

True Christian Prayer

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Bible Text: Luke 11:1-13
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We turn in sacred scripture to Luke 11. Luke 11, where Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer, what we call the Lord's Prayer but really is the disciples' prayer, the prayer that he teaches us as disciples to make. We read the first 13 verses, and we read this in connection with Lord's Day 45 of the Catechism. Luke 11,

1 And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord [Master], teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. 2 And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. 3 Give us day by day our daily bread. 4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. 5 And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? 7 And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. 8 I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. 9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. 10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? 12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

It's on the basis of this passage of scripture, and on the basis of many passages of scripture, that we have the teaching of Lord's Day 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45, excuse me. Page 25 in the back of the Psalter. Lord's Day 45.

Q. 116. Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

A. Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us; and also, because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them.

Q. 117. What are the requisites of that prayer which is acceptable to God and which He will hear?

A. First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only, who hath manifested Himself in His Word, for all things He hath commanded us to ask of Him; secondly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty; thirdly, that we be fully persuaded that He, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised us in His Word.

Q. 118. What hath God commanded us to ask of Him?

A. All things necessary for soul and body, which Christ our Lord has comprised in that prayer He Himself has taught us.

Q. 119. What are the words of that prayer?

And what follows is the Lord's Prayer which we already read from Luke 11.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are in the third section of the Heidelberg Catechism and we are looking at how we are to show our thankfulness to God for the salvation he has given us in Jesus Christ. We know who we are as God's people. We've seen who we are of ourselves. We know who Jesus is as our complete Savior. And now we live in thankfulness each day of our lives. That's the life of the Christian. A life of thankfulness day by day. And how do we show our thankfulness? Well, we've looked at two things already. Conversion, daily conversion, turning from sin to God, the mortifying of the old man and the quickening of the new man, and the 10 Commandments. This is how we show God our thankfulness. We strive to walk in his ways.

Here this morning with Lord's Day 45, we move on to an examination of prayer and we look at prayer in this third section of the Catechism because as the Catechism says, prayer is the chief part of thankfulness. We show our thanks to God not only by our works, keeping the 10 Commandments, but especially by our words in prayer. As we go through the rest of the Catechism, we're going to be looking at the Lord's Prayer in great detail and we do that because Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer as a model. In Luke 11:1, we read that after Jesus had finished praying, his disciples, one of his disciples said unto him,

"Lord, teach us to pray." And so, as we read, Jesus gives his disciples the Lord's Prayer as a model prayer. This Lord's Prayer then is not just given as a prayer for us to repeat over and over again, but it's a prayer that is given for us to study and to learn from it the principles of what good, pleasing prayers unto God look like. From those words, "Our Father which art in heaven," to those words, "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory," Jesus is teaching us. He's teaching us how to pray.

Well, beloved, as Jesus' disciples felt the need for instruction and growth in their prayer lives, so we feel the same need too, don't we? Prayer is difficult. We have a small beginning of the new obedience, we have a small beginning of a prayer life. Prayer is a holy activity that takes discipline, focus, and work. Sometimes we don't know what words to use, sometimes in prayer we don't know where to begin, sometimes in prayer we get into bad habits. I'm going to give an example of one bad habit that I've witnessed since coming to Grace. I'll do that at the end of the sermon. Perhaps we can forget to pray for certain things, perhaps we can start to use irreverent speech, we don't approach God in the right way, and Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer to guide us and help us grow in our ability to pray in a manner that is pleasing to God. This morning, as an introductory sermon, we just look at broadly what prayer is. We look at why prayer is necessary, and then we look at what needs to characterize prayer. So we take as our theme "True Christian Prayer" and we look at that theme under three points. First, necessary, true Christian prayer is necessary. Second, true Christian prayer is reverent. And then third, true Christian prayer is confident.

True Christian prayer, first of all, is necessary. That's what the Catechism emphasizes right away in Question and Answer 116. "Why is prayer necessary for Christians?" And in the answer, the Catechism gives two main reasons, "because it's the chief part of thankfulness, which God requires of us, and also because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires," who with continual sighs, literally, "continually ask them of him and are thankful for them." We'll look at those two reasons in their turn but before we do that, I want to look at another reason why prayer is necessary, really a reason that stands behind these and underneath these two other reasons that the Catechism gives and that's this: first, true Christian prayer is necessary simply by virtue of what prayer itself is. Prayer is often described this way. What is prayer? Prayer is the breath of the Christian life. That's why prayer is necessary. Just as it is natural and it is necessary for us to breathe physically, so it is natural and necessary for the spiritually alive child of God to pray, to breathe spiritually. Prayer is the breath of the Christian life. If you are spiritually alive, you will pray. Even if it's the most pathetic and weakest of prayers, the regenerated child of God will pray. He must, because he needs to breathe. It is simply natural and necessary, inevitable, just as good works are inevitable for the one who is spiritually alive. Right, Catechism students?

