

Christ Reformation Church

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The Language of Faith: Sermons On Prayer

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

*“Prayer – The Breath of Every
Real Christian”*

June 23, 2013

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 19

Introduction-

Robert Reymond has a very excellent discussion of prayer in his Systematic Theology, chapter 24, entitled *The Church's Means of Grace*. He begins:

The Christian is to grow in grace and in the knowledge of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Just as his physical body requires nutritious food to grow physically, so also he needs spiritual food to grow spiritually. This spiritual “food” that God has provided for the Christian’s growth in grace theologians refer to as the “means of grace.”

God the Father through the co-agency of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of all grace. Now while the Triune God can impart salvific blessings such as regeneration directly and immediately to the human spirit apart from means, normally he “graces” his people by or through “the means of grace.” What are these “means” whereby God communicates the benefits of Christ’s mediation to us?

Reymond refers us to the Westminster Larger Catechism for the answer:

“Question 154: What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates

to us the benefits of his mediation? Answer: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his redemption are all his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer, all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.”

By “sacraments,” the LC means of course baptism and the Lord’s supper. Under this heading is included then the issue of not forsaking the assembling together of the saints because it is in that assembly of the church that these ordinances are administered. It really is a “big deal” when a Christian grows careless and allows worldly affairs to draw him off from the gatherings of the church. No good will come of it.

Hebrews 10:23-27 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. (24) And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, (25) not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (26) **For** if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Therefore, the Christian must be diligent in using these means God directs for us so that we might grow in Christ. Carelessness in the use of these means is dangerous, as we have said in regard to prayer for example – that prayerlessness is equivalent to a soldier sleeping on guard duty. Negligence in gathering together with one’s church can be likened to being AWOL from the ranks. And careless disregard of the Word of God is parallel to not heeding our need to keep our weaponry honed and cleaned and ready for battle. It is a failure to train and be prepared.

Listen then as we summarize the points Reymond makes in regard to prayer as a vital means used by God to impart his strengthening, sanctifying grace to us.

Prayer in the Bible

The first implication of prayer, says Reymond, *is that God is “really there, personal and addressable in worship. Prayer is communication with God in worship according to his revealed will.”* He quotes Dr. Edmund Clowney here –

“To pray according to God’s will means to make God’s word the guide for our prayers....Prayer seeks God’s will in faith, believing in his power to answer in His created universe (Matt

21:21-22). *Faith does not use prayer merely as a technique to alter consciousness [as is often urged by rationalists and some hyper-Calvinists], but as an address to the living God....In adoration we praise God for what he does and who he is....God's holiness demands confession of sin; his grace invites supplication for pardon...In the communion of prayer we express our love for God and offer to him the tribute of our lives..By prayer the church resists the assaults of Satan (Matt 26:41; Eph 6:13-20); receives fresh gifts of grace (Acts 4:31); seeks deliverance, healing, and restoration for the saints (Eph 6:18; James 5:15; 1 John 5:16); supports the witness of the gospel (Col 4:3-4); seeks the return of the Lord (Rev 22:20); and, above all, worships him of whom through whom, and unto whom are all things."*

Prayer, as we have said, is the language of faith. Where there exists genuine faith in Christ, there will be prayer to Christ. Prayer, as J.C. Ryle noted, is to the newly born Christian as breathing is to the newborn baby. You see this in Scripture. Prayer is seen to be a vital part of the lives of God's people. Examples include:

- Hannah's prayers 1 Sam 1:9-11; 2:1-10
- David's prayers in 1 Chronicles 16; 2 Kings 19:15-19

- Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:22-61;
- Hezekiah's prayer that we have already read this morning in 1 Kings 19
- And think of Daniel's prayer in Dan 9:4-19,
- Nehemiah's prayers in Neh 1:1-11; 2:2-8; 9:9-38

Of course, as Dr. Reymond notes, it is in the Psalms that we see the nature of genuine prayer where there is example after example of the heart-felt outpourings of God's people to Him. Those prayer-Psalms are still very appropriate and normative for the Christian today.

Similarly, we find prayer to be pervasive in the New Testament. Listen to Clowney once again:

Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, prayed to his heavenly Father in unbroken communion. He began his public ministry in prayer (Lk. 3:21). He prayed in solitude before dawn (Mk. 1:31), and marked the turning points of his ministry with periods of prayer (Lk. 5:16; 6:12; 9:18). Before he went to the cross he agonized in prayer, submitting to his Father's will (Mt. 26:36-44). He who as the Priest prayed for his people (Jn. 17), became the sacrifice to die for them (Heb. 9:24-26). As the heavenly High Priest,

the risen Christ lives to make intercession for the saints (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:24, 25; 1 Jn. 2:1).

And of course Jesus taught His disciples (and us) to pray, and we find the New Testament church praying, including numbers of prayers recorded that the Apostle Paul offered. The New Testament gives us specific instruction about prayer and commands us to pray.

