

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (13) Following Jesus Christ Rightly –
#7. A Life of Prayer**

In order for us to follow Jesus Christ rightly, we must be given to prayer. If we are not praying frequently and faithfully, we cannot be following Jesus rightly.

Prayer is a both a wonderful *privilege* and an important *responsibility* for the believer in Jesus Christ. God has invited us to come unto Him with our concerns and requests frequently and confidently, knowing that He hears us when we pray. We are to be diligent and faithful in prayer, as the Holy Scripture constantly affirms to us. Our Lord once said to His disciples, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

Consider these verses to exhort and instruct us in prayer. In Romans 12:12 we read that we are to be always “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, *continuing steadfastly in prayer.*” In Ephesians 6:18 Paul described wrote that Christians should be “*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” He commanded the church at Colossae, “*Continue earnestly in prayer*, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). To the church at Philippi he wrote, “Be anxious for nothing, but *in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*” (Phi. 4:6). James urged the brethren “Confess your trespasses to one another, *and pray for one another*, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of righteous man avails much” (James 5:16). And Peter wrote to disciples, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore *be serious and watchful in your prayers*” (1 Pet. 4:7). The mandate is clear. We are to be a praying people. We are to be serious, deliberate, and specific in our prayers. We are to be expectant, confident, and grateful that our Lord hears us and that He will answer us when we lay our petitions before Him.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) believed that prayer was so conducive to the Christian life that if one did not pray, it revealed him to be a hypocrite, not a Christian. In His sermon entitled, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer”, he wrote these words:

I would exhort those who have entertained an hope of their being true converts, and yet since their supposed conversion have left off the duty of secret prayer, and do ordinarily allow themselves in the omission of it, to throw away their hope (of salvation).

If you have left off calling upon God, it is time for you to leave off hoping and flattering yourselves with an imagination that you are the children of God. Probably it will be a very difficult thing for you to do this. It is hard for a man to let go an hope of heaven, on which he hath once allowed himself to lay hold, and which he hath retained for a considerable time. True conversion is a rare thing; but that men are brought off from a false hope of conversion, after they are once settled and established in it, and have continued in it for some time, is much more rare.

Those things in men, which, if they were known to others, would be sufficient to convince others that they are hypocrites, will not convince themselves; and those things which would be sufficient to convince them concerning others, and to cause them to cast others entirely out of their charity, will not be sufficient to convince them concerning themselves. They can make larger allowances for themselves than they can for others. They can find out ways to solve objections against their own hope, when they can find none in the like case for their neighbor.

But if your case be such as is spoken of in the doctrine (i.e. that hypocrites are deficient in the duty of prayer), it is surely time for you to seek a better hope, and another work of God’s Spirit, than ever you have yet experienced; something more thorough and effectual. When you see and find by experience, that the seed which was sown in your hearts, though at first it sprang up and seemed flourishing, yet is withering away, as by the heat of the sun, or is choked, as with thorns; this shows in what sort of ground the seed was sown, that it is either stony or thorny ground; and that therefore it is necessary you should pass through another change, whereby your heart may become good ground, which shall bring forth fruit with patience.¹

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 74.

Yet often times, true Christians fail to pray faithfully and consistently, or they leave off importunate prayer, that is, prayer that persists until its request is granted. We tend to do so often because we are less than confident that God hears us or is willing to grant our requests of Him. The fact is that

I. It is a common spiritual problem of the Lord's people to doubt that God hears them and that He will answer their prayers.

This occurs due to at least four reasons (there may be more reasons, but I could think of four common reasons). Some of these reasons include these:

First, doubt that God hears us often exists because of *our personal failure before God*. You might think to yourself, "My life falls so short of doing His will how can I ask and expect anything from his hand?" There is a certain element of truth to this conclusion. For indeed, through our own refusal or failure to meet the conditions that God has established, God may justly refuse to answer our prayers. One of the psalmists in rejoicing that God did indeed answer His prayers, stated one reason that God might have refused to grant his requests.

Come and hear, all you who fear God,
And I will declare what he has done for my soul.
I cried to Him with my mouth,
And He was extolled with my tongue.
***If I regard iniquity in my heart,
The Lord will not hear me;***
But certainly God has heard me;
He has attended to the voice of my prayer.

