

Christ's Lesson On Prayer.

Text: John 16:23-30

Suggested Hymns:

422, 265, 423, 424, 426

1) To Whom We Are To Pray

2) How We Are To Pray

3) Why We Are To Pray

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 16:23-30, ²³ ***“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. ²⁴ “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.***

²⁵ ***“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ “In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷ “for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. ²⁸ “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”***

²⁹ ***His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! ³⁰ “Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Satan wants us to adopt a cold philosophy about God and destiny. That would make prayer unnecessary. It would also be the end of Christianity.

One of the chief functions of Christianity is for Christians to commune with God in prayer. The Bible has much to say about prayer and a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God.

God's children have always turned to God in their troubles and have had their prayers answered. The answer is not always the answer what we expect (because God's wisdom is not subject to human ignorance), but there is always an answer nevertheless. God's mercy is never withheld from us.

It is true, however, that we are in need of instruction in the art of prayer. Our text contains the very lesson on prayer which we need. Christ is the Teacher, and there is none better. Let us sit at His feet and learn — *Christ's Lesson on Prayer*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Christ Teaches Us To Whom We Are To Pray

To whom are we to pray? Certainly not to idols, the “vanities” of the heathen. That would not be pleasing to God. Israel tried it, and God said, *“They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.”*¹

*¹⁶ So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. ... ¹⁸ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight.*²

Prayer to idols is an abomination to the living God. He says in Isaiah 42:8, *⁸ I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images.*

Then, there is the folly of idolatry. We read in Psalm 115:4-8, *⁴ Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. ⁵ They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; ⁶ They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; ⁷ They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. ⁸ Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.*

And in Jeremiah 14:22, *²² Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? Or can the heavens give showers? Are You not He, O LORD our God? Therefore we will wait for You, Since You have made all these.*³

St. Paul tells the people at Lystra who wanted to worship him and Barnabas because they had miraculously healed a man who had never walked, *“Men, why*

are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.”⁴

Yes, to the living God. Our text says, ²³ *“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father The Father is the first person of the Holy Trinity, called Father because He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and also our true Father. Remember the Easter message in John 20:17, ¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”*

Our prayers are to be directed to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the only true God, just as we are to be baptised in His name.

We may pray to the Father alone, to the Son alone, or to the Holy Spirit alone, provided it is not our intention by so doing, to deny the deity, either of one or both of the other persons of the Godhead.

The prayers of the present-day Jews, Jehovah Witnesses etc. are not prayers to the only true and living God, but to idols, because they reject Christ and deny His deity.

Although they may address themselves in supplications to the Father, even though they pray the Lord’s Prayer, their prayers are a stench in the judgment of God. Remember the words of Jesus in John 5:23 that ²³ *“all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.*

But why does Jesus in our text mention the Father specifically? While Christ was with His disciples on earth, they brought their petitions chiefly to Him. That is true not only of the Twelve,⁵ but of His wider circle of disciples as well.

Remember John 11:21-22, ²¹ *Then Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² “But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”*

Recall the many other instances recorded in the four gospels of prayers directed to Jesus in behalf of the sick and such as were possessed by demons or by the sick themselves.

In fact, Christ's disciples continued to pray to Him even after He, in answer to one of their prayers, had taught them the Lord's Prayer, directed to the Father.⁶

This is not saying that the disciples failed to use the prayer that Jesus taught them, but only this — while He was visibly with them, they chiefly looked to Him for all they were in need of.

Moreover, their Master was praying to their heavenly Father for them. Christ's Sacerdotal Prayer in John 17 was not the first and only one Jesus offered up for them.

Even today Christ's followers may and should come to Jesus in prayer. Our Liturgy contains many collects and prayers addressed directly and solely to Christ. And we have prayers directed to the Holy Spirit.

Our text says²³ ***“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. “That day”*** refers to Pentecost. These words show that they had been chiefly offering prayers to Jesus while He was with them. After His departure they should turn again in prayer to the Father and pray chiefly to Him

Moreover, ***“in that day”*** the Holy Spirit would teach them ***“all things,”***⁷ and that includes the answer to the question, *To whom shall we pray?*

For the Christian there is only one answer: To the only true and living God, the Triune God,⁸ as He revealed Himself at the baptism of Jesus. He alone is willing and able to answer our prayers. The Psalmist says in Psalm 65:1-2, ***Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; And to You the vow shall be performed. ² O You who hear prayer.***

2. Christ Teaches Us How We Are To Pray

How shall we pray? In the name of Jesus. Our text says, ***whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*** What is the key to these words? Our text says,²⁸ ***“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”***

Why had Christ come forth, or why was He sent by the Father? The answer is in John 3:16-17,¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world that He gave⁹ His only***

begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ *“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

We are to pray in Jesus’ name because Jesus has redeemed us to God by His blood.¹⁰ “In My name” is equivalent to saying “on My account, for My sake.”

The words, ²⁸ *“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father”* is a brief description of the entire redemptive work of Christ.

