



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Theology of Prayer:

What is Prayer? or the Nature, Object and Grounds of Prayer?”

[Prayer] Father we come to Thee at the beginning of our series of studies in prayer and we ask that as we study the things that Thou hast revealed in the Scriptures that Thou will teach us through the Spirit the things that will enable us to have a deepened relationship with Thee. And also the experience of being more useful to Thee in our Christian lives. We commit to Thee all who are present. And we pray Lord that Thou will minister to them. And may these studies be the means of building of each of us up in our faith. May as a result of our studies we be more prayerful. And thus enjoy to a deeper and greater extent fellowship with Thee. We commit this hour to Thee tonight and pray Thy blessing upon us in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] This is the first in our series of studies on “The Theology of Prayer, or John Calvin at the Throne of Grace.” Now I have given it that title in order to illicit a smile from you [laughter] because you know there are people who do think that if you believe in the doctrine of predestination that God does control the affairs of men, then prayer is a useless exercise. And so that will be one of the things that we will be considering particularly, some of the problems that arise out of the attributes and decrees of God which we have studied over the past few years.

The subjects will be the second one next week: Why Bother an Infinite Omniscient God of Love, or Prayer and the Attributes? -- the first in a series of two on that subject. The second, being, Does Prayer Change an Unchanging God? And the third and fourth message: Why Should Weak and Willful Men Struggle With the Decreed Events and the Laws of Nature? or Prayer and the Decrees? And fifth: Does God Really Answer Prayer? or the Problem of Unanswered Prayer. And we want to consider the various types of answers that are given in the word of God, some of which seem to be unanswered. And sixth: Is the Answer No a Divine Cop Out? or the Problem of Unanswered Prayer, that’s the second in the series of two on that subject. And finally: The Prayer Life of Jesus, the Supreme Argument for Prayer or the Necessity of Prayer.

Tonight our subject is: What is Prayer? or the Nature, Object and Grounds of Prayer. And I want to, first of all, introduce the subject with a few comments, and then we shall look at the outline that I have put on our projector here. What is prayer? I’m sure you cannot read that top line. What is prayer? or the nature, object and the grounds of prayer. And for a text, let me just read one verse, not that it has a direct relation to what we’re going to say tonight, but one verse John chapter 15, verse 7 in which our Lord in the upper room discourse says, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” A remarkable promise and one to which many Christians have testified as being the source of very very remarkable experiences in their lives.

But first a few words of introduction, the value and importance of prayer to the life of the Christian is, of course, a well-known thing. Theology has been called the queen of the sciences, and prayer, which is experiential theology, is called the queen of the experiences. W. Graham Scroggie was an outstanding Scottish minister of the word of God once said, “a prayerful life is a powerful life. A prayerless life is always a powerless life.” Most Christians will testify to the truthfulness of that also. To these testimonies of the importance and value of prayer, we may add the testimony of John Calvin, the apostle

of predestination. For he said, “The principal exercise which the children of God have is to pray, for in this way they give a true proof of their faith.”

It should be evident from that, that John Calvin did not consider his predestination, his doctrine of the decrees, his doctrine of the foreknowledge and the foreordination of God in the hindrance to the life of prayer. As a matter of fact, those who have believed the things that John Calvin believed have been those who have been most characterized by prayer, surprising as it may seem to those who reason according to the natural man. Isn’t an interesting thing, too, that the Apostle Paul -- whom many accused of having an overemphasized doctrine of predestination -- in his own experience, he is described by Luke as a man of prayer from the beginning? For it was marked out concerning him that, “Behold he prayeth.”

Now that was the first Christian exercise so far as we know that the Apostle Paul engaged in. The method of prayer is less well known than the value and importance of it. And often when we do know the method of prayer it seems to issue in little more than just perfunctory religious exercise. Now that is most characteristic of our church services in which it seems often that the prayers that are offered are perfunctory exercises and particularly true -- I think -- when the Lord’s Prayer is repeated Sunday after Sunday in our churches. Scroggie has also said, “When we are praying monotonously the heart rocks monotonously on the surface of the great thought of God, of Christ, of eternity, of heaven, as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean.”

Now for those of you who are not preachers and therefore not guilty of standing in a pulpit and praying monotonously, and as if really prayer doesn’t mean a whole lot to you, can you think of the times when you got down by your bedside and began to pray to God and suddenly that your thoughts were ranging over your business or your friends or your children or perhaps you have just plain fallen asleep while you are praying.

