

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #57, Lord's Day 46

The Address of the Lord's Prayer



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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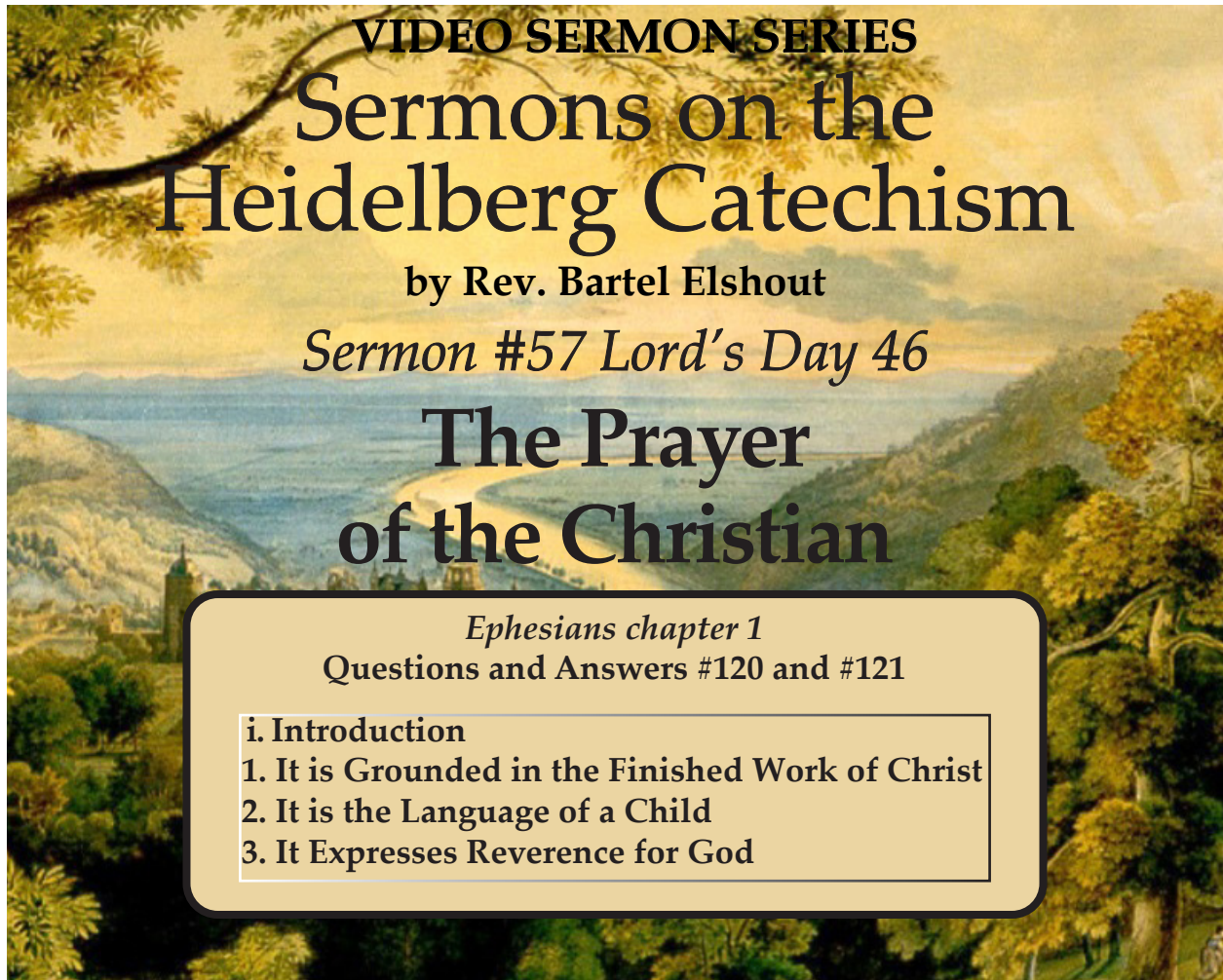
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Sermon #57 Lord's Day 46

**The Prayer
of the Christian**

Ephesians chapter 1
Questions and Answers #120 and #121

i. Introduction

- 1. It is Grounded in the Finished Work of Christ**
- 2. It is the Language of a Child**
- 3. It Expresses Reverence for God**

Introduction

Beloved, apparently it occurred in our history that one of our presidents had a distinguished and prominent member visit his office, the Oval Office, and the visitor, to his great surprise, saw the president's young son in the Oval Office. And he expressed his surprised. And he expressed his surprise to the president. He said, "Mr. President, I am surprised to see your child here in the Oval Office." And his answer was, the answer was very simple, "Yes, I am the President of the United States, but this boy is my child, and because he is my so, he can be where I am. Because he is my son, he can be in the Oval Office."

