



A Biblical Theology of Prayer

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'Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name' From around the globe the heavenly Father is addressed in the languages of earth. The prayer that Jesus taught begins where prayer must begin - with the true and living God. The Bible is God's Word; it is his story of his work in bringing rebellious men and women back to himself. It tells, not of man's seeking a lost God, but of God's seeking lost men. The Bible does not present an art of prayer; it presents the God of prayer, the God who calls before we answer and answers before we call (Isa. 65:24). In the biblical history, prayer is not introduced as a separate spiritual discipline: it rises as man's answer to God's address. God speaks to Adam; Adam speaks to God. In the Book of Genesis we find conversations between God and Abraham. Indeed, Abraham bargains with God, begging God's pardon for his insistence, but respectfully pleading his cause (Gen. 18). The richness of later revelation about prayer never does prejudice to this simple reality: prayer is personal address to a personal God: 'Our Father, which art in heaven. . . .'

Christian devotion has been tinged at times with forms of mysticism that reverse the biblical pattern. In the place of the triune God of Scripture, revealed in Jesus Christ, such mysticism substitutes an impersonal Absolute, an abyss of non-being into which the devotee is plunged and absorbed. Prayer as personal intercourse with God is then merely tolerated – for those of limited spiritual competence. Not prayer, but *samadhi* is sought: a consciousness transformed by absorption. The adept does not adore the personal God, he becomes the impersonal All. [1] The techniques that prepare for such an experience feature repetitive sounds, sights, or actions. Analytical thought is mesmerised to favour intuitive awareness, a relaxed state in which one's consciousness of individual identity is suspended. [2]

Mysticism seeks to alter the mental state of the mystic. Prayer seeks communion with God. To be sure, the praying Christian is transformed. Prayer plunges into agony and soars in ecstasy, but it does not seek the heights or depths of experience. It seeks the Lord. The delight found in his presence is offered to his praise.

I. PRAYER ADDRESSES THE PERSONAL GOD

A. God's glory is personally revealed

Prayer, like all worship, is always a response to God' s revelation of himself and his will. To call upon God' s name one must first know his name; it is God who takes the initiative by making his name known. God reveals himself by his deeds; he also makes his name known directly by his words. In both, God is revealed as personal. In his words he both promises and proclaims his deeds. The wonder of both his words and his deeds evokes the response of adoration.

1. In his works

God reveals his power and wisdom in the created universe. ' The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands' (Ps. 19:1). Creation itself forms part of God' s address to man. Psalm 147 beautifully joins the word of God that spreads the snow with the word that reveals his laws and decrees to Israel. Yet the God who speaks to his people is exalted above his creation, the work of his hands (Ps. 57:5). The thunder of God' s power in creation affects the response of prayer in a double way. First, because God has all power, he is able to act in answering prayer. The thunderstorm of God' s appearing described in Psalm 18 is his response to the cry of his afflicted servant. Second, the creative power of God shows the awe and reverence with which he is to be addressed and worshipped. God is not submerged in the cosmos, but greater far than all that his word called into being. We may not find a visit to the zoo a devotional experience, but God brought awe to Job with a close-up look at the hippopotamus and the crocodile. Job learned that his complaints had been addressed to a Creator whose power and wisdom surpass all understanding (Job 40,41).

God' s royal power appears in his control of history as well as of nature. ' The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand fast forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations' (Ps. 33:10,11).

The prophet Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant to see the chariots of fire that surrounded the besieging troops of Syria (2 Kgs. 6:17). Those who oppose the purposes of God are always outnumbered and overpowered. The prophet can pray with confidence to God as the Lord of history, and can proceed to capture those sent to take him captive.

The deeds of God that both invite and answer prayer are, above all, his deeds of deliverance and salvation. God hears the cry of enslaved and oppressed Israel, and declares to Moses in the desert that he has come down to deliver them and bring them to himself (Exod. 3:7,9). The exodus deliverance is God' s answer to the groans of his chosen people. Yet here, too, God' s answer both exceeds and precedes their prayer. Enslaved Israel is far from praying effectively for deliverance: the cry that comes to God is more the groan of affliction than the plea of faith. Moses, embittered by his own abortive attempt to champion the cause of Israel, is far from seeking God' s commission to deliver them. Rather, he angers the Lord by his reluctance to accept the charge that God thrusts upon him. God promises deliverance because he would be faithful to his own promises, the promises that he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:6,13,16).

With the patriarchs, too, the initiative was God' s. It was the Lord who called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees and promised to bless him and make a great nation from him (Gen. 12: 1-3). Abraham does pray for a son, but only after so many years have elapsed that he begins to despair of the promise years later, Abraham prays, not for its fulfilment, but its abandonment.

He actually laughs at the promise of God (Gen. 17: 17). The notion of Sarah' s bearing him a son in their sunset years has become ludicrous. Abraham would have God recognise the limitations of the situation and settle for a reasonable solution. Sarah is hopelessly childless, but Hagar, her maid, can and has borne to Abraham a son. Abraham therefore prays, ' Let Ishmael live before you!' God promised too much and should settle for reality! In God' s own time the impossible promise is fulfilled; Isaac is born. Sarah, who, like Abraham, had laughed in unbelief, laughs in another way: ' God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me' (Gen. 21:6). The marvel of God' s work so far surpasses the expectation, indeed, the imagination of Abraham and Sarah, that only laughter can express the absurdity of divine grace. Isaac, ' Laughter' , is a name that memorialises the overwhelming wonder of the saving work of God. Mary, promised a yet more amazing miracle, is reminded by the angel of the assurance given to Sarah: ' Noword is too wonderful for God!' (Gen. 18: 14; Luke 1 :37). [3]

Prayer, in the biblical context, is always response to the God who has made himself known. Further, it is a reverent response. The wonder of God' s works in creation and salvation demands adoration: ' It is the LORD!' Prayer is antithetical to magic. God is not to be manipulated nor his power exploited. He cannot be summoned like the genie of Aladdin' s lamp. Rather, it is he who does the summoning. Exiled Jacob, fleeing from his brother' s wrath, is met by the Lord in a dream; his vow is an awed response to the promise of the God who has spoken to him (Gen. 28:16-22).

2. In his name

Worship begins in the godly line of Seth when men ' call upon the name of the LORD' (Gen. 4:26). In the most basic sense, calling on God' s name means uttering his name aloud, addressing him by name. God' s name, then, has significance. In the USA, ' handle' has long been a slang term for ' name' . Knowing a person' s name gives us a ' handle' in addressing him. For that reason some tribal cultures have kept an individual' s ' real' name a secret so that others could not gain the control that knowledge of a name affords. In revealing his name to men, particularly to sinful men, God shows the wonder of his grace. He makes himself addressable, opens the door to prayer, provides a bond that calls to fellowship. In the patriarchal period described in Genesis, God' s disclosures of himself are linked with a series of divine names: 'çl `elyôn, ' God Most High' (14:22);çl r'î, ' You are the God who sees me' (16:13); 'çl ôadây, ' God Almighty' (17:1);çl ôlâm, ' the Eternal God' (21:33);çl h'ôwâ yirch, ' the Lord will provide' (22: 14);çl êlôhé yiúrâçl, ' God, the God of Israel' (33:2);çl bêl-çl, ' God of Bethel' (35:7). These names are often associated with places, and with altars set up to worship God in the name that was revealed. This series of names leads to the disclosure of the covenant name, *Yahweh*, when God calls Moses at the burning bush (Exod.3:14f.).

Taken in context, and sometimes elaborated by qualifying statements (e.g. Gen. 14:22), these names present powerful and dramatic witness to the attributes of God, attributes that are decisive for the address of prayer. They teach us that God is the Creator of heaven and earth; nothing is hid from his sight. He has all power, and can intervene at will in the world of his creation to accomplish his purposes of grace. Although he is eternal, he identifies himself as the God of Israel, forming his own name upon the name of his servant. His name is made the seal of his promises. He not only sees, he ' sees to' the desperate needs of those who trust him. His purpose of salvation is rooted in his own nature: he is the ' I Am' who is ~~be~~

determined and sovereign in his plan to redeem his people.

As the people of God respond in worship, they 'magnify' the name of the Lord (Ps. 34:4; 69:30): that is, they rejoice in what God's name reveals about his nature and at the same time pray that God will be true to himself. The prayer, 'Hallowed be thy name' marks the very pinnacle of devotion. It asks not merely that God's name might be hallowed on earth in the doing of his will. Far beyond that, the prayer reaches to heaven: it asks that God hallow his own name, that God be God in all the wonder of his being.

3. In his presence

Prayer responds to God's revelation of himself by deed and by word. Yet there is a dimension of depth in that revelation. God does not merely speak and act; he is present. Prayer is steeped in the awareness, often an awe-filled awareness, of the presence of God.

The immediacy of God's presence is sometimes symbolised by attending phenomena: the darkness that surrounds him, or the cloud through which his glory shines. God is represented as coming in the cloud and speaking from it. An awesome flame, shining like lightning out of deep darkness, represented the presence of God to Abraham. [4] These symbols of God's immediate presence show the contrasting truths of God's infinite transcendence and his immediate appearing. The heaven of heavens cannot contain him (1 Kgs. 8:27); he fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:24). For him to regard the heavens and the earth would be to humble himself (Ps. 113:6). Yet this is what he does. 'For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit . . ." ' (Isa. 57:15). No physical fire can reveal his holiness (Heb. 12:18). Even the wind that splits the rock cannot adequately express his power, yet he can reveal his presence in a whispered word (1 Kgs. 19:11, 12). The personal presence of the Lord is dramatically revealed in the appearance of his Angel. In the Angel God appeared to Abraham; in the Angel he led Israel through the wilderness. The Angel of God's presence bears his name, and is to be feared and obeyed as the Lord (Exod. 23:21), for, indeed, it is God who appears as the Angel. The immediate presence of the Lord is also expressed by the phrase, 'the face of the Lord' (Exod. 33: 14, 15). Isaiah speaks of the exodus deliverance of Israel by the 'angel of his face' (Isa. 63:9). [5]

The very expressions used to describe God's self-revelation show that the initiative must come from him. Man cannot ascend into heaven to look upon the face of God, nor can he build a temple-tower to bring God down to the box of his religious specifications. This was the sin of the builders of the tower of Babel. Rather than calling upon the name of the Lord, they sought to make for themselves a name, and to build a tower that would establish communication with God on their terms. The phrase that describes the tower of Babel (the top reaching to heaven) is repeated in a different context when God reveals himself to Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 11 :4; 28: 12). The stairway of Jacob's dream is set up by God, not by men; it is God who takes the initiative. He descends the stairway to stand beside Jacob in the dream and to repeat the promises that he had made to Abraham. [6] By God's initiative his presence is made known. Jacob marks the spot as Bethel, the 'house of God', exclaiming, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it!' (Gen. 28:16).

When Jacob returns to the land of the promise after his long exile in Haran, God again takes

the initiative in revealing his presence (Gen. 32). Jacob fears the encounter with his offended brother Esau, but he is taught to fear rather his encounter with God. The threat comes, not from the encampment of angels that meets him as he enters the land, but from a single antagonist who challenges him: the Angel of the Lord. The desperate wrestling match that follows should be understood as trial by combat: an ordeal in which Jacob prevails even as he is crippled by the touch of the angel. Jacob emerges as the lame victor: he has seen the face of God and has prevailed to receive the blessing (Gen. 32:28, 31; Hos. 12:4). [7] The deep mystery of this incident is illumined by its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. The touch of the Angel on Jacob' s thigh has reference to his descendants. [8] The stroke of judgment falls upon the Seed of Jacob; it is the Suffering Servant who is smitten of the Lord, but who strives with God and wins.

Jacob' s struggle reflects his prayer recorded earlier in the chapter (Gen. 32:9-12). He confesses his own unworthiness, prays for deliverance from Esau, and claims the promise of blessing that God had spoken at Bethel. Jacob' s victory is by faith: in his crippled condition he is no match for a human adversary, much less the Angel. Yet he clings with desperation to the Angel, claiming the promised blessing. When the Angel asks Jacob to release him because the dawn is breaking, we are not to understand that the Angel feared the dawn. The danger was to Jacob: the danger of seeing, in the light of the morning, the face of the One who was none other than the Lord. This is clear from Jacob' s words after the encounter. He calls the place ' Peniel' (' the face of God') because in the dim light he saw God' s face and yet escaped death.

Can Jacob' s wrestling with the Angel be made a model for prayer warriors of the new covenant? Certainly not if it is torn from its context in the history of redemption, and therefore from its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. It is Christ who delivers us from the judgment threatened at Peniel. His loud cries and tears have prevailed for us (Heb. 5:7). He has endured the ordeal that accomplished our salvation, the ordeal of Gethsemane and Calvary. God' s revelation at Peniel teaches the grace of his plan as he intervenes to bless the heir of the promise. Yet Jacob is not just an actor in a sacred drama. His fierce grip on the angel expresses his desperate faith. In that respect Jacob, like the host of saints surveyed in Hebrews 11, bears witness to us. We have received ' the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6). That light is the supreme blessing of grace. The prayer of faith lays hold of that gift with a persistence that will not be denied (Lk. 11:8; 18:5).

The Apostle Paul, who laboured in the gospel and suffered agony in persecution (Phil. 1:30), also agonised over the churches he had planted (Col. 2:1-3). He did so, not in fretful anxiety, but in prevailing prayer. Epaphras, in the company of the apostle, wrestled in prayer for the saints in his home church at Colosse (Col. 4:12).

B. The response of prayer is personal

The personal form of God' s self-revelation requires a response that is supremely personal. Prayer is not a magical formula to be repeated, but the personal communication, awed and adoring, of the redeemed creature who stands in the presence of the Saviour God.

