Lessons on How to Pray

Exegeting the Lord's Prayer

by

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for

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Introduction:

While it may be true that many topics that draw the attention of modern exegetical scholars and the subsequent published works of such material may never be seen as all that helpful for the lay person, and are at times considered to be much a waste of time, this is not the case with the Lord's Prayer. Every Christian across time is and has been taught the Lord's Prayer. Thus, expositions about it are almost innately practical for every Christian while debating the use of a word in some other passage may seem like a rather moot point to the average Christian. There are certainly problems in the grammar that many would not be aware of if it were not for footnotes in many modern translations. In fact, perhaps the most common version of the Lord's Prayer (most likely the KJV) complicates the issue with the very standard translation of the first half. This paper will discuss Matthew 6:5-13, with the intentions of dealing mainly with the Lord's Prayer but being sure to establish the context for which it belongs, specifically the entirety of Jesus' teaching on prayer.

This paper will analyze the text of Matthew 6:5-13, taking into account the text as is presented in Metzger's Fourth Revised Edition of the Greek New Testament and also making sure that the textual variants are well discussed. Further, this paper will serve as an exposition of grammar in the text in order to draw out what is possible, and then examining a few major issues that are often overlooked or deserve observation.

Text: (Presented here is the Greek text with textual variants discussed in corresponding footnotes.)

5 Καὶ ὅταν προσεύχησθε, οὐκ ἔσεσθε· ὃς ὢν ὑποκριτή, ὃτι φιλοῦσιν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς γωνίαις τῶν πλατειῶν ἑστῶτες προσεύχεσθαι, ὁπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ἀμήν

Footnote: The original reading of Sinaiticus actually reads with a subjunctive form of εἰμί with a second person subjunctive form of προσεύχομαι. The second corrector of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus both read as I have presented the text here. This is probably the more correct version; due mainly to the consistency in second
λέγω ὑμῖν, τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν. ὅποι ὁ ὕπατος ὑπόσχεται, ἐισελθεῖ εἰς τὸ ταμεῖον σου καὶ κλείσαι
tὴν θυράν σου πρόσευξις τῷ πατρὶ σου τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι. Ἐνδειξομένῳ δὲ Μή βαπτισμοὺς ὑπὸσχῆτε ὑπὸ ἐφθασίν, δοκοῦσιν γὰρ ὅτι ἐν τῇ πολυλογίᾳ αὐτῶν εἰσακούσθησαν.
Μὴ οὖν ὄμοιωθήτε αὐτοῖς· οἴδειν γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὅτι ἐχεῖτε πρὸ τοῦ ὑμᾶς αἰτήσας
αὐτὸν. Οὔτως οὖν προσεύχεσθε ὑμεῖς·

Πάτερ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς·
ἀγιασθῆτω τὸ ὄνομά σου·

10 ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου·
Γενεθήτω τὸ θελημά σου,

ถูก11 ως ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπί γῆς·

τὸν ἀρτὸν ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δός ἡμῖν σήμερον·

person plural, and Vaticanus is dated about the same time. Other than this, there are a few other variants that
generally are all cosmetic in nature, simply making an easier read.

b Here some manuscripts add ἐν τῷ φανερῷ to clarify that God does not grant something hidden
when prayers are offered for needs. However, it is almost certainly not the original reading.

c Vaticanus here adds the word “hypocrites” before pagans, but only Vaticanus. This is a little harder
to judge due to Vaticanus’ antiquity, but it being the only one rather makes it easy to say it is probably an
addition. The scribe probably just remembered the command previously saying “do not be like the
hypocrites” and followed the formula again.

d More tampering with Sinaiticus has led to a few variants here. The original reading of Sinaiticus is
that which I have presented here, but the first corrector wanted to add ὁ θεὸς before “our father” which is
consistent with Vaticanus once again, while Bezae Cantabrigiensis agrees with the original Sinaiticus. In
addition, later in the life of Christianity, a few scribes had a problem with Jesus saying “your father” and so
changed the letter from an upsilon to an eta to make it “our father,” which is easily ruled out for a number of
reasons from tidiness theologically to date of its earliest traceable manuscript.

