

The Lord's Prayer Through First-Century Eyes

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Introduction

The so-called Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-15) is one of the most well known portions of the New Testament (NT).² From the earliest days of church history, one sees that the church has always treasured these words of the Lord Jesus, with the result that it also became a foundational part of the liturgy of Roman Catholicism. Truly, from the earliest of times, and all throughout church history, this has been one of the most beloved portions of the NT as well as one of the most discussed portions of the Bible.

In more recent days, some, in their desire of being biblically precise, have suggested that the Lord's Prayer would be better called The Disciple's Prayer, since it was the disciples who had asked Jesus how they should pray,³ and that the expression The Lord's Prayer would be better applied to the so-called High Priestly Prayer of John 17. Despite this plea for biblical precision, which this writer endorses, this writer sees no

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² Although the Lord's Prayer is found in another portions of the Synoptic Gospels (i.e., Luke 11:2-4), this paper will focus solely on that which has been recorded by the apostolic eyewitness Matthew, in verses 6:9-15. It is beyond the scope of this paper to interact with the claims of Redaction Critics as they seek to explain the relationship of the Matthean and Lucan accounts. D. A. Carson presents a helpful summary of these issues in his commentary titled "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 166-167. This writer assumes the full historical integrity of the account as presented by the apostolic eyewitness Matthew.

³ While the desire for biblical precision is always commendable, a renaming of the Lord's Prayer may be considered by some as an unnecessary, theological hair splitting.

compelling reason for this kind of re-designation and will continue to use the traditional designation The Lord’s Prayer (LP).⁴

The purpose of this paper will be to focus on a fresh interpretation of the LP in a way that might bring certain fresh insights to the reader. In view of all that has been written on this portion of Scripture, some might ask whether there is a need for this kind of study; after all, there has been much written on the LP throughout church history. This writer believes that there is indeed positive value in a fresh interpretation. This is not because great theologians of the past have failed to bless the church with many fine observations over the ages. Rather, it is because a careful, contextual interpretation of this passage might actually help bring to light certain heretofore unrecognized nuances that can be a blessing to the Body of Christ as it seeks clarity in understanding the whole counsel of God’s truth. In particular, this paper will seek to show how two particular aspects of interpretation in this passage have often been missed or glossed over by commentators in past days. One of these major points centers on Jesus’ words in the first portion of the prayer while the second comes out of the second major portion of the prayer.

For starters, this study will first of all begin with a focus on critical hermeneutical issues by presenting a preliminary overview of the importance of progressive revelation and historical context when interpreting the LP. In other words one should ask, is it possible that some past interpretations in the LP have been off the mark because interpreters have sometimes failed to look at the LP in its original historical setting? This writer believes this to be the case. Most theologians will agree that good exegesis takes

⁴ John Broadus points out that historical evidence as early as A.D. 250 shows that this portion of Scripture has been called the Lord’s Prayer, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), 132.

place when the exegete takes into account the original historical context and where a certain saying occurs in the flow of progressive revelation. A failure to let the text speak from its own historical context sometimes results in theological ideas being read into the original context. For this reason, the first section of this paper will give attention to these broad hermeneutical issues.

The second and third sections of this paper will focus on the text itself by presenting a verse-by verse interpretation of the LP. Throughout the paper, the reader is encouraged to think about two major points of application that this prayer brings to the Christian. First and foremost, it is the way that Jesus in the first part of this prayer encourages each one of us to have our hearts focused on the glory of God and His promise of redemption and restoration.⁵ In the first portion of this prayer, Jesus reminded the disciples that the consuming focus of their hearts and thoughts must be on God's gracious promise of redemption and restoration, a restoration which will be fully realized with the return of the Lord Jesus. The second major point of application comes in the second half of this prayer wherein the focus is not so much on the vertical aspects of one's faith, but rather upon the horizontal aspects of faith in terms of how God's people should properly relate to one another while living in this world.⁶ As Jesus made clear, the purpose of God contains crucial truths at both levels, vertically and horizontally. Both of these will be unfolded in the exegetical portions of this paper. God is calling His people to a two-fold focus: (1) an all-consuming focus on the promise of glory and blessing at

⁵ Peter reminds his readers that the believer should "fix his hope completely on the grace to be brought" at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:13).

⁶ Just as Peter admonished believers to have a strong vertical focus (cf. 1:13), he also reminded believers that they should "fervently love one another from the heart" as well (1:22). The Lord's prayer brings the reader face to face with each of these two issues and shows the reader how he is to shape his life in view of the challenges every Christian must face.

the return of Jesus Christ, and (2) an all-consuming focus on applying the grace of God in everyday living.

The Importance of Progressive Revelation and Historical Context

One of the cardinal rules of sound exegesis revolves around the importance of recognizing the original historical context when searching for a correct interpretation of the biblical text.⁷ One simple example that can illustrate the importance of this basic hermeneutical principle comes from an incident in the wilderness when God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent as a means of healing for rebellious Israel (Num 21). As the text indicates, Israel had been in rebellion against God and His chosen leader Moses, so God sent poisonous serpents among the people to judge them for their rebellion. The people began to cry out for mercy, so God commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and raise it up on a pole so that healing might come to any who would look upon the brazen serpent. As Jesus later revealed (John 3:14), this incident would actually find a spiritual, typological realization in the crucifixion of Himself when He was lifted up on the cross of Calvary. Jesus spoke these words and the Apostle John recorded them so that we might know this typological connection. However, it would be wrong for anyone to ever assume that the OT audience knew or believed that the brazen serpent was a type

⁷ There are some who would seek to discard this time-tested principle, especially when the issues concern eschatological issues. Some, for example, would prefer to take a “Canonical Approach” to exegesis rather than letting each passage be interpreted in its own historical context. Rather than focusing on a text in its own historical context, taking into account where this saying or writing appears in the flow of progressive revelation, such writers would say that all exegesis (or at least exegesis involving eschatological contexts) should be done at a canonical level. In other words, earlier passages should be interpreted on the basis of the entire corpus of canonical revelation. For example, one would be justified to use the Book of Revelation as a basis for exegeting statements by Moses. This writer believes that one should always give due attention to the original historical context of any writing and to the issue of progressive revelation. Bruce Waltke illustrates this kind of thinking when he writes, “The classical rule . . . [that] the New Interprets the Old—should be accepted by all Christian theologians” (in “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Wheaton: Crossway, 1988], 264). This kind of faulty reasoning shows a blatant disregard for the contextual meaning of the original text in its own historical context.

of Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. Progressive revelation would later show this typological connection, but the original audience in the time of Moses (and for that matter, for anyone who read this passage before John 3:14-15) would have no way of knowing that such a connection existed. In other words, the exegesis of Numbers 21 must focus on the original historical context of Moses and his hearers. Likewise, a later reading and exegesis of Numbers 21 must refrain from reading John 3 into the exegesis of Numbers 21. This one example serves as a simple reminder that Bible exegetes must pay special attention to original historical context and not make the error of reading later, progressive revelation into earlier, antecedent revelation at the exegetical level.