So, prayer is inevitable. If you are spiritually alive, you have the spiritual life of God, you will be one who is breathing, praying. And the reality then is also this: one who is not regenerated, one who has not been raised to spiritual life, cannot pray. Oh, he may say a prayer with his words, maybe say a beautifully worded prayer, but he's merely speaking empty words. He's not praying because he's not spiritually alive. It's as simple as this: a

physically dead person does not and cannot breathe or want to breathe, and just so a spiritually dead person does not and cannot truly pray or want to pray, exactly because he's dead. And that thought makes it quite clear that it's simply nonsense to talk about an unregenerated person praying to God, asking God to enter his heart and regenerate him and save him and bring him to saving faith in Jesus Christ. That kind of prayer is sometimes referred to as the sinner's prayer. Maybe at college, the young people and young adults will hear that kind of language, maybe especially at the Christian college, praying the sinner's prayer. The sinner's prayer means this, to ask God to come into your life, to give you his Holy Spirit, and to regenerate you and make you alive in Christ. And when you make that prayer, the sinner's prayer, then because of that prayer, God will save you and make you a true Christian because you prayed and you asked for it, and you have invited God into your heart.

Now, young people and young adults, I hope you see that that doesn't make sense. I can't breathe a prayer except I am first alive. I can't pray except God first gives me spiritual life. Where I'm asking for God to dwell in me, where I'm asking for him to give me the Spirit, that's already because I am one who is spiritually alive. As Zacharias Ursinus says in the quote for contemplation, "No one desires the Holy Spirit except he in whom the Spirit already dwells."

That's what prayer is. Prayer is that activity of breathing spiritually but prayer is not just spiritual breathing, prayer is more. Prayer is covenant communication and fellowship with God. Now, we know what the covenant is. God's covenant is that relationship of friendship and fellowship that God has established with his people in and through Jesus Christ. And we all know what friendship includes, true friendship includes communication, back and forth, fellowship. And that's what prayer is. True Christian prayer stands at the very heart of covenant life with God. Where there is that covenant fellowship, where you are in a covenant relationship with God, there must be and there will be prayer just as we as friends in Christ enjoy our fellowship with each other by communicating with each other. And that's natural, you might say. So it is with us in God. If I am the covenant friend of God, not only does God communicate with me through his word and by his Spirit and through the preaching and bringing his word to us, but he also calls me to communicate with him through prayer, having that personal relationship with him.

Now, if we understand what prayer is as that covenant fellowship with God, then I think we have a very important application for us, even us as Protestant Reformed people. We heavily emphasize the doctrine of the covenant and rightly so. We say that's a distinct blessing God has given to us, a heritage that is ours, that we understand what the covenant is that relationship of friendship. God's covenant is that bond of sweet and intimate union that God establishes with his elect people in Jesus Christ. It's not a bargain. It's not a contract, a pact, or an agreement. But God graciously brings us into friendship with himself to commune with him. We emphasize that. But, beloved, if we emphasize that doctrine so strongly, and prayer stands at the very center of that covenant relationship, then we might say of all people, we ought to be those who are characterized by prayer. A covenant people is a praying people. Of all people, we might say, we ought

to be characterized by prayer because we know this relationship of friendship we have with God and it's the sweetest thing in the world.

Prayer is necessary then, first, simply by virtue of what it is, it is how we fellowship with God and live with God, but the Catechism teaches us that prayer is necessary also for two other reasons. As the Catechism says, first, we read, "Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us." Now those words of the Catechism are striking. Prayer is the chief part of thankfulness. That means, I show God my thanks chiefly, mainly, by praying. I say that's striking because I don't know if that's how we usually think of these things. I think we tend to think that my good works, right, my industry, my work ethic is the chief part of my thankfulness. My hard work during the day, my observance of the 10 Commandments, that's how I show God my thankfulness. But that's not the case. The Catechism says our prayer lives are the chief, the greatest part of thankfulness. It's not in my good works, it's not in my gifts or my sacrifices or my offerings to God, but it's in my speech. It's through the words of my mouth, particularly in prayer, where God is glorified in the highest sense of the word.

