would be provided at the last minute. When Jesus speaks to us about God's will he speaks with the authority of one who paid the ultimate price for carrying out that will. We have to listen carefully to what he taught on this issue.

Jesus teaches that we truly become God's children by doing God's will:

"Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:35 NIV)

We are saved by faith in Christ and we demonstrate that we are indeed saved by doing the will of God.

It's quite possible to deceive ourselves that we're doing God's will. Jesus told an interesting parable about two sons:

““What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go. “Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.” (Matthew 21:28-31 NIV)

Jesus told this parable in response to a challenge from the Pharisees:

“Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”” (Matthew 21:23 NIV)

Jesus is saying that it’s the Pharisees who were actually disobedient, because they were hardening their hearts against God. Rather, it was the apparently disobedient, but repentant, tax collectors and prostitutes who were actually being obedient to God. That was the irony Jesus expressed in his parable.

We can deceive ourselves in similar ways. Doing God’s will is never a matter of just what we say; it has to be reflected in what we do and how we do it. God continues to look at us to see whether we’ve honoured what we’ve promised.

Further, if we don’t turn to Jesus in faith and really know him, then our actions by themselves count for nothing. Listen to what Jesus said about this:

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’” (Matthew 7:22 NIV)

Having a vital and living relationship with Jesus is connected to doing his will. We have that vital relationship by loving him:

“But the man who loves God is known by God.” (1 Corinthians 8:3 NIV)

and also by obeying his commands which brings us to know him:

“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.” (1 John 2:3 NIV)

Knowing God, being known by him, loving God and obeying God are all interconnected. We cannot say God knows us unless we love him. We cannot say that we love him unless we are in the habit of obeying him and we cannot say we know God unless we obey him.

Some people struggle with the idea of God’s will, because it has a number of aspects. On one level God’s will cannot be thwarted and will come to pass. A Biblical word often used for this aspect of God’s will is *boolema*. For example Paul writes:

“And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 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,” (Ephesians 1:9-11 NIV)

So how can we be guilty if our actions are predetermined? Paul addresses this problem in Romans:

“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me:

"Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" (Romans 9:14-21 NIV)

Paul isn't actually answering the question here, but taking us as near to the edge of the mystery as we can approach. Our human logic doesn't always apply neatly to the things of God. We shouldn't actually be surprised because God has also made the physical universe indeterminate. In the sub-atomic realm, where quantum mechanics rules, things are both particles and waves. Sometimes they're waves obeying wave like laws and producing wave like effects and sometimes they're particles obeying different particle like laws and producing different particle like effects – we call this quantum duality. But, how can something be both a particle and a wave – they're contradictory. We don't know, but we do know that God made it that way. Similarly we can't understand how freewill can be compatible with predestination – they're contradictory in our eyes, but again we know that God has somehow made it so.

So if God's sovereign will is the particle side of his will, then the wave side is his desired will. The Bible usually speaks of this as *thelema* where God's desired will can apparently be fulfilled or thwarted by our obedience or lack of it. For example, it is surely God's desire that everyone should repent and come to faith in Christ:

"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 3:9 NIV)

but, experience tells us that this does not seem to happen in every case. Somehow we can choose to do God's will, as Jesus taught:

"If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." (John 7:17 NIV)

which must mean that we can also choose *not* to do God's will.

It is God's desired will that is the focus of what we say when we pray "Your will be done". It is our duty and responsibility to do God's desired will and our prayer here is that it should be so in both our collective and our personal lives.

We also need to understand that there are two aspects to God's desired will – the mechanical or physical aspects and the moral aspects. We think of whether we should settle in London or Paris rather than why am I going, what are the spiritual aspects of this decision. Christians commonly misunderstand God's purposes for them. God does have specific plans for us, but I believe that he does give us a lot of space to make choices wisely and prayerfully. In our example above both London and Paris may be within God's creative will.

