

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 45: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA 116-119

Question 116: WHY IS PRAYER NECESSARY FOR CHRISTIANS? **Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us, and because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who earnestly and without ceasing ask them of Him, and render thanks unto Him for them.**

The Christian life is a life of thankfulness. Prayer is the chief or main part of showing ourselves thankful for our salvation. God saved us *first* of all that we might *thank* and *praise* Him for His glorious grace. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ ...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:3, 5-6). You are “His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. Psalm 103:1-2; 116:12-17). “No one has faith who is not thankful for it; for all those who possess true faith taste the grace of God, and those who have tasted the grace of God show themselves thankful to God for it, and desire it more and more” (Ursinus, 620).

The second reason why prayer is necessary is because it is God’s appointed way for us to receive all those things that are necessary both for soul and body. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15). “For everyone who asks receives” (Luke 11:10). Our Father in heaven already knows what we need (Matt. 6:8) but still He requires us to ask Him, because He wants *us* to realize what our *real needs* are; and that *He* is the only who can meet our needs. “We do not obtain the blessings which are necessary for us, except we ask them at the hands of God; for He has promised them to none but such as ask. Prayer is, therefore, just as necessary for us as it is necessary for a beggar to ask alms” (Ursinus, 620).

But don’t the wicked receive many gifts from God, who nevertheless do not ask or desire them? “The wicked do indeed received many gifts [Matt. 5:45]; but not such as are principle nor peculiar to the elect, as faith, repentance, conversion, remission of sins and regeneration. And still further, the gifts they do receive do not contribute to their salvation, but to their destruction” (Ursinus, 620).

Our greatest need as Christians is for a continual supply of God’s grace and Holy Spirit, so that we might live an obedient and thankful life. Jesus says to all believers: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Since we believers already have the Holy Spirit, to ask our Father to give us the Holy Spirit is to ask for an increase of the Spirit’s grace and gifts, primarily the gift of sanctification, which is precisely what produces in us the faith and desire to call upon Jesus as LORD (1 Cor. 12:3). “God effects in us a desire for the Holy Spirit and gives Him to us in the very same moment.... We might also make a distinction between the beginning and increase of the Spirit within us, inasmuch as we do not desire the latter before we have the former. No one desires the Holy Spirit, except he in whom the Spirit dwells” (Ursinus, 621). For the Christian, prayer is a way of life: giving thanks, praying for help, and giving thanks for the help received: “pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God” (1 Thess. 5:18; cf. Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6-7).

Question 117: WHAT BELONGS TO SUCH PRAYER WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD AND WHICH HE WILL HEAR? **First, that with our whole heart we call only upon the one true God, who has revealed Himself to us in His Word, for all that He has commanded us to ask of Him; second, that we thoroughly know our need and misery, so as to humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty; third, that we be firmly assured that notwithstanding our unworthiness He will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised us in His Word.**

Three things are necessary for our prayers to be acceptable to God. First, we must sincerely ask the true God what He commands us to ask. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit [sincerely] and truth [according to Scripture]” (John 4:24). “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that *if we ask anything according to His will*, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). “God does not desire us to direct vague and wandering petitions to Him, being uncertain what we should pray for. A king would consider himself derided and mocked if anyone were to kneel before him, without knowing what to ask as his hands” (Ursinus, 620). Second, we must ask with humility, which is to realize how unworthy we are to receive the help we so desperately need. “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown me” (Gen. 32:10); “we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chron. 20:12). Third, we must ask with assurance that God will hear our prayer for Jesus’ sake. Jesus said, “whatever you ask [*according to His will*] in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14; cf. Mark 11:24; Heb. 11:6).

Question 118: WHAT HAS GOD COMMANDED US TO ASK OF HIM? **All things necessary for soul and body, which Christ our Lord comprised in the prayer which He Himself taught us.**

When the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), Jesus taught them what we call the Lord’s Prayer (recorded in Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-13). Jesus did not say, “Pray these exact words and no other.” He said, “In *this manner*, pray” (Matt. 6:9); that is, pray *like* this. The Lord’s Prayer “contains, in the most condense form, all things which are to be sought as necessary for soul and body. It is in like manner a rule or pattern with which all our prayers ought to conform and agree.... Hence Augustine declares that all the prayers of the saints which we have in the Scriptures are contained in the Lord’s Prayer. Augustine also adds, that we are at liberty to express the same things in other words when we pray” (Ursinus, 625-626).

Question 119: WHAT IS THE LORD’S PRAYER? **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 debtors. And do not lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

The remainder of the Catechism will explain the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer.

