

# The Lord's Prayer

<sup>1</sup> We have now heard what we must do and believe, in what things the best and happiest life consists. Now follows the third part, **how we ought to pray.** <sup>2</sup> For we are in a situation where **no person can perfectly keep the Ten Commandments**, even though he has begun to believe. The devil with all his power, together with the world and our own flesh, resists our efforts. Therefore, nothing is more necessary than that we should continually turn towards God's ear, call upon Him, and pray to Him. We must pray that He would **give, preserve, and increase faith** in us and the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments [2 Thessalonians 1:3]. We pray that He would remove everything that is in our way and that opposes us in these matters. <sup>3</sup> So that we might know what and how to pray, our Lord Christ has Himself taught us both the way and the words [Luke 11:1–4], as we shall see.

<sup>4</sup> But before we explain the Lord's Prayer part by part, it is most necessary first to encourage and stir people to prayer, as Christ and the apostles also have done [Matthew 6:5–15]. <sup>5</sup> And the first thing to know is that it is **our duty to pray because of God's commandment.** For that's what we heard in the Second Commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" [Exodus 20:7]. We are required to **praise** that holy name and **call** upon it in every need, or to pray. To call upon God's name is nothing other than to pray [e.g., 1 Kings 18:24]. <sup>6</sup> Prayer is just as strictly and seriously commanded as all other commandments: to have no other God, not to kill, not to steal, and so on. Let no one think that it makes no difference whether he prays or not. Common people think this, who grope in such delusion and ask, "Why should I pray? Who knows whether God heeds or will hear my prayer? If I do not pray, someone else will." And so they fall into the **habit of never praying.** They build a false argument, as though we taught that there is no duty or need for prayer, because we reject false and hypocritical prayers [Matthew 6:5].

<sup>7</sup> But it is certainly true that the prayers that have been offered up till now, when men were **babbling and bawling** in the churches [Matthew 6:7], were not prayers. Such outward matters of prayer, when they are properly done, may be a good exercise for young children, scholars, and simple persons. They may be called singing or reading, but not really praying. <sup>8</sup> But praying, as the Second Commandment teaches, is to **call upon God in every need.** He requires this of us and has not left it to our choice. But it is our duty and obligation to pray, if we would be Christians, just as it is our duty and obligation to obey our parents and the government. For by calling upon God's name and praying, His name is honored and used well. This you must note above all things, so that you may silence and reject thoughts that would keep and deter us from prayer. <sup>9</sup> It would be useless for a son to say to his father, "What good does my obedience do me? I will go and do what I can. It makes no difference." But there stands the commandment, "You shall and must obey." So here prayer is not left to my will to do it or leave it undone, but it shall and must be offered at the risk of God's wrath and displeasure.

## Line 1

The Commandments

The Creed

## Line 2

*What is the Lutheran view of good works?*

**See:** 2 Thessalonians 1:3

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## The Small Catechism The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie or deceive by His name, but **call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.**

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## Line 7

*What is the Lutheran view of good works?*

<sup>10</sup> <This point is to be understood and noted before everything else. Then by this point we may silence and cast away the thoughts that would keep and deter us from praying, as though it does not matter if we do not pray, or as though prayer was commanded for those who are holier and in better favor with God than we are. Indeed, the human heart is by nature so hopeless that it always flees from God and imagines that He does not wish or desire our prayer, because we are sinners and have earned nothing but wrath [Romans 4:15]. <sup>11</sup> Against such thoughts (I say), we should remember this commandment and turn to God, so that we may not stir up His anger more by such disobedience. For by this commandment God lets us plainly understand that He will not cast us away from Him or chase us away [Romans 11:1]. This is true even though we are sinners. But instead He draws us to Himself [John 6:44], so that we might humble ourselves before Him [1 Peter 5:6], bewail this misery and plight of ours, and pray for grace and help [Psalm 69:13]. Therefore, we read in the Scriptures that He is also angry with those who were punished for their sin, because they did not return to Him and by their prayers turn away His wrath and seek His grace [Isaiah 55:7]>.

