

Jesus said, “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

In the spring and summer of 2003, a study group led by Dr. Christian Smith from the University of North Carolina surveyed about 3400 teenagers across the United States to assess their spirituality. The results of the study have been published in several books, *Soul Searching*, by Christian Smith, *Transforming Student Ministry*, edited by Richard Ross, and *Parenting With Kingdom Purpose*, by Ken Hemphill and Richard Ross. I’d recommend any of these to you, particularly the parenting one if you’re a parent.

As I said, the purpose of the study was to assess the spirituality of American teenagers – to find out what they believe about God, Jesus, religion, morality. I’m going to read just some of the results of the ***conservative protestant*** subgroup, this would represent teens out of churches like ours, OK? Of those teens:

- 94% believe in God
- 88% believe in a judgment day

- 33%, though, would say that their faith is not extremely important in how they live their daily lives
- 23% do not necessarily believe in miracles
- 23% do not believe that God is a personal being who is involved in the lives of people
- 58% question whether demons or evil spirits are real
- 33% say reincarnation is possible
- 38% do not necessarily believe in life after death
- 46% say many religions may be true
- 36% said that they thought it was OK to practice other religions and Christianity too
- 36% said that it's OK to pick and choose religious beliefs within Christianity without accepting the teaching as a whole
- 64% said that people can be truly spiritual without being involved in a church

Of teens that are at least regular attenders at church, that is, teens who participate in church at least 3 times a month,

- 68% believe that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights and wrongs
- If they were unsure about what was right or wrong in a given situation, 33% would base their decision on whatever would make them happiest

Now, please understand, this little report is not a indictment of teenagers – this is an indictment of the teaching ministry of the Christian church in America today.

Orthodox Christian theological understanding may be at an all time low in the history of our country. I think the laziness of our fallen nature has helped that to happen, along with, at least in our culture, the subtle but constant pressure of individualism - the “live and let live” philosophy, that rejects the existence of any absolute truth. “I’ll believe what I want, you believe what you want, we can both be right – and we’ll both be just fine.” We’re exposed to more of that than we probably realize, and while it may be the prevailing philosophy of our culture, it is in no way Christian. Yet according to these stats, the church is embracing it, and it’s teaching it to its children.

God has given us truth in here by which we’re called to measure our opinions, our feelings, our circumstances. Christianity says that absolute truth does exist. We’re to test the spirits to see if they are of God.¹ We’re to correctly handle the word of God.² We’re not to peddle it for profit.³ We’re not to distort it, but we’re to offer it as wisdom to each other and to our world.

And so we study to show ourselves approved as workers of God. We work through the theological issues toward an understanding of truth, not simply so we can have a philosophy that pleases us, or that makes us feel good about what we’re already doing or how we’re already living. We study to know the truth, so that we have a right understanding of God, and so that our

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 Tim 4:1

² 2 Timothy 2:15

³ 2 Corinthians 2:17

children and their children don't grow up thinking that they might be some reincarnated life, or that morality is situational, or that they can pray to Buddha and Jesus as equals. We're responsible to know all the truth we can know about God and then to pass it on. And so our series on theology continues today.

We're looking at the person of God. Who is God? Following Jesus teaching about God in these verses 5 through 9, we found last time that God is, first, *honest*. God's character is of the deepest integrity and He calls for the same in us. We can trust Him and what He says, because He values truthfulness. God is honest.

Next, God is *honorable*. He can be trusted because He wants only the best for you and me. He rewards those who do His will. God is completely honorable.

Third, God is *omniscient*. God knows all things. God knows what we need before we ask Him. He knows without limitation. He knows the condition of the farthest reaches of the heavens and He knows the innermost secrets of our hearts. Time is no barrier of His knowledge. God is omniscient – he knows all things.

Fourth, we said last time that God is *communicative*. He wants us to pray to Him, to talk with Him, because He has much to say to us. He's interested in intimate communication with you and me.

Finally, God reveals Himself to us, primarily, as a Father. Jesus said, this is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven.’ We learn clear back in Genesis that, before God was anything else, He was a Father – the father of Jesus in the context of the Trinity. And even though God is many things to us, He is a Father first. We are not merely the subjects of a King, we are the children of our Father-King. We are not merely defendants in the courtroom of a righteous Judge, but the Judge is our Father who cares for us, who loves us deeply – as healthy and good fathers love their children. Our relationship with our Creator and Judge and King is covered by this blanket of love because He is first our Father.

We move on today, Verse 9, “Jesus said, “This then is how you should pray, ‘Our Father *in Heaven*,’”” Jesus intentionally associates God with a place, and a place not of this earth. I wonder if He doesn’t do this because He knows that humanity will try to manipulate God’s residence. The seat of God’s government is not here, but somewhere else. The place where God resides is different from this place – it’s bigger, grander, more magnificent than what we have here. We have no need to face Jerusalem when we pray. We’re not called to make pilgrimages to shrines where God is supposed to reside. That’s not to say it’s wrong to visit Israel - it’s fine to do that. But God doesn’t live there any more than He lives here. God the Father doesn’t live in temples made by human hands. In spite of what our New Age friends would say, God is not in the tree or in the table or in the rock or the dirt. Jesus gives us here a context for our prayer – who does it go to? God, our Father. Where

does it go? To Heaven, where God resides. His place – a place we don't really understand, but a place nonetheless. Our Father in Heaven.”

