

Lessons on Prayer

Matt. 6:5-13; 7:7-11; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-5

It would have been surprising if prayer had not occupied a prominent place in the instruction Jesus gave to His disciples. Prayer is a necessity for spiritual life. And all who sincerely try to pray soon feel the need to be taught how to do it. What subject could have occupied the mind of the Master more than this one? He Himself was emphatically a man of prayer, occasionally spending whole nights in prayerful communion with His heavenly Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; Matt. 14:23).

Jesus often spoke on the subject of prayer within the hearing of His disciples. For example, He devoted a paragraph to it in the Sermon on the Mount. He cautioned those who were listening to Him to avoid any outward behavior that was intended to bring praise to self (like the Pharisees did). He also warned them against vain repetition in prayer. Instead, Jesus gave them a model prayer that was simple, comprehensive, and brief (Matt. 6:5-13). At other times, He directed the people's attention to the necessity of persevering in prayer (Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-5), of agreement in prayer (Matt. 18:19), of strong faith in prayer (Matt. 21:22), and of expecting great things in prayer (John 16:23-24). This is the acceptable and prevailing kind of prayer.

Luke 11 gives an account of what may be regarded as the most complete and comprehensive of all the lessons Jesus communicated to His disciples on the important subject of prayer. The circumstances around which this lesson was given are interesting. The lesson on prayer was itself an answer to prayer. After hearing Jesus pray, one of the disciples - probably one of the Twelve - made this request, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). The request, together with the occasion on which it was made, convey to us in an unintentional way two pieces of information. We learn that on many occasions, Jesus prayed alone as well as with His disciples. He practiced family prayer as the head of a household in addition to secret prayer in personal fellowship with God His Father. From the request, we learn that the social prayers of Jesus were most impressive. When the disciples heard them, they were made painfully aware of their own inadequacies. After the "Amen," they were instinctively ready to make the request, "Lord, teach us to pray." It was as if they were ashamed to attempt the exercise any more in their own feeble, vague, stammering words.

We do not know when this lesson was given. Luke introduces his narrative of it in a very indefinite way. He does not record the time nor the place. His reference to John the Baptist in the past tense (“...just as John also taught *his* disciples”) might seem to indicate a date after his death. But Luke could have expressed himself in this way because the disciple had previously been a disciple of the Baptist (paraphrased: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught us when we were *his* disciples”). Nor can any certain inference be made from the contents of the lesson. As far as their spiritual needs were concerned, this is a lesson that could have been given to the Twelve at any time during their discipleship training. It is a lesson for children, for new believers, for Christians who are in the phase of their spiritual pilgrimage when they are rough around the edges - people who are confused in their thinking, who cannot seem to speak, who are dejected, who are unable to pray because they don’t have any clear thoughts or appropriate words to say. They also lack the faith that knows how to wait while living with hope. So this model prayer meets the needs of these people by suggesting topics, supplying actual words that can be repeated, and furnishing their weak faith with the props of convincing arguments so they will persevere in prayer. Now this was the state of the Twelve during the whole time they were with Jesus. This lasted until He ascended into heaven, and power descended from heaven on them. When it came, they were able to speak, and they possessed an enlarged heart. During the whole period of their discipleship, they needed to be prompted to pray like a mother reminds her child. They needed encouragement to persevere in the habit of praying in the same way that the most humble followers of Christ do. The Twelve were far from being exempt from such weaknesses. In fact, they may have experienced them to a very high degree. The heights correspond to the depths in religious experience. As disciples, these men who were destined to become Apostles must know more than the average person about the confused, speechless condition that sometimes happens in prayer. They must also know about the great, irritating, but praiseworthy business of *waiting on God* for light, truth, and grace, which all sincerely desire but have withheld from them for long periods of time.