This is not to say that one cannot or should not bring out the theological connections that truly do exist in the Bible. The theologian and Bible expositor is certainly right for showing such theological relationships. The relationships, though, are at the theological level and not the exegetical level. In other words, the exegesis of Numbers 21 must take place only within the historical context of the original audience. It is then, after the contextual interpretation of Numbers has already taken place, that the theologian and expositor can (and should) bring out the theological significance of this passage in connection with the redeeming work of Christ on the cross. It is a hermeneutical error, however, for someone to re-interpret an earlier passage on the basis of later revelation. It is proper, however, to allow earlier revelation—revelation that is already part of an informing theology to the later biblical writers—to help inform one when seeking interpretation of the later passage.⁸ This importance of this hermeneutical principle will show itself in the next section in the analysis of the LP. At this point, it is

⁸ Nevertheless, even at this point, each passage must be interpreted on its own. Earlier passages cannot become interpretive grids for later passages.

time to begin a focus on the text itself and how the Lord Jesus has taught His people about proper priorities of prayer.

Petitions at the Vertical Level of Man's Existence

In historical context, the LP stems from the rebuke that Jesus had just given his opponents about hypocritical, Pharisaic practices of worship. This included a rebuke for several forms of hypocritical externalism that seemed impressive to man, but was abominable in the eyes of God. For example, Jesus told His disciples that the giving of alms should not be done in a way that brings attention to the act itself (Matt 6:1-4). Giving that is done with the motive of man's praise finds no favor in the eyes of God; in fact, it is detestable to him.

Second, Jesus condemned the common practice of praying in public for the purpose of trying to gain attention to obtain the praise of men (6:5-6). This is not to say that public prayer is wrong in itself. Rather, the problem arises when such prayer is done with the motivation of self glorification and praise from men.

Third, Jesus also condemned the practice of meaningless repetition in prayer (6:7-8). Men may be impressed by repetitious kinds of prayer, but God is not. This is not to say that it is wrong for men to be persistent in their pleas, for Jesus Himself teaches that men should keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking (7:7; cf. Luke 18:1-8). The point is this, though: meaningless, vain repetition may impress men, but it is offensive to God if done to impress men with outward piety. Jesus tells His disciples that they should not imitate these kinds of hypocritical practices (6:8).

With this as the contextual background, Jesus then gives His disciples a positive instruction on *how* they should seek to pray.⁹ Unfortunately, many throughout the ages have been guilty of the very thing Jesus condemned in that they have turned the LP into a mantra that is repeated over and over, supposing that multiple repetitions will somehow elicit the favor of God.¹⁰ Verse nine makes it clear, though, that Jesus is not giving a template of fixed words, but rather a set of theological principles by which men might better understand the kinds of principles that should influence prayer. As Blomberg notes, “The key word in v. 9a is “how.” Verses 9b–13 illustrate key components and attitudes that Jesus’ disciples should incorporate into their prayer lives.”¹¹ With this basic fact in mind, one is now in the position of being ready to look at the particulars of the LP.

The church has long recognized that the Lord’s Prayer easily breaks down into two major portions: (1) petitions at the vertical level of man’s existence (6:9-10), and (2) petitions at the horizontal level of man’s existence (6:11-15). This distinction is not to say that there is not a relationship between these two ideas, but only to recognize that there is a certain emphasis that clearly comes out in each of these two sections. As many have observed in the past, these vertical petitions contain three major pleas which teach the Christian about what kinds of priorities should be kept in mind when approaching God in prayer.

⁹ In other words, Jesus was not giving the disciples a prayer formula, for this was the very kind of thing He was seeking to correct. Rather, Jesus was teaching the disciples about the kinds of things that should characterize God-approved prayer.

¹⁰ As Carson puts it, it is “the misconception that mere length will make prayers efficacious” (“Matthew,” 166).

¹¹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992), 118.

First Vertical Petition: The Plea for Men to Recognize Yahweh as Holy

The first petition taught by Jesus is the plea that God's name would be recognized as holy, as reflected in the words "hallowed by Thy name." As a preliminary observation, there is something about this opening command that would have immediately grabbed the attention of the original audience. This would have been the fact that Jesus told His disciples that they should address God as "Father." The use of this term Father indicates an intimacy of relationship that one did not commonly find in contemporary Jewish contexts.¹² It is true that there are several times in the OT when God is addressed as Father, but these instances are rare.¹³ The point is that whether one looks at biblical precedent or common Jewish practices of the day, one thing was true: this kind of intimate dialogue with God was not the common practice.¹⁴ By the teaching of Jesus though, one learns that God, the transcendent One who dwells in heaven, is to be approached by His children with a tender intimacy as Father, since this truly is the intimacy that He grants to His own.

In this petition, Jesus then gives His disciples instructions about the first thing they should pray for, telling them to pray "... hallowed be Thy name" (v. 9). This petition is in the form of a command, but it is in the less common form of a third person command (rather than a direct second person imperative). In other words, it is not a direct command to God to make His name be hallowed, but rather it is a command that

¹² Carson notes that even though one can find the use of father in reference to God prior to the time of Christ, it was not until after the coming of Christ that it became "characteristic to address God as Father" ("Matthew," 169).

¹³ Among these would be passages like Isaiah 1:2; 63:16; and 64:8 (cf. Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9; Pss 89:26; 103:13; Mal 2:10).

¹⁴ This is not to say that godly saints of the OT age did not enjoy rich, intimate fellowship with God in their prayer lives. As the Psalms clearly reveal, the godly saint has always enjoyed such intimacy.

His name might be hallowed.¹⁵ This immediately raises the question, “Just what did Jesus mean when He gave these instructions?”

