

Sermon on the Lord's Prayer, by Rev. Theodore Pitcairn, November 24th 1946

"Our Father who art in the Heavens, hallowed be Thy Name." (Matt. 6:9.)

While we preached a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer some years ago, the most essential things of worship are of such great importance that it is good to reconsider them from time to time; we will therefore again take the Lord's Prayer as a text for this and the following sermons.

Swedenborg once saw the Lord's Prayer represented as a pyramid commencing from the highest point and descending to its base. In the Greek the Prayer commences with the word "πάτερ", "Father." Father represents the Lord as the Divine Love, thus the Lord as the source of all things. It is the Lord's Divine Love which rules in all things of the Prayer. It speaks of Our Father who art in the heavens. The Lord is present in the Heavens as Divine Love in Human form; or what is the same, He has His dwelling place in the inmost reception of the human mind, that is, in the celestial degree, whence comes the Doctrine which is the Name of the Lord, and which is spiritual from a celestial origin. The second phrase of the Lord's Prayer is therefore, "Hallowed be Thy Name."

The Prayer commences with "Our Father" or "Father of us." Calling the Lord "Our Father" expresses a desire to be His children. The Lord in a sense is the Father of all, both the good and the evil, but with the evil the Lord above the Heavens is their Father; where there is no reception of the Lord's Divine Love, He is not their "Father in the Heavens." It is only by regeneration that men become the children of Their Father in the Heavens.

To desire to be truly the children of the Lord, implies a desire not to be led by oneself, but by the Lord; it implies an acknowledgment that one has neither the strength nor the wisdom to lead oneself; it also implies a total trust that the Lord provides everything necessary with infinite Love and Wisdom and that man can provide nothing. It implies that man willingly and with love accepts all things whether they be obvious blessings, or punishments and temptations, as being in the Mercy of the Lord, and necessary for the salvation of the man. The evil as well as the good are willing to ascribe their obvious blessings to God; but only the good are willing to perceive and love their trials, their punishments, their sorrows, the apparent rejection of their prayers, as being of the Mercy of the Lord for the sake of their salvation; not that such things are from the Lord, but they are in the Mercy of the Lord for the sake of the salvation of man.

In the other world many from the Christian world commence by worshipping the Lord, but when they come into trials, when their prayers are not answered, when the Lord appears to shame them, they first resent the things of the Lord, and afterwards hate the Lord. A man or woman of the Church will not consciously to himself hate the Lord. Yet he may hate the things of the Lord in another; particularly will he hate the true things of justice in so far as they shame him, and deprive him of what he considers his due, his honor, and his just reward. In so far as one hates these true things of justice in another, so far in the other life he comes into open hatred of the Lord.

A young man or woman has ambitions, aspirations; they set for themselves ends which they seek to attain; they plan for the future; and indeed this is in a sense necessary, for as yet they have not acquired a character which would enable them to do their duty in a regular and orderly way from day to day, trusting in the Lord, and living in the present. What is remarkable is that in so far as one does not trust in himself, but trusts in the Divine Providence, in so far as he realizes he cannot set a definite end or goal to be obtained,

not knowing the future, nor what is genuinely good for him, so far he comes into a clearer perception of future things, and the orderly means of preparing for them. This is a paradox that those who set for themselves a definite goal cannot understand. The worldly wise would see in such an attitude a childishness instead of seeing in it the wisdom of desiring to be the children of the Lord.

In order to see the true more clearly it is often necessary to compare it with the opposite false. Compare therefore the two following verses: "Our Father who art in the Heavens," (Matt. 6:9.) and the words of the Jews, "Abraham is our father." (John 8:39.) Abraham represents the Lord as the Divine Love; wherefore to say "our Father who art in the Heavens," or to say, "Abraham is our Father," appears to be saying the same thing. The good say, "Our Father who art in the Heavens," the evil say, "Abraham is our father." Man from himself can not distinguish between these two. The man who says, Abraham is our father, is in the greatest assurance that he is saying, "Our Father who art in the Heavens" ; while the man who says, "Our Father who art in the Heavens," fears lest he may have said, "Abraham is our father." But what is the difference between these two expressions?

"Our Father who art in the Heavens" is a prayer that we may be regenerated and thus become the Lord's children; a prayer out of the deepest humility.

"Abraham is our father" is nothing but an expression of pride; it is the conceit of self as being one of the chosen people, because we know the Lord, have the Word, and are in the True Doctrine of the Church. It is a despisal of others in comparison with ourselves; a despisal of all who do not have the Word and Doctrine thence.

