

“Prayer”

Trinity Baptist Church Discipleship Training (April, 2003)

Introduction:

Prayer is one of the glorious privileges of the child of God, but one which is often neglected and misunderstood. The people of God have always been a praying people. Queen Mary of Scotland said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than an army. It is a sad state when God’s people do not pray. The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of prayer as well as the necessity of prayer and to hopefully drive the Christian towards more fervent prayer.

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Definition –

Charles Hodge – “Prayer is the converse of the soul with God. Therein we manifest our express to Him our reverence, and love for his divine perfection, our gratitude for all his mercies, our penitence for our sins, our hope in his forgiving love, our submission to his authority, our confidence in his care, our desires for his favor, and for the providential and spiritual blessings needed for ourselves and others.”

1689 Confession (Chapter 22:3-4; 6a) –

3. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one part of natural worship, is by God required of all men. But that it may be accepted it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, according to His will; with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and when with others, in a known tongue.
4. Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter, but not for the dead, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death.
6. Neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship is not under the gospel tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; but God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth . . .

Shorter Catechism –

Question 98

Q. What is Prayer

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

Question 99

Q. What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer

A. The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer, which Christ taught His disciples, commonly called *The Lord’s Prayer*.

I. Prayer makes certain assumptions

- A. Prayer assumes the existence of God
- B. Prayer assumes the personality of God
 - 1. Only a person is capable of intelligent action
 - 2. Only a person is capable of conversing with other persons
- C. Prayer assumes that God is near us – He is omnipresent
 - 1. He is both separate from us and near to us
“Our Father, (near us) which art in heaven (separate from us)”
 - 2. God is willing to hear and answer
- D. Prayer assumes that God is personally in control of all things – Divine Providence
 - 1. That He governs the thoughts, feelings, and actions of men
 - 2. That He is everywhere present governing His creation
 - a. All of nature is ruled by Him - It rains because He wills it
 - b. All abundance comes from Him
 - c. All life is sustained by Him
 - 3. Not excluding the reality of miracles, God usually answers prayer through the normal use of second causes within the course of nature, God being the first cause of all things.
- E. Prayer assumes God’s infinite wisdom

II. The nature of true prayer

- A. True prayer it must be by the Spirit, through the Son, unto the Father
Ephesians 2:18 - "For through Him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."
 - 1. This does not deny examples where Christ is the object of prayer.
 - a. Stephen prayed to Christ before his death
Acts 7:59 – “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”
 - b. He even received prayers while He was on the earth.
Luke 17:5 – “And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”
 - c. But a proper recognition of Jesus as Mediator between God and man and the Holy Spirit as our guide gives us a proper focus in prayer.
 - 2. By the Spirit – The Holy Spirit draws us to pray and directs us in what to pray
Romans 8:26 – “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”
 - 3. Through Christ –
 - a. Jesus Christ is our Mediator – our access to the Father
John 14:6 - "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."
John 14:14 – “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*.”

- b. We must pray in His name
John 15:16 – “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”
 - (1) By “in my name” we are to understand “in His authority and power and for His sake.”
 - (2) It also implies, “by virtue of His mediation” which rules out the possibility of unbelievers praying.
- c. We must pray in His will, for His glory
1 John 5:14 – “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:”
- 4. Unto the Father –
 - a. Jesus taught this in His model prayer
 “Our Father which art in heaven”
 - b. Paul prayed before the Father
Ephesians 3:14 – “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,”
- B. It must be directed to God in faith
Matthew 21:22 – “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”
James 1:6-7 – “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. ⁷ For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”
John 5:14 – “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:”
 - a. We must believe that He is able to hear and answer our prayers.
 - b. We must believe that He is certainly will answer our prayers if consistent with His will and purpose and our good.
- C. Prayer must be passionate and fervent
James 5:16 – “Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”
- D. It must be in sincerity – God searches the heart. He cannot be deceived and will not be mocked. Prayer must be conducted with reverence and godly fear.
 Charles Hodge – “We sin against Him when we use terms, in the utterance of which the angels veil their faces, with no corresponding feelings of reverence; or use the formulas of thanksgiving without gratitude; or those of humility and confession without any due sense of our unworthiness; or those of petition without desire for the blessings we ask.”
- E. It must be in humility – we must come before God with a sense of our own insignificance and our own sinfulness.
Luke 18:13 – “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.”
- F. It must be offered up in importunity, perseverance. We must not leave off praying. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – “Pray without ceasing.”
 There must be an earnestness of desire in prayer. We must continue steadfastly before the throne of God.