Our prayers, we need to understand, are themselves good works just like the keeping of the 10 Commandments, and our prayers, we can say, are the highest good works. But you might ask, why? Why is prayer the chief or the greatest expression of thankfulness? And the answer is threefold. First, prayer is the chief part of thankfulness, because this really is where thanksgiving starts, doesn't it? It starts with prayer. When I am truly filled with thanksgiving to God for what he has done for me in and through Jesus Christ, when I see my horrible sins, when I see the grace of God to me, making me his child, my first reaction is this: I fall on my knees and I thank God through words. I drop all other activity and I pray to him and I give him my thanks. That's where thanksgiving starts, with praying. And then all my other activities, my other good works, what I'm busy with throughout the day, that flows out of my prayer life.

And that's the second reason then. Second, prayer is the chief part of showing thankfulness, not only because this is where thanksgiving starts, but also because the rest of my life and keeping the 10 Commandments depends, in a certain sense, on my prayer life. The whole rest of my life of thanksgiving is rooted in my prayer life. I cannot begin to show God my thanks by the keeping of the 10 Commandments if I am not first in prayer because I simply can't keep God's commandments without praying for his grace and his Holy Spirit to strengthen me. If prayer is the spiritual breathing of the Christian, like we just said, then my life as a Christian, right, my life as a Christian flows out of how I am breathing. That's true physically, too. If you can't breathe physically, you're not going to be a very active person. If your lungs are shot, you're just going to be able to sit there. You can't run and jump and be busy at hard work. And just so, it's the same spiritually. If my spiritual breathing is practically non-existent, the rest of my life will show it.

I need prayer. I need prayer in order to live a life of thankfulness and then, third, prayer is the chief part of thankfulness because prayer expresses so clearly in unambiguous language, in unmistakable language, that God, that God is the highest good. The activity

of prayer shows that it's not my life on this earth that I think is the highest good. It's not my earthly possessions. It's not my interactions with others that I think is the highest good. But it's God. It's God who is the highest good. It is God who is my chief delight in life. I drop everything in order to spend time with him in prayer. Putting aside my earthly labors and spending time with God in prayer, enjoying him, fellowshiping with him, is in itself an expression of thanksgiving and praise, right? That itself is communicating to God what I think of him compared to everything else I could be doing in life. I am thanking God for who he is as my Father in Jesus Christ. I am thanking God for simply who he is in himself. He is so glorious, so delightful, that simply to spend sweet time with him in prayer, that is joy and that is blessedness to me. And then when I finish praying and I unfold my hands and I apply my hands to the work God has put before me, then you might say, my activity in the rest of the day and keeping God's commandments as I carry out my calling and station in life, that's really but an extension of my prayer life. It flows out of my prayer life, my personal relationship with God. Hence, true Christian prayer is necessary because it is the chief part of thankfulness. That's where thankfulness starts and because prayer itself expresses that God himself is more to be desired than anything on this earthly life.

But the Catechism says more. True Christian prayer is necessary, first, because of what it is; second, because it's the chief part of thankfulness; and now thirdly, as the Catechism says, because God will give his grace and his Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of him and are thankful for them. Now we understand that that's not talking about our first reception of the Holy Spirit at the time of our regeneration. We already mentioned that. We first need to be regenerated before we can pray. But what this is talking about is the continued enjoyment and the continued conscious experience of God's grace and Holy Spirit. It's talking about the knowledge and assurance of the forgiveness of sins and of being righteous through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. It's talking about the joy of salvation, having strong faith, having a certain hope of everlasting life. The child of God loses the enjoyment of these things and will not grow in knowledge and confidence when he's not praying for God's grace and for God's Holy Spirit.

Now we might pause here and say, "Well, how does that work? How do our prayers make a difference because what this is saying is that they certainly do make all the difference? How is this true that only when I ask God for his grace and his Holy Spirit does he supply me with these things? Do my prayers really make a difference like that?" I think that question gets asked a lot. It seems that for some reason with prayer, some of us can grow a little skeptical here and it reflects in our prayer lives because we don't recognize how important prayer is. What we must see, congregation, is that we could really ask those same questions with regard to everything. Why is it that when I come to church and I faithfully attend the preaching, I grow and my spiritual life is maintained and nurtured and I grow spiritually strong, yet when I keep myself from the preaching, I quickly grow spiritually sick? Why is that true? Yet we know it's true. By our own experience, we know it's true. Again, why is it that God has his elect people yet to be gathered in different lands, and yet it's only when God sends his missionaries to preach to them that they are gathered into the church and it's not by some automatic gathering of

them without the preaching? Why is that true? Yet we know it's true. Why is the Lord's Supper a means of grace? Why is the Lord's Supper a means of grace? Why is the sacrament of baptism a means of grace to those who are exercising faith?