Now I think most of us who have prayed very much or prayed very little have had all of these experiences, so we should not blame just the preachers. It is awfully easy in

our prayer life to become perfunctory and to take it as just an ordinary religious exercise. Now to Charles Blanchard, who has said in his book on prayer that he once spoke to a little boy and he asked the little boy when he prayed or if he prayed. The little boy said he prayed sometimes and then Dr. Blanchard said, “Well when do you pray?” He said, “When I’m scared,” and that too is an experience of most of us. We pray when we feel an unusual need for it, but when we are happy and everything is rocking along wonderfully we never think about prayer.

Now I think the Bible does indicate to us that the idea of prayer is associated with our difficulties and our trials and our persecutions and our problems, but our prayers should be replaced by praise when we are not in those circumstances. So our communion with God should not be hindered by the experiences that we have. Well the aim of this study -- I think -- is set forth adequately by our title: The nature, the object and the ground of prayer. And so first of all let’s consider the nature of prayer. What is prayer? If you were asked by someone to define prayer what would you say?

A popular preacher by the name of John R. Rice has written a book on prayer and he has in few pages expatiated against the idea that prayer was anything more than just asking or intriguing. It is his claim that the idea of prayer is simply comprehended by asking. And some years ago when I read his arguments, I then went to my Webster’s dictionary in order to check him out. And I discovered that the dictionary that I had at that time defined prayer as “entreaty, earnest request” and that was all under the first definition, and then second the offering of adoration, confession, supplication, thanksgiving and other things to God. And so it would seem that so far as the dictionary is concerned that Dr. Rice is right, that prayer is simply asking. And that the other things that we associate with prayer: communion, thanksgivings, praise are byproducts of one’s approach to God.

On the other hand, when you turn to the Bible you discover that the Bible has never read Webster’s definition; because when you turn to the Bible and look at the

prayers of the Bible you suddenly discover that what the Bible comprehends by prayer is much broader than that which is comprehended by the definition entreaty, earnest request.

For example, to give you just a few illustrations, when Hannah prays as a result of the promise that she is to have a child, Samuel, after her years of barrenness, it says, “Then Hannah prayed,” but you can go down through 1 Samuel chapter 2, verse 1 through 10 and you will not find one single request. And yet the Hebrew word is the word for prayer in the Old Testament. And so in the Bible a prayer must be broad enough to comprehend a series of verses of praise of God.

The same thing is true in the prayer that Jonah reminds us of after he is out of the belly of the great fish. When he had been in the belly of the great fish, he said in the second chapter of Jonah he told us that he made vows to the Lord; he looked towards Jerusalem and other things. And finally he came to the conclusion that salvation was of the Lord. That’s the famous text that Mr. Spurgeon said was learned by Jonah in a strange theological seminary. Salvation is of the Lord. And the moment that he says this he is vomited out on dry ground, so he tells us. But when you go back through Jonah’s prayer -- which he prayed -- and it does say he prayed, you discover that there are no requests to God at all in that prayer and he had did his call to prayer. As a matter of fact, it is called by scholars of the Old Testament a declarative psalm of praise. And so again in the case of Jonah, his praise is called a prayer just as Hannah’s praise is called a prayer.

We could go on into the Psalms to Psalms 8 to Psalms 18, Psalms 23, Psalms 24 and we will discover that these Psalms, which are expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God, are called prayers. But often they do not contain any requests at all. So I think we must decide from what we see in the Bible that while Webster defines prayer entreaty or earnest request, the Bible’s definition is broader.

So we probably should speak of prayer in a specific sense; that is, the sense of asking, request and the general sense by which we would include communion with God,

adoration, praise, thanksgiving and other aspects of communion with God. Clement of Alexandria, who lived back in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century after the time of the Lord Jesus Christ said, “Prayer is intercourse or communion with God.” And that seems to be the kind of definition that is more in harmony with the prayers of the Bible.

Prayer is communion with God and when we get down upon our knees and offer a word of thanksgiving to God we are praying. When we get down upon our knees and we praise him we are praying. When we get down upon our knees and make a request, we are praying. As a matter of fact, we don’t even have to get down on our knees. If we rise up on our feet and offer a petition to God, we are praying. If we are just having communion with God while we are riding the bus or in our automobile, we are praying according to the biblical sense.

