

The Lord's Prayer – "A Simple Way to Pray"

Reflections

"It is of great importance that the heart be made ready and eager for prayer." Martin Luther
"... no man should ask for, expect, or demand, anything at all except what is included, by way of summary, in [the Lord's Prayer]; and though the words may be utterly different, yet the sense ought not to vary." John Calvin¹

Review: Westminster Larger Catechism

Q. 185. How are we to pray?

A. 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.

Q. 186. What rule hath God given for our direction in the duty of prayer?

A. The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in the duty of prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which our Savior Christ taught his disciples, commonly called The Lord's Prayer. (1 John 5:14; Matthew 6:9-13)

Q. 187. How is the Lord's Prayer to be used?

A. The Lord's Prayer is not only for direction, as a pattern, according to which we are to make other prayers; but may also be used as a prayer, so that it be done with understanding, faith, reverence, and other graces necessary to the right performance of the duty of prayer.

The Lord's Prayer: Adequacy and Freedom

- Everything that is worthy of God, acceptable to God, and necessary for us--in effect, all that He would willing grant--is set forth in the Lord's Prayer.
- Use of the Lord's Prayer should keep us from:
 - Seeking to add to God's wisdom from our own; and
 - Uncontrolled desire and fails to confine itself to God's will.
- We are bound to the form of the words, but not the content. (see Calvin, above)

"Here nothing is left out that ought to be thought of in the praises of God, nothing left out that ought to come to man's mind for his own welfare ... this is the teaching of Divine Wisdom [Christ], teaching what is willed and willing what is needful."²

¹ Calvin, Institutes III.XX.49.

² Id.

Luther: "A Simple Way to Pray"

- **Centrality of the Scriptures in Prayer**

"First, when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other tasks or thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede and obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or if it be the day and hour for it, to the church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and, if I have some time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do."

- To what end, prior to prayer, does Luther use the Scriptures?

- **Occasions for prayer and distractions to prayer**

"... let prayer be the first business in the morning and the last at night."

[Calvin: "... when we rise in the morning, before we begin daily work, when we sit down to a meal, when by God's blessing we have eaten, when we are getting ready to retire."³]

"Guard yourself carefully against those false and deluding ideas ..."

- **Pray without ceasing and "the habit of true prayer"**

- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24 -- model of Biblical piety; cf., Psalm 1:1-2.
- Luke 11 -- persistence/perseverance in the habit of true prayer; cf., Psalm 22

"Yet we must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless in prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer."

- **"When you heart has been warmed ... and is intent on the matter ..."**

- Use of the Lord's Prayer

"Rather do I want your heart to be stirred and guided concerning the thoughts which ought to be comprehended in the Lord's Prayer. These thoughts may be expressed, if your heart is rightly warmed and inclined toward prayer, in many different ways and with more words or fewer. I do not bind myself to such words or syllables, but say my prayers in one fashion today, in another tomorrow, depending on my mood and feeling. I stay however, as nearly as I can, with the same general thoughts and ideas."

³ Calvin, Institutes III.XX.50.