

LORD'S DAY 45

116. Q. Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

A. Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us. ¹
Moreover, God will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them. ²

1. **Psalm 50:14-15** Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. ¹⁵ Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”

Psalm 116:12-19 What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me? ¹³ I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. ¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people. ¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints. ¹⁶ O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. ¹⁷ I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. ¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people, ¹⁹ in the courts of the Lord's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray

without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

2. **Matthew 7:7-8** Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Luke 11:9-13 So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 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!

117. Q. What belongs to a prayer which pleases God and is heard by Him?

A. First,
we must from the heart call upon the one true God only, who has revealed Himself in His Word, for all that He has commanded us to pray. ¹
Second,
we must thoroughly know our need and misery, so that we may humble ourselves before God. ²
Third,
we must rest on this firm foundation that, although we do not deserve it, God will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord, as He has promised us in His Word. ³

1. **Psalm 145:18-20** The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. ¹⁹ He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. ²⁰ The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.

John 4:22-24 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit

and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Romans 8:26-27 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. ²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

1 John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

2. **2 Chronicles 7:14** If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

2 Chronicles 20:12 O our God, will You not judge them? For 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.

Psalms 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Psalms 62:8 Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

Isaiah 66:2 For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.

Revelation 4

3. **Daniel 9:17-19** Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. ¹⁸ O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

Matthew 7:8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

John 14:13-14 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

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.

Romans 10:13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

118. Q. What has God commanded us to ask of Him?

A. All the things we need for body and soul, ¹ as included in the prayer which Christ our Lord Himself taught us.

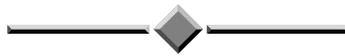
1 **Matthew 6:33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

119. Q. What is the Lord's Prayer?

A. *Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory for ever. Amen*

1 Matthew 6:9-13 ; Luke 11:2-4



In this Lord's Day the Catechism begins its discourse on prayer. That it comes last in the Catechism does not imply that it is the least important. Prayer is very important, for it is a fundamental means whereby we enjoy communion with God.

Already in Lord's Day 43 we mentioned that God created the gift of communication in order to make possible communion (fellowship) between God and us. God communicates with us through the written word of Holy Scripture, and we communicate with God through the spoken word of prayer.

This communication from God's side is very important, for if God does not communicate with us, we would find it impossible to communicate with Him. This is true also of our relationships with our friends. If we write letters to friends overseas, but never receive letters from them in return, we will find that after a while the relationship fails. After a while we lose interest and we don't know what to write about. If a relationship is to flourish there must be communication from both sides. It is no different with us in our relationship to God. If the line of communication from God's side fails, then the line of communication from our side will fail as well.

God communicates to us through His Word and through the preaching of His Word. It is our duty to open and read Holy Scripture and to place ourselves under the preaching. If we do not bother to read Scripture, and if we do not bother to listen to Him when He speaks to us in the preaching, we will find it extremely difficult to pray. Conversely, the more we busy ourselves with the Word of God, the more we will find ourselves in prayer to God.

The Necessity for Prayer

The Catechism says that prayer is necessary because it is the most important part of the thankfulness that God requires of us. Does this mean that *words* are more important to God than *works*? We often think just the opposite. We say that words are cheap. Or we say that actions speak louder than words. It is one thing to *say* that you are thankful, but it is something else to *show* thankfulness. We might suppose, therefore, that keeping God's commandments should be the chief part of our thankfulness to God.

The Catechism maintains, however, that prayer is the chief part of our thankfulness to God. We should not make this a dilemma, as though words are more important than works. Both words and works are

an important means of expressing our thankfulness. As far as words are concerned, Christ said, *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Matthew 12:34). Regarding works He said, *"If you love me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15).

Yet the Catechism says that prayer is the chief part of our thankfulness. This is true for two reasons.

1. In the first place, ***the chief means by which we express our thankfulness is through the spoken word, by way of prayer and song.*** This is evident from the book of Psalms:

- Psalm 9:1 *I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works.*
- Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.*
- Psalm 28:7 *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.*
- Psalm 57:7 *My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise.*
- Psalm 138:1 *I will praise You with my whole heart; before the gods I will sing praises to You.*

2. ***In the second place, prayer is the means whereby we receive the ability to do works of thankfulness.*** Of ourselves we are unable to do good works. Our inability to do good drives us to prayer. We ask God to give us His grace and Spirit and so enable us to do good works. Notice how many petitions of the Lord's Prayer are directed to doing good. We pray that God will rule us by His Word and Spirit so that we hallow His Name, work for the coming of His kingdom, and do His will at all times. Only through prayer do we receive the ability to keep God's commandments, and thereby show our love and gratitude

to God through works. Only those who pray are able to do good works.