It was beneficial to the church that her first ministers received this lesson on prayer. For the time comes in most people’s lives, if not all, who genuinely try to live for Christ, when this teaching on prayer is most needed. In the spring of the Christian life, at the time when the beautiful blossoms of godliness emerge, believers may be able to pray freely so that the words flow with ease and passion. They are not embarrassed by a lack of words, thoughts, or certain kinds of feelings. But that wonderful stage soon passes. It is succeeded by one in which prayer often becomes a helpless struggle, an inarticulate groan, a silent, distressed, despondent waiting on God. This happens to people who are tempted to doubt whether God hears prayers. They wonder if it is entirely superficial and useless. There are three needs considered and addressed in this lesson: the need for 1) ideas, 2) words, and 3) faith. These are as common as they are tragic. Consider how long it takes most people to fill even the simple petitions of the Lord’s Prayer

with definite meanings! For instance, the second petition, “Thy kingdom come,” can only be offered intelligently by those who have formed for themselves a clear conception about the ideal spiritual republic or commonwealth. How difficult, and therefore how rare, to find acceptable words to express such special thoughts that have been so slow in developing! There have been so many people who have never received anything that they had set their hearts on without asking for it often. How many of them have been tempted, when the answer was delayed, to give up in despair! And no wonder! For delay is hard to endure in any situation, especially as it pertains to spiritual blessings, which are, in fact, the major goal of a Christian person’s desires and are assumed by Christ to be as well. Spiritual people should not be totally confused by delay. They should not even be surprised by not receiving temporal things. For they know that things such as health, wealth, spouse, children, home, position, are not unconditionally good. They realize that it may be appropriate for them not to obtain them - at least not easily nor too soon. But it is extremely confusing to want the Holy Spirit with all your heart and yet seem to be denied the priceless favor; to pray for light, and to get in its place deeper darkness; to pray for faith, and to be tormented with doubts which shake cherished convictions to their foundations; to pray for personal holiness and to have the mud of corruption stirred up from the bottom of the well of eternal life in the heart by some temptation. Yet every bit of this is part of the discipline through which Christ’s disciples have to pass in order for the desires of their hearts to be fulfilled. Every experienced Christian knows this.

The lesson on prayer taught by Christ was in response to a request and consists of two parts. In one, the thoughts and words are put into the mouths of immature disciples. The other provides aids to faith in God as the One who answers prayer. First, there is a form of prayer. Then, there is an argument which enforces perseverance in prayer.

The Form of Prayer

The form of prayer that Christ gave us is commonly called the Lord’s Prayer. It appears in the Sermon on the Mount as a sample of the right kind of prayer. It contains a summary of the general headings under which all special petitions come. The form is called the *alphabet* of all possible prayer. It has the elements of all spiritual desire summed up in a few choice sentences and has been given for the benefit of all who may not be able to articulate their hopes and dreams. It contains six petitions. The first three refer to God’s glory; the last three to man’s good. First, we are taught to pray for the coming of the divine kingdom, which includes showing reverence for the divine name and universal obedience to the divine will. Secondly, we are taught to pray for daily bread, pardon, and protection from evil. The whole prayer is addressed to God as Father. It comes out of the mouths of those who realize they have fellowship with other members of the body of Christ, and therefore say, “Our Father.” The prayer does not end as ours today do, with “For Christ’s sake.” It could not. If it did, it would not be consistent with the assumption

that the prayer came from Jesus. Before His death, no prayer given by Him to His disciples for their use could have this sort of ending. The request it makes could not have been understood by them prior to the event. The Twelve did not yet know what Christ's sake meant. They would not understand this until after their Lord had ascended and the Spirit had descended, revealing to them the true meaning of the facts of Christ's earthly history. Just before His passion, we find Jesus telling His disciples that until that time, they had asked nothing in His name. He told them that in the future they would be able to use His name as a plea that would be heard. It would be one of the privileges they would have. He said, "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full" (John 16:24). And in another part of His discourse: "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

We do not know the extent to which the disciples used this beautifully simple, yet profoundly significant, model in later years. But it could be assumed that they habitually repeated it just as the disciples of the Baptist might repeat the forms taught them by their master. It had permanent value as a part of Christ's teaching. However, there is no reason to think that the "Lord's Prayer" was designed to be a standardized, compulsory method of addressing the Father in heaven. It was meant to be an aid to inexperienced disciples, not a rule that was imposed on the Apostles. Even after they had come to spiritual maturity, the Twelve could have used this form if they wanted to - and they possibly did. But Jesus expected that by the time they became teachers in the church, they would have outgrown the need for it as an aid to devotion. As they were filled with the Spirit, had their hearts enlarged, and became mature in their spiritual understanding, they should then be able to pray like their Lord had prayed when He was with them. The six petitions of the model prayer would still play a part in all their supplications before the throne of grace. But they would do so in the same way that the alphabet of a language forms the lengthy and eloquent messages of a speaker. He never thinks of the letters that form the words he speaks.

