

The **STANDARD BEARER**

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Dear Reader:

This is the first of our special issues for the current volume-year. It is devoted in its entirety to the subject of Prayer. While you will find a variety of articles on the subject, the treatment is not, and is not intended to be, exhaustive. Originally we had planned to have ten articles in this issue; but due to space limitations one article, on "The Intercession of the Spirit," is being held over to the December 15 issue.

We hope you will find this issue instructive and spiritually helpful. —HCH

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MEDITATION

Never Be Anxious

Rev. H. Hoeksema

Translated by Rev. C. Hanko

Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

—Philippians 4:6

Hear, O ye of little faith!

Incline your ear, open your heart, ye children of
the Most High, who walk in the midst of this world!

Listen attentively, ye who believe, ye who have

the Lord as your portion, even as you walk in the
midst of pain and sorrow, burdened with a thou-
sand cares, anxiously troubled with a thousand
fears.

Take heed! It is God, your God, Who speaks! He addresses, admonishes, encourages you, saying, "Be careful for nothing But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

God, Who is GOD, is speaking to you! And when He speaks, it behooves you to be silent, to listen, to believe.

Our sinful heart is so readily inclined to contradict when God speaks. His divine Word stands opposed to the shallow, lying word of man. It rules and triumphs over the things that are seen. It does exactly what it says. It carries out all that God wills. It is highly exalted, far above our judgment of things. It contradicts that judgment. And it requires that we surrender our judgment, and believe what He says. Therefore that divine Word seems so impossible, so contradictory, so humanly unattainable. And for that very reason our vain and foolish hearts find thousands of reasons to cast His Word from us, and to follow the dictates of our own minds, as things appear to us, or to listen to the word of man

This was true already when we were confronted with the Word of God immediately preceding this verse: "Rejoice in the Lord always!" How impossible that appears to be; how completely in conflict with all reality: to rejoice always!

This applies also to this Word of God. Be careful for nothing!

Yet it is God Who speaks.

Therefore, let your ear be attentive and your heart receptive to this divine Word, in order that you may respond with the Psalmist:

O why art thou cast down, my soul
And why so troubled shouldst thou be?
Hope thou in God, and Him extol,
Who gives His saving help to me.

* * * * *

Do not be careful! That is, be concerned about nothing; never be anxious!

It is obvious that this is the negative of the positive statement, "Rejoice always; again I say, Rejoice!"

For who has not experienced that troublesome, oppressive frame of mind that burdens our lives and fills our hearts with anxiety and robs us completely of our joy in the Lord? Anxiety and joy are mutually exclusive. They show themselves on the face of the child of God by completely different creases and lines.

Worry — who is not acquainted with it? Who has not experienced it?

We have certain needs, wants, and desires. We need food and clothing, a roof over our heads, money to meet our obligations; we want conditions in which we can find work for our hands; health and strength to perform our labors and to supply our needs and the needs of our families. There are many things to which we are devoted and which deeply concern us. Often we are afraid that we shall not receive the things we so sorely need, that everything will go wrong, so that we will lack those things that are so necessary for our lives.

Worry is aroused in us by the things we cannot control, concerning which we have nothing to say, over against which we are completely helpless, because we cannot change them. Nor do we have a calling to change them. They are the things which only God can and does control. The farmer entrusts his seed to the soil; he looks to the sky, but there is no rain; and he becomes concerned about his crops. The laborer is dependent upon the economy, but there is no work. The enemy creeps into the church and deceives many, whether by means of false doctrines and worldmindedness, or by threats of sword and fire. God's cause seems to be delivered into the hands of the enemy. God's child sees all this and is filled with fear for the future

It is always concerning God's work that we are filled with anxiety.

What fills our souls with worry is the fear that God is leading us in the wrong direction, so that His cause will meet with disaster.

What smallness of faith!

When our eye strays from the living God and stares at things, when things seem dark and momentarily we see no way out, we want to direct for ourselves the course of our lives and the lives of our dear ones, as well as the future of God's cause. As we see it, everything will go completely wrong in the future. That is what creates worry

For the moment all is well!

The crops have not yet failed. We still have our daily bread. God's cause has never yet met with defeat But!

We look to the future. And that future fills us with apprehension. Tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow; next week, or the next generation What will come of it all? Where is it all going?

To that anxious heart of little faith this Word of God is directed. It demands: Be anxious for nothing! The Word is so absolute, so all-comprehensive, that it precludes any idea of an exception to the rule, any idea that the situation is so alarming that we have reason to worry, after all, about the future. In nothing!

Be anxious in nothing! Be without anxiety in respect to all things!

No, you understand, God's Word does not encourage a sort of careless attitude such as you sometimes encounter in the world, which in the most difficult situations and under the most trying circumstances seeks to comfort you with saying, "Everything will be all right." The trouble with such a careless attitude, with which the world flatters itself, is that it has no basis for its vain optimism. Nor does Scripture teach that God's people, who are in the world, should assume an attitude of cold, stoical indifference toward the things of the world, suppressing every desire and feeling, not caring what happens.

But God's Word does require of us that we shall walk, also in our daily affairs, in childlike trust in the Most High.

He does all things well!

In His eternal counsel, even from before the foundations of the world, God has determined a place and purpose for all things. Nothing is excluded. In that eternal counsel, Christ, His Church, and all the elect have a place. For God wills to glorify Himself in Christ and in the eternal salvation of His people in Him. Everything serves that one great purpose, so that all things are so directed by God that they serve that eternal purpose. Also those things that worry us must work together to realize that great and glorious purpose.

Be careful then in nothing!

These are the things which the Most High God has determined and decreed in eternal wisdom. No, even more than that. He actually does all things and works them out according to His eternal wisdom! The reins that control the course of events are in His almighty hands, and nothing escapes His power. He directs all things in sovereign love for His people, revealed to them in Christ Jesus!

Therefore, be not anxious! Be careful for nothing! Ever!

Hope thou in God!

For this God is our God, forever and ever!

He will be our Guide even unto death!

* * * * *

Be careful for nothing . . . But!

The Word of God also points out the way in which we can be delivered from all our vain care and be truly care-free in the midst of this world.

O, indeed, we can know all about this. We can understand that God gave everything its place in the counsel of His will, that He carries out that counsel in eternal wisdom, and that therefore all

things must work together for good for those who love God. There is simply no reason why we should be troubled. We can understand this, and can even rest assured that this is so very true, but without applying it to our own hearts, so that when we face anxious days and the way becomes steep and difficult we fail to cast our way upon the Lord.

There is such a great difference between knowing the truth and applying it!

Our practical living is far different from our confession!

How, then, can we bring this Word of God into practice in our lives: Be careful for nothing?

But! And then follows: In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. Be careful in nothing, but! . . . The one excludes the other. If you make your requests known with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving before God, you no longer worry. You cannot worry. When you make your requests known to God *in everything*, you have *nothing* about which to worry. And if you worry about anything at all, the reason is exactly that you have not made that matter known to God!

Your requests! That is, whatever lives in your heart concerning the things you think you should have or the things which should happen; things you desire; upon which you have set your heart; things you expect.

Make them known to God!

The idea is: do not go to your neighbor to make your complaints to him; do not shout from the housetop, complaining loudly about your needs. Do not mull over them in your own mind, choking yourself in your worries which crop up. But go with your requests, with *all* your requests, to stand before the face of God and pour them out! If you go to your neighbor with your needs, he will not help you. If you shout them from the housetop, you will find companions in your misery by the dozen. If you mull over them in your own mind, the way becomes darker and you become more anxious. But turn your face to God, and then speak. Make your requests known with your face directed to God. Not, you understand, to enlighten God, as if He does not know what you need; not to tell Him what actually should be done; but for your own sake!

Do you worry?

Then go to God, tell Him, pour out your heart before Him. Show Him your situation. Open your innermost heart to Him. Tell Him everything. Hold back nothing!

Do that by prayer, that is, by that act of faith whereby you sincerely approach the living God

and acknowledge Him as the overflowing Fountain of every good and perfect gift, whereby you thirst after Him . . .

Then it naturally follows that throughout your prayer and supplication you will give thanks. For all sincere prayer ends in a song of thanksgiving!

And your care has disappeared!

Be careful in nothing . . . But!

Why is that the way? Why do our prayers and supplications with thanksgiving deliver us from all our vain cares? Does this mean that if we are concerned about a certain thing which we strongly want and think we so sorely need, God will grant it to us as soon as we make our requests known to Him?

Perish the thought! Prayer and supplication intended as a magic charm to impose our desires upon God and bring about a change in His way is no prayer; nor does this ever end in thanksgiving!

Take note: Unto God!

You should make your requests known with prayer and supplication unto GOD! You fully, consciously place yourself before the face of God! What does that mean? First of all, immediately many of your imaginary needs and desires disap-

pear; and if you would try to express them, they die on your lips. We probably thought we had reason for complaint or reason to be concerned about food and clothing. But before the face of God our complaint is changed into shame, and we realize we have never yet lacked. We still have food and drink and clothing. We thought we should make ourselves concerned about our business; and, behold, He has provided throughout the ages. You speak before the face of God, the true God, and all your desires melt away like wax!

Secondly, that means that we are filled with entirely different desires, eternal and spiritual desires, seeking after God in Christ, to have our desires abundantly supplied by His Spirit and grace!

And, thirdly, this prayer brings about the realization that He is our God and that all worry is evidence of lack of faith . . . And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, fills your hearts.

Be careful for nothing . . . But!

Tell it to God, Who is GOD!