1. Prayer by persons in God's image

In prayer the creature addresses the Creator. Prayer therefore requires dependence, but it also requires access, the possibility of communication between the creature and the Creator. The image of God in man provides the ground for both. God created man in his image; clearly man is a creature. He is like God as his image-bearer, but he is not divine. In the creation story of Akkadian mythology the god Kingu is executed for planning rebellion; mankind is fashioned from his blood. [9] In contrast, the biblical account declares that man is created by God from the dust of the ground. Mankind is 'Adam' as formed from *adamah*, the soil (Gen. 2:7; 5:2). As Paul says, 'The first man is of the earth, earthy' (1 Cor. 15:47). Likeness is not identity. The divine inbreathing that gave life to Adam did not impart deity. The Lord 'forms the spirit of man within him . . .' (Zech. 12:1). [10] In spirit as in body, man is God's creature. It is the tempter who holds out the false promise that Adam and Eve can be as God (Gen. 3:5).

Yet the creation account in Genesis sets man apart as made in God's image (Gen. 1:26, 27). Because of that distinction, mankind is given rule over the rest of creation. Adam names the animals, but none is suitable to be a companion for him. Adam, God's image-bearer, is God's representative on earth; Adam and Eve are to serve God as rulers of creation. God's image relates mankind not only to the created world, but also to one another. Human life is precious in God's sight because of the dignity of God's own image (Gen. 9:6). Yet, above all, the divine image relates man to God. Adam, formed in God's image, may be called a son of God (Luke 3:38). Luke's genealogy reminds us that Jesus is the Son of God as the second Adam; in him the image of God marred by sin is restored and renewed. But Jesus is more than mere man; he is God the Son, the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15; 3:10; 2 Cor. 3:18). The image of God that is restored by salvation is the image of the divine Son (Rom. 8:29). The incarnation gives meaning beyond all imagining to man's creation in the image of God. Christ is the very brilliance of the Father's glory, and we are transformed from glory to glory in the same image (2 Cor. 3:18; Heb. 1:3).

Human personality cannot be understood or expressed apart from the fundamental reality of the image of God. [11] Only as God's image-bearer can man have both freedom and purpose without contradiction. Prayer expresses both. In the midst of the created cosmos, man is called to prayer, not only to praise God for his marvellous works, but also to further his will and design in creation. Consider the amazing boldness of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples. They may call God their Father and ask that he hallow his own name; they may seek the accomplishment of his will on earth as in heaven. God stands in no need of counsellors; he requires no support or encouragement to unfold the mystery of his will. Yet God's grace so draws creatures of dust to his side that they may join with him to seek his sovereign purposes. Union with Christ enables us to seek with him the fulfilment of his Father's will.

On the other hand, the image of God puts the seal of God's possession upon those whom he has made. When the enemies of Jesus confronted him with a catch question about paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus asked to see a denarius, a Roman coin. The image and inscription on the coin were Caesar's. Jesus said, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's' (Mt. 22:21). That answer cut through the trap that was laid for him, but it did much more. The coin was Caesar's, for it bore his image. We are God's for we bear his image. God's image in us is also his claim on us. Prayer gives to God what is his. The boldness of the Lord's prayer is matched by its humility, its simple dependence on the heavenly Father. Nothing magnifies the grace of God more than the realisation of the privilege that grace gives. The more the image of God is restored in us the more personal becomes our relation to him, and the deeper our devotion.

2. Prayer by the whole person

Because God's image makes man to be man, prayer involves a response that has no parallel in human experience. Personal relations on the human level are necessarily partial. A man relates to his wife in a way that differs from his relating to a business partner or to a chance acquaintance. We sustain roles that can express only partially our own personhood. In relation to God, however, we are 'naked and pinned down' (Heb. 4:13). Our masks are gone, pretence is useless: the relationship is not partial, but total. All that we are stands related to our Maker and Redeemer.

Worship is overwhelmed by the *presence* of God's being and glory. When the seraphim cry 'Holy, holy, holy' in God's temple, every utterance springs from a fresh perception of the glory of the Lord sweeping over them like the waves of the sea. But the redeemed taste a greater glory. Our awareness of God our Creator is inexpressibly heightened by our sense of the presence of God our Saviour. John Newton, once a 'slave of slaves' and of sin, knew that wonder: 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me' To the boundless wisdom and power of God there is added the depth of his mercy and the height of his love (Ps. 103:11; Eph. 3:18-19). David tasted it; he added to his psalm of deliverance from Saul the opening exclamation, 'I love you, a LORD, my strength' (Ps. 18:1; cf. 2 Sam. 22:2). David's experience has been deepened for us by the coming of the Lord, but his cry is still ours.

In the presence of the Lord prayer spirals from faith to faith, from blessing to blessing. The more aware we become of the One to whom we pray, the more we are drawn to seek his face; the more we seek his face, the more aware we become of the inexhaustible riches of his grace (2 Cor. 3:18).

C. The response of prayer is effective

The pattern of prayer that is assumed and described in the Bible is grounded in God's own nature, his saving work and word, his gracious presence. This biblical theology of prayer gives answer to objections that are often raised against the practice of prayer. The assumptions of rationalism still underlie popular liberal thought. The physical universe is conceived as a machine governed by the laws of causality. It grinds on inexorably; it would be foolish to think that so insubstantial an entity as a whispered prayer could affect its course. Strangely, this view of nature is often supported by an appeal to God's laws. A liberal preacher, rejecting the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, defends his unbelief eloquently:

Brought up as we have been in an atmosphere charged with scientific methods and presuppositions, it is hard for us to share the physical interpretation of the event. The God we know is not a God who reverses his laws and we find it difficult to imagine that he who decreed that dust is the beginning and end of man's material existence should in this instance reverse that declaration. [12]

No doubt the deistic conception of God's relation to creation has long outlived the Newtonian physics with which it was so closely linked. No doubt, too, equally un-biblical views could be associated with more recent physical models. [13] Our views of the cosmos tend to bear suspicious similarity to the cultural context in which they are constructed. [14] The profound

simplicity of biblical teaching has no difficulty with God' s ability to answer prayer. Through the prophets the Lord calls upon men and women to call upon him: he will show them great and wonderful things that they could not imagine (Jer. 33:3). By the prayers of his prophets God restores the dead to life: nothing is impossible for God. The real difficulty is not with the nature of prayer; it is with the nature of God. Given the God of the Bible, answers to prayer are no problem.

The strength of the biblical answer to that difficulty seems to create another. If God is Lord and Sovereign, if he takes the initiative, if he accomplishes his will in heaven and in earth, *why* pray? Will not God carry out his purposes without our requesting that he do so? Since we do not know how God will accomplish his plan, would it not be better to leave everything in his hands? Is not prayer presumptuous meddling, offering God unnecessary advice? If the first difficulty misses God' s power, the second misses his goodness. The plan that God will accomplish is a plan that includes the dedicated participation of his creatures. For this purpose he has made man in his image and is restoring him in the image of his Son. As Jesus prays for those the Father has given him, he is fulfilling the will of his Father (John 17). Our prayers, too, are part of the great sweep of God' s plan for his people. God' s sovereignty does not rob history of significance; to the contrary, it is God' s plan that gives human history meaning. We do not know how to pray as we should, in the light of God' s purposes. But for that very reason his Spirit who dwells in us makes intercession according to the will of God (Rom. 8:27).

II. PRAYER ADDRESSES THE COVENANT GOD

A. Prayer in the bond of the covenant relation

1. Prayer is grounded in God's covenant

Reflection on the personal quality of prayer has already brought us to consider that God is personally present as Saviour, not just Creator. The fellowship between God and man that existed in the garden of Eden was broken by human sin. Paul in Romans describes the progressive apostasy of mankind. Men gave God up, and God gave men up to the consequences of their sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Human lostness consists of both alienation and guilt. Men and women wandered away from God and sought out idols: they are lost like sheep on the hills. They also defied the will of God to serve their own lusts: they are lost like doomed criminals under sentence. Yet God in mercy did not abandon lost mankind to the justice of his judgment. Rather, he revealed his purpose for salvation. God' s remedy is both ' to seek and to save that which was lost' (Lk. 19:10). That pattern of God' s saving work, climaxed in Jesus Christ, was already evident in the Old Testament. From a lost race scattered and doomed by the resurgence of sin after the flood, God sought out and called Abraham. He promised to bless Abraham and to make him a blessing. In faith Abraham went to the land to which God directed him. There God sealed his covenant with Abraham by taking an oath (Gen. 15:17-21; 22:16; Heb. 6:13-18). Clearly, God' s call to Abraham focused on the promise that God made, and to which he swore. Abraham was made the heir, not merely of the land, but of the promise of blessing, blessing in which the nations of the earth would share. By his covenant promise God also put his claim upon Abraham.

The heart of the covenant that God made with Abraham was the relationship that God established. He would be *God* to Abraham: in that relationship was both God' s claim and his promise.

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you (Gen. 17:7).

Abraham is called to walk before God, to keep the way of the Lord in righteousness and justice. His obedience is to manifest the relationship created by the Lord' s taking knowledge of him (Gen. 18:19), a relationship received by faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4).

The relation established by God provides the access of prayer. Abraham prays to God about his childlessness, claiming God' s covenant promise (Gen. 15:2,3). Because of his relation to God, he intercedes for others. God says, ' Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?' (Gen. 18:17). Abraham prays for Sodom so that his nephew Lot may be spared. He prays for Abimelech, even though Abimelech' s problem has been occasioned by Abraham' s own failure. Abraham is a prophet whom God hears (Gen. 20:7, 17).

Moses, like Abraham, prays on the basis of the covenant relation God has established. Appearing to Moses at the burning bush, God identifies himself by his covenant with Abraham. He hears the cry of enslaved Israel because they are the descendants of Abraham, to whom God bound himself (Exod. 3:6). God claims Israel and demands that Pharaoh let his people go: ' Israel is my firstborn son . . . Let my son go, so he may worship me' (Exod. 4:22, 23). God leads Israel his son out of Egypt to enter into covenant with him at Sinai.

2. Prayer pleads the covenant relation

The importance of the covenant bond for prayer appears vividly when Israel rebels against the Lord. Even while the covenant ordinances are being given to Moses on the mountain, Israel is sinning in the worship of a golden calf. Moses intercedes with God for Israel, pleading God' s cov' enant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 32:13). He argues the honour of God' s name: what will the Egyptians and the Canaanites say if God destroys the people that he delivered from Egypt? (Exod. 32:12; Deut. 9:27-29; Num. 14:13-16). Above all, Moses calls upon God to remember his own mercy and the faithful love that he has toward his own. God has bound himself to Israel by the strong cords of his own covenant love, his *hesed* (Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18). [15]

The intercession of Moses for rebellious Israel shows both the claim and promise of God' s covenant. God' s covenant claimed his people for himself, God' s promise showed the meaning of that bond: not only what God would *do* for Israel, but what he would *be*: their God, dwelling in their midst. After Israel' s worship of the golden calf at the very foot of Mount Sinai, God judged the idolatrous nation: many died. He then threatened to cancel the plans for the building of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was to be God' s tent, his dwelling among the tents of Israel. But now God said that it was not safe for them to have his dwelling in the midst. Instead, he would go before them in the Angel of his presence, drive out the wicked inhabitants of Canaan, and give them the land as he had promised. No tabernacle need be built for his dwelling; rather, God would appear in the cloud of glory at the door of a tent pitched outside the camp. In that tent Moses and Joshua would be sheltered to meet with God. It was a tent of

meeting, not of God' s dwelling God would not be present in the midst of the camp.

Moses and the people responded with grief and dismay. Moses cried, ' If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here' (Exod. 33:15). The whole point of the journey to Canaan would be lost if God' s presence in the midst were lost. God was not simply liberating a people to give them a homeland: he was leading them to a place of fellowship, to a land where he would ' set his name' at the place of his dwelling among them (Deut. 12:5).

What plea would Moses use to seek the restoration of God' s original purpose? He could not promise improved performance on the part of Israel. His only hope was to cast himself on the rich mercy of God, and to plead his promises. God had professed to know Moses by name, that is, to choose Moses as his son and servant. Let Moses, then, know God by name: ' Teach me your ways so I may know you . . . Show me your glory' (Exod. 33:13, 18). God granted the prayer of Moses. He passed by before Moses so that his glory might be seen, and he proclaimed his name to Moses. He is Yahweh, the I Am, who declares, ' I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion upon whom I will have compassion' (Exod. 33:19). Moses cannot look upon his face and live, but he can hear his name proclaimed: Yahweh, the God who is full of grace and truth (Exod. 34:6). John alludes directly to this passage in the introduction to his Gospel. He reminds us that, while no man has seen God, the grace and truth that was promised through Moses was given in Jesus Christ (John 1:14-18). In him God has finally tabernacled among his people, and the prayer of Moses is answered: they see the glory of the Lord. When Philip echoed Moses' prayer, Jesus answered, ' Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9).

The name of the Lord, freshly proclaimed, became the basis of Moses' prayer. [16] He pleads that God will go in the midst of the ' stifnecked' people, ' forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance' (Exod 34:9). To turn aside the threat of God' s removal from the midst of Israel, Moses could appeal at last only to God' s willingness to reveal his own nature as the God of the covenant and of *hesed*. Not Israel' s devotion to the Lord, but the Lord' s devotion to Israel is the plea of Moses the intercessor. Significantly, Moses does not pray that Israel may be given the inheritance of the land, but that Israel be made God' s inheritance. Having *seen* the glory of God, Moses *seeks* the glory of God. The glory of being God' s possession is the greatest blessing of his people. The tabernacle was built in the midst of the camp, a symbol of God' s claim and blessing in Christ (Jn. 1:14).

Those who are brought into covenant relation with God plead his mercy and cast themselves by faith on his grace. At the same time, their relation to the Holy God requires of them the obedience of those who have been made the people of God. To have God as your God is to live before him. The presence of God opens the door of prayer; it also opens our lives before him. Ceremonial cleanness, the core of the levitical ordinances, symbolises the reality of God' s presence among his people (Deut. 23:9-14). The people are to be holy, as God is holy: the ceremonial law symbolises that moral purity (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Num. 19).