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 45: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA 116-119

Question 116: WHY IS PRAYER NECESSARY FOR CHRISTIANS? **Because it is the chief part of thankfulness which God requires of us, and because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who earnestly and without ceasing ask them of Him, and render thanks unto Him for them.**

The Christian life is a life of thankfulness. Prayer is the chief or main part of showing ourselves thankful for our salvation. God saved us *first* of all that we might *thank* and *praise* Him for His glorious grace. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ ...having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace” (Eph. 1:3, 5-6). You are “His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. Psalm 103:1-2; 116:12-17). “No one has faith who is not thankful for it; for all those who possess true faith taste the grace of God, and those who have tasted the grace of God show themselves thankful to God for it, and desire it more and more” (Ursinus, 620).

The second reason why prayer is necessary is because it is God’s appointed way for us to receive all those things that are necessary both for soul and body. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me” (Psalm 50:15). “For everyone who asks receives” (Luke 11:10). Our Father in heaven already knows what we need (Matt. 6:8) but still He requires us to ask Him, because He wants *us* to realize what our *real needs* are; and that *He* is the only who can meet our needs. “We do not obtain the blessings which are necessary for us, except we ask them at the hands of God; for He has promised them to none but such as ask. Prayer is, therefore, just as necessary for us as it is necessary for a beggar to ask alms” (Ursinus, 620).

But don’t the wicked receive many gifts from God, who nevertheless do not ask or desire them? “The wicked do indeed received many gifts [Matt. 5:45]; but not such as are principle nor peculiar to the elect, as faith, repentance, conversion, remission of sins and regeneration. And still further, the gifts they do receive do not contribute to their salvation, but to their destruction” (Ursinus, 620).

Our greatest need as Christians is for a continual supply of God’s grace and Holy Spirit, so that we might live an obedient and thankful life. Jesus says to all believers: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” Since we believers already have the Holy Spirit, to ask our Father to give us the Holy Spirit is to ask for an increase of the Spirit’s grace and gifts, primarily the gift of sanctification, which is precisely what produces in us the faith and desire to call upon Jesus as LORD (1 Cor. 12:3). “God effects in us a desire for the Holy Spirit and gives Him to us in the very same moment.... We might also make a distinction between the beginning and increase of the Spirit within us, inasmuch as we do not desire the latter before we have the former. No one desires the Holy Spirit, except he in whom the Spirit dwells” (Ursinus, 621). For the Christian, prayer is a way of life: giving thanks, praying for help, and giving thanks for the help received: “pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God” (1 Thess. 5:18; cf. Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6-7).

Question 117: WHAT BELONGS TO SUCH PRAYER WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD AND WHICH HE WILL HEAR? **First, that with our whole heart we call only upon the one true God, who has revealed Himself to us in His Word, for all that He has commanded us to ask of Him; second, that we thoroughly know our need and misery, so as to humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty; third, that we be firmly assured that notwithstanding our unworthiness He will, for the sake of Christ our Lord, certainly hear our prayer, as He has promised us in His Word.**

Three things are necessary for our prayers to be acceptable to God. First, we must sincerely ask the true God what He commands us to ask. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit [sincerely] and truth [according to Scripture]” (John 4:24). “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that *if we ask anything according to His will*, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). “God does not desire us to direct vague and wandering petitions to Him, being uncertain what we should pray for. A king would consider himself derided and mocked if anyone were to kneel before him, without knowing what to ask as his hands” (Ursinus, 620). Second, we must ask with humility, which is to realize how unworthy we are to receive the help we so desperately need. “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown me” (Gen. 32:10); “we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chron. 20:12). Third, we must ask with assurance that God will hear our prayer for Jesus’ sake. Jesus said, “whatever you ask [*according to His will*] in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14; cf. Mark 11:24; Heb. 11:6).

Question 118: WHAT HAS GOD COMMANDED US TO ASK OF HIM? **All things necessary for soul and body, which Christ our Lord comprised in the prayer which He Himself taught us.**

When the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), Jesus taught them what we call the Lord’s Prayer (recorded in Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-13). Jesus did not say, “Pray these exact words and no other.” He said, “In *this manner*, pray” (Matt. 6:9); that is, pray *like* this. The Lord’s Prayer “contains, in the most condense form, all things which are to be sought as necessary for soul and body. It is in like manner a rule or pattern with which all our prayers ought to conform and agree.... Hence Augustine declares that all the prayers of the saints which we have in the Scriptures are contained in the Lord’s Prayer. Augustine also adds, that we are at liberty to express the same things in other words when we pray” (Ursinus, 625-626).

Question 119: WHAT IS THE LORD’S PRAYER? **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 debtors. And do not lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

The remainder of the Catechism will explain the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer.