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Testimonials for Old-Fashioned Truths.*

I.

LUKE 13, 24—30.

The sermons of our Savior sparkle with telling parables. As we peruse the record which the evangelists have given of His active ministry, we cannot but be impressed with the fact that they were distinct favorites in His public and private discourses. I call them telling parables because they are striking illustrations to drive home momentous and important truths. Some one has said: "They are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning." Such a parable has been selected to rivet our attention to-day. Under God's gracious guidance let us, then, consider:—

THE CLOSED DOOR.

1. *The door is now open.*
2. *The door will surely be closed.*
3. *The closed door will find you within or without.*

The Savior had just been asked by one of the audience to whom He had been preaching: "Lord, are there few that be saved?" This man had evidently missed the point which our Lord had made in His sermons. He was asking about a matter which was of no concern to his soul's welfare. Hence Christ gave him an answer which should set him right. He told him: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." That was equivalent to saying: "No man who thinks seriously about his eternal salvation will worry about such a question, but will rather focus his attention upon this one thing that he be saved. To engrave this truth indelibly upon his heart, the Lord tells this parable: The master of a house is anxiously waiting for more and more guests to come to his beautiful mansion. At his hour he will arise and

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The Proof-Texts of the Catechism with a Practical Commentary.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

THE INTRODUCTION.

The Introduction to the Lord's Prayer reads: "*Our Father who art in heaven.*"

Why do we address God as "Father"?

1 John 3, 1: "*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!*"

What Christian can read this marvelous passage without experiencing a thrill of joy? "*Behold,*" look well, pay strict attention to this remarkable exhibition of God's *love*: He calls us His *sons*. And as if that "behold" were not enough to arouse our minds to be on the alert as to the wonderful thing he has to disclose, the apostle says: "*Behold, what manner of love*" (*potapen agapen*), of what *amazing* quality, of what surpassing excellence, the love is that "*the Father hath bestowed upon us!*" And this "*manner of love*"—how did it manifest itself? The *Father* bestowed upon us a glorious title: "*sons,*" "*children*" (*tekna*) of God! God's titles are not *tituli sine re*; God's names are facts; when God calls us *tekna*, "*children,*" "*sons,*" we *are* His children indeed. But, how amazing the fact: *we*, sinners, by nature children of wrath, nevertheless *children of God!* Can there be any nearer and dearer relationship than that of father and child? And how did this relationship between us and God come about? God's *love* to us impelled Him to declare us His "*sons.*" "God so *loved* the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—"In this was manifested the *love* of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him." 1 John 4, 9. And this *child*-relationship—how was it effected? Paul tells us: "*Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" Gal. 3, 26. Christians *only* are children,

“sons,” of God, and Christians are *nothing less* than children of God. This title was bestowed upon them, *dedoken, given* them out of *love, i. e.*, by grace. — Well may St. John exclaim: “Behold, what manner of love,” what amazing, astonishing *love* of the *Father!*

And when Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, He tells them: When you address the Thrice Holy call Him — *Father*. Why this endearing address? He knoweth our frame. Although by faith we are God’s children, still, because of our innate sinful nature, we are prone to doubts; we oftentimes cannot muster up courage to pray as we should; especially is this true in times of affliction when we need it most. Says Jesus: Go to God; call Him *Father* — that He is. What child fears to tell his loving *father* of his troubles? Satan, get thee hence with all kinds of doubts thou wouldst instil in me as though God would not hear my prayer! God Himself has declared me His *child* in His Son; He is my *loving* Father; hence I shall cry even out of the depths, in spite of devil, world, and flesh that endeavor to dissuade me: *Father, dear Father, hear Thy child!*

Rom. 8, 15: *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!*

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the *sons* of God.” V. 14. This assertion is proved by the experience of the Roman Christians: they are led by the Spirit: they live and act as children of God. This is proof of their child-relation to God. “*For,*” at the time of your conversion, “*ye did not receive the spirit of bondage,*” *i. e.*, of *slavery (douleias), unto fear,*” so that you live in constant *fear* and trembling as slaves do in anticipation of the dreaded severity of their masters, who may punish, aye, kill them at their pleasure. At the time of your conversion “*ye received the Spirit of adoption*” (*hyiothesias*), of *child-relationship*; you received a *filial* spirit, so that you may approach God *without fear*, with love and confidence. — The unbelievers lead a life of

fear; "Through fear of death they are all their lifetime subject to bondage," Heb. 2, 15; not so the Christians. We are delivered from this "bondage," Heb. 2, 14, by our Savior. Through Him we have become children of God. Under the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who assures us through the Word of our *filial* relation to God, from our hearts rises again and again that "*cry*," that sweetest of all appellations, "*Abba, Father!*" And our Elder Brother, Jesus, who so teaches us to pray, did He not in His great agony in the Garden cry, "*Abba, Father!*"? And so, even if our Jesus should take us, as He did His disciples, into the garden of adversities, let us cry boldly, confidently, "*Abba, Father!*" "This is a noble and comforting text, worthy of being written in letters of gold." (Luther.)

NOTE.—*Abba*, we are told, is the Syriac term for "father." "*Pater*" (Father) is the Greek translation, added by Mark by way of explanation, because he primarily wrote for Gentile Christians, to whom the *Abba* would be unintelligible. Later, the two terms were closely linked together as *one* endearing appellation of God.

