

# The Means of Grace

Prayer “In the Name,” Our Weapon of Spiritual Warfare

<sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>7</sup>“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. <sup>9</sup>Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup>Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread,

<sup>12</sup>and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.”

**Matthew 6:5-13**

## Hammer Time

Born in 1962 as [Stanley Kirk Burrell](#) as one of nine siblings of a professional gambler, casino manager, yet extremely religious Pentecostal father, Burrell spent much

time as a child as an Oakland A's batboy. During games he would often entertain the fans with his amazing dance moves. It was here that he was given the nickname "Hammer" by [Reggie Jackson](#) who said he was the spitting image of all-time homerun leader "Hammerin" Hank Aaron. His dance moves came from emulating his musical idol, James Brown, and after spending three years in the Navy, Burrell would pursue a career in music.<sup>1</sup>

Originally an R&B/Rap singer, his fame came from [his second album](#), which became the first Hip Hop album to sell over 10,000,000 copies. With the help of those dazzling parachute pants and his hit solo "[U Can't Touch This](#)," Burrell became known to millions as [MC Hammer](#), adding the MC moniker for being a "[master of ceremonies](#)" in his early days on the road with the A's, in the military, and at various clubs where he cut his musical teeth.

That album actually saw an even bigger hit than "U Can't Touch This." Believe it or not, it was [the B Side song](#) of that single called "[Pray](#)." Perhaps you've heard the chorus, "[That's word, we pray ... We got to pray | Just to make it today](#)." The word "pray" is actually mentioned 147 times during the song, setting the record

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<sup>1</sup> Biography from [BeforeTheyWereFamous](#), "[MC Hammer | Where Are They Now? | Tragic Downfall Of His Music Career](#)," *Youtube* (March 22, 2022).

for the number of times a song title is repeated in an American Top 40 hit.<sup>2</sup>

Hammer would eventually gain a net worth of 30 million dollars, before squandering all of it and going bankrupt. After his bankruptcy, he decided to pursue becoming [an ordained preacher](#). By the late 90s, he hosted “MC Hammer and Friends” on the Trinity Broadcasting Network, telling the world that the MC, which he had taken out of his name and now put back in now stood for “[Man of Christ](#).”<sup>3</sup>

[What did the MC teach us about prayer](#) in his song? It starts off, “[All my life I wanted to make it to the top | Some said I wouldn’t | They told me no, but I didn’t stop | Working hard, making those movies everyday | And on my knees every night, you know I pray.](#)” “[Now I just think that you | Can do what ever you want | I’m bustin’ these rhymes | Making this money and I won’t | Forget my people or my town or my ways | And on my knees every night I’m still gonna pray.](#)” He goes on to sing about people who were against him, so he prayed. He saw children dying in the slums, so he prayed. Once he made it to the top, he still prayed. So now he’s [sending his song](#)

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<sup>2</sup> ["American Top 40 with Shadoe Stevens"](#). *Webcitation.org*. Archived from [the original](#) on October 25, 2009. Retrieved May 30, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See “MC Hammer,” *Wikipedia*, last accessed Nov 11, 2024.

out to the Lord, “Cause all the blessings that are good they come from above.”<sup>4</sup>

The lyrics aren't bad. And Hammer **did teach an entire generation of kids the importance of prayer**. But what effect has it had? It might be tempting to pick on Hammer for promoting a kind of Health and Wealth Prosperity Prayer Gospel because of his affiliation with TBN and a song about becoming famous. Do we pray simply to get rich? What if that doesn't happen? Who do we pray to? Who is this Lord? Does it matter? It is also interesting to see **what has happened to prayer in churches** over the last 35 years since the song was released. Essentially, corporate prayer has vanished, along with the prayer meeting. Do our people know why they've got to pray? Do we know how to pray?<sup>5</sup> Do we even know what prayer is these days?

## Prayer as a Means of Grace

In this series, we've been looking at the means of grace. We've discussed **the word** as a means of grace and

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<sup>4</sup> MC Hammer, “Pray,” *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em*, Capitol (1990).