It is at this point where one sees how some have made the error of confusing interpretation and original meaning with subsequent application and how the passage might have relevance for daily living.¹⁶ For example, one might say that the meaning of this petition is that godly, Christian living is what results in God’s name being seen as holy, but the question remains, “Is this actually the true interpretation of what Jesus meant when He spoke these words?” Keener is among those who recognize that there can be very good application of this principle when he writes,

In the present God’s people could hallow his name by living rightly; if they lived wrongly, they would “profane” his name, or bring it into disrepute among the nations (cf. also Ex 20:7; Jer. 34:16; 44:25–26; Ezek 13:19; 20:14; Amos 2:7).¹⁷

This writer sees value in this kind of application, but the issue of contextual meaning still remains. So, on the one hand this may be a good application of the verse, but there is also good reason for not holding this as an exegetical interpretation of the statement but only a mere application.

The command Jesus made comes from the Greek verb ἀγιάζω (*hagiazo*), a word which has the root idea of holiness and separateness. The term can be used in a mere spatial sense, but in the Bible it often has the ethical idea of spiritual separation from that which is sinful and defiling. As Lloyd-Jones brings out, this verb carries the basic idea of

¹⁵ One should be careful that in noting this grammatical nuance, there may not be any real theological significance to this detail that one should try to force.

¹⁶ The reader is reminded that even though applications may be many, the interpretation and original meaning of the passage will always be one. Christians should always strive to see how Scripture can be applied, but this step of application should only come after one has done sound, contextual exegesis to determine the meaning of the text.

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Matt 6:9.

sanctification or reverence.¹⁸ Now, on the one hand, in terms of God's essential nature, the Bible makes it clear that there already is a very wide ethical gap between Himself and sinful man (i.e., God is holy but men are not). Thus, for example, God gave Moses the command to remove his sandals, because God is holy and men are not (Exod 3:5). The prophet Isaiah repeatedly emphasized the holiness of God in contrast to the sinfulness of man (cf. e.g., Isa. 6:1-7; 57:15). In both an existential, spatial sense and in an ethical sense, then, God always has been and always be holy because of who He is. Thus, men do not and can not make God holy for He already is by virtue of His own nature.

The command that God's name be hallowed, then, should be understood in the following way: God is commanding not that His name (i.e., He Himself) should be made holy, but rather that men might recognize God as holy.¹⁹ In other words, says Jesus, for the Christian a priority aspect of prayer should be that of wanting God to be recognized on earth as the holy God who He truly is, and making this a priority aspect of personal prayer.²⁰

In this search for interpretation, it would be appropriate at this point to ask whether or not there is anything in the OT (i.e., in prior revelation that would have been available to the community of Israel) that might help the exegete in determining more precisely what Jesus might have intended when He made this statement. It would seem that the OT actually may provide such a background that helps uncover the meaning of Christ's words. In particular, the reader should consider Ezekiel chapter 36 for a possible

¹⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1960), 59.

¹⁹ The heavenly realm (i.e., holy angels and dead saints) already recognizes and acknowledges the holiness of God.

²⁰ The plea, then, is not that mankind would make God holy, but that mankind might recognize God as holy.

thematic connection that might stand behind the teachings of Jesus. Ezekiel 36 falls within a larger section that effectively begins in 33:21 and goes all the way through the end of the prophecy in 48:35.²¹ In chapter 36, Yahweh is making the promise that a day of restoration will come for the nation Israel. As the chapter indicates, it was the apostasy of Israel and her own guilt that brought her into judgment, exile, and reproach, but, as God promises, one day He will reverse that tragic situation, for He Himself will take action to restore that same nation from their shame (Ezek 36:1-15).

In this section, God also makes it clear that Israel's apostasy and exile did not only bring reproach and shame upon the nation itself, but more importantly their sin and exile also brought reproach and shame upon Yahweh Himself (36:16ff.). In verse 20 God tells them, "When they came to the nations where they went, *they profaned My holy name*, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.'"²² In considering these words, one should pay careful attention to how many times in this section Yahweh emphasizes ideas like (1) the holiness of His name and (2) the fact that Israel's apostasy and exile brought a profanation of the name of Yahweh. God's name should be recognized as holy by all men, Jew and Gentile alike,²³ but Israel's sin has brought shame to God since they are the ones who bear His name as His people.

²¹ This entire latter section is dominated by Yahweh's promise to Israel for a merciful restoration.

²² The original Hebrew text is provided along with an English transliteration, LXX rendering, and English transliteration of the LXX: וַיְהִלֵּלוּ אֶת־שְׁמָךְ קָדְשָׁם (wayehallelu `eth shem qadeshiy, καὶ ἐβεβήλωσαν τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ ἅγιον, kai ebebēlosan to onoma mou to hagion). The key point to be observed is how in this verse and in the verses that follow God makes repeated references that His name is "holy" and is to be regarded by men as holy.

²³ The Hebrew root for the word "holy" is the term קָדֵשׁ (*qdsh*), a word that carries the same basic semantical significance as ἀγιάζω (*hagiazo*) as used in the LXX.

In the verses that follow, God goes on to say that even though His people have caused reproach to fall upon His name, the day is coming when God Himself will take action to reverse this situation, and the reason why is because He has concern “*for [His] holy name*” (v. 21).²⁴ That is, says Ezekiel, God is concerned about the fact that His name has been blasphemed and dishonored due to the sin of His covenant nation Israel. It should not have been a surprise to Israel that God’s reputation was being blasphemed by their apostasy. Centuries earlier, Moses warned the people that disloyalty to the Mosaic covenant would bring about covenant curses (cf. Lev 26:32-33) and that this would also include great consternation among her enemies.²⁵ Israel had been told centuries earlier that their own sin would bring reproach upon Yahweh their God. In other words, just as Moses had foretold and just as Ezekiel was now explaining, the apostasy and exile of the covenant nation had brought shame to the name of God in the eyes of the rest of mankind. The reason is because it was an issue that revolved around “the character of Yahweh,”²⁶ for in the eyes of the Gentile world either (1) “Yahweh had willingly abandoned His people,” or (2) He was “incapable of defending them against the superior might of Marduk, the god of Babylon.”²⁷

Therefore, says God, His restoration plans for the nation will not be motivated by virtue of their miserable situation (not at least primarily as the present context suggests), but primarily because of God’s “holy name,” the name which they had profaned among

²⁴ The Hebrew and Greek of v. 21 read as follows: קָדְשָׁם כַּלְלָע, διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ ἅγιον (i.e., “for my holy name”).