As it pertains to the Twelve, we are not concerned with the fact that the prayer does not end with the phrase, "for Christ's sake." We maintain that, for these disciples, the character of the Lord's Prayer was temporary and for this specific time in their lives. This phrase could easily be added afterwards, either mentally or orally. So their not using it offers no reason for not using it today. To allow this model prayer to fall by the wayside and not be used today simply because this customary plea is missing at the end is a weak reason. On the other side of the coin, it ought not to be repeated too frequently. The Lord's Prayer is neither a piece of Deism (the belief that God exists and created the world, but thereafter assumed no control over it or the lives of people) unworthy of a Christian, nor is it a magic charm to be said in church without meaning. The most mature believer will often find relief and rest in his spirit when he meditates on the simple, yet majestic, sentences of the prayer. During these times, he realizes just how many aspects there

are to each of the particular requests. He also understands that he is only a beginner in the art of praying and, generally, in living the Christian life. His devotions consist mainly, or even exclusively, of repeating the words which Jesus put into the mouths of immature disciples.

The view which is now being advocated regarding the purpose of the Lord's Prayer is in harmony with the spirit of all of Christ's teachings. In general, liturgical forms and the systematic methods that religions use were much more acceptable to the strict, ascetic school of John the Baptist than to the free school of Jesus. Our Lord evidently attached little importance to forms of prayer. The same could be said for His view of fixed, periodic fasts. If this were not true, He would not have waited until He was asked for a model prayer. Instead, He would have made systematic provision for the needs of His followers just like the Baptist did, by (so to speak) compiling a book of devotion or composing a liturgy. It is evident, even from the present instructions on the subject of praying, that Jesus considered the form He gave them to be of very little importance. It was only a temporary solution for a minor problem (their lack of words to say in prayer) that was to be used until the greater problem (their lack of faith) was resolved. For the larger portion of the lesson is devoted to the purpose of offering a remedy for their unbelief.

Persevering in Prayer

The second part of this lesson on prayer is intended to teach the same moral that the preface to the parable of the unjust judge does - "that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart" (Luke 18:1). The reason for not persevering in prayer is also the same: God delays in answering our prayers. This is not as obvious in the earlier lesson as in the latter. The parable of the neighbor who would not get out of bed is not given to convey the idea that God delays for a long time before He answers prayer (see Luke 11:5ff.). For the favor which is requested, if it is granted at all, must be granted in a very few minutes. But the lapse of time between the presenting and the granting of our requests is implied and presupposed as a matter of course. By delaying, God seems to say to us what the neighbor said to his friend. So we are tempted to think that there is no reason to pray.

Both of the parables that Christ gave - and they were spoken to teach perseverance in prayer - seek to accomplish their purpose by showing the power of importunity (perseverance) in circumstances that seem to offer no hope of an answer. The characters that are appealed to are both bad - one is not generous and the other is unjust. And nothing is to be gained from either of them except by working on their selfishness. The point of the parable in either case is that perseverance has a power of annoyance that enables it to obtain what it wants.

It is important again to notice what is supposed to be the primary aspect of prayer that is being taught in connection with the argument that we will now consider. Christ assumes His disciples

have set their hearts on personal sanctification. This is apparent from the concluding sentence of the discourse: “how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:13b). Jesus takes it for granted that the people He is speaking to here seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Therefore, though He inserted a petition for daily bread in the Lord’s Prayer, He drops it in the latter part of the discourse. Why? Because it is not the main thing we ought to desire. And secondly, because for all who truly put God’s kingdom first, food and clothing are thrown into the bargain.

To those who do not desire the Holy Spirit above everything else, Jesus has nothing to say. He does not encourage them to hope that they will receive anything from the Lord. Least of all, they should not expect the righteousness of the kingdom or personal sanctification. What does He think of the prayers of a double-minded man? Those prayers are a hollow mockery because that person has two primary purposes in mind. This person is speaking mere words which never reach Heaven’s ear.

The supposed reason for losing heart is delay; and the supposed object of one’s desires is the Holy Spirit. So the spiritual lesson that Jesus wants to teach in the argument is, without question, clear. The Teacher’s goal is to help and encourage those who feel that the work of grace happens slowly with them. They wonder why and sadly let out a sigh because it does. We believe this was the condition of the Twelve when this lesson was given. They had been made painfully aware of their inability to do their devotional duties in the right way. They looked at this inability as a benchmark of their spiritual condition. As a result, they were depressed.

