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## OLD TRUTHS FOR A NEW AGE.\*

### I.

*Heb. 13, 8:* "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

IN CHRIST, OUR ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST, DEARLY BELOVED FRIENDS:—

A deluge of wrath and terror has swept over the earth these last four years and has left in its wake a terrible mass of wreckage and ruin. Thrones and dynasties have been toppled over, and the very foundations of society shattered. Confusion, anguish, and despair have taken possession of vast numbers of souls. We now see fulfilled the prophecy of Christ regarding the latter days: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." As a result, the cry for reconstruction is heard all over the world, reconstruction of all the things and institutions that determine man's relations to his fellow-men and the relations of nations towards nations. More significant still, reconstruction is called for in the relation of man towards his Maker. The religions of the past, Christianity included, we are told, have utterly failed to achieve their purpose and their promise, and are now things of the past. A new religion is needed.

Thus is the gauntlet thrown down to all who are determined to cling to the old Christ and His Gospel. The charge and the challenge must be met. Are we prepared to do so? We are. And our answer to both, the charge and the challenge, is made in the words of our text:—

*"JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOREVER."*

Calmly and boldly we declare the old Christ and the old Gospel of Christ efficient and sufficient for the true purposes of religion and the high and glorious purpose of God's Church on earth until the end of time.

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\* A series of addresses delivered during the first week in Lent at the Lutheran Noonday Services at the American Theater, St. Louis, Mo.

# THE PROOF TEXTS OF THE CATECHISM WITH A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER.

### PRAYER IN GENERAL.

*(Continued.)*

What distinction should we observe in our prayers? For spiritual things pray unconditionally, Luke 11, 13; for temporal blessings pray conditionally, Luke 22, 42; Matt. 8, 2; 1 John 5, 14; in both cases "with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father."

Luke 11, 13: *If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!*

Let us not overlook the "*then,*" *oun,* in our text. Clearly it marks an inference drawn from the preceding context. The inference is based on a *contrast* between a human *father* and our *heavenly Father*, and by means of the rhetorical figure *a minore ad majus* the truth is forcefully brought home by our Savior: Since what I say holds good in the minor case, in that of the human father, *how much more* will it not hold good in the major case—in that of our heavenly Father?

"*If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children.*" A human father, though "*evil,*" sinful, can and does discriminate between good and bad gifts for his children, and gives them the good gifts only. (See vv. 11. 12.)

Should the wisdom and love of God, our heavenly Father, *ho pater ho ex ouranou*, "the Father who is of heaven," who is altogether good, be less than that of an earthly father? Impossible! Our heavenly Father "knows how to give good gifts unto His children." Hence, ask, seek, knock! v. 9. Our heavenly Father loves us, His children, much more than a human father can love his. Ask, seek, knock!—But oftentimes we ask, and do not receive what we asked for! What is the reason? Our heavenly Father will give us gifts if we ask for them, that is His promise, but they must be "good gifts" we ask for. In our short-sightedness we often ask for things not good for our spiritual welfare; we imagine we are asking for bread, but in reality it is a stone we are petitioning for; or we imagine we are requesting fish and eggs, but in truth we are demanding a serpent or a scorpion. (See vv. 11. 12.) Such bad gifts our Father will not bestow upon us. His wisdom, looking to our eternal welfare, forbids it; His love towards His children will not allow it. "Ye . . . know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him." Matt. 7, 11. Not only will God give us "good things," both spiritual and temporal, but He will give the best of all gifts, "the Holy Ghost, to them that ask Him." Bread, fish, eggs, ordinary articles of food, necessities of life, a father gladly gives to his children; likewise our heavenly Father lovingly bestows upon us "good things," Matt. 7, 11, the necessities of life, if we ask Him. But the one indispensably necessary gift unto salvation is *the Holy Ghost*. The Father wills our salvation. Hence ask Him for His Holy Spirit, and your prayer will be granted. This is His promise. Ask the Father *unconditionally* for this precious gift, because you know you are asking according to His will. "If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us," 1 John 5, 14. Hence we pray:

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,  
 With all Thy quickening powers;  
 Come, shed abroad a Savior's love,  
 And that shall kindle ours.