Jesus said, when you pray, say, “Our Father in Heaven, *hallowed be your name.*” Generally speaking, in our culture, we choose names without a whole lot of thought – something we like. Something that sounds good to us, or that sort of “goes” with our last name. But in the Jewish culture, names meant much more. The name reflected the person; it represented the essential nature of the person, which helps us understand Jesus’ words here. These first words of His prayer are words of worship that reveal God’s character to us. If God’s name is hallowed, then God is hallowed. God is special. He’s different. He’s set-apart, sacred, sanctified, holy. Although He is our Father, He is distinct from us by nature. God is perfect and pure; flawless and excellent.

Too often, we imagine that God must be like us, with all our weaknesses and limitations. Thinking that makes it easier for us to approach Him – we’re more comfortable with a God like that. But we cheapen Him by our casual approach to Him, our casual approach to the things of God, the way we use Him; the way so many speak His name inappropriately or use His name in vain. I wonder, is there a sacredness...a hallowedness in our voice and in our spirit when we speak of God? When we talk of His business?

Jesus says here, God is holy.

God is our *Father*, He is *in Heaven*, and He is *holy*. Next, God is a King. Jesus says in verse 10: “*Your kingdom come.*” God is a King with a kingdom that has come and that will yet come on earth. On one hand, His kingdom has been established in Christ. There’s no doubt who is the King of all creation; there’s no real contest – there never was. Jesus, in dying for our sins and in rising from the dead defeated Satan and with him, the curse of death. God’s Kingdom has come.

And yet there remains an insurrection going on within His Kingdom even today. There is evil in the earth, there is rebellion against Him in these days. Many of His subjects refuse to bend their knee to God as their rightful King. And so there is coming a day when His Kingdom will come in its fullness. When God will be revealed to all for who He really is. Paul talks about that day in 1 Corinthians 15, when Christ defeats all of God’s enemies and God’s kingdom comes in its completeness. Make no mistake – God is King. He is now, even though it may seem otherwise, and He will be for all the world to see one day soon. God is a King.

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

God is a Father, God is in Heaven, He is Holy, He is King, and *He has a will* – a plan. This is not Star Wars. God is not some impersonal force to be used or tamed by humanity in order to help us get what we want. Now, I’d think that most Christians would agree with that, and yet how often do we make *our goals* and plans

and *then* ask God to bless them and make them happen without ever considering what *His* will might be?

God has a will. He has ideas about what He'd like to see happen here. God wanted Adam and Eve to grow and prosper in Eden. God wanted the Hebrews to leave Egypt. He wanted Moses to enter into the promised land. God wanted Israel to let Him be their king...He didn't want them to have a human king. God wanted Israel to be a blessing to the other nations of the earth. He wanted Jesus to suffer and die for your sin and mine. Some of those things happened according to God's will, some didn't, and some were delayed because of humans asserting their will and ignoring or defying the will of God. Yet God's will for His creation, and for you and me, remains.

Jesus not only taught us this about God here, but a couple years later, He demonstrated how this is all supposed to work. In the Garden of Gethsemane, as the time for His crucifixion drew near, Jesus fell facedown, you remember, and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, by as you will."

For all the times when the Israelites refused to say to God, "Thy will be done."

For all the times when King Saul and David and Solomon and the rest refused to say to God, "Thy will be done."

For all the times when *you and I* have refused to say to God, "Thy will be done."

For the times when the first Adam, in the first garden, refused to say, “Thy will be done...”

The *second* Adam, in the *second* garden, bowed His will to the will of the Father; so that the sin and the disobedience of all the rest could be atoned for and forgiven.

God has a will that He wants us to know and to do.

We’ll mention these last few quickly – our time is running out. Verse 11, “*Give us today our daily bread.*”

We see that God is a provider – for even the most simple, daily needs. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father. He wants us to understand that and look to him for our needs, and then faithfully give Him thanks for all that He provides for us. God is a provider.

Verse 12: “*Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.*”

God is a forgiver. This is the hope of the gospel, that though we are indebted to this God, though we have sinned against Him, through the life and death and resurrection of His son Jesus, the forgiveness of God is possible. 1 John 1:9 says that “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us. We’ll talk more about this in a couple weeks, but for now, know that God is a forgiver and He wants to forgive you. Nothing you have done is too grievous, there is no debt too large that the work of Jesus will not cover. Believe that, believe in Christ, turn your life and your guilt over

to Him and God will forgive you. Repent and believe and be forgiven and have a relationship with your God. He is a forgiver.

Verse 13: *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*

There is much that could be said here, but for our purposes, this verse tells us that God is also a protector. He can and apparently will shield us from temptation; He'll protect us from evil, from the evil one. He'll guide us and help us out of difficult or dangerous circumstances. How fitting are these marks of a good King, a good Shepherd, a good Father...you see how this all fits together? God is a protector.

In these two weeks, Jesus has described God the Father to us as honest, honorable, omniscient, communicative, and fatherly. We understand that God is somehow in Heaven, that God is holy, that God is a King, a provider, a forgiver, and a protector.

That's a pretty good start...our God is certainly all of these things, but He's so much more. If you really want to know who God is and what He's like, look at Jesus, God's son. No clearer picture of God has ever been given. If you're curious about the character of God, read through the book of Matthew and watch what Jesus does, watch what He says, how He says things, notice what's important to Him, and you will see a picture of God. Jesus told Phillip in John 14, “Anyone who has

seen me has seen the Father.” He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

God wants to be known. He wants us to have a right understanding of Him, for His glory, for our own good, and for the good of our world.

8:30 17 Ye Servants of God 1,2,4
 56 Day by Day

10:50 426 The Lord’s Prayer

Mothers, pick up your gift at the doors at the rear.