And congregation, this example sets the stage for what we hope to consider this evening, when we will consider the address of prayer, of the prayer that Christ gave to his disciples, whereby he answered their petition, "Lord, teach us how to pray" (Luke 11:1). Christ responded that we must thus pray, "Our Father which art in heaven" (verse 2). And so, *The Address of the Lord's Prayer*, as this prayer is called, the disciples' prayer, is expounded for us in Lord's Day 46 of our Catechism. So please turn with me to Lord's Day 46.

Question #120: *Why hath Christ commanded us to address God thus: "Our Father"?*

The Answer is: *That immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, He might excite in us a childlike reverence for and confidence in God, which are the foundation of our prayer, namely, that God is become our Father in Christ, and will much less deny us what we ask of Him in true faith*

than our parents will refuse us earthly things.

Question #121: *Why is it here added, “which art in heaven”?*

The Answer is: *Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God’s heavenly majesty, and that we may expect from His almighty power all things necessary for soul and body.*

And thus, we will consider *The Address of the Lord’s Prayer*, or the preamble to the Lord’s Prayer, we could call it. First of all, we will see that that address is grounded in the finished work of Christ. That’s what the Answer says so powerfully: *That immediately*—immediately, at the beginning of our prayer, there will be *a childlike reverence*, and a focus on *the foundation of our prayer; namely that God is become our Father in Christ*. So, *It is Grounded in the Finished Work of Christ*. Secondly, it is the language of a child, just like an earthly child, addresses his or her father as “father,” by virtue of that relationship. And so it is spiritually. *It is the Language of a Child* addressing his or her father. Thirdly, it expresses reverence for God, because that’s the brilliant wisdom of this simple formulation, where Christ, on the one hand, emphasizes the intimate relationship between God and his children, and yet that this God, whom we may address as our Father, is our Father which is in heaven; so that we do not form any earthly conceptions of God’s heavenly majesty. *The Address of the Lord’s Prayer; It is Grounded in the Finished Work of Christ; It is the Language of a Child; and, It Expresses Reverence for God.*

1. It is Grounded in the Finished Work of Christ

Beloved, in God’s providence this morning, we already spoke briefly about the Fatherhood of God. Also, in light of the fact that Christ, as the Son of the Father, took the place of a man who was named the son of the Father, and yet, who lived as a son of the devil. And yet, we saw this morning that it was precisely for such sinners, for such men as Barabbas, that *the* Son of the Father gave himself as a sacrifice to redeem fallen sons and daughters of men to become the sons and daughters of the living God. Because we need to understand that the “Father” name of God is so very foundational to the very being of God. It’s the Fatherhood of God that expresses and sets before us the ultimate identity of God. There is no name that so defines the being of God, that so defines the character of God, as that he is, in the first place, the everlasting and eternal Father of his only begotten Son. That relationship is an eternal relationship, without beginning and without end. And yet, in the second place, precisely because he is the Father of his Son, God purposed to create a creature in the image of his only begotten Son, a creature that he would bring into a Father-child relationship with himself.

And I realize that this is not the first time that I’m addressing this, but it needs to be addressed again. We need to understand that this is the foundation of all this. We need to understand that that “Father” name so powerfully communicates to us the very character of God. And that’s what made that relationship so special. God entered into a relationship with a creature created expressly by him, with the capacity of having this intimate love relationship with himself. In a sense, God is the Father of all of creation. But there’s only one creature that he created in his image. There’s only one creature capable of knowing him, loving him, and serving him, and such was the relationship between God and Adam. As I pointed out this morning already, that’s why, in the last verse of Luke 3, Adam is referred to as “the son of God” (verse 38). And that means that before he fell, Adam reflected his Father’s character, and the Father delighted himself in his son, because in his son, Adam, he saw the reflection of his only begotten and his eternal Son. That’s why God also purposed that he would redeem fallen sons and daughters of Adam. That’s why there’s no redemption for angels. Angels were not created in the image of God’s Son, but man was created in the image of God’s Son. And because the Father loves his Son, therefore God has purposed that

