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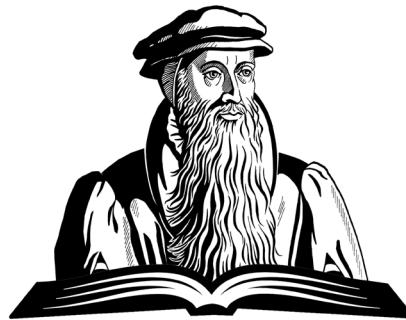
*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

Lecture #53

**The Lord's Prayer:**

**The Preface**

*Catechism Question 100*



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# *The Shorter CATECHISM*

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*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

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# *The Shorter CATECHISM*

## VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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### Lecture #53

## The Lord's Prayer: The Preface

**Question 100:** *What doth the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us?*

**Answer:** *The preface of the Lord's prayer (which is, "Our Father which art in heaven") teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others.*

Our Lord Jesus was a man of prayer. On one occasion when he was praying, his disciples witnessed it, and it led them to ask him to teach them to pray. We read of this in Luke 11, and verse 1: "And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." On that occasion, as when he was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapter 6), Christ taught them to pray. And among other things that he taught them, he provided them guidance through the Lord's Prayer.

Notice how he begins his instruction, in Luke 11, verse 2: "And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven." You'll notice that before any request is made, Christ instructs his disciples to call upon God in a very loving and reverent way, "Our Father which art in heaven." Now this is full of help and guidance in prayer, as we'll see. And Question #100, of the *Shorter Catechism* focuses our attention upon this preface. Notice the Question: "What doth the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us?" And the Answer: "The preface of the Lord's prayer (which is, *Our Father which art in heaven*) teacheth us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others."

Well, we should notice this word, "preface." It refers to something that goes before other material. We should not think of it as unimportant. Instead, it sets the foundation for what follows. You'll remember an earlier preface—the preface to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). Well, this is not an unimportant introduction at all. In fact, we can't rightly understand the Ten Commandments without the truth of what the preface sets forth. It is of great necessity and importance, because that preface reminds us of God's grace. It provides the foundation for all true obedience. Well, similarly, this preface provides us the firm foundation for all true prayer, as we'll see.

So for our lesson, we will look at three points: first, *Reverence in Prayer*; second, *Confidence in Prayer*; and third, *Brethren in Prayer*.

So first, *Reverence in Prayer*. Prayer is a great privilege. Men and women in this world think themselves special if they're given the opportunity to meet with, and speak with, and express their desires to someone who stands above them—a ruler, perhaps, or a famous person, or a wealthy person. When that takes place, we have a tendency to think of our thoughts and words, what we'll say, how we'll appear, what we'll wear, and all of these things, because we realize we're having the opportunity that is a privilege.

Now, think of what happens in prayer. Remember the previous lesson: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God." In prayer, we are actually permitted, in fact, elsewhere in the Bible, we're commanded to pour out our heart to the Lord. All of our concerns, all of our needs, all of our confusion, all of our confession and our thanksgiving—everything that is within our heart, we're to bring unto the Lord in prayer. Now, this is, of course, a privilege in and of itself that anything that concerns us we can express, but it's a heightened privilege when we realize to whom we express these things—to God. He is the Almighty, and all-knowing God, and it is he who welcomes us into his presence. And astonishingly, he welcomes us into his presence that he may hear from us. Well, the Answer before us tells us that we are to "draw near" to him. Prayer is a close intimacy with God. This is a great privilege indeed. This is the one true God! You'll remember, he is that "Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" (Question #4). There is nothing like God. No one in this world compares properly to God. God is above us, beyond us, most majestic, the angels never cease worshipping him, and he beckons us to draw near to him. This is indeed a wondrous privilege.

While we'll see that the believer has great encouragement to approach God with confidence and assurance because of his grace, this does not change the fact that the God who we approach, even as believers, through Christ, that this God is most glorious. He is most majestic and truly awesome. This should humble us and cause us to draw near with reverence. We see this expressed in the preface itself: "Our Father which art in heaven." The one we are privileged to call upon as Father is in heaven. He is in the highest heaven, the Holy of Holies, the one that's not made with hands as in the tabernacle and temple; rather, the heavenly most holy place. And this reminds us of God's glorious transcendence. He is above and beyond all else that is. This is expressed in some ways in Ecclesiastes, chapter 5, verse 2. We're exhorted, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." We understand a little bit of this, when we think of a little child and an adult. The child is to honor the adult. And even if that child is the child of the adult—his son or his daughter—it's still even as the fifth Commandment tells us, the child is to honor his father and his mother. Well, how much more so when we think of ourselves approaching to God, who is not only better than we are by degree, but is essentially, infinitely more than we are? It is truly a wonder.