Blessed be God,
Who has not turned away my prayer,
Nor His mercy from me! (Psa 66:16-20)

To "regard iniquity in my heart" would be to treasure a sin, refusing to acknowledge it as sin, and refusing to turn from it. God may justly choose not to answer the prayers of those who persist in sin and rebellion to Him.

God declared to Israel that He would not hear their prayers due to their unrelenting and unrepentant sin.

Alas, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity,
A brood of evildoers,
Children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the Lord,
They have provoked to anger
The Holy One of Israel,
They have turned away backward.

***When you spread out your hands,
I will hide My eyes from you;
Even though you make many prayers,
I will not hear.***
Your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes;
Cease to do evil,

Learn to do good. (Isa. 1:5, 15f)

In another place Isaiah spoke a word to Israel, telling them that God would not hear them due to their sin:

Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear. (Isa. 59:2)

People who persist in their rebellion to God have no basis of assurance that God will hear and respond to them, until they humble themselves and purpose to repent of sin.

A *second* reason that we may doubt that God hears us is when *we pray for things or for persons that God has determined He will not bless*. Jeremiah was faced with this issue. God would not hear his prayer to pardon and restore his people, the inhabitants of Judah. It was not because of Jeremiah's failure that God would not grant his request. It was because God had determined that He would not bless Israel due to their sin. We read in Jeremiah's prophecy that God would refuse to hear Jeremiah, if he prayed for this people.

Therefore, do not pray for *this* people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them, nor make intercession to Me: for *I will not hear you*. (Jer. 7:16)

Later God said to the prophet again,

So do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them; for *I will not hear them* in the time that they cry out to Me because of their trouble. (11:14)

And yet again, God said to Jeremiah:

Do not for this people for their good. When they fast, *I will not hear their cry*; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. (14:11)

A *third* reason that we may doubt that God hears us is *when we fail to pray in faith*. James wrote of God's refusal to answer prayer that comes forth from one who doubts God's ability to grant his request.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-7)

Now we need to make a distinction between having faith in *God's ability* and having faith that it is *God's will* that He grant a specific request. We are never to doubt God's ability. I believe the double-minded man that James writes of is one who errs in this matter.

Our Lord would sometimes draw out of people whether or not they had faith in His ability to grant their requests. Matthew records the account of Jesus healing two blind men:

When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him.

And Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

They said to Him, "Yes, Lord."

Then He touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith let it be to you." And their eyes were opened. (Matt. 9:27ff)

We are never to doubt God's ability to answer our prayers. If we do doubt, let us not think that we will receive anything from His hand.

But though we may have no doubt in God's ability, we may have legitimate doubts in God's willingness to grant our requests. This is implicit in our prayer requests. This is why we always append our prayers with the expression, "If the Lord wills." We ask in confidence of God's ability to grant our request, but we ask humbly and submitting ourselves to His wisdom and purposes because we do not always know if it is His will to grant the petition that we lay before Him. We might cite the example of a leper who was healed by Jesus.

And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. (Matt. 8:2, 3)

This leper did not doubt our Lord's ability to heal him; however, he did have some question as to whether or not the Lord was willing to do so. We frequently offer prayers in the same manner as this leper, asking God to hear us and grant our requests, yet at the same time not knowing if it is in God's purposes that He do so. This is not a lack of faith; it is recognition of His prerogative to govern His world as He chooses.

But there is a *fourth* reason *some may doubt the willingness of God to hear and answer their prayers*. They do not doubt because of a possible failure of their own. They do not doubt because they suspect that God has determined that He will not hear a prayer respecting a rebellious person or people. Nor do they doubt His ability. But *they doubt the goodness of God and His general approachableness and willingness to hear them and answer them when they pray*. It was to this fourth cause for doubting that our Lord addressed His disciples after which He set before them a pattern of prayer. Jesus sought to encourage, convince, and assure His disciples that their Father would hear them and readily, and speedily grant their requests. Let us consider a passage in which we read of...

II. Our Lord instructing His disciples in prayer-- Luke 11:1-13.

Here we read:

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

²So He said to them, "When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

³Give us day by day our daily bread.

⁴And forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one."

⁵And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? ⁸I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

⁹"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³If you

then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

These words of our Lord are set before us in the context of the final journey that our Lord and His disciples were making from Galilee to Jerusalem. Jesus knew that this was a journey to His death, for when He arrived at Jerusalem He was rejected, He suffered and died, but was raised the third day. This journey comprises a major portion of Luke’s Gospel, which begins in 9:51. As Jesus departed from Galilee, a shift of emphasis occurs in the Gospel from our Lord’s interaction with the multitudes to a more intimate, instruction of His disciples. Much of Luke’s record of Jesus’ teaching is found in this travel section of his Gospel. Even the encounters with non-disciples seem to be recorded in such a way as to provide instruction and encouragement for His own followers.

