

The use of

# 'Thee' and 'Thou' in Prayer

By Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

## The Tradition of using Thee and Thou to address God

Every church has its own unique characteristics and traditions. Some of them we are used to, while others seem strange and foreign to us. At present, the ministers of our churches and most of the members still use the Old English pronouns Thee and Thou to address God in prayer. To many people this tradition may be totally new. To others who remember the old practice it has, in their mind, become obsolete. Most people address God using common pronouns, You and Your.

the way they speak to God, is reverent and God-glorifying. There is nothing holy about Old English pronouns. Neither do we condemn a person for using modern pronouns when addressing God. It is a matter of Christian liberty.

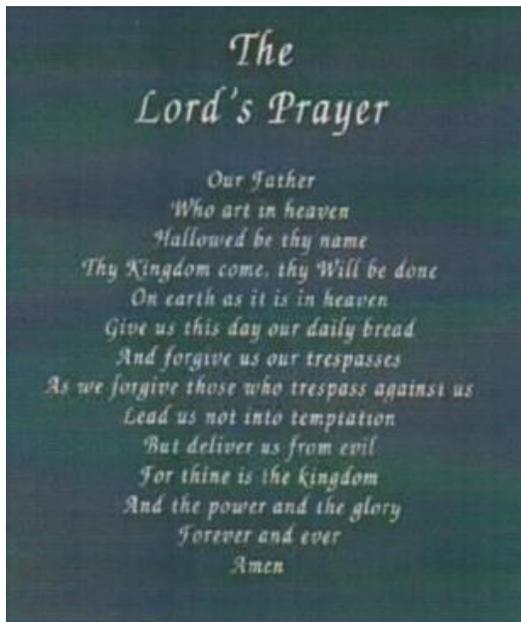
## An Old Practice

At one time the vast majority of English speaking Christians addressed God using Thee and Thou. This was true because of the large influence of Presbyterian Calvinism in the British Isles and the United States. Calvinism is a name that has become synonymous with the truth of God's sovereignty. That God is sovereign means that He rules in great power over all the creatures of His hands. He sits in heaven and the earth is His footstool. All creatures, including all men, are subject to His control and power. As our divine Creator and Ruler God does what pleases Him, and no one can question Him. He has the right and the power to rule over all things.

Because all of this is true of God, we are called to bow before Him in fear. The chief duty of man is to fear God. This means when we speak about Him, or to Him, we do so with deep reverence and respect. For that reason, the Old English pronouns Thee and Thou were utilized in addressing God in prayer in order to hold God in highest esteem and speak to Him with the deepest of respect.

This tradition changed with the onset of the 1970s. It was said by some that this tradition held God in too high esteem and therefore

We do not deny that the use of Thee and Thou to address God in prayer is a tradition. It is not something that is required or demanded by the Word of God. We certainly do not accuse those who use You and Your in addressing God of sinning, as long as the language of their prayers, that is,



made prayer impersonal because it distanced God too far from us. That people started addressing God using You and Your was not in itself wrong, however. What was wrong is that with this the entire language of prayer changed. God was no longer held in high esteem. People no longer spoke to Him with reverence and in godly fear. He was spoken to as if He were a buddy. Petitions became shallow and mundane. The language of prayer changed. This view of prayer has continued to this day.

**Our Continued use of the Old English pronouns.**

Again, the use of Thee and Thou in addressing God in prayer may seem like an odd practice to those who are not used to addressing God in this way. But the

ministers of our churches and most of our members continue its use because they were taught to do so from childhood. Neither is the use of Thee and Thou in prayer discouraged. We still think it is an excellent tradition.

We also follow the practice that our ministers preach regularly on the Lord's Prayer in order to teach us the proper petitions we must ask of God in prayer. This way our prayers continue to be God-glorifying and reverent.

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