Luke 22, 42: *Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done.*

The indescribable agony of the God-man had begun. The full moon cast her mellow beams on the sad scene in the Garden. Jesus "was withdrawn" from His disciples "about a stone's cast," *i. e.*, "He was taken away," He tore Himself away reluctantly from the companionship of His disciples. Through this dark hour He must go alone. He "kneeled down," the posture corresponding to the intense agony of His heart. Next, as Matthew informs us, He "fell on His face," prostrating Himself before His heavenly Father, and prayed: "*Remove this cup from Me.*" In Oriental countries the master of a feast presents a *cup* to the guests. The Father here extends to the Son a *cup*; however, *not* a cup of joy, but one brimful of sorrowful affliction. John 18, 11. (Cf. Matt. 26, 39; Is. 51, 17, 22; Ps. 73, 10; 75, 8.)

"What is the *poterion* (the cup) of which our Lord here prays that it may pass by? Certainly not the mere present feebleness and prostration of the bodily frame, not any mere section of His sufferings, but *the whole* — the betrayal, the trial, the mocking, the scourging, the cross, the grave, and all besides which our thoughts cannot reach." (*Alford, ad Matt. 26, 37.*)

Oh, the deep agony of our Savior in this hour! Who can fathom it? It is true what Luther remarks upon this text: "We men, conceived and born in sin, have an impure, hard flesh that is not quick to feel. The fresher, the sounder the man, the more he feels what is contrary to him. Because Christ's body was pure and without sin, and our body is impure, therefore we scarcely feel the terrors of death in two degrees where Christ felt them in ten, since He is to be the greatest martyr and to feel the utmost terrors of death."

Now, in a measure we are in a position to apprehend faintly the prayers our sins have pressed forth from our Substitute's heart.

"*Father,*" hear the supplication of Thy Child, "*Father, if Thou be willing,*" if it be possible, Matt. 26, 37; and if it is

possible, Thou wilt be willing to remove this cup from Me. Father, the cup is bitter. Is drinking it the only way of gaining the end in view—the salvation of the sin-stricken world? Hast Thou in Thy unlimited wisdom and power no other means than the cross to save mankind? “*Father, if Thou be willing,*” if another course is consistent with Thy counsel, if the world can be redeemed by other means, “*remove this cup from Me.*”—Who can understand the reluctance, the shrinking of the sinless Son of God, who, as the *man Jesus*, prays to be spared to go through the depths of God’s justice and Satan’s hate?

But let us inspect the wording of the prayer more closely: “*Pater, ei boulei, parenegke touto to poterion ap’ emou; plen me to thelema mou, alla to son ginestho.*” “Father, if Thou be willing to take away this cup from Me—but not My will, but Thine, be done.” Note the break in the thought after the first clause indicated by the dash. The sentence is not complete, the afterthought is suppressed, an abrupt change to a new thought is made. This suppression of words after the dash—a figure of speech called aposiopesis—indicates the thought flashing through the mind of the agonized Jesus: “If Thou be willing,”—but no, it cannot be done, this cup cannot be removed, the *via dolorosa* is the only way to save mankind,—then, Father, “*not My will, but Thine, be done.*”

The Savior here has given us a model prayer. In time of calamity, of sickness, of affliction, it is proper to ask the Father for deliverance. This is a child’s privilege. This the Savior did. But let us not overlook the “if”: “If Thou be willing.” When we have no definite promise of the Father in His Word as to this or that petition which we may utter; when we pray for earthly things, for the removal of a burden, which may seem to us greater than we can bear, let us pray to the Father, but let us not omit the “if.” We do not know whether the answer to our prayer for things mundane will accrue to our Father’s glory and our own welfare.

Though “this cup” was not, and could not be, removed from the lips of Jesus,—He had to drink the contents to its

very dregs, — still His prayer was answered: “*And there appeared an angel from heaven, strengthening Him.*” And thus *strengthened* He went forth to do His Father’s will.

