

THE PREFACE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

MATTH. vi. 9.—*Our Father which art in heaven.*

THE Lord's prayer consists of three parts, the preface, petitions, and conclusion. The preface is in the words which I have read, designing the object of worship, and particularly of prayer, namely, God himself. And we are directed to address ourselves in prayer to him, (1.) As a *Father*; (2.) As *our Father*; and (3.) As *our Father in heaven*.

The words afford this doctrine.

DOCT. 'If we would pray acceptably, we must address ourselves to the Lord in prayer, as our Father which is in heaven.'

Here I shall shew,

I. What our being directed to call God *Father* in prayer doth teach us.

II. What our being directed to call God *our Father* teaches us.

III. What we are taught by our being directed to address ourselves to God as *our Father in heaven*.

IV. Deduce some inferences.

I. I am to shew, what our being directed to call God *Father* in prayer does teach us. It teaches,

1. The children of God to be those who only can or are capable to pray acceptably: for they only can indeed call God *Father*. We cannot pray acceptably unless he be our Father, and we his children, namely, by regeneration and adoption, John ix. 31. How can one plead the privileges of the family, if he be none of the members thereof, but of his father the devil, a stranger to the covenant of promise? Therefore, if we would pray aright, our state must first be changed, Jam. v. 16.

Quest. May none pray, then, who cannot call God, *Father*? *Ans.* There are two sorts of these.

(1.) Unregenerate persons, who are yet in the state of black nature, who have no ground to plead this saving relation to God. They may, yea, ought to pray, though they cannot pray acceptably; because prayer is the natural duty of all, which all are bound to, and the neglect of which God will punish them for, Jer. x. ult. And prayer is not a sin, but a duty, though, as it is by them managed, it is turned into sin, as all other duties are. But the neglect of it is a greater sin.

Object. But it is needless for them to pray, since they cannot pray acceptably. *Ans.* No: for it is a mean of grace, and an ordinance

of God; and though God have no respect to it as it is their performance, yet he may have respect to it as it is his own ordinance, and do good to them by it. The matter lies here; they are neither to continue in their sinful state, nor to satisfy themselves with their praying in that condition, but come out of it, and join themselves to God's family, and so they will come to pray acceptably.

(2.) The children of God who cannot discern their relation to him. These not only may pray, but pray acceptably, Psal. ciii. 13. 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' But it is their duty to endeavour to assure their hearts before him, to advance their hunger and thirst after him to an actual acceptance of God to be their Father in Christ, and thereupon to believe he is their Father.

2. That it is through Jesus Christ we have access to God in prayer, Eph. ii. 18, because it is through him alone that God becomes our Father; by him, for his sake, we are adopted into the family of heaven, John i. 12. When we hear that a company of guilty creatures, who stood before God as their terrible Judge, trembling for fear of his sentence of condemnation, change their note, and call him by the kindly name of *Father*, and confidently apply to him as children, we must own this to be owing to the mediation, obedience, and death of his Son, John xx. 17. And therefore,

3. That coming to God in prayer, we must come in the name of his Son, as the alone foundation of all our confidence in and expectation from God, John xiv. 13. Being married to the Son, we call God Father, and make bold in his house, by virtue of our relation to him, through our Lord and Husband. And on the continuance of this relation to Christ depends the continuance of this relation to his Father; and blessed be our immortal Husband, that the marriage with him can never be dissolved.

4. That the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of Christ in his people, is the principle of all acceptable praying to God; for by him it is that we are enabled to call God Father, Gal. iv. 6. and therefore it is called 'inwrought prayer,' Jam. v. 16. He it is who excites his people to pray, moves them to go to God with their whole case, Psal. xxvii. 8. He furnishes them with acceptable matter of prayer, Rom. viii. 26. and with praying graces and affections, ib. And without the Spirit dwelling and acting in us, we cannot pray acceptably; and the more we have of the Spirit, we will pray the better.

5. That we should draw near to God in prayer with child-like dispositions and affections towards him.

(1.) Though he be very kind and admit us into familiarity with him, yet we must come with a holy reverence, Mal. i. 6. 'If I be a

Father, where is mine honour? Familiarity must not breed contempt. The character of a Father bears not only kindness, but reverence and fear in it. It is a mixture of love and awful authority; and the ingenuous child will regard both. Slavish fear is to be laid aside, but child-like reverence is necessary, Heb. xii. 18.

(2.) Though we have offended God, and be under the marks of his displeasure, we must come with confidence, whatever we want, whatever we need, Eph. iii. 12. While he bids us call him *Father*, he requires of us confidence in him for the supply of all our wants. For fatherly affection is tender; the child's trouble touches the father nearly, and his interest is the father's interest, which is ground of confidence, Psal. ciii. 13. forecited, Isa. lxiii. 9. 'Surely they are my children,' Zech. ii. 8. 'He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye.'