H.H.

[This meditation originally appeared in Volume X, p. 481, in the Dutch language. It has been slightly condensed to meet space limitations. HCH]

That "Chief Part of Thankfulness"

Rev. G. Van Baren

Briefly and simply the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45, states that prayer "is the chief part of thankfulness." This is the answer to the question concerning the necessity of prayer. If the answer is correct, as we firmly believe it is, then there is no doubt but that prayer has an essential place in the life of every Christian.

John Calvin also expounds prayer and emphasizes its importance in his "Institutes" as also in his various commentaries. He states, "By means of prayer . . . we penetrate to those riches which are reserved with our heavenly Father for our use. For between God and men there is a certain communication; by which they enter into the sanctuary of heaven, and in his immediate presence remind him

of his promises, in order that his declarations, which they have implicitly believed, may in time of necessity be verified in their experience."

The first principle of proper prayer is that it is to be addressed to the living, sovereign God Who has revealed Himself in His Word. There are many who do indeed appear to pray. Many address "God." Our nation itself is considered a "pious" nation — especially since the coins express, "In God we trust," and the pledge of allegiance contains a reference to "one nation under God." Yet the principle is violated.

Many consider that any prayer to any "god" is in reality a prayer to the true God. There are those who address "Allah." The Jews address "Jehovah"

— but not the Triune God. Others have their idols to which prayer is made. Some flippantly speak frequently, "Oh, my God!" — though there is no desire to come to God nor worship Him. Offense is taken if any imply that these "prayers" are not prayers at all.

God has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture through Jesus Christ. He has shown Himself in His Word that He is the sovereign God Who rules over all things. He presents what we need to know concerning His eternity, His infinity, His almighty power. But He has shown, too, in His Word the love and grace and mercy in the highest way through the sending of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ.

Thus, in prayer one must address God properly — as He has revealed Himself. All other utterances can not be termed "prayer." God must be addressed as the true God.

Each must then carefully study the Word of God. Where else can we know God as He must be addressed in prayer? It is surely true, all other things being equal, that the Christian who knows best the Word of God is the one also who most carefully and properly addresses God.

The second principle involved in prayer is that prayer must be expression of true thanksgiving. It must be the "chief part of thankfulness."

That thankfulness must show itself in a proper asking of God that which is needed. In asking of God, a thankfulness is seen in that we acknowledge that all which we have, and all that we need, comes forth from our God. The thankful Christian asks for all that which God has promised for Jesus' sake.

We have our needs: both of body and of soul. The Christian must seek his daily bread from Father in heaven. God provides all material things which one receives. The Christian, in prayer, expresses this knowledge as he comes to God.

But, above all, in thanksgiving one acknowledges that every spiritual blessing is of God. God provides that way of salvation: the cross. In that cross, God also bestows all spiritual blessings. He provides His Spirit Who guides in all the truth. He gives His love and grace according to the need.

Thanksgiving in prayer manifests itself also in that praise is expressed to God. He made and sustains all things by the Word of His power. He directs and governs according to His sovereign will. And God has shown Himself as the God of all power Who accomplishes all of His purpose. For this, the Christian would adore and praise the Name of God in prayer. He must surely ascribe all power to God. He acknowledges that which God does. Prayer becomes that means whereby one can

correctly thank God through proper praise.

Such thanksgiving through every form of prayer expresses one's gratitude to God for such great deliverance which is ours in Christ. He has redeemed His people from sin and death — and that, by taking upon Himself the guilt of our sins. Therefore, gratitude and thanksgiving properly are expressed in all of our prayers to God. Prayer, uttered in the consciousness of what God has accomplished through Christ, becomes important, sincere, urgent before God. Who could neglect or minimize prayer — knowing such great salvation which He has accomplished in His Son?

A final important principle in proper prayer is that it must be presented by the regenerated, converted Christian to God.

It has been often implied, if not openly maintained, that anyone can pray. One need not the work of the Spirit in his heart in order to pray. One who addresses the idol, one who addresses "Allah," or any other god of man's imagination, is presented as a good religious person. He prays — and is to be commended for his endeavor.

Frequently, too, it is said that we are to urge the unregenerate to pray to God for forgiveness and deliverance. Just as the dead sinner is urged to open up his heart's door to admit the Savior, so also the dead sinner is urged to address God and make request for His favors.

It must be understood that prayer is the fruit of regeneration. Not prayer leads to regeneration, but regeneration and conversion produce proper prayer. Just as a baby, obviously, can not call to father or mother before conception or birth, so also none can address "Father in heaven" except he is born again.

It is true, certainly, that one born again does not know the time of that rebirth. Before becoming aware of rebirth, there stirs in him the desire to seek God and to cry out to Him for mercy and grace. That prayer is heard, and the elect sinner is brought to an awareness of his salvation in Christ.

This same Christian continues to pray earnestly to God. Because he is converted, he knows his deep dependence upon God. He knows that he must come to his heavenly Father in order to receive all that which God has promised. God is pleased to provide for His people always in the way of their asking of Him.

One's prayer-life reflects, then, the work of God within one's heart. Where there is no prayer, where there is no concern about prayer, surely there is no evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Where prayer is seen, there one also sees evidence of God's work in the heart.

What then is prayer for the child of God? Is it a gift of God — or a special talent given to some? If prayer is only a gift, then is it true that some Christians can not properly pray — because they failed to receive the gift? One hears this at times. There are Christians who claim an inability to pray — they never received that gift.

Prayer is indeed a gift of grace. We said that prayer is the fruit of regeneration. Not all receive this gift in equal measure. Some of the saints can pray in a manner which is almost envied by others. So eloquently, so fervently, can they come before God and bring their petitions. Others seem only to be able to stammer a few words.

Still, all are given this great gift in regeneration. The gift is necessary in one's spiritual relationship to God. There can be no "tongue-tied" Christians. There must be communion with God.

Prayer is also an ability or talent which can be developed. Just because the gift comes with regeneration, does not mean that there is no change or development of this gift. The abilities which God gives can also grow. When one has the ability to play the piano, it takes much practice and great effort to become an accomplished pianist. So it is with prayer. Where there is little effort, one's ability to pray does not develop. Where one faithfully

applies himself, there is the growing ability to pray in harmony with Scripture to the glory of God.

How does one develop this gift of prayer? First, of course, one must know what to pray for as he ought. There can be presented no better model than that which Christ presented to His disciples. In answer to their request, "Lord, teach us to pray," He gave to them the well-known "Lord's Prayer." No more perfect model can be found. And the meaning of that prayer is beautifully set forth in the *Heidelberg Catechism*. So, a study of Scripture, a study of the Lord's Prayer, a study of instances of prayer in Scripture all assist the Christian to develop in his own ability to pray.

And there is the matter of practice. Just as piano practice is necessary if a gifted person is to become an artist, so also regular practice is required for the Christian. He must be on his knees before God. He must learn to pray with his family. Nor is it out of line to expect that he also practice at praying in public. Constant effort bears blessed fruit. Prayer seldom comes easy. Effort produces increasing improvement in one's prayers.

Let us be encouraged in learning to pray. It is the chief part of thankfulness — which each must show towards the God of our salvation.

Prayer and the Counsel of God

Prof. H. Hanko

"Prayer Changes Things."

It is an old saying that is often used. I have even seen it inscribed on a plaque and hung on the wall of a room in peoples' houses. It is evidently intended to inspire those who read it to be more faithful in prayer, by means of a promise that prayer really means something and can accomplish something which we earnestly desire. It usually reminds me of appeals that are periodically addressed to the electorate either to write one's congressman about an issue or to vote when elections are held, for your letter (or vote) "can make a difference." Things in Washington can be changed to your liking.

The expression itself sounds rather pious, and appeal is even sometimes made to Scripture in support of this contention. One is reminded, for example, of the fact that God sent Isaiah the prophet to tell Hezekiah to set his house in order, because he was going to die; but after the prayer of Hezekiah, the prophet was sent back to tell the king that his life would be extended fifteen years (II Kings 20:1-11). Or one is told to read what James writes: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16), which statement is followed by a reminder that the Lord withheld and sent rain upon Israel in the days of Ahab at the

word of Elijah. Did not Elijah's prayer change fruitful years to barren times, and famine to a time of plenty?

Now it is true that the motto, "Prayer Changes Things," can have a good interpretation. It all depends upon what one means by the word "things." If by that is meant that prayer changes those who pray, this would certainly be true, and no one would deny it. But it must be admitted that this is usually not the idea. People are not things. And the motto expresses the hope, especially by appeals to the passages of Scripture mentioned above, that prayer will change the mind of God, so that those things which He has apparently determined to do are altered or amended by the prayers of people.

No one can deny that this is a very common conception of prayer. Why else are people urged to pray long and fervently when a crisis comes into their life? Why are "prayer chains" and "prayer vigils" organized when someone in a congregation is desperately ill? One cannot help getting the impression that through a storm of prayer the Most High will be prevailed upon to do what so many want Him to do — even though His will is otherwise. It seems as if we are being told that by battering down the doors of heaven with large numbers of people who press God's throne with fervent and anxious petitions, God can be persuaded to change His mind and do something other than He had originally intended to do.

It is precisely this mistaken (and very carnal) notion of prayer which creates the problem suggested in the title of this article.

In order to appreciate the problem fully, we must understand, first of all, what the Scriptures teach concerning God's counsel. There are several truths concerning God's counsel which are important for our discussion.