To pray in Jesus’ name demands faith in Him, a belief in His deity and in His meritorious work, a knowledge of it and a firm confidence in it. *You ... have believed that I came forth from God.*

People without this faith will not pray in Jesus’ name, nor will their prayers be answered, even if they did mention His name; for hypocrites find no favour with God.

Faith in Jesus Christ calls for acceptance of His promise concerning the prayer made in His name. Here is the promise, *Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.* Note the double solemn affirmation.

And here is the proof for the statement in Matthew 21:22, ²² *“And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”* The prayer of one who does not believe the Lord’s promises concerning prayer in Jesus’ name is vain.

Furthermore, faith in the Saviour and His merits leads us to approach the Father in the right spirit — humbly like the tax collector, not arrogantly like the Pharisee. He will plead for God’s mercy, not his own merits, and yet will approach Him boldly.¹¹

It moves us to pray fervently,¹² with persistence,¹³ without ceasing,¹⁴ alone in our closet,¹⁵ wherever we may be¹⁶; together with the congregation of believers,¹⁷ not from selfish motives, but with an eye to the welfare of others first,¹⁸ even for our enemies,¹⁹ remembering that Christ prayed for His enemies on the cross; for the Church; for the success of mission-work,²⁰ for the saints living,²¹ always leaving the time and manner of answering our prayers to God.

We are to pray our prayers instead of merely saying them thoughtlessly, and to refrain from vain repetition.²²

What posture should we assume while praying? Should we stand when praying or be seated or lie down? Should we pray on bended knee? with folded hands? with hands uplifted? with hands behind our back? Should we pray with our eyes turned heavenward? or earthward? with eyes open? or closed? Should we read or not read prayers? Should we pray aloud or silently?

These are weighty questions to all those people who are accustomed to strain at gnats and swallow camels. The Bible has little or nothing to say on this matter.

One of the few references to posture during prayer is found 1 Timothy 2:8,⁸ *I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* But the emphasis is on the words *“holy, ... without wrath and doubting.”*

Prayer is an act of worship, and whether our worship is acceptable to God or not, entirely depends on the heart. We read in Hebrews 10:22²² *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.* And John 4:24,²⁴ *“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

3. Christ Teaches Us Why We Are To Pray

Firstly, we should we pray because we have the Lord’s command to do so. Jesus says in our text *“Ask.”* This command is repeated many times in Scriptures.²³ For example in Matthew 7:7-8,⁷ *“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 he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.* Prayer is one of the foremost of Christian duties and cannot be neglected without great loss. No prayer — no child of God.

Secondly, we should pray because of the promises attached to the command to pray. Our text says, *He will give you, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.* Do we need we a greater incentive to pray? Oh, if only we had a stronger faith!

Thirdly, we should pray because of our troubles. The disciples were in trouble. The Master was going away. They themselves were to be scattered.²⁴ When it happened, they felt as though their sun had set. But praying to the Father in Jesus' name, their sorrows would vanish like mist before the noonday sun, their joy would be full.

In answer to prayer they were freed from their despondency and grief at His departure. They would soon know the reason why He left them, and they would be comforted by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They would be sustained in the arduous trials of their ministry. Instances of the joy supplanted their sorrow.²⁵ Troubles fly away and joys come in answer to true prayer.

Fourthly, we should pray because God's love of the Christians invites their prayers. Our text says, "***for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.*** The more children know themselves loved by their father, the more will they confide in him and request of him.

Finally, we should pray because we must not leave it to Christ alone to pray for us. We read in verse 26, ***I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you.*** Jesus does not have to pray for us because the Father Himself loves us. And because of Jesus atoning sacrifice we have direct access to the Father through Jesus. Meanwhile, Jesus also pleads our case with the Father without our asking.²⁶

May this knowledge of the importance and blessings of prayer spur us on in our prayers. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Deut. 32:21

² 2 Kings 17:16,18

³ Jer. 14:22

⁴ Acts 14:15

⁵ Matt. 8:25; Luke 11:1; John 14:8; Matt. 24:3

⁶ Luke 11:1-4

⁷ John 14:26

⁸ Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14

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- ⁹ “delivered,” Acts 2:23, i. e., offered up as a ransom for sin, 2 Cor. 5:21
- ¹⁰ Revelation 5:9
- ¹¹ Heb. 4:16
- ¹² James. 5:16
- ¹³ Luke 11:5, Matt. 15:22
- ¹⁴ 1 Thess. 5:17
- ¹⁵ Matt. 6:6
- ¹⁶ 1 Tim. 2:8
- ¹⁷ Psa. 26:12
- ¹⁸ 1 Tim. 2:1
- ¹⁹ Matt. 5:44
- ²⁰ Eph. 6:19
- ²¹ Eph. 6:18
- ²² Matt. 6:7
- ²³ Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17
- ²⁴ John 16:32
- ²⁵ Acts 13:52; Rom. 14:8; 2 Cor. 2:3; Gal. 5:22; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:19-20; 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:8
- ²⁶ Rom 8:34, Heb 7:25, 1 John 2:1