Many Christians believe that if they miss God's best plan for them then that's it – they'll always have to live with God's second best. But I believe that's wrong. I believe that God has a generous and creative will that can work with our errors and even our follies. He can bring us back to his larger purposes for us. What is important for us to know is what God has clearly and definitely revealed to us concerning his desired will – his words to us in the Bible. The more we study and obey God's word, the more we will come to know and obey God's desired will.

We will know God's best for us as we spend time with him in prayer and read his word. As we consecrate ourselves in worshipful obedience and allow God's Spirit and word to shape our thinking and living then:

"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. 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 12:1-2 NIV).

Tertullian said: "when we say 'Let your will be done' we wish ourselves well because there is nothing of evil in the will of God." Doing God's desired will leads to our own good and well being, so we can sincerely pray this phrase of the Prayer – Your will be done.

### **On earth as it is in heaven**

In my view this phrase clearly elaborates "Your will be done". We're talking about God's will being done on earth and saying that the standard is the way it's done in heaven – without question or demur. It wasn't always like that, of course. In chapter 12 of Revelation John tells us about a war in heaven, but that war has been decisively won.

Unfortunately the war was transferred to our universe where Satan's voice seduced the first humans into rebellion against God, triggering the Fall and the sad history of our world ever since. In his grace and mercy God sent his son to save us from sin and the death that would have been our punishment. But history is not yet over and the conflict continues.

I believe that God's desired will is done freely and willingly in heaven. We read of elders falling down in worship and of angels handling bowls of incense and we need to follow this pattern of active participation too, as John Wesley often preached when speaking on the Prayer.

Habitually doing God's will on earth prepares us for our life hereafter. Origen said: "When this will of God is done by us on earth as it is in heaven, then we shall be like them that are in heaven."

Of course, this prayer will not be fully and finally realized until the second coming of Christ. Then as heaven and earth intersect in some way we cannot fully comprehend:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (Revelation 21:1-3 NIV)

God's will shall be fully and finally done on earth as it is in heaven.

### **Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread**

One feature of Gnostic distortions of Christianity was a return to the old pagan idea that the material world was essentially evil and that the spiritual realm was the 'real' world. The incarnation of Christ as well as God's statement recorded in the book of Genesis that creation, the material world, was 'good' give the lie to this viewpoint.

We should remember that when we pray this phrase of the Prayer.

Bread was the staple food in Judea in Jesus' time. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray for this he was saying that God is interested in and cares for our bodies as well as our souls. I think this follows naturally from the fact that God created us as embodied beings and the fact that we shall be resurrected in a resurrection body at Christ's second coming.

In his treatise on the Lord's Prayer, Tertullian wrote that the 'daily bread' in this phrase of the prayer refers both to the earthly food we eat daily and the heavenly food we eat in the Eucharist. So, Tertullian finds both a spiritual meaning and a literal meaning in this phrase of the Prayer. Other church fathers have argued for a purely spiritual meaning to bread (e.g. Origen) and yet others have argued for a purely literal physical meaning (e.g. Gregory of Nyssa). The reformers such as Luther and Calvin argued for a purely literal meaning and I would largely agree with them, although I have some sympathy with Tertullian's viewpoint and would want to find a small space for a spiritual interpretation.

So, when we pray this phrase of the prayer I think we are praying that God will satisfy our daily material needs, such as money, clothing etc as well as just food. God does recognize these needs and he does provide for them, although it's interesting that this phrase of the Prayer comes immediately after our prayer for things to be in accordance with God's will.

In the beginning God provided for our need of food by allowing us to eat from the trees in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16), but not everything that exists is for our consumption – Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat the fruit from one tree (Genesis 2:17). I believe that God was warning us of the disobedience of greed. Greed harms us. Let's not forget that it was greed which brought the world financial system to the brink of disaster back in 2008.

