

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 98 What is prayer?

A. 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.

Scripture References: Ps. 62:8. I John 5:14. Matt. 26:39. John 16:23. Daniel 9:4. Phil. 4:6.

Questions:

1. Some feel that prayer is simply petitions of God. Is this the only part of prayer?

No, petitions are certainly not the only part of prayer though they are basic to prayer as we offer up our desires to Him.

2. What other kinds of prayer are legitimate?

We can confess in prayer and we can give our thanksgivings to God. However, the matter of our supplications to God are important in His sight.

3. When we say we are to offer up our desires to God do we simply mean the Father?

Certainly we do not mean simply God the Father though most prayers are offered in that way, in the name of Jesus Christ. However, when we pray to God it is understood that all members of the Trinity are being addressed.

4. Could you list some of the things that would be agreeable to His will in our prayers?

As we pray we can ask Him for spiritual grace and strength for each day, for deliverance from temptations, for the pardon of our sins, for the vision of that wonderful day we will be with Him, for our brethren in the Lord.

5. Why is it necessary that we pray in the name of Jesus Christ?

We must pray in the name of Christ because our sinfulness is so great that we have no ability to reach God without the Mediator that has been supplied for us.

6. Why is it necessary to confess our sins in our prayers?

It is necessary for us to confess our sins for He will not hear us if there is iniquity in our hearts. (Ps. 66:18)

7. What are the mercies for which we should be thankful?

These mercies are His free gifts to us, both spiritual and temporal. His mercy is great and free and we could not live without it.

PRAYER IS VITAL

In the year 1898 two members of the Presbytery of New York returned to their work from a Bible conference. A called meeting of Presbytery was held. One asked a question concerning the prayer life of the brethren. "Brethren, let us today make confession before God and each other. It will do us good. Will every one who spends half an hour every day with God in prayer regarding His work hold up his hand? Fifteen minutes?" Not a hand went up. The minister then said, "Prayer, the working power of the Church of Christ, and not one person spends fifteen minutes a day!"

We all know that our Bible reading and our Bible study is important to us. But supremely important is our regular, earnest, daily prayer. There is a parallel here between the spiritual and the physical. So far as our bodies are concerned we must have air to breathe. The spiritual air we have to breathe is our prayer life. When prayer dies out spiritual life dies out and becomes feeble.

E. M. Bounds, a great prayer warrior, once said, "Prayer is a privilege, a sacred, princely privilege. Prayer is a duty, an obligation most binding, and most imperative, which should hold us to it. But prayer is more than a privilege, more than a duty. It is a means, an instrument, a condition. Not to pray is to lose much more than to fail in the exercise and enjoyment of a high or sweet privilege. Not to pray is to fail among lines far more important than even the violation of an obligation."

Time and time again in the history of the Christian Church it has been proven that the thing of supreme importance is the practice of daily, private prayer. God has used those who make use of this privilege before Him. We do not mean to intimate that Bible study is not important. But the more a believer knows of the Word of God the more he will know the important of his prayer life. J. Sidlow Baxter once said that the Christian service was the "Outer Court" of the Tabernacle. Bible study was the "Holy Place" of the Tabernacle. But prayer was the "Holy of Holies" and must be carried on without ceasing.

How much time do we spend in prayer? Have we developed the sacred habit of daily prayer? May we read Rev. 5:8 and ask God to give us no rest until we are consistent in our prayer lives!

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Rev. Leonard T. Van Horn
Editor

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