

Heidelberg Catechism 116 –You Must Pray If You Are A Christian

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: I have often asked myself why Reformed Christians don't pray more. One of the main reasons I think we are not as faithful in prayer is **because we think that since God is sovereign and he will do whatever is good for us, we don't need to pray as much.** But God insists on it and Christians need to pray. You will hear from God concerning this.

Our headings are:

Prayer is Necessary as Thankfulness

Prayer is Necessary for Things you need

Our goals are: That **seeing the need for consistent prayer**, you will **pray for yourself and others to receive the help you need** so you can be effective covenant children of Christ.

116 Q. WHY DO CHRISTIANS NEED TO PRAY?

A. Because prayer is the **most important part of the thankfulness** God requires of us. And also because God **gives his grace and Holy Spirit** only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, **asking God for these gifts and thanking him for them.**

Prayer is Necessary as Thankfulness

1. You are commanded to pray.

Prayer is a command to talk to God through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ.

Where is that command to pray?

Philippians 4: 6 Be anxious for nothing, **but in everything by prayer and supplication**, with thanksgiving, **let your requests be made known** to God;

2. You pray to show you are thankful to God for all the good things Jesus has done for you.

Psalm 50: 14 **Offer to God thanksgiving**, And pay your vows to the Most High. 5 **Call upon Me in the day of trouble**; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

When you pray and ask God for "stuff" you are showing you are thankful to him.

Does this make sense? Yes! **Your prayer shows you recognize God redeemed you, that he is your Lord, and that you are his child.** This is rather difficult to fathom because when someone asks you for something, you are not always interested in helping and you may see it as an imposition. But...

Psalm 116: 12 What shall I render to the LORD **For all His benefits toward me?** 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, **And call upon the name of the LORD.** 14 I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the presence of all His people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints. 16 O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. 17 I will **offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving**, And **will call upon the name of the LORD.**

More, you show your thankfulness by asking for more! That's how God wanted it!

3. The so-called scientific world largely rejects prayer because it thinks success in life depends on man's skills and smart's – his higher education, his position in society, his science, etc., but you know better. The Christian depends on Christ for good. God is your great benefactor. He is bigger than we.

4. Sadly, even some Christians, as they are influenced by the world, think too much of their own abilities, and therefore minimize prayer also.

They have little sense of what the Lord has done for them.

Other "Christians" are often "conformity" Christians. They see what other Christians do and they do it. **They don't have a personal relationship with Christ – a personal experience.** They pray, but it is out of routine...without any thinking. **They rattle off a form prayer without hesitation, but without hope.**

Prayer is Necessary for Things You Need

1. You must also pray in order that God might supply yours and your neighbor's needs. Examples:

a. You need sustenance for your body and soul. You need food, clothing, and shelter. You need friends and family. You need the fellowship of believers. So you pray!

Psalm 145: 8 The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth. 19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; **He also will hear their cry and save them.**

b. You need God's Holy Spirit; he is most critical to your existence and sanctification. So you pray.

Psalm 51:11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

You want God's Holy Spirit to come and fill you more and more.

But how can God give his Holy Spirit through prayer, and yet you cannot pray to God without the help of the Holy Spirit? The answer is easy! God's Holy Spirit must quicken you first so that you would believe and put your trust in Christ. **This catechism question was not referring to the initial act of conversion, but the subsequent acts of growing in grace.** Even though you already have God's Holy Spirit, you need to pray for his reformatory work in your life. We even use the phrase "be filled with the Spirit of God." This means you become more and more conformed to the image of Christ (you are sanctified and you serve better) as the Holy Spirit works in you.

Romans 8: 26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, **but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us** with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, **because He makes intercession for the saints** according to the will of God.

c. You need the destruction of God's and the church's enemies, people who daily harass the souls of God's people and hinder his work. Consider the Lord's rhetorical question to his hearers?

Luke 18: 7 "**And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?** 8 "**I tell you that He will avenge them speedily...**

When you pray for the destruction of Christ's enemies and the enemies of his church, he blesses you. It shows you understand God's holiness and you want to preserve it. By the way, do you see how we fail in our duties when we avoid singing of judgment on God's enemies? How can God keep you safe when the enemy is out to steal, kill, and destroy? Did not Jesus come to destroy the Devil and bind him? Should you not pray God would confound the work and the wealth of the wicked...wealth they use against you.

You may not pray for judgment on your personal enemies, but on God's.

2. Let me address the often-repeated false notion that "prayer changes things."

Prayer changes nothing. Prayer is not the source of grace. God changes things through your prayer. This distinction is important because *many people look at prayer as superstition*. They believe if they mime a specific prayer a few times it would bring a magical answer. Roman Catholics are notorious for repetitive prayer. Pentecostals are similar. They have a phrase they repeat over and over again like Hare Krishnas, expecting to get better results.

The effective fervent pray of a righteous man moves God...to act...to save...to destroy.

It is the object – the one who answers your prayer that matters.

3. What about those who argue you don't need to pray because God knows what you need before you ask?

God does not *need to know* what you need by your prayers. He knows everything. But you *need to ask* God for what you need. In other words, God doesn't need prayer. **You need prayer.**

Further, praying shows you understand you need God's help!

4. Since you always need things, you must pray consistently and do it persistently.

Remember how Daniel prayed regularly? He stood up to the Babylonian establishment and publicly prayed as was his custom in Judah. Nothing made him change. Prayer was like breathing to him. And he regularly did it. Prayer is your spiritual breath.

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees **three times that day**, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

The Apostle Paul was keen to remind the Thessalonians to never stop praying –particularly in light of the persecution they were facing.

1Thessalonians 5: 16 Rejoice always, **17 pray without ceasing**, **18 in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

This is why in many churches have prayer chains. (A good idea!) This is a network of people who pass the word around and pray for help for specific problems or provisions for particular needs.

You must be like that persistent widow. Luke 18.

5. One of the reasons you and your neighbor don't have sustenance and the Spirit of God (and everything else you need) is because you don't ask.

Luke 11: 9 "So I say to you, **ask, and it will be given to you**; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. **11 "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?** 12 "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

6. Only arrogance, thinking if you ask something once God is obligated to give it to you, would cause you to only pray once for something.

So if you have stopped praying for your children's salvation, or healing...or a job...or a spouse...or revival in Canada...examine your heart to see whether you think too much of yourself.

Conclusion:

Someone accurately described **prayer as the breath of the soul**. If you don't pray, you are dead. Prayer is necessary to **show you are thankful to God for all he has already done** for you. Prayer is necessary for **God to provide sustenance for your body and soul (and your neighbor's as well)**. You must **persistently pray**. And remember, you can only pray to God because **you have access through Christ**. Only the Christian's prayer has proper direction.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Do you pray enough?

Do you pray because you have **gratitude in your heart** for what God has done for you?

Do you pray for **God's gifts of sustenance and his Spirit** for yourself and for others? And when you receive these gifts, do you use them well – use them for the advancement of Christ's kingdom?

Do you **pray persistently to your heavenly Father** who delights to hear you ask for things?

Do you pray for the unsaved?

2. If you do these things, then your prayer is a sweet-smelling savor to God. Keep faithful in this! Don't let your prayer be a weak whiff of perfume? **A Christian without prayer is like a perfume without a scent.**

Finally, if you are not a believer in the true God **you dare not go to him in prayer**. If you are a Muslim, or Hindu, or Buddhist you cannot pray to God and ask for his good gifts. It is arrogant to do so and God will reject you. But if you first go to him and say: "I want to become your child," God will accept you. If you sincerely ask, he is bound to accept you knowing Christ paid for the sins of all who call upon him in sincerity.