Adam and Eve consumed the forbidden fruit in secret outside God's presence. Now there are two meals described in the book of Proverbs one personifying wisdom (Proverbs 9:2) and the other folly (Proverbs 9:17). The meal personifying wisdom is eaten openly in public; the one personifying folly is eaten secretly like the forbidden fruit. Humankind was poisoned by a secret meal of forbidden fruit and the antidote was given by Christ who offered himself as an exceptional spiritual meal.

Jesus taught that we shouldn't worry about our daily material needs:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” (Matthew 6:25-27 NIV)

I don't believe that this means we shouldn't be at all concerned for our own needs. I think we should work to the extent that we are able to provide for our material needs and diligently take care of the possession over which God has given us stewardship. But we shouldn't be worried or overly concerned about these things and also we need to remember that we're talking about 'needs' here, not all the material things we might want or desire.

Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father knows all our material needs. The implication is that as our loving heavenly Father he will lovingly meet those needs. For our part we should



not worry about our material needs but spend our energy in pursuit of God and his righteousness. So, we pray to God, "Give us ... bread" acknowledging that we are dependent on a gracious and merciful God. That is what we do when we say grace before we eat; we remember and give thanks to God for his provisions.

Of course, we need to maintain balance here. Jesus would not accept people following him simply because he supplied their material needs:

"Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." (John 6:26-27 NIV)

Jesus demonstrated this balance in his own life when he refused the temptation to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger. He said:

"Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4 NIV)

For Jesus, the material has dignity and purpose, only when connected to the spiritual.

Jesus pointed to the importance of our spiritual hunger and our spiritual food; he identified himself as the heavenly bread:

"I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:48-51 NIV)

Just as physical bread gives us physical life, Jesus the bread from heaven brings us spiritual life. It is in this sense that Jesus spoke of eating his flesh and drinking his blood and we remember this when we share of the Lord's Supper.

This doesn't mean that Jesus was against the material, he wasn't. He was merely against forms of materialism which denied the reality or the centrality of the spiritual.

Returning to the physical bread, we need to remember that we are praying "Give *us* this day *our* daily bread" and not "Give me this day my daily bread". We aren't praying just for our own needs, but for the needs of all. We can see this illustrated in the OT command to farmers not to completely harvest their fields but to leave behind something for the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10). This was important in the lives of Ruth and Naomi:

"And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." (Ruth 2:2 NIV).

There is a recognition that it is God who ultimately feeds us and we should be ultimately dependent on him. The poor can look to him and he does intervene, but he also leaves much of the answer to the prayer "Give us bread" in our hands by telling us to be part of the process of provision. He's telling us to give them some.

Just one final aspect to this phrase of the Prayer. We need to remember it says "Give us *this day* our *daily* bread". In other words give us today enough for today, we are not to ask for more than we need. It is a prayer we can and should pray every day for that particular day.

So when God fed the Israelites in the desert he only provided for them day by day:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out *each day* and *gather enough for that day*. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.” (Exodus 16:4 NIV).

Somehow, whether the people gathered much or little it was enough for that day (Exodus 16:18), but it could not be stored up for another day (Exodus 16:19-20).

I think this is what Jesus had in mind when he said:

“ .... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them ..... “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:32, 34 NIV).

Of course, like so much of Jesus’ teaching this is completely counter cultural. We live in a world which promotes greed, but we should resist the temptations of our culture. John Wesley earned large sums as an Oxford academic, but he kept only what he really needed and gave most of his earnings to the poor. After his death in 1791 it was discovered that the only personal possessions Wesley had left behind were a few coins in his pockets and the dresser draws. Wesley’s example is a powerful one and one in which this part of the Prayer is powerfully expressed.

In our anxiety and greed we forget the warnings of scripture:

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Timothy 6:6-10 NIV)

Anxious and greedy economic behaviour turns us into ugly people. The answer is to turn regularly to our Father in heaven and pray “Give us this day our daily bread”. When we can say that sincerely, from our hearts, we will discover godly contentment and we will be able to share what the Father graciously gives us with others, so becoming part of the answer to our prayer.