NOTE: I might make mention here of some information Reymond provides from church history that can be of benefit to us. He lists and briefly discusses several of what he calls “significant discourses on prayer in church history.” These include:

- Origen’s *Treatise on Prayer*. This, he says, is one of the most complete treatments of prayer in the history of the church. Along with a general discussion of the specifics of prayer, Origen expounded upon the Lord’s Prayer and he is the one who appears to be the originator of the ACTS outline of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.
- Augustine wrote an exposition of the Lord’s Prayer.

- John Calvin devotes a chapter to prayer in his *Institutes*. There, Calvin gave a six-point argument for the necessity of prayer:

Therefore, even though, while we grow dull and stupid toward our miseries, he watches and keeps guard on our behalf, and sometimes even helps us unasked, still it is very important for us to call upon him: First, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor. Secondly, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts. Thirdly, that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand. Fourthly, moreover, that, having obtained what we were seeking, and being convinced that he has answered our prayers, we should be led to meditate upon his kindness more ardently. And fifthly, that at the same time we embrace with greater delight those things which we acknowledge to have been obtained by prayer. Finally, that use and experience may, according to the measure of our feebleness, confirm his

providence, while we understand not only that he promises never to fail us, and of his own will opens the way to call upon him at the very point of necessity, but also that he ever extends his hand to help his own, not wet-nursing them with words but defending them with present help.

Reymond, Robert L. (1998-08-09). *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (p. 972). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

It has been rightly noted by Christ's people that prayer is the very first expression and exercise of faith. Think about that:

Romans 10:13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

What is this saving "calling on the name of the Lord" if not *prayer*?

Dr. Reymond moves on in his discussion of prayer then to a section that he calls:

The Efficacy of Prayer

Listen as he begins with words from Calvin:

In his commentary on John 7:37–39 Calvin says something that most

Christians can only read with shame: *"That we lie on earth poor and famished and almost destitute of spiritual blessings, while Christ sits in glory at the right hand of the Father, clothed with the highest majesty of empire, must be imputed to our slothfulness and the narrowness of our faith."*

There can be no question where the blame must be placed for our spiritual poverty. Every sin problem reveals a prayer problem. There is no sin that the Christian will ever commit that could not have been avoided by prayer. Jesus instructed his disciples: "Pray that you enter not into temptation" (Mark 14:38), and he taught his disciples to pray that they would be delivered from temptation and from the evil one (Matt. 6:13; Luke 11:4). James declares: "You do not have, because you do not ask God [dia to me⁻ aiteisthai hymas]" (4:2). The preposition dia, with the aorist infinitive in the accusative case has a causal nuance here and teaches that there is a direct cause ("because you do not ask") and effect ("you do not have") relationship in the matter of receiving the things one needs from God.¹¹⁹

Reymond, Robert L. (1998-08-09). *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (p. 973). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

We all struggle. We have burdens. We all fall and yield and sin. We act foolishly sometimes without wisdom. Why? Is it not true that we must own some responsibility in these things because of our prayerlessness?

Listen to these Scriptures that Dr. Reymond points us toward. They all concern this whole matter of “asking and receiving” that Scripture lays before us:

Matthew 6:5–13: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen of men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Matthew 7:7–11: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him.”

John 14:13–14: “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

John 15:7, 16: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.... the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

John 16:23–26: “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”

Romans 8:26–27: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the

Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts [the Father] knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with the will of God.”

Ephesians 3:20: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

James 1:5–8: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

1 John 3:21–22: “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.”

1 John 5:14–15: “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

Ask → Receive. Ask not → Don't receive.

If it Be Thy Will

Two final issues that Reymond deals with on the subject of prayer are:

1. Some Christians have maintained that if we pray with the qualification “*if it be Your will*,” then we are praying without faith. But of course this is erroneous. To submit ourselves *to God's will* IS to pray in faith! We pray and we make our requests in the same manner our Lord Jesus Christ did – *if it be Thy will*. Faith recognizes that God is God and that His will is good and right. We prayed, for example, that God might heal Dan Dawson of his cancer, but we did so in faith when we said “if it be Thy will.” And it so happened that God's will was not to heal that cancer, at least in the temporal manner we think of healing. Of course, the resurrection to come is the ultimate healing!