The only difference among texts is whether Jesus said τῷ οὐρανῷ or τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. The plural form
is what I have included here, which is held except for the Didache where it seems that the author wanted to
place God in a heaven, whereas the overwhelming majority of texts seem to point to an abstract idea of
“heavens” which probably just means “above.”

f Bezae Cantabrigiensis leaves out the ὃς and adds an article before γῆς in order to make it “the
earth.” Both of these are again insignificant and are hardly worth mention.
And whenever you all might pray, you will not be as the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, in order that that they might show the men; truly I say to you, they are receiving in full their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and after closing your door pray to your father who is hidden; and your father, who is seeing the hidden will give you. And while praying do not babble with many words just as the pagans, for they think that in their many words they think that in their many words they will be heard. Therefore do not be like them, for you all’s father knows of the things you all need before you all ask him. Therefore pray like this:

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8 Here the Didache changes the word from what is in the text above to τῇ ὀφειλήν which is obviously a related word, yet refers to a different kind of debt. This is most likely a mere scribal error. There is also the changing of the word to τὰ παραπτωματα which is most likely done in order to draw a better connection between what Jesus prays, and what he teaches directly after the prayer on forgiveness.

b There are two different (yet similar) variants here that will hold a lot of importance to the understanding of this verse and what is being said here. The first one is held by Bezae Cantabrigiensis, and it changes the verb from ἀφήκαμεν to ἀφιέμεν. This changes the aspect from punctiliar to ongoing, and further changes the time from past to present. The last variant which is held by the Didache and the corrector of Sinaiticus is merely ἀφιέμεν which seems to simply be an error.

i Perhaps the most well known variant of all is the doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer that nearly everyone is taught when learning this prayer. There are a few variations of the ending of the Lord’s Prayer. One which is not held up well at all is merely the word amen. After this, the variants are quite intense. The most well known is “for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory into the ages; amen.” Unfortunately, this one is not well backed up either. Also, pieces of it are missing in many manuscripts as they all have something along these lines yet not the same. The most comical (in my opinion) is the last one which says “for yours is the kingdom of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; amen.” This one was obviously written after the Trinitarian debates among the church and was used most likely to give some credence to the new theology. The text as I have represented it above is the original according to three out of four of the “oldest and best” manuscripts: Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Bezae Cantabrigiensis. However, it will probably never happen that people stop saying the doxology at the end.
Our Father who is in the heavens;

Let your name be holy;

10 let your kingdom come;

let your will be done,

as in heaven even upon earth;

11 give us our bread for today, today;

12 and forgive us our debts,

as even we have forgiven our debtors;

13 and may you not lead us into trial,

but deliver us from the oppressive.

Comments on Translation:

v.5: It is obvious that in English, the future form “you will not be” is rather awkward. However, to be true to the text, I have left it. This is in fact a perfectly natural use of the future tense: to give a command. This is a rather emphatic way to command something, because unlike the imperative that leaves the option of a response to the audience, here the commander is telling his audience that they basically have no option. Wallace states that this usage of the future has a “universal, timeless, and/or solemn force to it.”i This usage is often compared to a mother telling her child “you will eat your vegetables.” The future is used because the speaker is implying their sternness to make the verb happen.

v.6: Because it sounds awkward in English to say “when you might pray,” I decided to translate the ὅταν as “whenever” in order to denote the subjunctive conditionality. It is not certain that the audience will pray, but should they do so, Jesus will give them instruction for when the time comes.

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v.7: I have translated the word βατταλογήσατε as “babble with many words.” This is an extended translation of the word’s meaning because neither “babble” nor “use many words” seems to be a complete meaning. Yes, Jesus does not want his disciples to use too many words when praying so as to sound “uppity,”—something that many Christians can understand—but surely the High Priestly Prayer contains a lot of words. Further, “babble” on its own does not seem like an accurate interpretation because what would be said of new Christians who babble or fumble through their first few prayers as they learn how to pray? No, Jesus here is referencing those who know what they are doing yet use many words to sound more important than they truly are.

v.8: The introductory μη̣ with the subjunctive serves as a prohibition for those listening. A very common way of prohibiting, the imperative commands or requests, and the subjunctive with μη̣ is used to prohibit. The literal translation here would be “may you not be like them” which carries the idea of Jesus’ desiring the audience to not conform to the patterns of the pagans. So idiomatically for translational purposes this is a prohibition. It is notable that this is the first time since v 5 that a second person plural pronoun is used. Perhaps there has been a redaction here. The οἴδαν here is perfect, but it is translated presently (which I translated as a historic present: knows). There is a statement to be made here with the perfect form (even though it is not translated this way). God knows (already) what is needed. This is illustrated further in the phrase “before you all ask him,” but it is consistent (emphatic even) with the use of a perfect verb.