<sup>5</sup> In his biblical theology of prayer, J. Gary Millar has an Afterword where he asks, “Whatever Happened to Evangelicals and Prayer,” and he gives several diagnoses. 1. Life is Easy. 2. The Communications Revolution. 3. The Rise of Bible Study Groups. 4. The Availability of Good Teaching. 5. The Dominance of Pragmatism. 6. The Vacuum Created by Cynicism. See **J. Gary Millar**, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 38, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2016), 233–236.

then the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Today we will take a look at prayer. **Jeremiah 23:29** says, "Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a *hammer* that breaks the rock in pieces?" Whether he understood the connection to his name or not, MC Hammer was in fact on to something that is actually **the real hammer**—God's word. And it becomes the key to prayer *as a means of grace*, something many people do not understand and which is basically absent in the song.<sup>6</sup> Too many people think that prayer is only *their* words, not God's. To understand, we must think rightly about prayer.

*The Baptist Catechism* (Q. 93; Q. 88 in the WSC) asks, "What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?" It answers, "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the word, baptism, the Lord's supper, *and prayer*; all which means are made effectual to the elect for salvation."<sup>7</sup> Notice that these means are

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<sup>6</sup> On a humorous note, when Hammer sings, "That's word, we pray...", he isn't referring to God's word, but to slang for "word up" or some kind of agreement, more like "Amen."

<sup>7</sup> "Baptist Catechism of 1693," in **James T. Dennison Jr.**, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014), 587. You can access the catechism [here](#).

“outward” and “ordinary.” That is, they belong to all God’s people publicly, and they are common things, repeatable things, not extraordinary things such as miracles.

The catechism cites [Acts 2:42](#), “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread *and the prayers*.” Curiously, the Greek here is “[The prayers](#),” and it must refer to [specific prayers they were already accustomed to praying](#), prayers that came out of the [synagogue liturgies](#), and almost certainly out of especially the Psalter. These prayers should most certainly be understood to include at least God’s word in the form of prayers we have in the Holy Scripture.

One of the [vital teachings](#) the catechism gives us about prayer comes in Q. 95. “[How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation.](#)” “[A. That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend to it with diligence \(Prov 8:34\), preparation \(1Pet 2:1-2\), \*and prayer\* \(Ps 119:17\); receive it with faith and love \(Heb 4:2; 2Th 2:10\), lay it up in our hearts \(Ps 119:18\), and practice it in our lives \(Luke 8:15; James 1:25\).](#)” In this way, we focus on [the human responsibility](#)

*side* of the effectual nature of the means of grace. That is, the means of grace are not meant to be learned about and understood to be *only* God's sovereign direct working, but rather to be treated as something precious and holy by *receiving them with faith* as Christians. If you don't engage in them, they are of no value.

Prayer is one of the chief ways God gives us to receive the word and sacraments so that they are effectual in our sanctification. That is, we prepare ourselves ahead of time through prayer, knowing that we are coming before these powerful and otherworldly means of grace, especially when we don't see it that way with our physical eyes. So remember, God not only uses his word to save us apart from our cooperation, but then *to sanctify us through our cooperation*, especially using prayer in the accompanying of the other means. An obvious question is therefore, when you come to church are you preparing yourself that morning and even the night before through prayer to expect God to meet with you, or do you just show up giving no thought ahead of time to what you are about to enter into?

Starting in *Q. 105*, the catechism gives a *series of instructions* on prayer. It begins with a most foundational question. "*What is prayer?*" "*A. Prayer is an offering up*

our desires to God, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, believing, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledges of his mercies.” It could be easy here to make this definition only about our words to God, since it is [an offering up of our desires to God](#). But notice, it is the Holy Spirit who assists us, and he does this regarding things agreeable to *his will* and *in the name of Christ*. All of this necessitates to one degree or another knowing God’s word and praying it back to him. This is especially true of the last part, confessing our sins and being thankful for his mercies, for [where do we learn about our need for both](#) of those things? Through the holy Scripture.

So I would tell you that while prayer is in fact offering up our desires, it is doing so not in the absence of God’s word, meaning it is only and solely my heart’s desires (ala a straightforward interpretation of Hammer’s lyrics), but a doing so in conformity with [praying God’s words back to him](#), agreeing with them, and making them conform your desires to his will. Whatever prayers you offer, be they prayers of adoration, confession of sin, thanksgiving, or supplication, grounding your prayers in God’s word must be foundational.



# A Biblical Theology of Prayer

## *Habakkuk*

What do I mean? We are going to spend some time on this. Let's start with the example of the prophet **Habakkuk**. This little prophetic book is one of the great short treatments of theodicy in all the world. **Theodicy** is essentially humans grappling with **the problem of evil**. Many people think the book begins with a complaint from the prophet over why God won't hear his prayers for help in the face of great wrongdoing of the wicked (**Hab 1:2-4**). As such, we might call this a kind of starting place for **the prophet's prayers of his desires** to be heard.