<sup>12</sup> Now, from the fact that prayer is so solemnly commanded, you are to conclude and think that no one should in any way despise his prayer. Instead, **he should count on prayer.** <sup>13</sup> He should always turn to an illustration from the other commandments. A child should in no way despise his obedience to father and mother, but should always think, “This work is a work of obedience. What I do I do for no other reason than that I may walk in the obedience and commandment of God. On this obedience I can settle and stand firm, and I can value it as a great thing, not because of my worthiness, but because of the commandment.” So here also, we should think about the words we pray and the things we pray for as things demanded by God and done in obedience to Him. We should think, “**On my account this prayer would amount to nothing. But it shall succeed, because God has commanded it.**” Therefore, everybody—no matter what he has to say in prayer—should always come before God in obedience to this commandment.

#### Line 13

*From where does the power of prayer come?*

<sup>14</sup> We pray, therefore, and encourage everyone most diligently to take this counsel to heart and by no means to despise our prayer. For up to now it has been taught in the devil’s name that no one should think about these things. **People thought it was enough to have done the act of praying, whether God would hear it or not.** But that is staking prayer on a risk and murmuring it at a venture; therefore, it is a lost prayer. <sup>15</sup> For we let thoughts like these lead us astray and stop us: “I am not holy or worthy enough. If I were as godly and holy as St. Peter or St. Paul, then I would pray.” But put such thoughts far away. For the same commandment that applied to St. Paul applies also to me. The Second Commandment is given as much on my account as on his account, so that Paul can boast about no better or holier commandment.

<sup>16</sup> You should say, “**My prayer is as precious, holy, and pleasing to God as that of St. Paul or of the most holy saints. This is the reason: I will gladly grant that Paul is personally more holy, but that’s not because of the commandment. God does not consider prayer because of the person, but because of His Word and obedience to it.** For I rest my prayer on the same commandment on which all the saints rest their prayer. Furthermore, I pray for the same thing that they all pray for and always have prayed. Besides, I have just as great a need of what I pray for as those great saints; no, even a greater one than they.”

<sup>17</sup> Let this be the first and most important point, that all our prayers must be based and rest upon obedience to God, regardless of who we are, whether we are sinners or saints, worthy or unworthy. <sup>18</sup> We must know that God will not have our prayer treated as a joke. But He will be angry and punish all who do not pray, just as surely as He punishes all other disobedience. Furthermore, He will not allow our prayers to be in vain or lost. For if He did not intend to answer your prayer, He would not ask you to pray and add such a severe commandment to it.

<sup>19</sup> In the second place, we should be more encouraged and moved to pray because God has also added a promise and declared that it shall surely be done for us as we pray. He says in Psalm 50:15, **“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.”** And Christ says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, “Ask, and it will be given to you; ... for everyone who asks receives” (7:7–8). <sup>20</sup> Such promises certainly ought to encourage and kindle our hearts to pray with pleasure and delight. For He testifies with His own Word that our prayer is heartily pleasing to Him. Furthermore, it shall certainly be heard and granted, in order that we may not despise it or think lightly of it and pray based on chance.

<sup>21</sup> You can raise this point with Him and say, **“Here I come, dear Father, and pray, not because of my own purpose or because of my own worthiness. But I pray because of Your commandment and promise, which cannot fail or deceive me.”** Whoever, therefore, does not believe this promise must note again that he outrages God like a person who thoroughly dishonors Him and accuses Him of falsehood.

<sup>22</sup> Besides this, we should be moved and drawn to prayer. For in addition to **this commandment and promise**, God expects us and He Himself arranges the words and form of prayer for us. He places them on our lips for how and what we should pray [Psalm 51:15], so that we may see how heartily He pities us in our distress [Psalm 4:1], and we may never doubt that such prayer is pleasing to Him and shall certainly be answered. <sup>23</sup> This *the Lord’s Prayer* is a great advantage indeed over all other prayers that we might compose ourselves. For in our own prayers the conscience would ever be in doubt and say, “I have prayed, but who knows if it pleases Him or whether I have hit upon the right proportions and form?” Therefore, there is no nobler prayer to be found upon earth than the Lord’s Prayer. We pray it daily [Matthew 6:11], because it has this excellent testimony, that God loves to hear it. We ought not to surrender this for all the riches of the world.