A. An entreaty for instruction in prayer (11:1)

One of Jesus’ disciples gave a good request: “Lord, teach us to pray.” This reveals that he knew the *importance* of prayer. But it also reveals he knew of his *ignorance*, at least in comparison to what the disciples of John the Baptist had known and practiced. May we be as this disciple, and fully realize the important role that prayer plays in our life before our God

1. The importance of prayer.

Why is prayer important? Several reasons could be cited.

a. Good things do not happen unless *prayer* is offered. God has ordained that He will work through the prayers of His people. He need not do so, but He chooses to do so. Nothing will happen for good in your life or the life of your loved ones unless you pray, unless other persons pray for you, unless the Lord Jesus prays for you, or unless the Holy Spirit Himself prays for you. But you can mark it down, *you will not receive from your Father unless you or someone asks of Him*. James wrote, “You do not have, because you ask not” (James 4:2). Many live spiritually impoverished although they have great riches in store for them, if they would but draw upon them, requesting of the Lord that which He has given them freely.

b. Good things do not happen unless *proper prayer* is offered. By “proper prayer”, we mean two things:

1) Prayer is answered by God when the one praying has *proper motives*. God will not grant our requests if our attitudes and motives toward are not right. Again, James wrote, “You do not have, because you ask not. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives . . .” wrote James (James 4:2). If God were to give good things to those who ask with wrong motives, He would reinforce their errant desires and attitudes. Proper motives are essential if we would receive good things from God.

I wish we as parents would learn this principle and be consistent in this. I have seen parents give in and give things to their little children even while they are exhibiting a spirit of stubbornness, defiance, and rebellion. To give “good things” at such a time only reinforces the attitudes they are exhibiting. You are teaching them that good things will come to them if they persist long enough in their inappropriate, even sinful behavior. Your heavenly Father does not deal with you so. You do train up a stubborn and strong-willed child if you give good things at the wrong times.

The second aspect of proper prayer is that...

2) Prayer is answered by God when *proper things* are requested. This is also suggested to us from the passage in James:

“You do not have, because you ask not. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, *that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.*” (James 4:2, 3)

Thankfully, God does not give us everything we ask. He only obligates Himself to give us *good things*; that is, things which are for our temporal and eternal good. But it should be noted, He will only give us temporal good things, if they will somehow bring spiritual good things; otherwise, He is kind to us, and withholds from us that which we want but which may cause us harm. And so, God only obligates Himself to give His children that which is according to His Will--those things for our ultimate good and His glory. And so we see, that we should be greatly concerned about prayer for good things do not happen unless *prayer* is offered, good things do not happen **unless proper prayer is offered.**

c. Good things do not happen unless persistent proper prayer is offered. This too, is important, but we will wait until we get down to our parable in Luke 11:5-8 before we emphasize this matter.

We see from verse one, therefore, that at least one of the disciples knew the importance of prayer, and so he requested instruction in prayer on behalf of them all. But this disciple's request reveals not only his recognition of importance of prayer, but it reveals, secondly, that...

2. Ignorance with respect to the importance of prayer.

Many people would acknowledge their weakness in praying often, but do many acknowledge their ignorance? I don't know. But we should ask ourselves, "Are the things which are set forth here by the Lord Jesus as essential for proper prayer characteristic of our praying?" "Do our prayers reflect the patterns laid out for us in Scripture?" "Do we pray for one another, requesting for one another, the kinds of things the New Testament writers set forth as proper things to request from our God?" Do we, for example, offer regular and persistent prayer for spiritual knowledge (Col. 1:9), prayer for discernment (James 1:5), prayer for spiritual growth? (Col. 1:9-14), prayer for spiritual power and boldness (Acts 4), or prayer that we might know the unique and discriminating love that God has for those in Christ (Eph. 3:14ff)?

I fear that we, too, are generally quite ignorant of what to pray for; that is, what might be most needful for one another and ourselves. But we should be informed about these matters so that they should be the subject of our continual, fervent prayer to our Father. I don't know about you, but I feel my ignorance, and do request even now of our Lord, as did this disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

One more point we might make is this: The disciple requested of Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." John the Baptist was a good man, a good prayer, and a good teacher. He taught others how to pray. May we be as John? Let us go beyond merely asking the Lord to teach *us* to pray, but let us ask God that He would make us as John--teachers of prayer to others.