Jesus Inspires His Disciples

The argument Jesus used to inspire His discouraged disciples with hope and confidence that their desires would be fulfilled is characterized by boldness, warmth, wisdom, and logic. Its boldness is revealed by His choice of illustrations. Jesus has such confidence in the goodness of His cause that He states the case in an unfavorable light by selecting, as examples, men considered to be below the normal standard of human virtue. One is a man who is asked at any hour of the night to help a neighbor in a real emergency. This is the situation presented in the parable (Luke 11:5ff). The emergency could have been the one presented in the text, or it could have been sudden sickness. The man in bed puts him off with these words: “Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything” (vs. 7). This response would greatly upset his friends. It would become a proverb among them, representing all that is selfish and heartless. Jesus’ willingness to take an extreme case is also seen in a second argument. This one is taken from the way fathers act toward their children. “Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish...” (Luke 11:11). This is the way it begins. Jesus does not care what father is selected. He is willing to choose anyone they please. He

will take the very worst just as readily as the best. We could even say he would choose the worse more readily, because the argument is not made on the basis of the goodness of the parent, but rather on his lack of goodness. Its purpose is to show that no special goodness is required to keep all parents from doing what is right. People would be outraged if a parent did not even have a natural love for the child. That would be revolting to everyone's feelings.

The warm, kind character of the argument is shown by the insight and sympathy displayed in it. Jesus knew what hard thoughts people have about God when their desires are not met. They doubt His goodness and think of Him as indifferent, heartless, and unjust. He shows His intimate knowledge of their secret complaints by the cases He discusses with them. The unkind friend and the unloving father, as well as the unjust judge, are illustrations to be sure. But they are not pictures of what God is like. They are not even pictures of who Jesus would have us believe God is. However, they are illustrations of who even spiritual people sometimes think Him to be (see the book of Job, Ps. 73 and 77). Jesus not only knows this by using His divine knowledge; He also sympathizes. He does not, like Job's friends, find fault with those who harbor thoughts full of doubt or thoughts that are even profane. Nor does He rebuke them for their impatience, lack of trust, and despondency. He deals with them as men who are surrounded with weakness and in need of sympathy, counsel, and help. And in supplying these, He comes down to their level of feeling, and tries to show that there is no reason for them to be in despair, even if things were as they seemed to be. He argues from their own thoughts about God and maintains that they should still put their hope in Him. In effect, He says to them, "Suppose God is who you think He is - indifferent and heartless. Still continue to pray! In the case that I presented, do you see what perseverance can do? Ask in the same way that the man who wanted fish asked, and you will also receive from Him who at the present time seems deaf to your requests. Things may seem unfavorable, but they cannot be more unfavorable than that of the man in the parable. Yet you observe this man's favorable outcome because he was not easily discouraged."

Jesus displays His wisdom in dealing with the doubts of His disciples by avoiding all the elaborate explanations of the causes or reasons for delay in answering prayer. He uses only arguments which He adapted to the capacity of the people who were weak in faith and in spiritual understanding. He does not attempt to show why sanctification is a slow, tedious work rather than a momentary act - why the Spirit is given gradually and in a limited, rather than all at once and in an unlimited, way. He simply urges those who listen to Him to persevere in seeking the Holy Spirit. He assures them that their desires will be fulfilled in the end, in spite of the delay which tries their patience. He does not teach them a philosophy of waiting on God but only tells them that they will not wait in vain.

Delays in Prayer

The Teacher followed this method, not out of necessity, but by choice. Although no attempt was made to explain God's delays in providence and grace, it was not because an explanation was impossible. There were many things which Christ might have said to His disciples at this time if they could have handled them. Later on, they said some of the same things themselves. But it was only after the Spirit of Truth had come and guided them into all truth. He made them aware of the secret of God's way. He might have pointed out to them: 1) that the delays about which they complained were also seen in nature where gradual growth is the universal law; 2) that time is needed for producing the ripe fruit of the Spirit in the same way that ripe fruit in the field or orchard needs time; 3) that there is a law of growth that the more complex the product, the slower the process by which it is produced (the principle: that we should not be amazed if spiritual fruit is particularly slow in ripening); 4) that instant sanctification, though not impossible, would be as much a miracle as was the transformation of water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana; 5) that if instantaneous sanctification were the rule instead of the rare exception, the kingdom of grace would become too much like the imaginary worlds of children's dreams; in them, trees, fruit, and palaces spring into being as full-grown, ripe, and furnished. It happens in a moment as if by magic. It is too unlike the real world in which delay, growth, and fixed laws are unchanging characteristics.

