

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTIONS # 178 & 98.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #178. *What is prayer?*

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God,¹ in the name of Christ,² by the help of his Spirit;³ with confession of our sins,⁴ and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.⁵

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #98. *What is prayer?*

A. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God,⁶ for things agreeable to his will,⁷ in the name of Christ,⁸ with confession of our sins,⁹ and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.¹⁰

Question 1—*What is the nature of prayer?*

Answer—Prayer is a part of religious worship which consists in making known of our desires to God, Ps. 62:8. The object of this act of worship is *God*—the supreme Deity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Matt. 4:10. God alone ought to be the object of prayer, because he alone can search the hearts and try the reins of the children of men, Ps. 145:18, 19.

When we address God, it must be in a manner very different from that in which we address our fellow-creatures, Ps. 99:3. It is not to be after the manner of commanding or demanding, it is an offering, or petitioning, of our desires that our wants may be supplied, Eph. 6:18. Prayer is an offering up, because prayers are spiritual sacrifices, which must be offered up to God alone, 1 Pet. 2:5; 2 Kings 17:36.

If we would have our prayers accepted in the sight of God, they must be offered in an acceptable manner, including: 1.) With a sense of the divine majesty impressed upon our minds and with understanding, 1 Cor. 14:15, 19. 2.) With a sense of our own unworthiness, necessities and wants, Gen. 18:27; Luke 18:13. 3.) With penitent and thankful hearts, Ps. 51:17. 4.) With faith unfeigned, Heb. 11:6; Jer. 29:13. 5.) With great fervency, Jas. 5:16. 6.) With charity untainted, 1 Tim. 2:8. Understanding that God is the only satisfying portion of the soul, Ps. 73:25; so that this prayer is made with

¹ Ps. 62:8.

² John 16:23.

³ Rom. 8:26.

⁴ Ps. 32:5, 6; Dan. 9:4.

⁵ Phil. 4:6.

⁶ Ps. 62:8.

⁷ 1 John 5:14.

⁸ John 16:23.

⁹ Ps. 32:5, 6; Dan. 9:4.

¹⁰ Phil. 4:6.

perseverance, Rom. 12:12; and waiting upon God with humble submission to his will, Mic. 7:7.

Finally, the end for which we pray to God is not to inform him of our desires, for he knows better than we do ourselves, Ps. 139:4. Nor do we pray in order to alter the mind of God concerning us, or to incline him to anything which he was formerly unwilling to grant, for with him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, Num. 23:19; Jas. 1:17. We are to pray because he commands, entreats and encourages us to do so, that he may confer upon us what we may know and believe he is most willing to bestow, Ps. 105:4; Luke 18:1; 2 Chron. 7:14.

Question 2—*How ought this prayer to be offered up?*

Answer—First, We are not to pray for the fulfilling of any sinful desires, Jas. 4:3. Rather, we may and ought to pray to God only for those things agreeable to his will, 1 John 5:14, 15. We are not, however, to pray for all things agreeable to his secret will, 1 Cor. 2:16; but must pray for those things agreeable to that revealed will of God in Scripture, or all things God has promised to bestow, Ps. 34:10. In this, we must prefer spiritual to temporal mercies or blessings, Matt. 6:33.

Second, Our prayers must be offered up in the name of Christ, John 16:23. This is not merely to mention the name of Jesus in the conclusion, or in any other part of the prayers, but to mention his name by faith, depending on him alone for access to God, Eph. 3:12. This offering up in the name of Christ is absolutely necessary because neither our persons nor our prayers can find acceptance with God, apart from the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, Rev. 8:3, 4. It must be remembered that Jesus Christ is the only mediator in whose name we may approach unto God, 1 Tim. 2:5.

Third, These desires must be offered up to God in dependence upon the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who helps with our infirmities bringing to remembrance both our need and the encouraging promises of God, so that we do not ask amiss, Rom. 8:26, 27.

Fourth, Prayer must be offered up with confession of sin, Dan. 9:4. In the faith that our iniquity shall be forgiven, we must confess our original sin, from which flows all actual transgression, Ps. 51:5. Confession of sin is absolutely necessary for the following reasons: 1.) If we do not confess our sins, by which God is greatly dishonored, and express our guilt, we cannot be said to justify him against us when he proceeds in a way of punishment, Ps. 50:6; Gen. 18:25. 2.) If there is no confession of sin, there can be no mercy, Prov. 28:13. 3.) The more we are under a sense of sin, the more ready are we to receive Divine favors with heartfelt gratitude, Ps. 32:5, 6.

In order for this confession to be acceptable, the manner of it must be considered: 1.) If sin be confessed but the love of it not forsaken, it is not a genuine confession before God, Job 34:32. 2.) If sin be confessed and yet hidden, it is the course of those who wish only to confess some sins and not all sins, or not all the aggravations of those sins, Lev. 26:40-42. 3.) If the sin be confessed merely through constraint and not willingly, it is not genuine, Jos. 7:19; free and voluntary confession proceeds from a contrite heart and humbled soul, Isa. 57:15.

Fifth, Prayer ought to be offered up with thankful acknowledgement of God's several mercies, Phil. 4:6. Mercy respects that which is miserable, and man, who has rendered himself miserable by sin, is the object of God's mercies, 2 Cor. 1:3; all of which come to us as free gifts, 1 Tim. 6:17. These mercies are either spiritual, respecting the life to come, Eph. 1:3; or temporal, respecting the present life, Ps. 139:14.