B. An example of a model prayer (11:2-4)

1. The prayer generally

This should not be regarded as a set of words repeated by rote, but the Lord was setting forth the kinds of things to be prayed for, giving emphasis where emphasis is due. It is a *pattern prayer*, with each word and phrase expressing some important aspect of prayer or identifying an issue, or category, which should be the subject of our prayers. Now we might be so familiar with the words to the point of reciting them, but that does not necessarily indicate you could recount the meaning, if asked to do so.

2. The prayer specifically

Our Lord Jesus first said to His disciples, "When you pray, say, *"Our Father in heaven."*

(1) "Father"

The Lord Jesus taught and encouraged His disciples to view God as their Father, who was approachable, willing, and even eager, to hear from His children and grant their requests. Note, that when we are to pray, we

are to pray, "Our Father." He does not say, "When you pray, say, "My Father", although for the individual believer that would be perfectly appropriate. Rather He said, "When you pray, say, "Our Father in heaven." Perhaps the stress here is not on individual prayer as it is prayer offered in the assembly of the people of God. Please recognize the great privilege that belongs to you, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. You belong to that select group that has the glorious entitlement to call upon God as "Father." Jesus was giving instruction to *His disciples only*, on how they were to pray. Because they believed on Him, they had privileges and promises that were theirs alone. They could relate to God as their Father, One who regarded them as His children and cared for them as a Father cares for His children. They could pray to God with this familial acquaintance.

The privilege to regard and pray to God *as Father* belongs only to true believers in Jesus Christ. Although this Lord's Prayer is known by many, and can be recited verbatim by them, they have no right to call God Father unless and until they believe on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. People apart from faith in Jesus Christ are estranged from God. They may not call upon Him as their Father, for He does not regard them as His children. Only through the reconciling work of the death of Jesus Christ can sinners become members of the household of God; they only may call God their Father.

If you are a devout believer in Jesus Christ, you may join with all your brothers and sisters in Christ in the wonderful privilege of addressing God, "Our Father in heaven." As such you may be assured that He cares for you as a father cares for his children, that He will protect you and keep you and provide for you, as one who is loved and regarded as precious in His sight.

(2) **"Hallowed be Thy name."** This should be seen as the first request, "Father, it is our desire that your name be hallowed, or honored." It is essentially a prayer that God would glorify Himself, make Himself known. This should be our greatest desire, above all things. That in all that we do, in all that we experience, in all that we witness about us, in all that we ask of God that God Himself would be glorified. By God being glorified we are saying that we desire that others would see Him as He truly is--all-glorious, full of majesty, sovereign, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, all-holy. May we first and always pray, ***"Father, it is our desire to see your name hallowed, we desire ourselves and others to see you as you are."***

(3) **"Your kingdom come."** Now in a sense, *the kingdom has come*. Christ came as King of the Jews. He was rejected by them, but in spite of their rejection, and because He was obedient to God enduring their rejection, He was raised from the dead and granted all authority. In a sense, the kingdom has come. Peter argued that the kingdom had been inaugurated evidenced by the fact that Jesus had received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, and that He, Jesus, had given the Holy Spirit to His followers on the day of Pentecost. The Kingdom of God has come.

But in another sense, *the kingdom of God has been coming and is coming*, even as we speak. When a soul begins to order his/her life according to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, His kingdom is "coming", or is being realized. Whenever the power and dominion of Satan is defeated in someone's life, we are witnessing the "coming" of the kingdom. When we pray for souls to be converted to Christ, we are praying that God's kingdom would come.

And yet there is a sense in which *the kingdom is yet to come*. At Christ's second coming His kingdom will be manifested for all to see. We see His kingdom now with the eye of faith. All will see His kingdom when He returns in glory, at which time He will put down all resistance and all rebellion to His rule. We long for that day to come, and we are instructed here to pray to the Father that He would bring it to pass.

We are to pray that He would advance His kingdom. God is not only Father to His people, He is the Sovereign of the world.

His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And his dominion is from generation to generation. (Dan. 4:3)

We are to pray that His kingdom would be seen and acknowledged by all. How is this done? By bringing others to do His will "on earth as it is in heaven."