3. Prayer and the ceremonies of covenant worship

The tabernacle vividly symbolised the presence of God among Israel. The spiritual reality that Moses so desperately sought was made visible in a tent of leather and linen, and later in the cedar and gold of Solomon' s temple. On the one hand, the elaborate symbolism of the

tabernacle and temple might seem to institutionalise God's presence. No longer did God appear to an Israelite in Bethel as he had once appeared to Jacob. God was now to be worshipped at Jerusalem, in the place where he had put his name. An appointed priesthood mediated worship; a sacred calendar prescribed the times of worship; a detailed directory fixed the cultic actions. But on the other hand, God's appearing to Jacob or to Abraham had been only occasional. In contrast, the temple symbolised the *abiding* dwelling of God; the worshipper could come with confidence to the house of God, knowing that he could enter his courts with praise. God was present in his house, ready to receive the sacrifices he had appointed and to hear the prayers of his people. Indeed, Solomon, in dedicating the temple, recognised that this house of God was the place to which all nations were called to direct their prayers (1 Kgs. 8:41-43).

Only with the coming of Christ was the tension between the personal and the institutional resolved. Jesus presented his body as the true temple (John 2:19-21). His was the sacrifice foreshadowed at the altar of the temple, his is the royal priesthood of the Messiah (Zech. 6:12, 13; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 6:19-20). There is one place of worship, one place where God is immediately present. That place is not Mount Gerizim, as Samaritan tradition taught, but neither is it Jerusalem (John 2:19-21; 4:21). The veil of the temple is torn in half. The way to heaven is now opened through the veil of Christ's flesh (Heb. 10:20). No longer can there be a holy place on earth: not even on Mount Zion. Christ has entered into the true tabernacle, the dwelling of God in heaven (Heb. 8:1, 2).

The mediatorial role of the priesthood indicated the distance that remained between a sinful people and a holy God. Only a divinely appointed representative of the people could stand before God's face to offer the petitions of the people, symbolised in the burning incense (Exod. 30:1-10; Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:10). Yet, if the priesthood functioned as a buffer, it also showed the intimate approach that lay at the heart of God's covenant. The Old Testament priesthood is not abolished, it is fulfilled. Only through the ministry of the perfect High Priest can the once-for-all sacrifice be offered, and the mediation of a heavenly priesthood be forever established. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is uniquely qualified to minister the new covenant as a royal priest, seated on the right hand of the Father. There he ever lives to make intercession as the Advocate of the people of God (Heb. 7:25).

The intimacy of new covenant prayer does not flow directly from the simple fact that all believers have now become priests. We must not forget that Peter is quoting from the Old Testament when he declares, 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:9; Exod. 19:6). The people served by the sons of Aaron were themselves a holy nation. In the new covenant God has not simply eliminated priestly mediation by promoting every believer to priestly status. Rather, it is Jesus Christ, the true and final Priest, who fulfils the priestly office. True, we have an access far more intimate than even the high priest of the old covenant. But we have it in Christ, who has entered heaven for us. We draw near to God through him; our boldness to enter the holy of holies in heaven itself is a boldness we gain from the finished sacrifice and continuing advocacy of Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:14-16; 7:25; 10:19-22). Our prayer is not intimate because it is unmediated. It is intimate because Christ, the Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, is our Mediator.

The concreteness, the specific location of the presence of God symbolised in the temple now has its fulfilment, not in a building made of stone and cedar, but in the incarnate person of the Lord. In Jesus Christ, God is personally present. By his Spirit he is present where two or three

are gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20). By his Spirit we enter the heavenly Jerusalem in worship to gather with the saints and angels, and to be led in our worship by Jesus himself, the one Mediator between God and man (Heb. 12:22-24).

The fulfilment in Jesus Christ must also be kept in view to understand the relation between prayer and sacrifice. Because sacrifice was an outward ceremonial it could be substituted for the heart attitude that God's covenant demanded. For that reason the prophets condemn the offering of sacrifices as meaningless ritual on the part of people who have turned aside from obedience to God (Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 6:20; Mal. 1:10). Yet the place of sacrifice continues to be acknowledged in the prayers of Israel in the Psalms. Particularly are the vows of thank-offerings mentioned (Ps. 22:22, 25; 54:6; 116:14; Jonah 2:9). Whether literally or figuratively, the paying of vows to God is expressed as the way in which God's saving mercies are acknowledged. The prayer of David in Psalm 51 brings together the sacrifice of a broken heart and the thank-offering of restored fellowship (Ps. 51:16-19).

4. Prayer in the community of the covenant

God's covenant was never exclusively individual. At Sinai, all the people redeemed from Egypt entered into covenant with the Lord. Indeed it was God's covenant that formed a nation, a people of God, from the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt. God's words, mediated through Moses, were addressed to all the assembled people.

The consciousness of God's dealings with Israel colours the prayers of individual Israelites. The prayer of Hannah is suspect to the critics: it seems more appropriate as a hymn for the nation than as the thanks of a simple woman to whom God gave a son (1 Sam. 2:1-10). The hymns of the first chapter of Luke have a similar cast, reflecting, as they do, Hannah's song. Yet we fail to appreciate how deeply the consciousness of God's promises to the people were woven into the piety of each member of the community. Indeed, the deeper a person's trust in the Lord, the stronger is the awareness of God's covenant promises.

In the Psalms that same corporate consciousness is present. Many of the Psalms are 'we' psalms, addressing praise and petitions to the God of Israel in the first person plural. But the individual psalms are also corporate. They appear in the Psalter, not as samples of private poetry, nor even as the prayers of typical Israelites. Rather, the individuals speak as representatives of the people of God. This is particularly clear in the psalms of David, who writes as the king, the royal servant of the Lord. His tribulations are troubles for all the people of God; his enemies are the enemies of God and of the nation; his victories show the outstretched hand of the covenant God. Other individual psalms are also the words of servants of the Lord. Their cry is one in which all the people of God may join.

God's judgments on Israel's sin brought destruction and captivity. The prophets, however, promised that a remnant would be spared and that renewal would come. The winnowing process pointed to an Israel within Israel: a small but faithful number who would be circumcised in heart and renewed in spirit. As a refining process, the captivity put a new emphasis on prayer, and on individual prayer. Daniel prays faithfully in personal devotion. Yet Daniel prays facing Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10). His prayer is corporate in language and in burden (Dan. 9:3-20). Like Moses, he intercedes for the people of God.

Jesus prays alone, and teaches the need for private prayer. In contrast to the publicity-seeking Pharisees, the disciples are to pray to the Father in secret (Mt. 6:5,6). Yet Jesus also chides his disciples that they could not watch with him in prayer in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:40). He teaches them to pray together, '*Our Father, which art in heaven . . .*' In the new covenant as in the old, the people of God join in praise, confession, petition and thanksgiving. The revelation of God's full and final salvation in Christ binds those born of the Spirit in a fellowship of prayer. Individual prayer is not put above corporate prayer as more spiritual, more profound, or more pleasing to God.

B. God's covenant Lordship shapes prayer

1. God's zeal for pure worship

Access to God in prayer implies that we seek to do the will of God. The covenant love of God for his people is a jealous love. God will tolerate no rivals. He will not be consigned to a polytheistic pantheon to be worshipped along with Baal and Astarte. To belong to God is to forsake the false gods (Exod. 20:5; 34:13; Deut. 4:23, 24). Solomon dedicated the temple of the Lord in prayer, but he later violated God's covenant by erecting a shrine to Chemosh, the god of the Moabites (1 Kgs. 11:7; cf. Deut. 13:6-8). John reminds Christians of their loyalty to Jesus Christ: 'He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols' (1 John 5:20,21). As God reveals himself in his Son, his zeal for exclusive worship demands that we come to God through him: 'Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

The jealousy of God burns not only against the false gods, but against any idol that would be placed in his temple, any representation of him, the true God. He reminded Israel that they saw no form or likeness when he spoke to them from the fire on Sinai (Deut. 4:15). In the tabernacle the throne of God was symbolised by the golden lid of the ark of the covenant. That throne was attended by figures of the cherubim, but there was no representation of God. God's ban on images of himself did not mean that no image was possible; God had made mankind in his own image and likeness. It was the design of God that his own Son would take human flesh to reveal him. The 'mercy seat' awaited the coming of Jesus Christ. God's jealousy against idolatry is jealousy for his Son, who alone can reveal his Father (Mt. 11:27).

The limitation and the freedom of Christian prayer have the same root. God alone can tell us how he will be worshipped. Israel was warned against adapting their worship to the religious customs of the Canaanites. Israel, on entering the land, was not to say, 'How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same'. Rather, God warned his people: 'You must not worship the LORD your God in their way . . . see that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it' (Deut. 12:30,32). Only God can teach us how to worship or pray; we are therefore bound to his commandments. Yet this limitation is the fountain of our liberty in prayer. No one can bind our conscience to prescribed forms or rituals of prayer. We are not to pattern our prayers on the incantational spells of the heathen, who suppose that they may be heard for their much speaking, or who have discovered the mesmerised transformation of consciousness that can arise from endless repetition. Even the Lord's Prayer is recorded in the New Testament in two slightly different versions (Mt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). This principle, however, does not rule out the use of forms of prayer to enable a group or congregation to pray in unison. The richly indwelling word of Christ is the source of corporate song by which

the congregation praises God and is built up (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19, 20). Such songs are themselves often prayers. Unison prayers whether sung, chanted, or recited play an important part in worship. The use of such forms, however, must always be qualified by the freedom God has given to his people in prayer, both individually and corporately.

2. Our zeal for our Lord

a. Expressed in submission to his will

The bond of God's gracious devotion toward his people draws us to a corresponding zeal. Prayer in the fellowship of God's covenant is not a grudging acceptance of his revealed will. Rather, it is zealous concern for his glory and for the accomplishment of his purposes. The petition that Jesus taught, 'Thy will be done', has the whole Old Testament for its background. Elijah cried, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty' (1 Kgs. 19:10, 14). To be sure, the prophet's confession was also his complaint, but it yet expresses the devotion to God that is the fruit of faith among God's servants.

In seeking 'a better country, that is, a heavenly' the Old Testament saints were expressing their faith in God's purposes and designs. Abraham submitted to God's will even when God's command to sacrifice his son seemed to cancel the very promise that had been fulfilled in the gift of Isaac. Abraham told his servants, 'Stay here . . . We will worship and then we will come back to you' (Gen. 22:5). The word for 'worship' is a common term; it means to bow or prostrate oneself in prayer. [17] The unqualified submission of that posture symbolised the heart of Abraham's faith. In the covenant relation, God is the Lord, Abraham his servant. It is for the Lord to command, and the servant to obey. Abraham submitted: 'Thy will be done!' In faith, Abraham refused to see God's command as a betrayal of his promise. Isaac was given by a miracle; if need be, he would be restored by a miracle: 'Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death' (Heb. 11:19). On the slopes of Mount Moriah Abraham told Isaac, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son' (Gen. 22:8). When God did provide his beloved Son as the Lamb, Jesus prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will' (Mt. 26:39). Jesus cast his body on the ground and his spirit on the Father. Here we may see the deepest meaning of prayer according to the will of God. In Gethsemane Jesus entered the mystery of God's purpose revealed to Abraham on Mount Moriah, the purpose that brought darkness over Calvary. Never will any child of God be called upon to bear the abandonment to wrath that was the Father's will for his Son. Only Jesus could endure that for us. Yet in our prayers we, too, may ask the Father to remove our cup of suffering. When the cup remains, Jesus himself enables us to say, 'Not as I will, but as you will'. His *gratia* is sufficient; his power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:8-10).

The servant of the Lord, however, does not always walk in darkness, or face God's will as mystery. He reflects on the meaning of God's works, and meditates on the word of God (Ps. 1:2; 119:97; 145:5). The apostolic preaching of the cross knew the joy of a mystery revealed: the cross of Christ that had seemed to be the end of all their hopes was actually the beginning of hope that reached beyond the grave. We do not understand the ways of the Lord; much remains in mystery, but, reflecting on the wonder of God's redemption, we may already begin our praise (Ps. 35:28; 71:24; 105:2).

b. Expressed in confession seeking forgiveness

Since prayer is offered by a sinful people, God's Lordship demands that we confess the holiness of God and penitently plead for forgiveness of sin. To draw near to the Lord in prayer is to cry out with Isaiah, 'Woe is me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty' (Isa. 6:5).

In the Psalms David confesses his personal transgressions, and cries to God for forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration (Pss. 32; 51; 6:1, 2; 38:1-4; 40:12). His greatest joy centres in the mercy of God who removes our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Many Psalms written in the first person singular express awareness of sin and look to the Lord for forgiveness (*e.g.* Ps. 130:3, 4; 143:2).

It is true that the psalmist will often plead his own faithfulness to God, and his innocence of transgression (*e.g.* Pss. 17:4, 5; 44:17, 18). This is common in the psalms of refuge (*e.g.* 7, 11, 17, 31, 142) and in other psalms where the psalmist appeals to God for judgment against his adversaries and accusers. [18] In this setting the psalmist's protestations of innocence do not imply a claim to sinless perfection; rather, they plead 'not guilty' to accusations. The Lord's servant may also contrast his own faithfulness to God with the wickedness and treachery of his enemies (Ps. 26:1-6). This leads to the theme of suffering of the righteous servant of the Lord. The wicked appear to prosper, while the godly suffer (Pss. 37; 73). In Job as in the Psalms the issue of God's justice is raised. On a deeper level, the psalmist perceives that he suffers for the Lord's sake: 'For zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me' (Ps. 69:9). The figure of the righteous servant, suffering, as did Moses and David, for the Lord's sake, becomes a type of Christ, the truly righteous Servant of the Lord (John 2:17).

