

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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In our modern world, much confusion abounds regarding prayer, even among professed Christians, because there are many religions outside of orthodox Christianity. Therefore, this month's topic for consideration in light of the Holy Bible is: **The basics of proper prayer.**

The 1943 Concordia edition of Luther's Small Catechism in its sections on the Lord's Prayer should be read by everyone who has a copy, specifically pages 12-15 and pages 146-168. In fact, on page 146, question number 201 asks: "What is prayer?" And, the answer given is: "Prayer is an act of worship wherein we bring our *petitions* before God with our *hearts and lips* and offer up *praise* and *thanksgiving* to Him."

The foregoing definition for **prayer** is Scriptural and quite accurate, for in Matthew 21:13 Jesus said to those who were defiling the temple by making it a merchandise-mart: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." The English word **prayer** is a translation of the Greek word (transliterated): **proseuche, pros-yoo-khay'** And, Strong's Greek/English dictionary supplies the meaning as: "prayer (worship); by implication, an oratory (chapel)."

Accordingly, proper prayer is indeed an act of worship. Proper prayer is NOT mere speech but comes from a heart beating with faith in the true God and frequently issues through the believer's lips as the following Bible passages indicate:

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14 KJV)

"O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." (Psalm 51:15 KJV)

"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." (Psalm 103:1-2 KJV)

"Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." (Psalm 106:1 KJV)

Comment: Observe the necessity of prayer being from the heart and not merely from the mouth. Furthermore, note that thanksgiving and praise to the LORD are to be included in proper prayers, rather than solely requesting temporal and spiritual blessings.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7-11 KJV)

Comment: Jesus promises us that petitioning God in proper prayer will bring positive results— God our heavenly Father will give us good things, not harmful things.

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” (Matthew 6:5-8 KJV)

Comment: Jesus makes it clear that proper prayer is NOT putting-on-a-show so that other folks see you praying and admire you for it; nor is proper prayer the empty repeated recitation of words and phrases, such as exhibited in praying the rosary or making use of prayer-wheels or prayer-gongs. Wordiness means nothing if the heart behind the words is not beating with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 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 that we desired of him.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6; 1 John 5:14-15 KJV) Note that proper prayer is asking for things in accord with the Lord’s will, NOT asking for things that are harmful to us.

Being an act of worship, proper prayer is rendered ONLY to the TRUE GOD, the TRIUNE GOD.

“And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” (Exodus 20:1-7 KJV)

“Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him.” (Deuteronomy 4:35 KJV)

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.” (Psalm 95:6 KJV)

“Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.” (Isaiah 63:15-16 KJV)

*Comment: It is obvious from the foregoing Old Testament Bible passages that prayer is ONLY to be addressed to the LORD God, not to departed saints or false gods. In the Old Testament of the Holy Bible King James Version, when the English word "LORD" in all capital letters is used along with the English word "God" with a capital "G," it is a translation of the Hebrew words (transliterated) **Yehovah Elohiym (Jehovah Eloheem)** — Jehovah meaning "the eternal existing One" and Eloheem being a plural noun meaning "God," thereby indicating that the one true God is plural in Persons: the Triune God. In fact, in the first book of the Bible, in its first chapter, we read: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Genesis 1:26 KJV) Notice that "God" is speaking with Himself and says "us" and "our," thereby indicating the plurality of divine Persons.*

"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matthew 4:10 KJV)

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24 KJV)

Comment: The Lord God ONLY is to be worshiped, prayed to; and, such prayer is to be rendered to Him in spirit and in truth, that is, from one's heart and soul in accord with God's Word — the Holy Scriptures — which are 100% truth.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." (2 Corinthians 13:14 KJV)

"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (1 John 5:5-7; John 1:1, 14 KJV) *Note that Jesus Christ the Son of God is the incarnate Word of God.*

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." (Jude 20-21 KJV)

Comment: The Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – IS THE ONE TRUE GOD, as is plainly evident in the foregoing New Testament Bible passages. Observe also that proper prayer is made by those in the "most holy faith" who are "praying in the Holy Ghost," that is, praying with the assistance and guidance of God the Holy Ghost who dwells in all true believers in the one true God, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9 KJV) Thus, proper prayer is rendered to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Furthermore, when one believes in the Triune God, the one true God, one can address the Father, or the Son who is Jesus Christ, or the Holy Ghost, for addressing any of the three divine Persons in prayer is addressing the one true God since the three divine Persons are NOT

each merely 1/3 of God; rather, each divine Person IS GOD ENTIRE as the following Bible passages make clear: "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10 KJV) Hence, the Father IS GOD. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:8-9 KJV) Hence, Jesus Christ IS GOD. "Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." (Acts 5:3-4 KJV) Hence, the Holy Ghost IS GOD.

Proper prayer is ALWAYS rendered to the true God in JESUS' NAME.

Yes, proper prayer is always made to the true God with faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord, for Jesus promises, "whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." (John 14:13 KJV) Thus, faith in Jesus Christ is an absolute necessity if a prayer is to be a proper prayer, for, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (1 John 2:23; Hebrews 11:6 KJV)

Being an act of worship, proper prayer is made jointly only with fellow Christians who share the same faith, having unity in doctrine and practice.

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24 KJV)

Comment: We looked at this passage earlier and it is appropriate as proof here again since Jesus commands that we worship God in spirit and in truth. Therefore, since prayer is an act of worship we must be one in doctrine and practice with those people with whom we pray to the true God, for the Holy Bible which is 100% truth says: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." (Romans 16:17-18 KJV) Yes, we are NOT to pray with those who hold to doctrinal error and falsehood! We are to AVOID them, we are NOT to pray with them! "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:10 KJV) Unity in doctrine and practice is a necessity for those who would pray together.

Proper prayer is made to the true God FOR ALL people, NOT WITH ALL people!

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Timothy 2:1-6 KJV)

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 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. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”
(James 5:13-16 KJV)

“Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.” (Luke 6:26-28 KJV)

Comment: Note well that we Christians are NOT to pray with all people; but, we are to pray for all people, especially fellow Christians, civil authorities, and even our enemies.

The basics of proper prayer have briefly been put forth in this bulletin with proofs from the Holy Bible. Let us regularly make use of proper prayer, for the Apostle Paul by inspiration of God declares: “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”
(1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 KJV)

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