### **Forgive Us Our Sins As We Forgive Those Who Sin Against Us**

In many ways this is the heart of the Prayer dealing with our need to be forgiven by God and to forgive our fellow human beings. Healed and healthy relationships are the heart of the Christian faith. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was he said it was to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus was saying that the heart of our faith was our relationship with God and with our fellow human beings.

We’ve already looked quite deeply at the issue of our reconciliation to God when we looked at “Our Father”. We saw that we were estranged from God following the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the Fall, but that we have now been reconciled to God because we have been justified through Christ’s saving death on the cross. But, in many ways, we remain alienated from our fellow human beings. Actually all our sins are against God, because when we sin against our fellows we are actually sinning against God. God has forgiven us all of our sins and so he calls on us to forgive any and all wrongs that have been done to us by our fellow human beings – whether they have repented of those sins or not.

But, we saw that in Matthew's gospel, the text speaks of forgiveness of "debts" and not "sins". This is because in Jewish thought, our sins are understood as leading to our indebtedness to God. In Jewish thought, when we sin we enter into debt *vis-à-vis* God. In this thinking God cancels our debts to him when he forgives us. That's why Jesus told a parable about a man forgiven a huge debt by his master and condemned him when he failed to forgive a small debt to his fellow servant. Our debts to God are huge, we could never pay them. But the amounts owed to us by our fellows are relatively small. So having been forgiven a huge debt by God we should readily forgive small debts owed to us by our fellows. This view of sin as debt is why the modern version of the Prayer speaks of sins and not debts.

Some liturgy also speaks of "trespasses" rather than "sins". Again the word "trespasses" (meaning a false step or wrongdoing) can also be understood as equivalent to "sins". Paul uses "trespasses" when speaking of the wrongdoing of Adam in Romans chapter 5. Historical Anglican versions of the Prayer used the word "trespasses" (although "debts" is a better translation of the Greek of Matthew), but again "sins" is a more comprehensible word for us today.

### Our Need to be Forgiven

We are all sinners:

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8 NIV)

if we're honest with ourselves we know that this is true. And we all deserved to pay the penalty that our sins deserved – death:

"For the wages of sin is death, ....." (Romans 6:23 NIV)

but, in his grace and mercy, God sent his son Christ to pay the penalty that our sins deserved through his death on the cross. Because Christ has paid the penalty that our sins deserved we are forgiven and justified in God's sight and so reconciled to God.

This is a very important subject and a very deep subject, it could form a whole teaching morning in itself, so I'm just going to leave it at the basic bald statements I've just made. If any of you want to know more, download the notes of my teaching morning on The Atonement from my website, or if you want even more depth read John Stott's *The Cross of Christ* or Leon Morris's excellent *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*.

We needed God's forgiveness for our sins and in his grace and mercy he has provided that forgiveness – alleluia! As Tertullian wrote, we pray this part of the Prayer not only to petition for the forgiveness of our sins, but to renounce and avoid those sins. When we pray "Forgive us our sins" we are coming to our heavenly Father in repentance. God doesn't need to be persuaded to forgive us, he's already done it. Even whilst we were still sinning against him he died for us on the cross. But, we do need to come to God regularly and ask for his forgiveness of our sins, because if we don't the sin which is always accumulating in our lives will spoil our intimate relationship with God.

### Our Need to Forgive Others

Our petition for God's forgiveness of our sins is linked to the need to forgive others. But – and it's a very big but – our forgiveness by God is not conditional on our forgiving others. As I just said he's already forgiven us. However, like the man forgiven a huge debt in the

parable I mentioned a while ago, we should forgive others out of gratitude for the grace and mercy God has already shown us.