Corporate as well as personal sin is confessed. Moses confessed the sin of Israel and prayed that God might remain amongst his people and forgive their sin (Exod. 34:9). The cries of sinful Israel to the Lord punctuate the book of Judges. Repeatedly the people rebelled against God, were judged by military defeat and oppression, and then sought deliverance from their enemies (Judg. 2; 3:15). Yet their cries were far from genuine repentance. Later, godly kings (Joash, Hezekiah, Josiah) took the initiative in expressing repentance and in taking action against idolatry. In connection with the exile, major prayers of repentance are included in the covenantal history. Psalm 106 reviews the melancholy history of Israel's disobedience leading up to the exile. Daniel prays eloquently, confessing the sin that led to the exile, and claiming the promise of God for restoration (Dan. 9:3-19). Nehemiah prays in a similar fashion (Neh. 1:5-11); the returning exiles are assembled and led in a great prayer of repentance by the Levites (Neh. 9:5-37). The penitent people cast themselves on God's *mercy* (Neh. 9:32).

c. Petitions

Prayer and petition are nearly synonymous; God is addressed out of the depth of human weakness and need. The cry for deliverance is the continual petition of Old Testament believers. King Hezekiah spreads before the Lord the threatening letter of the Rabshakeh of the besieging army of Assyria. His plea is direct: 'Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God' (2 Kgs. 19:19). The rod of Moses, lifted as an ensign in Israel's battle with the Amalekites, marks utter dependence on the Lord's deliverance. It also expresses the commitment of God to his

covenant people. Moses' hand is indeed lifted, but more important, ' A hand is lifted up upon the throne of Jah!' (Exod. 17:16, ASV mg.). *Yahweh-nissi*: the Lord is the lifted ensign of his people; his raised hand grants their deliverance. Through the whole history of Israel the lesson is repeated: ' Salvation is of the LORD' (Jonah 2:9). God can save by a handful against a host (Gideon' s band); indeed, by one sole champion, empowered by his Spirit (Samson). David conquers as the Lord' s anointed, trusting not in his armament but in the name of the Lord. No impasse is too hopeless, no predicament too impossible for the Lord. Jonah' s psalm celebrates the sure hope of God' s deliverance from the depths of death.

God' s salvation from enemies includes the execution of his sentence against them *é.g.* Pss. 54:5, 7; 58:6-11; 69:22-28; 79:6; 94:1, 2; 109:12; 137:7-9). The righteous name of the Lord must be vindicated against those who blaspheme his name and persecute his people. Such judgments are often sought in psalms that appeal to the Lord for the adjudication of a cause. Not only does the psalmist plead his own innocence of offence; he also describes the guilt of his accusers and persecutors, and calls for God' s just judgment *é.g.* Pss. 3:7; 5:10; 7:6, 12, 15, 16). The Lord abhors the bloody and deceitful man, and will destroy those who speak lies (Ps. 5:4-6). The violence of the wicked will descend upon his own head (7:15, 16). The psalmist knows God' s judgment is certain; he calls on the Lord to deliver his saints by a speedy execution of justice (Pss. 10:1, 14-18; 11:6; cf. 12:5). Retribution is sought with a vehemence that has experienced the horror of atrocities: those who are responsible for such evils deserve to receive themselves the punishments they have inflicted (Ps. 137:8).

Jesus teaches his disciples to love their enemies; they are not to call down God' s wrath upon their persecutors, but to pray for them (Mt. 5:43-48). The marvel of God' s own love for his enemies appears at the cross. While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8-10). Christ' s teaching is sometimes presented as in flat contradiction to the imprecatory psalms. Yet Jesus unequivocally teaches the holiness of God and his wrath against sin (Mt. 5:22; 25:41; Luke 13:4). Indeed, apart from God' s just judgment on sin, the death of Christ on the cross would be unnecessary. The wrath of God remains for those who are yet unreconciled to God in Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The apostles preached the gospel by warning of the coming judgment, and of every man' s accountability before God (Acts 10:42; 17:31). The Christian does not take vengeance into his own hands, but he does leave vengeance in God' s hands (Rom. 12:19) In the book of Revelation, as in the Old Testament, the saints cry out to God for the deliverance and vindication of the people of God (Rev. 6:9-11).

The wars of Israel were holy wars, fought at God' s command to execute his sanctions. They symbolised the last judgment. When Christ by his coming changed the form of the people of God, the sign of the sword was removed from the church. Its sanctions are now only spiritual, not temporal. The people of God are not called to theocratic war. Christ came to bear the final judgment on the cross, not to inflict the final judgment from the throne. In this age, judgment is withheld so that men and women may repent. The church does not pray imprecatory psalms against those who persecute it. Rather, those psalms are now the battle-cry of the church against the hosts of Satan. We pray for a different victory over the human enemies of the gospel: the victory of God' s saving grace (2 Cor. 2:14|6).

Besides praying for deliverance from enemies, God' s people also sought deliverance from evils and ills. As a blessing of his covenant God promised Israel freedom from the diseases that he had placed in judgment on the Egyptians: ' I am the LORD who heals you' (Exod. 15:26). Hezekiah prayed to God for healing, and was delivered from mortal illness. In contrast,

Asa was attended by physicians, but failed to seek his healing from the Lord (2 Kgs. 20:1-11; cf. 2 Chr. 16:12).

God' s people had other needs besides deliverance. These, too, are reflected in the prayers of the old covenant. They need God' s guidance and provision in the wilderness: the pillar of cloud to lead them; the manna and water from the rock to sustain them. Prayer for guidance appears early in the Pentateuch. We find a beautiful prayer by the steward of Abraham, sent to find a bride for Isaac (Gen. 24:12-14). David, who knew the uncertainties of life as a fugitive in the wilderness, prayed: ' Let the morning bring me word of your *hesed*, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul' (Ps. 143:8). Solomon, confronted with the task of reigning over Israel, prayed to God for wisdom so that he might know how to guide God' s people (1 Kgs. 3:9).

Psalm 107 pictures the people of God, scattered and wandering in the desert, crying out in their hunger and thirst (v.4-6). It is the Lord who answers their prayer: ' He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things' (v. 9). The dependence of Israel on manna in the wilderness is reflected in the prayer the Lord taught to his disciples: ' Give us this day our daily bread' (Mt. 6:11). [19] The depth of such a prayer appears in the New Testament. The provision of the manna symbolises the giving of Christ as the Bread of heaven (John 6:32-35); the provision of the water from the smitten rock points to Christ from whose heart flow rivers of living water, the water of the Spirit (Exod. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:37-39; 19:34). [20]

d. Thanksgiving, praise, and hope

The greatest desire of the people of God goes beyond deliverance from surrounding enemies and the provision of daily needs. It stretches toward the fulfilment of the promises of God. Moses prayed to know the Lord; like the patriarchs of old, the prophets desired a better country, a heavenly one (Heb. 11:16). God himself must at last be the inheritance of his people. ' Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever' (Ps. 73:25, 26).

Throughout the Psalms, the supreme good that is sought is God himself (Pss. 4:7; 16:11; 17:15; 23; 27:4; 36:9; 42:1, 2; 63:1-8; 131). The psalmist thirsts for God, yearns to appear before God, to dwell in his courts. This desire also points toward God' s promise of future blessing, a promise linked to his coming as Judge and Saviour (Pss. 96:13; 98:9).

The true worshippers of the Lord will not end prayer with petition. They will realise to whom their petition is being addressed, and sensing the presence of God, will move to praise. In psalms where an individual voices his lament there is also praise in the assurance of being heard. For example, Psalm 22 alternates lamentations with expressions of trust. This pattern is followed by a cry for deliverance (vv .19-21) that is immediately succeeded by an assurance of being heard, ' And from the horns of wild oxen you have answered me!' (v.21). [21] The psalmist then describes the thank-offering of praise that he will present in the midst of the worshipping congregation (v.22), and concludes with a magnificent doxology. Claus Westermann observes that while the urgent situation described in these psalms still remains (the sufferer has not been delivered), yet the prayer is regarded as realised. God may be praised, the thank-offering may be held in view, because God will answer. The transition to the assurance of being heard is therefore the real theme of these Psalms (Pss. 6:8; 10:17; 13:6;

28:6; 31:7, 21; 54:7; 56:13). ' They are no longer mere petition, but petition that has been heard. They are no longer mere lament. but lament that has been turned to praise.' [22]

The praise of God in the Psalms is both declarative and descriptive. God is praised for what he has done and for who he is. Such praise looks naturally toward the future, for God will come, and fulfil his promise in David' s Son, his Anointed (2 Sam. 7:1&29).

C. The renewal of the covenant restores and renews prayer

Prayer in the Old Testament points forward to fulfilment in the New. There is a deepening emphasis on prayer in the prophets. The sin of Israel was not a lack of prayer: prayer was regularly and publicly practised. But many in Israel addressed their prayer to other gods. Those who did pray to the Lord offered their words but not their hearts. The prophets condemn the hypocritical pretence of such formal prayers: ' When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood . . . ' (Isa. 1:15). Jesus cited the prophecy of Isaiah & condemn the lip-worship of those whose hearts were far from God (Mt. 15:8; Isa. 29:13). Isaiah pours out a prayer of penitence on behalf of those who will heed his message:

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away . . . Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are all the work of your hand . . . Oh, look upon us, we pray, for we are all your people. (Isa. 64:6-9).

Few indeed joined the prophets in prayers of penitence. The prophets warned of the approaching storm of God' s judgments. Israel in the north was carried captive by the Assyrians. Then the clouds of judgment gathered over Judah. Jeremiah cried out in agony to God as the storm broke and the invading armies came. The vocabulary of distress fills the book of Lamentations. Jeremiah voices his personal grief, but mourns above all for the doom pronounced upon Jerusalem. So severe is the judgment of God' s justice against the people that Jeremiah is forbidden even to pray for them (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

Yet the prophets looked beyond the darkness to a dawn of mercy. God' s judgments against his people would be neither total nor final. A remnant would be spared, and to that despised remnant God would fulfil promises too marvellous to be described. The faithful are summoned to pray to the Lord for the restoration and renewal that only he can give: ' Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things, and difficult, which thou knowest not' (Jer. 33:3 ASV). Those who pray for the future blessings of God cannot even conceive of what they will include. They are hidden things, like the inaccessible treasures of a fortified city. [23] God himself will perform them: he will come to be their Saviour. His coming is joined with the coming of the Son of David, God' s anointed. ' In those days, and at that time, will I cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land' (Jer. 33: 15 ASV).

If the renewal of that day, the people will call and the Lord will answer. They will cry, and he will say, ' Here I am!' (Isa. 58:9). Indeed, ' Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear' (Isa. 65:24). The open communion of prayer will be the supreme blessing of God' s presence with his people (Zech. 13:9). In that time of blessing even the Gentiles will call upon the name of the Lord, and will be heard. God will reveal himself to the Gentiles because his own people have ignored his outstretched hands (Isa. 65:1; Rom. 9:20; 10:21). But at last God

will make himself known to the full number of his people from Israel as well as from the Gentiles. The enemy nations Egypt and Assyria will pray to the Lord for healing and restoration; they, along with Israel, will be made a blessing in the earth (Isa. 19:19-25). ' Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD' (Zeph. 3:9).

How will God purify the lips of sinful Israel and of the unclean Gentiles? He must come, not only as the Warrior (Isa. 59:16, 17), and as the Shepherd (Ezek. 34:11, 12); he must come in the person of his Servant to bear their iniquities. The greatest prayer of the Old Testament is the prayer of the victorious Messiah, the prayer of intercession that pleads his atonement:

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isa. 53:12).

The prophets, proclaiming God' s promises, call for true repentance (Isa. 58:68). Those who pray for the promised mercy must confess their sins, renounce their idols, and return to the Lord (Hos. 14:1-3; cf. Isa. 55:6-13). In the judgment of the exile God did strip away from Israel the evil of open idolatry. Those who remained faithful to the God of the covenant began to seek his face in penitent prayer. God' s word to the prophet Zechariah describes the repentance of the exiles in Babylon. They confessed that God' s judgments had come, just as the prophets had predicted (Zech. 1:6). [24]

Daniel found in the prophecy of Jeremiah the promise that after seventy years the captivity would be ended. The time was near: Daniel earnestly prayed for the promised restoration (Dan. 9:2, 17-19). The great prayers of confession of sin that we find in Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah eloquently summarise the history of Israel' s unfaithfulness and God' s continuing mercy. The prayer of Ezra comes with particular poignancy, for he fears that the returning exiles are again becoming involved with the heathen (Ezra 9:5-15).

The return from exile after seventy years was indeed a fulfilment of God' s promise. Yet Ezra tells of the weeping of the oldest men when the foundations of the temple were laid (Ezra 3:12). They remembered the glory of the former house of God. The restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah fell far short of the promised glory. The post-exilic prophets therefore still point ahead to the great day of the Lord. Zechariah tells of the nations coming to worship the God of Israel (Zech. 14:16, 17). The glory of Jerusalem passes description: the pots of the city will be like temple vessels. The weakest inhabitant will be like King David. What then of the King? He will be as the angel of the Lord among them (Zech. 12:8)! The promises will at last be fulfilled when God himself comes, when his Spirit is poured out, when the Sun of righteousness rises with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2).

III. PRAYER ADDRESSES THE TRIUNE GOD

A. The renewal and fulfilment of prayer in Christ

1. Fulfilment of the petition of the faithful remnant

Four centuries elapsed after the last prophetic word was spoken to the returned exiles. In that

period prayer became central in the services of the synagogue. The ' Eighteen Benedictions' in an early form appear to go back to the time of Christ. The first three petitions praise God as the Creator, the God of the fathers, the holy and the only God. They go on to confess sin, to call upon God to give repentance and forgiveness and to visit Israel with redemption. [25] In the Psalms of Solomon the Messianic hope is strongly expressed (Ps. Sol. 17:23{21}). [26]

Formalism again undercut the fervency of true prayer, but God preserved men and women to pray for the coming of his salvation. God had promised not only that he would restore and renew his people, but that he would answer prayer in doing so: ' For this, moreover, will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them' (Ezek. 36:37 ASV; Zech. 10:6). In grace God raised up those who would plead his promises.

That grace appears as God lifts the curtain on the first scene of the new covenant. It is the hour of prayer; God sends his angel to the altar where a priest of Aaron' s lineage is offering incense. In the courtyard of the temple the people are assembled in prayer. As the incense and the prayer ascend, the angel tells Zachariah that his personal prayers have been answered (Luke 1:13). As God gave Sarah a son centuries before, so God will now give a son to Elizabeth. That son will be John, the forerunner of the Messiah. The speechless priest cannot pronounce the customary blessing, but it is God who has pronounced blessing for his people.

The theme of God' s answer to prayer is again portrayed in the figures of Simeon and Anna who greet the infant Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:25-38). These aged saints represent ' all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38). The prophetess Anna bears the joyful word to those who, like her, have been praying night and day (v.37).