Well, in other words, we should never think we are approaching someone who is just like we are. We should never be casual or careless with God in prayer. He is God. He is infinite, and eternal, and unchangeable. He is most holy. Isaiah 6 reminds us of the angels who have never sinned, and they're approach to God. There, in verses 1 through 3, we read, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted upon and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy,

is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.” Well, angels, as glorious as they are, as holy as they are, are still creatures, infinitely beneath God. And they perceive this. They perceive the overwhelming glory of God. And so, though sinless, they cover themselves with reverence to God. Well, men are also creatures, but we have something that the sinless angels do not. We have our own guilt, profanity, and corruption; and even though answered by grace through faith in Christ, this should humble us all the more, and cause us to approach with reverence as we draw near to God in prayer.

However, it is all holy reverence and confidence as children to a father. The reverence is likened to children drawing near to their father. This may be difficult for some cultures to understand today, where there is increasingly a lessening of the authority and dignity of adults. However, as mentioned earlier, remember the fifth Commandment, “Honour thy father and thy mother.” Although there is to be great joy and blessing in the relationship between a child and his father, there is to be still a loving fear and reverence shown to the father. Not one that would make the child cowardly or scared, and overwhelmed with grief, but rather, one that would bring forth respect and honor. Well, so it is here in prayer. When we draw near to God in prayer, even as believers, we are to draw near with loving reverence to our great God. Well this should govern our thoughts and our speech. Not that we would put on a show, but with sincerity, we would lift our desires to God with reverence.

Well, second, *Confidence in Prayer*. Christ’s teaching includes this great expression of assurance: “our Father.” I realize that some, perhaps many in this world have had earthly fathers who have been unkind, and even cruel. This is a wicked abuse of a good relationship. The term “father” refers to a loving relationship in a family. The father who stands as head of the home is also to be the one who loves those in the home, who cares for them, who provides for them, who instructs them and trains them, nurtures them. When this is the case, not only will the children honor their father, the children will love their father and delight in his presence.

When we understand this, we realize what Christ is saying. He’s teaching us to draw near to *the* Father, not only as he is God in heaven, but as he is *our* Father in heaven. This expresses an assurance, a confidence, and comfort because of his mercy and love and goodness. This is why the *Catechism* says that the preface teaches us to “draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us.” When we come near to him with holy fear, we also come near to him with holy confidence—not presumption, not a carelessness, but with a holy confidence. Notice, the *Catechism* gives us the comparison, “as children to a father, able and ready to help us.” When children are persuaded that their father is able and ready to help, they come confidently with their requests. This is how we, through Christ, are to draw near to God.

There is such a thing as false confidence, and to be persuaded that something will happen, only to be let down when it does not, brings forth great disappointment, even shame. Unfortunately, many people in this world lift up their desires confidently, thinking that God in heaven will do all that they request. But they’re disappointed in the end, because they had founded their hope on a false foundation. Well, how then can we pray in the confidence that Christ teaches us to pray with? How can we be persuaded that the God who is as “a father able and ready to help us”?

Well, first, by seeing his revealed will in the Scriptures as our guide. We don’t pray for just anything. We pray for those things which are in accordance to his will. We’ll give more attention to this in the following petitions. But we remember, it’s God who has called upon us to draw near to him in prayer. And this means then that he would have us bring requests to him. To avoid doing that is to engage in sin. And so, one thing we need to see, if we’re going to have assurance, is that it is God who calls us to come near to him. Failing to do that means that we are actually sinning.



But we're to pray for things in accordance to his revealed will. So in 1 John chapter 5, and verses 14 and 15, we read, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we desired of him." Think of it this way. If our earthly father were very wealthy, and he told us that if we were ever hungry, even as adult children, that we should come to him and as him for food, we would have great confidence to approach him. Why would we have such confidence? Because he has stated explicitly that we're to come to him for those things. This is what happens when we search the Scriptures, and we see what he's promised, and we see examples of what he blesses, and this guides and governs our own requests. When we search God's Word and discover his will and his encouragements for us to pray, we can then draw near to God with assurance. As we ask for things according to his will, he hears us.

A second way to have confidence in prayer is by embracing his offered redemption. In fact, we can say this: there is no confidence in prayer, if it is not by the mediation of Jesus Christ. God has come near to us in the preaching of the gospel, and offered us pardon, and peace, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. In truth, this is the only sure ground of assurance and confidence in prayer. This is why we often in our prayers we'll say, "in Jesus' name;" or "in Christ's name;" or "for Christ's sake." Because we're saying in our prayers that it is by Christ, our great and High Priest, *the* mediator between God and man, the one to whom has been given a name, by which we must be saved. It is in Christ and by Christ that we draw near. It is the blood of Christ only that cleanses us from all sin. So when we draw near to God, through Christ the Savior, we have the assurance that God welcomes us as those forgiven and accepted through his beloved Son. So Christ must be indeed our focus, as the cause of assurance before God in prayer.

A third and related way of confidence in prayer is by enjoying the ministry of God's Spirit. Remember that believers are adopted into God's family. "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God" (Question #34). This is a great privilege. The Bible helps us understand this great privilege, in Galatians 4, verses 6 and 7. Paul gives much encouragement, when he writes the following: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into you're your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Notice what Paul's helping us see. It goes back to the second reason for assurance—through Christ. But through Christ, we are no longer slaves, but children. And the Spirit's ministry helps us lay hold of that great privilege. The Holy Spirit works within us to cry out to God as our Father through Jesus Christ. So you'll notice that his work is according to the relationship we have through Christ. If a son, then an heir of God, through Christ. And the Spirit works faith in us, and causes us to believe the promises of God in Christ. We are given great encouragement to draw near to God in confidence. And so, we ought to ask him, "Bless us to know the gracious ministry of your Spirit. Enliven us, quicken us, that we may call upon your name in prayer."

