

## Doctrine and Practice of Christian Prayer

### Week 1: Who is God that I should pray to Him?

#### Why do we pray?

- Covenant (Genesis 17:7)
- Adoption (Galatians 4:5)
- Temptation (Matthew 26:41)
- Command (Romans 12:12)
- Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13)
- Praise and thanks (Phil. 4:6)
- Dependence (Psalm 13)
- Confession (1 John 1:9)

#### Why a class on prayer?

#### Who is God that I should pray to Him?

God made you and all things. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. *All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made*" (John 1:1-3).

Eight attributes of God important to prayer<sup>1</sup>:

- God is *personal* (Exodus 6:7)
  - Personality of God makes prayer possible. "Only a person can say I or be addressed as Thou; only a person can be the subject and object of intelligent action, can apprehend and answer, can love and be loved, or hold converse with other persons. If God, therefore, be only a name for an unknown force, or for the moral order of the universe, prayer becomes irrational and impossible."<sup>2</sup>
  - God is with us: "God, however, although a person, may dwell so far off immensity, and have no intercourse with his creatures on earth. Prayer, therefore, assumes not only the personality of God, but also that He is near to us; that He is not only able, but also willing to hold intercourse with us, to hear and answer; that He knows our thoughts afar off; and that unuttered aspirations are intelligible to Him."<sup>3</sup>
- God is *plural* (Matthew 28:19)
  - The Bible presents a pattern of prayer to the Father in the name of the Son by the power of the Spirit (John 16:23, Romans 8:26).
- God is *perfect* (Matthew 5:8)
  - Apart from Christ, we should tremble before God (Isaiah 6:5).
  - "We are to pray with an awful apprehension of the majesty of God, and a deep sense of our own unworthiness...."<sup>4</sup>
- God is *powerful* (Psalm 135:6)

<sup>1</sup> Borrowed from J.I. Packer (*Praying*, IVP, Pages 21-33)

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology*, Volume 3, Page 692)

<sup>3</sup> Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology*, Volume 3, Page 692)

<sup>4</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism #140

- Prayer “assumes that [God] has the personal control of all nature, *i.e.*, of all things out of Himself; that He governs all his creatures and all their actions. It assumes that He has not only created all things and endowed matter and mind with forces and powers, but that He is everywhere present, controlling the operations of such forces and powers, so that nothing occurs without his direction or permission.”<sup>5</sup>
- God is *purposeful* (Ephesians 1:11)
  - “What is God’s purpose in this world that he has made? It is two fold. One the one hand, it is honoring and glorifying of his incarnate Son, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who in turn glorifies the Father by his obedience [see Isaiah 43:25]. ... The second aspect of it, bound up with the first, is the holiness and happiness of God’s adopted family, which is the church, the people of God, millions of redeemed sinners including you and us [see Romans 8:28].”<sup>6</sup>
- God is a *promise-keeper* (2 Corinthians 1:20, Deuteronomy 34:4)
  - Scripture is a testimony to God’s fulfilled promises. We can ask God *in faith* to keep His promises (Nehemiah 1:8ff).
  - “Prayer is drawing on the account where God has deposited all his promises. Prayer is not hoping in the dark that there might be a God of good intentions out there. Prayer goes to the bank and draws on promises. ... ‘All the promises of God find their YES in him. THAT [because of the promises!] is why we utter the Amen through him, to God for his glory.’ Which leads to...  
AMEN Is a Full and Precious Word in Times of Prayer  
 It doesn't mean primarily, ‘YES, I have said all this prayer.’ It means primarily, ‘YES, God has made all these promises.’ ... AMEN is like an exclamation point of faith in a prayer for help. Or an exclamation point of strong affirmation after a statement of God's greatness.”<sup>7</sup>
- God is *paternal* (Matthew 6:9, 1 John 3:1)
  - God—who made all things—who knows your sinful heart—has adopted you as His heir and child through Christ.
  - As creatures created by God, we owe Him our obedience as bondservants. As Son’s, we are invited into his loving presence in prayer.
- God is *praiseworthy* (Psalm 117)
  - The better we know God and His word, the more we will see how awesome His is. The more we see that, the more we will praise Him in our prayers.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Hodge (Systematic Theology, Volume 3, Page 692)

