

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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I have been asked a few times since I have been Pastor at tCatS a very good question, and it is my hope that I can adequately explain my understanding on the matter. The question goes something like this, “Why don’t we regularly recite ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ when we meet for worship at The Church at Sunsites?” Let’s take a close look at the passage in mind.²

⁵“And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. ⁶But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. ⁷And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. ⁹Pray, then in this way: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. ¹⁰Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”

One of the most important tools that a person can avail himself of when attempting to accurately interpret and apply the meaning of scripture is the observation of context. It has been said that a text, taken out of context, is a proof text for a pretext. Therefore, let me make two observations. First, notice the admonition that Jesus gives us in verses five and six. Our prayer time is to be done discreetly. The modern church has often observed the use of “The Lord’s Prayer” as a form of public prayer, to be recited whenever the saints assemble for worship. Jesus makes it clear in His comments leading up to the model for prayer that should not be the case. So, one could conclude that if a person were to recite this prayer regularly, it should be done privately. Second, Jesus warned us against meaningless repetition. We humans have the distinct ability of turning

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² *The Holy Bible*, New American Standard Bible, The Open Bible, Expanded Edition (Nashville: World Publishing, 1985), Matthew 6:5-13.

a precious act of personal devotion into an habitual act of religious activity, thereby losing its meaning. The Jews were especially adept at this practice. Each of their annual festive events was meant to commemorate the spiritual events in their own religious history. However, by the time Jesus had arrived on the scene of history, they failed to recognize Him as the Passover Lamb that would literally take away their sin. Ritual has that effect.

There is another principle to observe when interpreting and applying Scripture. Oftentimes the Bible will interpret itself through the use of parallel passages. The parallel passage to Matthew 6:5-13 is found in Luke 11:1-4. In Luke's account, it can be noted that Jesus gave this prayer in response to a question by the disciples regarding the proper method of prayer when they said, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."³

So, to summarize, it appears that three things can be learned from this brief presentation. First, "The Lord's Prayer" was meant to be a model for prayer. It provides us with the essential components for effective prayer. Second, this model for prayer was not meant to become a part of a regular ritual, or liturgy, of the church. Finally, this model for prayer was not meant to be repeated verbatim, repetitiously.

³ The disciples were referring to John the Baptist. Apparently, it was common knowledge that John had taught his disciples how to pray effectively.