

Christ Reformation Church

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The Language of Faith: Sermons On Prayer

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

“Prayer: The Language of Faith”

June 16, 2013

Sermon Text: Matthew 6:1-8

Scripture Reading: Ps 139

Introduction-

What is prayer? Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.

Are we to pray unto God only? God only being able to search the hearts, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfill the desires of all; and only to be believed in, and worshipped with religious worship; prayer, which is a special part thereof, is to be made by all to him alone, and to none other.

[Westminster Larger Catechism]

Prayer is faith put to words as we speak with God. As the catechism states here, faith believes that God alone can:

- Search our hearts
- Hear our prayers
- Forgive our sins
- Provide for our desires

...and that God alone is to be the object of our faith and worship. Prayer is the language of faith, you see. That which/whom we pray to is our God.

While we are hearing the Larger Catechism on prayer, listen to what else it says-

What is it to pray in the name of Christ? To pray in the name of Christ is, in obedience to his command, and in confidence on his promise, to ask mercy for his sake; not by bare mentioning of his name, but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation.

So, while we often actually say the words “in the name of Christ,” we must take care not to reduce those words to some kind of empty mantra that somehow magically gains God’s ear. To pray in the name of Christ means to pray in a manner consistent with Christ’s Person and Work, relying then totally upon Him as our Mediator/High Priest who has promised that our prayers in His name will be heard. The LC continues

Why are we to pray in the name of Christ? The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator; and there being none in heaven or earth appointed to, or fit for, that glorious work but Christ alone, we are to pray in no other name but his only.

Scripture frequently tells us that we are to pray “in the Spirit” and the LC addresses this as well.

How does the Spirit help us to pray? We not knowing what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit helps our infirmities, by enabling us to understand both for whom, and what, and how prayer is to be made, and by working and quickening in our hearts (although not in all persons nor at all times in the same measure) those apprehensions, affections, and graces which are requisite for the right performance of that duty.

This is an amazing thought, and of course it comes from Romans 8-

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (27) And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We will need to deal with this aspect of prayer in more detail as we proceed through this study of prayer. But it is an incredible thing. Somehow it seems that the Holy Spirit who perfectly knows the will of God, takes our prayers, converts them in any degree

necessary, and presents them to the Lord? And also the Spirit is praying for us – offering prayers then that are always answered because they are always in perfect harmony with God’s will.

For whom are we to pray? We are to pray for the whole church of Christ upon earth; for magistrates, and ministers; for ourselves, our brethren, yea, our enemies; and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead nor for those that are known to have sinned the sin unto death.

For what things are we to pray? We are to pray with an awful apprehension of the majesty of God, and deep sense of our own unworthiness, necessities, and sins; with penitent, thankful, and enlarged hearts; with understanding, faith, sincerity, fervency, love, and perseverance, waiting upon him, with humble submission to his will.

The LC then goes on to give a detailed examination of the Lord’s Prayer as our Lord’s instruction to us as to how we are to pray.

Prayer, then, is a very important and broad topic for the Christian and a vitally important part of our personal communion with God. The LC devotes questions 178-196 to prayer, and in fact closes with this subject.

Before we move on to examine specifics regarding prayer, looking at selected Scriptures on the subject, let me turn to the Shorter Catechism’s use of the Lord’s Prayer to affirm the fundamental truth about prayer, namely, that *we are to pray, how we are to pray, and what we are to pray for.*

Matthew 6:9-13 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. (10) Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us this day our daily bread, (12) and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

- Our Father teaches us to draw near to God with all reverence and confidence, as children to a father who is able and ready to help us.
- We should pray with (our) and for others (us).
- That God would be glorified and known in all the creation
- That Satan’s kingdom would be destroyed and God’s kingdom would advance.
- That we would be able and willing to know, obey, and submit to God will in all things

- That God would provide for us the good things needed for life
- That God, for the sake of Christ, would freely pardon all of our sins and enable us to forgive others
- That God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted.

