

Last week we started a short topical study on prayer—if you recall I suggested a definition of prayer and then made a few applications from that definition. We took our definition largely from John Bunyan, who suggested that prayer is (1) a pouring out of the heart to God, (2) by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, (3) through Christ, (4) for the things promised in Scripture, (5) in submission to God's sovereign will.

This brings us this morning to our second study on Christian Prayer—Its Descriptions. That is, What are the characteristics or descriptions of true prayer? Well, as I have thought about this, I have decided to reduce these attributes of true prayer into three – It's Reverent, Confident, and Persistent. These of course, are not the only attributes of true prayer, but as we examine the Holy Scriptures, we find that these are three dominant attributes. All true prayer is Reverent, Confident, and Persistent.

- I. It is Reverent
- II. It is Confident
- III. It is Persistent

I. It is Reverent

1. John Calvin in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, has a wonderful section on prayer at the beginning of Book III.
2. In it, he suggests Four Rules of Right Prayer—the first one is Reverence—"Now for framing prayer duly and properly, let this be the first rule: that we be disposed in mind and heart as befits those who enter conversation with God."
3. Thus, by "reverence" is meant a respect and holy awe that's proper for those who enter God's special presence.
4. There are two facts that combine to make this reverence—a right understanding of who we are and who God is.
5. [1] A right understanding of who we are—that is, we are creatures, fallen in Adam, and weak and needy in ourselves.
6. [a] We are creatures—man by nature fails to properly appreciate the distinction between the Creator and His creation.
7. Gen.18:27—"Then Abraham answered and said, Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the LORD."
8. Though man has been created with great privilege, and created in God's image, nevertheless, he is a creature.
9. Thus, in prayer we must ever be mindful we approach our Creator—we approach the Maker of heaven and earth.
10. Ps.110:3—"Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves"—this is how we must approach God...
11. We must "know that the LORD, He is God"—He is the maker of heaven and earth, and we are the work of His hands.
12. [b] We are fallen creatures in Adam—we must remember the distinction between what we are by nature in Adam, and what we are by grace in Christ.
13. Every person is an unworthy sinner by nature—this is true of Christians as well as nonChristians—it's true of all men by nature.
14. By grace we are forgiven and accepted in Christ—we are loved as children and have access to God through Christ.
15. But this doesn't change what we are by nature—Christians are, and will always be, sinners saved by God's grace.
16. [c] We are weak and needy creatures in ourselves—that is, even as Christians, we are weak and needy beggars.
17. Christians are simultaneously servants and sons—we come before our Sovereign LORD—we are beggars before our King.

18. Thus, reverence in prayer, necessarily knows who we are—we are creatures, fallen in Adam, and weak in and of ourselves.
19. [2] A right understanding of who God is—that is, the sovereign, transcendent Creator and Judge of heaven and earth.
20. Matt.6:9—"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name"—that is, Holy is your name.
21. Our Savior would have us pray to our Father "in heaven"—that is, the holy God who dwells in glory and heaven.
22. We must not only know who we are in ourselves, but we must know who God is—He is the transcendent God.
23. 1Ki.8:22-23—"Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven; and he said: LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You."
24. Oh my friends, why do so many people speak of God as "the man upstairs"—why is there so much irreverent and foolish behavior in worship?
25. Here is why—few people truly know who they are in themselves, and even fewer people, truly know who God is.
26. [a] The heart must be prepared for prayer—that is, we must get our hearts affected with who we are and who God is.
27. We must not flippantly enter God's presence, without having given some thought to properly prepare our hearts.
28. Job 11:13—"If you would prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him"—to stretch out the hands toward God refers to prayer.
29. Before we stretch out our hands to God in prayer, we must first prepare our heart—we must get it ready for the task.
30. Dear brethren, I fear this is something we fail to think enough about—our hearts need to be prepared to see God.
31. And how is the heart properly prepared, but by reading and meditating on Scripture—allowing the truth of Scripture to affect our hearts.
32. [b] The heart must remain worshipful throughout prayer—we must never forget that prayer is an act of worship.
33. Thus, what's true for worship in general is true of prayer in particular—we must enter His presence with a sense of awe and respect.
34. This is why traditionally people bow their heads in prayer, as an outward expression of humility and submission.
35. We must remain mindful while in prayer, that we are in the very presence of the Creator of heaven and earth.
36. Ps.95:6—"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker"—let us remember who God is.
37. Brethren, remember what we learned last week—it's through prayer that we enter the very throne room of God.
38. Yes, the throne is a "throne of grace" and yet it remains a throne—we must come humbly and with reverence.
39. [c] The words we use must reflect reverent prayer—that is, we must speak to God in a way that reflects who He is.
40. Again, I think many Christians err here—they think, because God is their Father it doesn't matter how they speak to Him.
41. But brethren, this isn't true with our earthly fathers—while our children can speak to us openly, they must speak respectfully.
42. And the same is true with regards to our Heavenly Father—we must ever remember, He is in heaven and we on earth.
43. Ecc.5:2—"Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few."