But a close reading shows that he is not simply complaining that God won't hear him, thus venting his pure emotions, but that he is not answering him *right now*. "*How long, O LORD ...*" (**1:2**) is how it begins. God answers him and starts to teach him that he is in fact working (**5-11**), but praying at this moment for mercy is not going to be heard "**because God is on the point of**

acting in judgment through the Chaldeans (Babylonians).”<sup>8</sup>

Again, the prophet complains to God. He realizes that his people are evil, but how could God use an even more wicked nation to punish a less wicked one (1:12-2:1). God tells him that he does not have the whole picture, and Babylon will not escape God’s judgment either (2-20).

It is at this point that Habakkuk lunches into the last chapter which is called, “A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to the Shigionoth” (a musical instrument; 3:1). He calls out to *the name of the LORD*, “O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy” (3:2). In this prayer, the prophet has learned that while he “may not fully understand, he has learned to rely totally on the wisdom and justice of God to bring about the proper resolution in ways he could never have imagined. This God is certainly worthy of Habakkuk’s praise and worship, which is how the book ends.”<sup>9</sup> But it

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<sup>8</sup> J. Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 38, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2016), 102. Much of the coming biblical theology will come from Millar’s excellent and quite illuminating study.

<sup>9</sup> Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1720.

is more than this. The prophet has learned that his prayers must be **in accordance with God's will** and that God's will is revealed as his covenantal plan for history. It isn't that the prophet has come to realize that God does in fact answer prayers, but that it may not be the time for him to answer his prayers *for mercy* and **Habakkuk must adjust his thinking and emotions accordingly**. This is how prayer becomes a means of grace, for through the right understanding of God's word, his prayers were adjusted from being totally self (or completely Israel)-centered to be God-centered. Prayer as a means of grace transformed him better into the image of his Creator by thinking properly about God and his world and actions in it.

### *Calling on the Name of the LORD*

Habakkuk opens the door for us to learn some vital truths about **what prayer is, biblically speaking**. In what follows, as we did with baptism and the Supper, we will consider a short biblical theology of prayer.<sup>10</sup> Where is **the first prayer** in the Bible? It seems to come after the fall at the end of Genesis 4. After giving us the genealogy of the

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<sup>10</sup> See n. 6 above.

line of Cain we read, “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.’ To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time *people began to call upon the name of the Lord*” (Gen 4:25-26). This verse is very curious. The Targums take the word “began” to mean “pollute,” for these words are identical in Hebrew. The idea is that they were polluting the name of the LORD by creating idols for themselves of the Name.<sup>11</sup>

But no English translation takes this view.<sup>12</sup> Contextually, given its proximity to both Cain and his line and the Genesis 6 event, it could be a possible reading,<sup>13</sup> but we also should consider Genesis 3:15 and the promise of the seed of the woman. In this case, the working out of the story is that Cain and his line show to

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<sup>11</sup> So also Rashi, Kimhi, and Gersonides. See Michael Carasik, ed., *Genesis: Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Michael Carasik, The Commentators’ Bible (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2018), 56–57. Even if this is the case, it does not hurt the thesis of Millar (though he does not seem to even be aware of this translation possibility), because it presupposes that prior to this, people were calling upon the Name of the LORD in the same sense he sees them doing here.

<sup>12</sup> Rashbam explains, “It was then that men began to invoke the Lord by name. They began praying to Him because of the troubles they were beginning to have. This would seem to me to be the straight-forward sense of the text.” Ibn Ezra says that though “profane” is a possible meaning of the word, “the syntax of our verse shows that this cannot be the meaning here.”

<sup>13</sup> See Douglas Hamp, “Genesis 4:26: Calling on or Profaning the name of YHWH?” Academia (2020).

a man that none of them are the seed. So as Peter might put it, “Where is the promise of his coming?” It is into this that the sons of Seth begin calling upon the name of the LORD.<sup>14</sup>

Either way,<sup>15</sup> it seems that calling upon the name of the LORD becomes the definition of what prayer is, biblically speaking. But what does it mean exactly? It means to cry out to God in prayer.<sup>16</sup> And we see this over and over in the OT (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; 1Kgs 18:24; 2Kgs 5:11; 1Chr 16:8; Ps 79:6; 80:18; 99:6; 105:1; 116:4, 13, 17; Isa 12:4; 41:25; 64:7; Jer 10:25; Lam 3:55; Joel 2:32; Zeph 3:9; Zech 13:9). But looking at these many other examples, we can get more specific. It means to cry out to the Name of God—this is the Word of God, Jesus Christ, specifically, to come through on his promises.<sup>17</sup>

We see this time and again. Prayer isn't just venting your frustrations or asking God for the desires of your

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<sup>14</sup> This is Millar's thesis.