v.9: When Jesus tells his disciples to pray a certain way he is not telling them that the only way to pray is to copy his every word (if he is, then Luke is in a little bit of trouble for missing the last phrase). Rather, Jesus is saying to pray in such a manner (that is: to follow his thematic outline but not his exact diction). It is interesting to note that while the previous verses discuss praying in secret, Jesus uses the word ἤμων. Thus the Lord’s Prayer is either a prayer that is meant to include the body of Christ in the mind of the pray-er, a theological statement claiming that God is the father
of all creation (or at least that is how it would be understood), or is meant to be a communal prayer—which is probably the case. More will be said later concerning the third person imperatives that are in vv 9-10. Lastly, it is important to note that the Πάτερ is in the vocative, thus showing that God is the person being addressed (because it is a prayer), and he is being called “father.”

v.10: In common Christian circles when this prayer is recited, there is a pause between “thy will be done” and “on earth as it is in heaven.” It can be noted that I did not translate in the same order of words as is commonly done because I wanted to emphasize what is being said. Jesus is requesting all three of the previous lines to be done “on earth as it is in heaven” (this is the common word order among English translations). I followed the word order of the Greek because I believe it to better convey the idea. All of the first three petitions are already done in heaven, but Jesus is praying that (somehow) they come to pass on earth. Both here and in v 12, ὄς plays an important role. It makes more significance for v 12 and will be discussed there.

v.11: Once again there is a communal aspect to this prayer as “we” ask for “our” bread. It is interesting that in this verse there is the emphasis on “today.” The text reads ἐπιούσιον which means “for today,” and at the end, pray-ers once again say “today.” I believe that this “today” is governing the rest of the prayer. However, in the immediate context it shows that Jesus does not want Christians to worry about more than they need. In the same way that God provided manna day by day and the people were to gather only what they needed for the day (and the day following if the next was the Sabbath), so too should Christians ask him for daily provision (and no more), daily.

v.12: Translationally there is something that has been done above that may seem a little wrong. I have translated the aorist first person plural verb “to forgive” as “we have forgiven,”

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1 Exodus 16
impacting a translation that is more along the lines of a perfect tense verb. This is done for a few reasons. First off, it is obvious from the variants that this was read with an ongoing sense early on, as is evident in the switch from aorist to present. Thus, I have translated it in the consummative aorist. That is, I have translated the word with the nuance of already completing the action (here, forgiving). Secondly, in one of the rare cases where Jesus exegetes himself, vv 14-15 tell readers exactly what he means in this prayer. After completing his prayer, Jesus takes the opportunity to instruct his disciples in the ways of forgiveness. He tells them that if they want God to forgive them of their sins, that they must forgive others of their sins. However, I want to be sure and not lose the idea of a past action that is inherent in the aorist. Here, Jesus (or more abstractly, whoever is praying this prayer) tells God to forgive “us” as “we” have already forgiven.

As I mentioned with v 10, ὁ is a key word here. The word “as” in English can be a little misconstrued away from what is meant in Greek. In Greek, it is a comparison word. So while in English it can be used to show a contemporaneous action, that is not its function in Greek. For example, in English one can say “I chew gum as I walk to class.” But this sentence does not mean “I chew gum in the same way that I walk to class.” However, this is the sense in which the sentence would carry if it were Greek. Thus, the author here is NOT stating that the will of God will be done on earth at the same time while it is being done in heaven, nor is he saying that “we” will forgive at the same time that God forgives us. No, what is being claimed is that on earth, these things will be done in a manner similar to that of the one who is in the heavens.

v.13: It should appear obvious to readers that I have not treated v 13 as most translators do. Not only do I not include the doxology (much like most committee translations today), but I have significantly changed the last word of the last two lines from what is normally read. There is a reason for this, and it will be discussed in full below. To quickly summarize however, there is more to πειρασμόν than simply “temptation” and πονηροῦ can be used appositionally to refer back to
something before it that was “bad” in some nature. I have translated it here as “oppressive” because in the Christian sense, temptations and evil are oppressive, and yet so too can trials and tests seem to be so. In my translation above is I search for some way to bring into English the nuances of the Greek πονηρός without having to say something like “evil and other bad.” The issue is further complicated by the singular form of πονηρός when I would like to translate it plurally “bad things,” which I believe to be much closer to the true meaning in Jesus’ prayer.

**Key Issues:**

This section will serve to better illuminate problems that have been alluded to earlier, and more importantly how they apply to Christianity today. Specifically, this paper will take abbreviated (from what is possible) looks at the three third person imperative clauses of vv 9-10 and then as discussed just above, look at v 13.