Now let’s turn to the words for prayer. And I’m going to just concentrate on the New Testament words and I’m only going to say a few words about them because I know that you did not come here tonight to get a lesson in Greek, but it is helpful to go over these different aspects of the doctrine of prayer in the New Testament.

Now I have put the words on the board. Can you read those at all? Is that clearer or is this? How’s that? Is that better? I’ll leave it that way. The first one is *deomai*, D-E-O-M-A-I. Now this is a word in which the emphasis, it really means to want for oneself. And the emphasis in the use of the word *deomai* is upon one’s own need. In Luke chapter 5, verse 12, when the leper, “implored Him,” saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” He used the word Luke, used the word *deomai*. That leper spoke out of his sense of need.

The second word is *parakaleto*. It means to call alongside. It is the word that is the same root that is used of the Holy Spirit as the paraclete. It is also used of advocate. In the New Testament it means to encourage, to exhort, to comfort. *Parakaleto* -- to call along side. The emphasis is upon one’s helplessness. It is the word that issued in Matthew chapter 8, verse 5 where the centurions speaks concerning his own specific

need. And he spoke out of his helplessness. There we read, “And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, and saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented.’” And so the centurion feeling his helplessness in the presence of the disease that had gripped him came to Jesus out of his helplessness for help.

Peter Wolf has said, “Self-sufficiency never finds its way to the feet of God,” and this man acknowledged his need and came. And so he exhorted the Lord. He came along side with his sense of helplessness and asked our Lord for help. It is the word that is also in found in Matthew Chapter 26, verse 53. And there we read, “Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” In other words, do you not think that I in my apparent helplessness before you in your hands, do you not think that I cannot appeal to the Father? And he will answer my need with the legions of angels if I were to request it.

The third word is *aiteo*, A-I-T-E-O. This one means to ask directly or definitely or indefinitely. To ask directly and definitely. And the emphasis in the use of this word is upon the thing that is to be given. In Matthew chapter 7, verses 7 and verse 8 is an illustration of it. And this, of course, is the famous text, which our Lord gives in the Sermon on the Mount in prayer. He says, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” The word is translated “ask here.” And so the thought of *aiteo* is to ask directly and definitely for something.

Now that’s a great promise. Ask for something and it shall be given to you definitely, directly, do not hesitate. That is a promise.

The fourth word is *erotao*, E-R-O-T-A-O. This word also means to ask directly and definitely. It means the same thing as *aiteo* -- but although a synonym -- the stress is slightly different. In this one, the emphasis is upon the person doing something for us. It is never used of men to God. No man ever comes with *erotao* on his lips asking

something from God. It really means something like, to ask for information often. It is a word that is used of the Son with the Father and some, therefore, have said this word that is used of a request between equals and not a request from an inferior to a superior person. That is not, however, always its usage, though that may be part of it. It means to ask definitely and directly and the emphasis is upon the person doing something for us. I do think there is a sense of asking a person who is a more lofty being than we are, but that is not always the sense.

The fifth word is *entungchano*, E-N-T-U-N-G-C-H-A-N-O. These, by the way, are transliterations of the Greek words and if you are a Greek scholar in the room -- I have -- you will see translated, transliterated a gamma by an N-G because that’s the way it should be pronounced. *Entungchano* it means to meet with to converse. To meet with, to converse. So if I were to say I want to meet you afterwards I might use *entungchano*; I have something I want to say to you. It means to intercede therefore.

The emphasis is upon the childlike confidence and confiding approach. It’s the word that is used of the Holy Spirit’s intercession for us. In Romans chapter 8, verse 27 it’s the word that is used of Jesus Christ’s intercession for us. In Romans chapter 8, verse 34. So the Holy Spirit is one who intercedes for us. The Son of God is one who intercedes for us. Hebrews chapter 7, verse 25 says that, “he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Because of his close relationship with the Father, he has a childlike confidence and confiding approach in him. Seems strange that this should be used of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but nevertheless the sense of intimacy between the two it seems to me explains why it is used. And it is one of the things that we ourselves are to offer to God; intercessions. 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 1 states that. So we too -- because we are children -- are to have the same childlike confidence and confiding approach as we come to God in prayer.

The sixth word is really an adjective H-I-K-E-T-E-R-I-O-S, *hiketerios*. Now this word is used of a suppliant. Emphasis, therefore, is upon humility and submissive spirit;



the will resigned to God. It is found only one place in the New Testament and that is in Hebrews chapter 5, verse 7. And why don’t you turn over there to that one because it is an interesting occurrence of it. It is a reference to our Lord Jesus himself. And it’s a reference to the Gethsemane agony. Hebrews chapter 5, verse 7, “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.” He had offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears. And so the stresses upon humility and the stresses upon submissiveness the stresses upon the will resigned to God and that is why Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, “Oh my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me nevertheless not my will by Thine by done.”