So there it is, you see. The disciples specifically asked Jesus to teach them to pray and this is His instruction to us, including some other texts such as that we are to pray at all times and not lose heart.

Pray for Our Enemies

So let's turn then to some specific New Testament texts on prayer and see what we find:

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (44) **But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,** (45) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

(47) And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (48) You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Here then is one aspect of our prayers that gives us opportunity to reflect the character of our heavenly Father. It is in regard to how we deal with our enemies – who turn out to be enemies of Christ because they persecute Christ's people.

God's common grace is extended to all men in lesser or greater capacity. God does not restrict sunshine and rain and day and night and harvest time to those who love Him. He sends these things on "the evil and the good." We also know that God desires all men to be saved. His Spirit goes out and convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. These then are matters for our prayers. We pray for those who persecute us. For their salvation. In that respect we show love toward them. They still remain enemies. This does not mean that we trust them or even that we have relationship with them (which is impossible in regard to an enemy), but we can pray for them.

Romans 12:20-21 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something

to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Exodus 23:4-5 "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. (5) If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

Praying for our enemies then is one of the most powerful tools we have been given in dealing with them and the persecution they heap on us because of Christ. (This is indicated in the phrase "as we forgive our debtors" in the Lord's prayer).

Don't Pray Like a Hypocrite

In the next chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, here are these instructions which immediately precede the Lord's Prayer -

Matthew 6:1-8 **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them,** for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. (2) "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as

the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

(5) **"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.** For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

(6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. **And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

(7) "And when you pray, **do not heap up empty phrases** as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Do not be like them, **for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

We really have quite a lot of instruction in these few verses. Let's begin with the main principle stated in verse 1-

Don't use the name of Christ to exalt yourself.

Here then we come to an incredibly important Scriptural principle that EVERY Christian absolutely must get a firm hold on-

Satan and evil people love to use a false profession of Christ's name as a cover for their wickedness. That wickedness often occurs then, within the visible church.

Listen to this observation from Dr. George Simon's book, *The Judas Syndrome*-

"Very few Christians really understand the third (by some accounts, the second) utterance of God to Moses. After God introduced himself, he commanded the children of Israel to afford their utmost reverence to his very identity (Christ himself affirms this in the opening lines of the Lord's Prayer . . .Hallowed be Thy Name). He decreed that his Name not only be held sacred but also never be uttered with any prideful or base intention. Not taking the Name of the Lord thy God in vain is much more than not cursing or uttering forms of it in exclamations of hate, disgust, or frustration. It's never using God's great and supremely good name for any mundane,

pointless, or most especially, self-serving purpose." Loc 649

This is precisely what the Pharisees had been doing, and it is exactly what these counterfeit plants in the church are doing today. They *practice their "righteousness" before other people in order to be seen by them. The trumpets blow when they give to the needy or when they perform some other "noble" act. They always do it in such way that they will be SEEN.*

Prayer can be used in the very same manner, as our Lord says. Many prayers are offered from pulpits in local churches that are nothing more than shows of religion for self-glorifying reasons.

Have you noticed this little phrase in the Lord's Prayer? –

Matthew 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Deliver us from evil. Deliver us from the snare of evil. The Greek here has the definite article if I am not mistaken – Deliver us from the Evil One.

Our prayers, you see, are one of the chief ways that we "keep watch" –

Matthew 26:40-41 And he came to the disciples and found them

sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? (41) Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Here is the point. One of Satan's chief tactics used against us constantly is that he cloaks himself in what looks like the name of Christ. He is very subtle and crafty in this. He sends his emissaries into our midst and in a blasphemous, deceiving manner they use the name of Christ for self-glorifying, wicked ends. They wreak havoc among the flock of Christ if we are not on watch and wise to these tactics.

One of the marks of such wolves in sheep's clothing is that they appear so remarkably eminent in their religion.