Now, when we consider the matter of God's will, we are to understand that the Bible speaks of His will in two senses. *First*, there is ***God's will of decree***. This refers to all events that transpire in history which He had

determined before creation would come to pass. It is the will of God's decree that is described in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, God's will is "His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass" (W. S. C., Question 7). This "eternal purpose" is God's decreed will, referred to in Ephesians 1:11, in which Paul describes God, "*who works all things according to the counsel of His will.*" When we pray, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we are asking God to fulfill His purposes that He has determined beforehand that would come to pass. We should not think that because God has decreed something to take place and because we know it will therefore indeed take place that we need not pray about the matter. We are to pray that God fulfill His decrees in our lives and in the world about us. It is with this resignation to God's will of decree that Paul's friends acquiesced when Paul insisted to continue to Jerusalem even though they knew he would be arrested. Luke wrote of the incident, "So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done'" (Acts 21:14).

But the Bible depicts God's will in a second sense--*God's will of command*. This is God's instruction to His creatures that He has given in Scripture, concerning how people should believe and behave. This is sometimes called His "preceptive will." Sin is a failure or refusal to conform our belief, our attitudes or actions to His precepts, His "will." We are to pray that He would enable us by His grace to do His will, that His to obey and conform our faith and practice to His Word. His will of command has issued forth from His throne in heaven and is contained in the Holy Scriptures. We are to pray that His will be done in our lives on earth as it has been directed to us from heaven. This is a petition for grace to help us be submissive and obedient to His Word. We are to pray, "Your kingdom come." And His kingdom is realized when His will is done by us on earth as it is in heaven.

The next phrase to consider is...

(4) "Give us each day our daily bread."

We are first to pray that our Father's name would be revealed and held in highest esteem, certainly by us, but by all others as well. We are to pray that He would accomplish His purposes in history. We are to pray that He would enable us to obey Him. Then, we are encouraged to petition our Father with respect to our personal concerns. "Father, please give us this day our daily bread."

What is meant by "bread"? Bare necessities? Is this a petition for tomorrow's provision? Is it merely a request for physical bread, or for the spiritual bread that comes down from heaven, Jesus Christ Himself, who gives life to His people? Probably it should be understood as *a request for God to go on providing that which is necessary to sustain life day after day*. As the Father sent to Israel their daily provision of manna, bread from heaven, so He provides each of us with that which daily sustains us.

But do we recognize this from His hand? Or rather do we only regard our bread as the product of our hands, or the gift of our employer with each paycheck or the government with its handouts? God is our Provider, and we ought to recognize Him as such. We should not take for granted His daily sustaining of us, and we ought to pray as though He might stop, if we fail to ask. But we should pray with confidence that He will provide, if we do ask, "Give us each day, our daily bread."

(5) "Forgive us our sins."

We are to pray that God would forgive us our sins. Remember that this is specifically a prayer for Christians. Through sin Christians grow indifferent and distant from their Father. They are in need of ongoing forgiveness of sin in order to maintain and continue in a close walk with their God. We are to pray that God our Father would forgive us when we find ourselves having sinned. We are to pray that God our Father would forgive us our sins at the end of every day (night), every week, and upon every occasion we gather for the Lord's Supper.

Now the Matthew form of the Lord's Prayer has "forgive us our debts." Actually the idea of the word "sin" has essentially the same idea in Luke's Gospel; that is, to sin against God is to become indebted to God. This is a common idea in our own culture. When one commits a crime and is caught and convicted, we say that he must pay his debt to society. He had an obligation to society to be a good and lawful citizen. When he broke

the law, he had to pay for his crime. In the same way, when we sin against God we incur debt to God. We owe God restitution. But thankfully, God forgives debtors and sinners freely, apart from restitution. The reason that He can do this is that Jesus paid the debt for sinners when He died on the cross. Christ made restitution for the debts of His people when He died on the cross. God was satisfied with the sacrifice of His life as a payment for our sin indebtedness. And so we pray that God will forgive us our sins, and He does, and we may have confidence that He does: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

But notice the next clause:

(6) “...for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”

Here it appears that a condition is placed on receiving forgiveness from God. Does this bother you? Does this pose a conflict in your thinking regarding the ways that God deals with people? Does it not smack of works-righteousness? That by forgiving others, you earn the right to be forgiven? Please understand, it is not a prayer that says, “*Father, because I have forgiven others, I merit your forgiveness of my sins.*” Rather, the idea may be like this, “*Father, because I have forgiven others their wrongs against me, nothing stands in the way of you being merciful and gracious to me in forgiving my debts (sins).*”

God is gracious to forgive sins. And you cannot merit His grace, he must bestow it freely. But He chooses not to be gracious to them who refuse to be gracious to others. Our Lord often repeated this teaching:

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. *Forgive, and you will be forgiven.* (Luke 6:37).