44. A fact—"For God is in heaven, and you on earth"—that is, God is the transcendent Creator and you the humble creature.
45. A result—"therefore let your words be few"—that is, don't merely multiply words which have little meaning to them.
46. Thus, all true prayer is reverent, for those who approach God properly, know who they are and they know who God is.

II. It is Confident

1. By this I mean, all true prayer is believing prayer—it's coming before God confident that He will hear our prayers.
2. And so we learn, that reverence and confidence are not contrary to each other, but they go together in the regenerate heart.
3. It's for this reason, as we read through our Bibles, we learn that all true prayer is believing prayer or prayer offered in faith.
4. Matt.21:22—"And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive." Js.1:5-7—"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting."
5. [1] Why is faith necessary in prayer?—[a] because faith honors God, God has chosen to honor faith in prayer.
6. A doubting and unbelieving spirit dishonors God, it casts a shadow over His character and especially His promises.
7. Faith is essential to prayer because it brings glory and honor to God—it glorifies His word and His promises.
8. Heb.11:6—"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
9. Those who come to God rightly "must believe that He is"—that He is who He claims to be in His word, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
10. This is why God loves to answer believing prayer, because it glorifies Him, His faithfulness, and His promises.
11. [b] Because faith receives from God—that is, faith is the channel through which grace is communicated to the soul.
12. Now, we will return to this point in a future study, but let simply say at this point—prayer is a means of grace.
13. That is, prayer is one of the primary means whereby the Holy Spirit communicates grace from Christ to our souls.
14. And so, as it is with all means of grace, prayer without faith in God and His word, will never benefit anyone.
15. [2] How is faith increased in prayer?—that is, how do we foster or strengthen our confidence before God in prayer.
16. [a] Remember God's promise—that is, Scripture again and again promises us, that God hears the prayers of His people.
17. Ps.81:10—"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it."
18. By "opening our mouth" is meant bringing our petitions to God, and thus, to "open our mouths wide" refers to asking great things of God.
19. "Open your mouth wide"—ask Great things of Me—"and I will fill it"—I will give you what you ask Me for.
20. Here God not only promises to answer prayer, but to answer it in abundance—to fill our mouths beyond imagination.
21. Oh dear brethren, let us come before the throne of grace with boldness, because God promises to hear prayer.
22. [b] Remember God's heart—that is, remember that God's heart is large for you, and that He loves His dear children.

23. Matt.7:11—"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"
24. For example, what father would withhold good from his child, if the father possessed what the child needed.
25. If this is true of men who are by nature evil, then how much more is it true of our heavenly Father who is perfectly and infinitely good.
26. [c] Remember God's Son—that is, we must remember, we come before God for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.
27. Oh dear brethren, we do ask on our behalf, but for the sake and in the name of Christ—we come at His back.
28. Heb.10:19-22—"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true (sincere) heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil (guilty) conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."
29. This entire passage contrasts the OC with its temple, blood, and High Priest, with the NC and its temple, blood, and High Priest.
30. Christ as our High Priest, has entered into the very presence of God, and there has sprinkled blood upon the Mercyseat.
31. V22—"let us draw near with a true (sincere) heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (forgiveness) and our bodies washed with pure water (regeneration)."
32. The imagery is that of the OC priesthood, who washed their hands and feet in water before entering the OC temple.
33. Christians, as NC priests, are not only to enter into the first part of the temple, but beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies...
34. Why—"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest BY THE BLOOD OF JESUS"—that is, for the sake of Christ and His atoning work.
35. It's because of this blood, and the fact that we have Christ as a High Priest over the house of God, we are to draw near to God "in full assurance of faith."
36. That is, with a strong faith, believing that God will give us an audience—that He will welcome us into His presence.
37. And let me just say here, that one of the many hindrances to believing prayer is a conscience weighed down with guilt.
38. But dear brethren, here we learn the remedy for such guilt—we come as those sprinkled with His blood and washed in His word.

