

We have been considering the broad and beautiful theme of Christian prayer, and last week we came to Its Parts. If you recall last week I suggested there are four primary parts to prayer – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (ACTS).

I began with three clarifications: (1) not all prayer will contain every part, (2) not all prayer will equally contain every part, (3) not all prayer will follow this order. But generally speaking, as we examine the prayers of the Bible, we find four basic parts, and ordinarily, prayer begins with Adoration, which results in Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

And so, having considered the first three last week, we come this morning to Supplication. Essential to prayer is petitioning or asking God for things. Fundamentally, prayer consists of making our desires and needs known to God.

Shorter Catechism (Q.98)—"What is prayer? A. Prayer is an offering up our desires to God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies."

- I. The Need for Supplication
- II. The Matter of Supplication
- III. The Answer to Supplication

I. The Need for Supplication

1. Here I want to briefly answer the question—Why does God have us ask for things, if He already knows our needs.
2. Matt.6:8—"Do not be like them (like the pagans who use vain repetitions). For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him."
3. And yet our Savior then says, v9—"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debts. And do not lead us into temptation."
4. In other words—having affirmed that our Father already knows our needs, He then exhorts us to ask Him for all these things.
5. Why are we to ask God for anything, if He already knows our needs, and has promised to protect us and provide for us?
6. [1] Asking honors God—that is, God commands us to ask Him for things, because it glorifies Him as a loving Father and benevolent Sovereign.
7. In other words—God would have His people to ask Him for things, that He can reveal Himself as the Giver of good gifts.
8. Perhaps another way to put this would be—God wants to be known as the sole Giver of all good gifts to His people.
9. Matt.6:3-4—"But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."
10. Here our Savior condemns giving things away for the purpose of being seen, and receiving the glory and honor.
11. Do your charitable deeds in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly at the Judgment.
12. Because we are mere creatures, we are not to take the credit for what we do, or give for the purpose of receiving glory.
13. This is NOT true of God—for God everything He does is for His own glory, and it is in every way right that He does.
14. While it's wrong for us to do things for recognition, it's very right for God to do things for recognition and credit.

15. [2] Asking humbles us—that is, God commands us to ask Him for things, because it reminds us we are needy beggars.
16. Prayer reminds us that we have nothing native to ourselves, and thus are in need of asking for everything from God.
17. Prayer by very definition is humbling—it reminds us how desperate we are for sustaining strength in body and soul.
18. God would have His people have their needs meet through prayer, because it humbles them as needy creatures.
19. In short—supplication honors God and humbles man—it reminds us that God is in heaven and we are on earth.
20. And so, it's for these reasons and others, that even though God knows our needs, we must ask Him for these things.

II. The Matter of Supplication

1. Here I want to address the question—What are we to ask for—and I want to summarize my answer into three parts.
2. [1] We must pray for our physical needs, Matt.6:11—"Give us this day our daily bread"—that is, our physical needs.
3. Scripture often uses "bread" to refer to all physical needs, thus, we must pray for all of our "daily" physical needs.
4. [a] We must ask lawfully—that is, obviously, we must be sure what we ask for is in agreement with God's law.
5. We have no reason to assume God will answer our prayers, if we are asking for things forbidden in His word.
6. [b] We must ask moderately—by this I mean, we must be sure to ask out of need and not carnal or worldly greed.
7. I think this is largely the idea behind the concept of "daily"—we must pray for those things we have need of.
8. In other words—we need to foster a daily dependence upon the provision of God for all our physical and temporal needs.
9. [c] We must ask for right reasons—by this I mean, we must ask with proper motives—the good of men and glory of God.
10. For example—you desire to have a larger house, and thus you ask yourself—Is it lawful for me to ask for a larger house when I already have a house?
11. Well, ask yourself this question—Why do you want a larger house—is it to have more space to show hospitality?
12. Do you desire a larger home that you can accommodate your growing family, and honor God with additional space?
13. Or, do you desire a larger home so that you earn the approval and praise of worldly, unsaved family members.
14. Or else, think of another illustration—Let's say you are a pastor of a little church which you ask God to grow.
15. Why do you desire the church to grow—Do you want it to grow so that people give you praise and recognition?
16. Or, do you want it to grow because you want people to be saved and sanctified, and you want God to be glorified!
17. You see, dear brethren, it's all about our motives—WHY are we asking what we are asking—what are the reasons for our petitions?
18. [2] We must pray for our spiritual needs—we must pray for daily grace, mercy, leading, protection, and forgiveness.
19. Now, as I have said, while it's not wrong to pray for physical needs, it's more important to pray for spiritual needs.