“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, *forgive him.* And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ *you shall forgive him.*” (Luke 17:3)

(7) “...and lead us not into temptation...”

Some think this is referring to a request that God allow us not to put Him (God) to the test, which would be a violation of Deuteronomy 6:16: “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” But I think that is not so. I believe that it is a simple request that God not allow us to be placed in situations where we will be tempted to sin against Him.

Now may I remind us of this point: our temptation to sin can never be laid at the feet of our Lord. James 1:13 “*When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.*” Nevertheless, the Lord does lead His people. And His leading them may bring them into the place where temptation may be possible--the Lord was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And I would suggest that as the Lord leads us, we may encounter periods of time and enter places where temptation is greater. It is good to pray that the Lord preserve us in these places and spare us from the enticement that may come. “*Lord, lead me around these things, so that I not be tempted to fail you.*”

“But wait”, someone might ask, “does not the Scripture say in 1 Cor. 10:13, ‘There hath no temptation taken you such as common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye be able to bear it.’?” Yes, that is true, there is not temptation that you can encounter that we have not all encountered in one form or another to some degree to another. And indeed, God has provided the means to preserve you through it once you enter it. But *it is far better not to enter temptation to begin with than to have to fight through temptation after having entered it.* It is a good thing to pray continually, “Father, do not allow me or my children, or my friends to encounter temptation. Preserve us from this trial.” We cannot escape all temptation, it will come, it is “common to man”; nevertheless, it is good and right, and encouraged by our Lord to pray, “Do not permit me to enter temptation.”

Let us also remember that we have certain responsibilities not to place ourselves in the place of temptation--by reading or viewing those things that incite our lusts, by being with some people or in some places where we know we will encounter the Tempter. We have only ourselves to blame if we fail to temptation when we have not guarded ourselves, but have tempted the devil to tempt us.

C. An encouraging word on the readiness of God to answer prayer (11:5-8)

The Lord gave this story about a friend who comes to his neighbor at midnight in order to illustrate how His disciples should perceive their Father when they pray.

And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

Our Lord was stressing at least two points.

1. There is a point of comparison. Although a friend may be reluctant to give you the things you ask him because he is being inconvenienced, yet will do so because of your persistence, so in the same way be persistent in your praying to God. *Do not be discouraged by what seems to be God's reluctance to answer you because you have not received what you need.*

2. There is a point of contrast. Although we can account for our neighbor's reluctance of giving us what we need because we are inconveniencing him, we should not think of God in these terms. *In contrast to the reluctant friend, our Father is willing to give us what we need; this should encourage us all the more in our continual asking.*

Now it is true, that God at times does not respond to us immediately. In fact, it would seem that at times God does seem reluctant not only to give us "good things" but the bare essentials that we need for survival. But *we should not attribute our failure to receive as due to His lack of interest or concern for us.* He is not bothered by our requests. God has other purposes for waiting:

- 1) While we wait, we do a lot of self-examination. -- Our motives, our actions.
- 2) Through waiting character is developed -- patience, endurance, and faith.
- 3) Through waiting we are demonstrating to others who observe us that the God we serve is worthy of our worship and devotion and obedience, regardless of the temporal benefit it brings to us.
- 4) God is honored and pleased by the faith and faithfulness of people who trust Him and His Word though they not see any evidence that what He says is so. Hebrews 11:16 tells us that God is not ashamed to call Himself the God of those who wait on Him. In fact I would say, that the longer you wait and yet maintain your allegiance to Him and your submission to Him, the more pleased He is with you.

D. An emphasis on the certainty that God will answer prayer (11:9-13)

1. A promise that God will answer persistent prayer (11:9, 10). In our waiting, we are to be asking. We can be certain that God will hear and answer. The emphasis here is on continual...