You see that here in Matthew 6 in Jesus' words. The hypocrites put on a big show of piety for all to see. They prayed loooooonnnng prayers. That they may be SEEN and PRAISED by others. If we are not to be taken in, then we must pray and keep watch for these kinds of attacks – "Lord, deliver us from evil."

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no

wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (15) So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

I hope that I have grown at least a bit wiser in this regard after so many years of being duped by these trickeries. We are a small church. We would love to have more genuine believers join us. We are excited when occasionally a new person or family comes here and they appear to truly love Christ and seriously want to follow Him. But we must learn to proceed with caution.

1 Timothy 5:21-24 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. (22) **Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.** (23) (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) (24) The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later.

We must not be swayed by partiality nor by a quick evaluation that a person seems to be truly in Christ. We must

not be hasty or we can find ourselves ordaining a person to some ministry that is in fact evil, **and thus we take part in the sin of the thing ourselves.** We must carefully and earnestly pray, and that over a considerable time – *Lord, deliver us from evil. Please protect us from the schemes of the enemy. Don't let us be deceived by false professors whose only goal is self-glorification, no matter how charming and holy they may appear to be.*

Because, let's note the principle again here in Matthew 6 –

Satan and evil people love to use a false profession of Christ's name as a cover for their wickedness. That wickedness often occurs then, within the visible church.

We must FULLY EXPECT this to happen –

Jude 1:4 For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ...
Jude 1:12 These are hidden reefs at your love feasts, **as they feast with you without fear,** shepherds feeding themselves; waterless clouds, swept along by

winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted;

Listen to Martha Stout describe just such people – the evil among us -

“Imagine—if you can—not having a conscience, none at all, no feelings of guilt or remorse no matter what you do, no limiting sense of concern for the well-being of strangers, friends, or even family members. Imagine no struggles with shame, not a single one in your whole life, no matter what kind of selfish, lazy, harmful, or immoral action you had taken. And pretend that the concept of responsibility is unknown to you, except as a burden others seem to accept without question, like gullible fools. Now add to this strange fantasy the ability to conceal from other people that your psychological makeup is radically different from theirs. Since everyone simply assumes that conscience is universal among human beings, hiding the fact that you are conscience-free is nearly effortless. You are not held back from any of your desires by guilt or shame, and you are never confronted by others for your cold-bloodedness. The ice water in your veins is so bizarre, so completely outside of their personal

experience, that they seldom even guess at your condition. In other words, you are completely free of internal restraints, and your unhampered liberty to do just as you please, with no pangs of conscience, is conveniently invisible to the world. You can do anything at all, and still your strange advantage over the majority of people, who are kept in line by their consciences, will most likely remain undiscovered...

No—let us say you are not quite such a person. You are ambitious, yes, and in the name of success you are willing to do all manner of things that people with conscience would never consider, but you are not an intellectually gifted individual. Your intelligence is above average perhaps, and people think of you as smart, maybe even very smart. But you know in your heart of hearts that you do not have the cognitive wherewithal, or the creativity, to reach the careening heights of power you secretly dream about, and this makes you resentful of the world at large, and envious of the people around you. As this sort of person, you ensconce yourself in a niche, or maybe a series of niches, in which you can have some amount of control over small numbers of people.

Maybe you cannot be the CEO of a multinational corporation, but you can frighten a few people, or cause them to scurry around like chickens, or steal from them, or—maybe best of all—create situations that cause them to feel bad about themselves. And this is power, especially when the people you manipulate are superior to you in some way. Most invigorating of all is to bring down people who are smarter or more accomplished than you, or perhaps classier, more attractive or popular or morally admirable. This is not only good fun; it is existential vengeance. And without a conscience, it is amazingly easy to do. You quietly lie to the boss or to the boss's boss, cry some crocodile tears, or sabotage a coworker's project, or gaslight a patient (or a child), bait people with promises, or provide a little misinformation that will never be traced back to you.

