

## **Advanced Bible Correspondence Course Lesson 45A**

In the Heidelberg Catechism, prayer follows after the commandments. In the Bible, commandment and prayer are also joined together. One example: *"Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes!"* (Psalm 119: 4-5). True Christians, who have been regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit, constantly pray to the Lord to daily increase their living according to God's commandments. Prayer is indispensable for communion with God. In prayer, we may have contact with God in a very intimate way, and we may tell Him all our needs. At the same time, a distance also remains: an insignificant creature has an audience with the highest Majesty.

### **LORD'S DAY 45**

#### **Q. 116. WHY IS PRAYER NECESSARY FOR CHRISTIANS?**

**A. BECAUSE IT IS THE CHIEF PART OF THANKFULNESS WHICH GOD REQUIRES OF US (A): AND ALSO, BECAUSE GOD WILL GIVE HIS GRACE AND HOLY SPIRIT TO THOSE ONLY, WHO WITH SINCERE DESIRES CONTINUALLY ASK THEM OF HIM, AND ARE THANKFUL FOR THEM (B).**

(A) PSALM 50:14; (B) MATTHEW 7:7, LUKE 11:9,13, 1 THESSALONIANS 5:17.

### **Prayer is necessary**

Prayer is essential for Christians. "Pray without ceasing," said Paul (1Thessalonians 5:17). God has commanded and ordered it. It is the explicit will of the Lord that we pray. *"Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"* (Matthew 7:7).

First of all, prayer is the chief part of thankfulness. God says, *"Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High"* (Psalm 50:14). It is thankfulness for deliverance from the power of Satan and for the forgiveness of sins. Thankfulness is expressed in keeping God's commandments. However, we are unable to keep those commandments in our own strength. We are incapable of fulfilling the law. Therefore prayer is necessary. "Grand grace, O Lord, that we may treasure Thy law, and faithfully rejoice in Christ alone, with strength and pleasure serve Thee, with thankful heart and voice" (The Ten Commandments, verse 9).

Secondly, God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them. The Lord has connected praying and receiving. “*Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it*” (Psalm 81:10b) Christ gives a beautiful example of a persistent prayer in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8)

### **Why pray?**

Prayer must be made without ceasing. Paul said: “*Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving*” (Colossians 4:2).

What must the believing Christian ask the most for in prayer? For God’s grace and the Holy Spirit! This concerns the grace of sanctification and the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart. These are the spiritual benefits, and are the most important in our lives. With sincere desires and without ceasing we must and may pray for them. One who truly prays is actually a beggar. A thankful beggar at that, for prayer must also be combined with thankfulness for all the gifts of grace given by the Lord. Without thankfulness prayer is not pleasing to God.

**Q 117. WHAT ARE THE REQUISITES OF THAT PRAYER, WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, AND WHICH HE WILL HEAR?**

**A. FIRST, THAT WE FROM THE HEART (A) PRAY TO THE ONE TRUE GOD ONLY, WHO HATH MANIFESTED HIMSELF IN HIS WORD (B), FOR ALL THINGS, HE HATH COMMANDED US TO ASK OF HIM (C); SECONDLY, THAT WE RIGHTLY AND THOROUGHLY KNOW OUR NEED AND MISERY (D), THAT SO WE MAY DEEPLY HUMBLE OURSELVES IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS DIVINE MAJESTY (E); THIRDLY, THAT WE BE FULLY PERSUADED (F) THAT HE, NOTWITHSTANDING THAT WE ARE UNWORTHY OF IT, WILL, FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST OUR LORD, CERTAINLY HEAR OUR PRAYER (G), AS HE PROMISED US IN HIS WORD (H).**

(A) JOHN 4:24, PSALM 145:18; (B) REVELATION 19:10, JOHN 4 22-24; (C) ROMANS 8:26, 1 JOHN 5:14, JAMES 1:5; (D) 2 CHRONICLES 20:12; (E) PSALM 2:11, 34:18, ISAIAH 66:2; (F) ROMANS 10:14, JAMES 1:6; (G) JOHN 14:13, 16:23, DANIEL 9:18; (H) MATTHEW 7:8, PSALM 27:8.

