

The Lord's Prayer

"Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

'Give us this day our daily bread.

'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'] [1](#)*

The prayer above is known as the Lord's Prayer and is the most widely known prayer in Christendom. Almost everyone who has attended a church has recited it. It is commonly taught that this prayer is the central prayer in Christianity and the model for how Christians should pray. But is it? And as long as we are going along this path we must ask an even more provocative question. Is it Christian? At first blush such a question may seem outrageous. But is it? The answer is more involved than one might think. That is what this article is about.

The Texts

The Gospels provide two accounts of the prayer. One, quoted above, is from Matthew 6.9-13. The other is found in Luke 11.1-4.

In Matthew's gospel, the Lord gave this prayer in response to His observation of two categories of people: 1) Jewish hypocrites (most likely religious professionals) and 2) Gentiles. In the first case, Jesus warned His followers against the self-righteous exhibitionism of religious Jews who wished to advertise their devotion to God. Such behavior is

typical of religious people. Jesus' assessment of these was, "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full" (Matthew 6.2). From the gospels we learn that Jesus despised religion. The only categorical criticism He ever gave was to religious people. In the second case, Jesus warned against praying as the heathen, i.e., Gentiles, prayed. Their practice was to recite long-winded, repetitive prayers. His point was that God did not need to hear requests over and over. God is not stupid.

With these two things in mind, Jesus offered a succinct prayer which has come to be known as the Lord's Prayer.

	The Lord's Prayer	Comment
v. 9	Our Father who is in heaven	Recognition of God and that He resides in heaven above all
v. 9	Hallowed be Your name (ἁγιασθήτω, aorist imperative)	Recognition that God is holy
v. 10	Your kingdom come (ἐλθάτω, aorist imperative)	Request that God's kingdom be established on the earth
v. 10	Your will be done (γενηθήτω, aorist imperative)	Request for God's will in recognition of His sovereignty
v. 10	On earth as it is in heaven	Request for God's kingdom to be established on earth just as it is in heaven
v. 11	Give us this day our daily bread (δός, aorist imperative)	Request for God to provide daily provision

v. 12	And forgive us our debts, (ἄφεσις, aorist imperative) as we also have forgiven our debtors (ἀφῆκαμεν, aorist indicative)	Request that God forgive sin on the basis of forgiving others
v. 13	And do not lead us into temptation, (εἰσενέγκης, aorist subjunctive) but deliver us from evil (ῥῦσαι, aorist imperative)	Request that God deliver us from evil and temptation to sin
v. 13	[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']	Acknowledgement of God's sovereignty forever

Luke's version of the prayer (Luke 11.2-4) is more brief than Matthew's. Jesus gave this version in response to a request from His disciples. Luke recorded the occasion:

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."

	The Lord's Prayer	Comment
v. 2	Father, hallowed be Your name.	Recognition of God's holiness—no mention of His heavenly position
v. 2	Your kingdom come.	Request for God's kingdom to come to earth
v. 3	Give us each day our daily bread.	Request for daily provision

v. 4	And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.	Request for God to forgive based up forgiving others
v. 4	And lead us not into temptation.	Request that God not lead us into temptation

Is the Lord's Prayer a Christian Prayer?

The answer to this question is in three parts. The first is definitional. The second and third are theological.

1. Definition

To understand the first answer to this question requires that we define the term "Christian." Were Jesus' disciples "Christian?" Did Jesus proclaim Christianity? A careful reading of the Bible will reveal that Jesus' disciples were not Christians. The first usage of the term "Christian" was in Antioch Syria (Acts 11.26). Antioch Syria lies outside the borders of Israel and the term was coined years after Jesus' earthly ministry and after the Apostle Paul's conversion. Therefore, Jesus' prayer was not Christian for the term "Christian" was not in existence. If the disciples were not Christians, what were they? The Scriptures provide no specific term for those who believed Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. In God's sight they were true Jews, racially and spiritually (cf. Romans 9.6). They were identified as followers of "The Way," (Acts 9.2, 19.9, 23, 24.14, 22). This designation may have come from Jesus' proclamation that He was "the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14.6).

2. Theological: Jesus' Ministry

The theological answer to the question is somewhat involved. Jesus, in His earthly ministry, proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God (Matthew 4.17). Paul wrote that the purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry was "to confirm the promises to the fathers" (Romans 15.8). What were these promises? They were

God's covenants to the nation of Israel. They included the Abrahamic, Palestinian (Land), Mosaic, Sabbatic, Davidic, and New covenants. In addition to the covenants themselves, the prophets had provided additional details about how these covenants would be fulfilled—especially about the nature of God's kingdom on earth and how it would be established. The central tenants of this kingdom were that Israel would be the supreme nation among the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13) and that it would be characterized by peace and righteousness (Isaiah 11.1-10).

John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Messiah, the King of Israel. Many fail to realize that Jesus' ministry was wholly Jewish. Jesus had no ministry to Gentiles and specifically commanded His disciples not to go to Gentiles (Matthew 10.5-6). Jesus Himself made two exceptions: a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15.21-28) and a Roman centurion (Matthew 8.5-13). According to Luke, His meeting with the centurion was proxied, not face to face (Luke 7.1-10). When Gentiles came to Jesus' disciples before the Passover and requested to see Him the disciples were flummoxed (John 12.20-26). Why? Because Jesus had commanded them not to have dealings with Gentiles. We have no record that He saw them.