<sup>15</sup> See comment in n. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Millar, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Millar seems OK with taking “name of Yahweh” as a metonymy for “the nature of the Lord.” He seems unaware of the older two-powers discussions that “name” was a kind of hypostasis for the Second Power in Heaven, what Christians believe to be Jesus. Consider the Targums, “The sons of man began to make idols for themselves and to surname them by the name of the Memra (Word) or the Lord” (Neofiti) or “... calling their idols by the name of the Memra of the Lord” (Ps-Jon).

heart. It is pleading with God in Christ to deliver on his covenantal promises. Alexander summarizes (Millar) the plot of OT prayer this way:

Nascent Israel, led by Moses, asks God to make good on his commitment to be their God and lead them to Canaan. Prayer in Joshua and Judges asks God to give his people victory in the conquest [which he had promised them], and then (especially by the kings as recorded in Chronicles) to save his people from their enemies and to secure them in the land [which he also promised them]. David's prayers are prayers not simply of self-interest and personal protection, but for the covenantal promises of Yahweh to be fulfilled by securing him for the throne (Millar 57). Solomon's prayer at the temple dedication asks God to come through on his promised forgiveness for his people when they repent (59–62).

The prophets pray that the nations would see God's glory in salvation and judgment, as God had promised. And they pray that God would establish his people in his place beyond the exile (67–106) ... Job pleads for covenant blessing to replace his inexplicable suffering. In the exilic and post-exilic literature, "prayer continues to be understood as calling on Yahweh, particularly at moments when the future of the covenant hangs in the balance" (120). The argument crescendos in the Psalms,

where David's messianic prayers ask God to vindicate his chosen king and to use him to accomplish God's saving plan for his people (137–166).

In the [Gospels](#), the nativity narratives pray in response to God's nascent fulfillment of his saving promises in the birth of Jesus. [The Lord's prayer](#)—"your kingdom come, your will be done"—[i]s "a plea that God will act so decisively in judgment and salvation that his glory will be unveiled ... It is thus a prayer ... for the consummation of the kingdom of God" (173). [Jesus' high priestly prayer](#) calls on God "to complete what he has started (181). Jesus also models prayer at key points in the saving mission God gave him—in his baptism, at the selecting of disciples, at Gethsemane, and on the cross as he prays for the forgiveness of his executioners (167–189).

As we visit early church prayer meetings in [Acts and the Epistles](#) we hear them praying about God's saving purposes in Christ and asking for boldness in preaching those saving purposes. They also pray for opportunities to proclaim the gospel and the power to confirm it in the hearts of those who hear (191–195). Paul's prayers for the churches focus on the growth of the churches in the truth and grace of the gospel, so much so that "everything Paul prays for has already been achieved for us, and is held out to us in the gospel" (205). [And] John confirm[s] the thesis: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am

coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).  
This is the heart of biblical prayer” (230).<sup>18</sup>

## The LORD’s Prayer

### *Our Father*

As it was mentioned above and as Jesus told us that this is both **what we should pray** (**Luke 11:2**—“**When you pray, say...**”) and a **model for how to pray** (**Matt 6:9**—“**Pray like this**”), let’s take a look at **the Lord’s Prayer**. I will follow Matthew’s version, as it is longer and better known.

**Who do we pray to?** Properly speaking, we pray to “**Our Father.**” It matters who you pray to, because there are other supernatural entities that pose as God. The true God is our *Father*. He has adopted us into his family as Christians, and so we go to the one who gave us life. We go to him directly, though the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the Name of his Beloved Son Jesus. This is a privilege no other religion knows, to call God “father.”

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<sup>18</sup> **Paul Alexander**, “[Book Review: Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer](#), by J. Gary Millar,” 9Marks (Oct 14, 2016).



Let alone, when you understand that your father is not just any old god.

He is our Father “in heaven.” God is transcendent and above all things. Here he sits enthroned over all his creation (e.g. Ps 29), including over all the most powerful of supernatural created beings. As such, he is powerful to hear and to answer our prayers. Who can thwart him? But he is also holy, for this is what transcendence means. The catechism summarizes this “preface” for us, teaching us “to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us” (Baptist Catechism, Q. 107).