The songs of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), Zachariah (vv.68-79), and Simeon (2:29-32) follow the patterns of the Psalms and the prophets in praising the Lord for his coming in salvation. [27] Mary' s hymn reflects the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:10). The mystery of new covenant fulfilment already appears: God' s grace is revealed to the poor and lowly. The songs celebrate the fulfilment of God's glorious promises, but a fulfilment that runs counter to all the vaunting of man. A humble virgin is the chosen handmaid of the Lord; despised shepherds are surrounded by angelic heralds. God' s coming mocks the power and privilege of kings and princes. He hears the cry of the poor.

2. Fulfilment in Christ transforms prayer

a. Christ comes as Lord to receive prayer

Prayer addresses the personal God, the Lord who reveals himself to his chosen people as the God of *hesed*, devoting himself to the redemption of his own. Through the history of his dealings with his people, God promised to come to them that they might know him, and that he might be made known to the ends of the earth. The message of the gospel is that the Lord has come (Luke 2:10, 11). That for which the true Israel prayed has come to pass. The Holy One conceived by Mary through the power of the Spirit is the Son of God (Luke 1:35). He is Immanuel, God with us (Mt. 1:23). It is he who shall save his people from their sins (Mt. 1:21). John serves as a herald to prepare the way of the Lord. God promised to come himself, marching through the desert in the final Exodus deliverance of his people (Isa. 40:3). John the Baptist takes up the prophecy of Isaiah and announces the coming of the Lord, the One whose

shoelace he is not worthy to tie (Mt. 3:1-3, 11, 12). The angels announce the birth of him who is not simply the Lord' s Anointed; he is the anointed Lord (Luke 2:26, 11 ASV mg.). The Gospel of John announces the coming into the world of him who is the Light of the nations. The Word was *with* God, God' s eternal Fellow; the Word *was* God, God' s own Self (John 1:1-4).

It is the glory of the Holy One of God that is revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ (John 6:69). He comes to reveal by word and deed who he is, and to call sinners to put their trust in him. He hears the petitions of the sick and afflicted, and shows his glory by power that gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, strength to the paralysed, life to the dead (Luke 7:22; Isa. 35:4, 5). Yet these miracles are but signs of the deity of the One who has power on earth to forgive sins (Mt. 9:2; Mark 2:5, 10). The sinful woman worships at his feet: she loves much because she has been forgiven much (Luke 7:47-50). The devils know him and fear the judgment that is his to bring (Luke 8:28). He commands the fish of the sea and stills the storm, walking on the waters with the authority of the Creator (Mt. 14:22-33; Ps. 77:16-19; Isa. 43:15f.; Job 9:8; 38:16, 17). Moses and Elijah, the great servants of the Lord of the old covenant cannot compare with him (Luke 9:30, 31). The glory that they experienced in their day on the mount of God' s revelation now appears again. They are permitted to stand with Jesus in the Mount of Transfiguration. The cloud again covers the Mount. But the shining of glory began not in the cloud, but in the face of Jesus. He it is who is transfigured to reveal the glory that was his before the foundation of the world (John 17:5).

On the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about his ' exodus' to be accomplished at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). These two great praying prophets, men who had effectively interceded with God, now speak of the mystery of God' s salvation. Jesus came in answer to the prayers they offered long ago. He came to do what they could never do: to accomplish that salvation. He came to manifest the presence of God in human flesh; but had that been his only mission, he would have had to come as Judge. Rather, he came in the inexpressible *hesed* of God to take the place of sinners on the cross. God was seeking worshippers, and to redeem them he gave his only Son. The ' lifting up' of Jesus on the cross and in his resurrection and ascension completely transformed the meaning and practice of prayer. Prayer was ever a response to the initiative of God' s saving grace. But never had the eternal depths of that grace appeared until Christ came and was lifted up on the cross. Prayer had reached out to the personal God; prayer could only claim his promise, his covenant grace. But now God made his covenant anew in the fulfilment of all his promises. What assurance, what boldness, yet what penitent confession must mark the prayer of those who look to the cross of Jesus Christ and to the throne of his exaltation!

b. Christ comes as Servant to offer prayer

Christ is the Lord, at whose feet sinners fall in supplication. Yet he is also the Servant of God. As the incarnate Saviour he fulfils both sides of the covenant. He is the Lord of the covenant and comes to gather and claim his scattered sheep (Mt. 9:36; Luke 12:32; John 10:27-29). But he is also the Servant of the covenant. If the blessings of the covenant of grace are to be ours, they must be given to us by the rightful heir of all the promises of God. Only Jesus Christ is the righteous Servant of the Lord; only he fulfils the calling of the true Israel (Rom. 15:8, 9; Isa. 49:3). On the one hand, his prayer stands in the line marked out in the Old Testament. The pleas of God' s righteous servant come from his lip. He not only sings and quotes the Psalms, he fulfils them. On the cross, his cry of dereliction is not merely a citation from Psalm 22, it is

the realisation and fulfilment of that prophetic lament. As Moses, the shepherd of Israel, prayed for the flock that he led through the wilderness, so does Jesus, the Good Shepherd pray for the sheep that the Father has given him. But on the other hand, in fulfilling the role of the praying Servant of the Lord, Jesus transforms it. His prayers are unique, for he who is the Son of Mary is also the Son of God. His prayer is to the Father, his Father, whom as the divine Son he alone knows (Mt. 11:27). He who cried out to the Father in the tears and strong crying of his human nature was the unique Son of God. He could pray with the confidence that he was accomplishing his Father's will; he knew that his Father always heard his prayers (John 11:41, 42). In the mystery of the incarnation the divine Person, the Son of God, cried 'Abba' to the Father in whose bosom he was and continued to be from all eternity (Mark 14:36).

Wonderfully, the human nature of Jesus found full expression in his prayers. At every crisis of his ministry he spent hours in prayer. He prayed as he was baptised (Luke 3:21); he prayed before he chose the twelve disciples to be with him (Luke 6:12). After he fed the five thousand, he sent away his disciples, dismissed the multitudes, and went up into a mountain to pray alone (Mark 6:46; Mt. 14:23). The crowds would have marched him to Jerusalem to crown him as their political Messiah. But he came to do his Father's will: he would go to Jerusalem not to wield the spear and bring the judgment, but to receive the spear thrust and bear the judgment. He knew the crowds would leave him; he was already praying for Peter, that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). Before he elicited Peter's confession, Jesus prayed (Luke 9:18); he was in prayer on the mountain when he was transfigured (Luke 9:28). He prayed as he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41, 42). In the garden of Gethsemane he endured an agony of prayer, for there he took the cup of abandonment that he must drink in the place of those who deserved the wrath of God (Isa. 51:17, 22; Mt. 26:36-44; Mark 14:35, 39; Luke 22:41, 45). Before his death he prayed to the Father for those the Father had given him, and for the others who would believe through their word (John 17). On the cross where he cried in forsakenness, he committed his spirit to the Father (Mt. 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:46).

Jesus was not ashamed to call us brethren; he prayed in the midst of the worshipping congregation on earth, and continues to praise the Father in the festival assembly of heaven (Heb. 2:11, 12; 12:24). It was his custom to attend the services of the synagogue (Luke 4: 16); he may well have observed the customary three hours of prayer; [28] he cleansed the temple as the house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). His example in prayer led the disciples to ask, 'Lord, teach us to pray' (Luke 11:1). They did not join him, however, in his lonely vigils in the desert or on the mountains (Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 5:16; 6:12; Mt. 14:23). When he asked Peter, James, and John to watch in prayer with him in Gethsemane, they slept in exhaustion. Not until the risen Lord sent his Spirit from heaven did his disciples begin to pray with a fervency modelled on their Master's.

Jesus addresses the Father in familiar forms of prayer. He gives thanks, blesses God, offers petitions, and submits himself to the Father's will. He blesses others in the Father's name. But all these forms of prayer are remarkably altered and deepened on the lips of Jesus. His thanksgiving praises the Father for the wonder of his electing love: that he has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to babes (Mt. 11:25; Luke 10:21). Jesus rejoices in the sovereign mercy of the Father's will. His petitions are to the same end. As the hour of the crucifixion draws near, he will not pray the great Old Testament prayer for deliverance: 'Father, save me from this hour!' Rather, he prays, 'Father, glorify thy name!' The coming hour brings the purpose for which he has come into the world. He shrinks back in horror from what that means: separation from his Father. In Gethsemane he asks that, if it be

possible, the cup be taken away. But he will not ask for twelve legions of angels to deliver him in flaming judgment (Mt. 26:53). His prayer remains, ' Yet not my will, but yours be done' (Luke 22:42).

Submission to the Father' s will, joy in the Father' s plan, zeal for the Father' s glory: the prayers of Jesus are the prayers of the Son who lifts up the name of his Father and accomplishes on earth the work the Father has given him. Along with his devotion to the Father runs the depth of his intimacy with the Father. The name ' Abba' used by Jesus was colloquial Aramaic; it was familiar, the language of both immature and mature children. [29] Jesus addresses the living God with the intimacy of a little child speaking to his father. The Son knows God as Father, and as Father he reveals him to his disciples. The holy name of God in the new covenant is ' Father' , for Jesus opens the relationship that puts that name on our lips.

3. Christ's teaching renews prayer

a. Prayer to the Father

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, ' Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name' . What immense brevity! Jesus had rebuked the lengthy eloquence of the Pharisees and the endless chanting of the heathen. Repeating ' OM' a thousand times may induce a change of consciousness, but it does not address the God of heaven. Neither may we convert the prayer Jesus taught into a mantra and mumble a hundred ' paternosters' as steps on a ladder to heaven. It is enough to pray as Jesus taught us.

Dare we pray such a prayer? May we address with such simple boldness ' the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords . . .' (1 Tim. 6:15, 16)? What effrontery is it to call upon the Lord whose holiness so threatens us, and to ask – of all things – that he hallow his own name? But Jesus teaches us to pray, ' Our Father' . The God of heaven, whose name is infinitely holy, is *Abba*, Father. Those two syllables on the lips of Jesus arch over the history of redemption. The God of heaven is a God of mercy; he has taken the initiative to save his people. The Father demanded of Pharaoh that he let his son go (Exod. 4:23). He led Israel his child through the wilderness (Deut. 32:6; Hos. 11:1, 3). Like a father he grieved over his rebellious son, ' How can I give you up, Ephraim?' (Hos. 11:8). At the last, he did what his love had purposed from the first. He gave his own beloved Son (Rom. 8:32). The Father' s Isaac, his passover Lamb, was offered up in the place of sinners (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:17-20; Gen. 22:13, 14). Jesus, the only Son of the Father, is the substitute who died to pay the price of sin and to bring many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus puts ' Abba' on the lips of those who trust in him, for he bought their birth-right with his blood.

Jesus, therefore, does not simply offer to us the example of sonship in prayer. He does far more than model loving and intimate trust in the heavenly Father. Rather, he does what only he could do in the perfection of his divine and human sonship. He saves sinners, brings them to the Father, and gives them a new relation that far exceeds the relation in which Adam and Eve were created. Redeemed sinners can come to the Father only in and through his work, but coming in him, they may address the Father by the very name he uses.

Prayer to the Father is prayer in dependence. The father is the progenitor, from whom the life of the child is derived. As we have seen, the Old Testament passages that speak of God as Father emphasise this (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 64:8). Peter blesses ' the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again into a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 1:3 ASV). Those who pray ' Our Father' are those who have received new life from above. Their Father has created them and given them new life in Christ.

The Father who gave life also sustains it. We pray to him for our daily bread. As Israel was fed with manna in the wilderness, so God meets our needs day by day. Faith confesses that complete dependence on him for physical and spiritual life. Childlike trust lies at the heart of Jesus' teaching about prayer. Our heavenly Father knows our needs; we may trust him. We may come to him with importunity in our most urgent needs, never forgetting; that he cares. Jesus urges persistence in prayer by comparing the holy heavenly Father to an unjust judge, and drawing the powerful *a fortiori* argument. If even sinners give good gifts to their children, and unjust judges will dispense justice to spare themselves annoyance, how much more, how infinitely much more, may the heavenly Father (who has given us all things) be trusted to hear our prayers and to provide good gifts for those who ask him?

There is adoration in the name ' Father' . The caricature of the father in television comedies ill prepares our culture to understand the term as Jesus uses it. The father was the lord of the patriarchal family, and when God is called ' Father' in the Bible, his Lordship is always in view. Jesus prayed, ' I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . . ' . It was natural for Jesus, to add the words, ' Thy kingdom come' to the address, ' Our Father' . In the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom he speaks of God not as King, but as Father. He promised his disciples that he would eat and drink with them in the Father' s kingdom (Mt. 26:29). When Jesus comes again in the power of the kingdom, it will be in the glory of the Father (Luke 9:26).

Real prayer can be destroyed by sentimentality. We dare not say, ' Abba, Father' without recognising that the Father is Lord of heaven and earth. Indeed, precisely because he is Lord, he can provide for us. Jesus said of the birds, ' Your heavenly Father feeds them' (Mt. 6:26). The Psalmist is to call to God: ' You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour' (Ps. 89:2). We pray that the name of God as Father be hallowed. This is not a contradiction, or an inappropriate connection. The Father is the holy God, to be approached with awe.

At the same time, there remains the marvellous intimacy of this prayer. ' As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him' (Ps. 103:13). Jesus, who knows the Father, and can reveal him, tells us the story of the father' s welcome for the prodigal (Luke 15). He presents the joy of the father in the son who was lost and is found, was dead and is alive. To tell the story, Jesus puts a self-righteous Pharisee in the role of the elder brother: one who does not understand his father' s heart of love, and is scandalised by the feast of celebration. The parable points to the contrast with Jesus himself. Jesus told the story to defend his own actions in eating with publicans and sinners. The elder brother would refuse to do that, even in his father' s house. But Jesus does it, and goes to the far country, even to the pig-sty to do it. He is the seeking Shepherd of the first parable in the chapter; he is the true elder brother in contrast to the Pharisaical elder brother of the last. All that the Father has is his, and he gives to us the blessings of the Father' s feast of welcome. When Jesus teaches us to pray, ' Our Father' , he brings us home to heaven' s joy.