- G. It must be offered up in submission –
Luke 22:42 – “Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”
 God has infinite wisdom and knows what is best for His children. Granting our every request might do us great harm. We must submit to His wisdom and will.
- H. Prayer must never be recited mechanically; not with "vain words," not with "much speaking"
Matthew 6:7 – “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”

III. Types of Prayer

Philippians 4:6 – “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

- A. Invocation or calling upon God – Prayer invoking the presence of God. This is part of the pastoral prayer at the beginning of our worship services.
Psalm 4:1 – “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me *when I was* in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.”
Psalm 17:6 – “I have called upon thee, for thou wilt hear me, O God: incline thine ear unto me, *and hear* my speech.”
Psalm 55:1 – “Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication.”
- B. Praise and Adoration – Prayer directed to the praise and worship of God with the highest of reverence. Prayer making mention of His attributes and works.
Matthew 6:9 – “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name”
Acts 4:24 – “And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou *art* God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:”
Psalm 57:11 – “Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: *let* thy glory be above all the earth.”
- C. Confession – Prayer directed at acknowledging our sin and seeking forgiveness.
1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
- D. Petition – Prayer for our own particular needs
 “Give us this day our daily bread”
Psalm 51:10 – “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”
Psalm 69:1 – “Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto *my* soul.”
- E. Intercession – Prayer for others
1 Thessalonians 5:25 - :Brethren, pray for us.”
2 Thessalonians 3:1 – “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you:”
Matthew 5:44 – “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;”
- F. Thanksgiving – Prayer directed at thanking God for His providential care and mercy
Philippians 4:6 – “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

Colossians 4:2 – “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;”

Revelation 7:12 – “Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, *be* unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”

IV. Reasons we must pray -

- A. Because God is all-sufficient for us
1. As a child we are drawn to His throne of grace
 2. We enjoy communion with Him and enjoy His presence
- B. Because prayer is a means of grace
1. God has ordained that we should pray that that we will pray
 2. Prayer is a means through which God often blesses His children
- C. Because of the power of sin. We are dependent upon God for increase of holiness
We must pray for holiness
1. **Ephesians 3:16** - Paul prayed for the Ephesians that God would: "would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."
 2. Paul prayed for the Colossians:
Colossians 1:9 – “For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;”
 3. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians:
1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 – “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all *men*, even as we *do* toward you: ¹³ To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.”
1 Thessalonians 5:23 – “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
 4. **Hebrews 13:20-21** – “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.”
- D. Because prayer is expected of us – Prayer is both a gift and a mandate
1. There is the supposition that Christians will pray
Matthew 6:5 - "And when thou prayest, thou shall not be as the hypocrites"
Matthew 6:6 - "But when you pray, enter into thy closet."
Matthew 6:7 - "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions"
Matthew 6:9 - "After this manner pray ye..."
 2. Jesus taught on prayer
Luke 18:1 - "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

3. The New Testament presents prayer as an imperative
Colossians 4:2 – “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;”
1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing.”
- E. Because our prayer life is a test of our relationship with Christ
1. A saving knowledge of Christ creates a life of intimacy
 2. J.C. Ryle - "What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray little, and those who are eminently holy pray much."
- V. What does it mean to pray without ceasing
1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing.”
- A. Obviously it cannot mean that prayer is the only thing we do we have many responsibilities (including sleep)
 - B. It means that we must persevere in prayer - It will not suffice to pray only occasionally - it must be continued prayer
Ephesians 6:18 – “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit”
 - C. It means that we pray about everything - things great and small
 - D. It means that we pray in every occasion
sometimes in private - in our closet
sometimes in public with the saints
sometimes oral, sometimes silent
sometimes altogether without words - groanings from our heart
sometimes formal (Lord's Prayer), sometimes informal
sometimes short, sometimes longer (length does not always = quality)
sometimes praise & worship, sometimes thanksgiving, petition
- IV. Reasons Christians do not pray
- A. Sin - creates a breach of fellowship. We cease to feel His presence and leave off praying.
 - B. Unbelief - if we expected results we would certainly pray
James 1:5-7
When a person fails to see the greatness of God his prayer life will be small.
 - C. Apathy - a sense of being satisfied - we feel little need of prayer
 1. Pride and self-sufficiency leads to little prayer
 2. In times of great need men are driven to prayer
 - D. Preoccupation - We become so distracted by other things that we leave off praying.
 - E. A lack of discipline - We don't plan to pray. We don't set aside times for prayer.
- VII. The Discipline of Prayer
- A. We must give ourselves to the study of prayer
 1. Prayer is learned - this does not diminish the fact that we must pray in the Spirit. In the same way preaching must be in the Spirit but that does not diminish the necessity of study and preparation.
 2. The disciples of Christ asked, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).
 - B. By praying - as we pray the Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray
 - C. By meditating on Scripture - It has been said that prayer is the reciting of God's thoughts back to God.