In the end, those are the same kind of questions and what we must always remember is this, what you need to make very practical in your own hearts and your own lives is this: our God is a God who uses means. That's how God reveals himself to us in everything. He uses the preaching of the gospel to keep his people spiritually strong. He uses the missionary and the preaching through his servants to gather his elect people. He uses bread and water to keep us physically alive. And he uses the prayers of his saints as the instruments, as the means, whereby they come to taste and to see that the Lord is good. The question really should be this: God shows himself in every other area of life that he is a God who uses means, right? Now why with this one thing, prayer, can we now give rise to doubts and questions? God plainly says, he promises us, he says, "When you ask for my grace and my Holy Spirit, I will give them to you." That's the bulk of what we read in Luke 11. "Ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and ye shall find. Ye shall find when ye seek me with all your heart. Knock and it shall be opened unto you." And God says, "Not otherwise. For I am the God who uses means. Do not expect spiritual growth except in the way of asking for it. Prayer determines your spiritual growth. I will not deal with you as stocks and blocks. I've brought you into a personal relationship with me. Now we're going to live in this personal relationship."

True Christian prayer is necessary then for our own spiritual needs, for our own enjoyment of salvation. This is how God has ordained it. Congregation, if you are lacking in spiritual strength, if you are struggling, if things are not how you would have them with your life spiritually, you need to be praying. You need to be praying. God will not give his grace and Holy Spirit except to those who with continual sighs, who with sincere desires ask them of him and are thankful for them. Let those words be etched into your hearts and your minds. True Christian prayer is necessary.

But exactly because of what prayer is, we must see that true Christian prayer also must be reverent. Prayer is communion with God. Prayer is entering into the very presence of God. Prayer is worship and adoration. Prayer is confessing our sins to the holy God. Prayer is expressing thanksgiving. Prayer is bringing all our petitions and supplications before God. By virtue of what prayer is, prayer must be reverent.

When you look at the first half of Question and Answer 117, that's really what Question and Answer 117 is emphasizing. "What are the requisites of that prayer which is acceptable to God and which he will hear? First, that we from the heart pray to the one true God only who hath manifested himself in his word," so look there, look to his word to know him, "for all things he hath commanded us to ask of him. Secondly, that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of his divine majesty." So there are two things required for prayer. First, we need to rightly know God and pray to him only and rightly know him then so that we're praying to him, and then second, we need to rightly know ourselves.

Know God and know yourself. And the point is when you have those two things, well then you will have the proper reverence that is required for prayer.

Think about that, that in prayer I am conversing with the one only sovereign Maker of heaven and earth. Prayer is a wonderful, unfathomable gift. I am speaking to the Creator who is infinite in holiness and glory. If the holy angels and the saints in glory fall down and worship God in reverence, then certainly when we bow our heads and go to him in prayer we ought to be characterized by utmost reverence as well. Yes, God is our Father. Yes, he gladly and compassionately bows down his ear to us. He delights to fellowship with us. Jesus teaches us right away in the Lord's Prayer, this is how you approach him, you approach him as your Father. But while we are mindful of that, we are also mindful of this, that he is in heaven. We heard it in the call to worship, Psalm 89:7, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." In worship, in prayer, you are about God. You are in the throne room of heaven and you must approach him with reverence.

This reverence is all the more required, we might say, when we are mindful of who we are. While God is great, and that is one thing, who are we? We are creatures of the dust. We are needy. We have nothing of ourselves. We stand entirely dependent upon God for everything and besides that we are sinners, sinners who have no right on our own even to approach God, even to knock on the door. True Christian prayer then must be reverent and we must be characterized by humility. When today it seems the push is to make prayer casual and informal, we must understand what prayer is, who God is, who we are, and remember, prayer demands reverence.