- a. **Asking** -- Laying before Him your petitions
- b. **Seeking** -- God is waiting to be found by those who long for Him.
- c. **Knocking** -- As one would continually knock on a door to gain entrance

There is never a suggestion in the Bible that a Christian can live before God in idleness or presumption. The Bible assumes that you cannot live without prayer, that you can just presume upon God to care for everything as it arises. The tenor of all Scripture is that we, His people, are to come continually to Him in prayer, requesting from Him those things we need, while we rely upon Him to provide them, but always seeking His face-- a hearing with Him--so that we might receive the things that only He can give.

2. A promise that God will give good things (11:11-13a). Here we see another contrast is given:

a. A human father is described (11:11, 12). A human father would not be so cruel as *to deceive* or harm his children by supposing to give them what they asked but giving them in its place something that was harmful to them.

b. The heavenly Father is contrasted (11:13). You should not think God is anything but more willing to give everything good and needful to His children who ask Him.

3. The promise that the Father will give the Spirit. What are the good things that the Father bestows upon His children? His Holy Spirit. And with the Spirit come all the graces of God that He imparts to His children--faith, love, hope, patience, endurance, mercy, and goodness. All of these things, in fact, all good things that come to us do so through the operation of the Spirit of God.

The Lord, in teaching His disciples to pray, taught them to pray for the Holy Spirit to be given to them! Now here is one of those passages that is treated by some--even many-- as though it does not apply to the Christian. It is said, "Jesus gave these instructions before the cross, while the Jews were under the law, and before the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, these words, therefore, do not apply to believers today. **C. I. Scofield**, and the editors of the **New Scofield Bible** took this position:

"It is evident that none of the disciples, with the possible exception of Mary of Bethany, asked for the Spirit in the faith of this promise. It was a new and staggering thing to a Jew that, in advance to the fulfillment of Joel 2:28, 29, all might receive the Spirit. Mary alone of the disciples understood Christ's repeated declaration concerning His own death and resurrection (John 12:3-7). Save Mary, not one of the disciples but Peter, and he only in the great confession (Mt. 16:16), manifested a spark of spiritual intelligence till after the resurrection of Christ and the impartation of the Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 2:1-4). To go back to the promise of Luke 11:13, is to forget Pentecost, and to ignore the truth that now every believer has the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 8. 9, 15; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 2:20, 27). (Scofield, p. 1090)

They say, in other words, "These words of Jesus do not apply for the Christian. Here is another quote that I find amazing:

What does it mean to be Spirit-filled? Let me give you a short theology lesson. We will call it theology of the Spirit-filled life. When you were saved, the moment you received Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit came to live within you. There is no Christian who does not possess the Holy Spirit. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9 cf. 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:12-13). Yet it is amazing how many Christians think they do not have the Holy Spirit.

I have sat in church and heard sincere people pray, "O, God, send Your Spirit," and have thought to myself, No, He is here. He is here! I have heard people pray, "God give me more of Your Spirit," as if He came in doses.

The Holy Spirit is a person; He lives within you. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" (1 Cor. 6:19) So many times we ask for what we already have! We pray for the Holy Spirit, and He is already here.

Have you ever analyzed your prayers? You pray, "God, give me more love for so and-so." The Bible says the "love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5).

You say, "God, I need more grace." God says that the grace He has already given you is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9).

You cry, “O Lord, I need more strength.” The Bible says you “can do all things through Christ” who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13).

“O God, guide me,” you say. And He is thinking, “I’m trying. Why don’t you follow?”

“God, I need power,” you cry. In fact, you have had power since the Holy Spirit came upon you (Acts 1:8).²

The conclusion one must draw from these comments is that the Christian should disregard the teaching of the Lord to His disciples here in Luke 11:13. You should not ask for the Father to give you the Spirit of God, through Whom comes these good things. I have some serious problems with this position for these reasons:

a. It dismisses a portion of the Scriptures as not applying to you. But the Gospel of Luke was written by a Christian and was circulated among Christians, and surely the contents were regarded by them as having binding authority upon them.

b. It presumes that you are not in need of present, recurring manifestations of the Spirit’s presence and power in your life; after all, you have already been given all you need. Now, it is certainly true that each Christian has the Holy Spirit indwelling him; His presence is ever with us. But His power is not always upon us. You can grieve the Spirit so that the sensible presence of the Spirit is absent, the power of the Spirit is absent. The Scriptures teach that there are times when we need to be in prayer that God will give us fresh manifestations of His Spirit so that His presence and power be experienced among us a fresh. And I think that one can do this and not to “forget Pentecost.”

