

Hallowed be your name

3-Your will be done, as in heaven

We've prayed for the Father's kingdom to come—in other words we want a world where God is in charge. Now, we're asking that we, and everyone, will be obedient subjects. Here's what Christians think is 'heavenly'—everyone doing what people in heaven do.

All prayer involves asking for something we can't live without, and for something only God can provide, and that is true here, when we ask that God's will be done.

A commanded life

Our culture teaches that goodness is a human virtue arising from within us. But Christians love to be commanded. It is why we read the Bible and seek out teaching. It is our security and hope (Psa. 119:25, 50, 52. etc.). We celebrate that the Shepherd leads us in paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psa. 23). We are following Jesus who said he spoke and acted as commanded by his Father (John 12:49f; 14:31).

This Sermon on the Mount shows what this would look like. There would be no hatred, lustfulness, boasting—just simple speech. There would be love, even for enemies, and plenty of generosity. We would be like our heavenly Father (Matt. 5:21-48.)

Jesus also shows that God's commandments are to be obeyed in their intention, not hypocritically. And when Jesus is asked about the greatest commandments, he goes straight to love—for God and for one another (Matt. 22:36-44). This, of course, is what the law has always been about (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 10:12; Mic. 6:8).

The apostles, likewise, are eager in their many exhortations—showing how to behave now, as we will certainly do in heaven. We should studiously avoid anything unclean (2 Cor. 6:16—7:1).

There's plenty of information in the Bible about what God wants, but that is not the subject of this prayer. We are not asking *what* God's will is. We are asking that it may be *done!*

An assisted obedience

Is this prayer a bit cheeky? God tells us what to do, and we ask him to make it happen! But if we are honest, we will know how much we need this help. And Jesus is saying to ask.

Plenty of creeds and ethical systems can tell us what we *should* do, but have no power—other than manipulation, or force—to ensure that it happens. How does this work?

First, God dismantles false confidence so we will listen to him. Sometimes, hard things happen. 'Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees' (Psalm 119:67-68, 71).

Most of us learn the hard way. So, when we pray for God's will be done on earth as in heaven, we may be asking for trouble! But it will be a trouble that leads to righteousness.

A promised obedience

We are on good ground in making this request. God asks Israel to circumcise their hearts—but then, says *he* will do it (Deut. 10:16; 30:6).

And then, when his people are being afflicted (as above), God says he will cleanse them from all impurity. He will take away a 'heart of stone' and give them 'a heart of flesh'. He says, 'I will cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey all my rules' (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

Jeremiah says God will write his law on hearts—not like the law carved in stone. (Jeremiah 31:34). Through forgiveness, they will both know God *and* what he wants them to do. Old Testament prophets always put these things together.

It is this that Jesus has come to fulfill, so we may pray this prayer with much comfort and expectation! 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled' (Matthew 5:6)—filled with practical righteousness. This is a powerful prayer!

A gospel obedience

There are reasons why we find it easy to do wrong and hard to do good. We are sinners. It's our nature—called 'flesh'. Then, the unbelieving world supplies many of our needs and we are inclined to go with the flow. And it agrees with our 'flesh'.

Then there's the devil! He is a deceiver and accuser. He can control guilty people. He tells us that God isn't friendly. Then, we have to keep our good works ahead of our bad works to warrant his favour. And because God seems unfriendly, we need to impress people rather than him.

But doing good works like this isn't doing them as they are done in heaven! God's commands don't work by condemnation but by justification.

Only a humanity re-formed in Christ can truly obey. We need to know we have been taken through his death and resurrection, and that we have received his Spirit. Jesus unites himself with us in our need. Through faith, we are united with him in his victory.

Using the three-fold problem identified above, we must see that Satan's accusations are now null and void (Rom. 8:1). We must see that our flesh has been crucified with him (Gal. 5:24). We must see that we have been crucified to the world and it to us (Gal. 6:14). This is the setting in which the apostles give their instructions as to how to live—and in which we obey.

This is why Paul talks about *not* being under the law of God (Romans 6:14). It's not because God's commandments are irrelevant but because of our propensity to use them to justify ourselves. Nobody ever gets into God's favour by their performance. Righteousness, or justification, is God's gift, and then we want to—and are called to—act accordingly. This is not a performance. It's a relationship!

Paul says, 'But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness' (Rom. 6:17-18).

And, 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death, *in order that* the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us...' (Romans 8:4). We have found a new law—the law of Christ, and it teaches us to live like Jesus himself (Galatians 6:2). And of course, this keeps all of God's commands.

We are no longer condemned but indwelt by God's Spirit. Justifying ourselves by God's law is now totally unnecessary, and precisely for that reason, we are freed to do what he wants.

Exhortation

Here is what God will do when we pray, 'May your will be done as in heaven'. Forgiven people love (Luke 7:47). Love keeps Christ's commands.

Trusting in such good news enables us to do good things, to learn God's ways, to restrain bad habits, to persevere, to be godly and kind. In other words, to love (2 Peter 1:3-9). This is living like we are in heaven! And if you are not doing these things, you have forgotten you were cleansed from your sins. You can't be looking at what God has done for you and then be slack about God or mean to your neighbor.

So let's pray 'May your will be done as it is in heaven'. Let's hunger and thirst for righteousness and expect God to fulfill our desire. Some of the tasks that love gives us may be hard, but loving God isn't—not if we keep our eye on what he has done. For Jesus to die for our sins wasn't easy, but he did say, 'Not my will but yours be done'. He loved his Father, and that settled the matter. Let's follow him, and pray this prayer.