20. And the simple reason I suggest that is because—while our bodies are important, our souls are more important.
21. Thus, we must not only pray for our daily bread, but we must also pray for daily forgiveness, strength, and guidance (I want to return to this subject next week as we consider the Benefits of Prayer).
22. [3] We must pray for the needs of others—this is referred to as intercessory prayer and means we intercede for others.
23. There is a sense in which we intercede for them—in their place—we are asking God to save and sanctify them.
24. [a] Our homes—this is implied in the Lord's Prayer—"OUR Father...give US...forgive US...lead US...deliver US."
25. He doesn't teach us to pray—"Give ME...forgive ME...lead ME...deliver ME"—but, He uses plural pronouns.
26. Why—because our Savior presupposes we would pray with and for others, and not merely, or predominantly, for ourselves.
27. [b] Our leaders, 1Tim.2:1-2—"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."
28. Notice we are not only told to pray for our national leaders, but we are also told why—"that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."
29. In others words—we should pray that our leaders will lead our nation in such a way that allows us to live a quiet and peaceful life.
30. [c] Our enemies, Matt.5:44—"Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."
31. What must we pray—well, in part, we must pray that God has mercy upon them and turns them into Christians.
32. [d] Our brethren, Eph.6:18—"praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."
33. What should we pray for with regards to the saints—we should pray for similar things that we pray for ourselves.
34. [e] Our pastors, Eph.6:19—"and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel."
35. We must pray that God would bless the word as it is prepared and preached—that the elders of the church would have humble and pure hearts.
36. Oh, dear brethren, what a wonderful privilege we have to stand between God and others, and ask for His mercy.
37. I really believe that most of us (if not all of us), underestimate the importance of interceding on behalf of others.
38. And thus, I want to finish this second main-heading, by suggesting a few helps to motivate us to pray for others.
39. (1) Think of their desperate need—it's not wrong to think about how needy people are around us—family, friends, neighbors, and enemies.
40. Those who are Christian have need of sanctifying and strengthening grace, and those who are not Christian need saving grace.
41. Now, obviously, there is a very real sense in which we can't do anything for them—we don't have anything to give them.
42. And yet, we know someone who does—we know of someone who has the ability and to assist them in their need.
43. Dear brethren, unless the Lord give them daily bread they will starve—unless He gives them keeping grace they will sin—unless He gives them saving grace they will perish.
44. And we must enter into our prayer closets with these sober realities weighing heavily upon our minds and hearts.
45. (2) Think of their potential good—that is, the potential good they could do if the Lord saved them or sanctified them.

46. Remember, our ultimate purpose in asking God for anything is His glory—this is what drives us to ask anything.
47. Why do we desire that sinners be saved and saints sanctified—Yes, for their good, and Yes, for our encouragement (those are good reasons).
48. But the ultimate and final goal in all of our prayers is the honor of God—saved sinners and holy saints glorify God.

