

Orthodoxy: The Attitude of Prayer

New City Catechism Question 39: With what attitude should we pray?

Answer: With love, perseverance, and gratefulness; in humble submission to God's will, knowing that, for the sake of Christ, he always hears our prayers.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).



When we pray, we approach the throne of the King of the universe. There is a tendency in the modern church to view prayer as chatting with a pal. This way of viewing prayer overemphasizes God's immanence at the expense of his transcendence. However, the bible portrays prayer as a cosmically significant action—speaking before the One who has dominion over the whole world. The author of Hebrews says that we "draw near to the throne of grace" when we pray (Heb. 4:16). This emphasizes that God is an almighty king. However, God's immanence means that we can approach the throne confidently, because of Jesus, our advocate and mediator (Heb. 4:16).

How do we approach the throne in prayer, keeping in mind both God's immanence and transcendence? First, we approach the throne with an attitude of love. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and the second is like it: love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:36-40). Our prayers should display our abundance of love for our heavenly Father with all our being. Similarly, our prayers should show love to the people around us. Prayer should never be a selfish exercise. We pray that God would be glorified, and we do so with love in our hearts.

Second, we pray with perseverance. God is not slow to answer his promises like some understand slowness (2 Peter 3:9). When we pray, we can know for certain that God is active in the situation, making his will come to pass. He has promised that if we ask for wisdom, then he will grant it if we ask without doubting (James 1:5). However, this most likely will not happen instantly. God changes us over time through prayer as we conform to his will. This is why we must persevere in prayer. We must claim the promises of God every day, washing ourselves in his promises in Scripture, because that is how we discipline ourselves spiritually. Persistent prayer results in holiness.

Third, we pray with an attitude of thankfulness. God mercifully hears our prayers even though we are sinful people. Simply being allowed to approach the throne of grace is a blessing that we do not deserve. When we pray, we should thank God that we can pray in the name of Christ. His holiness becomes our holiness, and we become righteous before God. We should be grateful for all of the good and perfect gifts that he gives us (James 1:17). We do not approach the throne of grace with pride, but with grateful humility.

These three attitudes of prayer hint at the purpose of prayer: to humbly submit to God's will. We do not pray that our will be done, but that his will be done (Matt. 6:10). Our prayers should echo the Scriptures that show us what God's perfect will is. One way to make sure that our prayers submit to the will of God is to pray the bible. The book of Psalms is a divinely inspired prayer book that helps us conform our will to God's through prayer. We also pray for the end of suffering and oppression, because we know that God hates these products of sin. Every form of prayer should be prayed in humble submission to God's will.

Our prayers will be humble if we remember that God hears our prayers for Christ's sake. Christ is the only mediator between God and man, and God listens to our prayers because of the righteousness of Christ. We can have comfort knowing that our prayers are not effective because of the words we use or our own piety; our

prayers are only effective, because of the sacrifice and his intercession on our behalf. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf with wordless groans (Rom. 8:26). Our prayers are not about us, and this is the attitude that we must pray with.

Re-Gathering to Worship Together

We will be re-gathering to worship together Sunday June 7th at 10:00 am. It will be wonderful to gather together by faith in Jesus Christ at God's throne to worship in Spirit and truth. But things will not be as they were before we suspended worshipping together. Our liturgy will be the same, but the way we carry that liturgy out in our life worshipping together will be different. Yet in the midst of those differences, we will worship together with the same God guiding our lives together in love.

"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."
—Romans 12:10

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."
—Philippians 2:3-4

The church was never meant to cater to our personal preferences. When we gather to worship together, we are participators in the body of Christ, not consumers of a product. "We shouldn't demand our church to do things a certain way. Instead, we should look for ways we can let go of our favorites and sacrificially love the church."
(Ed Stetzer)

The Scripture gives us the basis for our worship and life together. Most of the time our preferences do not come from Scripture. For example, we have preferences for music in our worship that are not given to us in Scripture. The Bible does not contain musical notes. Therefore, there is no musical preference in God's word. Another example is in the clothes we wear when we gather for worship. There is no direction from Scripture about what clothes you should wear in the Bible. There is not even any direction about how long a service of worship should be. This is also true about our preferences for how our present situation should be handled as we seek to regather for worship.

The Bible does command us to read Scripture, preach God's Word, observe the Sacraments, and sing together. But most of the things we get upset and argue over are the preferences we have as participants in a culture.

When we regather for worship, we need to be ready to let go of our preferences to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. One of the ways God instructs us to do this is by looking to the interests of others. When we are outdoing one another in showing honor then we will not insist on our own preferences.

We need to keep in mind that our preferences are not essential issues. When we gather to worship around the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ that is an essential issue. We will not change that. But we must not mistakenly believe that our preferences are outlined in the Bible so that we must stand firm on and defend.

As we regather on June 7th, we need to be humble and loving enough to let go of our preferences for the sake of our brothers and sisters. The way you believe you should handle this present situation we're facing may not be the way everyone else should. Consider one another as more important than the preferences you hold dear. Hold the Lord before you, offering your heart to him, and hold people dear and your preferences lightly.