1. Meditation is the link between Bible intake and prayer – meditation prepares us for prayer
 2. As we meditate on the Word of God considering what God has to say to us prayer follows naturally
 3. The Puritan preacher Thomas Manton wrote: "The Word feeds meditation and meditation feeds prayer"
 4. George Muller - "There is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation."
- D. By praying with others - we learn by hearing others pray
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, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”
1. Not just little phrases to use over and over
 Jesus warned about vain repetition. - our prayers are never to be offered to impress others with our eloquence.
 2. We listen to others for principles of prayer - not phrases
 Example: the Lord's Prayer
Our Father - Directed to the Father
Which art in heaven - Recognition of His transcendence
Hallowed by thy name - Recognition of His holiness
Thy kingdom come - petition for the increase of His people
Thy will be done - petition for His rule & dominion - His law
In earth as it is in heaven - the totality of His rule on earth
Give us this day our daily bread - petitions for supply
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors - confession
And lead us not into temptation - providential restraint
And deliver us from evil - power over temptation & sin
For Thine is the kingdom... - Worship, praise
- E. Reading biographies and various accounts of other people of prayer

VIII. Reasons for unanswered prayer

- A. A failure to pray
James 4:2 – “Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.”
- B. There is something amiss or wanting in our prayer
James 4:3 - "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."
 1. Praying in selfishness or to fulfil sinful lust
 2. We are not praying for His glory. Our motives are impure
- C. Failing to deal with blatant sin which causes God to put all our prayers on hold?
1 John 1:6 – “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:
1 Peter 3:7 – “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”
- D. Failing to pray according to His will
 1. God may have answered in a way not obvious to us?
 2. We must not allow our own shortcomings and weakness in prayer to lead us to the conclusion that God does not answer prayer
- E. A failure to persevere in prayer – **Luke 18:1-8**

IX. Miscellaneous

- A. True prayer leads us to a true peace
Philippians 4:6-7 – “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
1. This does not negate the necessity of importunity in prayer – **Luke 11:5-9**
 2. This does not exclude the need to struggle in prayer
Evangelical Dictionary of Theology – “Prayer is both a pleading with God that he will hear and act upon our requests and a trusting surrender to God in the confidence that he will act in his own time and way. But the confidence comes only through the struggle.”
- B. Prayer must never assume that God is mutable
1. All of God’s purposes upon the earth were ordained before creation
Acts 15:18 – “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”
 2. God has ordained, however, that we will pray and that He will hear and answer our prayers
 Charles Hodge – “God has not determined to accomplish his purpose without the use of means; and among those means, the prayers of his people have their appropriate place.”
 - 3.. Prayer must never be an effort to change the purposes of God but rather to conform to them.
Luke 22:42 – “Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”
- C. Christian prayer is both individual and corporate
1. We must have time to be alone in solitude with God
 2. We must recognize that we are a part of a body – a community
 3. It is excellent for husbands and wives to pray
1 Peter 3:7 – “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”
- D. Prayer is a means of grace
 Charles Hodge – “Means of grace are those means which God has ordained for the end of communicating the life-giving and sanctifying influences of the Spirit to the souls of men.”
1. Prayer brings us near to God.
 2. Prayer is a means by which God bestows His blessings.
 3. Prayer is a means by which we grow in holiness.
 4. Prayer is a means by which we overcome temptation.
Ephesians 6:17-18 – “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: ¹⁸ Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”
Matthew 6:13 – “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”
 5. Prayer is a means by which the seeking sinner comes to Christ seeking repentance and forgiveness.

X. What about praying in tongues?

1 Corinthians 14:14-15 – “For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

- A. Paul is condemning any idea of tongues spoken without edification. He made it clear that tongues could only be practiced in the presence of an interpreter.
1. The entire passage is speaking of the superiority of prophecy over tongues.
 - a. Prophecy is preferred because all can understand and be edified.
 - b. The entire context is dealing with the public assembly. Paul is saying that tongues demand an interpreter so that the entire assembly might be edified.
 - c. Why would Paul suddenly begin speaking about a private prayer language?
 2. The Bible does not teach a disconnection between our spirit and our mind, as if our spirit can be thinking something of which our mind is unaware.
 - a. Preaching is directed to the mind although it must be understood spiritually
 - b. Prayer originates in our mind although it must be directed by the Holy Spirit
 3. Paul is simply saying if a person prayed in tongues his mind would receive no benefit and so there would be no edification.
 4. The conclusion: “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also”
- B. New Testament tongues were the utterance of known languages. They were not an indiscernible ecstatic utterance.
- Calvin – “The gift of tongues was not bestowed merely for the purpose of making a noise, but rather for the purpose of communication. For how laughable it would have been had the tongue of a Roman been directed by the Spirit of God to utter Greek words, when he himself had no knowledge of Greek whatsoever. He would have been like the parrots, magpies, and crows which men train to make human sounds!”
1. To pray in a foreign language would be unbeneficial to both the individual praying and anyone who may be present.
Calvin – “The principle we must always hold is, that in all prayer, public and private, the tongue without the mind must be displeasing to God” (*Institutes*, 3.20.182).
 2. Paul links prayer with the singing of praises – both of which should be in a known tongue.