Here we are faced with a paradox. The Word teaches that the Christian Churches are dead with no hope of revival, that evils and falsities have taken possession of them. The Doctrine of the Church teaches similar things about the organizations of the so called New Church. Morely natural good, and so-called charity, rebel against this teaching of the Word and of the Doctrine, as for example in the prevailing attitude of the Convention. The teaching of the Word and of Doctrine in regard to the states of the Church must not be weakened. On the other hand we must be deeply impressed with the fact that we inherit the inclination to despise others in comparison with ourselves, and that the teaching of the Word and of Doctrine can readily be perverted by this natural inclination, and that if we fall into this evil of despising others in comparison with ourselves we become far worse than the denominations of the Old Christian Church, and far worse than the other bodies of the so called New Church which we despise. If we reflect deeply on this subject we are brought into a state of despair as to the possibility of being liberated from one or the other of these opposite evils, namely, the evil of not believing the teaching of the Word and the Doctrine concerning the state of past Churches, or of the evil of despising others in comparison with ourselves; and this until we realize that it is only of the Mercy of the Lord that we can be preserved from one or other of these evils. There is however a teaching of the Word that is of assistance in this temptation; namely the teaching concerning the gentiles and the teaching concerning the simple. We can come to realize that there are many of the gentiles and of the simple who in the other world will be far wiser than we; that while the Word and the Doctrine is preserved with us for certain uses, with us, to a degree, these uses are as yet largely representative; and that these uses are permitted to us to carry on, not because we are better than others, but for the sake of the use. In fact we can come to realize that there are evil and false things with us that are worse and more profane than with others, and that if it were not for the Mercy of the Lord we would all be carried away by such things; and that the moment we cease to pray for the Lord's Mercy from a humble heart we are so carried away; and if

so carried away we immediately become like the Jews of whom it is written: "They answered Him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man ..... I know you are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill Me, because My Word hath no place in you... They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the Truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they, We are not born of fornication; we have one Father, God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceed forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent Me.... Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him." (John 8:33-44.)

This is the nature of all who are in interior pride, and from this despise others in comparison with themselves. Such a pride can only be broken by many bitter experiences; wherefore with a Church and with the man of the Church who can be regenerated the Lord's Mercy permits evils to break forth one after another until the Church and the man of the Church is brought into a state of humility, and this until a man, no longer trusting in himself, begins to look to His Father in the Heavens.

"Our Father who art in the Heavens, hallowed be Thy Name." The Name of the Lord is that by which He is known, and as the Lord is known in the Church by means of the Word and by means of Doctrine out of the Word, the Word and the Genuine Doctrine of the Church are the Name of the Lord which is to be hallowed.

Our end must not be merely to understand the Word and the Doctrine, but to make and keep holy the Word and the Doctrine; and the Word and the Doctrine can only be made and kept holy by faithfully living it from day to day. It is obvious that a man can only honor the family name by living honorably and justly. It is equally obvious that the Church can only hallow the Name of the Church by living according to the genuine Good and True of the Church, and the inmost of the Name of the Church is the Name of the Lord, the Name of Our Father who is in the heavens.

In regard to "Our Father who art in the Heavens," we presented a contrast. Now observe the following contrast in regard to the Name of the Lord. First, "Hallowed be Thy Name." Second, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? and in Thy Name have cast out devils? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works? And then I will declare unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity." (Matt. 7:22,3.)

The Name of the Lord, that is, the Word and the Doctrine, has indeed the power to prophesy, the power to cast out evils, or devils, the power to perform many wonderful works or miracles. But there is also an imitation of the understanding of the Word, and Doctrine, which when seen from without appears like the Word genuinely understood in the light of Doctrine, and which appears to have similar powers. One who knows the Doctrine and yet is in iniquity can prophesy, that is, to all appearances bring forth remarkable new things of doctrine. Such can manifest and apparently cast out evils, and can apparently perform wonders; and this with such ingenious imitation that it is only by the Mercy of the Lord that a man can distinguish between the Word and the Doctrine being hallowed, and the false imitation thereof.

We read in the Memorabilia, number 5419, about monks who had an ever-burning lamp made by magical means, and it was shown that this lamp burned from casting the Celestial Doctrine into a crucible, and so into fire, and that they

also made shining banners by the same means, which greatly impressed the people. In another number it is described how by similar means they made an artificial sun, but which faded away when Swedenborg looked at it.

It is said of this that it was "the foulest magic of all, because effected with Divine Truths," and that "the doctrine shone from the Divine Truths in it."

Those who are in the Divine True things of Doctrine, if they act from the love of self and from the pride of their own intelligence, perform such magical miracles, which if possible deceive even the elect. For they appear to hallow the Name of the Lord while in reality they profane it.

Let us ever keep this in mind, and continually pray to the Lord to be protected from our love of self, from the love of our own intelligence, and the despisal of others in comparison with ourselves, lest in appearing to hallow the Name of the Lord, that is, in appearing to keep holy the Word and the Doctrine of the Church, we in reality profane it.

When we daily pray, "Our Father who art in the Heavens, hallowed by Thy Name," let us at the same time in the greatest humility pray that those words may be with us from the Lord and into the Lord; for they are frequently from self, in which case they only increase our damnation.

Amen.