It is important to point out that as we pray this introduction, we align ourselves in the prayer with God by recognizing that he is not like us, but also as the catechism teaches, “That God would enable us and others to glorify him in all things in which he makes himself known, and that he would dispose all things to his own glory” (I’ve modernized the spelling modernized). Notice then how the prayer already causes us to conform to God, rather than causing God to conform to us.

This reminds me of a popular saying that seems to trace its roots to Kierkegaard. Speaking about confessing

sins, he wrote, “Prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who offers it.”<sup>19</sup> God already knows everything you need before you ask it (Matt 6:8). He knows your heart (Ps 139:2, 23). There’s nothing you can say that will take him by surprise. And, he has already ordained the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10). So prayer isn’t changing him.

But we are not like God. We do not know his thoughts in and of ourselves (Mic 4:12). He has secret things that belong to him (Deut 29:29). The future is unknown to us. So in praying this way, we are learning to align ourselves to the one whom we are not naturally in tune with by recognizing and affirming the truth about him and ourselves. Hence, prayer is a means of *grace* that changes us.

Second, notice the corporate nature of this: *our*. This prayer is a public and communal prayer, and likely it is among those prayers that the earliest Christians in Acts devoted themselves to praying. It has, after all, been the central focus of books on prayer from the time of Tertullian (*On Prayer*), Origen (*Prayer: “The Lord’s Prayer”*), and Augustine (*Letter 130: To Proba*), to the

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<sup>19</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing* (Harper Collins, 1956), epub edition.

Reformation and *Luther's Catechism* or the *Baptist Catechism* (Q. 107-14), to Puritans like Thomas Manton (*A Practical Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*) or Thomas Watson (*The Lord's Prayer*), to more modern Christians such as Arthur Pink (*The Lord's Prayer*) or J.I. Packer (*Praying the Lord's Prayer*), or Bryan Chapell (*Praying Backwards*).

### *The Six Petitions*

After the introduction, there are **six petitions**, the first being the imperative “**hallowed be.**” To be hallowed means to be holy, sanctified, set apart—hence transcendence. But because he is holy, God is **good** in all that he is and does. He is not an evil god. He is the only Good God. As such, and because he is your Father, you can trust this God when he answers your prayers that it will be *only* a good answer, whatever that answer may end up being, even if you don't like it.

But “hallowed” here is **an imperative verb**, a verb of **command**. As such, it is a petition. Petitions teach us that we can entreat God. Synonyms of that word include implore, beg, plead, beg, ask, request, and pray. To say

“Hallowed be...” is therefore something we are asking God *to do*.

But what are we asking? **To hallow his name**. Chapell rightly explains, “**By requesting that God honor his name, Jesus teaches us to ask God to make all creation recognize and revere his holiness. Of course, included in creation is the one praying. So in the same breath that we request God to make his name holy everywhere else, we also ask God to make our own heart honor him.**”<sup>20</sup>

As true as this is, there is **more that most Christians miss**. For the Name of God is not the letters printed on the page. This is not magic or kabbalah here where we are doing bible codes or gematria with the name. **The name of God is God**. And the Name is Jesus. Our Savior tells us, “**I have manifested you name to the people...**” (**John 17:6**). It’s not merely that we pray *in Jesus’ name* because he is the only way to the Father. It is that *Jesus is the Name* because he is one with the Father! So in asking God to hallow his name, we are especially **asking him to make Jesus known to the world** as the Holy One of Israel, the Savior, the Divine Warrior, the Prince of Peace.

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<sup>20</sup> **Bryan Chapell**, *Praying Backwards: Transform Your Prayer Life by Beginning in Jesus’ Name* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 36.

The second petition is, “Your kingdom come.” The catechism again is on point. “In the second petition ... we pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed (Ps 68:1, 18), and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced (Rev 12:10, 11), ourselves and others brought into it and kept in it, and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened” (Q. 109). Notice that there are competing kingdoms and they are not America vs. China. The kingdoms of men are *all* the dominion of Satan and the gods, for they were given to them. But out of all the nations, God is now making for himself a holy nation and a royal priesthood, people who actually still live in the earthly kingdoms, bringing both the law and gospel to them, transforming them for the better, but not confusing the two. This makes us a peculiar nation, one with no geographical boundaries, for our citizenship is in heaven.