²⁵ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, gen. eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 347.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 348.

the nations (v. 22).²⁸ As the NASB puts it, God tells them that He will “vindicate the holiness of [His] great name which has been profaned among the nations” which Israel has caused to be profaned in their midst. In other words, Israel’s apostasy and exile have caused God’s name to be profaned and mocked by the rest of the world since they were the ones who had been named as His people. What is God’s solution? God says that He will act in such a way so as to “vindicate the holiness” of His name. God’s promise is that He will act so as to cause mankind to see that He is a holy God. The Hebrew text is even more clear and emphatic than the English on this issue of holiness for the term rendered as “vindicate” by the NASB is actually a Hiphil form (in basic essence, a causative form) of the verb *שָׁדַךְ* (*qdsh*), “to be holy.”²⁹ To put it in literal terms, God is saying that He will cause His great name to be recognized as holy among all the Gentile nations into which His people have been scattered.³⁰ Ezekiel shows the reader that God’s restoration of Israel will bring about a situation in which all the nations of the world will at long last come to recognize Yahweh as the holy God who He truly is. God’s name will be hallowed among men. As Cooper puts it, “The restoration of Israel would serve as a signal to the nations, including Babylon and Edom, that Yahweh was still in control and

²⁸ The Hebrew and Greek of v. 22 read as follows: *לֹא־שָׁמֵן־קְרָב־יְהוָה אֶת־שְׂמֵחָה, διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ ἅγιον* (i.e., “for my holy name”).

²⁹ The Hebrew and Greek of v. 23 read as follows: *וְלֹא־שָׁמֵן־קְרָב־יְהוָה אֶת־שְׂמֵחָה, καὶ ἀγαπάσω τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ μέγα* (i.e., “and I will sanctify my great name,” or to put it in other terms, “and I will cause my name to be hallowed”).

³⁰ Ibid., 351. As Block puts it, Ezekiel’s use of *שָׁדַךְ* “highlights the fact that his activity is designed to resolve the present theological crisis. That which was once holy [i.e., God’s holy name], but has been desecrated, must be reconsecrated.”

still regarded Israel as His people. God promised to reestablish his reputation, or ‘name’ among them.”³¹

How and when will this take place? Verse 24 explains how this will be, for God tells Israel that He will take His people (i.e., an elect remnant from within the nation Israel) from all the places where they have been scattered and He will bring them back to their own land. Permanent restoration to the land of Canaan for the nation Israel (along with deliverance from enemies and perpetual peace in the land) is one central element of God’s gracious promises to Israel.³²

Secondly, God also promised that this restoration will not be merely external, but more importantly it will involve a spiritual cleansing and regeneration (vv. 25ff.). God’s promise to the nation Israel is that He will bring about a spiritual cleansing and restoration for the corporate nation, (v. 25), a corporate restoration that brings the nation to the place where she has both the desire for heartfelt, godly obedience, but also a genuine capacity to live it out.³³ As the OT affirms in numerous locations, Israel’s

³¹ Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel* in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 17 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 315.

³² It is a false assertion to say that Israel’s release from Babylon by the hand of Cyrus, king of Persia and the subsequent return to the land by some Jews was a fulfillment of God’s restoration promises and kingdom promise to Israel. Several lines of biblical data make this clear: (1) Moses said that God’s eschatological restoration of Israel would include a permanent return to the land as well as a permanent spiritual restoration, events which never took place (cf. e.g., Deut 30). (2) The promises of the pre-exilic prophets expand and amplify the Mosaic promises so clearly and so extensively that it is impossible for one to claim that these promises have been fulfilled in a release from Babylon and temporary return to the land. (3) The messages of the post-exilic prophets (who spoke after the release from Babylon) make it abundantly clear that the restoration promises were still in the future and would also result in an utter destruction of Israel’s enemies—something which has **never** happened. (4) The Jews never again had a king ruling from Jerusalem on David’s throne. In fact, they were in bondage to Gentile overlords (cf. Neh 9:36). (5) The NT affirms that these promises will not be fulfilled until a second coming of Christ has arrived (e.g., Matt 6:10; 24:30; 25:31-46; 26:29, 64). (6) The crushing defeat by Rome brought an even greater and more extended stage of the *diaspora* that has persisted to this very day. God’s promises to Israel for restoration have not yet been fulfilled, but they shall be at the return of Messiah Jesus.

³³ This promise is tantamount to the “heart circumcision” that Israel lacked (cf. Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; 9:25-26), but which God has promised He will one day bring forth for the nation (Deut 30:6).

restoration will come by the gracious outpouring of God's Spirit upon an elect remnant from within the nation (cf. Zech 13:8-9 in which God speaks of redemption to a remnant of one third of the nation), a restoration which God will bring about during the great tribulation when He brings this remnant to recognize that Jesus is in fact the promised Messiah even though they had previously despised and rejected Him (Zech 12:10).³⁴ God's eschatological promise to Israel is that of full covenant restoration, a never-ending age of blessing, says God, when they will be His people and He will be their God (Ezek 36:28). God will accomplish this restoration through the fiery trials of the tribulation period when He restores Israel and at long last establishes His kingdom on this very earth with the messianic Son of David ruling from His throne in Jerusalem (Ezek 37:21-28).

Now it is time to pull together a few observations from this OT background to see how they relate to the LP. Throughout the OT, one can see that God has indicated that the future restoration of Israel and the coming of the messianic kingdom will be those events which cause all the rest of mankind (Israel included) to recognize the holiness of Yahweh's name and to worship Him the way that they truly should.³⁵ This is exactly what Jesus said His people should pray for. Jesus was commanding His people to pray for the fulfillment of His restoration promises as enunciated in the OT. Why pray for God's name to be hallowed, then? It goes hand in hand with the fact that the restoration

³⁴ Just as here in Ezekiel, a number of other OT texts speak of this promised Spirit outpouring upon the nation Israel (cf. Isa 32:15; 43:18-19; 44:3-5; Joel 2:28-32; Zech 12:10), an outpouring that brings about repentant faith and full restoration to Yahweh for that nation. These events will transpire during the final seven-year time period which is sometimes called Daniel's seventieth week (i.e., the seven-year tribulation period which comes immediately after the rapture of the church and commences with a seven-year covenant that is orchestrated by the one known as the Antichrist).