<sup>6</sup> J.I. Packer (Praying, Page 28)

<sup>7</sup> John Piper ([http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1989/704\\_All\\_the\\_Promises\\_of\\_God\\_Are\\_Yes\\_in\\_Christ/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/1989/704_All_the_Promises_of_God_Are_Yes_in_Christ/))

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# Doctrine and Practice of Christian Prayer

## Week 2: Three Quotes on Sovereignty, Freedom, and Prayer

### Edmund Clowney

If God is Lord and Sovereign, if he takes the initiative, if he accomplishes his will in heaven and in earth, why pray? Will not God carry out his purposes without our requesting that he do so? Since we do not know how God will accomplish his plan, would it not be better to leave everything in his hands? Is not prayer presumptuous meddling, offering God unnecessary advice? If the first difficulty misses God's power, the second misses his goodness. The plan that God will accomplish is a plan that includes the dedicated participation of his creatures. For this purpose he has made man in his image and is restoring him in the image of his Son. As Jesus prays for those the Father has given him, he is fulfilling the will of his Father (John 17). *Our prayers, too, are part of the great sweep of God's plan for his people. God's sovereignty does not rob history of significance; to the contrary, it is God's plan that gives human history meaning.* We do not know how to pray as we should, in the light of God's purposes. But for that very reason his Spirit who dwells in us makes intercession according to the will of God (Rom. 8:27).<sup>15</sup>

### John Calvin

But if God knows what things we have need of, before we ask him, where lies the advantage of prayer? If he is ready, of his own free will, to assist us, what purpose does it serve to employ our prayers, which interrupt the spontaneous course of his providence? The very design of prayer furnishes an easy answer. Believers do not pray, with the view of informing God about things unknown to him, or of exciting him to do his duty, or of urging him as though he were reluctant. On the contrary, they pray, in order that they may arouse themselves to seek him, that they may exercise their faith in meditating on his promises, that they may relieve themselves from their anxieties by pouring them into his bosom; in a word, that they may declare that from Him alone they hope and expect, both for themselves and for others, all good things. *God himself, on the other hand, has purposed freely, and without being asked, to bestow blessings upon us; but he promises that he will grant them to our prayers. We must, therefore, maintain both of these truths, that He freely anticipates our wishes, and yet that we obtain by prayer what we ask.* As to the reason why he sometimes delays long to answer us, and sometimes even does not grant our wishes, an opportunity of considering it will afterwards occur.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Clowney, Edmund P. "Biblical Theology of Prayer." Beginning with Moses.org. Web. 9 May 2010. <<http://www.beginningwithmoses.org/articles/btprayer.pdf>>.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, Jean. "Commentary on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6." A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972. Print.

### Charles Hodge

It is also involved in the assumptions already referred to that the sequence of events in the physical and moral world is not determined by any inexorable fate. A fatalist cannot consistently pray. It is only on the assumption that there is a God, who does his pleasure in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, that we can rationally address Him as the hearer of prayer.

...

It is certain that the Scriptures teach both foreordination and the efficacy of prayer. The two, therefore, cannot be inconsistent. God has not determined to accomplish his purposes without the use of means; and among those means, the prayers of his people have their appropriate place. If the objection to prayer, founded on the foreordination of events, be valid, it is valid against the use of means in any case. If it be unreasonable to say, 'If it be foreordained that I should live, it is not necessary for me to eat,' it is no less unreasonable for me to say, 'If it be foreordained that I should receive any good, it is not necessary for me to ask for it.' If God has foreordained to bless us, He has foreordained that we should seek his blessing. Prayer has the same causal relation to the good bestowed, as any other means has to the end with which it is connected.<sup>17</sup>

### Other Reading

- *Prayer and Predestination: A Conversation Between Prayerful and Prayerless* by John Piper.  
[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1996/1505\\_Prayer\\_and\\_Predestination/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1996/1505_Prayer_and_Predestination/)
- (Last week) Westminster Larger Catechism Questions 178-196

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<sup>17</sup> Hodge, Charles. "Prayer." *Systematic Theology*. Vol. III. 698-99. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Web. 9 May 2010. <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology3.iii.vi.xx.html>>.

