

LD 45; Matthew 7: 7-11; Luke 18: 9-14; "The Prayer of the Righteous" I. Defining Prayer II. The Necessity of Prayer III. Identifying True Prayer

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, prayer is such a normal part of our life that we often forget how special and important it really is. I mean, we pray before and after meals. We pray at the end of every day. We even started our worship service with prayer. We pray so often, we might be tempted to see prayer as a simple ritual. But prayer is not a light thing! Prayer is a very expensive gift that has been purchased for us! I mean, the fact that we can call upon God and He would listen- even delight to hear from us- is a wonder! As a congregation we have finished our series through 10 Commandments, and now we begin our consideration of the Lord's Prayer. Before we get into the heart of the Lord's Prayer, we start by considering prayer in general. So what is prayer, where does it come from, and how should it function in our lives? So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ secures prayer for us and teaches us how to pray.

I. Defining Prayer

In our first point, we will begin by defining prayer. How would you define prayer? What is it, at its core? Although the Bible does not define prayer for us specifically, we do find many examples of prayer in the Bible. Chief among them would be the High Priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 and the Lord's Prayer as it is included in Matthew 6. Prayer is at its core a conversation with God- prayer is communion. Where God talks to us in His Word, we respond to Him in prayer. The Westminster Confession defines prayer as the offering up of desires to God in the name of Christ by the help of the Holy Spirit. Prayer has also been defined as asking God for what He has promised. So there is a clear aspect of asking something from God that is evident in prayer. But did you notice that our Catechism does not start with this aspect- rather the Catechism starts with the thanksgiving aspect. You will note that in QA 116 we find that prayer is the most important part of thankfulness that God requires of us. Later on in QA 118 we will see that we are in fact to ask of God everything that we need by way of prayer. But thanksgiving comes first. So although we could say that prayer is asking God for what we need- we should start by saying that prayer is thanking God for what He has given! Remember that we are in the

3rd section of the Catechism. Obeying the 10 Commandments is how we should show God that we are thankful. But it is in prayer that we thank God verbally and specifically for what we have received from His hand! This is an important reminder- because thanksgiving tends to be lacking in our prayers. We tend to start by asking and end by asking- but starting with thanksgiving reminds us to acknowledge our God as the fount and source of every good and perfect gift! But there is time for asking as well. The order that we find in Psalm 50:14 is instructive. First we are told to offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. And next we read that we are to call upon God in the day of trouble. So call- yes! As we find in Mt. 7- ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open. Prayer is to call upon God as you ask for what you need each day- for your body and your soul as QA 118 says. Like the poor invalid crying out for alms, without God giving to us according to our needs we would have nothing! As I Tim. 2 puts it, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people. True prayer is also uniquely Trinitarian. As Jesus taught His disciples to pray- our Father. Prayer is available to us because Jesus has secured this right. We have blood bought access to the throne of God- to present ourselves before the throne of the Father. Jesus is interceding at the Father's right hand for us. But we also have the gift of the Holy Spirit who intercedes within us. It is this same Spirit who puts into words the groans of our heart- enabling us to cry out Abba Father.

II. The Necessity of Prayer

Now that we have considered what prayer is, in our second point we will see why it is that we must and we will pray! In the first point it could have been said that we need to pray because we are so needy and we will pray because we are thankful. Now that is true- but there is also one, pressing reason why we must pray! And that reason is simply that prayer is required of us by God! God calls us and commands us to pray! Notice that Jesus said- not "if" you pray- but "when" you pray! Prayer is a regular and necessary part of our life- as necessary as breathing. Every Christian will pray- a non-praying Christian is an oxymoron- and impossibility! As we read in Psalm 50- call upon me! A command! Or as Jesus said- ask, seek and knock! The prayer of a righteous man is powerful- doors open by it! Prayer is