In the first place, Scripture is clear on the point (and it has always been maintained by those who are truly Calvinists) that God's counsel is *all-comprehensive*. By this we mean that God's counsel, which is His eternal plan, is absolutely inclusive of all that takes place in all the history of the world. All that happens on earth, in heaven, and in hell is determined absolutely in the counsel of God. We need quote only one text in support of this: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). From the viewpoint of our own lives in the world, this means that every detail of our lives is determined by God before the worlds were formed by His creative Word. The believer confesses that God "upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health

and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by God's fatherly hand" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day X).

The counsel of God is also *unchangeable*. Because God determines His counsel from all eternity, it cannot be changed. God never changes His mind about things. He never alters what He has determined to do. Not all the prayers of all men and all angels, brought with fervency and earnestness, made continuously for twenty years running, can make Him Who is God alone, change His eternal mind about the smallest detail of history or of the course of our life. The prophet Malachi expresses God's Word in this respect: "I am the Lord, I change not." The wise king of Israel testified of this truth: "There are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21). And through Isaiah the Lord says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my good pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10).

There are here important truths which we ought to understand. God is God, high and lifted up above all His creation. He is great and glorious, the sovereign Lord of all things. He sees and determines all that happens in heaven and on earth as one perfect whole, with an eye and mind that spans the universe and comprehends 6000 years of the world's history. He determines all things with such perfection that every detail fits into place as all things serve the purpose which He has determined — the glory of His own great name in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We see things in infinitely small measure. We see what happens at the moment, in a given minute of the world's history. We see things as they appear to us with our weak and almost blind eyes. The difference between the minute things which concern us at the moment and the all-comprehensive counsel of God is greater than the difference between a small drop of rain which falls on our noses and the vast expanse of the oceans on our planet.

Therefore to presume to change the mind of the Almighty God is a presumption so great, so startling, so wicked, that it scarcely can be taken in. We who know nothing and understand nothing, bothered by something which for the moment we do not like, are going to tell the great Ruler of the universe how He ought to do things? We are going to attempt to prevail upon Him to alter His counsel to meet our whims? There is a pride and presumption here which is too great to ponder.

Nevertheless, a problem arises for all that. And the problem has to do with the fact that we are enjoined by Scripture to pray. Prayer is absolutely essential to the spiritual life of the child of God. Prayer is as important to him as breathing is to a liv-

ing creature. Prayer is so critically a part of his life that he cannot even be a child of God without praying.

Now there are, of course, many different kinds of prayer. And with some of them we have no problem. We are enjoined by all of Scripture, for example, to use prayer as a means of praising God and extolling His great and glorious name. Prayer is to be an expression of our gratitude to God for all He has done for us. Prayer is to confess before God His truth which He has revealed to us in Christ Jesus. With these kinds of prayers there is no problem.

But prayer is also for other purposes. Prayer is to confess before the face of God and in the consciousness of the atoning work of Christ on the cross all our sins, so that we may find forgiveness and pardon, peace for our troubled and burdened souls. Prayer is even the means which God uses to give to us the blessings of His salvation. God will, after all, give His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who sincerely ask Him for them.

And it is here that we begin to see the problem. Briefly stated, the problem is this: why ought we to seek these things from the hand of God if God has determined to give them to us in His counsel? If it is true that His counsel determines to save us, and if it is true that all the blessings which He purposes to give to us are surely ours in Christ Jesus, why need we still seek them at His hand? Will we not receive them whether we ask or not? Jesus makes the point very strongly when He tells us that our prayers ought not to be vainly repetitious, as if we shall be heard because of our much speaking, for "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:7, 8).

But the problem is greater than this. We are repeatedly told in Scripture that we must bring not only all our needs to God, but all our problems and troubles. We are even told to cast all our *cares* upon God in the knowledge that He cares for us (I Peter 5:7). And, as if this is not enough, we are told in Scripture that he who asks will receive; he who seeks will find; he who knocks at heaven's door will have it opened to him. Even more strongly, Jesus tells us in Matthew 21:22: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." (Cf. also Matt. 21:21; 18:19; Mk. 9:22, 23; John 14:13.)

It is interesting that C.S. Lewis claims to find here an insoluble problem. He does not know what these statements of the Lord mean, and he cannot understand the absolute problem of these verses in the light of our calling to pray that the Lord's will be done. (Cf. his essay, "Petitionary Prayer: A Problem Without An Answer.")

In answer to these problems there are several

fundamental truths of Scripture which we must understand, truths which are intended also to lead us into the true patterns for prayer.

First of all, it must never be forgotten that, because God's counsel is all-comprehensive, it includes in it all our prayers. God has determined from eternity every prayer which every saint has ever made. Prayer is a blessing, a privilege, a good work. And God has determined from all eternity the relation between our prayers and their answers. This, too, is known and fixed by God in His eternal purpose. That we are still commanded to pray is due to the fact that God does not save us as stocks and blocks, but as rational, moral creatures. What is true of all the calling of all God's people is also true of prayer.

Secondly, prayer must always be made in the deepest submission to the will of God. I fear that C.S. Lewis, to whom we referred above, has never really come to grasp the spiritual importance of this truth. When the Lord taught us to pray, He taught us, first of all, to ask for the hallowing of His name, then submission to His will. These are the two "hurdles" to overcome in prayer. If we can get over these two mountains, the rest of prayer becomes very easy. Unreservedly to want God's will, and not our own, is absolutely requisite to all prayer. In fact, in the texts referred to above, where God promises us whatever we ask, it is added that we must pray in faith. And while this certainly means more, it surely also means that we *believe* and confess that God's will is always good. We pray for His will. When we know what that will is — as in prayers which seek God's blessings of salvation upon us — we do pray according to the will of God. When we know not what His will may be — as in our prayers for the recovery of a loved one who is desperately ill — we bow in humble submission to God's will.

Nor must we be reluctant to pray this. We may think we know what is good for us. We may earnestly and fervently want something from God which seems to us to be essential for our life. But we are so small and see so imperfectly that we cannot tell what is really good. If we pray in the consciousness that God always seeks our good, no matter what great sorrows and troubles He sends upon us, we will readily pray for His will to be done. After all, all things work together for our good — also the great afflictions of life.

In the third place, and just because we are little children, God wants us to seek all things at His hand. We do not pray to inform Him of things which are taking place here in the world; we do not have to let Him know what we want; He knows before we ask. But we confess our dependence upon Him when we come with all our needs to

Him. Even an earthly parent deals with his children in this way. A parent knows beforehand what he plans to give his children, such as food at dinner-time. But he wants his children to come to him to seek these things from him. He is delighted when his children seek these things from him. God is pleased, too, when we seek what we need from His hand: for we confess that we are His children, utterly dependent upon Him, Who is the fountain of all good.

In the fourth place, when we really come to God in our prayers with Scripture in our hearts, then often our worldly, carnal, selfish, and even wicked petitions die on our lips. We may boast loudly that we are going to demand of the president that he do this or that for us; but when we are ushered into his presence and see him in the majesty of his God-given office, our petitions choke in our throats. So much more when we come to God. Standing consciously before His face, filled with awe and wonder at His greatness and power, overcome by His majesty and everlasting goodness to His people, we dare no longer utter what we had intended to say.

Finally, God uses prayer to teach us what our calling and obligations are. This was the case with Hezekiah. As is clear from the context, Hezekiah had no son. The line of David was stopped with him until such a time as he produced an heir. Christ could not come unless Hezekiah brought forth seed. What a terrible thing it would have been if

Hezekiah had died. God used this announcement of his death to bring Hezekiah to his knees and to teach him that Christ had to come through him. In God's counsel, it was all arranged: God's first announcement to Hezekiah, Hezekiah's prayer, God's promise of longer life, the birth of Manasseh. Much is learned through prayer. Much which we would not otherwise understand is taught us when we are brought on our knees, also in our great needs, before the throne of grace.

Prayer changes things? Thank God it is not so. The child of God who has learned what it means to pray does not want prayer to change things. Indeed, if he had the slightest suspicion that his prayers would alter the eternal and unchangeable purpose of God, he would never dare to pray at all: for he would then be faced with the awful prospect of having his weak, sinful, carnal, insignificant will substituted for the all-wise, all-good, eternally perfect will of His heavenly Father, Who always does what is best and what will serve his everlasting salvation.

It is never easy to pray. No one has said it is. There are many times in our lives when our first prayer is: "Lord, teach us to pray." For all prayer is the work of grace, contrary to our nature, but given us as a wonderful gift of love from our Father in heaven.

(Slightly condensed to meet space requirements. HCH)

Christ's Intercessory Prayer and Our Praying

Rev. G. Lubbers

Our subject is a weighty one and it is of extreme importance to come to grips with the Biblical implications of it. The matter here under consideration is prayer, which is the chief part of Christian gratitude when exercised by believers in the midst of this present world. Angels too worship the Lord God before the great white throne day and night; they ever behold the face of our Father in heaven, but their prayers are in a sense qualitatively different from the prayers of the redeemed saints. They ever worship as attending servants of the

throne, but not as members of the body of Christ Jesus (Heb. 1:14; Psalm 103:10; Matt. 18:18). Satan cannot and will not pray, nor can anyone outside of Christ pray the prayer of thankfulness to God, a prayer which is acceptable to Him.

When we speak of the prayers of the saints we are not thinking of the prayers of the future ages in the perfection of heavenly glory as the full perfection of the covenant of God with man, face to face in the vision of God (the *Visio Dei*). On the contrary

we are here concerned with the praying of the church in the here and now as redeemed, justified, and principally sanctified saints. We think of the prayers of all saints as they are placed upon the altar, the golden altar of incense in heaven, while the saints are in the battle here on earth, running the race with patience. We are dealing with the mystery of covenant godliness in relationship to the Redeemer — Christ in glory.

