

Catechism Sec. 18: God-centred Prayer

by B. S. Poh

Q81. What is prayer?

A81. Prayer is the offering up of the desires of the righteous¹ to God², for things agreeable to His will³, in the name of Christ⁴, by the help of His Spirit⁵, with confession of our sins⁶ and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies⁷.

Notes: Spurgeon's Catechism leaves out the section on the Lord's Prayer totally. We have followed the SCBV, making the answer trinitarian, but leaving out "Acceptable" at the beginning of the answer.

- 1. Prov. 15:8, The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.*
- 2. Psalm 62:8, Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.*
- 3. 1 John 5:14, Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*
- 4. John 16:23, And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*
- 5. Rom. 8:26, Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*
- 6. Psalm 32:5-6, I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him.*
- 7. Phil. 4:6, Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*

Comments

1. This section shows that prayer should be God-centred, i.e. focused on God, His will, and His glory. Prayer is primarily an act of worship, not an act of gaining merits before God. It is the presentation of the desires of believers to God, not the attempt of non-believers to gain something from God or from pagan deities. This is the chief difference between the prayers of Christians and that of non-Christians and pagans. Many pagan religions, as well as Roman Catholicism,

practise reciting certain prayers many times, using a “rosary” (i.e. a chain of beads) to count, to gain merits from their gods. True prayer is offered up to God out of faith in Jesus Christ.

2. The true Christian is saved by God’s grace, through faith in Christ alone. He has confessed his sins to God and acknowledged His mercy to him, an unworthy sinner. In his life as a believer, he continues to desire for things that are in accordance to God’s will. He continues to confess his sins to God and to thank Him for His mercies. All these are made possible only because of the sanctifying work of the Spirit in him. True prayer is different from merely “saying a prayer” (cf. Luke 18:9-14). True prayer arises from a heart that is converted, humble, and thankful (cf. Rom. 8:26-27).

Q82. What rule has God given for the direction of His people in prayer?

A82. The whole word of God is of use to direct His people in prayer¹, but the special rule of direction is that pattern of prayer, which Christ taught His disciples, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer².

1. *1 John 5:14, Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*
2. *Matt. 6:9-13, In this manner, therefore, pray: 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 into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Comments

1. The Lord’s Prayer is a pattern, or model, to guide believers. Although it is not wrong, on certain occasions, to recite the Lord’s Prayer, it is not meant for this purpose (Matt. 6:9 cf. verse 7). As far as the content and form of our prayers are concerned, the Lord’s Prayer teaches us to be: (i) God-centred; (ii) simple; (iii) brief; and (iv) comprehensive.
2. Other parts of the Bible reinforce what are alluded to in the Lord’s Prayer concerning the attitude and manner of prayer, which should be: (i) reverential; (ii) earnest; (iii) trustful; and (iv) persistent (e.g. Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8; Dan. 9:18-19).

Q83. What does the preface of the Lord’s Prayer teach His disciples?

A83. The preface of the Lord’s Prayer, which is, “Our Father in heaven”, teaches His disciples to draw near to God, with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help them¹, and that we should pray with² and for others³.

1. *Luke 11:13, If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*
2. *Matt. 18:19-20, Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*
3. *1 Tim. 2:1-2, Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*

Comments

1. A right relationship with God is essential before we can pray acceptably. It is only when we are converted - by grace through faith in Christ alone - that we become children of God (John 1:12-13 cf. John 8:43). Only true believers can call out from their heart to God, their Father in heaven (Rom. 8:14-15). It is not wrong to teach our children to pray. It is not wrong for non-believers to pray, especially when they are faced with a crisis. God, in His abundance of mercy, might hear them, with the view of drawing them to know Him through faith in Christ (cf. Mark 9:24; Acts 8:22).
2. The prayers of believers are heard by God because of the intercession of Christ the Mediator, who is divine and human, in one person (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-25). God is not so high above us as to be unreachable, nor so much like us as to be powerless to help. As the Father to believers, He hears the prayer of His children. As God in heaven, He is all-powerful and ready to help His children. God takes pleasure in His children drawing near to Him in prayers - both individually and corporately. He desires the prayer of His people to encompass not only personal needs, but also the needs of others.

Q84. What do we pray for in the first petition?

A84. In the first petition, which is “Hallowed be Your name”, Christians pray that God would enable them and others to glorify Him in all by which He makes Himself known¹, and that He would dispose all things to His own glory².

1. *Psalm 67:1-3, God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You.*
2. *Rom. 11:36, For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

Comments

1. The name represents the person. To desire God’s name to be “hallowed” is to desire God to be honoured highly. The desire of a Christian is for himself and others to highly honour God in all by which He makes Himself known. God makes Himself known by His word, His people, and His creation. The Christian would want to be faithful to His word, by preaching and teaching it faithfully. He would want the church reflect His glory - in her membership, government, worship, and service. The necessity of sounding forth warnings against heresies, practising separation from those in serious errors, and exercising corrective discipline must be seen in this light. While we pray for God to send a revival so that many souls will be saved, we must also engage in the reformation of the church so that we will be vessels worthy for God to use (Rom. 9:23; 2 Cor. 4:7).

Q85. What do Christians pray for in the second petition?

A85. In the second petition (which is, “Your kingdom come”) Christians pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed¹, and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced², sinners brought into it³, and believers kept in it⁴, and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened⁵.

1. *Psalm 68:1, Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him.*

2. *Psalm 51:18, Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem.*
3. *Matt. 9:37-38, Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."*
4. *John 17:15, 20, I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word*
5. *Rev. 22:20, He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

Comments

1. God's kingdom is His rule in the hearts of men (Luke 17:20; John 18:36). God's glory is seen in the church of Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:21). The salvation of souls and the building up of the church of Jesus Christ is bound up in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). There is no better way to glorify God than to live to build up the church of Jesus Christ.
2. God's kingdom is to be built up, not by imposing Christian values upon the institutions of this world, as the Theonomy (or Christian Reconstructionist) movement seeks to do, but by spiritual regeneration through the hearing of the gospel (Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:22-25). It is good for Christians to remember that the kingdom of God is spiritual, antithetical, and eschatological. Since it is spiritual, it is not to be advanced by the weapons of this world (2 Cor. 10:4). Since it is antithetical, it is to be separate from this world (1 John 2:15-17). Since it is eschatological, it is not to be confused with this temporary world (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Let us live as "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13).

Q86. What do Christians pray for in the third petition?

A86. In the third petition (which is "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven") Christians pray that God by His grace would make them able and willing to know¹, submit to^{2, 3}, and obey⁴ His will in all things, as the angels do in heaven⁵.

Notes: The answer has been slightly altered to follow the order of "mind, affection and will", so that we have "to know, submit to, and obey" instead of "to know, obey, and submit to".

1. *Psalm 119:34, Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*
2. *Job 1:21, And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*
3. *Acts 21:14, So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."*
4. *Psalm 119:35-36, Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness.*
5. *Psalm 103:20-21, Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.*

Comments

1. God's revealed will in the Bible is sufficient for all our needs (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Deut. 29:29). Left to ourselves, remaining sins hinder us from desiring to know, submit to, and obey God's will. We need God's grace to make us able and willing. Teachers are appointed in the church to help us grow spiritually. If the chief means of grace, viz. hearing God's word taught systematically and regularly, is not attended to, it is hard to expect spiritual growth (2 Pet. 3:16). It is a mistaken idea that "If you do not serve you cannot grow (spiritually)". Service should follow correct and good teaching, not *vice versa* (cf. Heb. 5:12-6:3). Do you seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33)?

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