³⁵ Both the OT and NT make it clear that the only ones who are permitted entrance into the messianic kingdom (whether Jew or Gentile) are those who have personally repented of sin and trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior. As Carson points out, when that time comes Yahweh will at last "be treated as holy" ("Matthew," 170).

of Israel (which will also include a restoration of this whole) will produce an age of eternal bliss when all mankind will recognize God as the Holy One who He truly is.

Having established the proper interpretation of Jesus' teachings, it is at this point that the reader should now ask, "How can I apply these truths to my life in the here and now?" The answer is as follows: Like Peter said, believers should have their hope fixed completely on the grace to be brought to man with the return of Jesus Christ. God's people are to be a heavenly minded people whose passions are not governed by the lusts and desires of this present age. God's people should have "kingdom attitudes" and "kingdom passions" in the here and now which also bring glory to God in the here and now. The Christian should be living this way and praying that God would help him to live these things out so that God's name might even be hallowed in the present age and not only in the coming kingdom. This is certainly a proper kind of application, but it is also one that is driven by a proper interpretation.

Second and Third Vertical Petitions: The Plea for the Messianic Kingdom to Come and the Plea for God's Will to be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

In light of all that has been said with reference to the first petition, it should now be clear to the reader that both the second and third petitions bear a very close relationship to that first petition, for they are intimately connected with one another in theme.

Even a cursory reading of the OT will show that the OT is replete with promises about Israel's restoration in association with the messianic kingdom.³⁶ The subject is huge and a short, focused study like this cannot even begin to develop this theme in

³⁶ E.g., Isa 2:1ff.; 4:2ff.; 9:6-7; 24:23; 32:1-20; Jer. 23:5; 30:21; 33:15; Ezek 37:21-28; Dan 2:44-45; 7:14; Hos 3:5; Joel 3:16-21; Amos 9:11-15; Obad 19-21; Mic 2:12-13; 4:1ff.; :3ff.; Zech 12-14.

detail. However, it can bring sufficient attention to the petitions “Thy kingdom come” and “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” to adequately make the point about what Jesus intended to say when He spoke these words (Matt 6:10). One would expect that those who were listening to Jesus speak these words on that hillside would have naturally made a connection with the promises they were already familiar with in the OT (i.e., the OT promises of total restoration that come with the arrival of the Messiah and His kingdom). In other words, by thinking of Jesus’ words in the original historical context, the most natural inference is that Jesus was referring to the earthly, geo-political kingdom that the OT had repeatedly promised.³⁷ In other words, Jesus was *not* saying that God’s kingdom comes and His will done here on earth when Christians practice kingdom living in their personal lives here and now.³⁸

Granted, this sort of interpretation is a popular idea and many godly teachers have suggested this idea as the meaning of this passage. One illustration comes from the Puritan preacher Thomas Watson who said that Jesus did *not* mean by these words a “political or earthly kingdom,” but rather Jesus meant first and foremost a “kingdom of grace” within the hearts and conscience of godly Christians as they live their pilgrimage in this present world. In other words, says Watson, Jesus was telling believers that they should pray for God’s kingdom to increase by praying that grace would abound in their

³⁷ By using expressions like “geo-political” this by no means is meant to suggest any kind of dichotomy between the ideas political and spiritual. Some writers have put forth the utterly false idea that an earthly millennial kingdom cannot be spiritual. It is this kind of dichotomous/Platonic thinking that says an earthly kingdom would be carnal and unspiritual, but this is not a biblically driven idea. In the same way that Genesis 1-2 was earthly and material, but thoroughly spiritual, so too the millennial, messianic kingdom will be earthly and material, but also fully spiritual (i.e., dominated by godly, spiritual principles).

³⁸ In the discussion of the last petition, it was suggested that there is potential application with this kind of idea although this is not the proper contextual interpretation of original intent.

daily lives.³⁹ In other words, this is a plea for God's help for godly living on a daily basis. This certainly could be a way in which one might find application in Bible exposition, but this is not the contextual interpretation as Watson has asserted.⁴⁰

MacArthur makes it clear that even though one might make such an application by speaking about kingdom living, the primary aspect of the text in terms of interpretation lies in the expectation of Christ coming to rule on earth:

To pray Thy kingdom come is to pray for the program of the eternal Deity to be fulfilled, for Christ to come and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. His program and His plan should be the preoccupation of our lives and of our prayers.⁴¹

Thus, the God-centered Christian should always be wanting to let Christ have lordship in the heart (application), but this, in fact, is not the direct interpretation of what Jesus told His disciples they should pray for. The coming of Christ and the establishing of God's kingdom on this earth will usher in an age when His moral will shall be carried out here on earth just as it is carried out in heaven right now by the holy angels. This is something God's people are to desire and pray for.

It would seem that much of the debate and confusion about this issue has arisen because of the attempt to impose theological presuppositions upon the text, and then to try and justify the imposition with an ambiguous form of hermeneutics. At the core of the problem are some of the following issues: (1) Many theologians have inherited the theological position that there simply cannot be a literal restoration of the nation Israel in which Christ blesses the present earth by ruling from His throne in Jerusalem (i.e., a

³⁹ Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993), 59.

⁴⁰ Watson's denial that Jesus was speaking of an earthly, political kingdom (i.e., the kingdom that God promised to the nation Israel in the OT) seems to come from the a-priori presupposition that God will not fulfill His promises to the nation.

⁴¹John MacArthur, *Matthew* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 379.

Premillennial position).⁴² (2) Some have attempted to get around this issue by redefining the kingdom language as being strictly spiritual and by saying that it refers to Christian living in the church (as having been noted in the former section). (3) Other writers sought to redefine the kingdom language by saying that at an exegetical level it should be understood as having two kinds of meaning: (a) a literal, future kingdom and (b) present Christian, “kingdom” living. As Carson put it:

To pray “your kingdom come” is therefore simultaneously to ask that God’s saving royal rule be extended now as people bow in submission to him and already taste the eschatological blessing of salvation and to cry for the consummation of the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 11:17; 22:20).⁴³

Despite the many helpful insights Carson offers, this writer is compelled to bring attention to the hermeneutical problems of this kind of reasoning. One of the problems is that it imposes a theological idea upon the text that would have been foreign to the original author and audience. Secondly, it introduces a confusion between the steps of exegesis and application. There certainly would be nothing wrong with looking for a good way of applying this text to the present time; in fact, this is what every Christian should be doing. However, by saying that present salvation and present Christian living