2. Second, Reymond calls our attention to the old apparent problem of conflict between the sovereignty of God and answer to prayer. If God has ordained all things from eternity past, then why should we pray? He answers:

But this is to overlook the fact that God ordains not only ends but all the

means to those end as well. Prayer, simply put, is one of the means he has ordained that his children should use to receive blessings from him. If this is problematic, “this is not a problem unique to prayer,” Jones writes, as the following quotation from Charles Hodge seeks to demonstrate: It is certain that the Scriptures teach both foreordination and the efficacy of prayer. The two, therefore, cannot be inconsistent. God has not determined to accomplish his purposes without the use of means; and among those means, the prayers of his people have their appropriate place. If the objection to prayer, founded on the foreordination of events be valid, it is valid against the use of means in any case. If it be unreasonable to say, “If it be foreordained that I should live, it is not necessary for me to eat,” it is no less unreasonable for me to say, “If it be foreordained that I should receive any good, it is not necessary for me to ask for it.” If God has foreordained to bless us, he has foreordained that we should seek his blessing. Prayer has the same causal relation to the good bestowed, as any other means has to the end with which it is connected.¹²¹ “The classic biblical example” (Jones) of praying for a temporal need which was not granted is 2 Corinthians 12:8–9: “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it [Paul’s thorn in the flesh] away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for

my power is made perfect in weakness.’” Paul’s experience highlights the simple yet profound truth that prayer is not the means by which we get from God what we want. Rather, “prayer is a means God uses to give us what He wants.”¹²²

Reymond, Robert L. (1998-08-09). A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith (pp. 975-976). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

“The faithful, worthy employment of prayer and the other means of grace will strengthen the Christian and equip him for every good work in life. Their willful neglect can only result in spiritual loss. Christians should faithfully attend upon these gracious helps that the wise God has established for their growth and spiritual health.” [Reymond]

Prayer Rooted in the Goodness of God

Finally, let’s spend a few minutes considering once more how the subject of prayer inevitably drives us back to a consideration of the attributes of God. We pray the Lord would forgive us of our sins – because God is Holy and because He is merciful and gracious. We pray that the Lord would strike down His enemies and effect justice for the weak and oppressed – because

the Lord is Almighty and omnipotent and just.

And we pray, bringing our requests and needs before the Lord in the name of Christ by the Spirit, because God is *good*. We could also consider other related attributes such as the fact that God is love, God is kind, and so on. But we will limit our discussion here to *the goodness of God*. Listen to Scripture declare this truth:

God is *good*. God eagerly desires to do good for His creatures. It is God's desire to give good gifts to His people. God is anxious to bless us! God is anxious to do good to and for us. God the ultimate Gift-giver!

Do you believe this? Do you believe that God is *good* and that he therefore desires to give *good things* to us and that in His providence He desires to work all things, all details, all circumstances out for our good?

Matthew 7:7-11 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (9) Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? (11) If you then, who

are 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!

How much more? Think of it – this is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If we...then God. Our Father in heaven *desires* to hear our requests and to give good gifts to us. Do you believe that? Our prayer life answers that question.

Listen again as Luke repeats it with a few added details:

Luke 11:9-13 And I tell 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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. (11) What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; (12) or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? (13) If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

You no doubt noted the interesting additional detail given by Luke – that the “good things” given to us when we

ask are specified as “the Holy Spirit” by Luke. Apparently the giving of good gifts to His people entails the giving/ministry of the Holy Spirit:

Ephesians 4:4-8 There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (7) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (8) Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

John 4:7-10 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (8) (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) (9) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) (10) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

And there are numbers of other Scriptures, including in the Old Testament, that make this connection

between the good gifts of God and the Holy Spirit. We ask for water, He gives us water AND Living Water. We ask for gifts, He gives us better gifts.

Isaiah 41:17-18 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. (18) I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

This is the goodness of God. He gives His people every good gift – and more. Listen to this goodness described by Paul in Ephesians 1 –

Ephesians 1:3-8 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (4) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love (5) he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (6) to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (7) In him we have

redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, (8) which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

God, you see, is a God of excess! Excessive goodness to us! From the beginning He has created all things very good. He sees that it is not good for man to be alone, and he sets out to correct that non-goodness.

How can we doubt His goodness? Yet we do doubt, and that doubt is evidenced by our lack of prayer.

God is our Father who loves His children in Christ. His children come to him, asking...."would it be possible for you to give me...? and more than any loving, good human father He rises up with a smile and with eagerness, as if to say "here, yes, take this! Oh, and here is some more – take this too, and this, and this, and this!"

Deuteronomy 28:12 The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

John 21:5-11 Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." (6) He

said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. (7) That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. (8) The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. (9) When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place, with fish laid out on it, and bread. (10) Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." (11) So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.

When we obey Him, when we trust Him, *when we pray to Him*, God showers us with His blessings. And somehow, in a way that I do not fully understand yet, He gives to us in excess and that excess involves the Holy Spirit's gifts which are beyond all we ask or think. You ask for a few fish? He gives us fish until our nets can't hold them all. You ask for bread? He sends manna from heaven AND He gives us Himself as the bread

of life. You ask for forgiveness of sins? He forgives AND he washes and washes and washes us white as snow. You ask for life? He gives us provision for it – but He grants us life, real life, life indeed – and eternal life!

This is the goodness of God, and it is one of the reasons faith speaks by praying.