We are interested in a better understanding of the prayer-life of the Spirit-indwelt Christian upon whom rests the Spirit of God and of glory (I Peter 4:15). Apart from this Holy Spirit the children of God can do nothing (John 15:5, 6); they cannot even say from the heart "Lord Jesus" (I Cor. 12:3); no one can confess the blessed name except through the Holy Spirit! Only those who abide in Christ as living branches in the vine can pray, for God is ever far from the prayer of the wicked (John 9:31; Ps. 18:41; 34:15, 16; Prov. 1:28; etc.).

That is one element in my subject.

The second element in my topic is that there is also a prayer of Christ as high priest. This is His intercessory prayer in glory before the face of the Father. We read clearly in the Bible that Christ ever lives to pray for His struggling saints in the world; in the battle of the ages they daily and without ceasing have to deal with their mortal foes: Satan, the world, and their own flesh. The living and glorified Christ intercedes for us. The nature of this intercession we hope to explore just a bit. It is comforting to know that in the conflict we have a high priest Who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb. 7:25; 4:15; 5:2, 3). Due to Christ's intercession we receive mercy and grace in the time of need (Heb. 4:15).

Obviously there are two things which stand out in bold relief. We are here dealing with two different prayers, two praying subjects: Christ the merciful high priest in the things pertaining to God (Heb. 2:17, 18), and the saints, who pray in their capacity of being a *spiritual priesthood*, a holy nation, called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, to declare God's praises, as fruit of their sanctified lips (Ex. 19:5, 6; I Pet. 2:9; Deut. 33:4; Deut. 7:6).

Scripture teaches the most intimate relationship between the intercessory prayer of the Christ and the prayers of all saints (Rev. 8:4). Frequently in the book of Revelation we read of these prayers of the saints as connected with the temple of God and with the great high priest in the temple (Rev. 15:3-5; 22:17).

We shall now attempt briefly to show under two basic propositions these two prayers of Christ and

of the saints — and in that order, too.

The first and basic proposition is that Christ's prayer is such that it affects the prayers of the saints. There are numerous Scripture passages which we could cite at this point. However, we will limit ourselves to a classic passage from the Old Testament Scriptures. Space forbids a broader consideration. We refer to Zechariah 12:9-14. We invite the reader to check this passage from his own Bible (KJV).

We notice here that the prophetic light shines toward what God will surely do in the future, in a very definitely appointed time. It will be "in that day." (See Zechariah 12:3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4.) It will be the day when God will smite the shepherd, and by this smitten Shepherd He will gather His flock (Zech. 13:7). This refers, of course, to what God wrought in the crucifixion of the Lamb of God. It refers to Calvary (John 19:34; Rev. 1:7). Here we see the water and the blood flow from Christ's riven side *after* He has given up the Ghost and died; *after* He was delivered for our offenses and was raised for our justification (Is. 53:5, 6; Rom. 4:25). And this smitten Christ is raised unto God's right hand, ever to pray for us as the glorified Mediator (Acts 2:32-34).

Furthermore, the text in Zechariah 12:10 speaks of the miracle of the grace of Pentecost, the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh. The text says that God will pour out the Spirit of prayer and of supplications upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He will *make* suppliants of the most stubborn and obstinate people; a people who are by nature dead in trespasses and sins. And these shall be such people who come in earnest supplications when they shall look upon "ME, JEHOVAH" Whom they have pierced. The power of the Cross will cause those to bow before the throne. When John views the wonder at Calvary of actual water and actual blood flowing from a dead Christ, he sees the fountain of grace and glory opened! Yes, we look upon "HIM" Who was pierced for our sins. Ever we see the Christ as such. We ever seek Jesus Who was crucified. From this pierced "Lord" the streams of water flow, so that it becomes in us waters springing up unto everlasting life, rivers of waters from our bowels (John 4:14; 7:38).

Do not forget ever that Christ went to heaven for the very purpose to fulfil His commission *to give* repentance unto Israel for the forgiveness of sins. And this repentance and complete change of heart is given to Israel as well as to the elect Gentiles upon Christ's intercessory asking (John 14:16; Acts 5:3; Acts 2:33, 37; 11:18).

Such is the Spirit of grace and of supplications.

The Spirit of grace is poured out in copious measure; it is thus upon each of the elect individually according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:7, 8). What a full measure! Our cup overflows! It is grace abounding. Such is the power of Christ's intercessory prayer. The windows of heaven are opened. There shall be showers of blessings (Ex. 34:26; Mal. 3:10).

It is the Spirit of grace. It places us, who are legally "under grace," so under the influence of the Spirit that we are made to be full of "supplications." Notice the plural number. This term for supplication in the Hebrew is only employed in the plural. And the Hebrew term has in it the root "chan" = grace. It is the fruit of grace; it is perhaps the most infallible fruit of election (Canons of Dordt, I, 12). It is the incessant hearty sighing after the grace of the Holy Spirit (Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 44. Ques. 115). Of these "supplications" the Psalms speak often (Ps. 28:2, 6; 31:12; 116:1, etc.). Daniel's great prayer is an excellent example of these "supplications" (Dan. 9:3, 23).

Now our prayers all need to be purified by Christ as good works of thankfulness. They are all imperfect and polluted with sin. We pray so imperfectly. Alas, this is our everyday experience. We shall not worship God perfectly in spirit and in truth until we arrive in heaven. It is a refreshing wind from heaven's grace to know that there we shall see God face to face in Christ. The true earmarks of a prayer which is acceptable to God and heard of Him we have but in principle, a very small principle.

In the first place they are not wholly and unspottedly directed to the one only true God as revealed in God's word. God's perfect law and our prayers are not to be disregarded. We do not yet serve God only in our prayers with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. Christ must make our prayers His own. Our prayers are as of the members of Christ's church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 2:23). Only thus, when Christ makes our prayers His as the High Priest, the head of the church, are they acceptable. God is too pure of eyes to behold sin. We have a high priest which becomes us: holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens (Heb. 7:26).

In the second place we must ever bear in mind that we do not entirely know our need. The Lord knows His own and their errors as God knows and sees them. Often we do not even know what we should ask for. Besides, there is ever the unwillingness of the flesh to admit the depth of our need. We are too often filled with hypocrisy and self-righteousness. There is so much malice, guile, and evil

which we must put off. And hence, without Christ's intercession for us, to impart grace or repentance to us, we would not even ask as we ought in principle. Apart from Me ye can do nothing, and no one can come unto the Father, except through Me, Who am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

Then too there is not a perfect letting ourselves rely upon Christ's accomplished work. Ever our prayers of trusting alone in Christ must be made, having the intercessory approval of Christ. We need to have the examination of Christ's Spirit whether we truly hate with perfect hatred those who are Christ's enemies, so that we can so unite ourselves with Christ in prayer and say "all Thine and mine enemies" cast Thou them into hell, and take me and all the elect with Thee into eternal glory.

Shall our prayers then be heard we need the intercessory prayer of Christ, the Son of God in our flesh, risen and glorified. For He is the very "Amen" of God. In His name we say "Amen." And that is no mere term to indicate that our prayer has ended, but it is the blessed assurance that God will more surely hear my imperfect, stammering prayer than what I feel in my heart that I even desire such great benefits from Him. He hears us for Christ's Name, for Christ's prayer's sake.

Yes, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is there to plead our case legally, but also as our advocate, Who works in us both to will and to do according to God's good pleasure.

Christ's intercessory prayer vouchsafes the hearing of our imperfect prayer. And presently, in heaven's glory, His prayer will too be all in all in our prayers!

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Pray Without Ceasing

Rev. J. Kortering

How important is prayer in your life?

In grasping for an answer to this important question, we undoubtedly evaluate our prayer life on two levels. First, we ask ourselves, how frequently do we pray? Do we pray when we arise at the beginning of the day? Do we sit down quietly at meal time and have devotions? If we are engaged in Christian education or have Christian gatherings, do we begin and end the meetings in prayer? What about the end of the day? Even as we begin to think about the frequency, we are reminded that there are times we pray alone, and other times when we have group prayers. How important is this? Secondly, we evaluate on another level: how sincere are these prayers? Importance is not determined merely on the basis of frequency; we must add the spiritual dimension of sincerity. If prayer is important, it will not be an empty act of external piety, expected of me to perform, yet one I don't delight in. Rather, we will pray from the heart and have communion with our God. It will furnish us with spiritual energy and worshipful praise.

It is rather significant that in evaluating our prayer life we exercise caution and patience. It is very easy for us to throw up our hands in utter dismay and say, my prayer life is so empty and I cannot honestly say it is important. Prayer is a measure of godliness, and we struggle with our lack of godliness. It is hard work to pray. We say this not as an excuse for spiritual indifference and worldliness, rather we must encourage one another not to despair, but to press on in our growth in spirituality, also as it relates to prayer. It is good to compare ourselves to men of God who were giants in prayer, whether they are those mentioned in the Bible or those whose accounts are recorded in daily memoirs. Think of men like August Toplady, Ralph Erskine, John Owen, Andrew Bonar, and D.M. McIntyre. Add to that list one like the great missionary George Whitefield. These English divines spent hours in prayer. Time and again they would set aside an entire day for spiritual reflection and prayer. Even when they were busy with religious duties, some would arise from 2-4 a.m. in order to be alone with God.