But going to God with reverence is not just something that is required, having this attitude of reverence is also what's going to shape and guide the whole of our prayer so that it is pleasing unto God. Having an attitude of humility and reverence actually influences and changes the very content of our prayers also. This is where having an attitude of reverence becomes very practical. If I come before God very casually and flippantly, not reflecting on who God is, I can so easily begin to treat God as if he is some kind of Santa Claus. I go to God and I bring all my earthly wants and desires before him and I pray, "God, I just pray for food and drink, and I just pray for an abundance of things. God, I pray for health and for joy and peace and happiness and freedom from oppression." And then I start to say, "God, I would really like this to happen today. God, just bless me and make me happy and make things go well. We pray for no problems and discouragements, no difficulties, that everything might just go well and we all might just live joyfully. Amen." But you see, in such a prayer like that, have you even become conscious of the one to whom you are speaking?

That's not fellowship, is it? That's just treating God as some kind of waiter or waitress who is supposed to take down your order and then go and then come back and bring you everything you want. That's no personal relationship being expressed in that kind of prayer. In that kind of prayer, there's no remembrance of who we are as those who've sinned against God. There's no remembrance even of how we need Jesus as our mediator. But our minds have been completely absorbed with ourselves, our own earthly situations,

our own desires. We haven't even thought about God and then you really haven't entered into prayer because prayer is fellowship.

Now compare that with this kind of a prayer, a prayer that starts out this way, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." A prayer in which you first contemplate who God is as the holy, almighty, Creator God. You see, when I first do that, and I contemplate God's wisdom and his grace to me in Jesus Christ and his perfections, then I quickly remember to be reverent in prayer and then also my petitions quickly change because I've seen God's worth. Even as I've opened my eyes in prayer and I've dwelt on his glory, I see his worth and I'm reminded that all my prayers should be devoted to his glory and honor, that I'm reminded of God's glory, that he is the all-knowing one, he already knows my needs better than I know them. And I'm reminded that he's the good God, that he sends me all things to prepare me for his eternal kingdom. And then my prayer quickly changes. That's what the Lord does in us by his Spirit that our prayers change and suddenly we're praying, "Father, thy will is good. Let my will be more and more conformed to thy will. And Father, then give me also the grace to endure through the way that thou hast ordained for me and sustain me, that I bring no occasion to blaspheme thy name and that I do things faithfully and rightly for thy glory. Father, forgive me for being so earthly-minded. In all our earthly activities in this day going forward keep us from sin, cause us to walk in the way of holiness, cause us to enjoy thee, and cause us, work within us that we give thee pleasure for all things were created by thee, and for thy pleasure they were created. So now me too, in this day that thou hast created, let it be for thy pleasure."

Congregation, let me make this a little bit more practical. In the congregational prayers in church every Sunday morning and Sunday evening, maybe you've noticed that frequently, if not always, the congregational prayer starts out with a short reflection on who God is, and praising God's name. That's done not just because that sounds like a good idea, or out of habit or custom, or because, well, this is long prayer, so we're going to make it long by first spending a few minutes on God. No! That's offensive to God, even to think that kind of way. But we do it so that at the beginning of our prayers, our minds might actually be lifted up to God and we might actually contemplate who God is, so that we are brought into that state, if I may say it, that we're brought into that posture of reverence and humility. And then being filled with reverence, we're not only worshipping God, but then we're also in a better frame of mind to bring our requests and our needs to God, knowing who he is as our Father who is in heaven. And all of this is needed to guide us into the rest of our prayer.

So true Christian prayer must be reverent. If it's going to be prayer, it must be reverent. Finally, true Christian prayer must be confident. True Christian prayer is necessary, it is reverent, and it must be confident prayer. That's emphasized in the last part of Question and Answer 117. "Thirdly, that we be fully persuaded," this is how we approach God in prayer, "that we be fully persuaded that he, notwithstanding that we are unworthy of it, he will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer as he has promised us in his word." When we pray, we must have confidence that God will hear us. Indeed, God is offended when we would pray to him and yet not have the confidence that he would hear

our prayers and give us his grace and Holy Spirit. Jesus, again, to point out from Luke 11, Jesus says very plainly, "If you, you who are evil, you who are sinners, and you who are so self-centered, if you know how to give good gifts unto your children, and you think you love your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father, who is the perfect Father, the perfect parent, give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Back in verse 9, Jesus says, "I say unto you," get it in your heads and in your hearts, "Ask and it shall be given." Why don't you have it, James says? Because you don't ask it. "Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

Most of the passage that we read this morning emphasizes that we must be confident that God will hear us when we pray, and why will God hear us? As the Catechism says, for the sake of Christ our Lord because he has adopted us through his Son, Jesus Christ and on the basis of his shed blood, and in Christ, God looks upon us with joy and delight. We are righteous in Christ. We are accepted before God in Christ. Christ is our perfect High Priest who makes the perfect sacrifice for our sins and who has passed into the heavens and who makes continual intercession before the Father for us. We can be confident. We must be confident because we know who we are in Christ. That's our comfort. If we have any comfort, that's our comfort in life and death.