Well third, *Brethren in Prayer*. The *Catechism* picks up upon something that may have easily been missed. You'll see it at the end of the Answer. The preface teaches us "that we should pray with and for others." Well, where in the preface to we see this? It's in the word "our." Certainly, the Christian may call upon the Father as "my Father" through Christ. However, Christ is teaching us to remember something that's important. God is not only the individual believer's Father by grace; he is the Father of all of his children through Jesus Christ. And as we have been saved through Jesus Christ, all of his children are saved through Jesus Christ. And we share fellowship with them. This means that, by God's grace, we are made part of that redeemed family. We're given

many brothers and sisters. God has made us part of his family. Just as in an earthly family, we are to love our brothers and sisters, so in God's family, we're to love our brothers and sisters. And one way that this love is shown is in praying with them and for them. When we pray with them, it's right for us to pray to him who is *our* Father. And so, when we gather with others, perhaps in public worship, you'll hear the minister leading in prayer. And he'll be using that expression, "our Father." He'll pray, "We approach you," and "We ask you for these things," and "We give thanks to you for these things." His voice is representing this truth. It's not merely he alone who comes, but he with his brothers and sisters. And so, in our families, when others are praying, it's not just "I ask," and "This is what I need, and what I would hope for." But we are asking as a family. And when we're with other Christians, we do the same. When we're praying with others, we're praying together to our Father.

However, we're not always with our brothers and sisters. And of course, there is to be the exercise of faith in prayer in secret. We need to remember even then, when we're alone to pray for them. There's a great verse on this at the end of Ephesians 6, there at verse 18. Paul exhorts Christians, saying, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." This is to be a part of our praying, that we are laboring before the throne of grace, on behalf of our brothers and sisters. This is to be a regular part of our life of prayer—to pray for all saints.

And certainly this means that we need to pray for those near to us, those who we know more fully—our family, our congregation, and others who are well known to us. But it also means that we should be praying even for others still. There are ways to learn about Christians in other countries and around the world, that can help us to pray for our brothers and sisters, that God our Father would remember them and bless them. It's right for us to pray about personal things, and there's much, of course, that concerns us, that we need to seek the Lord regarding. But as Christ teaches us, we *must* pray with and for others.

Well, as we come to a close, let me call your attention to an important lesson that this preface teaches us. And if we can apply it, we can say it this way. If we're going to pray rightly, we must do so by starting with God himself. And so there's a need to acquaint ourselves and learn about the needs facing ourselves and others. But if ever we're going to pray rightly, we have to know the truth regarding God. We must first think about the God to whom we draw near. He is the glorious God of heaven and earth. This will both humble us, but encourage us. Because, as he's the Maker of heaven and earth—"our Father which art in heaven"—he has all power, and all ability. He is the glorious God who rules over all. And yet, as this encourages us by the fact of his power and wisdom. It also cultivates right and good reverence. This helps us then approach him according to his Word, because so great and glorious as God is, demands that we come near to him through the one who is "the way, the truth, and the life." Remember what Christ said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). And so we start with God, and we draw near to him through Christ. Spend time to think on this. Talk with your parents. Talk with your pastor, about ways in which you can have more faithful thoughts about God. And of course, your parents and pastor will direct you to study the Word of God, to learn about God, to realize the one you are drawing near.

We can ask ourselves, "Am I showing reverence to God as I pray? Do I spend some time reflecting upon what I've read in private time, or in public worship, or what I've heard? And do I reflect upon those things, and then draw near to God in a way prepared? Am I asking for things according to his Word? Am I consciously relying upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the reason for my hope?"

So start with God. And as you do, by his grace, it will cultivate this holy reverence and holy confidence the preface teaches us to have. This is not to discourage us. Rather, as we draw near to God through Jesus Christ by faith, we then find the assurance that God receives us, he welcomes us, indeed he commands us to draw near to him with confidence. We must remember that true confidence is not something we manufacture or invent. True confidence comes from a right understanding of God's grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. When we understand this, we'll have a real reason to come near to him with assurance.

Another thing to consider is that, as we work through the remaining Questions of our *Catechism*, which lead us through the rest of the Lord's Prayer, we'll come across many particulars for which we should pray, and ought to pray, and must pray. And as this lesson has reminded us, let us be sure to consider these petitions with reference to our brothers and sisters as well. In other words, do not only think about your personal needs. But think about the brothers and sisters in your congregation. Calling upon God as our Father necessarily reminds us we are part of a family. So this is something I challenge you to do. Start this week, if it's not your habit; start this week by going to another Christian and asking, "What needs do you have?" And then write those down, and bring those to *our* Father which art in heaven. May the Lord bless you as you do, through faith in Jesus Christ.