Isn’t it interesting how the true humanity of our Lord Jesus shines out? If that last clause had not been put there, I might have wondered if he really was a sinless human being. “Oh my Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me.” Why the Lord had already given more than prophecy that he was going to die, that he was going to be buried, that he was going to be raised from the dead. How could he now pray that this might pass from him? Well, of course, he prays out of his humanity, out of his true experience of all the tests of humanity even here in Gethsemane, but that last clause guards us against any criticism of Our Lord’s request for it was always within the Father’s will for him. Nevertheless not my will as a man but Thy will be done. It is the submission of the human will to the divine will, and evidence in the experiences of life of the absolute perfection of the true genuine humanity of Jesus Christ. He was a man such as we are apart from sin. And he knew precisely what it was to be a human being to the fullest.

As a matter of fact, so full that he could increase in wisdom and stature before God and men. Well we’ve dealt with that when we were talking about the person of Christ so we need not dwell anymore with it. In ancient days when one who had been defeated in a battle came to the one who had defeated him as a suppliant to ask for

mercy, he brought a little branch called an olive branch. And this word was used in description of that olive branch. It was the branch of the suppliant. And so it is the picture of a person who bows down in mercy before God.

Now finally the last word *prosuchomai* or *proseuchomai*, P-R-O-S-E-U-C-H-O-M-A-I. That word means simply to pray. So far as I know that’s the only way it is rendered in the New Testament. There may be some rare cases, but it occurs about a hundred and twenty times in the New Testament. And so this is the common word for prayer in the New Testament. It is used always to God or to the gods. In other words, it is a term for addressing a god.

Now in the New Testament, of course, it is primarily God the Father, the true God who is addressed. But it may be used of the gods, for they thought they were praying too. Today in our pulpits in this land a man gets up and says, “Oh God we pray to Thee,” but if he does not pray to the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ he’s not praying to the same god we are praying to. You often people say we all pray to the same God. No we don’t. Not if we do not believe that the God to whom we pray is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He’s not the same God. If we do not believe that this God has sent his Son and that his Son has come and has died for sins and has been buried and has been raised again the third day; we are not praying to the same God. We may call him capital G-O-D but we are not praying to the same God. How we define our God determines the god to whom we pray.

Now this word is used of prayer to the gods. But that is false prayer. The emphasis in this word is upon loyalty and devotion to God. Peter Wolf, who has written a book on prayer, has said, “This something more than submission. It is saying Thy will O God be done, but it is more. It is the devotement of self to God in seeing that his will is done.” In other words, what he is saying it is not only submission to God but it is a complete submission that makes oneself available for the will of God.

Now this too is a kind of prayer that we’re called upon to exercise in 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 1. And since I’ve just mentioned that text why don’t we turn over to it because we have several of these words in 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 1. Here Paul says, 1 Timothy 2:1, “Therefore I (beseech) exhort first of all that supplications,” -- That’s *deomai*. Supplications be made that’s the noun from the verb is derived. “Prayers.” *Proseucha* from *proseuchomai*, *entunchosis* from *entungchano*. This is the word that we said to meet with in order to converse or the word that stresses childlike confidence and confiding approach “intercessions,” and then a word that we have not discussed “thanksgivings” which indicates again that the idea of prayer is broader than simply asking. So Paul prays that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men.

Now capital B: The types of prayer.

Now what I’m going to say now I’m just going to pass over real quickly. What I hope to do in all of these studies is to have at least ten, possibly fifteen minutes left in our class in here for some questions from you. So let me just pass over these comments regarding, these notes regarding types of prayer with just a few comments, because if you’re a good theologian you’ll notice that those types of prayer that I have listed there are not precisely organized. And so I’ll just mention them. They’re not really quite parallel. Most of these things I’m sure you are familiar with. There are many types of prayer, of course, in the Bible. Here are some of them and probably your own experience will enable you to relate to them. First of all, there is inward silent prayer. In the Bible, in 1 Samuel chapter 1, verse 13; 2 Samuel chapter 7, verse 27, there is evidence that it is possible for us to pray without saying a thing.