The English and Puritans have this pietistic emphasis which is quite different from our Dutch tradition. Abraham Kuiper offers this interesting

observation: "Prayer meetings, or hours for prayer, are undoubtedly to be recommended, even though our Holland people will never succeed to give to these meetings the character of the English prayer meetings. These little talks, after which six or seven hearers lead in a short prayer, compose an art which the English understand very well, but we alas, do not." *E Voto* (Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism) Vol. 4, p. 420. One wonders whether we encounter the same thing when we consider our Singapore brothers and sisters who earnestly engage in prayer cells, opening their hearts to the Lord in the presence of one another. Can we even do that here? Are we spiritually able?

CONSTANT PRAYER

The Word of God does emphasize the need to pray without ceasing. These words are taken literally from I Thessalonians 5:17. Our Lord emphasized, "Watch ye therefore and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). Luke also emphasized, "And he spake a parable unto them to the end that men ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Enoch's covenant communion with God is described thus: "And Enoch walked with God" (Genesis 5:22). This must have included constant prayer. The Psalmist declared, "My soul, wait thou only upon God!" (Psalm 62:5). Such waiting was an act of prayer.

What does it mean to pray always, or without ceasing? Let's use an illustration. We say the sun always shines in Jamaica. Presumably that means that not a day goes by without sunshine. It is physically true. We also say, a covetous man is always greedy. This means that his character is morally possessed by greed; his thoughts, his actions, his secret motives are greedy. Applying these two usages to prayer, we do not interpret the "always" in a physical sense, that we must do nothing other than being physically engaged in prayer. Rather, the second idea applies, the whole of our life from a moral perspective is prayerful. We are mindful of God's presence, our whole life is one cathedral within which we worship our God in everything we do. It may have been easier for Jacob to do this within his tent and while caring for his family and possessions, yet the principle is the

same for us. A mother prays without ceasing when she makes her home a house of worship, when the music that fills the home, the programs of entertainment, the books and magazines that are available for reading, the conversation and conduct of family members, all are done in the awareness of God's presence. The same is true in the work-world. Amidst the hammer blows of construction, the beeps of computers, the roaring sounds of industry, the Christian laborer prays without ceasing as he engages in his work knowing that God is sovereign over all and that all this work serves Him.

PRAYER TIME

Within such an environment of Christian living, we are also commanded by God to spend time in prayer. It will not do for us to say, I don't need to pray when I wake up or during the day, I'm praying without ceasing all the time.

What better example do we have than our Lord Himself. "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). We read often how Jesus either took the disciples along or even went alone and spent the night in solitary prayer. From this point of view, Jesus instructs us, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:6).

You may wonder, where did we get the idea of praying at meal time? We read of this in Psalm 55:17: "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud and He shall hear my voice." Similarly, Daniel opened his window while in Babylon and prayed, three times a day, looking toward Jerusalem, "and he gave thanks before his God" (Daniel 6:10). Whether that was connected with eating we are not told. It is a conclusion we draw. Daniel was engaged in private devotions. The Lord Jesus emphasized that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Join these ideas together and we are on good Biblical ground to have devotions at meal time.

We must carefully distinguish private prayer (devotions) from family prayer (devotions). These two aspects of our prayer life must not be combined or confused. It is not enough for our spiritual welfare to pray at table with our families and not to have private devotions. We must have both.

Family devotions are to be encouraged. Whether all our family devotions are at the table when we eat is another subject. All of us learn that there are definite limitations with family devotions when we

are at the table. The time for meaningful discussion on Scriptures or a prayer of any length is inappropriate at the beginning of the meal. All are hungry and the meal will get cold. Besides, after eating at a leisurely pace (if this is possible, surely desirable) and enjoying dinner conversation with the family, the children are getting restless and are least responsive for spiritual devotions of any length. Hence meal time devotions are usually short, with Scripture and a meaningful point of application. Family circumstances can altar this considerably. When to have meaningful family worship is constantly a challenge that each family has to work out for the best of all concerned, taking into consideration the circumstances of the individual family.

The point we should make here is this, it is important for the father and mother to pray out loud at these devotions. Silent pray is not appropriate. I'm thankful that this influence of some Dutch families is fading away. Our children must hear father and mother pray! They must have the assurance that these prayers include them and they hear that. They themselves will learn to pray from such audible prayers. In these family prayers, mother has her place to pray as well. Headship doesn't mean only father prays. He must, to be sure, but the role of helpmeet includes spiritual assistance, also in family praying. There also will be time when our children will be encouraged to pray aloud with the family.

A few thoughts yet on our private individual prayers.

The one word that speaks the most to this important activity in the inner closet is **QUIET!** Surely, we need a quiet *place*. The Lord went to the wilderness. It may be a room, it may be in the barn, it may be in the woods, but it must be quiet. Away from the activities of life, the soul has opportunity to worship, to think, to read, to reflect, to open up to the God of heaven. In our age, this has to be planned, because quietness is a rare commodity today. In that quiet place we need a quiet *hour*. We need to set aside time. Often the question arises, how long should our devotions last? You can see from the examples of godly saints, time is not mechanically set, it follows from the heart that is in communion with God. Here too, we can do much to fill precious time with sweet communion with God. If we recall what prayer is, we can easily fill hours with prayer. We worship God in prayer, fill our minds with divine thoughts. This is done with our Bible open, when we meditate upon God's precious Word. Many times devotional reading assists us, singing quietly lifts our souls to God, or we enjoy the beauty of nature. Prayer is a confession of sin — not a general reference, but an honest review of our past life before the holy face of God.

We wrestle, making explicit mention of these sins and seeking forgiveness. Also, we have many requests that we make for things natural and spiritual. God provides for us in the way of our asking. We have many needs which take much time in expressing. Finally, prayer requires a quiet *heart*. In the way of confessing our sins and meditating upon

the cross of Jesus, the peace of God that passes all understanding floods our souls.

As we think upon our prayer life, may God keep us from both extreme evils: praying out of empty tradition, or not praying at all. May our prayers lift us to the gate of heaven; and even if our pillow be a stone, may it be Bethel, the House of God.

Praying for the Sick

Prof. Robert D. Decker

There are not a few questions concerning this subject among God's people. There are many differences of opinion concerning this subject as well. For what may we pray for the sick? What ought to be the contents of prayers offered on behalf of those who are ill? May we pray for healing? The question concerning prayers for the healing of the sick provokes the most discussion and even controversy. Some, many in fact, believe we must pray for the physical restoration of the sick. Many teach that if we pray "in faith" God will heal the sick in answer to our prayers. Among some, prayer chains are formed so that when illness or tragedy strikes someone, many prayers will ascend on that person's behalf. What does Scripture teach concerning these matters?

We must understand that sickness is the result of the fall of the human race into sin. There was no sickness before the fall. But when Adam and Eve fell into sin God said, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). When man fell into sin he became dead in trespasses and sins. God executed His sentence: "... for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17b). Sickness is part of that death which has passed upon all men on account of sin.

Christ has redeemed us from the curse through His suffering and death on the cross. In the resurrection of Christ we and all of the elect are delivered from the power of death. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never

die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25, 26). The child of God does not die in the sense that he perishes forever in hell. Death for the Christian has been changed. Through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, death has become the passage from this earthly life (which is nothing but a continual death) into perfect fellowship with God in the glory of heaven. Already now, through the principle of regeneration, we have the life of Christ in our hearts. When the Lord returns we shall be raised incorruptible to enjoy God's fellowship eternally in the New Creation. In that faith and out of that hope we are able to exclaim with the Apostle, "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:54-57).

Sickness, like death itself, of which it is part, has also been changed. Sickness is not something bad for the child of God. By this we do not mean that the child of God is exempt from the anguish, pain, anxiety, and misery which accompany the physical ills he experiences. Quite the contrary! What we mean is that sickness belongs to the "all things" which work together for good to them who love God, who are the called according to His purpose (cf. Romans 8:28). Sickness belongs to the chastening of the Lord. Sickness, therefore, has a sanctifying effect in the life of the Christian. This is plainly taught in Hebrews 12:5-11. In this passage Scrip-

ture admonishes us not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor to faint when we are rebuked by Him. The reason is that God chastens those whom He loves. The Lord scourges every son whom He receives. Chastening, of which sickness is a form, is proof of the fact that we are God's children, the ones whom He loves in Christ Jesus. Just as an earthly father disciplines his children in love, corrects them when they do evil, so God, our heavenly Father, chastens His children. God does this for our spiritual profit. His purpose is to work holiness in us. Even though it be true that no chastening, no sickness, seems joyous in this life, but grievous, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in the ones exercised by it.

How true to our experience! No one denies the misery and pain which sickness brings. Countless of God's people experience the anguish, both physical and mental, which comes with cancer, heart disease, stroke, and other forms of sickness. But in all of that they learn their utter dependence upon God, and their own weakness. God's people in their sickness learn more and more not to set their affection on things earthly, but to seek the Kingdom of God. They learn to trust in the Lord, to pour out their hearts before Him. In the way of sickness they are reminded of the fact that they are strangers in the earth, pilgrims as all their fathers were. When God's child is put upon a bed of pain he learns that God sends that sickness in His love and wisdom, not to destroy him but to save him. God in His love uses sickness and other trials to prepare and mold His children for the place Jesus is preparing for them in the Father's House of many mansions. Sometimes, often in many cases, this involves a profound spiritual struggle for the Christian; but always this is the effect of sickness in the life of God's child. By faith the Christian is given to see that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17, 18).