The Lord hearkens to the prayer of His children in earthly matters, in which they submit their will to His by a confident “If Thou art willing”; “If it be possible”; and if in His wisdom He sees that we pray amiss, He answers our prayer in a way that makes for our salvation and His glory.

Matt. 8, 2: *And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.*

A person in great bodily distress, a leper, comes to Jesus. Leprosy baffled and still baffles the skill of physicians — it is an incurable disease. This the leper knew. But he also knew that what is impossible to men is possible with Jesus. Jesus is man and God, He is almighty, He can cure even leprosy. The leper is a believer, a Christian. He evidences this by his coming to Christ, by his action; “*he worshiped Him,*” bowed down unto Him as unto God in his prayer. — Afflictions, great afflictions, befall also the Christians. What are they to do? Do as the leper did — go to Jesus. Said the leper, “*If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.*” He knows that Jesus *can* heal him, so he places his case before Him, but resigns himself entirely to Jesus’ *will*. Jesus knows best. Great faith is here coupled with entire dependence on the *will* of Jesus: “*If Thou wilt.*” Observe the “if,” the restriction. In asking for *spiritual* blessings, which are necessary for our salvation, there is no place for an “if” in our petitions. We know the Father’s heart, we know He wills our salvation. He wills to give us the blessings necessary to reach the end. For these blessings we have His divine assurance, Luke 11, 13. Not so in earthly matters. Here we should pray *conditionally*: “If Thou wilt,” “If it be possible,” that God would grant them to us if they tend to His glory and our welfare. But, Christian friend, *go* to Jesus even in temporal matters, *go* confidently, *go* with the “If Thou wilt,” and you will oftentimes experience that in these matters, too, the Lord does according to your prayer. He frequently says to us as He did to the leper, “*I will.*” v. 3.

1 John 5, 14: *This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us.*

This passage is to engender *confidence, parrhesia, boldness, bold confidence, in prayer.* How timid we oftentimes are to approach God! Why do we not, as Luther so often did, speak to Him confidently, boldly confident of His hearing our prayer? We "believe on the name of the Son of God"; "we know that we have eternal life"; cf. v. 13. God is our Father, we are His children. Hence "with all boldness and confidence we should ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." (Luther.) Belonging to God's family by faith in Christ, God does not look upon us as a stern Judge, but as a kind Father, who gladly, attentively, listens to what we say, and cheerfully grants our requests. This is what the words "*He heareth us*" say. "*He heareth us*" does not merely mean: He hears our prayers in a general way, He knows what we say. God is omniscient; so that is self-evident. The construction in Greek is not *akouein hemas* (*akouein* with the objective case), but *akouei hemon* (genitive). That says: "He hears us" and grants our petition. So, child of God, make use of a child's privilege; knowing the heart of your God to be a merciful, loving Father's heart, approach the Father in bold confidence.

What may you ask of Him? "*Anything,*" be it of a temporal or a spiritual nature—*anything*; be it great or small—*anything*. We sinful fathers, though we love our children, often become irritated when Ruth or Adele bother us too frequently with their trivial, childish grievances. Not so God, for "*He heareth us.*" Is there *anything* that grieves you? Bring it to the Lord in prayer. You are a child of God and hence will ask "*according to His will.*" For spiritual blessings pray boldly, without condition: "Father, Thou must give me this or that." For temporal blessings pray boldly, but insert the "If Thou wilt," "If it be possible." In both cases you know that you are praying according to His will, and you know you have the assurance: "*He heareth us.*"

If we ask "*according to His will, He heareth us.*" "God's will is infinitely wiser than ours. And our faith in Him will

lead us to offer our petitions subject to His will." "God hears the prayer, but answers it according to His infinite wisdom, rather than according to our limited foresight." "God, in His love, buries our own mistakes in prayer, and gives us just what we should most desire, could we see as He sees." (*Pulpit Commentary.*)

(*To be continued.*)

Springfield, Ill.

LOUIS WESSEL.

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