⁴² To deny this kind of restoration and this kind of kingdom, the theologian must allegorize extensive portions of the OT and say that even though the OT repeatedly promises this restoration to the nation Israel, its true fulfillment is in the church. As church historians have noted (historians from every background whether Dispensational or Covenant), it is quite clear that the first 250 years of church history was dominated by a pre-millennial, futuristic kind of eschatology. It was only with the passing of many years that a denial of futuristic premillennialism began to fade as being the commonly held view of eschatology. Some of the factors that influenced this shift included the following: (1) Israel had ceased to exist as a nation after its defeat by Roman armies. (2) Anti-semitic attitudes in the Gentile world (even within the visible church) often found it offensive to speak of a kingdom that would be centered around Israel. (3) The Neo-Platonic thinking that was popular in that era was strongly opposed to the concept of an earthly kingdom (i.e., an earthly kingdom must of necessity be carnal and unspiritual). (4) The rise and propagation of allegorical hermeneutics by certain popular Christian theologians introduced what they believed was a way of harmonizing the Bible with popular philosophy (e.g., Philo, Pantaenus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria, Augustine). In other words, by giving an allegorical interpretation to the kingdom prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, the allegorizers believed that they had discovered the key to (a) making the Bible seem appealing to the world around them while at the same time (b) not denying inspiration or saying that they did not believe what the Bible actually taught.

⁴³ “Matthew,” 170.

(as Carson suggested) is part of the exegetical meaning of the passage is to introduce a confusion between an application of the text and the original, contextual meaning of the text. As Leon Morris has noted, with these words one should understand “the future kingdom that is in mind.”⁴⁴ Morris is correct in this observation. In other words, even if one does grant that the coming of Christ introduced some aspect of the messianic kingdom, one should not impose this idea where it is contextually unacceptable.⁴⁵

What then, is the major focus of these vertically oriented petitions? It is this: God’s people today should have a consuming focus on the return of Jesus Christ so that He might purge this world of evil and usher in an age of eternal bliss. God’s people should long for and pray for that time when Jesus Christ will bring an end to the wickedness and rebellion of this present age. Like the Apostle John, all of God’s people should have the heart-felt desire “Amen, come Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20). This, then, is the emphasis in these first three petitions. They are a focus on God’s promises of a coming kingdom and world restoration. They are a focus on that time of spiritual renewal for all of mankind.⁴⁶ They are a focus on those promises to Israel which repeatedly assure a complete restoration for the nation—a restoration that will include

⁴⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 145.

⁴⁵ The present writer does believe that the first coming of the Messiah (including His rejection, death, resurrection, ascension, and granting of the Spirit), has introduced a certain aspect of the messianic kingdom in this present age. There are a relatively few number of supports for this idea in the NT, but one should not dismiss them (e.g., Matt 13:11 which speaks of “the mysteries of the kingdom” and other passages like Col 1:13 or Rom 15:17). This present aspect of the messianic kingdom, however, is not that which the prophets of the OT foresaw. Rather, it is a new aspect of God’s work in this present age that was previously unforeseen until the NT era both introduced it and subsequently explained it in the NT itself.

⁴⁶ One should never make the mistake of thinking that the restoration of Israel with Jesus Christ ruling from His throne in Jerusalem will somehow mean that Israel is getting blessed more than the Gentiles. The fact is that Israel’s “acceptance” will be like “life from the dead” for the whole world (Rom 11:15). God’s promise was that all the nations of the earth would get blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:3), and this is exactly what will happen in God’s eternal kingdom with the second coming of Jesus Christ (eternal, although initially with 1,000 years on this present physical earth before the creation of the New Heavens and New Earth).

restoration to a remnant of all nations, and a restoration that will at long last cause mankind to praise Yahweh as the Holy God who He truly is.

Petitions at the Horizontal Level of Man's Existence

The second major set of petitions, those which revolve around the horizontal level of man's existence, begins in 6:11 and flows through to 6:15. As was true in the vertical petitions, one also finds here in the horizontal petitions a set of three particular pleas.

First Horizontal Petition: The Plea for Basic Provision of Life's Needs

The first horizontal plea is one which deals with man's appeal to God for the basic needs of life. Jesus tells His disciples that they should pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (v. 11). The concept of "daily bread" may sound a little strange to the Western ears of a twenty-first century Bible student, but it certainly was not strange to a first-century Jew. First of all, bread was the major staple food item for most of the ancient world. To ask for bread, then, was to ask for life's basic provision. Secondly, one must also recognize that the Hebrew term for bread, **לֶחֶם** (*lechem*), was often used to refer to food in general. Various English expressions might thus include ideas like (1) grain for bread, (2) bread, or (3) simply food for nourishment.⁴⁷ In other words, to pray for daily bread was to pray for basic food provision of life, at the center of which was bread itself. Jesus was telling the disciples that they should always live in full dependence upon God for the basic needs of life. This commandment by the Lord was not dissimilar to other contemporary forms of Jewish prayer as others have noted:

⁴⁷ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Volumes 1-4 Combined in One Electronic Edition., electronic ed. (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999, c1994-1996), 526.

The petitions in the Lord's prayer also echo ancient Jewish prayers. The first, "Give us our bread," is akin to the first benediction of grace at mealtime. "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who feedest the whole world with thy goodness ...; thou givest food to all flesh. ... Through thy goodness food hath never failed us: O may it not fail us for ever and ever.⁴⁸

Thus, the command by Jesus that Christians should pray for daily bread is tantamount to telling them that they should always be dependant upon God for all things, especially in the sense of trusting Him for the basics of life.⁴⁹

This kind of prayer might seem strange to wealthy societies in which many people have large stores of material wealth and perhaps have enough accumulated wealth to live the rest of their lives without ever again having to work. Such people may have a hard time praying for daily provision because their wealth has made it difficult for them to recognize just how badly they truly are dependent upon God.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, this is the command: depend wholly upon God and always seek Him for life's provision.

The truth is that all men are very needy in every sense of the word (i.e., needy in the physical and material realm and needy in the spiritual realm). Unfortunately, natural inclinations toward pride and material prosperity often blind us to this need. Perhaps one of the most important truths one could ever recognize and apply to daily living is that of living in full dependence upon God. This is a major theme that comes out not only here, but also in the second and third petitions which follow.

⁴⁸ James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible*, "Rewritten and Updated by Harold J. Chadwick"--Cover.; Includes Index., Rev. ed.]. (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 414.