The third petition is similar. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The idea here is ancient—earth is a mirror of heaven. The pagan phrase was, “as above, so below.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, what I said a moment ago about

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<sup>21</sup> The infamous Emerald Tablet is a cryptic esoteric Hermetic text supposedly composed by the legendary Hermes Trismegistus. Scholars usually date it between 200 – 800 AD. Prized by alchemists, Platonists, occultists, Gnostics, and Free Masons as a foundation of their crafts, the relevant portion of it for our purposes reads, “*Truth! Certainty! That in which there is no doubt! That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of one [thing]. As all things were from One. Its father is the*

Christians transforming culture is inevitable, even though we do not confuse the two kingdoms. Ancient peoples understood this concept so well that they created nearly all of their megalithic temple complexes to emulate the heavens on earth, as they aligned themselves to the gods. But we, Christians, *are* the temple of God and the Holy Spirit dwells in the midst of his people. Thus, we are praying here particularly that through his church and his people, God would bring his kingdom down to earth—now, *through us*. The catechism summarizes, “We pray that God by his grace would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the [holy] angels do in heaven” (Q. 110).

The fourth petition is, “Give us this day our daily bread.” This one is tied to our needs, which God knows before we ask him. Bread is certainly a figure of speech for all of our *needs*—including food, shelter, life, everything we need. It isn’t focusing on our wants or pleasures such as eating dinner at Ruth’s Chris steak house every night or

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*Sun and its mother the Moon. The Earth carried it in her belly, and the Wind nourished it in her belly, as Earth which shall become Fire. Feed the Earth from that which is subtle, with the greatest power. It ascends from the earth to the heaven and becomes ruler over that which is above and that which is below.” E. J. Holmyard, “The Emerald Table,” *Nature* 112.2814 (1923): 525-26.* The 2014 horror film “As Above, So Below” is an imaginative movie built off the basic premise of the Emerald Tablet which uses Dante’s Inferno as we are taken through the catacombs of Paris in search of the Philosopher’s Stone.

having a Krispy Kreme's Golden Doughnut valued at \$1,685. The Psalm says that God “will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps 37:4). But the verse begins, “*Delight yourself in the Lord*” and he will do this. In this way, our desires are realigned to his, so that what we ask is increasingly his will for us rather than our will, thus tying us back to the previous petition. As Jesus himself prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42), thus leading him to his own death on a cross.

But it is also specifically focused on food, which we need to renew and regenerate our bodies. In the physical realm, this is physical food. But we also need spiritual food, and Christ himself is our meat and drink, for he is the Living Water and the Manna from heaven. The Manna is a particularly good case study, because it was the daily provision of the Lord in the wilderness where there was no food, to feed his people every single day for forty years until they entered the Promised Land. God loves you and provides for you, so ask him and he will provide, even if it is his will that you starve to death as has happened to millions of Christians over the centuries, your spirit will be overflowing with God's grace and mercy and peace.

The fifth petition is about forgiveness. “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” This one deals with confessing, something absolutely vital in prayer. A debt is an obligation that you owe. Curiously, Luke has “sins.” A sin is a moral disobedience you have committed. But the two can be interchangeable, and sometimes one can lead to the other. Now, the catechism says, “We pray that God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all our sins...” But it knows the rest of the petition, which many people seem to not want to think about. “...as we forgive others.” It teaches us that we “are rather encouraged to ask [this] because of his grace we are enabled from the heart to forgive others” (Q. 111).

The point here, again, is that it is a means of grace. We know that God will forgive our sins, because he tells us in many places that he will. This in turn must make us ready and willing to forgive anyone what they have done to us. How many times? An astounding seven times? No, but seventy-times seven. People find it very difficult to forgive others. But the point of the prayer is to cause us to see that God has forgiven us infinitely more than we can ever forgive someone else, because we ourselves are finite and wicked creatures. As such, any offense against us is a



finite offense and perhaps sometimes even justified. But an offense against a perfect holy God is an infinite offense that never is. Yet, God in Christ can forgive me of all my sins? Once for all? How can it be? Only in dwelling on your own depravity and the condition God has forgiven you of can you find the grace to forgive others properly and from the heart. And in the prayer, this is exactly what we are asking God to do in us.

The last petition is, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” or better, “from the evil one.” “Evil” actually stands here as a substantival adjective, such as “The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly.” As such, it very well represents not just evil that happens, but evil that comes from the father of lies and the enemy of our souls—Satan himself. Prayer has now turned into a weapon against Satan.