Jesus could have further sought to help them understand delay by commenting on the virtue of patience. Much could be said on that topic. It could be shown that character cannot be mature where the virtue of patience does not have a place. The gradual method of sanctification is best suited for character development. It allows for the broadest scope for its exercise. It might be pointed out that the ultimate enjoyment of any good thing is enhanced by waiting for it. The triumph of faith is in proportion to the trial. Samuel Rutherford, in a sermon entitled *Trial and Triumph of Faith*, wrote from his own experience: "It is fit we see and feel the shaping and sewing of every piece of the wedding garment, and the framing and molding and fitting of the crown of glory for the head of the citizen of heaven; how the repeated sense and frequent experience of grace in the ups and downs in the way, the falls and risings again of the traveler, the revolutions and changes of the spiritual condition, the new moon, the darkened moon, the full moon in the Spirit's ebbing and flowing, raiseth in the heart of saints on their way to the country a sweet smell of the fairest rose and lily of Sharon; how as travelers at night talk of their foul ways, and of the praises of their guide, and battle being ended, soldiers number their wounds, extol the valor, skill, and courage of their leader and captain, so it is meet that the glorified soldiers may take loads of experience of free grace to heaven with them, and there speak of their way and their country, and the praises of Him that hath redeemed them out of all nations, tongues, and languages."

No matter how fair these considerations may have been, they would have been wasted on the disciples because of their current spiritual condition. Children have no sympathy for growth in any world, whether it is in nature or in grace. Nothing pleases them unless the acorn becomes an oak tree at once, or that immediately after the blossom, the ripe fruit comes. Therefore, it is useless to speak to those who are immature about the benefits of patience. For the moral value of the discipline that trials bring cannot be appreciated until the trial has passed. Therefore, as we stated before, Jesus restrained Himself from the kind of reflections we mentioned. Instead, He adopted a simple, popular style of reasoning which even a child could understand.

The Reasoning of Jesus

The reasoning of Jesus, while it is very simple, is very persuasive and decisive. The first argument - the one contained in the parable of the selfish neighbor - is intended to inspire hope in God, even in the darkest hour, when He appears indifferent to our cry, or positively unwilling to help, and so to encourage us to persevere in asking. "The man who wanted the loaves knocked louder and louder with persistence that knew no shame. He would not take no for an answer. Therefore, he got what he wanted. The selfish friend was glad (finally) to get up and serve him out of sheer regard for his own comfort. It was impossible to sleep with such noise, so (this is the drift of the argument)...so continue to knock at the door of heaven, and you will obtain your desire if only for the reason that heaven would finally be rid of you. This parable lets us know what a power persistence has - even at a most inconvenient time (midnight), and with a most unlikely person (one who prefers his own comfort to a neighbor's need). Ask persistently, therefore, and it will be given unto you also. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you."

At one point, this pitiful and sympathetic argument seems to be weak. The one who is making the request in the parable had the selfish person in his power by being able to annoy him and keep him from sleeping. Now, the disciple who is tired and despondent, whom Jesus would try to comfort, may respond, "What power do I have to annoy God? He dwells on high, far beyond my reach, in undisturbed bliss. If only I knew where to find Him; if only I could go to His dwelling! But if I go to the east, He is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find Him. When He is at work in the north, I do not see Him; when He turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of Him" (Job 23:3,8-9). The objection is one which can hardly fail to occur to the spirit of despondency. It must be admitted that this is not frivolous. There is really a failure of the analogy at this point. We can annoy a person like the selfish man in bed or the unjust judge, but we cannot annoy God. The parable does not suggest the true explanation for the divine delay, or of the ultimate success of perseverance. It simply proves, by a down-to-earth situation, that delay - apparent refusal - for whatever reason, is not necessarily final. Therefore, there is no good reason for giving up asking.

