

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

SHORTER CATECHISM

LESSON # 48 (Q4LES9) - PRAYER

1. **Prayer**
2. **Bible reading: Matt 6: 1 - 15**
3. **Review:** In our last lesson, we discussed the sacrament of the Lord's supper. The Lord's supper is the second and final of Christ's New Testament sacraments. It is a sacrament and seal of the covenant of grace, wherein the mutual obligations, both on God's part, and on our part, which are made in baptism, are renewed and confirmed. The outward representations of this sacrament are the breaking of bread, and the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine, according to Christ's appointment, the bread and wine representing Christ's body and blood, which were broken and shed for the elect. When participated in properly, it is a chance for believers to examine themselves, and their progress down the road of sanctification. Participation in the Lord's supper is reserved for the elect, and those nonbelievers who knowingly partake are sinning against God, and may bring judgement to themselves.
4. **Introduction:** In this lesson, we will discuss SC questions 98 and 99. These two questions deal with the last of Christ's ordinances, and introduce the subject of Prayer, which is the subject of the remaining eight SC questions. Question 98 introduces and defines prayer, while question 99 tells us how our Lord wants us to pray.

5. Questions & Answers:

Question 98: What is prayer?

Answer: Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.

Question 99: What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?

Answer: The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples, commonly called the Lord's Prayer.

6. The SC, LC, and WCF

- a. The SC covers the introduction to prayer in two questions, q98 and 99. The LC covers everything in the SC, and a whole lot more. The material covered in SC q98 is covered in LC q178 through 185, and the material covered in SC q99 takes LC q186, 187, and 188. A discussion of prayer is found in the WCF, in chapter 21, Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day.

7. What is prayer?

- a. Prayer is the last of the Christ's of the three ordinances of Christ.

What are Christ's ordinances?

- The Word
- The Sacraments
- Prayer

Remember, the answer to SC q88 says: *"The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation."*

- b. The SC, in answer to q98, says: *"Prayer is an offering up of desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies."*
- c. The LC answer, given in answer to q178, is very similar, but adds: *"by the help of his Spirit"*. This is reinforced by WCF c21p3 which says the same thing. We will talk about this in a minute.

8. "an offering up of our desires unto God"

- a. To whom are we to pray? To God only. [If answer is "to God", respond with; "that is partially correct, but there is more to it than that."] **(Psalm 5: 1 – 3 ⁽¹⁾Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my meditation. ⁽²⁾Harken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. ⁽³⁾My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.)** Also (Rom 10: 14 talking about those who call upon the name of the Lord **"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?..."**
- b. Why should we pray to God only? The LC q179 says: *"God only being able to search the hearts, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfil the desires of all;*

and only to be believed in, and worshipped with religious worship;” TV lists these reasons for praying to God only. They are consistent with the LC answer:

- Because prayer is a part of religious worship, and God is the only object of religious worship. (**Matt 4:10** *“Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”*)
- Because God only is everywhere present to see his people, and to hear their prayers. (**Psalm 34:15** *The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.*)
- Because God only can answer our prayers by fulfilling our desires, and giving the things which we pray for and stand in need of. (**Psalm 145: 18 – 19** *“(18)The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. (19)He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them.”*)

It makes sense that, as there is only one God, it should be to Him that we direct our prayers.

Catholics pray to others, such as Mary. Why is this wrong?

c. Offering up our desires unto God. For what are we to pray?

- C21p3 if the WCF says simply *“according to his will”* (**1 John 5:14** *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:”*)
- LC q184 says: *“We are to pray for all things tending to the glory of God (Matt 6:9), the welfare of the church (Psalm 51:18), our own (Matt 7:11), or others good (Psalm 125:4), but not for anything that is unlawful.”* (**James 4:3** *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”*)
- TV has an interesting answer to this question. He says: *“The things which we may pray for, are not all things which are agreeable to his secret will; for thus all things which come to pass, even the worst of sins which are committed, are agreeable unto God’s secret counsel and eternal determination; but all things which are agreeable unto God’s revealed will in his Word, we may pray for; such as the pardon of our sins, the supplies of his grace, spiritual life and strength here, eternal life and glory hereafter, deliverance from spiritual and eternal evils; also whatever temporal good things we stand in need of, and all those things which either expressly or inclusively he hath promised in his covenant unto us.”*

Not only is God totally in charge, but we are not a part of his counsel, and should direct our efforts in prayer to His will revealed in His Word. We are not responsible for God’s secret will.