Now, God does not tempt anyone, but we are each one lead astray by our own evil desires which give birth to sin (James 1:13-14). But God does test us, and the word in Greek is the same. It is very probable that this petition is not to be read as an isolated proverbial statement devoid of context, for the testing of God came to Israel in the wilderness as the precise moment that he gave them bread from heaven. It says, “The whole congregation of the

people of Israel grumbled” and wanted to “die in the wilderness” (Ex 16:2-3). So the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain *bread from heaven* for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, *that I may test them*, whether they will walk in my law or not” (4). The bread from heaven was the manna, and we’ve just seen how it is tied to the fourth petition.

Thinking about this OT connection, we can now understand the meaning better. The proverb says, “Remove far from me *falsehood* and lying; *give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me*” (Prov 30:8). An example of why he might want God to spare him from poverty is *not just because it is unpleasant*, but because *it may tempt him* to steal and dishonor God. Yet at the same time, he doesn’t want too many treasures because he will be tempted to become prideful and preoccupied with earth rather than heaven.<sup>22</sup> The chief graces that are in mind here are therefore *contentment and gratitude*. Chapell explains, “*The trials God uses to build up our faith Satan tries to hijack and use as temptations to tear down our spiritual commitment.*”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapell, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Because the ending of the prayer in Matthew, “*For yours in the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen*” is probably not original (though it is certainly biblical, cf. 1Chron 29:11), and for sake of time, I won’t deal with this here.

# Prayer in Practical Application

Now, we don't have time for a whole lot more today. It would be great to run through things like the types of prayers we can offer. I've mentioned them already as they form the acronym **ACTS**: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. **Adoration** is a prayer that simply revels in all that God is. **Confession** deals with bringing our sins before him. **Thanksgiving** is a thanking of God for whatever he brings into our lives—whether we wanted them or not. **Supplication** is entreating him especially for the things that we need, be they physical, spiritual, emotional, familial, ecclesiastical, national, or whatever. But my point today is that each must be informed by God's word so that they might become a means of grace.

In Romans, Paul says, “**For we do not know what to pray for as we ought.**” Arthur Pink, who wrote a book on the Lord's Prayer, has another book called *Gleanings from Paul: Studies in the Prayers of the Apostles* where his chapter headings alone are worth mentioning, for they teach us **what to pray for**. When we study the word, we find that we (following those chapter headings) offer prayers of

praise, prayer in hope, prayer for peace, for insight, for weaker brothers, concerning tribulation, in affliction, of benediction, of gratitude, for faith and knowledge, for understanding, for spiritual apprehension, for appreciation of Christ's triumph, of adoration, for inner strength, for Christ-centeredness, for comprehension of God's love, of doxology, for discerning love, for fruits of righteousness, for a worthy walk, for long-suffering, for joy and thankfulness, for brotherly love, for sanctification of the young saints, for preserving grace, for comfort and stability, for love toward God, for patience, for one another, and of worship.<sup>24</sup>

Again, to do this **rightly**, you must know God's word. To do this **biblically**, you must call upon the Name of the LORD, our Lord Jesus and conform your own thoughts through your prayers to God's will as it has been revealed in all these subjects through the Holy Scriptures, calling upon God to act according to his covenantal promises in them all. In this way, we **ground our prayers in the word**, even as we pray that the word would be made effectual in our lives.

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<sup>24</sup> See **Arthur Pink**, *Gleanings from Paul: Studies in the Prayers of the Apostle* (Banner of Truth: 1922, 2006).

To conclude, I wanted to give a couple of examples of individual and family prayers that might be helpful as ways of thinking about what I've just said, and then consider the act of corporate prayers together. In 1997, I took a tour through [the famous churches of England](#). In all of them, there were hourly prayers that were offered publicly for things like [the queen](#) (now the king), [country](#) (England), [the church](#), and for [missions](#). Paul says we are to pray for [all people](#) with supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we might lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way ([1Tim 2:1-2](#)). We should be praying and conforming our prayers to what God has said about these things.

For example, he goes on to say that [God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth](#) (4). When we pray for salvation of say our children or our friends, to pray God's word back to him in this way is not merely to say, "[If it be in you secret will, please do this](#)," but rather to be even more bold and to plead with God that he has told us that he desires this, so please act upon it. Understanding this [is to bring heaven down to](#)

earth from our discussion of the Lord's Prayer, so this would therefore involve a couple of things.

