

## Prayer As A Gift Of God

“God does answer prayer. That is the first thing we must know... In Question 129 of the Heidelberg Catechism\* it is stated that the answer to our prayer is more certain than our awareness of the things that we request. It seems there is nothing more sure than the feeling of our desires, but this Catechism says that God’s answer is still more certain. We too must have this inward assurance. Perhaps we doubt the sincerity of our prayer and the worth of our request. But one thing is beyond doubt: it is the answer that God gives. Our prayers are weak and poor. Nevertheless, what matters is not that our prayers be forceful, but that God listens to them. That is why we pray.”

\* Heidelberg 129: What does the word “Amen” signify? “Amen” signifies, it shall truly and certainly be: for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of him.

“By Jesus Christ, humanity is in the presence of God. God looks at Christ, and it is through him that he looks at us. We have, therefore, a representative before God. Calvin even says that we pray through the mouth of Jesus Christ, who speaks for us because of what he has been, because of what he has suffered in obedience and faithfulness to his Father. And we ourselves pray as through his mouth, inasmuch as he gives us access and audience, and intercedes for us. Thus, fundamentally, our prayer is already made even before we formulate it. When we pray, we can only return to that prayer which was uttered in the person of Jesus Christ and which is constantly repeated because God is not without humankind. God is the Father of Jesus Christ, and that very man Jesus Christ has prayed, and he is praying still. Such is the foundation of our prayer in Jesus Christ. It is as if God himself has pledged to answer our request because all our prayers are summed up in Jesus Christ; God cannot fail to answer, since it is Jesus Christ who prays.”

“If we do not pray, we fail to realize that we are in the presence of God. We cannot recognize what he is. Such an attitude would render us incapable of grasping the fact that God meets us in Jesus Christ. Now, when we are aware of this mystery, we must pray... To be a Christian and to pray are one and the same thing; it is a matter that cannot be left to our caprice. It is a need, a kind of breathing necessary to life... Prayer is quite simply the first act of *thanksgiving* [(Fr. *reconnaissance*) *recognition, acknowledgement, appreciation*] toward God... Every one of us who knows God must *return thanks* to him.” [italics added]

“Prayer is not an arbitrary act nor a step to be taken blindly. When we pray, we cannot venture according to whim in this or that direction... It is a matter ruled by God, not by our own initiative. How shall we pray? It was not by chance that Jesus gave us a formulary in the Lord’s Prayer to instruct all human beings how to pray aright... In order that our act may become true prayer, we must accept the offer that God tenders us... This discipline is necessary for us. If it is absent, we must not be surprised that we cry out in a void, instead of finding ourselves engaged in a prayer that has already been heard.

*Do you like to be told how you should think about prayer? Why or why not?*

*Connect Barth’s idea of “the foundation of our prayer in Jesus Christ” to the ending of most Christian prayers “in Jesus’ name”... Have you made this connection before?*

*How do you incorporate the Lord’s Prayer in your private prayers? How does it shape your prayers? Do you see how it shapes our corporate prayers during public worship?*