

A SPRINT THROUGH CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ

I. Book III, Chapter 20, entitled "Prayer, Which Is the Chief Exercise of Faith, and by Which We Daily Receive God's Benefits"

"Religion on earth finds its highest expression in the act of prayer." - Abraham Kuyper

"The prayer of a Christian is not an attempt to force God's hand, but a humble acknowledgement of helplessness and dependence. When we are on our knees, we know that it is not we who control the world; it is not in our power, therefore, to supply our needs by our independent efforts; every good thing that we desire for ourselves and for others must be sought from God, and will come, if it comes at all, as a gift from His hands." - J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 11.

II. How Should Christians Pray?

A. Two Images to Keep in Mind: "Treasure" and "Father"

"But after we have been instructed by faith to recognize that whatever we need and whatever we lack is in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ...so that we may all draw from it as from an overflowing spring, it remains for us to seek in him, and in prayer to ask of him, what we have learned to be in him. Otherwise, to know God as the Master and Bestower of all good things, who invites us to request them of him, and still not go to him and not ask of him—this would be of as little profit as for a man to neglect a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him... Therefore we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is it that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon." (3.20.1)

"For prayer was not ordained that we should be haughtily puffed up before God, or greatly esteem anything of ours, but that, having confessed our guilt, we should deplore our distresses before him, as children unburden their troubles to their parents." (3.20.12, 14)

B. Pray Expectantly: If God Already Knows, Why Pray?

"...they who thus reason do not observe to what end the Lord instructed his people to pray, for he ordained it not so much for his own sake as for ours...that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him." (3.20.3)

- What else can we add?

"The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." (James 5:16)

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance. Prayer is laying hold of God's willingness." - Martin Luther

"[Prayer] is not so much a means of talking God into a position repugnant to Him as a God-ordained means of obtaining the blessings that God in the perfection of His virtues is willing to bestow." - D.A. Carson

C. Pray Patiently: What If God Doesn't Seem to Hear? - *"...still very often [our most merciful Father] gives the impression of one sleeping or idling in order that he may thus train us, otherwise idle and lazy, to seek, ask, and entreat him to our great good."* (3.20.3)

D. Pray Properly: According to God's Revealed Will

- Does this mean we never pray according to God's "secret will"?
- How does spiritual maturity influence the effectiveness of our prayers?

III. The Lord's Prayer - *"...the first three petitions have been particularly assigned to God's glory... The three others are concerned with the care of ourselves" (3.20.35)*

- A. "Our Father..."** - *"...in calling God 'Father,' we put forward the name 'Christ'... By the sweetness of this name he frees us from all distrust, since no greater feeling of love can be found elsewhere than in the Father... For he is not only a father but by far the best and kindest of all fathers, provided we still cast ourselves upon his mercy..." (3.20.36-37)*
- How do the opening words remind us of Christ? Why is Christ crucial to all our prayers?
 - Additionally, what benefit can be derived from using the word "our" (instead of "my")?
- B. "...in heaven"** - *"...from this we are not immediately to reason that he is bound, shut up, and surrounded... [I]t signified that he embraces and holds together the entire universe and controls it by his might... [and] from his governing of the universe we are forcibly reminded that we do not come to him in vain..." (3.20.40)*
- How do the first four words of the Lord's Prayer give us both trust and confidence in prayer?
- C. "...hallowed be your name"** - *"...here we are bidden to request not only that God vindicate his sacred name of all contempt and dishonor but also that he subdue the whole race of mankind to reverence for it." (3.20.41)*
- D. "...your kingdom come"** - *"...God reigns where men, both by denial of themselves and by contempt of the world and of earthly life, pledge themselves to his righteousness in order to aspire to a heavenly life... Therefore God sets up his Kingdom by humbling the whole world, but in different ways." (3.20.42)*
- In what ways does God extend His Kingdom? Are there "inward" and "outward" expressions?
- E. "...your will be done..."** - *"It will not be absurd to take it as an explanation that god will be King in the world when all submit to his will." (3.20.43)*
- What does God's will being done look like in heaven? How should it look on earth?
- F. "Give us this day our daily bread..."** - *"...by this we give ourselves over to his care, and entrust ourselves to his providence, that he may feed, nourish, and preserve us...[A]s our Heavenly Father nourishes us today, he will not fail us tomorrow ." (3.20.44)*
- How does the use of "our" teach us about how God usually provides?
- G. "...Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors..."** - *"With this and the following petition, Christ briefly embraces all that makes for the heavenly life... He calls sins 'debts' because we owe penalty for them, and would in no way satisfy it unless we were released by this forgiveness." (3.20.45)*
- What is the logical link between these two clauses? Does God forgive only after we do?
- H. "...and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"** - *"...here we seek to be equipped with such armor and defended with such protection that we may be able to win the victory...Nevertheless, we do not here ask that we feel not temptations at all, for we need, rather, to be aroused, pricked, and urged by them..." (3.20.46)*
- I. "For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory..."** - *"...we will never lack a reason to pray, never be shorn of assurance, since the Kingdom, power, and glory can never be snatched away from our Father." (3.20.47)*
- How does the Lord's Prayer come full circle with this conclusion?
- J. "Amen"** - *"By it is expressed the warmth of desire to obtain what we have asked of the God." (3.20.47)*