If we cannot forgive others we are not really in a position to receive God's forgiveness, for we cannot truly pray for forgiveness when we are in a hypocritical state. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated our forgiveness of others is essential if we are to pray for others and experience true Christian community. In a Christian community we should all pray for one another – but how can we possibly pray for those we have not forgiven? I believe prayer and forgiveness are linked. When we pray for those who are difficult or who have offended us God's miracle takes place in our lives and we are given grace and strength to truly forgive them.

As Bonhoeffer says: "To make intercession means to grant our brother the same right that we have received, namely to stand before Christ and share in his mercy." At the cross we receive God's mercy and if we have truly received that mercy then we can allow that mercy both to touch us again and also to touch those we bring to the cross in prayer – even those that have hurt us and are hard to forgive. Forgiveness then lives in the offended hearts, both human and divine and God's mercy brings reconciliation, both vertically between God and man, and horizontally between us and our fellow.

### Collective Forgiveness

Again there is a collective aspect *our* in this phrase of the Prayer. This can refer both to all our individual sins and also to our corporate or collective sins. Humanity commits many collective sins – war, violence, racism, religious and other persecution and many more. Perhaps that's why the petition to "forgive us our sins" comes immediately after that to give us bread – because so many of our sins are linked to material greed and misuse.

As Christians, we need to become a community which takes sin, forgiveness and reconciliation seriously. The more we appreciate our forgiveness the better our relationship with God and our love both for God and also for our fellow humans who offend us will be all the greater.

### **Lead Us Not Into Temptation**

Immediately after forgiveness the Prayer turns our attention to temptation and evil, so we can't consider the time that follows our forgiveness as being without problems or danger. In fact as Christ taught us, Christians can expect difficulties, troubles and trials (John 15:20).

We did look at this issue earlier, but here I'm going to give a slightly different perspective. The Greek word *peirasmon* translated "temptation" can mean either enticement to sin or the trials and testings we go through as Christians. In respect of the first of these, enticement to sin, Satan is always tempting us to sin and disobey God. The encouraging thought here is that Jesus knows all about these temptations. He was tempted for 40 days in the desert and no doubt throughout his life. Jesus knows all the temptations we can meet:

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."

(Hebrews 4:15 NIV)

Let's remember how Jesus dealt with his temptations – by turning back to God's word. Jesus was surely steeped in the scriptures and we need to study them and make them part of our

lives in order to resist the temptations that will surely come our way. We also need to remain close to God in prayer and in communion with him.

At this point we need to be clear that these enticements are from Satan and not from God: “When tempted, no-one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” (James 1:13-14 NIV)

James is very clear about where our temptations come from and how they unfold.

So, why do we pray “lead us not into temptation”? I think the answer lies with the other meaning of temptation we looked at, trials and testings. It’s interesting that just before the passage from James I just quoted, he says:

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12 NIV)

As we read the book of Job it seems clear that God permitted Job to be put to the most severe testing. Unfortunately the book of Job does not tell us why this was so, merely that it happened – but near the end of the book, in chapter 42, we do get a clue:

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:5-6 NIV)

We see that Job ended the experience a better and Godlier man.

We don’t know why God sometimes allows us to go through these trials; we can only trust that our loving and all powerful God knows what he’s doing. Perhaps when we pray “lead us not into temptation” we are really praying that God will not find it necessary to put us to the trial or time of testing. In any event when we are tested or tempted we can turn to God, find his presence and rely on his mercy and love to keep us safe and sound.

### **Deliver Us From Evil**

Here, Jesus reminds us of evil’s existence and reality. Along with most of the Western reformed church, I believe this is a separate petition from the one about temptation that we’ve just been looking at. There is a connection, we are tempted to do evil and are tempted by evil, but I believe there is not such an intimate connection as some such as Calvin and Karl Barth contend.