When we speak about showing thankfulness to God by words and works, we should realise that God wants neither words nor works by themselves. For both words and works can be empty. As far as words are concerned, Christ said, *"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me"* (Matthew 15:8, cf. Isaiah 29:13). As far as works are concerned, God admitted that He found no fault with Israel as far as offering the required sacrifices were concerned. Yet God said, *"I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds...Offer to God thanksgiving"* (Psalm 50:9). God is only pleased with our words and works when they arise from a thankful and loving heart. For this reason the Catechism teaches us that we must call upon God *"from the heart."*

Prayer is not only needed to express our thankfulness to God, but also to express our dependence upon Him. God is glorified when we seek our needs from Him in prayer. For then we acknowledge that He is the God of providence. We do not lay our petitions before God in order to make Him aware of our needs, for *"your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him"* (Matthew 6:8). We lay our needs before God in acknowledgment that He is the fountain from which all blessings flow.

There are three things which we must know in order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God:

1. Knowledge of God (who God is, and what He has promised).
2. Knowledge of self (who we are and what we need).
3. Knowledge of Christ (who Christ is and what He has done).

1. Knowledge of God

Before we can pray to God we must know Him. Paul says, *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?"*

And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14).

Furthermore, we are required to pray with confidence. James wrote concerning prayer, *"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind"* (James 1:6). To have this confidence we need to know God, for we do not confide in someone who we do not know. We need to know about God's:

a. almighty power - Before we can ask God to provide us with our daily bread, we need to know that God is the almighty Creator and Sustainer of the world—the God of providence who makes the rain to fall, the sun to shine, the grass to grow, etc. Before we can ask God to heal us, we must believe that He is the God of life and death, health and sickness.

b. willingness - In order to pray with confidence we must be sure that God is willing to grant us what we ask of Him in prayer. We must come to know God as our Father through Jesus Christ who loves us and promises to provide us with all things we need.

For this reason the Catechism says *"that we must ...call upon the one true God only, who has revealed Himself in His Word."*

2. Knowledge of Self

In order to pray rightly we must know ourselves. We must know who we are and what we need. This knowledge of self falls under two categories:

1. We must know ourselves as **creatures** who are dependent upon God's **providential care**.

Man tends to be proud and haughty. He is inclined to believe that he is self-sufficient and that he is able to care for himself, that he does not need God. He relies upon his own strength and his own wisdom to provide himself with what is needed for life.

If we are to pray rightly, we need to know our dependence upon God. We

are but creatures. If God should withdraw His Spirit from us, we would return to dust. If God should close the heavens and withhold the rain, we would starve. We depend upon God to sustain us in life.

This knowledge of ourselves, as creatures dependent upon God, will set the right tone of **humility** in prayer.

2. We must know ourselves as **sinner**s who are dependent upon God's **grace**. We must always remind ourselves that we have no right of access to the throne of God. Like Israel was forbidden to enter into the Holy of Holies, so we by nature are barred from approaching God in prayer. We have no right to stand before God, for He is holy and we are sinners.

This knowledge of self will also set the proper tone of **humility** which belongs to prayer. Like the sinner who prayed in the temple, who, *"standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven,"* (Luke 18:13) so we fold our hands in meekness and bow our heads when we pray in order to show our unworthiness to come into the presence of God.

In order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God, we must also know what to pray for. Because of our corruption, it is possible for us to pray for things which displease God. James said, *"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures"* (James 4:3).

What are we to pray for? For all that we need for body and soul. We pray not just for our physical needs, but also our spiritual needs.

Our Physical Needs

Be aware that the emphasis falls upon the word *"needs"*. We do not pray for all the things we **want**, but for the things we **need**.

Our needs are not self-centred, but God-centred. We must not suppose that God exists to serve us to promote our happiness and our well-being. Rather, we are placed

on earth to serve God, to glorify Him and promote His kingdom. We must pray for all that we need that we may work fruitfully to fulfil these aims.

If our prayers are God-centred, we may be sure that God will provide us with all that we need, for He has promised this in His Word. Think of the well-known verses in the Sermon on the Mount: *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:31-33).

