

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTION # 179.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #179. *Are we to pray unto God only?*

A. God only being able to search the hearts,¹ hear the requests,² pardon the sins,³ and fulfill the desires of all;⁴ and only to be believed in,⁵ and worshipped with religious worship;⁶ prayer, which is a special part thereof,⁷ is to be made by all to him alone,⁸ and to none other.⁹

Question 1—*Why is prayer to be made to God only?*

Answer—First, Because God only is able to search the hearts of men, which is a glory peculiar to himself, in which he is distinguished from all creatures, 1 Kings 8:39. It is a demonstration of his supreme Lordship that he knows the hearts of men to the benefit of both his general and particular providence, Acts 1:24. After all, it is the heart which is principally regarded in the matter of prayer, Acts 8:21. If the heart is not right with God, no glory which we can ascribe to him will be reckoned any better than flattery or lying, Ps. 78:36, 37. Hence, the inward frame of our spirit, being the principle or spring whence all religious duties proceed, being known only to God, prayer is to be directed only to him, Rom. 8:27; Jer. 29:12, 13.

Second, God alone can hear our requests, Ps. 65:2. Prayer, when addressed to God, is not like that in which we desire favors from men, whereby some particulars pertaining to the lower nature are supplied, in which respect one creature may be of advantage to another, Jas. 2:15, 16. However, when we pray to God, we seek blessings which are the effects of infinite power and goodness, such as may make us completely happy, both in this and in a better world, Ps. 66:19, 20.

Third, God alone we are to implore for forgiveness of sin in prayer, Ps. 51:1-4. The blessing of forgiving sin is that which none but God can bestow, Mark 2:7. For as his law is the rule by which the goodness or badness of actions is determined, Rom. 7:7; and as the threatening which he has annexed unto it, is that which renders us liable to the punishment which the sin deserves, Deut. 27:26; so it is he alone who can remit the debt of punishment to which we were liable, and give us a right and title to forfeited blessings, Mic. 7:18.

¹ 1 Kings 8:39; Acts 1:24; Rom. 8:27.

² Ps. 65:2.

³ Mic. 7:18.

⁴ Ps. 145:18, 19.

⁵ Rom. 10:14.

⁶ Matt. 4:10.

⁷ 1 Cor. 1:2.

⁸ Ps. 50:15.

⁹ Rom. 10:14.

Fourth, God alone can fulfil the desires of all, Ps. 34:9. These desires are not merely expressions of the words of our mouths but they are from the heart, Isa. 29:13. These desires arise from a sense of need, for we do not have earnest desire after that which we do in no way sense lacking, Prov. 27:7. Since our sense of need stems ultimately from our separation from God, as creatures and especially sinful creatures, Col. 1:21; it follows that only God can fulfil desires that arise from this separation and alienation, Ps. 20:4, 5. God alone can fulfil the desires of all his creatures, Ps. 34:10.

Fifth, As the object of prayer and faith is the same, God alone is to be believed in, Rom. 10:14. There must be a firm persuasion that he can grant us the blessings we ask for, Heb. 11:6; faith addresses itself to him as all sufficient, and is persuaded that he will fulfil all his promises, as a God of infinite faithfulness, Lam. 3:22, 23.

Sixth, God alone is to be prayed unto because God alone is to be worshipped, Matt. 4:10. That God only is to be worshipped can be denied by none who are, in any measure, acquainted with either natural or revealed religion, Jon. 1:5, 6, 9. In worship, we are obliged to extol, adore, and admire those divine perfections which are displayed in the works of nature and grace, and to seek from God that help and those supplies of grace which we stand in need of to make us completely blessed, Matt. 6:31-33. This supposes that God is infinitely perfect and all sufficient, Ps. 18:30; Acts 17:25. For us to ascribe this divine glory to a creature, either directly, or by consequence, is, in effect, to say that he is equal with God, and to rob God of that glory which is due to him alone, Isa. 42:8; 48:11.

Question 2—*What does this have to do with prayer?*

Answer—Prayer is a special and an eminent part of religious worship, Joel 2:32. Furthermore, all acceptable religious worship is to be directed only toward the true God, 1 Sam. 7:3. This is the case because God himself has commanded it, Jer. 33:3. Prayer is one of the signs which designate a people to belong unto the true God, because God hears the prayers of those whom he has commanded to pray, Zech. 13:9. So much is prayer a special part of this worship of the true God that it characterizes the assemblies of his people, 1 Cor. 1:2.

Therefore, being considered as a special part of the worship of God, it ought to be offered only to him, Ps. 50:15. In our petitions, we are to honor him as God alone by restricting our prayers to him alone, Luke 4:8; and in the answering of these prayers, we are confirmed that he only is God who answers prayers, 2 Chron. 33:12, 13. Although the Person of the Father, being the fount (or root, *ρίζα*) of the Divine nature (*cf.* John 16:28), is most properly addressed in prayer, Matt. 6:6; yet, there being a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, it ought to be considered that any prayer offered to one Person should be understood to take in the other two Divine Persons, 2 Cor. 13:14. Thus, we may address either of the other Persons whether the Son, Acts 7:59; or the Holy Spirit, John 16:13 w/ Ps. 25:5; each being equally God, Matt. 28:19.

Finally, because they cannot call on whom they have not believed, Rom. 10:14; address to any one but God in prayer is an instance of such profaneness and idolatry as is not to be mentioned without the greatest detestation, Ex. 34:14. Thus, we are informed that such worship was sternly refused by the holy angels, Rev. 22:8, 9; and the saints as well, as seen in the case of the apostle Peter, Acts 10:25, 26; and Paul, Acts 14:12-15.