

Prayer (Rev. Bill Langerak)

Not everyone can pray. Nor is every prayer heard (Is. 1:15). Prayer is a distinctly holy and covenantal activity. Prayer is that act of faith whereby a child of God communicates with his covenant Lord, worships Him, petitions Him for what he needs, and thanks Him for what he receives. Prayer and thanksgiving are friends. One cannot pray without thanks, for God gives His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who are continually thankful for them (L.D. 45). Nor can one give thanks without prayer, for it is the chief part of thankfulness. But prayer is not chiefly giving thanks. It also consists of cries and groaning (Ps. 5:2; 38:9), supplication and intercession (Ps. 6:9; Jer. 27:18), confession and praise (Ps. 5:7; Dan. 9:4).

As an act of loving faith, prayer is addressed only to the one true God revealed in Scripture (Q&A 117). And He does not hear prayers to saints, other gods, or creatures. He that comes to God must believe that He is (Heb. 11:6), that He is great (II Sam. 7:22), is creator of heaven and earth (Is. 37:16), is God alone, and that He keeps covenant and mercy with His servants (I Kings 8:23). Significantly, therefore, most prayers in the Old Testament use His outstanding covenantal name. They are not addressed simply to God, but Jehovah, Jehovah-God, Jehovah of Israel, or Jehovah of hosts. And Jesus taught us to address this merciful, covenant-keeping God as Father (Matt. 6:9).

Prayer must be humble. God does not hear the hypocrite or pretentious (Luke 18:14; Matt. 6:6). He does not heed vanity or regard iniquity (Job 35:13; Ps. 66:18). To pray rightly, we must thoroughly know our need and misery, so that we humble ourselves before His divine majesty (Q&A 117). But this does not preclude confidence, for we must be fully persuaded that He will certainly hear us, although we are unworthy of it (Jer. 29:12), and that He does not hear us for our long prayers or repetitions (Matt. 6:7), but for Christ's sake grants what we ask in Jesus' name (John 16:26).

Petitions are an important part of prayer. He that comes to God must believe He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6), or as Jesus put it, that we will receive whatsoever we shall ask believing (Matt. 21:22). Believing, we must ask only for things He has commanded in His word (Q&A 117). He does not hear petitions for things contrary to His will or everything we desire. He requires that we ask for things *necessary* for body and soul (Q&A 118). And so Scripture records many such petitions, prayers for good (Jer. 14:11), peace (Jer. 29:7), deliverance from judgment (Num. 21:7), that our faith fail not (Luke 22:32), for God to hear us (I Kings 8:29), to look on our affliction (I Sam. 1:11), to spare us sickness or death (II Kings 4:34; 20:5), to deliver us from enemies (Neh. 4:9), and to lead us in the ways of righteousness (Ps. 5:8).

Being a distinctly covenantal activity, prayer is concerned with the needs of the entire family of God. Jesus taught us not simply to pray for ourselves personally, but to pray give *us* our daily bread, forgive *us* our debts, and deliver *us* from evil (Matt. 6:11-13). We must pray for the sins of the church (II Chron. 30:18), the pardon of foolish friends (Job 42:10), preachers for the whole harvest (Matt. 9:38), and that the kingdom and covenant be established forever to God's glory (II Sam. 7:26). And yet, even while asking God to observe the wickedness of our enemies (II Kings 19:16), we must also pray for them who spitefully use and persecute us (Matt. 5:44).

Prayer is necessary for a Christian (L.D. 45). It is necessary because God requires it as an expression of thanksgiving and fellowship, and because only He can provide what is necessary for body and soul. Everyone that is godly prays (Ps. 32:6). It is an activity of covenant children (I Sam. 3:10), mothers (I Sam. 1:10), fathers (Gen. 20:17), widows (Luke 2:36), and servants (Gen. 24:12). Ancient leaders, esteemed patriarchs, busy priests, faithful prophets, and mighty kings all prayed. Even the Son of God found it necessary to go often to some solitary place to pray (Matt. 14:23). How much more, then, we, who are weak and sinful! And so we must pray in the morning and when God may be found (Ps. 5:3; 32:6), pray that we enter not into temptation or faint not (Mark 13:33; Luke 18:1), pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17), and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to stand before Him (Luke 21:36). Let us, then, pray.