

LORD'S DAY 46

120. Q. Why has Christ commanded us to address God as *Our Father*?

A. To awaken in us
at the very beginning of our prayer
that childlike reverence and trust
toward God
which should be basic to our prayer:
God has become our Father
through Christ
and will much less deny us
what we ask of Him in faith
than our fathers would
refuse us earthly things. ¹

1. **Matthew 7:9-11** Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ “Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Luke 11:11-13 If 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? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If 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!

121. Q. Why is there added, *Who art in heaven*?

A. These words teach us
not to think of God's heavenly majesty
in an earthly manner, ¹
and to expect from His almighty power
all things we need
for body and soul. ²

1. **Jeremiah 23:23-24** “Am I a God near at hand,” says the LORD, “And not a God afar off? ²⁴ Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?” says the LORD; “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the LORD.

Acts 17:24-25 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Matthew 6:25-34 Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? ²⁸ So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the

lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹ and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” ³² For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Romans 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?



In order to teach His disciples to pray, Christ gave them an example of a prayer which pleases God. It is good that we realise this. The Lord's Prayer is a model. While it may be used as a prayer, we are not bound to only this prayer.

What is true for the prayer in general is also true for the address of prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, we are given a model of a proper address: "*Our Father in heaven.*" But we are not limited to this address. We may use others. In the book of Psalms we find various addresses:

- Psalm 28:1 *O LORD my Rock* (which expresses safety and protection)
- Psalm 80:1 *O Shepherd of Israel* (which alludes to God's guidance and care of His people).
- Psalm 84:1 *O LORD of hosts* (which speaks of God's power and strength as leader of the angelic army).
- Psalm 92:1 *O Most High* (which proclaims the greatness and glory of God).
- Psalm 123:1 *O You Who dwell in the heavens* (which suggests God's majesty and excellence).
- Psalm 145:1 *O King* (which points out God's dominion and authority).

Any of these addresses are pleasing to God. We are not limited to the one which the Lord taught us in His prayer. We should not make a false distinction as if the address of the Lord's prayer is more perfect than the addresses of David's and Asaph's prayers, for the prayers of David and Asaph were inspired by the same Spirit who dwells in Christ. Yet we focus upon the address which Christ taught because He gave us this address as a model, to teach us the right attitude of prayer.

When we write a letter, we begin with an address. This address sets the tone of the letter. If we write to a stranger, we might address our letter with "*Dear Sir/Madam.*" The tone of the letter will be business-like, impersonal. If we write to someone who has been given a high office or special position in the community, such as our

member of parliament, we would address our letter such as "*Honourable Mr. _____*" or "*Esteemed Sir.*" The tone of the letter would be one of humble respect. If we are writing to a close friend, we would address him/her by first name: "*Dear John*". The tone of the letter will be very intimate, personal. The address of the letter will tell us something about the relationship we have with the person we are addressing, and will set the tone of the letter.

So also the address of the Lord's Prayer tells us something about the relationship which we have to God and sets the tone of our prayer. Thus the address of prayer benefits God inasmuch as it glorifies God. But it also benefits *us* by putting us into the correct frame of mind. The Catechism teaches us that this address serves to awaken in us the child-like reverence and trust which is basic to prayer.

The original German text of the Catechism speaks about "*child-like fear*" while the Latin translation uses the word "*child-like reverence.*" The word *fear* brings out thoughts of dread or anxiety because of impending harm or danger. The word *reverence* makes us think about *awe, respect, honour.* Both elements are proper, for we read in Hebrews 12:28,29 "...serve God acceptably with **reverence** and **godly fear.** For our God is a consuming fire."

We are to fear God (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13, 1 Peter 2:17, Revelation 14:7). To be more correct, we are to fear lest we should in any way offend God and bring upon us His wrath. For it is the wrath of God that we fear, not God Himself. God is good and gracious, and all those who obey Him are blessed. But God is also holy, and His wrath burns against sin. We do not fear God Himself, but we fear lest we should arouse the anger of God. In Psalm 90:11 we read: "*Who knows the power of Your anger? For Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due You*" (NIV). "*For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.* (Deuteronomy 4:24). "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Hebrews 10:31).

This "*child-like fear*" is basic to prayer, for it is this "*fear*" that makes us reckon with our sins and our sinfulness. If children have never experienced the displeasure of their father for wrong-doing, they have little incentive to reckon with the wrong-doing. It doesn't bother them if they do wrong. They don't apologise for it. They don't change their ways. But if a child has experienced father's displeasure towards wrong-doing, and have felt father's hand come down heavily upon them when they have done wrong, then they come to have a child-like fear of father, and they begin to reckon with their sin. They will think twice before doing wrong. And if they do wrong, they will be quick to ask for father's forgiveness. In like manner, a child-like fear of God makes us think twice before doing wrong, and makes us quick to ask Father for forgiveness when we've done wrong.