Now we know that to be true. Probably many of you when you do pray, you probably pray silent. I don’t. I pray audibly. I don’t know why I pray audibly. Years ago I used to pray silently. I think I read somewhere it was a good idea to pray audibly. And probably because it kept you awake more easily [laughter]. But anyway, it has

become a custom with me, and I’m not sure the Lord would know I was praying if I didn’t pray audibly now. So I pray audibly, but we all offer prayers silently.

Now when I cannot pray audibly as in your presence, I pray silently. I don’t break out in prayer audibly whenever I pray. Now we all have this experience and that is genuine prayer. It is biblical.

Second, there is outward, audible prayer. And just a couple of texts for you to look up: Psalm 3:4, Psalm 5, verses 2 and 3.

Third, there is private prayer. Now, as you can see, this is not quite logical because it’s obvious private prayer may be audible or may be silent, but what I have in mind here is prayer in which a person withdraws by himself and prays by himself. Now that is specifically recognized in the Bible. In the case of our Lord, for example, in Matthew chapter 6, verse 6, he speaks about withdrawing within your closet. Now I’ve known people who’ve carried that out literally.

Now that would be inconvenient in some of the closets of our houses, I’m sure. Some of us do not open them without dodging what may fall out. But it’s not a very good place to pray but our Lord means simply, of course, in secret. And so this is a private prayer reference, Matthew chapter 14, verse 23, is a reference to our Lord’s withdrawing to pray while the disciples were making their way across the sea of Galilee before the storm arose in which storm Peter and he walked upon the water.

Fourth, there is social prayer in which the saints meet and pray together. Acts chapter 20, verse 36 -- Jude verse 20 is thought by some to be a reference to that.

Fifth, family prayer. Now again family prayer may be silent, may be audible; probably usually is audible so the references here are not again specifically harmonious logical. Family prayer. Acts chapter 10, verse 2 and verse 30. I think also there’s probably a reference to family prayer in Joshua chapter 24, says to the Israelites, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” He probably has referenced to the family

prayers that he as a father held in his own family. Let me just utter a few words here by way of advocacy.

In the Old Testament, it was the responsibility of the father to carry on the spiritual education of his family. It was the father who gathered the family together, who taught the law of God. It was the father who sat the children upon his knee and taught them the law of Moses. It was the father who taught them to offer the first prayers to God.

Now in Christianity in the practice of many of us, for some reason, it is often taken as a kind of axiom that it is the mother who teaches the children to pray and teaches them the word of God. That is not in accordance with Scripture. It is the father’s responsibility to teach and to instruct in spiritual things. And all of the Hebrew men were responsible for that. They went often to little study groups by which they came to a deeper mastery of the word of God so that they might instruct their family in the things of God. And I am convinced that our churches would be a great deal better if we actually carried this out successfully.

Now we wouldn’t have need for the Sunday school except for those who might be brought in who have never had the opportunity to have a father who taught them the Scriptures. The Sunday school is a stopgap measure just like the seminary is a stopgap measure. We shouldn’t need the seminary. We should be able to get the instruction we need right here in the local church, just as in a meeting like this. And furthermore, we should be able in our families to get the instruction in the word of God that we need. We should not have to go to Sunday school. That’s terrible isn’t it, to have to say that, but it’s true. It’s Scripture. Try to prove me wrong from the word of God. You cannot do it.

Now we use the Sunday school and it’s a legitimate tool as a stopgap measure, but I would like for my family to be at the spiritual place where they did not suffer at all if they did not attend Sunday school. Now I’m not telling you not to attend Sunday school at Believers Chapel or any church at which you may be a member. I’m just telling you

what the Bible says. I’m just trying to tell it to you straight because we would be a great deal better off if we would follow the Scriptures. Unfortunately, when we fall, then we go to these stopgap measures. There are so many in the church of God that it is hardly possible to know where to begin to reform the church. We have elders, for example, who are selected for three years. Whoever heard of a three year elder in the word of God? An elder was appointed by the Holy Spirit and until he was proven to have failed in the exercise of the office of which the Holy Spirit had called him, well he was to exercise that.

Why have people decided that we should have rotating elders? You know why, because they didn’t have the spiritual guts to go to an elder who wasn’t doing the job and say, “Look you are falling down in your job. And we want to encourage you exhort you to seek the Lord’s face and to carry out that office to which God the Holy Spirit has called you. If not, then we think it would be proper for you to resign from your office.” But the easiest way out is to erect another system by which every three years we try to eliminate those that are not doing their job in a nice way.

