

Lesson 15 **PRAYER**

If we understand the law properly, we are inevitably led to the LORD's requirement of true prayer. The law requires sincere communion with the LORD. Because of sin, we know how often we fail in keeping the law. Therefore, we may and must approach the throne of grace to ask for God's help. With the fulfilment of the sacrifices in Christ's work of the cross, we may pray with boldness and confidence. He sits at God's right hand, and intercedes for us.

15.1 **The Reason for Prayer**

1. God requires prayer of us, 1 Thessalonians 5:17. In teaching us to pray, the Lord Jesus also commands us to pray, Matthew 7:7. The law also requires prayer, as shown for example in the first, third and fourth commandments. The Lord demands our hearts, and the sacrifice of our hearts and lips is the most pleasing offering to Him, Hebrews 13:15.

2. Prayer is the chief part of the thankfulness God requires of us. Precisely because all our works are defiled with sin, we cannot rest in any of them. Therefore, the Lord loves a contrite heart more than any other work, Psalm 50:14, 15; Hosea 6:6; Isaiah 58:6f; Micah 6:6-8. True prayer shows a contrite heart to God.

3. The LORD only gives His children His blessings and gifts in the way of prayer. Prayer is not the ground for receiving His blessings, but it is the means that He has established. In prayer, our faith is also tested, Luke 18:1-8.

15.2 The Norms of Prayer

In order to receive the LORD's blessings, we must pray with a proper attitude and proper understanding. Improper prayer is not accepted by the LORD, Hosea 7:13,14; Amos 5:21f; James 4:3. The Lord sets the following requirements for our prayer:

1. We must rightly know the **one, true God**. We must address and confess the LORD as He has revealed Himself in His Word, in His mercy, grace and steadfast love, and also in His righteous anger and terrible wrath against sins and evil. We must know Him in His glory, honour and majesty, Isaiah 6:1-5. We must also know the **fear** of the LORD, Exodus 14:31.

2. We must rightly know **ourselves**. Even as human beings, we stand in complete dependence upon the LORD who created us. We can only appear before Him as creatures without any merit. If we also remember that we are sinners deserving eternal death, we see that we can only approach the throne of grace in humility and reverence, mindful of how small we are in God's presence, Job 13:25f; Isaiah 45:9f; Romans 9:19f, 11:33f.

3. We must rightly know **our Saviour**, and His intercession for us (Article 26, Belgic Confession). Christ's sacrifice is the only ground for our prayer, 1 Timothy 2:13; Acts 4:12. He is the Mediator of the covenant of grace, interceding for us at God's right hand, Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24. He is our only Advocate, who pleads our cause, John 10:9, 14:6, 13. He is our only High Priest, who also knows and understands us, and is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Thus, prayer to saints is both vain and sinful. They do not hear and cannot intercede. Intercession requires satisfaction and atonement Hebrews, 4:14f.

15.3 The Structure of the Lord's Prayer

Our Saviour not only intercedes for us, but also teaches us how to pray. Before His death, He taught His disciples the Lord's prayer, Matthew 6:9f; Luke 11:1f. There are minor variants in the two versions of the prayer, indicating that the Lord Jesus probably taught the same prayer more than once. This prayer comprises all our bodily and spiritual needs. We may divide the prayer as follows:

1. Address

The address **Our Father** immediately shows the restored covenant relationship in which we as God's adopted children may live. The address requires both trust, confidence and reverence or humility. We approach God as obedient and trusting children.

2. The Petitions

covenant demands	covenant promises
Hallowed be Thy Name	Give us this day...
Thy Kingdom come	And forgive us our debts...
Thy Will be Done	And lead us not into...

3. The Doxology

We also praise and magnify the name of God in our prayer, turning everything over to His hand, and expecting all things from Him alone.

In the doxology, we also leave the answer to our prayer in God's hand, that is, we ask that He answer us in His time and His way. Although the doxology is not found in the teaching of Jesus on the prayer, it is found in many places in Scripture, and may be seen as the Amen of the Church to the teaching of Christ, 1 Chronicles 29: 10f; 2 Timothy 4:18.

4. Closing

The word "Amen" means "It shall surely be". It is an expression of faith and trust, by which we express our hope and faith in God who hears us. God is more faithful than men.

Exercises Lesson 15

I. Reference Passages

Study and Review: Belgic Confession, Article 26.
 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45-52.
 Canons of Dort, Chapter III/IV. 11, 16, 17; V.
 2, 4, 5, 7, 12, Rejection of Errors, 9.

II. Review Questions

1. What is true prayer? Why is it necessary for a Christian?
2. What may we pray for? What may we **not** pray for?
3. Explain what should be the attitude and form of our address in prayer.
4. Are there some elements which should always be present in our prayers?
5. What does the word **Amen** mean? What does the believer confess in this word?
6. Does God answer all prayers?

III. Extra Questions

1. Did Christ also pray? How do His prayers differ from those of His Church?

2. List some of the things Christ teaches about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:1-18. How can we still apply these words today?
3. May we also pray to the Lord Jesus? To the Holy Spirit? Prove your answer.