

## 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 # 182.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #182. *How doth the Spirit help us to pray?*

A. We not knowing what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, by enabling us to understand both for whom, and what, and how prayer is to be made; and by working and quickening in our hearts (although not in all persons, nor at all times, in the same measure) those apprehensions, affections, and graces which are requisite for the right performance of that duty.<sup>1</sup>

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Question 1—*What is the first reason that we stand in need of the Spirit to help us to pray?*

*Answer*—The first is that we are often at a loss with respect to the matter of prayer, neither knowing nor understanding what or how prayer ought to be made, Rom. 8:26, 27. Our loss very often proceeds from our lack of genuine acquaintance with ourselves, Job 15:14-16; and our not being duly sensible of our wants, weaknesses, or secret faults, Jer. 17:9, 10. Sometimes we cannot determine whether we are in a state of grace or not, Ps. 51:10-12; or, if we are, whether it is increasing or declining, Ps. 139:1, 2, 23, 24. Or, if we have ground to complain by reason of the hidings of God's face, and our lack of communion with him, we are often hard put to find out what the secret sin is which is the occasion of it, Ps. 19:12; 55:1, 2; nor are we sufficiently apprised of the wiles of Satan, or the dangers we are in of being ensnare or overcome by them, 1 Pet. 5:8. Thus, it appears that we stand in need of the Spirit, as a teaching and instructing Spirit, affording proper matter of prayer, causing us to know what we pray for, Rom. 8:26.

Furthermore, we are often not able to know how to direct our prayers to God aright, because we do not know what is conducive to his glory, 1 Cor. 10:31; nor what he requires of us either in obedience to his commanding will, Matt. 20:22; or in submission to his providential will, Ps. 6:3, 9. For this reason, even many good men, in Scripture, asked for things which were in themselves unlawful, because of the weakness of their faith, and the prevalency of their corruption, 2 Cor. 12:5. Thus, some, suffering impatience under the many troubles and afflictions of this present life, desired that God would call them out of this world by death—Elijah, 1 Kings 19:4; Job, Job 6:8, 9; Jonah, Jon. 4:3. Likewise, Moses, though he had the character of the meekest man upon earth, and doubtless excelled all others in his day in those graces which he received from God, as well as the honors placed upon him, yet put up a most unbecoming prayer, both as to the matter and manner of it, Num. 11:11-15. Moreover, on another occasion, Moses asks for a thing which he knew beforehand God would not grant him, and receives a rebuff from the Lord, Deut. 3:25, 26.

The Spirit helps our infirmities, with respect to the matter of prayer, Rom. 8:26. It is by the Spirit, that God impresses upon the thoughts of men, in an ordinary way, those things he did, in a former time, often impress in an extraordinary way, so that it is a character of

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:26, 27; Ps. 10:17; Zech. 12:10.

the children of God that they are led by the Spirit, Rom. 8:14. So, too, Christ promises his people that the Spirit will guide them into all truth, John 16:13. It is the working of the Spirit that enlightens the mind in the knowledge of our needs, and those of others, Eph. 1:15, 16; bringing into our remembrance these things, suggesting them to us according to the word, together with the promises of God, on which prayer is grounded, John 14:26.

Question 2—*What is the second reason we stand in need of the Spirit to help us to pray?*

Answer—As fallen men, we are often straightened in our affections, and so we do not know how to ask any thing with a suitable frame of spirit, 2 Cor. 6:12. It is certain we cannot when we please, excite our affections, or especially put forth those graces which are to be exercised in prayer, Ps. 20:4, 5. Our hearts are sometimes dead, cold, and inclined to wander from God in this duty, Ps. 57:2, 7; and, at other times, we pray with a kind of indifference, as though it were of no great importance whether our prayers were answered or not, Rev. 3:16. Very seldom do we pray with the importunity of prevailing prayer, Gen. 32:26.

Thus, the Spirit is a quickening, or exciting, Spirit, Rom. 8:26. It is the work of the Spirit to qualify the soul with praying graces and affections, working in the praying person sense of needs, faith, fervency, humility, and all other necessary things, Ps. 10:17. In this way, the Spirit makes intercession for us, teaching and quickening, as he puts within us a praying frame, and draws all our petitions, which the Mediator presents, Jude 20, 21. This praying with the help of the Spirit is peculiar to the saints of God, Jas. 5:16.

In order to our understanding the desirability of the Spirit working in this fashion, it needs to be considered that we cannot, without the Spirit's assistance, bring our hearts into the right frame for prayer, Zech. 12:10. Our inability to do so is the reason why we engage in this duty in such a manner as gives great uneasiness to us when we reflect upon it, Ps. 38:9. Hence, when we pretend to draw nigh unto God, we can hardly say that we worship him as God, but we become vain in our imaginations, Matt. 15:7-9; and the corruption of our nature discovers itself more at this time than it does on other occasions, Ps. 77:1-3; and Satan uses his utmost endeavors to distract and disturb our thoughts, and take the edge off of our affections, so that we seem not really to desire those things which with our lips we ask at the hand of God, Eph. 6:11, 12, 18. As for the unregenerate man, he has not a principle of grace, and therefore cannot pray in faith, or with the exercises of other graces, of which he is destitute, Prov. 28:9. Yet, even the believer is renewed but in part, Rom. 7:23; and therefore if the Spirit is not pleased to excite the principle of grace which he has implanted, he is very much indisposed for this duty, which cannot be performed aright without the Spirit's assistance, Gal. 4:6.

Finally, let no man think that a readiness or ease of speaking in prayer is always the effect of the Spirit's assistance, Matt. 6:7. It is clear that one may have scarcity of words, and even groans instead of them, while the Spirit helps him to pray, Rom. 8:26; Ps. 102:20. Rather, the influences of the Spirit never fail to be humbling but sanctifying, as David, 1 Chron. 29:14. So, too, confesses the apostle Paul, Phil. 3:3.

In prayer, when rightly undertaken, it is not us but the Spirit speaking in us, Matt. 10:20. And, by the selfsame Spirit, we are made to have access to that fellowship that the Father enjoys with the Son, Eph. 2:18. In prayer, the Spirit exercises the desires of the saints to prepare them to receive those blessings which God is pleased to bestow, Rom. 8:15; Jer. 29:12, 13; Ps. 81:10.