Understanding what sickness is according to the teaching of God's Word we can also understand the needs of the sick. It ought to be evident that the need of the sick is not necessarily physical healing or restoration. When God strikes one of His children with sickness, His will for that person may very well be that he recover and continue for a time his earthly pilgrimage. But it is also very well possible that God's will is that the sickness terminate in the death of that person. How then should we pray for that person, and how should the sick person himself pray? The great need of the sick is to be content in whatever way God leads him. His conversation (manner of living) must be without covetousness. This means the sick must not desire that which God does not give him or intend to give him.

He must be content with such things as he has in the confidence that God will never leave or forsake him. He needs the grace to confess, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man can do unto me" (cf. Heb. 13:5, 6). This applies to all of life, but especially when one is sick. The sick need grace to be conformed to the will of God whether that will of God be healing or whether the sickness result in death.

For this we must pray when we are sick. This is the prayer we must bring for the sick. This is what Jesus taught us when He said, "After this manner pray ye: Our Father which are in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. *Thy will be done . . .*" (Matt. 6:9, 10). This is the need of the sick. God's will must be done in his life. Therefore, when we pray in our sickness we pray that we may have grace to accept the will of God for us. This is precisely how Jesus prayed when, in anticipation of the cross, He poured out His heart in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was experiencing terrible suffering. He was in agony: ". . . and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Jesus told His disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death . . ." (Matt. 26:38). In all that agony (a suffering we shall never have to endure) Jesus prayed three times these words: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup (the agonies of hell on the cross) pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). This is how we too must pray for the sick. We need to conform to God's will in our sicknesses and pains. This means we need to know that God loves us and that our sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. We need to know that God knows what is best for us. That God in His inscrutable wisdom is leading us in ways of sickness in order to prepare us for our place in glory is what we need to know. Along these lines, therefore, we must pray. And when we know these things we will have peace with God and we will be content in whatever way God leads.

This does not mean that we may not express our desires to the Lord when we or a loved one is sick. We certainly may. God wants us to tell Him exactly how we feel and what we desire. God wants us to pour out our hearts to Him and to cast all of our burdens upon Him. The Lord cares for us and He is our refuge and strength. A husband may certainly express in prayer his desire that his sick wife be restored to health for his and his children's sakes. But the deepest desire of that husband must be that God's will be done and that he and his wife and children learn to be content.

In this connection the question often arises concerning the meaning of James 5:14-16.* The text reads: "Is any sick among you? let him call for the

elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." This text is appealed to by Pentecostals and faith healers as support for their errors. It does not teach what they say it teaches. The term for "sick" refers to spiritual sickness or weakness which makes it impossible for a person to pray. In this event he must call the elders of the church to pray for him. The anointing with oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. That this is correct is clear from verse 15 which speaks of the person's

being saved from his spiritual sickness. He is saved and raised up by the Lord in the way of his sins' being forgiven. This in brief is the meaning of this passage.

In our sicknesses let us pray, "Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way. Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will . . ."

*For a detailed explanation of this passage the reader may consult Prof. H. Hanko's articles in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*; vol. VIII, 2 - IX, 1, 2. These issues are available at the Seminary Bookstore.

Learning to Pray in Public

Rev. James Slopsema

There are a number of occasions in which we may be called upon to pray in public. By praying in public we mean praying audibly before a group of people. We may be called to do this at the conclusion of a Bible Society meeting or while visiting with friends at meal time. We may be asked to pray at a congregational meeting or a school society meeting. There are certain positions in the church and kingdom that require that we pray regularly before others. Consistory members are expected to take turns closing the consistory meetings with prayer and to lead the consistory in prayer before the worship service. They must also lead in prayer as they conduct family visitation, go on sick calls, and visit the poor. Sunday School teachers are expected to lead in prayer. So too are teachers in the Christian school. We could go on. There are innumerable situations in which we may be called on to pray in public. This is true of both men and women, young and old.

There are many in the church who find it difficult, if not impossible, to pray in these kinds of situations.

Some find it impossible to pray in public. The thought of praying before others sends them into a panic. Consequently, they avoid those situations where they may be called to lead in prayer. They wish they could lead in prayer; but they find that they simply can not. We might be surprised to know how many people regularly avoid church and

school functions simply because they fear being with people and doing things in front of people. And part of that fear is the fear of leading in prayer.

Others there are who can manage when called to pray publicly. Nevertheless, they find leading in prayer very difficult and nerveracking. If they know ahead of time that they must close a meeting with prayer, it ruins the meeting for them. In turn, they feel that their prayers in public are bumbling and inadequate. They are very uncomfortable with it all and wish they could do better.

Praying in public is something in which we ought to gain a certain amount of proficiency. Certainly we ought not allow the fear of leading in prayer ruin what otherwise would be a profitable and enjoyable time with our fellow saints. Nor must we let this same fear hinder us from taking our proper place in the church and kingdom of God.

How does one learn to pray in public?

The best time to learn this is during one's youth. Youth is the time of learning. We learn best and most easily in the years of our youth. This is true not only for prayer, but essentially for everything. Consequently, the ideal is to learn to pray in public as a child and young person. Parents and teachers must attend to this. Parents must teach their children to pray in the home, not only in their private devotions but also out loud during the fami-

ly devotions. Teachers also ought to require their students to pray out loud and lead in prayer. This is true of the teachers both of the Christian school and Sunday school. This is the ideal way to learn to pray in public.

However, not all have learned to pray in public as children. What of them? They too can learn to pray in public. It may not be as easy for them as for children. But they too can and ought to learn to pray publicly.

There are usually two reasons why people find public prayer difficult.

The first reason is that they find prayer in general difficult. Those who have extreme difficulty praying in public frequently find it just as difficult to pray in private. They simply don't know how to pray. They really don't know what to ask for in prayer; they don't know what to say. They are at a loss when it comes to prayer. And therefore they don't pray very much either, even in the privacy of their homes. Yes, they pray at meal times. They may even lead in prayer at home. But their prayers generally follow a pattern. They're essentially all the same with only minor variations from time to time. And therefore their prayers tend to be meaningless over the course of time and are uttered thoughtlessly. When and if they pray in addition to the meal time devotions, their prayers partake of the same nature as their meal time prayers. They may even be the same prayer uttered at meal time, again with slight variations. But it all tends to be automatic, meaningless, unfulfilling, frustrating. It certainly isn't what it ought to be.

Here we come to the root of the problem. If one finds difficulty praying even in the privacy of his home, he will also find it difficult to pray in public before others. In fact, the difficulties one experiences praying in private will become exaggerated as he tries to pray in public.

And that leads us to the second reason why people find it difficult to pray before others. Many people are nervous and self-conscious in front of people, especially when they speak in front of a crowd. This is called stage fright. It's also called the fear of performance. But it's a common problem. Some people have been able to overcome this problem to one degree or another; others have not. Some people will do almost anything to avoid standing in front of other people. And this serves to explain in many instances why people can not pray in public. Because of stage fright even those comfortable with prayer in the privacy of their homes will often fail when it comes to praying in public. And as we have already suggested, if prayer is a struggle generally, being required to pray in front of others will simply compound the problem.

What's the solution?

The solution is first that we must learn to pray.

Prayer is something that must be learned. Prayer is not something that comes naturally or that is instinctive. This is due to the very nature of prayer itself. Prayer is a profoundly spiritual thing. Prayer is an act of communion with the living God. In prayer we very really come before the presence of the living God Who is spirit and therefore invisible, Who is also holy and just so that His eyes are too pure to behold sin. And as we come before that God in prayer we are able to communicate with Him. We are able to speak to Him, praise Him, thank Him, lay before Him our burdens and needs. This is not something we are able to do by nature. We are able to come before God in prayer only by virtue of the work of God's grace that transforms us from darkness into light. And even then prayer must be learned. We must learn not only the proper manner in which we are to approach God but also what we are to say to Him.

To learn to pray requires first that we learn the principles of prayer. There are certain principles that God has laid down that must guide us in prayer. These principles our Lord has incorporated in the Lord's Prayer. Without the guiding light of these basic principles, prayer becomes meaningless, frustrating, impossible. The first step therefore in learning to pray is to learn these principles. It is the purpose of this special issue of the *Standard Bearer* on prayer to set forth these principles. These principles can be learned from any good exposition of the Lord's Prayer, such as is found in Volume 3 of *The Triple Knowledge*, by Herman Hoeksema. These principles ought also to be taught in the catechism room and from the pulpit.

The next step in learning to pray is by doing. That's how we learn any skill. First you learn the principles. But principles alone aren't enough. One must also learn how to put principles into practice. And that's learned simply by doing. The same is true with prayer. Having learned the principles of prayer, we learn to put these principles into practice simply by praying. We must start with our own private prayers. We must pray, and pray often. We must pray at the family altar and we must pray in our own private devotions. And always we must strive to put into practice the principles of prayer we have learned. And simply by doing we slowly learn how to pray — what to say in prayer, the proper manner of prayer, how to pray meaningfully, how to feel comfortable with prayer.

This is 90% of the solution to learning to pray in public. 90% of all public speaking is simply having something worthwhile to say that you want to tell others. And the same is true with prayer. Knowing

how to pray is 90% of praying in public.

The next step is to learn to do in public what you have learned to do privately.

In this connection there are several suggestions.