- LC q183 asks “For whom are we to pray?” It answers: *We are to pray for the whole church of Christ, upon earth; for magistrates, and ministers; for ourselves, our brethren, yea, our enemies; but not for the dead, nor for those that are known to have sinned the sin unto death.*” (2 Sam 12: 21 – 23
“(21) Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done: thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. (22) And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live: (23) But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast: can I bring him back again: I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”))
- What is the purpose of adding, at the end, the part about not praying for the dead? Is this again, a response to the doctrine of the Catholics? Could it have something to do with the fact that the dead are beyond our help?
- What about that new stereo, or new car, or a victory for your favorite sports team?
- What about repetition of requests; asking for something more than once? (Matt 6:7 *“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”*)

9. In the name of Christ

- a. In whose name should we pray to God?

In the name of Jesus Christ. (John 14: 13 – 14 *“(13) And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (14) If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”*)

- b. What is it to pray in the name of Christ?

LC q180 says: *“To pray in the name of Christ is, in obedience to his command, and in confidence on his promises, to ask mercy for his sake; not by the bare mentioning of his name, but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and mediation.”* (Eph 3: 11 - 12 *“(11) According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: (12) In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.”*)

- c. Why must we pray in the name of Jesus Christ? (I like this.)

LC q181 says: *“The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator; and there being none in heaven or earth appointed to, or fit for, that glorious work but Christ alone, we are to pray in no other name but his only.”* (Isaiah 59:2 **“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and you sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”** Also John 14:6 **“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”**)

The WCF, c21p3 states, in part: *“Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men: and that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son,,,”*

- d. Again, back to SC q20 & 21, Christ is identified as our redeemer. LC says “mediator”. SCq25, dealing with Christ’s execution of the duties of a Priest, includes “making continual intercession for us.”
- e. Is the Spirit involved in our prayer, and if so, how?

LC q182 says, in answer to this question: *“We not knowing what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, by enabling us to understand both for whom, and what, and how prayer is to be made; and by working and quickening in our hearts (although not in all persons, nor at all times, in the same measure) those apprehensions, affections, and graces which are requisite for the right performance of that duty.”* (Rom 8: 26 – 27 ⁽²⁶⁾**Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.** ⁽²⁷⁾**And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”**

The WCF, c21p3 simply states, in part: *“by the help of his Spirit.”*

10. With confession of our sins.

- a. TV states: *“In prayer, we should make confession of our original and actual sins against law and gospel; of omission and commission, in thought and heart, of lip and life, with aggravations of them; acknowledging withal our desert of temporal, spiritual, and eternal judgements and punishments for them.”* (Psalm 32: 5 – 6 ⁽⁵⁾**I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.** ⁽⁶⁾**For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.”**

More about this when we discuss question 105.

11. Thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.

- a. TV says: *“The third part of prayer is, thankful acknowledgement of God’s mercies, temporal and spiritual, here, and the promises of life and happiness in the other world; which we ought to acknowledge with admiration, faith, love, joy, and all kind of suitable affections. “ (Phil 4:6 “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”)*

More about this when we discuss question 107.

12. What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?

- a. Two rules: (SCq99)
 - The whole Word of God
 - The Lord’s Prayer
- b. The whole The whole word of God. We are directed to use His Word for direction in prayer. **(1 John 5:14 “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”)**

And where is God’s will revealed? In His Word.

- c. LC q188 points out that the Lord’s Prayer can be used not only for direction, but also as a prayer by itself. **(Luke 11:2 “And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.”)**
- d. And, LC q189 instructs us that the Lord’s Prayer consists of three parts, a preface, petitions, and a conclusion.
- e. The Lord’s Prayer. The “special rule of direction is that form of prayer which Christ taught his disciples”. Jesus, in the sermon on the mount, instructed his disciples to pray, giving them the Lord’s Prayer. **“Matt 6: 9 – 13 “⁽⁹⁾After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. ⁽¹⁰⁾Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ⁽¹¹⁾Give us this day our daily bread. ⁽¹²⁾And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ⁽¹³⁾And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.)**

12. Summary

- a. Prayer is a form of communication with God. God directs us to pray to him. And he has given us a mediator, so that the prayers of sinful man may be heard and answered by the all glorious God. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God. Prayer should only be made for things that are agreeable to His will, and should be made in the name of His Holy Son, our mediator, Jesus Christ. Prayer should also include confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies. God has provided us with a guideline for prayer, His Word, and with help in His Spirit. His special direction in prayer is provided by His Son, and is called the Lord's Prayer.