

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—

Lesson 56—What does the preface to the Lord’s Prayer teach us? Q. 100

The preface to the Lord’s Prayer bears a most encouraging and comforting message to us as those who would humbly approach God in prayer in Jesus’ name. It encourages us to *pray boldly* as His children and to *hope expectantly* for an answer from Him as our Father.

- I. Christ invites us to believe that God is our Father and that we are His children.
 - A. God is our Father.
 1. He is eternally the Father of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who is equal to Him, with the Holy Spirit, as the one, living, Triune God, WSC Q. 5-6; Jn 5.19-23; 14.9.
 2. God is called the Father of all creation because He is its Creator, Ps 96.5.
 3. God is called Father of all mankind, because all mankind are made in His image, Gen 1.26-27.
 4. But He’s the Father of believers through Jesus Christ, Jn 20.12.
 - B. We are God’s children.
 1. By nature, of course, we’re children of disobedience and wrath and are of our father the devil, Eph 2.1-3; Jn 8.44. But through the salvation we’ve found in Jesus, and the union we now share with Him by His Spirit, God has become our Father and we have become His children by adoption, Jn 1.12; Rom 8.15; Gal 4.4-7; 1Jn 3.1; WSC 34.
 - a) Thus, God is the Father of Christ and of us, but not in the same manner, Jn 20.17.
 2. God has taken the name of a Father and Christ as the name of our Elder Brother, because these names import more nearly than any other the nature of the affection they have for us, 1Jn 3.1; 4.9-10; Jn 3.16; Eph 5.1; Gal 2.20.
- II. Christ tells us that heaven is the dwelling place of God.
 - A. Heaven is not a place in which God dwells, as if He could be confined to a place, but rather the dwelling-place of God, in that His presence is heaven, 1Kgs 8.28-30.
 1. No place can contain God because He is infinite and therefore omnipresent, 1Kgs 8.25-27.
 2. When we die and go to heaven, we die and go to be with God, 2Cor 5.6-8.
 - B. Since heaven is where God is, heaven isn’t locally and geographically up, above the stars and planets. It’s the spiritual realm that we cannot see with natural eyes.
 1. However, we’re taught in Scripture to look up when we pray to God, as He who is above us, in heaven, over all things. This is the pattern Christ left us and the testimony of all Scripture, Jn 11.41; 17.1; Ps 121.1; Lk 18.13; 1Kgs 8.22-23, 27; Gen 11.5-7; 18.21; Col 3.1; Js 1.17.
 - C. This *looking up to God in heaven* when we pray is a disposition of the submissive and humble heart more than it is an opening of the eyes to heaven. Hence the rationale behind *closing our eyes in prayer* is not to keep us from looking up, but rather so that nothing can be presented to our eyes or senses that would drag us away from prayer and so that we might pour out our souls to God more freely with a right, humble, upward looking disposition, Isa 38.2.
- III. Christ teaches us to draw near to God in prayer with the right heart and dispositions, WLC 189.
 - A. Prayer is a drawing near to God.
 1. Whyte, “Before we begin to pray, we are to think of ourselves as at a greater distance from God than we ought to be, need be, and desire to be.” We pray to draw near, to enter into fellowship, to commune.
 - B. Prayer is to be with all holy reverence. Because we come as children, we can come freely and boldly, but because our Father is God, we must always come with holy reverence, Ecc 5.2.
 1. The reverence required of us is a filial affection, It’s an equal measure of love and fear, the love of a child in awe of his Father, who is so high and lifted up, but also so gracious, kind, loving, and forgiving, Ps 130.

2. It's *believers*—who can come into the presence of God boldly in the name of Jesus—that are reminded that their God and Father is a consuming fire, Heb 12.22-29, cf. 10.19-23.
 3. When we pray do we reverence our Father as God? Do we approach Him as infinite high above us, Ecc 5.2? Are we humbled by His thoughts of us, Ps 8.3-4? Are we humbled and shamed by our sins against Him? Do we walk before Him all our days in fear, 1Pet 1.17?
- C. Prayer is to be done with confidence in God's goodness and care for us as our Father.
1. Confidence is another word for faith. We're to come knowing and believing that He is our Father and therefore does and will care for us, hearing our prayers and meeting our needs, Phil 4.6-7, 19; Mt 7.7; 1Pet 3.12; WLC 189.
 2. When we don't come to God in a childlike faith and trust that He hears and answers us, for no other reason than that, in Christ, He's our Father and we're His children, then we'll either add things to our prayer that we think causes God to hear and that we think makes them effectual, things like postures, gestures, and tears, or we'll rely on those things, which were otherwise genuine expressions of the heart's love and cry to God.
 3. Prayer must begin and arise out of this faith and confidence in God's goodness to hear us as our Father, Heb 11.6.
- D. Prayer is to be done with faith in God's ability and willingness to help us.
1. He is able because He is Almighty God, Rev 1.8; 4.8; 11.17.
 2. He is willing because He is gracious and kind, full of compassion and mercy, Ex 34.6-7; Isa 55.6-7; Ps 130.3-7.
 3. Henry, "The waterman in the boat, who with his hook takes hold of the shore, does not thereby pull the shore to the boat, but the boat to the shore. So in prayer we do not draw the mercy to ourselves, but ourselves to the mercy." For as the shore stands ready for the hook, so our God stands ready for our prayers.
 4. Prayer lays hold of a God whose heart is full of love, whose hands are full of blessings, and whose mind is full of reasons to bestow on all who come to Him graces and blessings beyond compare, Mt 6.33; 7.11; Rom 8.32.
- E. Prayer is to be done with and for others, even in private.
1. We're told to address God as *our* Father to teach us that we pray as one member of a large host of redeemed sinners. This is our perpetual reminder that we're to be *intercessors*, bearing one another's burdens and praying for the Church of Christ, Gal 6.2; Col 4.3-4; Eph 6.18-20; Js 5.16.
 2. There's no spiritual life without *personal, private prayer* to God as our Father. But private prayer cannot replace *united, corporate prayer*, and neither does it do as much. The sympathy and unity and love required for one another in corporate prayer puts a value and power in public prayer that's not true of private prayer.
 3. What, then, does it say about *public* prayer and what it can do when we see the mighty wonders done by *private* prayer, Gen 18; Neh 1; Dan 9?

Inferences

- I. Udemans, the preface of the Lord's Prayer teaches us that "we pray to Him whose name we must praise, whose kingdom we must advance, and whose will we must obey; for He is the One who cares for our physical needs, forgives our sins, and keeps us from Satan's temptations. To Him belongs the glory for all eternity."
- II. The preface of the Lord's Prayer encourages us to *pray boldly* as God's children and to *hope expectantly* for an answer from God as our Father.
- III. The first part of the preface teaches us to offer our prayers to God in reliance upon His *goodness* as our *Father*. And the second part teaches us to offer our prayers to God in reliance upon His *power* as the One who *dwells in heaven*, above and over all things below.
- IV. If we have a Father in heaven to hear our prayers, then let us see that we never fear going without as long as we live, 1Pet 5.7, and let us see that we don't fear death when it comes, because it'll bring us like a chaperone to heaven, 2Cor 5.8; Phil 1.21.