We see that what we’re to be delivered from could either be personified evil (as implied in Matthew’s text where the Greek has a “the” before evil) or evil in general (as in Latin translations of the Bible where the language doesn’t use the “the” prefix). This issue has been much debated, but I’m going to follow Calvin and not spend time on this issue as I believe it includes both – which is perhaps implied by Paul:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” (Ephesians 2:1-2 NIV)

Jesus was very aware of the devil and the damage he can do. Satan was one of the chief angels created by God, but he rebelled against God along with perhaps a third of all the angels and was cast out of heaven Isaiah speaks of this (Isaiah 14:12-15) as does John in Revelation:

“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in

heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” (Revelation 12:7-9 NIV)

Satan is called by several names in the Bible – dragon, serpent, accuser, father of lies, devil and so on because he has many tricks and roles. Satan was completely defeated by Christ on the cross as Jesus and Paul tell us:

[Jesus said] “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.” (John 12:31 NIV); and

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Colossians 2:15 NIV)

but, pending Christ’s return at the end of the age, the devil continues to create mischief for us and on earth generally.

We need not fear Satan and his demons, provided we remain close to Jesus, and yet Christ taught the disciples to pray for deliverance from evil. He also prayed for us himself after the Last Supper:

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” (John 17:15 NIV)

Although Satan is ultimately defeated he remains active in the world and causes us problems.

Satan also dulls people minds to the gospel message and opposes the ministry of evangelism. He also creates mischief within churches – look at the message to the churches of Smyrna, Philadelphia and Pergamum in Revelation.

This is why we must pray for God to deliver us from the evil one and his evil manoeuvrings.

Apart from Satan’s wiles, there is anyway much evil within our hearts:

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean’.” (Matthew 15:19-20 NIV)

and

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV)

The image of God in which we were created has been marred by our sinfulness – and Satan wants to keep it that way.

Evil is frequently deeply stored within us:

“..... the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45 NIV)

The evil in human beings can be manifested as evil *thoughts* (Matthew 9:4), evil *motives* (Matthew 22:18) and evil *words* and *deeds* (Matthew 15:19). This evil is connected with the sinful self, or the “flesh” as it’s often called in scripture. We need to deny this side of ourselves, take up the cross and follow Christ:

“Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23 NIV)

Much of our world is also evil. Satan and his evil forces are actively at work in every sphere trying to lead mankind astray. As Christians we need to be countercultural. We need to work actively against this evil and suffer the persecution which will surely come:

“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15:19 NIV)

remembering that Jesus prayed for his disciples:

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” (John 17:15 NIV)

and assured them he had overcome the world:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NIV)

But, until the second coming, we continue to live in this fallen world – waiting patiently and working to help God to redeem many and make the world as much like the kingdom as possible. In our resistance to evil we depend on Jesus the Victor as we pray “deliver us from evil”. As Rudolf Schnackenburg said “Because the prayer is offered in the faith that God’s kingdom is coming, fear of the power of evil is eliminated.” So, we say with the psalmist, “I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). The one who dealt decisively on the cross with Satan and evil generally will one day remove every smallest piece of evil from around us and from within us.

### **For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever**

The modern version of the Prayer ends with this doxology, these words of praise. As we’ve seen they derive from the *Didache* and are not present in early manuscripts of Matthew’s gospel. As we’ve said the *Didache* is an early text which had wide acceptance in the early church and thus carries significant authority (unlike the later Gnostic texts), although it doesn’t have the full authority of scripture. Whatever its origins the doxology makes sense both theologically and liturgically. The prayer both begins and ends with God and it’s appropriate that it should end with praise of God.

We’ve already looked at the kingdom of God and its significance and here we focus on its permanence. At the time the Prayer was given the Roman Empire was near the peak of its power, yet it soon began to crumble and was eventually destroyed. All earthly empires eventually fall. Not so with God’s kingdom, that’s eternal.

This was revealed to Daniel:

“And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever.” (Daniel 2:43-44 NIV)

God also revealed to Daniel that Christ and his kingdom would bring all earthly kingdoms to an end:

“While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.” (Daniel 2:34-35 NIV)

The rock represents Christ and his kingdom. All other kingdoms will fall at the feet of the King of Kings whose kingdom will be eternal.