If we become ill, we do not pray for healing simply so that we can enjoy life longer. Rather, we pray for healing so that we might work fruitfully in God’s kingdom. (This was the motive of Hezekiah’s prayer for healing. He had not completed the *reformation* of Judah, and prayed that his life might be extended in order to further this work.) The same must be said concerning prosperity. We may not pray for prosperity so that we might bask in opulence, but we may pray for prosperity so that we might contribute to the work in God’s kingdom.

Our Spiritual Needs

Besides the physical there are also the spiritual needs which we must bring before the Lord.

We as humans were created to live in communion or fellowship with God. Without this communion we cannot rightly speak of life. Christ once said, *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent”* (John 17:3). This *“knowing God”* is more than just knowing about God. It refers to knowing God in a very personal and intimate way. This friendship or fellowship is an essential part of life. Our joy and satisfaction in life arises from this close communion with God.

We know, however, that our sins have made a separation between God and us (cf.

Isaiah 59:2). Our greatest spiritual need, therefore, is the restoration of communion (fellowship) between God and us. Since our sin has two aspects (guilt and corruption), the restoration of communion with God requires the removal of both guilt and corruption. Both of these aspects should be included in our prayers.

1. For communion to be restored between God and us, the **guilt** of our sin must be removed. God separated Himself from us because of our guilt. God’s wrath burned against us, and He excluded us from His glorious presence (which is Paul’s definition of eternal death, cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:9).

How desperately we need to receive the forgiveness of sins if we are to live in communion with God again. This prayer for forgiveness is the first great spiritual need that we must bring before God in prayer.

2. For communion to be restored between God and us, the **corruption** of our sin must be removed. As a result of our sin, our hearts became hard and corrupt. We no longer loved God, nor did we take delight in doing the good that God required. Rather, we hated God and delighted in sin.

How urgently we need to have our hearts cleansed of all hatred for God and all corrupt desires. This prayer for renewal of the heart is the second great spiritual need that we must bring before God in prayer.

3. The Knowledge of Christ

We have spoken earlier about God’s power and about God’s willingness to provide us with all that we need for body and soul. We must now focus our attention upon the work of Christ that makes God willing and able to provide us with what we need. Thus the third thing that we need to know in order to pray a God-pleasing prayer is the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When man sinned, God had to close the fountain of His blessing. For God is a God both of truth and justice. In Paradise God

said that if man obeyed, he would receive God's blessings eternally. But if he sinned, he would bring upon himself an everlasting curse. Because God is true and just, He cannot give blessings of life to those who are guilty of sin.

In order to satisfy both the truth and the justice of God, Christ came into the world. He took our sins upon Himself and made atonement. He rendered the obedience which we should have rendered, and He suffered the curse for our disobedience which we should have suffered eternally. On the basis of Christ's merits, we may now approach the Father and ask for His blessings in Christ's name.

This knowledge of Christ's redeeming work is an important aspect to that confidence

which is essential in a prayer that pleases God. Although we know that we are unworthy to receive anything good from the Father, we may be sure that God will grant us all that we need, for Christ has promised, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you*" (John 16:23). It is for this reason that we often close our prayer by saying something like "*Answer us for Jesus' sake*" or "*All this we ask in Jesus' Name.*"



Questions:

1. What is needed to make communion (fellowship) possible between God and man? How does God communicate with us? How do we communicate with God?
2. What would cause us to lose interest in prayer, or make it difficult for us to pray?
3. Why is prayer necessary?
4. Is it more important to show thankfulness to God by words rather than by deeds? Explain why (not).
5. For what two reasons does the Catechism say that prayer is the chief part of our thankfulness to God?
6. God is not pleased with our words and works by themselves. What is required to make them pleasing to God? Show this from the Scriptures.
7. Besides thankfulness, what do we express in prayer? How does this glorify God?
8. What three things must we know in order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God?
9. Why is this knowledge of God necessary for prayer? What did James write (cf. James 1:6)? What two things do we need to know about God?
10. What two things do we need to know about ourselves in order to pray properly? What tone does this set in our prayers? How does this become evident in our prayer-posture?
11. On what does the emphasis fall when we pray for our physical needs? Is this need self-centred? Of what may we be confident? Memorise Matthew 6:33.
12. What example from Scripture can you show of a prayer for physical needs that was God-centred?
13. May we pray for prosperity? If so, for what purpose?
14. How did Christ define eternal life? What does that mean? How did Paul define eternal death?
15. What two things must we ask God to remove from us in order to restore communion between God and us?
16. What is the third thing that we need to know in order to pray a prayer which is pleasing to God? What does this knowledge enable us to do? Is this important?