fallen sons and daughters of Adam would be brought back into a love relationship with himself; that fallen sons and daughters of Adam would again become sons and daughters of the living God. That is the good pleasure of God. And for that purpose, God's Son, God's eternal Son, became a man in the fulness of time. For that purpose, God's Son went to the accursed cross, in order to lay the foundation for the restoration of that Father-child relationship. That's the reason why, at the accursed cross, in the very midst of his suffering, he no longer called upon his Father as "Father," but he called out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). And so, the eternal Son of the Father, the true Barabbas, he descended into the very depths of hell, in order to secure the restoration of that Father-child relationship.

That's why I will try to make clear tonight, there's nothing so close to the heart of God as that reality. That's why it is so important for us to grasp this. That's why, when Jesus arose and appeared to Mary Magdalene, he made this remarkable statement. We have quoted it often, but I'll say it again, these remarkable words that he said to Mary Magdalene, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascended unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). What Christ there so profoundly stresses, he's saying, "This is the very heart of why I came; this is the essence of why I came; that's why I left my Father's glory; that's why I came to become the Son of man; that's why I emptied myself of all of my glory; that's why I willingly surrendered myself into the hands of wicked men; that's why I allowed myself to be nailed to the accursed cross; that's why I descended into the very depths of hell, so that on the basis of my sacrifice that my Father can be your Father, and that my God can be your God.

And so, the Catechism profoundly grasps that essential truth, profoundly grasps the essential truth, it is God's desire that those who are redeemed by his Son come to know him as their heavenly Father. And so, what the Catechism correctly grasps, and what Jesus is saying in the words of John 20, verse 17, this is it, this is the very essence of the work of redemption; this is that God desires, this is what he delights in, is to bring fallen sinners back to himself. Then it should be obvious to us that it is the desire of that God that his children would know him as such.

That's why it says here, *That immediately, in the very beginning of...prayer.* And so, what it's saying here is that when we bow our knees, we should at once focus on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should at once focus on basis on which we are coming into the very presence of God. We should at once focus on the fact that in Christ, in Christ, we have the basis for our Father-child relationship with God. And that instruction is so important. That means that in order for us to pray profitably, in order for us to pray in a God-honoring way, we must not begin by focusing on ourselves—something we are so inclined to do. But this is saying, this wonderful instruction of the Catechism is saying, the very first thing we need to do when we bow our knees, we need to look away from ourselves, we need to look outside of ourselves, we need to look to him who is the foundation of our hope.

Immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, He might excite in us a childlike reverence for and confidence in God,—I'll come back to that—which are the foundation of our prayer; namely, that God is become our Father in Christ. Open your Bibles please to Galatians 4. I want to read verses 4 through 6. That's so powerfully, powerfully expressed there for us—a very precious and important portion of God's Word that summarizes everything I'm trying to say. Galatians 4, verses 4 through 6: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law,"—lawbreakers like ourselves; why?—"that we might receive the adoption of sons"—that we might be brought into God's family—"And because ye are sons,"—Paul writes—"God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." What an extraordinary statement that is. "God hath

sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” By the way, I hope you noticed, a remarkable expression of the Trinity, of the Trinitarian interaction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “God,” the Father, “sent forth the Spirit of his Son,” the Spirit of his only begotten Son, causing us to cry, “Abba, Father.”

And that’s why, again, the Catechism correctly says, in its opening Question, *Why hath Christ commanded us to address God thus?* Thereby emphasizing that, for the Christian, this is not optional. This is the holy obligation of a child of God. The holy obligation is to address God as to who he is in Christ. That’s why the “Father” name of God is the most prominent name in the New Testament—256 times the “Father” name is used in the New Testament. And, in the Gospel of John, 112 of those 256 instances are recorded. Paul writes of this, too, in Romans 8, verses 15 and 16, where he says, “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”

So what that simply means, congregation, when God saves a sinner through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit, whereby we become partakers of the salvation that Christ has secured by his sacrifice, his goal, as the Spirit of adoption, is to bring God’s children to a full grasp of what that means to be a child of the living God. In other words, it is the Father’s desire that those whom he has eternally chosen in his Son, who he has given to his Son, whom he has redeemed by his Son, it is his desire that every believer would come to a conscious understanding and knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. There’s nothing that is more foundational to the Christian life than the fact that a Christian must come to that recognition that God is our Father for Christ’s sake. And so, the whole notion that calling God as your Father, to call upon him as your Father, is but reserved for a very few, is not only contrary to Scripture, but it’s contrary to the very nature and to the very character of God.