**Third Person Imperatives:**

Perhaps the most overlooked section of the Lord’s Prayer is in fact the use of the imperative mood in Matthew 6:9-10. Part of the problem is that English does not have a third person imperative, and because of this, no Bible is able to accurately translate (in a way that communicates what was written) the Lord’s Prayer. To begin, Daniel Wallace says that

The third person imperative is normally translated *Let him do*, etc. This is easily confused in English with a permissive idea. Its force is more akin to *he must*, however, or

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m Ephesians 6:12

a Mark A. Matson, “The Our Father and 3rd Person Imperatives.” (paper presented at the annual Catholic Biblical Association Meeting, Fordham University, 2008), 1.
periphrastically, *I command him to ...* Regardless of how it is translated, the expositor is responsible to observe and explain the underlying Greek form.\(^{\text{o}}\)

Wallace is helpful in understanding the force, but yet it does not yet help readers (or listeners or speakers) to know what is meant. If it is to be translated “Let him make your name holy” there is still some ambiguity in who is being addressed, or told to make the name holy. Matson observes if (generally) a student is asked what Mt. 6:9-10 means that he gets some form of the following as the answer

- Hallowed be thy name = your name is holy
- Thy kingdom come = your kingdom is to come
- Thy will be done = your will will be done\(^{\text{p}}\)

However, it would seem that even scholars do not understand what Wallace claims in his grammar. Hagner, who writes on Matthew for the Word Biblical Commentary takes all three of these petitions to be commands for God to act in some way that benefits his disciples (or whoever is praying this prayer). He says (of the first petition) “God is called upon to vindicate himself.”\(^{\text{q}}\) The problem is that this is not what Jesus prayed at all.

Imperatives, according to Wallace are not merely the mood for commands, because “the imperative moves in the realm of *volition* (involving the imposition of one’s will upon another) and *possibility.*”\(^{\text{r}}\) This is because the imperative is not a surefire mood. The indicative deals with that which is known and the imperative is the farthest thing from the sure. Wallace describes it as the

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\(^{\text{o}}\) Wallace, *Greek Grammar* 486.


\(^{\text{r}}\) Wallace, *Greek Grammar* 485.
“mood of intention.” There are a few different categories of imperatives that Wallace defines in his book; these imperatives of vv 9-10 are described in the grammar as “Request Imperatives.” These are common when the speaker addresses a superior (as is the case with humans praying to God) and mean “please...” Thus, it is obvious that “imperatives in their directive focus anticipate a response.”

Imperatives themselves are easy to understand and are taught very early in primary school as children learn how to find the subject and verb of a sentence they learn that in commands, there is an “understood you” as the subject. However, this is the second person imperative. Both English and Greek have this form; it is the use of the Greek third person that makes it hard to understand. In this case there would be an “understood he” that is neither the speaker nor the one listening (directly). Rather than the speaker telling the listener to do something, the speaker is telling the listener that someone else must do something. Which in the terms of prayer seems even more awkward. Matson asserts that “the third person allows the writer/speaker to shift the focus to certain individuals in the audience, or extend it beyond the audience” as he quotes Schuyler Signore.

\[\text{Wallace, Greek Grammar, 485.}\]
\[\text{Ibid. 487-488.}\]
\[\text{Matson, “Our Father,” 4.}\]
\[\text{There are times when Jesus makes statements that are all inclusive to the audience and uses the third person imperative. Such times are when he says “If anyone has ears, let him hear.” Obviously, he is addressing the audience, but he uses the third person imperative, and translation is relatively easy as the “year one” method of translating not only works, but it makes sense. This is not the case with Mt. 6:9-10. If it were the case, Jesus would have to say something like “if anyone has the power, let him make God’s name holy.” This is not the construction that he uses however.}\]
\[\text{Matson, “Our Father,” 9.}\]
In conclusion, the third person imperatives are used in order to show that it is not God who is to be the “primary agent for bringing these situations to completion” as Hagner wants to argue on all three accounts in his commentary. No, rather, the third person imperatives are used in order that as Christians pray communally the Lord’s Prayer, they acknowledge that it is the Church’s job to make God’s name Holy; bring about his kingdom; and to do God’s will on earth just as it is done in heaven.

Word Studies in Mt. 6:13

The concluding verse of the Lord’s Prayer is one that is perhaps more confusing for many than even the above exposition on third person imperatives. The problem is that most (if not all) mainstream Bible translations read “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (or “the evil one”). However, through this section I will argue that this reading is incorrect.