The bond of God' s covenant is deepened in the new covenant. It goes beyond the model of the treaty a sovereign would make with a vassal. The Sovereign, the Lord, is our Father, and his kingdom is a ' fatherdom' (Eph. 3:14,15). The image of kingdom remains, but it is enriched by

the image of the family of God.

' Our Father' is therefore also a prayer of assurance, a prayer that pleads the new covenant faithfulness of the Father who gave his only begotten Son. As Paul points out, it is the Spirit of Christ in our hearts who enables us to pray, 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15-17). Christ's Spirit is the Spirit of sonship: first of his, then of ours.

b. The prayer of trust

The prayer addressed to the Father seeks the glory of his name. That petition asks not simply that *we* may glorify the name of God, but that *he* may do so. At the last, it is the secret of all prayer. It is the petition that God be God; that the glory of his own Being remain and be continuously intensified. All praise prays exactly this.

But the prayer goes on to ask that God's will be done. His name is to be glorified by the full accomplishment of his own plan for salvation. This was the purpose of the mission of the Son. Jesus came proclaiming the message that John had also brought: the kingdom of God was at hand. God's kingdom does not describe a realm so much as a rule. The kingdom of God shows the power and glory of God. God promised to come and to rule. Those who proclaim the good news cry, 'Your God reigns!' (Isa. 52:7). Jesus came as Lord, and in his coming, the kingdom was already present. His miracles were signs of the power of the kingdom. The devils trembled at the presence of the King of glory. Jesus said, 'But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Mt. 12:28). In his ministry, Jesus brought the power of the kingdom as he accomplished the will of his Father. God's kingdom came with the triumph of Christ over Satan at the cross, with the resurrection victory that carried him to the throne of glory, with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church. The kingdom that has come continues to come as the Spirit works with power in the world and as Jesus rules at the Father's right hand. Yet the kingdom is also future. Jesus came once, but he is coming again. The kingdom will come when he comes; this is the great hope of the Christian church. [30] The prayer 'Thy kingdom come' seeks both the advancement of God's kingdom of grace and the coming of his kingdom of glory.

The announcement of the kingdom by John and by Jesus was linked with the preaching of repentance. The Lord himself had come; men and women must prepare to meet God. 'Who can stand when he appears?' (Mal. 3:2). He is the Judge of all the earth. In the coming of Christ, all the nations are called to accountability before God. When Paul preached the gospel at Athens, he spoke of the ignorance of God among the Gentiles and concluded: 'In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead' (Acts 17:30, 31).

The Christ who taught his disciples to pray for forgiveness is the Lord who will judge men in the last day. He did not come to judge men's sins, but to call sinners to repentance. The problem of sin is not simply the guilt we feel, it is the doom we deserve. The Bible condemns every effort to hide sin. When a man tries to live with his guilt, it becomes rottenness in his bones. He must come to the place where he cries out to God, 'Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight' (Ps. 51:4). True religion before God is always the religion of the broken heart. God dwells not only in the high and holy place, but also with the one who has a humble and contrite spirit (Isa. 57:15). God does not hear the prayer of the proud Pharisee

thanking God that he is so good, but rather the cry of the wicked tax-collector, beating his breast because he is so bad: ' God, have mercy on me, a sinner' (Luke 18:13).

The glory of the gospel is that forgiveness is to be found with God, forgiveness for sin as a debt. Because God is personal, sin against God is a personal affront; because God is just, sin incurs the penalty of his judgment. God can deal with that sin in both justice and grace. Just as a debt can be cancelled, sin can be forgiven. Jesus not only freed men from the grip of disease and death, he freed them also from the debt of sin: he had the authority to say, ' Your sins are forgiven' (Mt. 9:2, 6). Jesus could forgive sin because he came to bear the penalty of sin. In the person of his Son, the holy God himself paid the price of forgiveness. The Judge bore the judgment. Paul can quote with joy from the Psalmist: ' Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered' (Rom. 4:7, 8; Ps. 32:1, 2).

In Christ, God' s beloved Son, ' we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God' s grace . . .' (Eph. 1:7). In praying the Lord' s Prayer, we must remember who gave us these words!

' Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' Forgiveness must issue in forgivingness. The one who knows the reality of God' s forgiveness will be ready to forgive others. The comment of Jesus drives this point home: if we do not forgive others, we will not be forgiven (Mt. 6:14, 15). The parable of the unforgiving debtor (Mt. 18:23-35) shows that our forgiving does not *merit* our being forgiven. Rather, we have been forgiven an enormous debt, one that goes beyond all reckoning. Compared to the debt that God has forgiven us, the debts that we forgive others are like pocket-money. If we refuse to forgive, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times, we show that we cannot claim the forgiveness of God.

The beautiful simplicity and the breath-taking sweep of the Lord' s Prayer set it apart. It is distinctive, above all, in its focus on the Father. We first pray that his name be hallowed, his kingdom come, his will be done. Even when the prayer turns to our own needs, it is through and through prayer before the Father in heaven. The bread that we pray for every day is not ours to command or to control. It is God' s gift. Indeed, every meal given from the Father' s hand is a foretaste of his final provision in the great feast of his kingdom, when his will is done on earth as in heaven. [31] Our cry for forgiveness recognises not only the presence of the Lord, and therefore our sin, but the presence of our Saviour and the remission of sins.

When Christ' s disciples pray, ' Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil' we hear yet another petition forged in the presence of the Father. Without the awareness of standing before God, an apostate culture does not seek to escape from temptation. Rather, it builds a society designed to make temptation an everyday convenience. Enticement to sexual sin becomes the standard of advertising, and other lusts for power and pride are equally well provided for. But one who knows the meaning of forgiveness will be aware of the threat of temptation. Only God' s mercy can preserve us in the present and deliver us in the future,

There are two great assumptions in this petition: our trust in God and our distrust of ourselves. We pray it because we know that God can control temptation and that God' s power directs our lives. The book of Job describes the shield that God puts about his own. Satan can assault Job only as God permits him. At the last, Job is in God' s hands, not Satan' s. Further, this petition assumes that God can lead us where temptation is. God, of course, cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt anyone in the sense of enticing him into sin (Jas. 1:13, 14). God is

not the tempter. Yet God does prove his people. He led Israel in the wilderness with the express purpose of proving them and searching their hearts (Deut. 8:2). They needed to learn that they lived, not by bread alone, but by every word that came from the mouth of the Lord. They lived not only by the word spoken from Sinai, but by the word that directed their march. Day by day they were called to walk in the path God ordered for their lives. When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, he refused to turn the stones into bread at Satan' s suggestion. He quoted the passage from Deuteronomy. In the wilderness where his Father had brought him, Jesus would trust. He lived by the word that directed his life; his Father who gave the manna would provide bread in season. Where Israel rebelled, Jesus obeyed.

Jesus would have his disciples ask the Father so to guide their lives as to shield them from temptation. Included in our petition there is profound self-distrust. No Christian is so strong that he can seek out occasions of temptation. He knows the power of evil, knows that the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking his prey (1 Pet. 5:8). The Christian knows, too, the weakness of his own sinful nature (Gal. 5: 17). When Simon Peter boasted that he would never deny Christ, his pride contained the seed of his denial. But what of God' s use of trials to prove us? Is there not trial that purifies us like the fire of a furnace (1 Pet. 1:7)? Surely the Christian must not seek temptation, but can he pray not to be led into it?

It may help us to remember that Jesus, in Gethsemane, prayed that the cup of suffering might pass from him. He commanded his sleeping disciples to ' watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation' (Mt. 26:41). In the Lord' s Prayer as in this charge, Jesus may be teaching us to pray for deliverance from temptation as a threat to our life of obedience. This prayer would then claim God' s promise that he will not permit us to be tempted beyond our ability to handle it, but will provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

It may be, however, that the Lord' s Prayer presents us with an even more vivid situation. The petition ' Lead us not into temptation' is paralleled by another: ' Deliver us from evil' (or ' the evil one'). It may be that this last petition of the Lord' s Prayer is looking forward to the final onslaught of Satan before Christ comes again. Jesus spoke of tribulation so severe that God must shorten it if even the elect were to be saved (Mt. 24:21, 22). In any case, deliverance from the power of Satan is part of the burden of this prayer. Through Christ' s victory that deliverance is ours. Paul praises God who has delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col. 1:13). Satan desired to sift Peter as wheat, but Jesus prayed for him that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:31). The Lord is faithful, who guards us from the evil one (2 Thess. 3:3).

c. Prayer in the name of Jesus

As we have seen, the Lord' s Prayer is his not only in the sense that he taught it, but also in the sense that he is revealed in it. The Father is his Father; he it is who hallows the Father' s name on the cross; the kingdom has come with his coming, and will come with his return; he does the Father' s will on earth; he is the bread of heaven; he forgives sins with the authority of the Father; he has endured temptation in our place and keeps us in the hour of trial by his intercession.

Although the Lord' s Prayer does not mention the name of Jesus, it is a prayer that reveals the Son as well as the Father. Jesus taught the disciples that they should ask of the Father in his

name (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 16:23, 24). Prayer among God's people claimed his covenant name. He is the 'I Am' God; his name reveals his presence. In Jesus the Son, God is present; the covenant promise is fulfilled. [32] God's name is revealed as Father, but that name has meaning through the divine Son who alone can reveal the Father.

Jesus reveals the Father, making his name known, but the Father also reveals the Son, giving him a name that is exalted above every name (Phil. 2:9-11). Forever at the right hand of God Jesus sits as the God-man. From that throne he sent the Spirit of his glory. Jesus told the disciples that they had not asked in his name, but that 'in that day' they were to use his name in their petitions (John 16:26). The use of his name awaited the sealing of his triumph with the sending of the Spirit. To pray in his name does not mean simply to append his name to our prayers as a formula, but to confess his name, to acknowledge him as God the Son, the only Way to the Father. It has been well said that prayer in the name of Jesus is prayer through which the self-revelation of Jesus shines. [33] The Father hears us not only because we use the name of his beloved Son, but because we pray in the Spirit of the Son. Through our prayers there echoes the voice and will of Jesus.

4. Christ the Mediator of Prayer

a. The Mediator foreshadowed

Moses stands as the great mediator of the old covenant. He was chosen and commissioned by the Lord to be his spokesman to Israel and to Pharaoh (Exod. 4:12-16; 7:1). Because the people could not bear to hear the voice of God speaking from Sinai, Moses received from the Lord the words of the covenant to give to Israel (Exod. 19:9; 20:19). God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to another (Exod. 19:11). The unique relation that Moses held as God's servant became the basis of his intercession for Israel. God knew Moses by name, and Moses claimed God's name of mercy for Israel (Exod. 33:12, 13; Deut.9:25, 26; cf. 9:9). He even prayed to be made their sin-bearer: to be blotted out of God's book in the place of sinful Israel (Exod.32:31, 32).

Like Moses, later prophets served as mediators, bringing God's word to his people and pleading to God for them. The false prophets are condemned because they did not 'stand in the breach' as mediators (Ezek. 13:5; 22:30). The priests also mediated between God and men. On the day of atonement the high priest went into the most holy place to appear before God for the people (Lev. 16). When he came out again, two priests blew on silver trumpets to announce the blessing of God on the accepted sacrifice (Num. 10:10). The priestly blessing put the name of God upon his people (Num. 6:22-27).

Yet these mediators could not accomplish God's promised redemption. Job cries out for a mediator to plead his case with God (Job 9:33; 13:3; 16:18; 19:25). Moses sees the generation for whom he prayed die in the wilderness, under God's judgment. A greater Servant of the Lord must be raised up to mediate God's salvation. He will come as a royal Servant; he will receive the blessings of God, deliver the people, and establish God's peace and justice (Ps. 2:7; cf. 2 Sam. 7:14). The Psalms describe the sufferings, victory, and glory of the ideal King, the Lord's Anointed (e.g. Pss. 22; 72).

In the prophecy of Isaiah the mediatorial role of the Lord's Servant is clearly presented. The Servant is identified with Israel (Isa. 49:3), but he is also the Saviour of Israel, and a light to the

Gentiles (Isa. 49:6, 7). In his suffering he will do what Moses could not do: he will bear the sin of his people. As the chosen Servant of the Lord, he will make intercession for the transgressors, pleading his own sacrifice for them (Isa. 53).

It is this mediatorial work that Jesus Christ fulfils. He speaks the words given to him by the Father as the final Prophet (John 15:15; 17:8; Heb. 1:1, 2; 2:3). He comes to give his life a ransom for many (Mt. 20:28). In his ministry of healing he is revealed as the suffering Servant, who himself bears our diseases, paying the price of sin even as he delivers from the curse (Mt. 8:16, 17; Isa. 53:4). He prays for those the Father has given him, even as he prepares to give his life for them (John 17:9). He raises his hands in the blessing of the true Priest as he ascends to heaven (Luke 24:50, 51).

b. His mediatorial office

The epistle to the Hebrews focuses on the unique and final position and work of Christ as the Mediator. Turning to the prophecy of Psalm 110, the author affirms that Christ holds the priestly office by divine appointment, an appointment sealed with God's oath: 'The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever"' (Heb. 7:21).

Christ is priest, not by genealogical descent from Aaron, but by divine oath, appointing him to a royal priesthood, like that of Melchizedek. The oath appointing Christ fulfils God's oath to Abraham (Heb. 6:17, 18). Christ is made both the guarantee and the Guarantor of the new covenant (Heb. 7:22). We have, therefore, the strongest encouragement for prayer. Christ's appointment to heavenly status as an eternal priest provides for us an anchor in the sanctuary of heaven itself (Heb. 6:18-20). Indeed, heaven becomes our 'sanctuary' as we flee for refuge to Christ (6:18).