And so, I can boldly say to you tonight that when the believer bows his knees and when he cries out by the Spirit of adoption, “Abba, Father,” even though perhaps in hesitation, even though perhaps at times in strife, but when that precious name comes across our lips, I can assure you that that is music in the ears of God, that is music in the ears of your heavenly Father. Because, when God’s children come to the understanding, when they come to understand the gospel in such a way that they call upon God as their Father, we can reverently say, that’s what God has been waiting for eternally for that moment, when we would so understand the gospel, that with freedom and liberty, we would cry out, “Abba, Father.” That’s what that Spirit of God’s Son does, in Galatians 4 and Romans 8. That Spirit, the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of childhood bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. The Dutch divine, Theodore van der Groe,¹ in his exposition of the Catechism, says this very beautifully. He says, “Nothing moves God’s heart more deeply and insights him to bestow loving grace upon his believers than the acknowledgment that he is their Father and that they are his children.”

And congregation, is it not so in natural life? When a child is born, that infant is not yet capable of calling you “father.” But what do you do as a father? The moment that child is born, you are beginning to reveal your countenance to that child; you speak to that child; and you speak to that child, and you express your love to that child; and you long for that moment when that child, for the first time, calls you “father.” What a moment of great delight that is for an earthly father, when his new child reaches that point that they say, “Daddy.” And congregation if that’s true in the natural realm, it is far more true in the spiritual realm. That’s why van der Groe says, “Nothing moves God’s heart more deeply and insights him to bestow loving grace upon his believers than”

1 Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784), a Dutch Reformed minister and theologian who published several religious works, best known as a penitential preacher.

when we acknowledge him to be our Father.

And therefore, dear believer, don't let Satan deceive you into thinking that you are presumptuous by calling upon God as your Father. And I realize we live in a culture, in a Western culture where many use that "Father" name flippantly, and irreverently. But that does not mean that we ought not to use it. No, the Catechism says it correctly, that *Why hath Christ commanded us to address God as our Father?* So, what that means negatively is that if we do not address God as our Father, we are thereby denying the very nature and core of the work of Christ. That's why he came. That's what he said to Mary Magdalene, "That's who I am. That's why I came into the world. That's why I died and rose again, so that my Father could be your Father, and my God could be your God." That's why, in 2 John 1, verse 9, the second epistle, John makes a profound statement when he says—why don't you open your Bibles to the second epistle of John; let's read it together, 2 John, verse 9, and there, the Apostle says, "Whosoever...abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God." And then, positively, "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." A remarkable statement. So there, the Apostle John is saying this is the very core of that doctrine, when, by the grace of God, we embrace that doctrine, when we embrace who Christ is in his Person and his work, what he came to do, we have both the Father and the Son. And so, *The Address of the Lord's Prayer Is Grounded in the Finished Work of Christ.*

2. It is the Language of a Child

But it's also the language of a child. Congregation, it's an extraordinary privilege to be able to call yourself a child of God. Sadly, I've known people in my life who claim to be a child of God, and who do not hesitate to say it, and yet, who will not call God their heavenly Father. That's entirely inconsistent. You cannot claim to be a child of God and yet not then call God your heavenly Father. The two belong inseparably together. That's why we need to realize that the use of the "Father" name is a privilege of all God's children. Just like in a family, where you have a family where you have a twelve-year-old and you have a two-year-old. They both equally have a right to call that man their "father." Now, granted, the twelve-year-old already has a far better understanding of who that man is than a two-year-old. But the privilege is the same. Galatians 3, verse 26: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." Do you see, that's one of the marks of a child of God. A child of God is someone who is irresistibly attracted to God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. A child of God is someone whose heart is knit to their elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. And that relationship is established in the hour of regeneration. In the hour of regeneration, the Spirit cuts us off from Adam, and grafts us into Christ. From that moment a fallen sinner becomes a child of the living God.