Eph. 3, 14. 15: *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*

From a point of view different from, though related to, those mentioned in the preceding texts, we here again have a mighty incentive to humble, but bold and confident, prayer.

In the Greek there is a play upon the words "*pater*" (Father) and "*patria*" (family). The word for *family* (*patria*) designates a lineage, the descendants of a common father; so a *patria* (family) is a generation of children. Joseph, Luke 2, 4, is described as "being of the household and family (*patria*) of David." So, says our text, "*the whole family in heaven and earth is named*" "*of the Father.*" The name He bestowed upon us is "*children*," 1 John 3, 1. After the "*Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*" this *family* is named. Christ is God's unique Child; we are Christ's—Christians, bought by Him with a price; thus He became "our Lord," and so we also belong to the Father as His dear children. Gal. 3, 26.

The *Father* has a family *in heaven*: the “sons of God,” Job 38, 4. 7, the holy angels, and the perfected saints. The *Father* has a family *on earth*: His children from among all nations, kindreds, and tongues. Both, the family in heaven and the family on earth, constitute *one* great family—the *ecclesia una sancta* in a wider sense.

The text speaks of Paul as *bowing his knees* in humble prayer unto the Father, supplicating Him in Christ’s name for the bestowal of precious gifts upon one part of this family named after Him, for His children “on earth.” The “family” in heaven is well provided for—it is the family *triumphant*. But the family *militant* also needs be provided for. And great are the gifts which he asks of the Father, cf. 15 ff. But Paul, who *humbly* bows his knees before God, at the same time prays *boldly, confidently*, knowing that the Father *can* and *will* do what he asks of Him; and hence he concludes his supplication with a triumphant doxology: “To Him be glory,” etc.

What a grand conception this: “a family in heaven,” “a family on earth”! You belong to the latter as yet. God is the *Father* thereof. Will He not hear His *children’s* cry? Truly, God would by this winning name “Father” encourage us to pray without fear or doubt, in all boldness and confidence.

Why do we pray: “*Our Father* who art in heaven”?

Eph. 4, 6: *One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

This text forms the close of the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of the Church—the sum total of all believers. It reads: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*”

Through Christ God has become our *Father*. He is *above* all; He protects and governs us, and causes all things to work together for good to His children. He works *through* the Chris-

tians; the good the Christians do, God works in and through them. Finally, He lives *in* the Christians; we are His temple. The three main concepts are: *one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father*. In this Triune God the Christians are united with one another. By the one Spirit and in the one Spirit they are at the same time united with the one Lord and the one God and Father. Knowing this, they should walk worthy of their high calling: this is the trend of the Apostle's thought.

But since there is *one* God and Father of *all*, since all that have one and the same Spirit and faith constitute *one* body, — this spiritual body, the Church, — what a strong incentive for the *members* of this *body*, or, to go back to the picture portrayed in Eph. 3, 14, 15, for the *children* of this *family*, to pray for and with one another! And does not Paul, in the passage considered before, Rom. 8, 15, say, studiously changing from the second person in which he had addressed the Romans to the first person, "*we* cry, Abba, Father," suggesting that all *children* should pray together and for one another? To teach us this lesson, Jesus said to His disciples: "When ye pray, say, *Our* Father," etc.

And what a consolation to know: we do not pray alone; the whole family of God's children bows its knees before the throne of grace intoning that sublime prayer: "*Our* Father who art in heaven."

Why do we add, "*Who art in heaven*"?

Eph. 3, 20, 21: *Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages; world without end.*

The Apostle bows his knees unto the Father, v. 14, imploring to grant to the Ephesian Christians growth of the new spiritual life implanted in them, cf. vv. 16—19; he knows that the Father "is able to do" what he asks, v. 20; he is confident that the Father will do it, v. 21.

Earthly fathers must sometimes shake their heads in an-

swer to petitions from their children, saying, "Child, what you ask exceeds my ability." Need God's children entertain any fears as to the heavenly Father's ability to grant their petitions? "*He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.*" Why this impressive accumulation of words? Would it not have been sufficient to say: "*He is able to do what we ask*"? Observe the addition: "*He is able to do above all that we ask or—think.*" Thought oftentimes cannot find adequate expression in speech, in prayer. *God is able to do* not only *above* all that we *ask*, but even *above all* that we *think*! And still the Apostle has not exhausted the definition of God's ability to answer our prayer. He says: God "is able to do *exceeding abundantly* above all that we ask or think." It is as if he were struggling to find words to make us feel, realize, God's infinite, limitless resources of power to grant our petitions, and to assure us that He can and will hear us if we ask Him as dear children ask their dear fathers. — God's name is Omnipotence. This is the meaning of that phrase: "*who art in heaven.*" Expressed in words of the psalmist: "*Our God is in the heavens*" — He is not an "idol of silver and gold, the work of men's hands" — "*He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased.*" Ps. 115, 3. 4; cf. Eph. 1, 20—22.

We have considered the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven." What does this mean? Can a better answer be given than that of Dr. Luther? He says: "God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father."

Our Father, Thou in heav'n above,
Who biddest us to dwell in love
As brothers of one family,
And cry for all we need to Thee:
Teach us to mean the words we say,
And from the inmost heart to pray.

(Hymn 396, 1.)

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

(To be continued.)