Christ is appointed to a final and eternal priesthood. The author of Hebrews contrasts Melchizedek with the priests descended from Aaron: they claim their office by their lineage and pass it on to their successors, but Melchizedek is presented in Genesis (the 'book of generations') as without genealogy or descent. No beginning or end is assigned to the priesthood of Melchizedek. [34] This circumstance provides a fitting symbol of the abiding priesthood of Christ (Heb. 7:3). Christ is unchanging; he lives forever to be the mediator of those who come to God through him (Heb. 7:25).

Underlying the unique appointment of Christ are unique qualifications. What was a symbol in the narrative about Melchizedek is reality in the case of Jesus Christ. He has neither beginning of days nor end of life because he is the Son of God (Heb. 7:3). Nothing short of full deity must be attributed to the: One who has become our Mediator (Heb. 1:3-6). [35]

The other side of his qualification is the true humanity of Jesus Christ. The Mediator is identified with God; he is also identified with us. He is *Jesus* the Son of God (Heb. 4:14). He shares our nature, knows our weakness (2:14-17). Jesus has been tempted and tested in every way, just as we are, yet he was without sin (4:15). Although he is God's Son, he learned obedience through the things that he suffered (5:8). A priest must show sympathetic gentleness (5:2): that compassionate understanding is perfectly expressed in Jesus Christ. He knows our situation totally, not simply by virtue of divine omniscience, but by his incarnate hunger, thirst, and weariness; by the fierce assaults of the devil; above all, by bearing the burden of our sins in the abandonment of his crucifixion. Our High Priest not only prays for us;

he feels for us. More than a father pities his children, or a mother her infant, Christ cares and carries our burdens. He understands our needs, hears our prayers, and grants his grace at the right moment (4:16).

Israel, thirsting in the wilderness, accused God of unfaithfulness. 'Is the LORD among us or not?' they cried (Exod. 17:7). The cry of rebellion at Meribah has been forever answered in Christ. The Lord is indeed among us; he is one with us. The wonder of the high priestly ministry of Christ lies not just in *where* he is, but in *who* he is. *Where* he is we may boldly go; he has opened the way to the sanctuary of heaven and the throne of grace. Prayer enters where God dwells. But the boldness of our approach rests on *who* he is. We know him because he has first known us, and knows us still in all our helplessness and need.

c. His mediatorial sacrifice

In the symbolism of Old Testament worship, the altar of sacrifice stood at the entrance of the tabernacle court. The presence of the holy God brought the threat of death as the just punishment of sin. The priest could enter into the presence of God only with the blood of an animal victim. The animal, in a figure, bore the guilt of sin; the blood was evidence that the price had been paid and that the demands of justice had been met.

The blood of bulls and goats, however, could not take away sin. The language of pictorial symbolism pointed to the reality of a divine transaction. Not an animal, but a man must bear human sin. No mere man, however, could pay the price of sin. God did not require Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Not the son of Abraham, but the Son of God was given: the Lord did provide (Gen. 22:14; Rom. 8:32). Jesus Christ, our High Priest, entered the Holy of Holies in heaven itself, not by means of the sacrifice of an animal, but through his own blood (Heb. 9:12). He, the Priest, is also the sacrifice. He offered himself without blemish to God through his eternal spirit: that is, not just as man, but as God the Son (9:14).

Through the ritual of Old Testament sacrifices, God revealed the meaning of Christ's atonement. Our approach to God in prayer is not first a question of our preparation to pray; it is a question of Christ's preparation on our behalf. His atonement is an objective transaction. He is the 'propitiation' of our sins; that is, he satisfied the righteous judgment of God against our sin (Heb. 2:17; Rom. 3:25, 26). He bore our sins (Heb. 9:28); that is, he bore the punishment due to them. The debt is marked 'paid'; our sins are no more remembered against us (Heb. 10:17). The alienation of sin is overcome; the way is opened into the presence of God (Heb. 9:24; 10:20). The power of sin and Satan is broken; we are redeemed (Heb. 2:14, 15).

Christ's offering presented, once for all, the sufficient sacrifice for sin. Unlike the Old Testament sacrifices that were repeated, day after day, Christ's sacrifice is unrepeatable (Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 27; 10:10-13). Christ has finished his offering of himself: he is no longer the Victim but the Victor, seated in glory at the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12, 13). The doctrine of the repetition of the sacrifice of Christ in the 'bloodless sacrifice' of the mass contradicts the Scripture, and intrudes men into an office that only Christ possesses.

d. His mediatorial ministry

Our prayer may be addressed to God only through Christ's atonement. But the Lord who died now lives, and now mediates our prayers to God. His ministry is royal: he governs all things,

both now and in the world to come (Heb. 2:8). His kingdom, his rule cannot be shaken (12:28; 3: 13). We come in confidence to pray, for we know that Christ has the power to accomplish the will of God for our salvation. In prayer we look to Jesus who is not only above us but also before us. We run the race with patience because Jesus has finished his course. He is the Pioneer, the Founder and the Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

As we pray, we have confidence because of the finished work of Christ and his royal glory. But to this is added the joy of knowing that he ever lives to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). In the weakness and confusion that often surrounds our praying we take heart in the knowledge that Jesus represents us before the throne of God (Heb. 7:26; 9:24). Charles Wesley voiced that assurance in his hymn:

Arise, my soul, arise; shake off thy guilty fears
The bleeding Sacrifice in my behalf appears;
Before the throne my Surety stands:
My name is written on his hands.

Because our Representative stands in the sanctuary, we may find our refuge there; our hope is anchored within the veil (Heb. 6:18-20). We pray in awe, knowing that our God is a consuming fire (12:28, 29), but we also pray in bold confidence (4:16), for heaven is our refuge. From all the accusations against us we can appeal to our Advocate at the throne of grace.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus prayed with tears (Heb. 5:7, 8); we may be sure of his compassion as he leads us through suffering to the joy that is set before us (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:15, 16). He ever lives to intercede; there can be no limit to his power to save. As he prayed for his own before his death, so he intercedes now with his Father (John 17).

Jesus who prays for us in heaven also leads our worship on earth. In the midst of the congregation he sings his Father' s praise (Heb. 2:12; Ps. 22:22). It is by the Spirit that Christ is present, and by the Spirit that he enables us to pray with him. On the one hand, therefore, we come in prayer and worship to where Jesus is in the midst of the heavenly assembly of the saints and the angels (Heb. 12:22-24). On the other hand, Jesus comes to pray with us as we gather to worship the Father in his name (Heb. 10:25).

B. Prayer in the Spirit

1. The presence of the Spirit

The ministry of Christ, then, is not only in heaven, but in the midst of his people. He is present by his Spirit, sent from the throne. He promised not to leave his disciples orphans, but to come to them (John 14:18). In the coming of Christ by the Spirit we are given a deposit on the final inheritance that is ours (Eph. 1:13, 14; 2 Cor. 1:22; Rom. 8:23).

The Holy Spirit makes Christ present to us; he communicates to us the blessings that we receive from Christ. On the one hand, the Spirit is the Giver, the Lord himself who is with us. On the other hand, the Spirit is the Gift: the pledge that we receive of the full blessing that is ours. The power of the Spirit endued the church at Pentecost, ushering in the harvest season of God' s redemptive work. Jesus said that it was good that he should go away, in order that the Spirit might come (John 16:7). The work that Christ has done for us is not left as a future

inheritance. It is accompanied by the work that Christ does in us as he gives us his Spirit. In this time of the Spirit we are exhorted to pray in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18). Through the Spirit the rich fellowship of the new covenant becomes our possession and experience.

The figure of the temple as God' s dwelling was fulfilled, as we saw, in Christ. In the incarnation God made his dwelling with men (John 1:14). Christ came to bring us to God, and to bring God to us. By his coming in the Spirit, Christ dwells in us. We are made temples of God by that fact. The Father, too, has come to us in the Spirit (John 14:23); the church is the house of God, made to be a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:20). The saving work of Christ is applied to our hearts by the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11). The Spirit works to purify us so that individually and in the body of the church we may be a holy temple to the Lord (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Prayer therefore requires consecration. We must present our bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1, 2). The church, too, in order to pray to God acceptably, must strive to be holy, and not be defiled by sin (1 Cor. 3:17; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1).

The immediate presence of the Spirit of the Lord that requires holiness also offers fellowship. The Spirit opens heights and depths of the love of God that the saints can measure only together, clasping, as it were, their outstretched hands (Eph. 3:14-19). Paul prays that the church might be filled with the richness of God himself. That filling comes from knowing the dimensions of the love of Christ. Our knowledge of the indwelling Christ is, in turn, the work of the Spirit. Paul speaks of being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), with Christ (1:23), with God (3:19). Together with all the saints we grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Filled with the Spirit, the Lord' s people speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Through the indwelling word of Christ, the Spirit grants wisdom for the praises of the new people of God (Col. 3:16).

Worship in the Spirit together implies individual worship in the Spirit. The Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, is the Spirit of sonship. By the Spirit we cry ' Abba' (Rom. 8:15,16). The Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God.

Paul also speaks of the intercession of the Spirit for us (Rom. 8:26, 27). [36] As Christians endure suffering, waiting for the coming glory, they are reminded that the whole creation is also waiting to be delivered from bondage into the ' liberty of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21). As the creation waits, it groans. We, too, even though we have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly (8:23). We have the Spirit of adoption, but we have not yet experienced that resurrection glory to which the Spirit leads us. That adoption is still in store. Amazingly, even the Spirit groans (8:26). The groaning of the Spirit takes place as the Spirit makes intercession for us. We are weak, we do not know how to pray as we should. The Spirit comes to our aid, helps our weakness. This weakness does not describe a particular time of depression; rather, it describes our situation in this time while we await the glory to come. Even though we already experience a taste of glory in the fellowship of the Spirit, we still wait with the created order for the day of the Lord. In our weakness, we do not know how to pray according to the will of God. We know that for those who love God all things work together for good. We know that we must pray for God' s will to be done and his kingdom to come. But we do not know what God' s will is in our immediate situation. In our weakness and suffering we cry out to him for relief, but we do not know how he is leading us, or what will be for our good and his glory.

In our need the Holy Spirit is our Helper. He prays for us, not at the right hand of God, but as the indwelling Spirit of Christ. His prayers are according to the will of God, for he knows that will perfectly. Yet he prays with us as well as for us. He makes our groaning (cf. v.23) his groaning; by his presence in our hearts he brings his will to expression through the groans of our yearning. Although the groans of the Spirit are inexpressible in the depth of their yearning for us, they communicate effectually with God. God, who searches our hearts, knows the mind of the Spirit expressed in the groanings within us. The intercession of the Spirit is answered as God works all things for our good (v.28).

2. The gifts of the Spirit

The Spirit, then, makes Christ present in our hearts, testifies to our adoption, and prays for us with inexpressible groanings. The Spirit also furnishes us with the fruit and gifts of his provision. All the Christian graces bear upon prayer. The love of God poured out in our hearts by the Spirit quickens the response of our love, which is the fruit of the Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22). Love for God draws us to seek his face; it kindles our love for others, love that will sustain persevering prayer for them (1 Pet. 4:7, 8). The patience of the Spirit sustains prayer without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). The Spirit who intercedes for us grants us gifts to intercede for one another. The strength of prevailing prayer lies in the faith the Spirit gives (Jas. 5:13-18). Like other spiritual gifts, gifts for prayer are blessed in their exercise. We are struck by the number of people mentioned in Paul's letters as the objects of his prayers. He prayed fervently for others, and asked others to pray for him (Eph. 6:18-20; Col. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25).

Wisdom as a gift of the Spirit guides us in praying. To recognise the depth of our need and incapacity, and the groaning of the Spirit on our behalf, is not to deny the blessing of the Spirit in giving us a measure of understanding in the word of Christ. In that wisdom we may sing with one another, praise God together, and pray for one another (Col. 1:9; 3:16). The wisdom that we need to pray aright may itself be prayed for (Jas. 1:5).

3. Union with Christ in the Spirit

The work of Christ as the heavenly Mediator guarantees access to the Father's throne for those who are 'in Christ', those whom he represents. But, as we have seen, we are not only in Christ; Christ is in us. That is to say, Christ not only stands in our place, he also dwells in our hearts. Union with Christ is vital as well as representative. It is by the Spirit that Christ comes to us and abides with us (1 John 4:12-16). Jesus gave the Spirit by inbreathing the disciples in the upper room after the resurrection (John 20:22, 23). Even before the Spirit was sent from the throne, the disciples were united to Christ by the Spirit of his resurrection.

The fellowship of the Spirit is a sharing in the Spirit; we live by the Spirit of life given to us. We are made 'partakers of the Spirit' and of Christ (Heb. 6:4; 3:14). ~~He~~ teaches that God gives us everything we need for life and godliness in order that, through his precious promises, we might participate in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). J. B. Mayor well asks, 'For what else is it to have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, but to be partakers of the divine nature, a participation promised in answer to prayer?' [37] Mayor also points out that this fellowship in the Spirit must be distinguished from Greek assertions of man's equality with God, and also from unguarded statements found in Athanasius and other early church fathers. [38] The closeness of

fellowship created by the Spirit does not absorb us into deity. We do not lose our identity as God' s creatures as we are transformed in likeness to Christ (2 Cor. 3: 18). The Spirit continues to witness to our spirits; the distinction remains in even the deepest experience of loving union (Rom. 8:16).

Knowing God, loving God, worshipping God: in this way our union with Christ in the Spirit finds expression. Paul continually prays for the saints that this may be their experience (Eph. 1:17-23; Col. 1:9-11; Phil. 1:9). The Spirit pours out in our hearts the love that God has for us (Rom. 5:5). He causes us to be aware of the infinite dimensions of that measureless love. That awareness yields overwhelming awe and the supreme delight of human existence. It tastes of heaven and the glory to come. Prayer rightly seeks the joy that the presence of the Spirit brings, the knowledge of the Father and the Son. Yet that joy must not be sought in itself. The supreme desire of one in whom the Spirit dwells is the desire that the Spirit gives: the glory of God. The highest aim of prayer is not to experience transports of delight but to bring joy to the Father' s heart.