And so, in 1 John 2, another passage that I want to look at—turn with me to 1 John 2 where, again, this is emphasized that calling God our heavenly Father is the privilege of all God's children. This is the first epistle of John, and John had a profound understanding, by the Holy Spirit, of the Fatherhood of God. Verse 12, of 1 John 2: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (verses 12 to 14). So what's important about this passage is that the Apostle John gives us the three stages of spiritual life: little children, young men, and fathers. The same stages that we find in natural life. But what is he saying about the little children? What is he saying about the youngest members of the

household and family of God? Two things—he says they know that their sins are forgiven for his name’s sake, and secondly, that they have known the Father. And so, that emphasizes that knowing that your sins are forgiven, and knowing that because of the fact that your sins are pardoned, that God is your reconciled Father for Christ’s sake, belongs to the foundational blessings of the Christian life. That’s where the Christian life begins. And then comes the young men, who by the grace of God, are victorious in that ongoing battle against the three-headed enemy. Then there are the fathers, who have a very deep and profound knowledge of God. But the foundation of spiritual life is expressed here, forgiveness of sins and knowing that God is your heavenly Father.

Again then, we quote Theodore van der Groe, when he says, “Children of God,” he says, “how great is your happiness. In the name of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, you may boldly come to the throne of grace, and call God your Father.” And so, dear believer, do not believe Satan’s lie. Do not believe Satan’s lie that you may not approach God and call upon him by that name. Let me say it again. The Father so delights in it, just like an earthly father is so delighted when his child calls him for the first time by that “father” name, so God delights to hear that. He delights it, when, on our knees, as we struggle, when we, by grace, focus on the finished work of Christ, and we say, “Abba, Father.” Oh, that’s why I began with that example. Because what the Word of God teaches us that God’s children have unlimited and unconditional access to their heavenly Father in Christ. That’s why, in Matthew 6, verse 6, Jesus says, “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet...pray to thy Father which is in secret.” You can’t help but notice, when you read through the Gospels, how Christ did everything he could to get that truth across to his disciples, constantly referring to their heavenly Father which is in heaven.

Oh, we need to understand that God loves his children with an everlasting love. A love that we cannot begin to comprehend. We cannot begin to comprehend how deeply God, as the heavenly Father of his children, cares about his children. We sang Psalm 103 together, verse 13, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.” We think of how our hearts, as fathers, can be moved towards our children, especially when they need us, when they have difficulties. Our whole heart is engaged to care for our children. And yet, that love that we show to our children is so primitive compared to the love that God has as the heavenly Father of his children. That’s why we read in Isaiah 49, verse 15, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” That’s why the words of John 17 are so profoundly glorious, and encouraging, and striking, when, in his High Priestly Prayer, at the end of his prayer, he twice refers to the Father’s love for his children. Please open your Bibles to John 17, verses 23 and 26. Verse 23: “That the world may know that thou hast sent me”—and here come the important words—“and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” Think about that for a moment. Think of what the Bible has to say about the Father’s love for his Son—an eternal love, an infinite love, a love that is beyond our comprehension. And yet, Christ is saying in this prayer that the Father loves his children with the same love with which he loves his Son. Now verse 26, the end of this prayer: “And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it”—that “Father” name—“that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” We need to meditate on that. We need to stop and consider the profound significance of these words. Dear child of God, not only does God love you, but Christ, here, defines the very nature of that love. Christ is saying that the Father loves you with the love with which he loves his Son, that eternal, infinite, unconditional love, a love that is beyond our comprehension. And God has purposed to bring his children into that love relationship. And because God’s children are united to Christ, are grafted into Christ, God always views you in terms of his Son, always. He never sees you apart from his beloved Son.

Then we have to be ashamed, because our perception of that love is often so very faulty. Our perception of that love is so often measured by who we are. But that love is so extraordinary. And yet, that is the love which is the portion of every child of God. And dear believer, if God loves you with the love with which he loves his Son, he loves to hear from you. He loves it, he delights in it, when you recognize that love, and when you respond to that love, when you cry out to him, “Abba, Father.”