and will be evident in our lives because God calls us to come- it is part of our worship and an act of faith! For a Christian, prayer will be a constant part of our lives. I Thes 5:17 calls us to pray without ceasing. Now this does not mean that we will live our lives with closed eyes and folded hands- but rather prayer - our communion with God- will be consistent! Each day lived in God's presence- each day asking God for what we need. Each day- thanking God for His gifts! This pleases God- and He would see His children call upon Him! Even persistence- as the widow of Luke 18 illustrates- is a praiseworthy trait! But not only is the command of God a motivation- the promise of God should also motivate us. As we read in Matthew 7:11- your Father in heaven will give good things to those who ask Him! The promise that God will surely give good gifts to those who ask for those good gifts is a promise that should stir us on into prayer! Do you need grace- do you want the Holy Spirit? Then pray! Listen again to QA 116- why do Christians need to pray? Because prayer is the most important part of thankfulness that God requires of us- so we need to pray because God requires us to pray. And we need to pray because God gives His grace and Spirit to those who ask Him for these! So it is the command and the promise of God that motivates us to pray! As Psalm 34:15 put it, God's ear is towards the cry of the righteous.

III. Identifying True Prayer

Now that we have seen that prayer is important- even a necessary part of a Christian's life- what remains is to identify true prayer. What are the parts or the marks of a true prayer? Even more specifically- what does a person of true prayer look like? To answer this question, we will compare and contrast the two men from our parable in Luke 18. One offered a true prayer that was answered while the other did not. As James says- it is possible to pray in such a way as to not be heard- if you pray for the wrong things in the wrong way. First we hear the prayer of the Pharisee. We can learn from his attitude and words. The Pharisee stands by himself and prays to himself and about himself. He stands in the open in order to be seen. In his prayer, he seeks to justify himself as he trusts in himself. His words are filled with boasting and pride. The Pharisee's prayer started good- I thank you God- but after that, his prayer falls off the rails. I thank you that I am better than everyone else- especially this sinner over there. I thank you that I am and that I do! He lists his own works as the basis of his acceptance- his own holy actions and tithe

giving. As Jesus introduces this mindset in 18:9- someone who trusted in themselves - relying on their own righteousness. He sees himself as worthy and better than others. This one's prayer is not a true prayer- and his words are not accepted. In contrast to this Pharisee- Jesus tells of a tax collector and his prayer. The tax collector comes in humility and stands at a distance. He knows that he is unworthy. He beats his chest in contrition. His words are filled with sorrow over his sins- he cries out for mercy. This sinner has come to the temple with a hope in a mediator and not himself or his own works. Now what was the end result? Well, it was the tax collector who was forgiven- he went home justified! His prayer was heard and answered. Now what makes the difference here? First of all, the person who prays is to be humble- the prayer is to be offered from the heart that acknowledges our need and misery as QA 117 puts it. He prayed for what he needed- forgiveness! It is the simple and straightforward prayer that is received. One offered in faith. Not the words of the proud man- not the vain, flowery words of someone who likes to hear his own voice. True prayer is a humble conversation with the heavenly Father. And in contrast with the Pharisee- one whose prayers will be accepted must trust in someone else- must rely on the righteousness of another! In other words, only those who have true faith in Jesus Christ! The Pharisee's prayer is all about me- what I have done. The forgiven sinner's prayer is one that is all about God and what He has done!

As we close, the centrality of prayer in the Christian's life is clear from its necessity and command. It is interesting that we have to be told to pray. Do children need to be reminded to be thankful to their parents? Yes- they do! We are such forgetful children- we think that we can make it on our own or that we got here on our own. As parents have to remind their children after receiving a gift- Now what do you say? So Jesus reminds us- when you pray! We will pray because we must pray! Because we are so thankful and because we are so needy! When should we pray? Always- without ceasing. Every day- as a part of your daily walk! Even when you don't feel like it- especially when you don't feel like it- God's people will be people of prayer. Jesus Christ secures prayer for us and teaches us how to pray. Thank you Jesus- for the gift of prayer.