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A prayerless man is of necessity, and thoroughly, irreligious. There can be no life without activity. As the body is dead when it ceases to act, so the soul that goes not forth in its actions towards God, *that lives as though there were no God*, is spiritually dead.

Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*

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## Doctrine and Practice of Christian Prayer

### Week 3: What is prayer?

- “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.”<sup>18</sup>
- “In the biblical history, *prayer is not introduced as a separate spiritual discipline: it rises as man's answer to God's address*. God speaks to Adam; Adam speaks to God. In the Book of Genesis we find conversations between God and Abraham. ... The richness of later revelation about prayer never does prejudice to this simple reality: prayer is personal address to a personal God: 'Our Father, which art in heaven. ...'”<sup>19</sup>

### Aspects of Prayer from Westminster Larger Catechism

#### *An offering up of our desires unto God*

- God is not only willing to hear our desires, but he eagerly invites us to bring them before Him in prayer.
- Philippians 4:8: “Do not be anxious about *anything*, but *in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*”
  - Because of God's promises of concern for His children, our petitions are not in vain
    - “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).
    - “For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things” (Psalm 107:9).
    - “...for I am the LORD, your healer” (Exodus 15:26).
    - “...if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:30).
- Read through Psalm 13, 28, 86, 130 (and others) to see Psalmists boldly share their desires with God.
- God's word should shape our desires. See Colossians 3:2ff: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.” See also Matthew 16:21-23.

#### *Confession of our sins*

- God does not promise to hear the prayer of a sinful man.
  - Proverbs 15:8 “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.”
- God hears our prayers only through the mediation of Christ.
  - Romans 5:10: “...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son....”

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<sup>18</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism, #178

<sup>19</sup> Edmund Clowney, *A Biblical Theology of Prayer*

- Even as Believers, we continue to sin as long as we live in this world; but these daily failings, “cannot destroy the believer’s *union* with God, but they can interrupt and weaken his *communion* with God.”<sup>20</sup>
- So we come to God recognizing our unworthiness and His mercy.

#### **Thankful acknowledgement of his mercies**

- Even through trials, we are to thank God for all good things (Philippians 4:6) for every good and perfect thing comes from Above (James 1:17).
- “We are debtors to God for everything in life except our own sinfulness. Life itself and all the things that make the continuance of life possible and pleasant are gifts of God’s kindness and love. Besides the natural blessings of life, such as rain and sunshine, food and clothing, peace and plenty, a Christian is under far greater obligation to render thanksgiving to God by reason of the great blessings of God’s gracious salvation. The Christian has had his soul delivered from eternal death, his eyes from tears, and his feet from falling. He has been rescued from the horrible pit and miry clay and has been set firmly upon that great Rock, Christ Jesus. Redeemed from Satan’s kingdom, he has been made a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and an heir of all things. Surely the Christian has abundant reason for thankfulness to God. Accordingly, the Word of God teaches us that even in times of affliction, we are to remember to give thanks to God: ‘Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you’ (1 Thess. 5:17-18).”<sup>21</sup>

#### **Recommended Reading**

- Carson, D.A. *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992.

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<sup>20</sup> J.G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*, Page 514

<sup>21</sup> J.G. Vos, *ibid*



## Doctrine and Practice of Christian Prayer

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:14-16, ESV).

### Week 3: Who am I that I should pray to God?

- God is good and righteous in all his ways. Man, because of Adam's first sin, is corrupt in all his ways. This sin alienates us from God.
  - Isaiah 59:2 "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."
- Because of our sinful warring against God and his righteous hatred of sin, we need a mediator to reconcile us to Him.
  - Job 9:33-34: "Would that there were an arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me." See also Number 21:4-8.
- The Israelite priests and their animal sacrifices were insufficient to truly bring us to God. For, these priests were, by nature, sinners; even those who were followers of Yahweh (and many were not) continued to sin, and continually needed sacrifices for their own sin.
  - "It was indeed fitting that we should have... a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens [who would have] no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people" (Hebrews 7:26).
  - "...When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he **sat down** at the right hand of God.... For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:11-12).
- Q. 181. *Why are we to pray in the name of Christ?* A. The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator; and there being none in heaven or earth appointed to, or fit for, that glorious work but Christ alone, we are to pray in no other name but his only.<sup>22</sup>
  - No other intercessor will do. Only man could pay for the sin of man. "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Only could live a perfect life, keeping the whole law, and so be the perfect sacrifice required to atone for sin.
  - Only through Christ do we have access to the Father. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (John 14:6).