But the Catechism, here, also expresses, I think powerfully, that all of this happens in a proper attitude. It says here, *He might excite I us a childlike reverence for and confidence in God*. A childlike reverence—so, boys and girls, that’s not difficult to understand. You love your moms and dads. You feel very close to them. They are very special to you. And yet, there is a proper relationship between you and your parents. Even though you feel very close to them, yet you know you have to respect them, precisely because they are your parents. That’s why a true childlike spirit will never express itself in a flippant and a casual way. This happens all too often in our day. That’s why that childlike reverence would never, never refer to God as “the man upstairs,” as some people flippantly do. But we must not overreact to that flippant use of the “Father” name. No, we have to use it, and we have to use it with childlike reverence, and with confidence, the confidence of knowing that God is so pleased when we call him by that name. This is what Calvin² says, “For that purpose,” he says, “he has laid down this rule by which we must frame our prayers if we desire to have them accounted lawful and approved of God. Let us therefore entertain no doubt that God is willing to receive us graciously, that he is ready to listen to our prayers. In a word, that in himself, he is disposed to aid us.”

3. It Expresses Reverence for God

So, *The Address of the Lord’s Prayer is Grounded in the Word of Christ*, secondly, *In the Language of a Child*, and then, as an extension of this, *It Expresses Reverence for God*, because in Question #121, the question is asked, *Why is it here added, “which art in heaven”?* First of all, *Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God’s heavenly majesty*. And what this is saying is that, as we call upon him, we must have a proper understanding of God. We may not lose sight of the fact that this God is the God of heaven and earth; that the heavenly Father of God’s children is the transcendent God of the universe. And so, in theology, we talk about the *transcendence of God*, and we talk about the *eminence of God*, and both are very essential truths that are captured here in the address of the Lord’s Prayer.

So what do we mean by the transcendence of God? The transcendence of God means that God is infinitely above and beyond us in his awesome, inexpressible majesty; that is it true what Solomon said in his prayer at the dedication of the temple: “The heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (1 Kings 8:27). That’s the transcendence of God—God, in his infinite greatness, his infinite majesty, his infinite power. And think of what we know about that universe today, because of the powerful telescopes that are now circling the earth. We know far more about the heaven of heavens than Solomon did, and man has not yet been able to find the edge of the universe. It says that those heaven of heavens, this incredible universe cannot contain him. That’s what we mean by the transcendence of God. However, that God is also an eminent God. That God is a God who has purposed to reveal himself. That God has purposed to create this earth, and to create a creature capable of knowing him, and loving him, and serving him. And so, this transcendent God, in his infinite majesty, is also a God who draws near to the children of men, who makes himself known,

² John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564) – was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and leading Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

who reveals himself in his only begotten Son. And we need to keep those two aspects of God's being together. The Apostle Paul did that in Athens in that remarkable sermon that he preached in Athens (Acts 17:16–31). If you read that sermon carefully, you'll notice that on the one hand, he emphasizes the transcendence of God—the God whom they ignorantly worshipped. At the same time, he said, “This God is not very far from every one of you.” There we have the eminence of God.

So what happens when we separate those two? You see, Christ unites those two in that remarkable address: “Our Father” speaks of that intimate love relationship. That emphasizes the eminence of God. And yet, that God is the God of heaven. And there, we see the transcendence of God. So if we only focus on the transcendence of God, and we lose sight of the eminence of God, then we become fearful of him, we do not dare to approach him. If we only focus on the eminence of God, and we lose sight of his transcendence, then our relationship would become casual. And Christ wants to make sure that neither of these things happen. So Christ is teaching here in this prayer that God's children have a true and genuine familiarity with God, but that familiarity, though it is intimate, it is never casual—intimate, but not casual: “Our Father, which art in heaven.” Even Christ, in his High Priestly Prayer, address his Father this way, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me” (John 17:11). Think of Abraham, the friend of God, a man who had such a remarkable relationship with God. And yet, when he approaches Him, when they are looking over the valley where Sodom and Gomorrah were located, and when Abraham realized what God is about to do, God was very near to him, very near. This was a preincarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis chapter 18). So Abraham, in a very real sense, experienced the eminence of God at that moment, and yet he recognized his transcendence. By now he knew who this man was in whose presence he was. And so, we read in Genesis 18, verse 27, “Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.” There is a man who had a proper understanding of his relationship, but also a proper understanding of who God was. “Our Father, which art in heaven”—*Lest we should form any earthly conceptions of God's heavenly majesty.*

But there's also a very encouraging aspect to it, because it says, *That we may expect from His almighty power all things necessary for soul and body.* And of course, the rest of the prayer focuses on this. The Lord's Prayer addresses our spiritual needs, and our temporal needs. And here, the Catechism is saying that, by addressing God as our Father, we may expect from him, and *from His almighty power all things necessary for soul and body.*

Because this God is your *omniscient Father*, a Father who knows everything about you, who knows every detail of your lives. All things are known to him. Oh, how comforting that is to a child of God, when they call upon their heavenly Father, to know that they are pouring out their hearts to a God who knows everything about them. That's what Jesus emphasized in Matthew 6, where he preached about it, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (verses 31, 32)—an omniscient Father.