To begin, there is an innate problem with the reading of “lead us not into temptation.” James 1:13 says that God is not the agent of our temptations, and Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:13 says that God only permits tempting to happen, and even so never so much that one cannot withstand it. Further, upon looking at Job, it is not God who tempts or even tests but the satan who God gives restrictions to. However, Betz points out that in the Wisdom Literature it is God’s temptation of humanity that is “part of his strategy of education.” He explains himself claiming that perhaps the writers of the literature realized that God was the tester and that in failing the tests of God, one may

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3Hagner, Matthew 1-13, 148-149.

z To go back to my previous statements about the word “as” or ὡς, this does not mean that they are simultaneous, rather that heaven is our model. This model is not only for God’s will however, I believe that the parallelism of the first three clauses links them all to this ὡς and as such, it is the holiness of his name, the bringing of his kingdom, AND the doing of his will which need doing on earth as in heaven.

aa Betz, Sermon on the Mount, 407.
sin. This would implicate God as the cause of sin.\textsuperscript{bb} However, what Betz fails to do is find a way to harmonize James and the Lord’s Prayer. He seems to not be able to translate πειρασμόν in a way that the two do not argue. While Hagner is unable to recognize the third person imperatives, he is able to reconcile this passage in a way that works. He says that πειρασμός “depending on the context, can be translated “temptation” or “testing.” Here the latter is preferred because God does not lead into temptation; he does, however, allow his people to be tested.\textsuperscript{cc}

There is a reason to translate this word more liberally than merely “tempted.” It is true that many translators when working with Biblical Literature tend to operate in a certain word bank and so when a word like this gets used, there is one definition. However, here especially, I believe that the more liberal translation is helpful. The pray-er is asking for God to not carry him through trials, or testign, and perhaps temptations. This allows the prayer to mean a lot of things. For instance, when my grandpa was dying and praying over him did not heal him that was a great trial to overcome, but it was not in fact a temptation. When I hurt myself only a few weeks into marriage and my wife and I had to pay hospital bills with what little money we had, it was a trial, but it was not a temptation in itself. Yes through both of these things there is the temptation to not rely on God and to resort to some other alternative, but that was not the trial, that was the result. The prayer here is a model of how to ask for an easier load. Just because God provides a way out does not mean that a Christian \textit{must} bear it, or ask for it to be difficult.

Secondly, there is the word πονηρός in v 13. It is the last word of the prayer, and is articular (that is, it has an article in front of it). Most translations treat this word abstractly as “evil” or the translators will claim that the article in front makes this abstract idea a substantive one, thus “evil one” or “evil man.” There is the problem that with πονηρός and πονηρόν are identical in the

\textsuperscript{bb} Betz, \textit{Sermon on the Mount}, 407.

\textsuperscript{cc} Hagner, \textit{Matthew 1-13}, 151.
genitive, as it is in the text, and so it is impossible to know if Jesus meant a person, or not. Liddell and Scott’s seventh edition *Greek-English Lexicon* defines πονηρός as “painful or toilsome” long before it ever mentions evil. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says “πονηρός can denote “that which causes trouble and brings sorrow.”

In his fictional work, Lucien uses the word πονηρός when talking about Alexander the Great. In his work “Alexander the False Prophet,” Lucien is describing how part of his story is happening, and decides to make a historical aside. His protagonist is sitting in a room with two doors and he has people coming in one door and out the other. His aside explains this situation in that it is like what “the Macedonians in Babylon did upon word of Alexander’s sickness, when he already had πονηρούς, and they all surrounded the king falling to see him and to say to him goodbye.” The people did not surround him because he already had evil. They surrounded him and wanted to see him because he was sick and they wanted to say goodbye.

I maintain that so too does this passage in the Lord’s Prayer reference something previous. Just as the πονηρούς in Lucien is used to represent something prior to it in the prose that was inherently bad (as any terminal illness is), so too does the πονηρός in Matthew 6:13 refer to the peirasmovn from the line before. Trials are not good, certainly tempting is not. Thus, the pray-er is to ask for deliverance from the trial, and the bad inherent in that trial. However, I believe that the vagueness of both words is beautiful in prayer. Christians can use this prayer when times are just hard, or when they are truly being barraged by temptations and the rulers of this dark world.

**Conclusion:**

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**dd** Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed. s.v. “πονηρός”

**ee** Harder, *TDNT* 6:547.

As is important with any exegetical work, there must be some way in which this discussion will impact modern Christianity. Through the brief exposition here, it is hopefully now visible the true great theology that is latent in the Lord’s Prayer. It is the job of Christians to be the agents of God’s name hallowing, bringing his kingdom into fruition, and bringing about his will on earth (and it was not even discusses what these looks like). Further, his will is not to be done while God does the same in heaven, rather Christians are to use his heavenly mold as the model. Likewise, forgiveness is given in order to receive forgiveness. Lastly, the prayer holds that Christians can pray for God to deliver from not only temptation, but also mere hard times and the pain that comes with them.
Bibliography