It is this child-like fear of God's wrath which induces us to pray the fifth petition: "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*" It is also this child-like fear of God which induces us to pray the sixth petition: "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*"

We are also to *revere* God. To revere God means to stand in awe of His infinite majesty, to glorify Him and cause Him to be glorified. He is our Father. By addressing God as Father, we are reminded that we are not addressing an equal. God is not our brother, but our Father. A father has authority, and therefore deserves and demands respect and honour. In like manner, God deserves and demands our respect and honour. Our reverence for God must exceed that which we give to our earthly fathers for God is our *heavenly* Father. His authority, majesty and glory cannot be compared with that of earthly parents. Our child-like reverence for God induces us to pray the first petition of the Lord's Prayer: "*Hallowed be Your Name.*"

We do not only show our reverence to God by speaking words as we do in prayer, but also by submitting ourselves to His authority. Just as children honour their parents by their obedience, so we honour

God by our obedience. It is this child-like reverence for God which induces us to pray the second petition: "*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*"

By addressing God as *our Father*, we also remind ourselves of the child-like trust which is basic to our prayers. By trust we mean *dependence, reliance*. We must place ourselves in the care of God, confidently expecting God to provide us with all that we need.

In order to do this we must know God's love for us. Those who hate us seek to destroy us, therefore we never trust our enemies. We must know that God cares about us, and that he seeks our well-being. And we do know of God's love, for it has been manifested in the giving of His only begotten Son. "*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32).

The address of the Lord's Prayer assures us that our relationship with God is a very intimate relationship of love. We are taught to pray, "*Abba, Father*" (cf. Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). Literally, "*Abba*" is a form of endearment which could be translated as "*Dad*" or even "*Daddy*." By this address we are assured that we are not addressing an impersonal deity, but a loving God.

In order to trust God we must also know of God's gracious promises. God has promised to provide us with all that we need for body and soul. However, we might doubt (which is the opposite of trust) that God will provide us with what we need because we have committed countless sins. Our conscience might say "*No, we will not receive God's blessings for we have sinned.*" But if we know of God's grace in Jesus Christ, we will overcome this doubt. For in Jesus Christ all the promises find their "*Yes!*" (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:20).

In order to trust in God we must also come to know God's power or His ability to provide us with all that He has promised. There is nothing too difficult for God. Once a man asked Christ if He could heal his son. The man said, "*If you can do anything ...have compassion on us and help us*"

(Mark 9:22-23). But Christ was insulted by the formulation of this request. We must not prefix our petitions to God with a statement of doubt: "If you can ..." for nothing is impossible with God (Matthew 19:26; Luke 1:37).

It is this child-like trust in God which enables us to pray "Give us this day our daily bread" and to close our prayer with certainty by saying "Amen - it will surely be!"

What a privilege, given through grace, to address God as "our Father." Through our fall into sin we destroyed our relationship with God and no longer have the right to call him "our Father." Through our fall we became children of the devil. In John 8:41-44 Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father; God." Jesus said to them,

"If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. ... You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (cf. also 1 John 3:10).

By nature no one has the right to address God as Father. This is a privilege which is given only to those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. "But as many as received [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).



Questions:

1. Why has Christ given us the Lord's Prayer? Are we bound to only this prayer?
2. What are some other addresses of prayers found in the book of Psalms? Is the address of the Lord's prayer more perfect than these prayers? Explain why (not).
3. What does the address of prayer do? Who then benefits from the address of prayer?
4. What does the address of the prayer tell us about our relationship with God? What "tone" should we use when addressing God?
5. The original German text and the Latin translation use two different words to describe the tone of our prayer. Which are they? What do each of these words make us think about?
6. In what sense are we to fear God? What does this fear make us reckon with? What will this fear of God make us do? In which petitions do we see the effect of this *fear*?
7. What does it mean to revere God? What will this reverence of God make us do? In which petitions do we see the effect of this *reverence*?
8. Besides child-like fear and reverence, what other attitude does the address awaken in us? What does that mean?
9. Before we can have child-like trust in God, what three things must we know? How has each of these been manifest to us?
10. What does the term "Abba" tell us about our relationship with God?
11. In which parts of the Lord's Prayer do we see the effect of this child-like trust?
12. Through our fall into sin, who became our father? Do we, sinners, have the right to address God as our "Father?" To whom is this privilege given? What does 1 John 3:1 say?