

## —Westminster Shorter Catechism—

### *Lesson 55—What rule has God given to direct us in prayer? Q. 99*

**Why** do we need direction in prayer?

- I. Prayer is intimate communion and fellowship with God.
  - A. As such, it involves praising Him for who He is and petitioning Him according to His will. It involves an acceptable relationship with Him and standing before Him such that we have a right to such intimate access to Him. And it involves a right understanding of our own needs and a desire to honor Him in return for all His blessings and to serve Him with all provisions.
  - B. In other words, prayer is the language of relationship and the proof of fellowship.
- II. But our sins have separated and alienated us from God. Our fall into an estate of sin and misery has darkened our understanding, corrupted our affections, and defiled our consciences so that we can't form correct ideas about God or ourselves.
  - A. How, then, can we rightly approach God in prayer without some guidance and direction?
    1. God must be approached as the God He is. But what does this entail?
    2. We must draw near as the sinners that we are. But what does this entail?
    3. Prayer is an act of worship. But how does God want to be worshipped through prayer?
    4. God has the power to kill and judge and destroy as well as to help and heal and forgive. But how are the first to be avoided and the second to be obtained?
    5. We're naturally ignorant of what to ask and naturally selfish in our asking. How do we know what to ask and how to ask so that God may be pleased? How do we pray in order to be heard and what do we ask in order to be answered?
  - B. Without guidance on the matter of prayer and on the manner of prayer, we'll miscarry in both.

**What** rule has God given us for direction in prayer?

- I. God has graciously given us His holy Scripture to direct us in prayer.
  - A. The Word of God teaches us *what* to pray.
    1. God reveals His purposes, Ex 3.7-10; Jn 3.16; Gal 2.20; Heb 2.14-18; 1Jn 3.8.
    2. God reveals our needs, Ps 46.1; 50.15; Isa 1.18; 41.14; 53.6; Acts 4.12; Rom 3.10-20.
    3. God reveals our sins, Ex 20.2-17; Mt 22.37-40; Rom 3.10-18; 13.9-10; Eph 5.21-6.9.
    4. God revealed His promises, Jer 32.36-41; Rom 6.23; 8.28-39; 10.9-10.
  - B. The Word of God teaches us *how* to pray.
    1. With sincerity, Josh 24.14; Heb 10.22; Jer 29.13; Mk 7.6-7; Js 4.8.
    2. With humility, 2Sam 22.28; 2Kgs 22.19; 2Chr 7.14; Ps 25.9; 147.6; Isa 66.2; Js 4.6, 10.
    3. In faith, Heb 11.6; Js 1.5-8; Mk 11.23; Isa 43.25-26.
    4. In fervency, Mt 7.7; Lk 18.1, 7; Js 5.16.
    5. In words, Hos 14.1-4.
    6. In psalms, Ps 28.2. The entire psalter is a collection of prayers to direct the saints on both the matter and manner of prayer.
    7. In epistles, Eph 1.15-16. Most of the epistles contain prayers to guide the saints in both what to pray and how to pray.
  - C. **Hodge**, the entire Word of God “gives the information needed for prayer, narrates the experiences of Christians under various and peculiar circumstances, and records numerous examples of acceptable prayers, and how God has answered, Gen 18.23-33; 24.12-19; Dan 2.18-19; Acts 12.5, 7-11; Js 5.17-18.”
- II. The Lord's Prayer
  - A. The Lord's Prayer, recorded in Mt 6.9-13 and Lk 11.2-4, is a special and particular rule for direction and guidance in our prayers and is to be received from Christ's own mouth with the utmost reverence.

1. It might be better called *the disciples' prayer* since it's the prayer by which Christ taught His disciples to pray, Mt 6.5, 7, 9; Lk 11.1-2. *The Lord's prayer* is found in Jn 17.
- B. This prayer is given to us as a *directory for prayer* rather than as a form to which we're bound.
  1. How do we know Christ didn't intend to bind us to these exact words?
    - a) Christ said, "Pray then *like this*."
    - b) Matthew and Luke record the prayer differently.
    - c) Christ and His apostles never used this prayer, though we have many of their prayers recorded in Scripture.
    - d) There are parts of prayer that are not included, such as thanksgiving and an acknowledgment of the person and work of Christ as the only Mediator through whom and in whose name we must pray. However, "when interpreted by his death and resurrection, it expresses the highest thoughts and petitions which Christians can be prompted to utter" (Hodge).
  2. Yet, it may be humbly used as a prayer. WLC 187, How is the Lord's Prayer to be used? *The Lord's Prayer is not only for direction, as a pattern, according to which we are to make other prayers; but may also be used as a prayer, so that it be done with understanding, faith, reverence, and other graces necessary to the right performance of the duty of prayer.*
- C. Udemans, "The pattern of every prayer is what our Saviour taught us [in the Lord's Prayer]; for we may not hope for things or pray for [things] not included in that prayer.... And we must pray, first, with an understanding heart; second, with a sincere heart; and third, with a believing heart; for if we want to be heard then we must pray in the way provided by our Lord [in the Lord's Prayer]."
- D. It is a perfect directory for prayer, to show us *how* to pray and *for what* to pray.
  1. Just as the *Ten Commandments* were given to us as a rule of life and the *Apostles' Creed* as a sum of faith, so the *Lord's Prayer* is a pattern of prayer.
  2. "Pray then like this." Christ is teaching us that our prayers to God are to agree with the things contained in the Lord's Prayer. Tertullian called it "a breviary and compendium of the gospel."
  3. It is excellent for its *Author*: Christ; for its *majesty*: it is the prayer of prayers; for its *simplicity*: even a child can learn it; for its *comprehensiveness*: it contains all the essential elements of prayer; for its *plainness*: the youngest babe in Christ can understand it; and for its *completeness*: it contains the chief things we need and the chief blessings God has promised to bestow upon us.
  4. Edward Irving, "Its end [purpose] is answered, not when we repeat it once or often, but when we conform the feeling and expression of our prayer to its model."
- E. The chief subject of the Lord's Prayer is *the glory of God in the salvation of men*, and it's the means by which the church is enabled to be co-laborers in this grand work. There are three parts:
  1. *Preface*: an invocation, in which we acknowledge our relation to God and each other.
  2. *Petitions*: the glory of God in salvation.
    - a) As regards God:
      - (1) The honoring of His name: the glory of the Father.
      - (2) The establishment of His Kingdom: the glory of Christ.
      - (3) The accomplishment of His will: the glory of the Spirit.
    - b) As regards us, as co-laborers, who need:
      - (1) Bread: temporal and spiritual nourishment.
      - (2) Forgiveness: from God and to others.
      - (3) Freedom: from temptation and the power of the devil.
  3. *Conclusion*: an ascription of all glory to God.

## Inferences

- I. We can be sure that God is ready and gracious to hear our prayers if He's given us a model to use in all our prayers.
- II. The Lord's Prayer keeps us from error in prayer, Lk 11.1-2. Watson, "It's hard to pray wrong when we pray after this copy."
- III. The Lord's Prayer helps us secure mercies by prayer. To pray according to this pattern is to pray according to God's will, which assures us of success, 1Jn 5.14-15.