

June 29, 2008

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:
OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN
MATTHEW 6.9A**

Addressing God as "our Father in heaven" expresses our relationship to the Father in Christ as the family of God, confesses our trust that he will deliver us, and commits us to being conformed to his image.

1. FATHER

Nearness: There is relatively little distance in that address: "Father." We do not address God who is far away and with words that only the educated, intellectual adults understand.

Nearness is not some cheap sentimentalism. Intimacy of this sort is not rooted in mere emotions. This doesn't mean that it is stoic (i.e., without feeling), but it means that our emotions don't determine the reality of intimacy or nearness we have with the Father.

Being near is to be a worshiper. Called to be a part of the family and, thus, in communion with God.

Familiarity but not the familiarity of equals. There is a reverent intimacy.

Nothing new and all new: Some say (1) addressing God as "Father" is totally new in the NC, or (2) that God is called Father in the OC, but it doesn't have much bearing on the NC understanding.

Remember: Jesus came to *fulfill* the Law and the Prophets. In doing so he does so as *the* son who has God as his Father. The way God is revealed as Father in OC shapes our understanding of Christ's relationship with the Father and his mission (ours as well).

Relationship of the Creator with man was as a Father. Adam = son (Lk 3.38). Relationship continues with Israel, the firstborn, the son (Ex 4.22-23). Solomon is also the son of God (2 Sam 7.14). The fatherhood of God is one perspective from which the whole story of the world can be told; a story that comes to its climax and fulfillment in Jesus.

Jesus certainly emphasizes God's fatherhood in the NT, especially in his unique relationship to himself. But this is because the story of God's fatherhood of his people is being re-shaped around Jesus, the son of God.

Sons in the Son: In order to address God as Father, you must be a son. Who is the son? Cf. Mt 1 and genealogy. Jesus is the Son. Only united to Christ can we call God "Father."

Something else: If Jesus is the unique Son who joins others to himself giving them the right to call God "Father," then *this is his prayer*; not just in the sense of it coming from his lips in teaching it to us, but his own address and petitions to the Father.

When we approach God as Father and pray this prayer, we are praying it with the Son who first prays it. He prays it as we are to pray it: not for his own sake individually, but for the sake of all those who in him call God Father.

The Father: the One who delivers: "Father" brings back images of the Exodus. Remember Ex 4.22-23. Context: God has heard the groans of his people (Ex 2.24) and remembers his covenant, determining to deliver them.

Cf. Isa 63. YHWH's day of vengeance. He will trample the unfaithful in his wrath. Then Isaiah recounts the many acts of covenant mercy YHWH has performed through history; the major event being the exodus from Egypt. The cry for deliverance: "For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name." (Isa 63.16)

Calling on the Father in this context we are saying (1) that we need an exodus, and (2) that he is the One who will bring it about.

What Jesus brings is the fulfillment of the Exodus shadow. Cf. Lk 9.31: Moses and Elijah speak to Jesus of his *exodus*; i.e., his death and resurrection.

Exodus for Jesus, all those joined to him, *and* the entire creation. Cf. Rom 8.19-23. The creation will be delivered when we sons of God experience our adoption, which is the redemption of our bodies; again, all exodus language.

Vocation of sonship: The eternal Son is the perfect image of the Father in eternity. The sons of God created after the likeness of

the eternal Son are also to image the Father and grow up to be in his likeness. This is a calling.

We are the new Adam. We are the new Israel. We are the new Solomon. We are all of these things and have their basic mission because we are united to the one who is the fulfillment of all of these types and shadows.

Calling God “Father” enduring tough discipline so that we can share in his holiness (Heb 12.3ff.). Sometimes, *because we are sons*, we are taken through the deepest and darkest times of our lives in order to shape us up into mature children of our heavenly Father.

Jesus, *the Son*: He suffered *because* he was a son. This was his calling *as the Son*. He learned obedience through the things that he suffered (Heb 5.8). As it was for him, so it will be for us who are in him. We endure what we endure *as sons* in order to mature us.

2. OUR FATHER

Child among children: (1) We are brothers (siblings) of Jesus. Cf. Heb 2.11-12.

After his resurrection we hear Jesus say to Mary, “... go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (Jn 20.17). Jesus is our brother, so God is our Father.

(2) “*Our Father*” indicates that we are united to all of those others around the world and throughout history who have the right to call God Father. The Christian faith is not an individualistic private matter.

Each member has a personal relationship with the Father, but it is in the context of the larger family. You can’t call God Father unless you call certain other people brothers and sisters. Your life is concerned with the greater family purposes.

This is a family: Not an impersonal contract or business partnership. Legal aspects, but it is no more impersonal than you parents having legal custody of your children. They are legally yours, but it is much more than bland contractual.

Think also of the comfort of those who are family-less in some way. God “sets the lonely in families” (Ps 68.6) and is a Father to the fatherless (Ps 68.5). Also, Ps 27.10, “When my father and my mother forsake me, Then YHWH will take care of me.”

The Father gives you a new family in the church. Granted, we are not all that we ought to be. We have a few warts, a few skeletons in the closet, and quite a few wrinkles to be worked out, but we are family.

3. OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

In the secret place: Father in the secret place or heaven basically equal. Behind the veil where God’s throne is. To enter into heaven when we pray is to go behind the veil into the secret place.

The nature of our praying is revealed when we realize that we cannot see heaven, God’s throne, the place we are entering when we pray. This place is veiled from our eyes. We pray *by faith*; i.e., trusting and acting upon God’s word of promise to us.

Heaven is the place of God’s throne: (1) God’s throne is *a throne of grace*. Cf. Heb 4.16. We have come to the Father, our Redeemer, in heaven. We must believe that he will be gracious to us and hear us.

(2) God’s throne is the place of power and authority. Cf. Ps 115.3 He has all authority and power to do what needs to be done.

If he were gracious without power, it would be nothing but sentimentalism. If he were powerful without grace, it would be tyranny. But our God, our Father, is the God of all power who uses his power to act in favor toward his people.

Calvin: “When the Scripture says, that God is *in heaven*, the meaning is, that all things are subject to his dominion,—that the world, and everything in it, is held by his hand, —that his power is everywhere diffused,—that all things are arranged by his providence.”

(3) Address aids us to keep healthy distinctions. We must not become disrespectfully familiar with God.

Calvin: “Whenever we engage in prayer, there are two things to be considered, both that we may have access to God, and that we may rely on Him with full and unshaken confidence: his fatherly love toward us, and his boundless power. Let us therefore entertain no doubt, that God is willing to receive us graciously, that he is ready to listen to our prayers,—[sic] in a word, that of Himself he is disposed to aid us.”