It first means that we are conformed to God's will through the prayer by believing it to be true because he said it. Often times, I think we struggle with these kinds of things, and it effects our boldness in prayer. The same application can be made for what God has said in his word about anything, be it healing our infirmities or giving us our needs like income and a job, etc.

But second, it means that as a means of grace, it changes us so that we then become an instrument through which this might occur. Praying for the salvation of a president is one thing, because you will never have the ability to impact him personally. But for your children or your best friend? That's entirely different, and in praying this knowing prayer as a means of grace that changes us, it follows that we become part of the means through which this end is brought. So we learn ever more about Jesus and how to answer people's questions. We teach our children about Christ. We give answers for the hope that is in us. We go to doctors or we find cures out there that they don't know about. We go and we help the poor, we adopt children, we do any number of things as a reaction to our

own prayers as we are conformed to God's will. In this way, prayer becomes something we are able to do "without ceasing" (1Th 5:17) because we recognize that our entire life become a life of prayer.

Second, we do this together, especially in worship in corporate prayer, but also with one another on other occasions, because prayer is a corporate activity that God uses with his church to be a means of grace for her. It is profoundly disturbing that churches are no longer praying more than a few seconds in their services, or are using prayer in manipulative ways, rather than taking the time to really enter into prayer together to call upon God's name to remember his covenant promises in all these many ways. What would God do if we actually believed this was a powerful weapon?

These an old song written by Louvin Brothers in 1956 which I heard through Mark Knopfler's *Notting Hillbillies*. It goes, "In that land across the sea, there's a job for you and men | though our presence there may not be found | We must stay standing there on the battle line and pray | We must never lay our weapons down. We don't have to be a soldier in a uniform | To be of service over there |

While the boys so bravely stand with the weapons made by hand | Let us trust and use the weapon of prayer.”<sup>25</sup>

Paul concludes in his “armor of God” discussion in Ephesians 6, that we put on “the sword of *the Spirit*, which is the word of God, *praying* at all times in the Spirit, with all *prayer* and supplication” (Eph 6:17-18). It seems reasonable, since “Spirit” is repeated, and given all we’ve said, that praying in the Spirit is somehow intimately linked with the sword of the Spirit—God’s word. As such, it is an offensive weapon. One through which we “are able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places” (12).

There is a fascinating example of this in the Targum of the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:23-27). “Speak with Aaron and his sons, saying: ‘Thus shall you bless the Israelites while they (the priests) spread their hands upon the pulpit. In (Hebrew) (the priests) shall speak to them: ‘May the Lord bless you and guard you in all your endeavor *from*

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<sup>25</sup> Louvin Brothers, “The Weapon of Prayer,” *The Louvin Brothers (Ira And Charles)*, MGM (1956). Reprinted by The Notting Hillbillies, “The Weapon of Prayer,” *Missing ... Presumed Having a Good Time*, Vertigo (1990).



*(the demons of the) darkness and from frightening demons and midday demons and morning demons and destroyers and night demons. 25. May the Lord make the graciousness of his countenance shine upon you in your study of the Law and reveal to you obscure things and protect you. 26. May the Lord show the graciousness of his countenance to you in your prayer and give you peace in all your space.’ 27. And they will place the blessing of my Name upon the Israelites and I, by my Memra [Word], shall bless them.”*<sup>26</sup>

Using this weapon, we are able to strike **a deadly blow to the enemy**. And that ought to encourage you all the more to pray, even as you see the day approaching. Especially when you are now better able to understand what that weapon is as one of God’s chief means of grace, praying in the Name of God, praying his very words back to him such as the Psalms,<sup>27</sup> to remember all his promises and answer them according to what he has spoken in his word.

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<sup>26</sup> Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara, eds., *The Aramaic Bible: Targum Neofiti 1: Numbers and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers*, trans. Martin McNamara, Ernest G. Clarke, and Shirley Magder, vol. 4 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), Nu 6:23–27.

<sup>27</sup> Stanley Gale has an excellent little section on praying things such as Psalm 24 (“**the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle**”) or Psalm 121 (“**The Lord will keep you from all evil**”), an many other Psalms as a way to go about doing this. See **Stanley D. Gale**, *What Is Spiritual Warfare?*, Basics of the Reformed Faith (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 32–33. Also Stanley Gale, *Warfare Witness* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2006), esp. ch. 7.

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