Secondly, an *omnipresent Father*, a Father who is everywhere present, who is present in all the circumstances of my life, no matter where I am. Psalm 139, verses 1, 2, and 3, “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.”—what a comfort—an omniscient Father, an omnipresent Father.

And, an *omnipotent Father*, for whom, nothing is too hard. That's what the psalmist expressed in Psalm 46, verses 1 and 2, he says, “God,”—the God of the universe, this God of infinite glory and

power and majesty, this “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed.”

And so, when we say, “Our Father, which art in heaven,” not only are we to have a proper view of him, but that should so encourage us to pour out our hearts to him, to make all of our needs known to him. Because the difference between this heavenly Father and an earthly father is that an earthly father is always very limited in what he can do for his children. Though we love our children, there are limits to what we can do. Not so with this heavenly Father. This heavenly Father, who has redeemed you through his Son; this heavenly Father, who cares far more about you than even you and I can begin to imagine; this heavenly Father is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present. What an enormous comfort that is. So there is no greater privilege for a human being than to be able to call God his Father in Christ.

And so, my beloved, is God your Father in Christ? Is there biblical evidence that you are a child of this heavenly Father? Because when you are a child of that heavenly Father, you will conduct yourself as a child of that heavenly Father. That means that, by the grace of God, you will seek to know that Father, you will seek to love that Father, you will seek to serve that Father. In Malachi 1, verse 6, God complained about his people Israel, named by his name: “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour?” And so, may God give us the grace to honor our heavenly Father, to conduct ourselves as children of this heavenly Father, and so, bring honor to his name.

And my dear friends, if God is not your Father in Christ, if Christ has not yet become precious to your soul—because you see, he’s your Father in creation, but that will not save you. You need to know that he is your Father for Christ’s sake, that he is your reconciled Father. And that can only be if, by the grace of God, the Lord Jesus Christ has become the only hope of your soul; when Jesus Christ has become precious to your soul; when you have been taught by the Spirit that as a sinner, your only hope is in that Christ. Because if that may be true—if you belong to those that hunger and thirst after him and his righteousness; if your heart is drawn to that Christ; that he has become to you the altogether lovely one, then that means that, therefore, his Father is your Father, and his God is your God.

If you are still a stranger to that, then the wonder of the gospel is that, in the gospel, God offers his Fatherly love to sinners. Listen to the remarkable words in 2 Corinthians 6, verses 17 and 18: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”—then these wonderful words—“and will be Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” And so, do not rest until you know that, for Christ’s sake, God is also your Father.

And dear believer, do not live below your privileges. If you cannot deny that your heart yearns after the living God, you cannot deny that Christ is precious to your soul, you cannot deny that you pant after God as a hart pants after the waterbrooks, then do not withhold from your heavenly Father that joyful privilege of hearing from your lips, “Abba, Father,” because that so delights him, and that so honors him. And that so, as we address God in prayer, that immediately, in the very beginning of our prayer, it may excite in us a childlike reverence for and confidence in God, which is the foundation of our prayer, namely, that God has become our Father in Christ. Amen.

Let’s pray.

Our faithful God and Father, in the name of our dear Savior, thy beloved Son, we come to thee into thy presence, knowing that he has paved the way into the sanctuary, and that in him we may call thee by that precious name. Lord, thou knowest that at times we struggle with it, that at times

our spiritual strife can be so great that we lose the liberty to call you by that name. But Lord, we pray that by the Spirit of adoption that thou wouldst continue to work in our hearts, that those who love the Lord Jesus Christ would come to a clear knowledge of that glorious privilege that those who are in Christ may indeed call upon God as their heavenly Father. Lord, bless us as we depart from here. Bring us home safely, go with us in this coming week. Grant what is needed in our daily calling, our young people, our children when they go to school, and bring us here again this coming Lord's Day. Be with all those families who are vacationing, who will be traveling, bring them back safely to us. And graciously pardon us, for the name and sake of thy dear Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.