But then, of course, that’s not for that person’s spiritual well being. He needs that revealed. And it’s not for the well being of those who want to give the review because they need also to examine their own lives to see if they are spiritual because it’s the spiritual ones that Paul says ought to do the rebuking. And so well, I don’t want to get off on all of these things.

Public prayer. Public prayer. Public prayer we’re all acquainted with throughout the Old Testament we have public prayer in the days of Enoch, the days of Moses, the days of the temple. Some of the greatest prayers in the Old Testament are the prayers of Solomon and Jehoshaphat, men like that. I’ve just been reading them recently as I’ve been reading through the Bible -- by the way I’m on page 670 now. Reading through the NASB.

There were prayers, public prayers in the synagogue and, of course, in the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. So these are the types of prayer. They are represented by the Greek words in their essence, and by these descriptions they also are described. Some years ago I was in Nacogdoches, Texas preaching, and I spoke on prayer in the morning. And one of the ladies came up to me and she says, “I’d like to tell you a little story which I heard in church not long ago.” And she told the story of a little girl who was being taught to pray to the Lord and she was being taught the various kinds of prayer. And shortly after that she was walking along the street one day and she saw a big dog coming toward her and she thought she would try out her newfound knowledge of prayer. And so she said, “Lord protect me from the dog,” but the dog kept coming. And so she said, “Lord keep that dog away from me,” and the dog kept coming. And finally the dog arrived nearby growling and barking and she said now, “Lord I told you to keep that dog away from me.” And needless to say her prayer was answered. Now what kind of prayer was that do you think?

Now Roman II: The object of prayer.

One does not pray to images. One does not pray to pictures -- even the picture of Jesus -- that you have in your bedroom by your bed. One does not pray to the saints. St. Christopher cannot help us. One does not even pray to the angels. When John fell down before the angels in the book of Revelation he said, “Get up. Don’t do that. Worship God.” So don’t pray to the angels not even St. Michael and all the angels. To whom do you pray. Well, you pray to God only. David said my prayer shall be unto the God of my life. But now our God is a God who subsists in three persons: Father, Son and Spirit. So how shall we pray to the Father, to the Son and to the Spirit? First of all, prayer is to the Father. I know what you are thinking and I’m thinking this too. “The New Testament does, so far as its overall teaching, suggests that our petitions should be addressed to the Father, but are there not, Dr. Johnson, petitions that are addressed to Jesus Christ.” Yes,

there are. For example, John said at the end of the Bible in Revelation chapter 20, “Even so, come Lord Jesus.” Steven said Lord receive my spirit.

Not only that, but the apostles prayed to our Lord in some other places. I’ll give you a couple of references in addition, Acts chapter 9, verse 14; 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 2. And there it is said to be a universal experience. Men call upon the Lord in every place and the Lord there is the Lord Jesus Christ. But those are the exceptions in the New Testament. The normal petition of the New Testament is addressed to the Father, and so I think it is probably wise for us to follow the normal pattern of the New Testament. And while we may get up in our meeting or in our home and say, “Oh Lord Jesus,” and we are quite sure that he hears us still since the pattern of the New Testament is to address our prayer to the Father then that is probably what we should do.

We are children and therefore, we come to a heavenly Father. And we recognize that he is a Father. He’s not a governor, a school master, an advisor, an employer. He is our Father and it is the purpose of Our Lord in his saving work in the New Testament to bring us into touch with the Father. After all, it was he who said in his model prayer that we were to pray, “Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.”

Second or B: Prayer is in the name of the Son.

This is an unknown thing in the Old Testament. You never hear in the Old Testament anybody pray in the name of the redeemer to come. You never, of course, hear anyone praying in the name Jesus Christ. And you may, if you are a good student of Scripture, remember that no one in the Old Testament ever individually called God Father either. So this idea of praying to a Father is unique.

Now that’s why when Jesus said after this, men are, therefore, praying, “Our Father which art in heaven.” Now I wasn’t there but I know what happened. As they listened to our Lord some of the apostles as they listened and he said, “Our Father which art in heaven,” you know why they looked? No one had ever called God, Father. Now to us it’s so common with us we lose the sense of the uniqueness of it, but it was absolutely



unique. There is no evidence. There is one reported source of evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but there is really no evidence of any individual praying to God as his own father. That was unique. And no one ever prayed in the name of Jesus Christ. So what we’re talking about is a new development in the redemptive program of God which comprehends the saving work of the Redeemer, who comes in the person of our Lord and makes it possible for men who believe in him to address the Father as their own Father.