Now we know that, we understand that, but let me come to the end of the sermon this morning by emphasizing this point. I'm bringing up something I think is very important for us to apply very directly to our lives and this is important for us as parents to teach our children and for us as adults to not lose sight of. I give this instruction and I give a little bit of a caution here. I say these things in love and I say these things in order that we might be better and stronger in our prayers. I've noticed since coming to Grace a tendency on the part of some in the congregation to end their prayers in a certain way. I've noticed this in other places too where prayers are made in other churches, and I've noticed it here too since coming to Grace. I'm not thinking about specific people. It's just something I've witnessed generally. I've already mentioned it to our council members at Censura Morum. The tendency is to do this, to end our prayers like this, "In thy name we pray. Amen." Now to me, that's a strange way to end our prayers. What are we actually saying when we end our prayers that way, "In thy name, amen"? I personally don't understand what that means. If we're saying "in thy name" as a substitute for saying "in Jesus' name," well, that simply doesn't work. That doesn't make sense. Then we're missing the entire point of saying "in Jesus' name" or "for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Beloved, in our prayers we are not praying to Jesus Christ but we are praying to our heavenly Father, the Triune Father, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the Mediator, through our High Priest, Jesus Christ. And so when we pray "in thy name," we're actually saying "in the Father's name, in the name of the Trinity we pray," and I personally just don't know what that means. We need Jesus, beloved. The Trinity is for all men. God could have chosen to not give Jesus and he'd still be the Triune God. We need Jesus. He is the only reason we can approach the Triune God. He is the only reason we can have confidence that this glorious God will hear us, specks of dust that we are. We need Jesus as our intercessor. That's what the Catechism is teaching us right here in this Question and Answer. God hears our prayers only for the sake of Christ, our Lord. If I try praying

to God without going through the name of Jesus Christ, God will not hear me and that's exactly why we say those words at the end of our prayers and we teach our children to say those words, either at the end or at the beginning or wherever else we might teach them to say those words. The point is, this is not a formality, but this is to remind ourselves to be conscious that the only reason we can have confidence and the reason we do have strong confidence that God will hear us is because Jesus Christ is the one through whom we are praying because Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross and right now, Jesus is my Lord. I belong to him and it's through him that I approach the Maker of heaven and earth and I approach him as my Father only because I have Jesus as my Savior.

Beloved, to pray "in thy name," in my judgment, really needs to be avoided. I don't understand what it means. We don't pray in God's name. We pray in Jesus' name, the name of our intercessor and mediator. And this is just a point for me too, we ought to be very deliberate with every word we use in prayer and in how we close our prayers. Don't just spew out those last few words as senseless, rote words. That's not what prayer is. That's not how you talk to your friend. You see your friend maybe three times a day and you say the same five sentences to your friend. You say, "Amen, see you for the rest of the day," and then you see them again and you say those same five sentences and then you're done. That's not fellowship. That's not friendship with your friend. That's not how you talk to your friend, is it? Are we talking to our friend Sovereign that same way? That's not how we talk to our friend Sovereign.

So a reminder for me, a reminder for all God's people, when we pray in Jesus' name, then we have confidence that God will hear our prayers. That's the point the Catechism is making. God will certainly hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ and the perfect sacrifice he made for us. He is your Father. He will give you what you need. May God give us the grace and his Spirit so that we use the gift of prayer faithfully, reverently, and confidently, and as we proceed through the treatment of the Lord's Prayer in the Catechism, may we truly grow and be strengthened in our prayer lives. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, Jehovah God, we thank thee for Jesus. Again, how good it is at the beginning of the week to be reminded that we have Jesus. We thank thee for prayer. We thank thee for even condescending to such a level that thou dost also teach us how to pray and thou art very patient and compassionate with us as, like little children, we stumble through our prayers to thee. Cause us to grow, Lord. Cause us to enjoy this glorious gift and to be strengthened in it so that not only do we grow closer to thee as our friend Sovereign, but that indeed in all things thy name might be glorified for thou art worthy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.