It is this truth we remember as we come to the end of the Prayer.

God is all powerful and incomparably glorious. In his prayer after the Last Supper Jesus used the words “glory” or “glorify” nine times suggesting that the glory of God which he shared with the Father was a key thought in his mind as he prepared for the cross. The glory of God is a key theme in scripture generally, because it refers to who God is and his majesty and magnificence. The Shorter Westminster catechism begins with the declaration that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. There is nothing else we can do that will make us more fulfilled.

Those who truly follow Christ will know where the true glory is. They like Paul will reject all the false glitter of this world and instead seek the glory of Christ alone:

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” (Philippians 3:7-9 NIV)

The things of God – his kingdom, his power and his glory – are forever, because God is forever. He’s eternal. We can’t really imagine what that means because it’s impossible in our present universe. But we know it exists in God’s kingdom. He’s infinite and eternal. The real wonder is that God has invited into the blessings of his kingdom and the eternity that goes along with that.

We end the Prayer with “Amen”. This word was traditionally used by the Israelites who used it to mean “And so be it”. It’s an agreement in faith to all that has been prayed. By saying Amen together when we pray the Prayer in church we collectively agree to all that the Prayer means and brings and we do so with a shout of joy. Also Jesus is our “Amen”:

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” (Revelation 3:14 NIV)

So, Jesus is the last word that follows all our praise and worship, all our prayers and petitions. We often end our prayers with “In the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord”. When we end the Lord’s Prayer by saying Amen we are reminded of the one in whose name we pray, the one who is our Amen. We long for his return as we say “Amen”.

### **The Prayer in Our Daily Lives**

Firstly we should pay closer attention when we say the Prayer in our Church services. We’ve learned a lot about the meaning of the Prayer this morning in a number of different contexts and from a number of different viewpoints; let’s bear all that it means in mind every time we say the Prayer. We mustn’t just say the Prayer mechanically; we need to say it with understanding and from our hearts.

Secondly, we should use the Prayer frequently as part of our personal prayers; again bearing in mind all of its meaning and significance. At the heart of the Prayer is our relationship with God, so we can use it to feed and nurture our relationship with God by approaching him regularly with the Prayer.



Thirdly, we can use the Prayer as a model for all our intercessions. We can do this by paraphrasing and expanding the various petitions. So, for example when we come to “lead us not into temptation” we can add in all the actual temptations we are currently facing and ask for God’s strength and wisdom in overcoming them. When we pray “give us today our daily bread” we can add in our current material needs and also those of others known to us and ask for God’s generous provision for these needs. When we pray “Your kingdom come” we can pray that it would be so in the inner lives of particular people we are praying for, or for the many situations we are concerned about. There are many possible themes we can use here.

In this way the Prayer begins to shape all our other prayers and petitions and gives structure and life to them. I believe that this will enrich our prayer lives and make our prayers more meaningful. It will allow the Prayer, the prayer of Jesus, to shape and nourish our daily prayer lives. When we pray in this way we can draw closer to Jesus, the one who taught us the Prayer.

Indeed, the Prayer can begin to shape the rest of our lives as well; look at the following words written by a seventeenth century Anglican Bishop, Jeremy Taylor:

“He walks as in the presence of God that converses with him in frequent prayer and frequent communion; in all his necessities, in all doubtings; that opens all his wants to him; that weeps before him for his sins; that asks remedy and support for his weakness; that fears him as a Judge; reverences him as Lord; obeys him as a Father; and loves him.”

I think it’s clear how the influence of the Prayer shines forth from these words.

Let us also make the Prayer a central part of our faith, thoughts, attitudes and actions. When we do that we will be drawn closer to Jesus and like Jesus we will be drawn to pray regularly. God’s will and words will flow from our hearts and minds to heaven, and God’s life, in all its richness and glory, will dwell in us forever.