

Thoughts on the Lord's Prayer

1. "Our Father"

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WE BEGIN our consideration of the Lord's Prayer with the first two words, both of which are important. Seven times, all in Matthew's Gospel, it is recorded that our Lord said, "my Father Which is in heaven" (7:21; 10:32,33; 12:50; 16:17; 18:10,19). Many times in the New Testament Jesus refers to God as "my Father", notably in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Psalm 89 it was foretold that this would be the case: "Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation" (v. 26).

However, God is not singularly our Father, nor are we singularly His sons or daughters. It is therefore inappropriate for us to address God in that same way. Certainly we may claim God to be *our* Father, but that claim is shared among many. As God's Son, Jesus is "the only begotten".

Owning God as our Father is a declaration of the truth of the creative record of Genesis as well as of our belief in the ongoing purpose of God. God has made us, and hence, as Paul said to the Athenians, "in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring" (Acts 17:28). Yet there were times in Israel's history when they did not even acknowledge the creative capacity of their God, "saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto Me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us" (Jer. 2:27).

How would we feel if our children disowned us? Imagine if they refused to acknowledge any physical connection between us and them, how hurtful would that be? Think then how God feels when most of His children refuse to admit that He made them. What a dreadful thing for the Father to see the evolutionists say in effect to the stones, "Thou hast brought me forth"!

Most of the Scriptures that speak of God as our Father are speaking more of His role in our lives than of Him as our Creator. He desires to make us His children in a far more real way. The work of fatherhood is to care for and nourish children and to bring them up properly. It is one thing to father children, it is another truly to be their

father. There are times when the work of fatherhood is done by others who are not the natural father, but nevertheless they are truly fathers. We need not only to acknowledge God's position as our Father, but also to allow Him to perform the work of fatherhood. Consider the following passage (and there are many more): "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up" (Ps. 27:10).

To address God as our Father acknowledges every aspect of His fatherhood. It is as offensive to God to believe He is our creator (in the physical sense) yet refuse to honour or submit to Him, as it is not to believe Him at all. The Jews of Malachi's day were guilty of exactly that. Certainly they believed in God, but they gave only lip service to the Creator. Consider the Father's complaint: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is Mine honour?" (Mal. 1:6).

To have any meaning at all, addressing God as "Our Father" must be accompanied by honour, respect and obedience. What if our children said to us, "Of course I love you Dad, I just don't want to do anything that shows it, I won't do what you say, nor will I tell anybody about you"? How would we feel then? Perhaps this helps us to understand how God feels when we treat Him in similar fashion. Think of your fleshly father; do/did you love him? How did that love show itself? Well, of course you showered him with affection, asked for his advice and acted upon it, defended his good name, spoke well of him to others, were hurt when he was evil spoken of and tried to live so that he would be proud of you. Is it like that with God? Consider the words of our Lord: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16), that is, choosing to act so that our Father is glorified.

How awful for God to have the opening words of this prayer rattled off by evil and corrupt atheists as a matter of formality on a public occasion! Let us take great care that we do not give so great an insult to God as to deny, in part or fully, His fatherhood.