

OF PRAYER

CCCXXVIII.

None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. It is a great matter when in extreme need, to take hold on prayer. I know, whenever I have earnestly prayed, I have been amply heard, and have obtained more than I prayed for; God, indeed, sometimes delayed, but at last he came.

Ecclesiastics says: *"The prayer of a good and godly Christian availeth more to health, than the physician's physic."*

O how great a thing, how marvelous, a godly Christian's prayer is! how powerful with God; that a poor human creature should speak with God's high Majesty in heaven, and not be affrighted, but, on the contrary, know that God smiles upon him for Christ's sake, his dearly beloved Son. The heart and conscience, in this act of praying, must not fly and recoil backwards by reason of our sins and unworthiness, or stand in doubt, or be scared away. We must not do as the Bavarian did, who, with great devotion, called upon St Leonard, an idol set up in a church in Bavaria, behind which idol stood one who answered the Bavarian, and said: Fie on thee, Bavarian; and in that sort often repulsed and would not hear him, till at last, the Bavarian went away, and said: Fie on thee, Leonard.

When we pray, we must not let it come to: Fie upon thee; but certainly hold and believe, that we are already heard in that for which we pray, with faith in Christ. Therefore the ancients ably defined prayer an *Accensus mentis ad Deum*, a climbing up of the heart unto God.

CCCXXIX.

Our Savior Christ as excellency as briefly comprehends in the Lord's prayer all things needful and necessary. Except under troubles, trials, and vexations, prayer cannot rightly be made. God says: "Call on me in the time of trouble;" without trouble it is only a bald prattling, and not from the heart; its a common saying: "Need teaches to pray." And though the papists say that God well understands all the words of those that pray, yet St Bernard is far of another opinion, who says: God hears not the words of one that prays, unless he that prays first hears them himself. The pope is a mere tormentor of the conscience. The assemblies of his greased crew, in prayer, were altogether like the croaking of frogs, which edified nothing at all; mere sophistry and deceit, fruitless and unprofitable. Prayer is a strong wall and fortress of the church; it is a godly Christian's weapon, which no man knows or finds, but only he who has the spirit of grace and of prayer.

The three first petitions in our Lord's prayer comprehend such great and celestial things, that no heart is able to search them out. The fourth contains the whole policy and economy of temporal and house government, and all things necessary for this life. The fifth fights against our own evil consciences, and against original and actual sins, which trouble them. Truly that prayer was penned by wisdom itself; none but God could have done it.

CCCXXX.

Prayer in popedom is mere tongue-threshing; not prayer, but a work of obedience. Thence a confused sea of *Horae Canonicae*, the howling and babbling in cells and monasteries, where they read and sing the psalms and collects, without any spiritual devotion, understanding neither the words, sentences, nor meaning.

How I tormented myself with those *Horae Canonicae* before the Gospel came, which by reason of much business I often intermitted, I cannot express. On the Saturdays, I used to lock myself up in my cell, and accomplish what the whole week I had neglected. But at last I was troubled with so many affairs, that I was fain often to omit also my Saturday's devotions. At length, when I saw that Amsdorf and others derided such devotion, then I quite left it off.

From this great torment we are now delivered by the Gospel. Though I had done no more but only freed people from that torment, they might well give me thanks for it.

CCCXXXI.

We cannot pray without faith in Christ, the Mediator. Turks, Jews, and papists may repeat the words of prayer, but they cannot pray. And although the Apostles were taught this Lord's prayer by Christ, and prayed often, yet they prayed not as they should have prayed; for Christ says: "Hitherto ye have not prayed in my name;" whereas, doubtless, they had prayed much, speaking the words. But when the Holy Ghost came, then they prayed aright in the name of Christ. If praying and reading of prayer be but only a bare work, as the papists hold, then the righteousness of the law is nothing worth. The upright prayer of the godly Christian is a strong hedge, as God himself says: "And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none."

CCCXXXII.

When Moses, with the children of Israel, came to the Red Sea, then he cried with trembling and quaking; yet he opened not his mouth, neither was his voice heard on earth by the people; doubtless he cried and sighed in his heart, and said: Ah, Lord God! what course shall I now take? Which way shall I now turn myself? How am I come to this strait? No help or counsel can save us; before us is the sea; behind us are our enemies the Egyptians; on both sides high and huge mountains; I am the cause that all this people shall now be destroyed. Then answered God, and said: "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" as if God should say: What an alarm dost thou

make, that the whole heavens ring! Human reason is not able to search this passage out. The way through the Red Sea is full as broad and wide, if not wider, than Wittenberg lies from Coburg, that so, doubtless, the people were constrained in the night season to rest and to eat therein; for six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, would require a good time to pass through, though they went one hundred and fifty abreast.

CCCXXXIII.

It is impossible that God should not hear the prayers which with faith are made in Christ, though he give not according to the measure, manner, and time we dictate, for he will not be tied. In such sort dealt God with the mother of St Augustine; she prayed to God that her son might be converted, but as yet it would not be; then she ran to the learned, entreating them to persuade and advise him thereunto. She propounded unto him a marriage with a Christian virgin, that thereby he might be drawn and brought to the Christian faith, but all would not do as yet. But when our Lord God came thereto, he cam to purpose, and made of him such an Augustine, that he became a great light to the church. St James says: "Pray one for another, for the prayer of the righteous availeth much." Prayer is a powerful thing, for God has bound and tied himself thereunto.

CCCXXXIV.

Christ gave the Lord's prayer, according to the ideas of the Jews - that is, he directed it only to the Father, whereas they that pray, should pray as though they were to be heard for the Son's sake. This was because Christ would not be praised before his death.

CCCXXXV.

Justice Jonas asked Luther if these sentences in Scripture did not contradict each other; where God says to Abraham: "If I find ten in Sodom, I will not destroy it;" and where Ezekiel says: "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, yet would I not hear," etc.; and where Jeremiah says: "Therefore pray not thou for this people." Luther answered; No, they are not against one another; for in Ezekiel it was forbidden them to pray, but it was not so with Abraham. Therefore we must have regard to the Word; when God says: thou shalt not pray, then we may well cease.

CCCXXXVI.

When governors and rulers are enemies to God's Word, then our duty is to depart, to sell and forsake all we have; to fly from one place to another, as Christ commands. We must make for ourselves no tumults, by reason of the Gospel, but suffer all things.

CCCXXXVII.

Upright Christians pray without ceasing; though they pray not always with their mouths, yet

their hearts pray continually, sleeping and waking; for the sigh of a true Christian is a prayer. As the Psalm saith: "Because of the deep sighing of the poor, I will up, saith the Lord," etc. In like manner a true Christian always carried the cross, though he feel it not always.

CCCXXXVIII.

The Lord's prayer binds the people together, and knits them one to another, so that one prays for another, and together one with another; and it is so strong and powerful that it even drives away the fear of death.

CCCXXXIX.

Prayer preserves the church, and hitherto has done the best for the church; therefore, we must continually pray. Hence Christ says: "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

First, when we are in trouble, he will have us to pray; for God often, as it were, hides himself, and will not hear; yea, will not suffer himself to be found. Then we must seek him; that is, we must continue in prayer. When we seek him, he often locks himself up, as it were, in a private chamber; if we intend to come in unto him, then we must knock, and when we have knocked once or twice, then he begins a little to hear. At last, when we make much knocking, then he opens, and says: What will ye have? Lord, say we, we would have this or that; then, say he, Take it unto you. In such sort must we persist in praying, and waken God up.

[HOME](#)

[TABLE TALK INDEX](#)