First, we must remember that we need not be eloquent when we lead in prayer; nor must we try to be eloquent. The feeling that we must somehow wax eloquent in prayer hinders many in their prayers, especially when they pray in public. All too often the attempt to be eloquent in prayer brings one into the same error against which Jesus warns in Matthew 6:5 — praying to be seen of men. Instead of seeking eloquence in prayer we must simply pray from the heart. Our prayers, even public prayer, ought to be nothing more than a simple, yet sincere, outpouring of what lives in our hearts. The people who are truly eloquent in prayer are not those who consciously seek to be eloquent but who simply pour out their hearts to God in prayer.

Secondly, we ought not to worry what men will think of our prayers. Most stage fright in public speaking and also in leading in prayer comes from an over-concern with what people will think. We want people to approve. Above all we don't want to make a mistake that will cause others to disapprove. We ought not to be too concerned with this. After all, when we pray we are praying to God, not

to men. And therefore we ought to be concerned that God is pleased with our prayers, not men. And God is pleased with our prayers, public and private, when our prayers arise from a sincere heart of faith.

Thirdly, it is important to remember to pray for the occasion. Some make the mistake of praying for everything under the sun when they must open or close a meeting with prayer or must lead the consistory in prayer before the worship service. These prayers can often be long and tedious. They are not always so profitable for those being led in prayer. Neither are they easy to utter, especially if one finds it somewhat difficult to lead in public prayer. Much better and easier to limit one's prayer to the occasion, asking God's blessing on the activities on hand. And be simple and precise. Utter what is in your heart and then be done.

Finally, if we know ahead of time that we will be called upon to lead in public prayer, a little preparation is helpful. Don't write out or memorize a prayer. Instead, collect your thoughts as to what kind of things you ought to mention in this prayer. And then commit the matter to God Who has promised to give us that which we are to say when called upon to bear testimony of Him.

In all this bear in mind that it's never too late to learn to pray, even in public.

Prayers That God Will Hear

Rev. John A. Heys

Even as it is true that all that glitters is not gold, so is it true that some of the prayers that seem to us to be those that God will surely hear are instead an abomination to Him. What is more, prayers that to us seem to be directed to God are often instead prayers wherein a man approaches a god of his own fabrication, a god the way he wants God to be.

But do not take my word for it. Search the Scriptures and you will find that the above is true and is not man's silly notion or gloomy conclusion. Consider what God Himself declares. And be assured that these lines are presented to help us in our prayers, and that we may have the joy and blessed-

ness that blood-washed sinners have through fellowship with God in prayer.

Let us begin with that truth. Praying is having fellowship with God. It is communing with Him as surely as your speaking to a friend or relative by means of a phone is having fellowship with that person, even though you do not see each other face to face in the literal, physical sense of the word. And make no mistake about it, prayer is not a one-way street on which man walks toward God but God does not come to meet him, or a monologue with man doing all the talking. Man speaks in prayer, but so does God. I say that God speaks *in*

prayer and not simply afterward, when He fills the request or denies it. In prayer man speaks to God in his soul. And in prayer God speaks to man in that soul, although his ears do not hear one word from God. But then, how often is it not that God hears us speak in our souls and hears not one word from our mouths? If we come properly to Him in prayer, He will by His Spirit speak to us by reminding us of what He speaks in His Word. In that way we do have fellowship with God. After all, fellowship requires not only that one listens to the other but that the other one speaks and thereby is encouraging and making known his friendship and love. That God does while and not simply after we pray to Him. While we pray He, by reminding us of what He speaks in His Word, fills us with awe and humility and impresses on us the majesty and faithfulness of Him with Whom we speak. That is why we, after such communion, leave His face with comfort and confidence. Often we will, while praying to Him, fail to make certain requests because we become aware of the wrongness of that desire as we stand before Him and, because of what He revealed in His Word and now reminds us of by His Spirit, we see Him in His holiness, sovereignty, and faithfulness, and our own calling before Him.

Here, for example, is one of those truths that He may bring before our minds: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth; But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with the other, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:6, 7). Verse 3 reveals that "fellowship with Him" means fellowship "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Now fellowship with a friend by means of a phone demands dialing a phone where that friend is. We here in America cannot have fellowship with a relative who is also in America by being connected to a phone in Europe. So it is that to have fellowship with God in prayer we must be in the light, even as He is in the light. While walking in the darkness of sin we can have no fellowship with Him. Try to pray to Him while holding on to your sins, loving them, enjoying them, and you have dialed the wrong number. You have come to a god of your own imagination, even though you use God's name and address your idol by that name.

Let us point out that it is extremely important that we have the God of Scripture clearly before our minds, before as well as while we pray. So often in public meetings the one leading in prayer will say, "Let us pray," and then without any hesitation begin to speak. We ought rather to wait — no matter how long it takes — until we have the holy God of Scripture clearly before our minds. Then, too, when leading others in prayer we ought to

direct those who follow us so that they too stand before God's face. Jesus taught us that in the model prayer which He gave us. Therein He taught us that, before we make our request for a blessing upon ourselves, we must have Him before us as our Father in heavenly glory Whose name, and not ours, must be hallowed; Whose kingdom, and not ours, must come; Whose will, and not ours, must be done on earth as it is in heaven. We must in our souls see Him as the God that He is. Otherwise we come before a god manufactured by man according to fleshly whims and fancies.

The Pharisee in Jesus' parable did that. O, yes, he seems to be praying to God and uses His name. But note how he is in darkness. He prays, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:11). Plainly, the god to whom he was praying was with him in darkness, a god who listens to the prayers of conceited, hypocritical people, and approves of hating the neighbor — in this case the sin-confessing publican — instead of a holy God Who demands that we love the neighbor. His god is not the God of the psalmist who in Psalm 66:18 writes, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." His god is not the God of the blind man whose sight was restored and in John 9:31 said, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners." He had not the wisdom of Solomon who wrote in Proverbs 28:9, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." He did not know the God of Isaiah 1:15 Who declares, "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea when ye make your prayers, I will not hear you: your hands are full of blood."

Do you not now see how easy it is, and how often it happens that our prayers are not to God but to a god of our imagination — to one who is not holy, from whom sins can be hidden, and who entertains sinful thoughts with us? Such prayers insult God, attach shame to Him, deny Him His glory and imply that He dwells in darkness with us. Such prayers are sin; and such prayers He does not hear.

The same thing is true when we in our prayers try to get God to help us in satisfying the lusts of our flesh, and when we try by prayer to impose our will upon Him. Then, as James 4:3 teaches us, "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." Indeed, in such prayers which are amiss we miss God and are speaking to a god our carnal minds have fabricated.

All this reveals how tremendously important doctrine and doctrinal preaching is for our prayer life. We must know God as He is to pray to Him. Our children must be taught not simply that God

saves us but Who He is and how He is. Yes, God is love, but He is also "a consuming fire" according to Hebrews 12:29. He is merciful but also just and holy and lives in the light.

But did Jesus not teach us in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you?" And then in verse 8 He adds, "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." To be sure, God is faithful and keeps His word. But do you not see that when we try to come to God with sin in our hands and with carnal requests, with the idea that we can twist Him around our fingers, if we only pray often enough and get enough people to do so with us that then we are not praying to the God of Scripture Who alone is God? Then we do not even have Him in mind. Am I really writing a letter to President Reagan if I address him as head of the Democratic party, extol him for choosing a woman for his vice-president, and ask him to reduce the taxes in his great country of Canada? Plainly I have another man in mind, another political party, and another country — one that does not even exist. Similarly, when we, even though we use God's name, pray to one who will listen to those who love sin, enjoys fellowshiping with them, will give them their carnal lusts, and let them make him change his mind for the sake of their carnal ambitions, we are not praying to God but to a god who is the figment of our sinful minds and carnal cravings.

Indeed there are times when God will give what we ask for from an idol. As the everywhere present and all-knowing God He hears it when we pray to this idol which we have created in our minds. He knows exactly what we asked this god to do for us or give us. And He may give us what we seek, but not as a blessing. Turn to Psalm 106:13-15. There we find that Israel, dissatisfied with the abundant and nourishing manna, "lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their souls." Here we see that He punished Israel for making this carnal request from their God. They were given the quails that their flesh wanted, but were not given what their souls needed. They got what they considered a blessing, but actually it was a curse to them. Their stomachs were filled, but there was a famine in their souls.

Let us then follow the example of the publican in that parable of Jesus. He approached God confessing his sins and thus to God Whom he knew to be holy. He revealed a sincere hatred of the sins that still cleaved unto him, and in that sense was walking in the light. He did not try to hide his sins from God, as the Pharisee tried, nor to talk them away. He came seeking forgiveness as the biggest sinner he knew. In the Greek we read that he said, "God be merciful to me *the* sinner." Now he was not the greatest sinner. The Pharisee was a bigger sinner. But the publican knew his own heart, and in his own eyes he was the biggest sinner that he knew. And he sought forgiveness in the mercy of God. He came to God as the One Who is justly merciful, because His Son died for the sins of His people. The publican did not know Christ and His cross, for these had not yet taken place. But he knew them in the types and shadows. And note that he went home justified. God heard his prayer and forgave his sins.

And we will be heard and will receive forgiveness when we come with our sins, revealing that we hate them and want them taken away from us. Carry them in your back pocket and God will still see them, and see them as something that you want to keep. He will not hear that prayer. But come holding them out at arm's length as that which you loathe, and He will hear your prayer.

Call Him your "Father which art in heaven" with those sins in your back pocket as that which you treasure, and you call Him the Father of sinners. Pray that His name be hallowed, His kingdom come and will be done while you are holding on to your sins for your name and kingdom's sake, and you are going contrary to His will on earth, the will you claim you want done as it is done in heaven. Do you not see that your prayer then is a breaking of the second commandment? You make a likeness of sinful men and call that your god, and you bow down before it. It is not a graven image, but it is a mental image that denies God His glory.