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<sup>22</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism

- Q. 180. *What is it to pray in the name of Christ?* To pray in the name of Christ, is, in obedience to his command, and in confidence on his promises, to ask mercy for his sake; not by bare mentioning of his name, but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation.<sup>23</sup>
  - Apart from Christ, we have no right, no access to the Father. In Christ, we have “boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him” (Ephesians 3:12).

## Aspects of Prayer in the Name of Christ

### *Asking mercy for his sake*

To pray in the name of Christ is to recognize our own sin and ask for forgiveness—not on our own merit, but on Christ’s merit, receiving his righteousness

### *Drawing our encouragement to pray from Christ*

- Luke 18:1-8 “He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart...”
  - In what sense are we “His elect”? “In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ...” (Ephesians 1:5).

### *Drawing our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer from Christ.*

- Boldness in prayer apart from Christ is sinful arrogance.
- Strength in prayer apart from Christ is fleeting.
- Hope in prayer apart from Christ is nonexistent.
- Yet, in Christ we have boldness (God welcomes us as sons and daughters), strength (Christ comforts us in our weakness and gives us His Spirit), and hope (God answers the prayers of His children and provides *all* good things for them).

Christian—Christ was crucified *for you*. Pray with boldness and confidence to God. Not by bare mentioning of Christ’s name, for mentioning of his name without faith is superstition and vanity. Not by bare mentioning of his name, but by drawing your encouragement to pray and your boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation.

### Recommended Reading

Powlison, David. "Praying Beyond the Sick List." *ByFaith Magazine* 8 (2006). *ByFaith Magazine*. PCA, Apr. 2006. Web. 30 May 2010.  
<<http://byfaithonline.com/page/ordinary-life/praying-beyond-the-sick-list>>.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

# Doctrine and Practice of Christian Prayer

## Week 5: Praying in the Spirit and with the Spirit

### Praying *in* the Spirit

- Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20 instruct us to pray “in the Spirit.” People have interpreted this in a variety of ways. Most often, to pray in the Spirit is interpreted to pray spontaneously immediate direction of the Spirit. “As the Spirit leads,” they say.
- The phrase “in the Spirit” is used over 20 times in the New Testament. For example:
  - John continually refers to himself as “in the Spirit” when he receives God’s Revelation (Revelation 1:10, 4:2, 17:3, 21:10).
  - Jesus refers to David as being “in the Spirit” when he writes Psalms under divine inspiration (Matthew 22:43ff).
- The general use of the phrase refers to those who are not under the way of “the world” or “the flesh” or “slavery of sin” but under the power of God. Those who are “in the Spirit” are exactly those who have been regenerated (given new life) by God through His Spirit. For example:
  - Colossians 1:7-8 “[Epaphras] is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. (See also 1 Corinthians 12:3.)
- The indwelling Spirit is a special gift of God to *all* his children.
  - “In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were *sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance* until we acquire possession of it” (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- Those who are in Christ are a new creation: renewed and continually being renewed by the Spirit who dwells in us.
  - Romans 8:9 “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.”
- To pray “in the Spirit” is to pray not as a natural man, an unregenerate man, a hypocrite (Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 6:5) but as child of God in whom the Spirit dwells.
- God’s Spirit renews our minds (to the mind and image of Christ) and *in him* we pray aright:
  - John Calvin: “Whenever we need constancy in our faith, we must have recourse to prayer, and as our prayers are often perfunctory [*formal*], he adds, ‘in the Spirit,’ as if to say, such is the laziness, such the coldness of our makeup, that none can succeed in praying as he ought without prompting of the Spirit of God. We are so inclined to lose heart, and be diffident that none dares to call God ‘Father,’ unless the same Spirit puts the Word into us. From the Spirit, we receive the gift of real concern, ardor, forcefulness, eagerness, confidence that we shall receive – all these, and finally those groanings that cannot be uttered, as Paul writes (Romans 8:26). *Jude does well indeed to say that no one can pray as he ought to pray, unless the Spirit direct him.*”<sup>24</sup>
- The Spirit gives us eyes to see and ears to hear and mouths to speak and minds to understand.
  - “The natural [unbelieving, unregenerate] person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them