And further, to come in the name of one who has infinite merit before God because to come in the name of someone means to come in their person. That is to come with their merit, to come with their authority. In the Old Testament, they prayed, “Oh God remember me, hear me because of your loving kindness.” In the New Testament, we say, “Oh God answer my prayer because I come in the name of the one who has consummated the covenant between us, the one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ.” And while the loving kindness of God shone in the Old Testament was great, this loving kindness now has blossomed out in all of the brightness of the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Now, in the name of Christ, my Christian friend, is not to be attached to your prayer as if it were a kind of magic charm, as if it were some kind of formula. It’s not like rubbing some beads to say, “In the name of the Lord Jesus.” There are many prayers in which a person never even says, “In the name of the Lord Jesus,” which may be prayed in his name. That is out of a sense of union with him and out of sense of dependence upon him and his saving work. And there are many in which those terms are used which God does not hear because the person does not have any relationship to him at all. The person may say, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, and he may be an unsaved man. So when you hear somebody pray in the name of Jesus Christ, that does not mean they are Christian. They may be repeating it because they learned it just by rote perfunctorily. This is not a magic charm, magic formula. It’s not a lucky charm.

Did you know Paul never used in the name of Jesus Christ. That is as in a prayer. Have you noticed that? Were his prayers answered? Well I think a great majority of them were. They were scriptural prayers; that’s why they were put in the Bible. I think I would go out on a limb and say all of Paul’s prayers were answered. But he didn’t say, “I make this prayer in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.” So you see we’re talking about a truth not about a formula. So banish the idea of the formula from your mind. And finally, prayer is in the power of the Spirit. The two texts that set this forth are Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20, praying in the Spirit. So prayer then is to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Spirit.

Let me just read one text in which we have all three of them set forth Ephesians chapter 2, verse 18. Ephesians 2, verse 18. Here Paul after discussing the way Jesus Christ has brought Jew and Gentile together, he says, “for through Him we both have our access,” that’s our access our communion with God. “in one Spirit to the Father.” Through the Son, to the Father, in the Spirit. So prayer then is to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Spirit.

Third, the ground of prayer. Capital A very quickly. Prayer in relation to the Father.

If we were talking about the ground of prayer, we would say the reason we are able to pray is because Jesus Christ died for us and made it possible for us to enter into relationship with God. There is no prayer without redemption. But each of the presence of the Trinity have a specific place in the redemptive program. For example, in connection with the Father, he is the official representative of the Godhead. He is the seat of sovereignty in providence throughout the world. He is the enforcer of the broken law. He’s the source of adoption into his family. And so our prayer is directed to him first of all. In relation to the Son, B, Jesus Christ is the official mediator.

If the Father is the official representative of the Godhead, he is the official mediator between men and God. He’s the revealer of God. He’s the Redeemer. He’s the

high priestly intercessor. And he’s the king. So we come through the Son. And finally, prayer in relation to the Spirit. He too is an official. He’s the official executive of God. And so he’s the divine revealer in inspiration and illumination. He’s the one who regenerates us. He’s the one who intercedes through us on Earth. Our Lord is our heavenly intercessor. He’s our earthly intercessor and he himself is the earnest of the glory which we shall have.

Now let me conclude. The remedy for a weak prayer life and a weak life is found in drawing near to the Father. Asking out of a sense of need, out of a sense of helplessness, definiteness in our prayers, out of confidence, out of humility, out of devotion. All of these things are expressed by our words for prayer. James Gilmore, the famous missionary to Mongolia, once said, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah? He’s waiting for Elijah to call on him.” And so if there are some Elijahs in this audience who want to call on the God of Elijah and see things happen, well the door is open for you. So may our prayer be that of the disciples. Lord teach us to pray.

Alexander White was a great Edinburgh preacher, one of the greatest. I’ve been in the church where he preached and I was in there because I wanted to see where he preached so successfully for so many years. He has a little book on prayer called *Lord Teach us to Pray*. And the first sermon in it is the magnificence of prayer. And he puts two texts together. One of them is, Lord teach us to pray, and the other is the text, I magnify mine office.