Are you not in need of fresh manifestations of His presence and fresh bestowal of His Grace to stand day by day? Do you not need patience, encouragement, boldness, enlightenment, and power to do His commands? Is not the prayer that God fill us with His Spirit the same as give us your Spirit? I would think so, and I would suggest that every good (spiritual) gift only comes to us through the means of the Spirit. It is perfectly proper to ask God to give you His Spirit, of course recognizing, that He already indwells you.³

Here are the words of **Matthew Henry**:

The encouragement he gives us to hope that we shall speed in this prayer: Your *heavenly Father will give*. It is in *his power* to give the Spirit; he has all good things to bestow, wrapped up in that one; but that is not all, it is in *his promise*, the gift of *the Holy Ghost* is in the covenant, Acts ii. 33, 38, and it is here inferred from parents’ readiness to *supply* their children’s needs, and gratify *their desires*, when they are natural and proper: If the child ask for a *serpent*, or a *scorpion*, the father, in kindness, will deny him, but not if he ask for what is *needful*, and will be nourishing. When God’s children ask for the Spirit, they do, in effect, ask for *bread*; for the Spirit is the staff of life; nay, he is the Author of the soul’s life. If our earthly parents, though evil, be yet so kind, if they, though weak, be yet so knowing, that they not only give, but give with discretion, give what is best, in the best manner and time, much more will our *heavenly Father*, who infinitely excels the fathers of our flesh both in wisdom and goodness, give us his *Holy Spirit*. If earthly parents be willing to lay out for the education of their children, to whom they design to leave their estates, much more will our heavenly Father give the spirit of sons to all those whom he has predestinated to the inheritance of sons. (vol. 5, p. 695)

And here are the words of **Charles Spurgeon**:

But it appears plainly enough from the text that *this Holy Spirit is to be given in answer to prayer*. Did not we hear some time ago from certain *wise* brethren that we were never to pray for the Spirit? I think I heard it said often, “We have the Holy Spirit, and therefore we are not to pray for it.” Like that other declaration of certain of the same brotherhood, that we have pardon of sin, and are not to pray for it, just as

² John MacArthur, *Found: God’s Will*, pp. 18, 19.

³ Cf. Philippians 1:19; Galatians 3:2, 5.

if we were never to pray for what we have! If we have life we are to pray that we have it more abundantly. If we have pardon in one respect we are to ask for a fuller sense of *it*; and if we have the Holy Spirit so that we are quickened, and saved, we do not ask for him in that capacity, but we ask for His power in other directions, and for His grace in other forms. I do not go before God now and say, "Lord, I am a dead sinner, quicken me by Thy Spirit," for I trust I am quickened of His Spirit; but being quickened I now cry, "Lord, let not the life thou hast given me ebb down till it becomes very feeble, but give me of Thy Spirit that the life within me may become strong and mighty, and may subdue all the power of death within my members, that I may put forth the vigor and energy which come from thyself through the Spirit." Oh you that have the Spirit, you are the very men to pray that you may experience more of His matchless operations and gracious influences, and in all the benign sanctity of His indwelling may seek that yet more and more you may know Him. You have this as your encouragement, that God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Ever since certain brethren gave up asking for the Holy Spirit they have not had it (Him), and they have gone aside into many inventions; if they will not ask they shall not have, but be it yours and mine to wait humbly and patiently upon the Lord that He may daily give us of His Spirit...

No miracles do we seek, but all the spiritual uplifting which the Holy Spirit gave to men of old we need, and He can give it to us still.

Though He will not reveal new truths--we do not want that He should, for we have already the complete gospel revealed--He will bring home the old truths to our souls and make them potent upon our consciences, and upon our lives, and this is what we want...

We should all pray throughout the day and onward, that God will give to His churches more and more of His Holy Spirit.⁴

Conclusion:

In this section of Scripture our Lord Jesus has been laid down some strong words to His disciples about their duties and the severe consequences for failing in them--- deny oneself, obey His Words, forgive everybody their offences from your heart. These things are not possible to any but those who are empowered by the Spirit of God. You cannot do the things which are set forth in this Book to do them apart from God's Spirit resting upon you and empowering you to do them. And for His presence and power to be manifested in you, you are going to have to pray that the Father give Him to you whenever the occasion arises, and even before it arises. You can only live before Him as He, the Spirit of God empowers you to do so. Do not fail to ask of the Father to give you this good gift.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights,
with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:17)

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 16, pp. 620-623.