III. It is Persistent

1. By "persistent" I mean "enduring or fervent prayer"—true prayer has a fervency that enables it to persist or endure.
2. Oftentimes, prayers are not answered the first time they are offered, but we must persistently ask again and again.
3. [1] What is persistency in prayer?—by persistency is meant a combination of two things—continuance and fervency.
4. Thus, persistency in prayer refers to a continuing in prayer with a fervent zeal—the old word that brings these together is importunity.
5. Importune or persistent prayer, is prayer that works hard—it's prayer that wrestles with God as Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the LORD.
6. Isa.62:6-7—"I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."
7. [a] The gift of watchman (v6a), [b] the duties of watchman (vv6b-7)—(1) speak of the Lord to the people, (2) speak of the people to the Lord.
8. Isa.64:7—"And there is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You"—this is what persistent prayer entails—stirring ourselves up to take hold of God.

9. Luke 18:1-8, v1—"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart (or not give up)."
10. This is what persistent prayer is—it's praying until we get an answer—it's praying that doesn't lose heart or given up.
11. He then tells a story about a poor widow that pled her case before an unjust judge, who finally heard her pleas because she troubled him by continually coming before his presence.
12. This in no way implies that God is reluctant in answering prayer—the point of the parable is that we must not give up.
13. He ended the parable with this saying in v8b—"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth."
14. That is, faith that enables us to wrestle with God—to bring our petitions continually before Him again and again.
15. This is what persistent prayer is—it's faith fuelled prayer—it's fervent prayer that pushes through all obstacles.
16. Jas.5:16—"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"—literally—the hard-working prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.
17. Providing what we are asking for is commanded or promised, we must persevere in prayer until we have an answer.
18. [2] Why is persistency in prayer needed?—that is, why does God often necessitate His people to persist in prayer.
19. For example, some of us have been asking God to save family members for years, in some cases for decades.
20. Others of us have been asking God to remove various temptations that have caused us to stumble many times.
21. Sometimes a Christian may ask for a spouse, a child, a new job, or else, relief from physical sickness, for months and even years.
22. Why doesn't He answer our prayers straightway, but often necessitates us to persevere in asking again and again.
23. Well, the first thing I have to confess is, I can't pretend to understand all the reasons God delays to answer prayer.
24. But I do want to suggest a few broad reasons why God often delays to answer prayer, causing us to persist in prayer.
25. [a] To make us feel our helplessness before Him—the Lord may delay an answer in order to empty us of strength and pride.
26. [b] To foster patience and dependence upon Him—the Lord may delay an answer to make us wait upon Him.
27. [3] How is persistency in prayer cultivated?—here I want to turn to another parable our Savior taught on prayer.
28. In Luke 11, our Savior was asked by His disciples to teach them to pray—thus, He provides the matter (vv2-4), manner (vv5-10), and motive for prayer (vv11-13).
29. With regards to the manner of prayer, or How we are to prayer, our Savior tells a parable about a persistent friend.
30. A man has a friend visit him late at night, and he has nothing to offer this traveller, as he is poor and lacks bread.
31. But he has another friend who has an abundance of bread, and so he goes and knocks on his door to ask him for bread.
32. The man refuses to come to the door because it is late and he is already in bed, and yet he continues to knock on the door.
33. Finally, the rises to give him bread, not because his friendship, but because of his persistence in asking for bread.
34. V9—"So I say to you, [keep asking] ask, and it will be given to you; [keep seeking] seek, and you will find; [keep knocking] knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who [continues to ask] asks receives, and he who [continues to seek] seeks finds, and to him who [continues to knock] knocks it will be opened."

35. [a] Know your needs—that is, we must feel the weight of the many needs around us—both for ourselves and others.
36. [b] Know you can not meet those needs, v6—"for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him."
37. [c] Know that can meet those needs in abundance, v8—"yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs."
38. Hymn—"Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring; for His grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much."