(3.) That God is ready and willing to help us, and we should come to him in that confidence, Matth. vii. 11. 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' We should pour out our hearts into his bosom, in full confidence of his pity. Whom can a child expect help of, if not of a father? But no father has the bowels of compassion that God has towards his own. If the mother's tenderness towards the child be ordinarily greater than that of the father's, yet the Lord is still more, Isa. xlix. 15, 16. 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands, thy walls are continually before me.' And there is no such present help as he is.

Object. But is not the heavenly Father often far from helping his children? *Ans.* The children of God often think so, when their trouble is continued, and the deliverance comes not quickly. But he is their Father: therefore, (1.) He designs their good by all the hardships they meet with, Rom. viii. 28. 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' (2.) He pities them under their hardships. (3.) He is a God of judgment, knows best when to remove them, and will do it in due time. The child cries, 'Father, remove this affliction, or this trial, for it pains me.' The Father pities, but his judgment leaves it till it be good for the child that it be removed.

II. I proceed to shew, what our being directed to call God *our Father* teaches us.

Negatively, Not that we may not pray, saying, *My Father*, or

that we are always to speak plurally, saying, *We pray*. For we have scripture-examples for praying in the singular number, Ezra ix. 6. Luke xv. 18, 19. But,

1. That we are not only to pray secretly by ourselves alone, but with others, joining with them in public and private. And hence may be brought no inconsiderable argument for that too much neglected duty of family-prayer; which the guilty would do well seriously to consider.

2. That we are to pray, not only for ourselves, but for others also, according to scripture example and precept, Acts xii. 5. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

Praying with and for others is a piece of the communion of saints. And it is one of the privileges of God's family on earth, that they have the prayers of all the family there. God is a rich Father, who has blessings for all.

III. I come now to shew, what we are taught by our being directed to address ourselves to God as *our Father in heaven*.

1. That we are to eye his sovereign power and dominion over all, in our addresses to him, believing that he is able to help us in our greatest straits, that nothing is too hard for him but he can do whatsoever he will, Psal. cxv. 3. This is a noble ground for faith. Our fathers on earth may be unable to help; but our Father in heaven is almighty, and has power to help in every case.

2. That we should be filled with heavenly affections in prayer, Psal. cxxiii. 1. And that God's glorious greatness above us should strike an awe upon us in our approaches to him, Eccl. v. 2.

3. God's glorious and wonderful condescension, who vouchsafes to look from his throne in heaven unto us poor worms on earth, Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

4. *Lastly*, That we go to God as those who are strangers on this earth, and to whom heaven is home, because it is our Father's house, 1 Pet. i. 17. looking on this world as the place of our pilgrimage, and the men and manners of it as those we desire to leave, that we may be admitted into the society of angels, and consort with the spirits of just men made perfect.

I shall conclude with a few inferences.

Inf. 1. Let us see here the miserable condition of those who have no ground to call God Father. They were never adopted into the family of heaven, but are of their father the devil, still members of the family of hell; and if they be not delivered from that hellish society, they must perish for ever. They have never yet prayed aright; for none can pray in a proper manner but those who have the Spirit of adoption. O cry to God, that he may be graciously

pleased to translate you from the family of Satan into the family of God, and invest you with the privileges of the children of his family.

2. There is no right praying without faith. For without faith it is impossible to please God; and whatever is not of faith is sin. We cannot call God *Father*, nor love or reverence him without faith: nor can we have any fellowship or communion with him, but by faith in him as our Father in Christ.

3. Hence see the happiness of the saints in the love of the Father, who is their Father; of the Son, who has made them the children of God; and of the Holy Spirit, who teaches them to call God their Father. How happy must those be who are so nearly related to all the three persons of the adorable Trinity, and are loved by, and have communion with each of them! O seek above all things to become the children of God, and ye shall be thus happy!

4. In no case a child of God is much to be pitied in the world, as long as he has a Father in heaven, to whom he can have access by prayer, at all times and in all cases, whether it be in life or in death, Micah vii. 7. The believer's Father is a very present help in trouble; and when all help fails, he will never fail his own children; but will sanctify their troubles, be present with them in their greatest straits and afflictions, support them under them, and deliver them, as he sees it will be for his own glory, and their good. O! then, let us plead our interest in him as our Father, and engage his Spirit and presence to be ever with us, in every circumstance of life, and in the awful scenes of death and the grave, which we should view, not with terror, but with joy, as the messenger sent to convey us to the house of our Father which is in heaven.

THE FIRST PETITION.

MATTH. vi. 9.—*Hallowed be thy name.*

IN the Lord's prayer are six petitions, whereof three are for God's honour, and the other three for our own good. Those which concern the honour of God take the lead of what concerns our good; for it is highly reasonable that the creature's interest vail to God's interest. The first of these petitions relates to the name of God, and the *hallowing* of it, or *sanctifying* of it, that is, the glorifying of it. So the first petition is for the glory of God's name. This is the first of all put into our mouths, because of all things it should lie nearest our hearts.