III. The Answer to Supplication

1. Here I want to address the potentially difficult question—Does God always answer our prayers or does He not?
2. But before I come to that question, I want to, in the first place, establish a basic and blessed truth—God does answer prayer.
3. All throughout the Bible we find testimony of the fact that God graciously, for the sake of Christ, answers our prayers.
4. And thus, we ought to look for and anticipate God answering our prayers, something I fear many of us fail to do.
5. Most of the older writers, who wrote major treatises on prayer, spoke about the need to wait on answers to prayer (they often referred to answers as returns of prayers).
6. Mal.7:7—"Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me."
7. This is how Christians ought to supplicate God—they should ask Him for something and wait for His answer.
8. Thus, I want to suggest God may answer or fulfill our supplications in one of three ways—He may deny it, delay it, or else modify it.
9. [1] God may deny an answer—that is, God may not give us what we ask for because we ask for something wrongly.
10. I fear many Christians are confused on this point—Scripture teaches it's possible to ask for something and not receive it.
11. Jas.4:3—"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss (with wrong motives), that you may spend it on your pleasures."
12. Even though they asked God for things, they never received them because they asked for sinful and selfish reasons.
13. Now, I personally don't think most Christians are guilty of this often, but, we have to admit, it is a real possibility.
14. [2] God may delay an answer—by this I mean, God may delay in answering prayer over days, weeks, and years.
15. This can be illustrated in the two parables our Savior taught on persistence in prayer—the persistent friend and widow.
16. Lk.18:7—"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them (delays in answering them)."
17. God's people are continually praying that the kingdom would come, that the King would come, and right every wrong.
18. And yet, for all their prayers, the King delays—Why—because He isn't concerned or doesn't hear their prayers.
19. NO—but for reasons known ultimately only to Him, He delays in answering this prayer of His beloved people.
20. And thus, a Christian may pray for months, years, and even decades for something only to have the answer delayed.
21. Thus, let me simply suggest a few generic and broad reasons why God may delay answering His people's prayers.
22. [a] To remind us of His sovereignty—we must remember, though He is our Father He remains to be our Sovereign.

23. [b] To teach us patience—a needy beggar should never be impatient—God may delay an answer to teach to wait on Him.
24. [c] To strengthen our faith—that is, to encourage us to exercise our faith by way of persistent and fervent prayer.
25. [3] God may modify an answer—by this I mean, He may not give us what we ask, but instead, something else.
26. Remember, our original definition of prayer—"Prayer is offering up our desires to God, according to revealed will (in Scripture), and in submissive to His sovereign and all-wise will."
27. All prayer is ultimately laid at the feet of God and then we say—Oh God these are the things I believe I need, but I leave it to You to answer them in the way You see best.
28. In other words, we confess, that we don't know what is best for us, and we ultimately trust Him and His wisdom.
29. Jonathan Edwards—"God will deal as a father with us, in answering our requests. But a child is not to expect that the father's wisdom be subject to his; nor ought he to desire it, but should esteem it a privilege, that the parent will provide for him according to his *own* wisdom."
30. In other words, we should not think we know better than God, and we should be thankful that He knows what's best for us.
31. 2Cor.12:8—"Concerning this thing (thorn in flesh) I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me."
32. That is, the Lord delayed in answering his pray—he asked three times over a space of time without an answer.
33. Verse 9—"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness'..."
34. Did Paul receive an answer—YES—was it exactly what he asked for—NO—but it was exactly what Paul needed.
35. Eph.3:20—"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."
36. God is able to do beyond all that we ask of Him—He answers our prayers in ways we never even thought of.
37. Paul asked if the thorn in his flesh would be removed, instead, the Lord used the thorn to humble and sanctify him.
38. I suggest to you, in this sense, our prayers may be answered, though they may not be answered in the way we asked.
39. We may ask that God would remove a thorn in our flesh, while God has allowed that thorn for wise and good purposes.
40. Thus, instead of removing the thorn He gives us grace to endure the thorn and so, in the end become better for it.
41. He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask—we ask to remove a thorn, He does great things with the thorn.
42. Oh, dear brethren, what a joy it is to confess that God is sovereign, powerful, wise, and loving—He can be trusted.
43. We don't know what we need—we are similar to the young tootler who keeps asking his mother for more cookies.
44. He knows he likes cookies and so he keeps asking, and yet, his mother is wiser than him, and she gives him better than cookies.
45. My dear friends, we can be assured—whatever we ask our Heavenly Father, He will only give us what we need.