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<sup>24</sup> Commentary on Jude 20. Available at CCEL.org

because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14) But “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:14).

- Though we have been redeemed and the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, we do not always pray as we ought. Nor do we always know *how* to pray as we ought. God, who desires communion and fellowship with his elect, is not satisfied with this.
  - And so we “have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness without spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ....” (Romans 8:15-17).
  - God gives us His Spirit, so that in the Spirit, we cry out to Him as Father.
- Notice that we do *cry* out to God. (“He didn’t say that the testimony of the Spirit was that we affirm doctrinally that God is father.” John Piper<sup>25</sup>) The “victorious Christian life” is a life in which we will be crying out to the God and groaning under the burdens of the world.
  - I cut verse 17 off early: “if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided we suffer with him* in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

### Praying *with* the Spirit

- Paul continues (in Romans 8) to explain that this life with words such as “sufferings,” “futility,” “bondage to decay,” and “pains of childbirth.”
- Yet not only do we have hope that all things will be made new but “Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).
  - In the trials and tribulations of a fallen world, there are times “we do not know what to pray for as we ought.”
  - As we groan with the trials of the world not know how to pray, God’s Spirit is interceding to the Father in our hearts.
- God uses this to accomplish His perfect will: “And he who searches hearts [God the Father] knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27). We may not know even how to ask God about something, and yet God’s Spirit is achieving good for us (Romans 8:28).
- Concluding thoughts from Pastor John Piper:
  - “Be encouraged that God’s work for you is not limited to what you can understand and express with words. ... God is not limited by your limited mind.”
  - “Be encouraged that in your weakness and sickness and loss and hardship and danger the Spirit of God is praying for you and not against you (Romans 8:31).”
  - “Finally, be encouraged that God the Father hears the prayer of the Spirit. This prayer is for you. And it is always heard! Always answered, God does not reject the prayers of God.”<sup>26</sup>

### Recommended Reading

Miller, Paul. *The Praying Life*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009.

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<sup>25</sup> [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/10/88\\_The\\_SpiritLed\\_Are\\_the\\_Sons\\_of\\_God/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/10/88_The_SpiritLed_Are_the_Sons_of_God/)

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2002/93\\_The\\_Spirit\\_Helps\\_Us\\_in\\_Our\\_Weakness\\_Part\\_1/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2002/93_The_Spirit_Helps_Us_in_Our_Weakness_Part_1/)

## Doctrine and Practice of Christian Prayer

### Week 6: The Lord's Prayer

- All of Scripture should guide and direct us in our prayers; since the prayer(s) of Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 are special directions of Christ to His disciples who desired to know how to pray, we should give it special consideration.
- Since we often do not know how to pray as we ought, we could benefit from using the petitions of the Lord's Prayer as a guide for our own prayers.
- However, there is no magic in the words of the prayer. Nor is there any benefit in vain repetition of it. Calvin noted, "...*the grace of God is not obtained by an unmeaning flow of words; but, on the contrary, a devout heart throws out its affections, like arrows, to pierce heaven.*"<sup>27</sup>

### What doth the preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?

"The preface of the Lord's prayer (contained in these words, *Our Father which art in heaven*) teacheth us, when we pray, to draw near to God with confidence of his fatherly goodness, and our interest therein; with reverence, and all other childlike dispositions, heavenly affections, and due apprehensions of his sovereign power, majesty, and gracious condescension: as also, to pray with and for others."<sup>28</sup>

### "Draw near to God with confidence of his fatherly goodness, and our interest therein"

As we've seen again and again: "God has become our Father through Christ, and will much less deny us what we ask of him in true faith than our parents will refuse us earthly things."<sup>29</sup>

### "Due apprehensions of his sovereign power"

J.G. Vos: "The fact that God is our Father does not mean that God and we ourselves are on a plane of equality, nor that we can approach God just as we please, or just as we would take with an earthly friend. *The Fatherhood of God does not cancel the majesty, glory, and sovereignty of God; it does not mean that we can approach God with careless familiarity.*"<sup>30</sup>

- Isaiah 40 gives two perspectives on God's nature.
  - "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (v. 11).
  - "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and it's inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness" (v. 22, 23).

