

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 21.-Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day.

IV. Prayer is to be made for things lawful¹, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter²: but, not for the Dead³, nor for those of whom it may be known, that they have sinned the sin unto death⁴.

Question 1.—*Is prayer to be made only for things lawful?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 John 5:14. Thus do they err who maintain that heretical opinion that we may pray for anything, without regard to the word of God, *cf.* Rom. 8:27. They are confuted because: 1.) The *objects* of petition, we are taught in Scripture, cover the whole ground of things that are at once desirable and lawful, 1 John 3:22. This is self-evident, because we depend upon God for all things, and therefore should ask him for everything we need; yet, of course, giving a precedence in our desires for the “best things,” “seeking *first* the kingdom of heaven and God’s righteousness,” 1 Cor. 12:31; Matt. 6:33. Desires for unlawful things are of course unlawful desires, and should be laid aside and repented of, Jas. 4:3. Even concerning those things which it is in general lawful for us to desire, there may be in many instances uncertainty whether it is the will of God that we should have them at the time and in the way we desire, Matt. 6:10. In every such case, we should, of course, make our petitions conditional upon God’s will as our blessed Lord did in Gethsemane, Luke 22:42. 2.) The proper rule of prayer is the whole Word of God, Matt. 6:9-13; 1 John 5:14; Heb. 13:21; John 7:17. Not only are its instances of inspired devotion our exemplars, and its promises our warrant; its precepts are the measure of our petitions, and its threatenings the stimulants, *cf.* Heb. 4:12. There is no part of Scripture which may not minister to the guidance of the Christian’s prayers, Eph. 6:17. But further, the Word of God is the rule of our prayers also in this sense, that all which it does not authorize, is excluded, Jos. 1:7; Prov. 30:6; Matt. 28:20; Rev. 22:18,19. 3.) Prayer being a homage to God, it is for Him to say what worship He will accept; all else is not homage, but presumption, Deut. 4:2; 12:32; 17:3. Again, both man’s blindness and corruption, and God’s infinitude forbid that we should undertake to devise acts of worship, of our own notion, *cf.* Isa. 29:13. They will be too apt to partake of some of our depravity, or else to lead in some way, unforeseen to us, to developments of depravity, Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35. And God’s nature is too inscrutable to our feeble minds, for us to undertake to infer from it, except as we are guided by the light of the Word, John 14:13,14. Hence, the strict Protestant eschews “will worship” as a breach of the decalogue, Ps. 34:15.

Question 2.—*Ought prayer to be made for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter?*

Answer.—Yes. 2 Sam. 7:29; Ruth 4:12. As to the subjects of intercession, we are taught to pray for all men living or to live, whether kings and those in high places or those

¹1 John 5:14.

²1 Tim. 2:1,2; John 17:20; 2 Sam. 7:29; Ruth 4:12.

³2 Sam. 12:21-23 *with* Luke 16:25,26; Rev. 14:13.

⁴1 John 5:16.

who are found in the lowest stations, 1 Tim. 2:1,2; John 17:20. Prayer is to be offered for those who are members of the church and its safety, Ps. 51:18; and those who are without, 1 Tim. 2:4. Prayers also ought to be made on behalf of those who carry forth the glad tidings of the Gospel, that it would have free course, Eph. 6:19. Indeed, we should pray for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in the world until his second coming, Ps. 102:16-18.

Question 3.—*May we pray for the dead, or those of whom it may be known, that they have sinned the sin unto death?*

Answer.—No. 1 John 5:16. Thus, the Papists err, maintaining, that prayers, alms and masses, ought to be appointed, and made for souls departed, as these which will really profit them. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the dead are either happy; and so, they need not our prayers, Rev. 14:13. Or they are damned, and so our prayers cannot profit them: For out of hell there is no redemption, Luke 16:25,26. 2.) Because we read that David mourned, and fasted for the child, so long as it was alive: But when once the child was removed by death, Wherefore, says he, should I fast? Can I bring him back again? 2 Sam. 12:21-23. 3.) Because all our requests and prayers are either founded upon a precept, or promise of God to hear our prayers, John 9:31. But there is neither a promise that God will hear us, in order to the dead, nor a command to pray for them. 4.) Because we are altogether ignorant of the state and condition of the dead, and therefore we cannot pray for them in faith, Rom. 14:23.