### **How must we pray?**

Now that we have heard *that* we must pray, we now read in answer 117 how we must pray. This concerns a prayer that is acceptable to the Lord. The Catechism mentions three marks of a true prayer:

1. praying to the true God,
2. praying in deep humility, and
3. trusting in his grace.

### **Praying only to God**

First, we must call upon the only true God and on Him alone. That is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we must not pray to creatures. Prayer is an honour of which only God is worthy. Christ said to Satan, who sought to tempt Him, that it is written: “*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve*”. (Matthew 4:10b). We must pray to God as he has revealed Himself

in His Word. How did He reveal Himself? It is as a God who is angry about our sins, but also as a God who is great in loving-kindness and mercy. The Lord has made Himself know as the Hearer of prayer. It is that God whom we must call upon for all what He commanded us to pray. John wrote: *“And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us”* (1 John 5:14). We must pray with our heart, and not without thinking about what we are praying.

We pray with our heart when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of grace and supplications, works in our heart. The Lord said of Paul: *“For, behold he prayeth”* (Acts 9:11).

### **Nothing deserved**

Secondly because of our need and misery, we must pray humbly. Our deepest misery is not our poverty, loneliness, sickness, or whatever else there may be. No, our deepest misery, also when we are children of God, is that we are sinners. Even then we still have many sinful desires within us, against which we have to fight. For that reason we only deserve the curse of God and eternal death. When we know our need and misery in a right and thorough way, this will humble us before God. Then our prayer will also become humble. Because of our sins, we must humble ourselves before God’s majesty, that is, bow down in shame. There must be knowledge of God and knowledge of self. We are guilty and miserable before that great and holy God. We are beggars who have no rights. Only the Holy Spirit can make us aware of our need and misery. David says: *“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit”* (Psalm 34:18)

### **Praying trustingly**

Thirdly, we must trust that God will answer our prayer when we pray to Him in faith. We must not approach God in a doubting frame of mind. We read in the epistle to the Hebrews: *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6). “For Christ’s sake” means, that one, although in himself so unworthy, still may hope for an answer, for Christ merited it. Although we are so guilty, we still have a firm ground to hope that our prayers will be answered. Christ says: *“Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you”* (John 16:23). We have no merits and we are not worthy, but the Lord, in spite of all this, promised that He for Christ’s sake will answer the prayers of His Children. *“For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh shall be opened”* (Matthew 7:8).

This does not mean that God will always answer in the way we would like. God did not give heed to Moses, when he prayed that he would be allowed to enter into the earthly land of Canaan. However, he was permitted to see the land (Deuteronomy 3:25-27). And he was allowed to enter into the heavenly Canaan. Paul besought the Lord that He would take away the vexation of the thorn in his

flesh which God had given him (a messenger of Satan to buffet him). The Lord did not give heed, but did give him grace to be able to bear this vexation: *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

On the one hand, we may pray to God in full confidence. On the other hand, we must render deep reverence because of the holiness of God. Reverence before the Lord ought to be shown by our posture during prayer. In biblical times, men lifted up their eyes unto heaven, with their arms extended and the palms of hand turned upwards. Today a much used posture of prayer is the closing of the eyes and folding the hands. Closed eyes indicate a disconnecting from the world; folded hands indicate dependence. The psalmist said: *“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker”* (Psalm 95:6).

*Questions:*

1. What is the chief part of thankfulness?

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2. How should we pray? (Read 1Thessalonians 5:17).

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3. In which Psalm do we clearly read the connection between praying and receiving?

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4. What is to be asked for most in prayer?

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5. What should go together with prayer?

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6. What three characteristics does true prayer have?

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7. What is necessary to know in order to pray humbly?

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8. What does Matthew 7:8 say about answers to prayer?

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Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_