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<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, Commentary on Matthew 6

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.ix.liii.html>

<sup>28</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer 189

<sup>29</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 120

<sup>30</sup> J.G. Vos, The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary, Page 514

### ***“To pray with and for others.”***

- Jesus did not teach us to pray “My father.” We pray with the saints throughout the world and of all ages! “Give us this day.” “Forgive us our debts.” “Lead us not into temptation.”
- We should not always pray alone.
  - There is also much need for praying together (Acts 1:14, 4:23, 6:6, 13:3, 16:25; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 2:8; James 5:16).
  - This includes both corporate prayer<sup>31</sup> (generally lead by the Pastor) and communal prayer (such as Wednesday night prayer meeting and prayer as families).

### ***What do we pray for in the first petition (Hallowed be thy name)?***

- “But what is it to pray that [God’s] name may become holy? Is it not already holy? Answer: Yes, in itself it is holy, but not in our use of it.”<sup>32</sup>
- ““In the first petition, (which is, *Hallowed be thy name*), acknowledging the utter inability and indisposition that is in ourselves and all men to honor God aright, we pray, that God would by his grace enable and incline us to know, to acknowledge, and highly to esteem him, his titles, attributes, ordinances, word, works, and whatsoever he is pleased to make himself known by; and to glorify him in thought, word, and deed; that he would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness, and whatsoever is dishonorable to him; and, by his over-ruling providence, direct and dispose of all things to his own glory.”<sup>33</sup>

### ***The utter inability and indisposition that is in ourselves and all men to honor God aright***

- By our nature, we do not honor God as we ought: “For although they [mankind] knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:21).
- But as creatures (those created by God) we are to honor and glorify God. God desires His name to be glorified.
  - Isaiah 43:6-7 “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every one who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/ABiblicalTheologyOfCorporatePr> for a biblical basis for corporate prayer.

<sup>32</sup> Luther, Martin, and Robert Fischer. The large catechism of Martin Luther. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Pr, 1976. 69.

<sup>33</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism #190

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of how God can seek his own glory without being selfish see [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/3\\_The\\_Glory\\_of\\_God/2509\\_How\\_Is\\_Gods\\_Passion\\_for\\_His\\_Own\\_Glory\\_Not\\_Selfishness/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/3_The_Glory_of_God/2509_How_Is_Gods_Passion_for_His_Own_Glory_Not_Selfishness/)

*God would by his grace enable and incline us to know, to acknowledge, and highly to esteem him*

- When we are converted, we receive new hearts from God. Our hearts of stone are replaced with hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 38). Yet, we are still damaged by the fall and susceptible to sin. We must be renewed continually by God's Spirit.
- Thus, as God gives "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1:17) and the joy of our salvation (Psalms 51:12), as He opens our blind eyes (Isaiah 42:7), as He gives us the Spirit of understanding (1 Corinthians 2:10-12), as we are "renewed in the spirit of your minds" and "Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:23-24), then we are truly able to glorify God.