This is a real if not a great service rendered. But the doubting disciple discovers with keen insight what the parable fails to prove. So he may not be able to gain any comfort from what it does prove. What is he to do then? He is to fall back on the strong assertion with which Jesus follows up the parable: "And I say to you" (Luke 11:9). Here, doubter, is a very wise saying that comes from One who can speak with authority; One who has been in the bosom of the eternal God, and has come forth to reveal His innermost heart to people who are groping in the darkness of nature after Him, in hopes of finding Him. When He addresses you in such emphatic, solemn terms as these, "I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:9), you may take Him at His word. Even those who doubt the reasonableness of prayer, because of the laws of nature and the unchanging purposes of God, might take Christ's word for it that prayer is not vain, even as it pertains to daily bread, not to speak of higher matters. In other words, they might believe Him in relation to food until they have more confidence in the subject than they currently have. If they choose, they may reject the parable as childish. Or, they may think it conveys crude ideas that attribute human passions to God. But they cannot reject the deliberate declarations of One whom even they regard as the wisest and best of men.

The second argument that was used by Jesus to encourage perseverance in prayer reduces the hypothesis to an absurdity (*reductio ad absurdum*). It ends with a conclusion that uses stronger reason (*à fortiori*). It is reasoned this way: "Suppose God refused to hear His children's prayers. Or, worse still, suppose He mocked them by giving them something that was only a superficial resemblance to the thing they asked for. When the deception was discovered, it would only cause bitter disappointment. God would not only be as bad as, but far worse than, the most depraved of all mankind. Take fathers at random. Which of them, if a son were to ask for bread, would give him a stone? Or, if he asked for a fish, would he give him a snake? Or, if he asked for an egg, would he offer him a scorpion? The very thought is monstrous. Human nature is mostly corrupted by moral evil. In particular, there is an evil spirit of selfishness in the heart which comes into conflict with generous feelings and thoughts. Often, it leads people to do base and unnatural things. But, on the average, people are not devilish. And nothing short of a diabolic spirit of trouble could prompt a father to mock a child's misery. Nor could he deliberately give him things that were potentially harmful. If, then, earthly parents, though evil in many of their traits, give good (and as far as they know, only good) gifts to their children, and would be filled with horror at the thought of any other treatment, is it to be thought that the Divine Being, that Providence, can do what only devils would think of doing? On the contrary, what is only barely possible for people is for God totally impossible. And things that everyone except monsters of sin will do, God will do much more. He will surely give good gifts, and only good gifts, to His asking children. He will especially give His best gift, which His true children desire above all things: the Holy Spirit, the enlightener and the sanctifier. Therefore, again I say to you, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

Yet it is implied that God seems, at least sometimes, to treat His children in this way. Christ uses such illustrations as a stone given for bread, a snake for a fish, or a scorpion for an egg. The time came when the Twelve thought they had been treated this way. The situation had to do with the very subject about which they were most interested - their own personal sanctification. They were interested in the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. But their experience illustrates the general truth, that when the Hearer of prayer seems to deal unnaturally with His servants, it is because they have made a mistake about the nature of good and have not known what they asked for. They have asked for a stone, thinking it was bread. Hence, the true bread seems like a stone. They asked for a shadow, thinking it was a substance. Hence, the substance seems like a shadow. The kingdom for which the Twelve prayed was a shadow. This explains their disappointment and despair when Jesus was put to death. The egg of hope, which their imaginations had been hatching, brought forth the scorpion of the cross. And they felt that God had mocked and deceived them. But they lived to see that God was true and good. They saw that they had deceived themselves. And they saw that all that Christ had told them had been fulfilled. All who wait on God ultimately make a similar discovery. They unite in testifying that “the Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him” (Lam. 3:25).

For these reasons, all people should pray and not give up. Prayer is rational, even if the Divine Being were like the average person who is willing to do good when self-interest does not stand in the way. The creed of heathenism is self-centered. Prayer is still more manifestly rational if God is better than the best of people (Christ taught this, and Christians believe it). There is only one supremely good Being - the *Father* in heaven. There are only two cases where prayer would be irrational: 1) if God were not a living Being at all, which is the creed of atheists, and with whom Christ has no argument; or, 2) if He were a Being capable of doing things from which even bad people would step back in horror (for example, if He were a Being with a diabolic nature). Hopefully, this creed is not held by any human being.