Jesus' audience was, therefore, entirely Jewish. The purpose of His earthly ministry was not to found Christianity but to "confirm the promises to the fathers." He came to fulfill God's covenantal promises with Israel and establish a Jewish kingdom on earth. In this kingdom He would reign as David's greater Son (Luke 1.30-33, 67-79). Jesus' ancestry qualified Him to be King. He was from the royal line of Judah and His royal title was "Son of David" (Matthew 1.1, 9.27, 15.22, 20.30-31, 21.9, 15, 22.42; Mark 10.47-48, 12.35; Luke 18.38-39, 20.41 cf. 2 Samuel 7.8-17). He was the King who had come to His nation to establish His kingdom and rule with a nation of priests, i.e., the Jewish people (Exodus 19.5-6) over Israel and over the entire earth (Zechariah 14.9).

3. Theological: Jesus and Paul

The differences between Jesus' earthly ministry and Paul's ministry are striking. Saul of Tarsus was a Jew's Jew. But he was also a complete enemy of Jesus of Nazareth. Not content to arrest Jews who were believing that Jesus was the Messiah within the borders of Israel, Saul obtained permission from the chief priests to extend his authority beyond Israel. On the way to Damascus, the resurrected, ascended Lord stopped him dead in his tracks. From heaven came a voice asking Saul why he was persecuting Him (Acts 9.3-4). Falling to the ground, Saul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" The response, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9.5) shook him to the core. No response was more unexpected or shocking than this. Speaking with him was God Almighty—Jesus of Nazareth. He was never the same.

Unlike the Twelve, who were commissioned during Jesus earthly ministry within the borders of Israel, the heavenly Lord commissioned Saul outside the borders of Israel. Unlike what Jesus had told the Twelve, that they were *not* to go to Gentiles (Matthew 10.5-6), the ascended Lord told Saul to *go* to Gentiles (Acts 9.15, 22.21). These facts reveal that Saul, who became Paul, had an entirely different commission and ministry than that of Jesus and His commission to the Twelve.

Theological Differences of the Earthly Jesus and the Heavenly Jesus (Paul's Ministry)

The doctrines the glorified Lord revealed to Paul were vastly different from those He had taught to the Twelve while on earth. With regard to our subject at hand we will examine two key doctrinal differences we find in the Lord's Prayer. These are Jesus' instruction about the kingdom and about forgiveness.

1. Kingdom

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructed His disciples to pray

for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. This kingdom was a kingdom in which Israel would be supreme among the nations (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13). Hundreds of verses speak of this kingdom in the Old Testament. One will search the Scriptures in vain to find any record that Jews had a hope of heaven. Their hope was wholly earthly.

Paul's teaching on the kingdom of God bears little resemblance to the kingdom proclaimed by the prophets or by Jesus (Romans 14.17; 1 Corinthians 4.20, 6.9-10, 15.24, 50; Galatians 5.21; Ephesians 5.5; Colossians 1.13, 4.11; 1 Thessalonians 2.12; 2 Thessalonians 1.5; 2 Timothy 4.1, 18). The kingdom of the prophets and of Jesus was earthly. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus called for the establishment of God's kingdom on earth (Matthew 6.10). Paul emphasized God's heavenly kingdom. Right before his martyrdom Paul declared, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4.18). Paul taught that members of the body of Christ, the Church (Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.18), i.e., Christians, had heavenly citizenship (Ephesians 1.3; Philippians 3.20) in God's kingdom, not earthly citizenship. This was entirely different from God's revelation prior to Paul.

2. Forgiveness

The second teaching from Paul which is different from the Lord's Prayer is the matter of forgiveness. In the Lord's Prayer, divine forgiveness was conditional and depended upon human forgiveness. Some, in an attempt to homogenize the teachings of the Gospels with the teachings of Paul, argue that Jesus was talking about forgiveness of one believer for another, not divine forgiveness. While it is true that believers are to forgive one another, this was not the point of Jesus' teaching. Jesus stated God would forgive based upon human forgiveness. To ensure no misunderstanding, He restated His point in Matthew 6.14-15, saying, "For if you

forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” Jesus also stated in Luke 6.37:

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

Could words be more plain?

Nothing could be further from Paul’s teaching on forgiveness than Jesus’ words in the Lord’s Prayer. Paul taught no conditions exist to receive God’s forgiveness other than believing the gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Paul taught that when one believed the gospel one received God’s forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1.7; Colossians 1.13-14, 2.13). Paul declared believers “have” (ἔχομεν), present, active, indicative of ἔχω, “to have or hold,” forgiveness of sins. For the believer of Paul’s gospel, forgiveness is a present possession, based, not upon forgiving others, but upon believing the gospel.

In Ephesians 4.32 Paul wrote,

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

A similar passage is Colossians 3.12-13 where Paul wrote:

¹² *So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;*¹³ *bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

These passages are vastly different from what the Lord taught the Twelve in His prayer. Paul exhorted believers to forgive

one another—not as a condition for divine forgiveness—but as a result of divine forgiveness. This is grace not Law (Romans 6.14).

Conclusion

Notable theological differences exist between what Jesus taught and what Paul taught. To the nation of Israel, Jesus ministered on earth. To the body of Christ, the Church, Christians, as it were, Jesus ministers from heaven. Paul taught doctrines he received from the risen, ascended, glorified, heavenly Christ. Jesus was a minister to Israel to fulfill the covenants and the prophetic kingdom program. Jesus ministered under the Law of Moses. The risen Lord commissioned Paul as a minister of grace. The Law of Moses said, “Do.” When one “did” he received God’s blessing. Paul declared that the Law was “holy, righteous, and good” (Romans 7.12) but that believers of his gospel were under a new administration which he received from the Lord.² That new administration was governance of the Holy Spirit under grace. God commissioned Paul as the minister of the “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20.24). Under Law, one forgave in order to be forgiven. Under grace we forgive because we have been forgiven. What a difference!

¹ The bracketed text is not found in the oldest manuscripts.

² See the study, [Paul and the Law](#).

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