And he says in his introduction that the Apostle Paul was an apostle and he said he magnified his office. We are told that we are a royal priesthood and we should magnify our office too. And one of the activities of our office is to pray. And so if we are to magnify our office let us pray. Pasquale says, “Why does God establish prayer,” and answers it, “To communicate to his creatures the dignity of causality.” It’s an amazing thing that the God who works all things according to the counsel of his own will should

delegate to us purposefully the causality of some of these events that he has pre-foreordained.

Now we didn’t get our ten to fifteen minutes but we did have six. So do you have some questions you’d like to ask? Yes, sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, “Is there any value in repeating the prayer which the Lord gave to the disciples,” and I presume you are speaking about the prayer in Matthew chapter 6. I think the primary purpose of that prayer is to be a model for prayer. He said after this manner, therefore pray. So I think the primary purpose is as a guide to us in prayer. And as I suggested once before perhaps the chief lesson from that model prayer is that you can get through it in fifteen seconds. That means that when you get up and pray in the company of the group of the saints, remember fifteen seconds.

Now I don’t mean that literally, but I mean our prayers should not be long. I think there is some value if we were to honestly pray it out of our hearts but you will notice that that prayer is a prayer of general petitions. We are to learn things like the proper order in our requests. “Our Father who art in heaven do not give me my daily bread, but hallowed by Thy name.” In other words, the first part of all of our petitions to God should be concerned with the sanctification of God not with our needs. There are things like this that we learn from. It is conceivable that there is some value in it. But I think it is far overshadowed by what happens when we repeat it time after time. Then we lose all of the freshness of it and it that very context in which it is found we are exhorted not to repetitiously say our prayers. So I would think that is probably a wise thing to not use it as a repetitious prayer but I wouldn’t deny there could be some benefit from praying it every now and then.

Some more? We have a few more minutes. Any other questions? Feel free to ask any...yes, sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well three minutes is not enough to handle a question of tongues but let me say this. We have -- last spring I gave three messages on tongues here -- an hour each so that’s three hours and if you stop by and see some of the men in the tape room there I think they can tell you how to listen to those tapes. And you’ll have a lot of things to think about after you listen to the tapes then if you want to call me and I’ll be glad to talk with you further about it.

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] Yeah, well I’m not going to say to you that you will get the purer light if you listen to my three tapes but I think you will. [Laughter] I was just kidding you. I really I think it will help you some and I would suggest you do that.

[Comment]

[Johnson] I don’t know. Don’t do that. Come see me before. [Laughter] Well that’s certainly a big question these days and the only reason I’m not saying anything about it because it’s just impossible to handle the question in two three minutes. Is there another question? Yes sir.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well he did have the concept of a great God who had entered into covenant relationship with Israel. And had taken them out through the Red Sea you know. So he had the concept of the mercy that God had shown them when they were in bondage in Egypt and he knew him in his greatness and in the covenant relationship that he bore to them. But in the special intimate aspect of father he did not have them. So they prayed just as I said. They prayed, “Oh God hear me on account of thy loving kindness,” which had been manifested totem in their deliverance from Egypt, and was known by them in experience in the fact that he had delivered them. He had redeemed them and many of them knew the experience of redemption but they did not know the fullest. It’s not a case of one being black and one white, but what was originally blackness becoming gray and then in the bright white light of our Lord’s revelation in the

New Testament. You know in the New Testament Paul says, “He has brought life and immortality to light.”

Now there was that in the Old Testament but we have a much greater revelation of it and a much deeper revelation and that’s the point. And I think this idea of the fatherhood of God to the true believer is a new thing but that doesn’t mean they didn’t have a sense of relationship with God to God. 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 9 I think is the text if it’s not it’s about right there at it 2 Timothy 1.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Yes, he could pray outside the sacrifices or the offerings. Very definitely he could. Jonah prayed in the midst of the belly of the great fish. So there were many who offered ejaculatory prayers -- the old Puritans used to call them. That is when they were in great need. And so they could pray. As a matter of fact, Spurgeon used to liked to say he lived in the day when people read prayers in the pulpit and if you’d go to England and to Scotland today you’ll still find people reading prayers from the pulpit. He was very much against it. He said that, “Who held the light for Jonah to read his prayers in the belly of the great fish?” [Laughter]

My time is up. For next time, we will launch into our series of problems in connection with the attributes and the decrees. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father we commit the hour to Thee. We pray thy blessing upon us. Enable us Lord to in our knowledge not forget the need of the experience of prayer to our great God. And may as we come together next Tuesday night, we come together in a closer relationship to Thee because in the mean time we have come to pray for Jesus sake. Amen.