⁴⁹ As a corrective to those who might pervert the Words of Christ, Jesus did not tell His people to pray for things like wealth, material prosperity, nor anything that they might want. Rather, Jesus commanded that His people should be fully dependent upon God by trusting Him for life's basic provisions.

⁵⁰ Consequently, this is why Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom.

Second Horizontal Petition: The Plea for Divine Forgiveness

The second horizontal petition Jesus commanded is the one “forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” (v. 12). In context, it is easy enough to see that this plea is not dealing with monetary debt, but rather with the sin debt which all men have towards God (Morris notes that in Luke 11:4 Luke recorded the word “sins”).⁵¹ Just as God’s material provision is crucial for man (v. 11), equally so (actually more-so) is God’s spiritual provision for the forgiveness of sins. Truly, man’s greatest need is salvation and the forgiveness of sins, for without this the end result is eternal loss. One is reminded of what Jesus taught when He said, “What is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” Yes, material provision is important, but in an infinitely greater way spiritual provision through the forgiveness of sins is even more important.

The sensitive reader will take note that when Jesus gives the command to *seek* God’s forgiveness, He also made an intimate connection with the idea of the *granting* forgiveness as well (“as we also have forgiven our debtors”). Here is biblical theology with regards to divine mercy: in terms of God’s willingness to grant mercy, He looks very carefully at the heart of those who ask Him to see whether or not they are willing to give mercy to others.

Now, on the one hand, it would be an error to suppose that personal salvation is somehow contingent upon the sinner first granting forgiveness to every person he should forgive, for salvation is clearly by the grace of God to those who believe (cf. Eph 2:8-9).⁵² On the other hand, in the Bible God repeatedly makes it clear that His willingness

⁵¹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 147; Carson notes that the Aramaic word for debt (*hoba*) was often used with reference to sins, “Matthew,” 172.

to be merciful is closely related to the way that men treat one another. Several texts bring this idea out quite clearly. Jesus taught this idea ever so clearly in Matthew 18:21-35 (i.e., it angers God when men come to Him for mercy, but are unwilling to show it towards others). James also emphasizes this truth when he commands believers to speak and act as those who will be judged, since judgment will be merciless to the one who does not show mercy to others (2:12-13).⁵³

What is the operative principle for the Christian to observe here? It is the idea that Christians should give a very high priority to being merciful and forgiving toward others since this will influence how God will be willing to treat them relationally. Morris summarizes the issue well when he writes, “we have no right to seek forgiveness for our own sins if we are withholding forgiveness from others.”⁵⁴ Given the number of times Scripture highlights this point, the reader is certainly well-advised to take seriously this warning that God gives about the need for showing mercy toward others, lest one cut himself off from the favor of God Himself.

Third Horizontal Petition: The Plea for Divine Help to Avoid Future Sin

In this third horizontal petition, Jesus gives His disciples a two-fold plea, the first one being negative and the second one being positive. Jesus then follows the plea itself with an explanation for why one should pray in this manner.

⁵² Scripture is clear that all men get saved on the basis of grace when they personally trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who paid for their sin.

⁵³ King David echoed this idea in Psalm 18:25 when he said that God is kind with the kind and blameless with the blameless, and pure with the pure, yet He is “astute with the crooked” (NASB). In other words, in terms of ongoing relations, God deals with men by the standard they dispense toward others.

⁵⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 147.

The negative form of this plea comes in the expression “do not lead us into temptation,” while the positive side comes in the expression “but deliver us from evil” (6:13). Immediately the question arises as to how these statements fit into the flow of the LP and what exactly Jesus meant when He commanded the disciples to pray this way. The first portion of this plea is a command to God that He not lead one into temptation. The Greek term rendered “temptation” (*πειρασμός*, *peirasmós*) can carry the idea of “temptation” along with a negative connotation, but it can also be rendered by the more neutral English word “testing,” a word that does not necessarily have this negative connotation. One lexical source suggests that the two broad ideas can include (1) “an attempt to learn the nature or character of something by test or trial” (e.g., 1 Pet 1:6; 4:12; Heb 3:8; James 1:2) or (2) “an attempt to make one do something wrong” in the sense of temptation or enticement to sin.⁵⁵ Morris points out that even though some have sought to suggest the more neutral idea of “testing,” it seems best that this use of the term has the negative idea of temptation.⁵⁶

In other words, Jesus was telling His disciples that they should pray that God would not lead them into temptation to sin. Now in a separate context, James made the explicit statement that God does not tempt men into evil (same verb). Many have sought to harmonize the Lord’s command with James by saying that this plea is an urgent plea which is asking God to totally preserve ones self from even coming into the state of temptation. This idea has good grammatical support from the fact that the negated aorist

⁵⁵ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Frühchristlichen [Sic] Literatur, Sixth Edition, Ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, With Viktor Reichmann and on Previous English Editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker.", 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 793.

⁵⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 148.

subjective verb form ($\mu\bar{n}\ \varepsilon i\sigma e\nu\gamma k\eta\varsigma$, *me eiseneykes*) often carries the idea of forbidding the inception of action. Thus, the idea would be that Jesus was teaching His disciples to urgently plead with God for preserving grace to keep them away from temptation, but instead, that God would deliver them from evil.

A question remains, though, how do these statements fit into the context of all that Jesus has been teaching in the LP. One suggestion that has often been overlooked is that this last (two-fold) petition is closely related with the second horizontal petition and the issue of forgiveness. In other words, the plea about protection from temptation and deliverance from evil may be directly related to the concept of granting forgiveness to others. Glasscock is one of the few commentators who have highlighted this connection.⁵⁷ As Glasscock puts it, this appeal (i.e., “do not lead us . . .”) “is best understood in connection with what had just been stated about forgiveness.”⁵⁸ That is, just as Jesus has already told the disciples to seek God’s forgiveness for past sins, He also is warning them about the need for prayer to keep them from future sins as well, in particular with reference to the sin of an unforgiving spirit.⁵⁹ One does not need to be a seasoned expert in the nature of sinful man to know that bitterness and an unwillingness to forgive others is one of the most pervasive of all evils that plagues mankind.