<sup>24</sup> The Lord’s Prayer has also been prescribed so that we should see and consider the distress that ought to drive and compel us to pray without ceasing [1 Thessalonians 5:17]. For whoever would pray must have something to present, state, and name, which he desires. If he does not, it cannot be called a prayer.

#### Line 23

*Are written prayers any less effective than others?*

<sup>25</sup> We have rightly rejected the prayers of monks and priests, who howl and growl day and night like fiends. But none of them think of praying for a hair's breadth of anything. If we would assemble all the churches, together with all churchmen, they would be bound to confess that they **have never from the heart prayed for even a drop of wine**. For none of them has ever intended to pray from obedience to God and faith in His promise. No one has thought about any need. But when they had done their best they thought no further than this: To do a good work, by which they might repay God. They were unwilling to take anything from Him, but wished only to give Him something.

<sup>26</sup> But where there is to be a **true prayer, there must be seriousness**. People must feel their distress, and such distress presses them and compels them to call and cry out. Then prayer will be made willingly, as it ought to be. People will need no teaching about how to prepare for it and to reach the proper devotion. <sup>27</sup> But the distress that ought to concern us most (both for ourselves and everyone), you will find abundantly set forth in the Lord's Prayer. Therefore, this prayer also serves as a reminder, so that **we meditate on it** and lay it to heart and do not fail to pray. For we all have enough things that we lack. The great problem is that we do not feel or recognize this. Therefore, God also requires that you weep and ask for such needs and wants, **not because He does not know about them** [Matthew 6:8], but so that you may **kindle your heart to stronger and greater desires** and make wide and open your cloak to receive much [Psalm 10:17].

<sup>28</sup> Every one of us should form the daily habit from his youth of praying for all his needs. He should pray whenever he notices anything affecting his interests or that of other people among whom he may live. **He should pray for preachers, the government, neighbors, household servants, and always (as we have said) to hold up to God His commandment and promise, knowing that He will not have them disregarded.** <sup>29</sup> This I say because I would like to see these things brought home again to the people so that they might learn to pray truly and not go about coldly and indifferently. They become daily more unfit for prayer because of indifference. That is just what the devil desires, and for which he works with all his powers. He is well aware what damage and harm it does him when prayer is done properly.

<sup>30</sup> We need to know this: all our shelter and protection rest in prayer alone. For we are far too weak to deal with the devil and all his power and followers who set themselves against us. They might easily crush us under their feet. Therefore, we must consider and take up those weapons with which Christians must be armed in order to stand against the devil [2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:11]. <sup>31</sup> For what do you imagine has done such great things up till now? What has stopped or quelled the counsels, purposes, murder, and riot of our enemies, by which the devil thought he would crush us, together with the Gospel? It was the prayer of a few godly people standing in the middle like an iron wall for our side. Otherwise they would have witnessed a far different tragedy. They would have seen how the devil would have destroyed all Germany in its own blood. But now our enemies may confidently ridicule prayer and make a mockery of it. However, we shall still be a match both for them and the devil by prayer alone, if we only persevere diligently and do not become slack. <sup>32</sup> For whenever a godly Christian prays, "Dear Father, let Your will be done" [see Matthew 6:10], God speaks from on high and says, "Yes, dear child, it shall be so, in spite of the devil and all the world."

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## The Small Catechism The Introduction

Our Father who art in heaven.

*What does this mean?*

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.

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<sup>33</sup> Let this be said as encouragement, so that people may learn, first of all, to value prayer as something great and precious and to make a proper distinction between babbling and praying for something. For we by no means reject prayer. We reject the bare, useless howling and murmuring, as Christ Himself also rejects and prohibits long idle talk [Matthew 6:7]. <sup>34</sup> Now we shall most briefly and clearly explain the Lord's Prayer. Here there is included in seven successive articles, or petitions, every need that never ceases to apply to us. Each is so great that it ought to drive us to keep praying the Lord's Prayer all our lives.

