

## The Lord's Prayer

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I recently led a one-hour class on The Lord's Prayer, which is found in Matthew 6:9b-13. I like teaching about this prayer because I had a teacher in seminary who knew more about it than anyone I have heard or read since. Unfortunately, he died before he published his opinions and proof. I try to carry on in his stead by expanding on notes from his class and my own thinking, to which he gave direction. I'm always available to teach about The Lord's Prayer.

The class the other night was very sharp, and we identified three concerns that can be easily addressed.

**The first** has to do with the first petition, *Hallowed be thy name*. The original Greek of the prayer says, *Make your name Holy*, which is the meaning of *Hallow your name*. All the petitions of TLP are in the indicative mood, the mood of exhortation. We exhort or support God in what God is already doing by saying, *Hallow your name*, *Your kingdom come*, *Your will be done*, *Give us daily bread*, *Forgive us our debts*, *Lead us not into temptation*.

What does not work for many in the class, including me, is *Hallowed be thy name*. Why did someone along the way add "be"? All we could figure out was that a choir introduced the word "be" into the first petition because it sings better that way. Maybe so, but for many people, saying it this way is not much different from saying, "Waldo be thy name." It's unclear.

**The second concern** has to do with what we want forgiven – our *trespasses* or our *debts*. There is no uniform agreement amongst denominations. For example, one summer two small rural congregations, one Presbyterian, the other Methodist, held joint services due to low attendance. These were held in the Methodist church building. As their time came to an end, a layperson said during morning announcements, "It has been great meeting together this summer, but next Sunday you Presbyterians have to go back to your debts, while we Methodists stay here with our trespasses."

There may be no agreement amongst denominations, but the word Jesus uses in New Testament Greek is *debts*. Why the difference then? In part a mistake was made by William Tyndale in 1525 while translating the New Testament into English. The NT Greek word for *trespasses*, *paraptomata*, is not found in the TLP. He translated *opheilemata*, which means *debts*, as *trespasses*. (And it's not as if he had a Greek-English dictionary. He was doing spadework that eventually helped us understand the Greek text.)

One little mistake, but then Thomas Cranmer perpetuated it by using Tyndale's version of TLP in The Book of Common Prayer in 1549. Over the next few years it became the rage, at least in England. But there have also been translations through the centuries using the proper word, *debts*, meaning SIN.

In this instance *debts* are not what we owe the bank or the mortgage company, but what we owe God in terms of attitude and behavior. A debt is the sort of sin that can be described as owing God better than we give. And what sin can't be defined as such? We owe God better than we give. Sin.

A *trespass*, which in the Bible involves crossing forbidden boundaries, is but one kind of sin. When I was growing up in Roswell, teenagers on occasion forgot what they had learned in Sunday school and actually "trespassed and entered." Some were caught by the police and sent home to their parents. Even though their trespasses weren't that great, they had to attend Trespassers Anonymous meetings. Those whose trespasses were more substantial were sent to reform school and became known as juvenile delinquents. There they prayed *Forgive us our trespasses* until they had paid their debt to society.

Trespassing is but one kind of debt – I owe God better - and the word in TLP is *opheilemata*, which clearly means debts, *Forgive us our debts*. But you wouldn't be wrong if you used the word *sin*.

The **third concern** stems from the context of TLP. Matthew 6:6: "*But when you pray, go into your private room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.*"

Jesus didn't give TLP just to be voiced in worship services. He gave it primarily to serve as the foundation of our personal devotion time. This is why it would serve us well to become more acquainted with it.

Next week we will look at the statement that bothers many, and with good cause, *Lead us not into temptation*.