C. Prayer to the Father

1. Prayer to the First Person of the Trinity

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, ' Our Father' . Are we to address all prayer to the Father? May we also pray to Jesus Christ, or to the Holy Spirit? Should we pray to the triune God without distinction of Persons? Christians are sometimes confused. Paul Tillich argued against the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity from the practice of prayer. [39] Tillich contended that if we address prayer to one of the Persons of the Trinity, distinguishing that person from the others, we are denying the unity of the Godhead. In effect we are worshipping one God of three. On the other hand, if we make no distinction, we are simply praying to God, not to a Trinity.

The New Testament teaches prayer to the Son as well as to the Father. [40] The worship of the whole creation is offered to the Lamb as well as to God in the heavenly scene (Rev. 5:13). To Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Phil. 2:9, 10; cf. Rom 14:11, where the same worship is ascribed to the Father). ' Lord' *Kyrios*) is used for the covenant name of God in the Greek Old Testament; that name is applied to Jesus in the New Testament in the context of worship. Stephen' s two prayers at his martyrdom are addressed to the Lord Jesus and to the Lord (Acts 7:59, 60). Peter does not hesitate to apply to Christ a passage from Isaiah describing in the most intense fashion the worship of God. Isaiah says that God' s people are to fear the Lord of Hosts and hallow his name (Isa. 8:13). Peter uses the words of the passage, but inserts Christ as Lord (1 Pet. 3:15). The Old Testament phrase ' calling on the name of the Lord' is used where the name of Christ is in view (Acts 9:21). Jesus will do what we ask of him in his name (John 14:14). [41] The disciples are not orphaned; they may still go to the Lord with their requests (John 14:18).

The New Testament does not teach explicitly prayer to the Spirit, but the deity of the Spirit is affirmed, and the Spirit is said to function as our Advocate (*paraklētos*: John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). That function in itself makes prayer appropriate: we address One who, like the Son of God, represents us and pleads our cause, our ' case' ; [42] to pray to the Spirit is to recognise both his deity and his work on our behalf.

Tillich's objection against the doctrine of the Trinity is not sustained by the Christian practice of prayer. Prayer does not remove all the mystery. We cannot explain by analogy to human life how there can be one God while the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are equally God. In prayer, as in theology, we may misconceive the teaching of Scripture and think of the three Persons as three Gods. But prayer, drawing us into communion with God, makes it easier, not harder, to confess the triune God. Calvin writes: ' I am exceedingly pleased with this observation of Gregory of Nazianzen: "I cannot think of the *one*, but I am immediately surrounded with the splendour of the *three*; nor can I clearly discover the *three*, but I am suddenly carried back to the *one*.'" [43] Those words of the Cappadocian father reflect experience in prayer and meditation. As we have seen, the very term ' Father' reminds us of the Son in whom the Father is revealed; we know that the cry of sonship issues from the Spirit of adoption. The Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of fatherhood as well as sonship. We experience the reality of sonship as the Spirit makes the Father present with us, and as he unites us with the Son.

2. Prayer to the Father in the Son through the Spirit

Paul Tillich's objection must be set aside, but it provides an important warning. Our prayer is always directed to the triune God. We dare not address the Father without awareness of the Son. To do so would be to fail to pray in the name of Jesus. Nor should we pray without recognising that the Lord is present to help us, present in the abiding reality of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, in our weakness and finitude, we may think now of the Father, now of the Son, now of the Spirit. Yet we do sense that our prayer is to the Trinity. The Spirit who makes intercession for us guides our praying, for he witnesses to the Father and to the Son.

Here, too, the Scripture gives sure guidance. Clearly prayer in the New Testament is addressed to the Father. In the teaching of Jesus, in the record of Acts, in the Epistles, Christian believers bow to the Father from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named (Eph. 3:14). Does this uniform practice ignore or replace prayer to the Trinity? Not at all; rather, it is in addressing the Father that we can best respond to the full revelation of the Trinity. It would be foolish (indeed, blasphemous) to imagine a kind of jealousy within the Trinity, as though the Son would feel slighted by our appeal to the Father. Indeed, such a travesty is in no way possible. We cannot turn our backs to the Son in order to address the Father. The Father will not hear such prayer. Only as we come in the name of the Son can we pray to the Father.

Prayer to the Father is not a limitation of our prayer. It does not exclude Christ, but confesses the purpose for which he gave his life. He came, not only to claim those that the Father had given him, but to bring them to the Father, losing none of them (John 17:12). The triumph of the work of the Son is to make us acceptable to the Father through him (John 16:27).

Prayer to the Father exhibits the consciousness of sonship that crowns prayer in Christ. The total submission of prayer, its utter trust, looks to Jesus Christ. He is Lord; we come to him with our burden of sin and receive forgiveness and life. Yet when Jesus receives us to himself and unites us to himself we are more than delivered from sin, more than made heirs of eternal life: we are brought into a relation with God the Father that can exist only because Jesus is the divine Son. We are made sons of God. Yes, children by the new birth, but, in a sense, more than children. In Christ there is no longer male and female: we are sons in the Son.

The lessons of prayer all hinge on this incredible reality; we bring to the Father the dedication of our new obedience (Rom. 12:1, 2); we recognise his discipline (Heb. 12:5-7); we seek his will, his plan, his kingdom. In the urgency of our helpless need, we come to him with importunity, knowing that our Father will not give us a stone for bread (Luke 11:11-13).

The prayer of sonship to the Father breathes assurance as well as dependence. We realise that the love of the heavenly Father is all our hope. Surprisingly, Paul writes, ' But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8). Since Paul was speaking of the willingness of a man to give his life for a friend, we should have expected him to write, ' But *Christ* demonstrates his own love . . .' Calvary displays not only the love of the Son who gave himself for us, it demonstrates the love of the Father, who gave his only Son.

All the delight of heaven itself begins in prayer as the Spirit of the Father and of the Son draws us into communion with the triune God. We pray, 'Abba, Father!' and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

ENDNOTES:

[1] ' There was no god to speak of, except myself' , Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1976), p. 43. Bharati observes that ' orthodox Jews, Christians, and Muslims really cannot seek this union and be pious at the same time, because losing one' s identity and becoming the cosmic ground is a deadly heresy in these teachings' (p. 28). See E. P. Clowney, *CM: Christian Meditation* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979).

[2] Clowney, *ibid.*, pp. 7-18.

[3] The translation ' no word' is more appropriate than ' no thing' in both passages, since the word of God' s promise that is in view. Both *dabar* and *rhçma* mean ' word' as their primary significance. ' Too wonderful' is a more literal translation of the Hebrew phrase.

[4] The terms describing the flaming and smoking fire are used again to describe the appearing of God at Sinai (Gen. 15:17; Exod. 19:18; 20:18; cf. Isa. 31:9; Deut. 4:11; 5:22). When the fire of God' s presence passed between the pieces, God was taking an oath, swearing by the threat of dismemberment to keep his promise to Abraham (cf. Jer. 34:18-20).

[5] On the manifestations of God in the Old Testament, cf. Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 73-85. Jacob seems to misunderstand the flow of the narrative in Exodus 33. God' s affirmation ' *My* face will go with you' (33:14) expresses the granting of Moses' petition, as is seen in Moses' reaffirmation of it (33:15). The ' face' of God is not a substitute for his presence. It is unnecessary, too, to suppose that the Old Testament text was altered to remove references to seeing God. The narratives reflect both the essential incomprehensibility of God and his clear revelation of himself.

[6] *Sullâm*, the word for ' stairway' , implies a stone stairway, similar, presumably, to the ziggurat stairways described by André Parrot, *The Tower of Babel* (N.Y., 1955). The NIV marginal reading of Genesis 28:13 is to be preferred. It is supported by the same prepositional phrase in Genesis 35: 13, ' and God went up from beside him' . Cf. Genesis 45:1.

[7] The name *yîrâçl* would normally be understood as meaning ' God contends' , with *l* as the subject. The explanation in Genesis 32:28 seems to imply a play on words. Not only does God contend with Jacob, but Jacob contends with God, and prevails.

- [8] ' Jacob' s thigh is Jacob' s progeny' : P. A. H. de Boer, ' Genesis XXIII:29 Some Remarks on the Composition and Character of the Story' *NTT* 1 (1946-1947), pp. 149-163. See also J. Pedersen, *Der Eid bei den Semiten* (Strassburg, 1910), p. 151; F. van Tricht, ' La signification de la lutte de Jacob pres du Yabboq, Gen. 32:23-33,' *OudStud* 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1958), pp. 280--309.
- [9] E. A. Speiser, trans., ' The Creation Ep̄ , VI:31,32, in James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1 (Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 37.
- [10] Henri Blocher points out the significance of this passage in his insightful discussion of the image of God in man: ' The spirit conferrd on man does not emanate as a portion of the Spirit of God. . .' *Révélation des origines* (Lausanne: Presses Bibliques Universitaires, 1979), p. 75 (ET *In the Beginning* [Leicester: IVP, 1984], p. 82, reads a little differently).
- [11] Roberto M. Unger gives a devastating critique of the concept of personality that contemporary culture takes for granted: *Knowledge and Politics* (New York: Free Press/Macmillan, 1975), pp. 29-62.
- [12] Theodore Parker Ferris, Rector, Trinity Church, Boston, in a sermon on ' The Empty Tomb' , Easter, 1967, published by the church, n.d., p. H-I.
- [13] The concept of a chance universe where there are no laws, only statistical averages of events, swings the pendulum away from a clockwork universe, but is no more congenial to Christian theology. Even the approach that sees the universe as an information processing system tells us more about our own culture than the cosmos. See Jeremy Rifkin, *Algeny* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984); Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).
- [14] As Rifkin points out, *ibid.*, pp. 34-43.
- [15] On *hesed*, see Gerald A. Larue, ' Recent Studies in Hesed' in the Alfred Gottschalk translation of Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1975). Glueck' s emphasis on the obligation of *hesed* has been disputed by later scholars. See Francis Andersen, ' Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God' , in P. T. O' Brien and D. G. Peterson, eds, *God Who is Rich in Mercy (Festschrift for Broughton Knox; Homebush West, NSW: Anzca/Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986)*, pp. 411-488. When used of God, the term expresses his love and mercy, his devotion to those he has bound to himself by his antecedent grace.
- [16] See Numbers 14:13-19, where Moses again prays on the basis of God' s revealed name.
- [17] The verb is *šĕhĕh* in the hithpael. See Johannes Herrmann, ' Prayer in the O.T.' *T/DNT* 2.785-800. ' It seems there can be no prayer without prostration' (p. 789).
- [18] See Georges Pidoux, ' Quelques allusions au droit d' asile dans les Psaumes' , *Maqqél Shâqédh, La Branche d' Amandier: Hommage à Wilhelm Vischer* (Montpellier: Causse Graille Castelnau, 1960), pp. 191-197.
- [19] It is possible that *ton arton ton epiousion* should be understood as ' tomorrow' s bread' , referring to the bread of the coming age: so Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1974), pp. 100, 101. The reference would then not be to the daily supply of manna.
- [20] John' s Gospel connects the symbolism of the water flowing from the side of the crucified Christ with the invitation of Jesus in 7:37. That passage is best punctuated to read: ' If anyone thirst, let him come to me, and let him drink who believes in me. As the Scripture says, "From within him shall flow rivers of living water." ' Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 319-323. John presents Jesus as the source of the Spirit in his death as well as in his resurrection (20:22).
- [21] Cf. the ARV translation and its defence in Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (London: Tyndale Press/IVP, 1973), p. 108. On the structure of the psalm of individual lament, cf. Claus Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms* (Richmond: John Knox, 1965), pp. 64-81.

[22] Westermann, *ibid.*, p. 80.

[23] The word for 'difficult' in Jeremiah 33 can mean 'fortified'.

[24] See Werner Foerster, *From the Exile to Christ* (trans. G. E. Harris; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 13.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 228.

[26] R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), 2.649. Cf. Foerster, *ibid.*, p. 159.

[27] On the Old Testament background of these passages, cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977); Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985).

[28] Jeremias, *ibid.*, pp. 73-75.

[29] *Contra* Jeremias, *ibid.*, p. 78. Cf. discussion by M. M. B. Turner in this volume, p. 65.

[30] Cf. note 19 for the possibility that 'daily bread' is 'bread of tomorrow', a reference to the feast of the future kingdom, of which we receive a foretaste each day. Cf. also Ernst Lohmeyer, *'Our Father', an Introduction to the Lord's Prayers* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Harper & Row, 1965). Cf. Luke 6:21; 22:30; Rev. 7:16f.

[31] See above, note 30.

[32] When Jesus says 'I am' in the Gospels, the divine name is brought into view (cf. John 18:5).

[33] J. P. Versteeg, *Het Gebed volgens het Nieuwe Testament* (Amsterdam: Briejten & Schepperheijn, 1976).

[34] As the author of Hebrews points out, Genesis does not record any end to the life of Melchizedek. This is remarkable in a book where the death-knell so regularly tolls: 'and he died' (cf. Heb. 7:3,8). Cf. Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 253.

[35] Cf. Hughes, *ibid.*, p. 68.

[36] On the much debated passage, Romans 8:26, 27, cf. the commentaries and Michel de Goedt, 'The Intercession of the Spirit in Christian Prayer', in Christian Duquoc and Claude Geffré, eds., *The Prayer Life* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 26-38; Charles Hodge, 'The Spirit's Intercession', *Conference Papers* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1879); B. B. Warfield, 'The Spirit's Help in Our Praying', in *Faith and Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, repr. 1979); Ernst Kasemann, 'The Cry for Liberty in the Worship of the Church', ch. 6 in his *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969). The passage has been carefully studied in an unpublished paper by Sylvain Romerowski, 'L'Esprit de Christ intercède'.

[37] Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistles of Jude and II Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1979), p. 190.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[39] Cited in Wayne R. Spear, *The Theology of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 24-27. The citation is from Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 3.289.

[40] See Spear, *ibid.*, pp. 25, 26.

[41] The reading 'ask me in my name' is well supported: cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 244.

[42] While 'paraclete' in John's Gospel means more than an advocate in a legal setting (it includes intercessor, mediator, spokesman), the legal meaning is clear. The Spirit comes to represent us, to take our case as Jesus has done. Cf. George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), pp. 119, 120.

[43] Calvin, *Institutes* I:xiii:17, cited in Spear, p. 27.

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