Stout Ph.D., Martha (2005-02-08).
The Sociopath Next Door. Three Rivers Press. Kindle Edition.

Does that jolt you? Does that make you want to pray – “*Lord, deliver us from evil*”? I hope so. Jesus is exposing these kinds of conscienceless hypocrites for us here, telling us what they are like, and instructing us NOT TO BE DRAWN IN BY THEM AND

THUS START IMITATING THEIR HYPOCRISTY.

Matthew 16:6 Jesus said to them, "Watch and **beware** of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

This is the very nature of evil and of the devil – subtle, cunning, *beauty* that requires us to be constantly vigilant.

Genesis 3:1-4 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (2) And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, (3) but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (4) But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.

So we see, prayerlessness is sleeping on guard duty! It is failure to keep watch when we fail to pray, "Lord, deliver us from evil. Give us the wisdom and insight to spot evil in disguise."

Because, we say once again, and we say it on the plain authority of Christ's own words – *evil loves to hide as good, darkness craves to counterfeit*

light, and the wicked very, very often use Christ's name to creep in among our midst and attack us from within.

Alright then, consider what else we have here in Matthew 6 –

(5) **"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.** For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

(6) But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. **And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

(7) "And when you pray, **do not heap up empty phrases** as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Do not be like them, **for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

So not only are we to be on guard against these enemy agents creeping in amongst us, we must see to it that we are not infected by their evil as well. We must not pray as they pray – we must not be like them.

Our prayers must be prayed with the sincere motive of desiring to make our requests be known *to God*. Therefore,

our prayers do not require an audience. This must be our motive even when we pray in the presence of others. Christ is not giving us a kind of absolute here – that somehow all prayer must be done in literal secrecy. We know this because Jesus Himself prayed in the presence of others and the New Testament records the early church meeting together to pray.

Here is a very encouraging truth about the attributes of God in regard to prayer – *Your Father sees in secret*. No matter where we are, the Lord is there and He sees us and hears us. He is in the secret places. There is no place on earth hidden from Him, which is the very point of the 139th Psalm which we read this morning –

Psalms 139:7-12 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? (8) If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! (9) If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, (10) even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (11) If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," (12) even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

God heard Jonah from the belly of a fish! How many “secret” places – pits and dungeons and remote parts of the world have Christ’s people prayed from? And God was always there and always heard. You don’t have to be a notable personality, and you don’t have to be in some prominent location in order for the Lord to see you and take note of you and hear your prayer.

And then let’s conclude with a look at these incredible words in vss 7-8,

(7) "And when you pray, **do not heap up empty phrases** as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Do not be like them, **for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**

Now, if you know much at all about prayers in various religions, you already realize that *vain repetition* is commonly characteristic of those religions and is a direct statement of their view of the nature of the god they worship!

- Buddhist prayer wheels
- Roman Catholic repetitious prayers

This does not mean that we are prohibited from praying the same thing more than once. Jesus did this Himself

Matthew 26:39-44 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (40) And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? (41) Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." **(42) Again, for the second time,** he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." (43) And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. (44) So, leaving them again, **he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.**

But prayer is not to be offered from any kind of motive that believes *God can be leveraged to action by our many words*. Nor that God is reluctant to hear our prayers or somehow unable to hear us unless we shout loudly and often enough. The priests of Baal did this –

1 Kings 18:26-29 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one

answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. (27) And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." (28) And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. (29) And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

And the very last phrase says it all in an extremely reassuring way to us –

(8) Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

1. Don't be like them BECAUSE your God is different! *Our prayers are a plain statement of who we really believe God is.* Therefore in our prayers, in the content and in the manner of them, we must pray consistently with the truth God has revealed to us about Himself.

2. God hears our request before we even verbalize it. Our prayers are not needed so that God can be informed of information He does not possess!

Rather, they are an expression of our faith.