Come to Him as He is revealed in Scripture, manifesting your hatred of sin, and He will hear you and bless you. That prayer glorifies Him, for it confesses Him to be holy. That He is pleased to hear. And He is a "jealous God . . . showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments."

*Take time to read and study
The Standard Bearer!*

Teaching Our Children to Pray

Gertrude Hoeksema

If we, with David, can pray each day, "As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord shall save me. Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and He shall hear my voice," (Psalm 55:16, 17) then we as covenant parents will know and understand the importance of the most intimate relationship with our Father in heaven, both for us and for our children. One of the most important tasks in our lives as covenant parents is to teach our children to pray. We must *learn* to pray, for prayer does not come to us and our children spontaneously. Prayer — true, sincere, earnest prayer — is an art, a learned skill that needs continual instruction and practice every day of our lives. When we consider that prayer is a holy art and that we address the Lord of heaven and earth, we as godly parents know what an awesome task it is to teach our children to pray.

How do we go about it? In a three-fold way: by example, instruction, and practice. We parents are examples for our children, especially our young children, whether or not we want to be. Before we teach them their first simple prayer, we would do well to examine our own prayers; for surely, before we utter a word of instruction to our smallest children in their high chairs, we have already taught them more than we realize about prayer.

How? By our attitude. How do we as parents come to God in prayer? What is our posture? Do we try to create an atmosphere of reverence and deep humility? What place does prayer hold in our lives? If it is a precious, all-important part of our lives, so important that we take the time to prepare for our prayers, lest they become stale and repetitive, or lest they are not directed to the specific needs of a growing family, our children will take note and understand.

Are we as parents satisfied to have our prayers used as models for the prayers of our children? What are the contents of our prayers? They will in all likelihood be the contents of the prayers of our children. If we use variety and fresh Scriptural approaches to our Father in heaven, and if we pray with sincerity from the depths of our hearts, our children will hear and heed. If we use the memorized clichés our own parents may have used, our children will learn to use those same stilted phrases in their prayers. It is urgent for us to remember that

we covenant parents, by our example, are shaping the prayers of the coming generations of covenant parents.

There is no point in time in our parental lives when the training of our children by example ends and our training by active teaching begins. Rather, the example and the teaching run side by side, so that while we are consciously striving to be godly examples as we lead in prayer, we are at the same time training our young children to pray. *Listening* is the first step in our very small children's learning to pray. We must teach them to *listen*, not merely to keep quiet. How do we do that? If their hearing is normal, don't they listen to our prayers? Not necessarily. It is easy for children to "turn us off." Therefore, we train them to listen by prodding them: "Can you tell me what I just prayed about?"

Careful listening to our prayers and the prayers they hear in church or Sunday School will give our children a beginning of an understanding of what prayer is. But listening is passive. How do we go about positive teaching so that they will begin to know the spiritual wonder of talking with their Father in heaven? Because He is the pure and perfect Almighty God, we tell them that — in so many words; and we tell them with a sincerity and a reverence that helps to instill in them an attitude of sincerity and reverence. We know, of course, that we cannot put reverence or any other spiritual virtues into their little hearts. Only the Spirit can do that. But God uses means to bring them to consciousness of those virtues, and we are the means He uses when our children are small.

The next step in our instruction is in the content of their prayers. What do we pray *about*? What do we pray *for*? If we are wise parents, we will take our children with us to the Bible to find the answers. In a simple way with our younger children and in greater detail with our older children we will take them to the Psalms and show them how to pray happy prayers: "Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God" (Psalm 146:1, 5); penitent prayers: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgression: and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:2, 3); trusting prayers: "I will say of the Lord, He

is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in Him will I trust" (Psalm 91:2); prayers about God's great love to us: "Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee" (Psalm 63:3).

How do we go about incorporating Scripture's direct words or Scripture's concepts into our children's prayers? For our very young children, I would suggest teaching them short texts as prayers, such as Psalm 19:14, Psalm 119:33, and the Lord's Prayer. Children enjoy praying memorized versifications of Psalms, too, such as the third stanza of Psalter number 60 or the last stanza of Psalter number 40; or a rhymed children's prayer such as the following from the *Scottish Psalter and Church Hymnary*:

Jesus, high in glory,
Lend a listening ear;
When we bow before Thee,
Children's praises hear.

We are little children,
Weak and apt to stray,
Savior, guide and keep us
In the heavenly way.

Save us, Lord, from sinning
Watch us day by day;
Help us now to love Thee;
Take our sins away.

Then, when Thou shalt call us
To our heaven home,
We will gladly answer,
"Savior, Lord, we come."

Praying memorized prayers in unison with one or more family members helps young children to be comfortable in praying aloud. During the years when I taught first grade classes, I expanded this idea and we as classroom prayed at least one unison prayer a day from a rather large number we had memorized. The children enjoyed praying together. In fact, some former first graders, now grown up, tell me they still remember and treasure those texts and rhymed prayers.

Finally, we teach our children that God has promised that He will surely hear and answer the prayers which His children utter in spirit and in truth. We can teach them about fervent prayers from James 5:16: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." And because we know that our prayers are poor and weak, we take them to Romans 8:26: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

How do our covenant children put into practice what they have observed by our example and

learned from our instruction? Through the years when our children are in grade school, they are as yet immature "prayer learners." If prayer is a holy art, and it is; and if prayer is a skill which demands a measure of spiritual maturity, and it does; then our children are not ready to lead in prayer until they have learned the holy art and until they have developed a measure of spiritual maturity. During their grade school years, I am convinced by more than twenty years of close contact with grade school children of all ages, they are still learners, not leaders.

What about our children of higher grade school age? Should we let them have practice in occasional leading in prayer at home or at school? Before we answer that question, we will read verse 7 of Deuteronomy 6: "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Scripture is a good teacher for us, too, and we learn from this text that while they are *children*, we parents are called to "teach them diligently," for all of their childhood is a drinking-in time, a time for absorption of knowledge. Scripture is full of the truth that childhood is a time for instruction: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Prov. 1:8); "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding" (Prov. 4:1).

We parents would not consider giving our twelve-year-old son the keys to the car, saying, "Son, you have watched us drive long enough. Now you take over." The results would likely be tragic. Why? Because a twelve-year-old does not have the judgment, maturity, nor ability to handle a car in traffic.

The results in giving our children the liberty to take over the leadership in prayer are even more tragic, because they bear longlasting spiritual effects. Our children do not have the judgment, maturity, nor ability to lead others as yet. What happens when a child prays in public? He is nervous. His nervousness may make him forget his prepared prayer; it may make him giggle; and at best it will make him utter a few trite platitudes. That is all he is ready for. He is not spiritually mature enough to pray properly for "the best gifts" (I Cor. 12:31).

Junior high school students have often confided to me when they took their turns to pray in the classroom: "It all degenerates into everyone saying what everyone else says, and it doesn't seem like prayer at all." These prayers are not nurturing them when they still need nurture. These children

know and confess their weaknesses; and there is a danger that our children will keep these weaknesses and bad habits of trite, routine prayers with little content, into their adult years.

When should we encourage our children to pray in public? Depending on the natures of individual children, probably at high school or college level. Then they can look back on the invaluable instruction during their youth, and as mature young people study the prayers in Scripture; and with a better understanding of the work of the Spirit in their hearts, further develop their spiritual skills in prayer.

In conclusion, I re-emphasize the thought, with which I started: one of the most important — and most difficult — tasks in our lives as covenant parents is to teach our children to pray. It is also one of the most rewarding tasks, and for our God-fearing children produces the most blessed benefits: the goodness and mercies of our covenant God. We and our children take no honor nor merit for our feeble efforts in prayer, for we have done it all through grace and by the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts. To Him be all the glory!

Book Review

STUDIES ON THE OLD TESTAMENT, by Fred-eric L. Godet; Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 351 pp., (cloth) \$10.95 (Reviewed by Prof. R.D. Decker).

STUDIES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT, by Fred-eric L. Godet; Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 406 pp., \$10.95 (cloth), (Reviewed by Prof. R.D. Decker).

Both of these volumes would make worthwhile additions to anyone's library. Ministers and lay persons alike will find them helpful aids to the study of Holy Scripture. The work on the Old Testament contains chapters on: Angels, The Plan of the Development of Life on Our Earth, The Six Days of Creation, The Four Greater Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel), The Book of Job, The Song of Songs. In addition there are appendices dealing with the Four Monarchies of Daniel 7 and the

Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9. Our main criticism of the book is that Godet makes too many concessions to Science in his discussion of the Six Days of Creation in chapter three. The chapter on Angels by itself makes the book worth having.

The volume on the New Testament consists of five chapters on the following subjects: The Origin of the Four Gospels; Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the God-Man; The Work of Jesus Christ; The Four Principal Apostles (Peter, James, Paul, John); Essay on the Apocalypse (the latter a summary of the Book of Revelation, nearly one hundred pages in length).

Godet is a good exegete, one committed to the inspired, infallible Scriptures. He was one of the most influential Swiss theologians of the 19th century. He unhesitatingly opposed the liberalism of the Protestant churches and seminaries of his day and was one of the founders of the Free Evangelical Church. From 1873 until his death in 1900 Godet was professor of New Testament Exegesis in the Free Evangelical Theological School on Neuchatel.

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