*Him, his titles, attributes, ordinances, word, works, and whatsoever he is pleased to make himself known by*

- "Name is often used in Hebrew in the sense of reveal character and essence. ... "To know the name of God is to witness the manifestation of those attributes and apprehend that character which the name denotes."<sup>35</sup>
- Aspects of God's self-revelation that are to be praised:
  - Him - Psalm 67:2-3 "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!"
  - His Titles - Psalm 83:18: "That they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth."
  - His Attributes - Psalm 86:12-13, 15: "...I will glorify your name forever. For great is your *steadfast love* toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. ... But you, O Lord, are a God *merciful and gracious, slow to anger* and abounding in *steadfast love* and *faithfulness*."
  - His Ordinances - 1 Corinthians 11:27-28: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup."
  - His Word - Psalm 138:2: "I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word."
  - His Works - Revelation 4:11: "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

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<sup>35</sup> John D. David, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, cited in J.G. Vos



### *Atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness*

- When we pray for God to be glorified in all things, we are to pray that the things which keep him from being glorified to cease.
  - I should pray God removes my own lack of faith, my own ignorance of his “name, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works,” my own false gods, my own profaneness towards God’s gloriousness and majesty. Likewise, I should pray for my Christian brothers and sisters.
  - We should also pray that God would cause His gospel to go into all the world by the preaching of the gospel and the work of the spirit. That God would be honored in all the world, and that every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2).

### *His over-ruling providence*

- As we said earlier (from Isaiah 43:7), the reason God created was for His own glory.
- Scripture teaches us that God “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).
- We can conclude, with the support of Scripture, that God’s will is for His glory.
- We should pray for God to glorify Himself; He is eternally worthy of that glory.
  - Since God’s will is also for our good (somehow intimately connected to His glory), we are in the same breath praying that all things work for our good.

### *Recommended Reading*

*What Should We Pray For?* by John Piper. [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1572\\_What\\_Should\\_We\\_Pray\\_For/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1995/1572_What_Should_We_Pray_For/)



## Doctrine and Practice of Christian Prayer

We are to pray with an awful apprehension of the majesty of God, and deep sense of our own unworthiness, necessities, and sins; with penitent, thankful, and enlarged hearts; with understanding, faith, sincerity, fervency, love, and perseverance, waiting upon him, with humble submission to his will (Westminster Larger Catechism 185).

### Week 8: Conclusion: Why Providence OPC Needs to be a Praying Church

#### God deserves our praise and thanksgiving

“Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 117)

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2).

#### God works through prayer

“In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death.... Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, ‘Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.’ And Hezekiah wept bitterly.... And the word of the LORD came to [Isaiah]: ‘Turn back, and say to Hezekiah... Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer... Behold, I will heal you’ (2 Kings 20).

#### Tony needs our prayer

“[Making supplication] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.... That I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Ephesians 6:19-20).

#### Our missionaries need our prayer

“Then [Jesus] said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the LORD of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest’” (Matthew 9:37-38).

“At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ...” (Colossians 4:3).

“Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

#### Our children need our prayer that God will call them and none should hinder them<sup>36</sup>

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 19:14).

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<sup>36</sup> See also [http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/590\\_texts\\_to\\_pray\\_for\\_our\\_children/](http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/590_texts_to_pray_for_our_children/)

### **We need the Holy Spirit**

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13).

### **We need forgiveness of sin**

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

### **We need freedom from temptation<sup>37</sup>**

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13).

“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15).

### **We need God’s provision and blessing**

“Give us each day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3).

### **We need wisdom.**

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:5-6).

### **We need to persevere until the end**

“For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:14).

“[Jesus] will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:8-9).

### **We need to better know the love of Christ and the hope we have in Him**

“...I bow my knees before the Father... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and

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<sup>37</sup> John Owen: “If we do not abide in prayer, we shall abide in cursed temptations. Let this, then be another direction: *abide in prayer, and that expressly to this purpose, that we ‘enter not into temptation.’* Let this be one part of our daily contending with God—that he would preserve our souls, and keep our hearts and our ways, that we be not entangled; that his good and wise providence will order our ways and affairs, that no pressing temptation befall us; that he would give us diligence, carefulness, and watchfulness over our own ways. So shall we be delivered when others are held with the cords of their own folly” (*Overcoming Sin & Temptation*, edited by Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor. Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).

length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge..." (Ephesians 3:14-19).

#### **We need God to save sinners**

"Jesus answer them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"" (John 6:29, 44).

#### **We need God for unity as a body**

[Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said] "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21).

#### **Recommended Reading**

Bennett, Arthur. *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions*. Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2007.

Smith, Scotty. *Pastor Scotty Smith | Leading the Community in Prayer*. Web. 11 July 2010. <<http://www.scottysmith.org/>>.