The second part of this final plea also includes the positive plea that God would deliver us from evil. Does this mean that Christians should pray for deliverance from Satan by praying, “but deliver us from the evil one” as Glasscock and others have

⁵⁷ Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Commentary: Matthew* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 149.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 150.

sometimes taken it?⁶⁰ This certainly is the connotation that one gets from certain Bible translations (“the evil one”) and the idea has considerable exegetical and theological support. First, one can note that the Greek text employs the article before the term evil ($\tauοῦ πονηροῦ$, *tou poneroū*). Certainly the article could be pointing to the personal identity of Satan as “the evil one.” Surely one could also cite a number of biblical passages to support the idea that Christians need God’s help to avoid the tempting powers of Satan (e.g., Eph 6:10-20). The question, though, is whether or not this was what Jesus intended when He told the disciples to pray this way.

Another distinct possibility is that this final petition is also closely connected with the preceding petitions and the theme of granting forgiveness. Several lines of argumentation support this idea. First, it would be fully in line with the rules of Greek grammar to see this use of the article ($\tauοῦ$, *tou*) as having an anaphoric force by pointing back to something already mentioned in the immediately preceding context. In other words, Jesus could be saying, “Deliver us from *this* evil,” the one concerning which He has just spoken. What evil would this be? It would be the evil of bitterness and the unwillingness to forgive others.

A second line of support for this interpretation comes from the fact that Jesus does not say “and” deliver us from evil, as though this were a separate idea, but He uses the expression “but” deliver us from evil, suggesting that the two pleas are not dealing with two dissimilar and unconnected ideas.⁶¹ In other words, one can see syntactical support

⁶⁰ Ibid.; along with Glasscock, Broadus would be among the other commentators who have preferred to see a personal, masculine idea in this expression with Satan as the referent, *Matthew*, 138. Another interpretation that is very possible is that “evil” should be considered evil in the most general sense. In other words, Jesus was reminding His followers that we always have to depend on God for His grace to help us in our struggle against spiritual evil.

for the idea that these second and third commands should be seen as both dealing with the same idea.

A third support for this line of argumentation, and perhaps the strongest, comes from the immediately following context. The discipline of textual criticism has made it abundantly clear that there is very little textual support in early witnesses for the doxological words “for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever Amen.” As Blomberg has pointed out:

Numerous late manuscripts add various forms of a conclusion to Jesus’ prayer, probably based on 1 Chr. 29:11–13, no doubt to give the prayer a “proper” doxology that it otherwise lacked. This well-known conclusion (“for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”) appears in the NIV margin but almost certainly did not appear in Matthew’s original text. It is absent, e.g., from Ι, B, D, ^f¹, various Latin and Coptic versions, and numerous church fathers.⁶²

What is the implication for the non-inclusion of these later words? It leaves verses 14-15 directly connected to what Jesus has just said in verses 12-13a: (1) the plea for forgiveness just as we have forgiven, (2) the urgent plea that God keep us totally away from this temptation of being unforgiving, and (3) the urgent plea that God would instead give us a radical deliverance from the evil of being bitter and unforgiving. Thus, each of these petitions (the second of which is actually a single, two-sided petition) deals heavily with the reality of the need for forgiveness from God and the urgent need for God’s people to be willing to grant forgiveness to others.

Why is this issue of bitterness and an unwillingness to forgive such an urgent matter that consumes so much of Jesus’ prayer? The answer comes in verses 14-15: “For if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you”

⁶¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 101.

⁶² Blomberg, *Matthew*, 120.

(v. 14), “but if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (v. 15). According to Jesus, a refusal to be forgiving with one’s fellow man leaves one in the wrong condition for seeking forgiveness from God, even if he already has personal salvation through faith in Christ. The point is clear: God looks with much disfavor on those who have unforgiving spirits toward their fellow man.

In this regard, Glasscock is correct in seeing the close connection that exists between 12-13 and 14-15.⁶³ It appears though that Glasscock has missed the further connection in argumentation that exists when one understands that the intervening words “but deliver us from evil” also refer to the same problem, the evil of being unforgiving. In doing so, he makes a connection between the command “do not lead us into temptation” and the supporting argument in verses 14-15, but misses out on seeing how there is an even tighter argument if one sees “deliver us from this evil” as referring to the evil of un-forgiveness. The whole context appears to unfold as dealing with a major ethical problem—the problem of bitterness and an unwillingness to forgive others. Thus, the major emphasis of the prayer does not change but follows through all the way to verse 15. What is the bottom line? It is the forceful reminder of how pervasive and harmful are the sins of being bitter and unforgiving. The cure, says Jesus, is to totally depend upon God for His sustaining grace. God’s people should cast themselves on the Lord and look for His grace to help them be forgiving and gracious toward others.

Summary

What is Jesus teaching His people here in this model LP? It would appear that apart from the plea for daily bread, there really are two major themes that take up the

⁶³ Glasscock, *Matthew*, 151.

bulk of the whole prayer.⁶⁴ The first of these concerns the overwhelming concern that Christians are to give to the coming of the messianic kingdom along with all the blessing that will accompany this kingdom. As one can see, each of these three pleas has its focus on God's kingdom promises. One future day when this kingdom comes, God's name will finally be recognized by all of mankind as being holy. Furthermore, this magnification and glorification by God takes place in large measure due to the redeeming and restoring grace which He pours out upon apostate Israel to bring them back to Himself. Jesus was telling His disciples (by direct application every believer) that they should be in earnest prayer for the coming of the kingdom by the return of Jesus Christ. When this happens, then God's will will be done here on earth just as it is in heaven right now.

The second major concern comes out of the horizontal pleas in verses 11-15. Jesus first tells the disciples that they can and should pray to God for life's basic provisions (v. 11). In other words, God's people should live in total dependence upon God. After this, though, Jesus gives the disciples a series of commands telling them that they should be in earnest prayer for divine mercy for the forgiveness of sins (i.e., total dependence). There is a catch, so to speak however, to this divine mercy. With repeated emphasis, Jesus makes it clear that the *receiving* of forgiveness from God is strongly correlated with the *granting* of forgiveness. It is sheer hypocrisy to ask for forgiveness while at the same time being unwilling to grant it.

In closing, this writer acknowledges that a discussion about this prayer involves standing on shoulders of those who have gone before. Many of the observations are not new, but at the same time there are certain ones that have become more clear by paying

⁶⁴ The petition for daily bread should properly be seen as teaching the idea of total dependence on God, the central idea which dominates every aspect of the entire prayer.

attention to contextual exegesis in light of historical context and progressive revelation.

May these observations be a blessing to all who, along with the Apostle John, pray

“Come Lord Jesus, Amen.”