# The First Petition

<sup>35</sup> *Hallowed be Thy name.*

<sup>36</sup> This is, indeed, somewhat difficult, and not expressed in good German. For in our mother tongue we would say, “Heavenly Father, help us in every way so that Your name may be holy.”

<sup>37</sup> “But what does it mean to pray that His name may be holy? Is it not holy already?”

Answer, “Yes, it is always holy in its nature, but in our use it is not holy.” For God’s name was given to us when we became Christians and were baptized [Matthew 28:19]. So we are called God’s children and have the Sacraments, by which He connects us with Himself so that everything that belongs to God must serve for our use [Romans 8:16–17].

<sup>38</sup> Now, here is a great need that we ought to be most concerned about. This name should have its proper honor; it should be valued holy and grand as the greatest treasure and holy thing [*Heiligtum*; relic] that we have. As godly children we should pray that God’s name, which is already holy in heaven, may also be and remain holy with us upon earth and in all the world.

<sup>39</sup> “But how does it become holy among us?”

Answer, as plainly as it can be said: “**When both our doctrine and life are godly and Christian.**” Since we call God our Father in this prayer, it is our duty always to act and behave ourselves as godly children, that He may not receive shame, but honor and praise from us.

<sup>40</sup> Now, God’s name is profaned by us either through our words or in our works. (For whatever we do upon the earth must be either words or works, speech or act.) <sup>41</sup> In the first place, then, **God’s name is profaned when people preach, teach, and say in God’s name what is false and misleading.** They use His name like an ornament and attract a market for falsehood. That is, indeed, the greatest way to profane and dishonor the divine name. <sup>42</sup> Furthermore, men, by swearing, cursing, conjuring, and other such actions, grossly abuse the holy name as a cloak for their shame [1 Peter 2:16]. <sup>43</sup> In the second place, **God’s name is profaned by an openly wicked life and works, when those who are called Christians** and God’s people are adulterers, drunkards, misers, enviers, and slanderers [1 Corinthians 5:11]. Here again God’s name must come to shame and be profaned because of us. <sup>44</sup> It is a shame and disgrace for a flesh-and-blood father to have a bad, perverse child that opposes him in words and deeds. Because of that child the father suffers contempt and reproach. In the same way also, it brings dishonor upon God if we are called by His name and have all kinds of goods from Him, yet we teach, speak, and live in any other way than as godly and heavenly children. People would say about us that we must not be God’s children, but the devil’s children [1 John 2:29].

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## The Small Catechism The First Petition

Hallowed be Thy name.

*What does this mean?* God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be **kept holy among us also.**

*How is God’s name kept holy?* God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven!

But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!

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### Line 41

*What is one of the greatest abuses of the Second Commandment?*

<sup>45</sup> So you see that in this petition we pray for exactly what God demands in the Second Commandment. We pray that His name not be taken in vain to swear, curse, lie, deceive, and so on, but be used well for God's praise and honor. For whoever uses God's name for any sort of wrong profanes and desecrates this holy name. This is how it used to be when a Church was considered desecrated, when a murder or any other crime had been committed in it. Or a monstrance or relic was desecrated—as though they were holy in themselves—when they became unholy by misuse. <sup>46</sup> **So this point is easy and clear if only the language is understood: to hallow means the same as to praise, magnify, and honor both in word and deed.**

<sup>47</sup> Here, now, learn what great need there is for such prayer. Because we see how full the world is of sects and false teachers, who all wear the holy name as a cover and sham for their doctrines of devils [1 Timothy 4:1], we should by all means pray without ceasing [1 Thessalonians 5:17] and cry out and call upon God against all people who preach and believe falsely. We should pray against whatever opposes and persecutes our Gospel and pure doctrine and would suppress it, as do the bishops, tyrants, enthusiasts, and such [2 Thessalonians 2:3–4]. **Likewise, we should pray for ourselves who have God's Word but are not thankful for it, nor live like we ought according to the Word.** <sup>48</sup> If you pray for this with your heart, you can be sure that it pleases God. For He will not hear anything more dear to Him than that His honor and praise is exalted above everything else and that His Word is taught in its purity and is considered precious and dear.