Section: Doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology)

Lesson 82: Wednesday February 10, 2021

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q101. In what way has God commanded the saved to communicate to Him?**

We are to communicate to God in persistent prayer.

**Q102. What is prayer?**

Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God in praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and expressing our requests to Him while submitting to His sovereign will.

Let’s go ahead and read our first catechism question and answer for tonight.

**Q101. In what way has God commanded the saved to communicate to Him? We are to communicate to God in persistent prayer.**

This may seem like an odd question at first. But it is worth asking the question. How are we to communicate to God?

***Introduction***

Now, before I get to answering this, I want to spend some time building out a foundation to help us. This question tonight gets to the nature of the Word and our relationship to it. *That* may sound like I’m overstepping, after all – I’m just talking about prayer, but stick with me. I believe it’s vital that we comprehend the nature of scripture in understanding how we are to communicate to God.

Let’s first look at what scripture says about itself:

2Tim 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Scripture is breathed out by God. It is the infallible words of God made manifest and carried along by the infallible Holy Spirit in fallible men. God has chosen to reveal Himself and His will to us through the written words of Scripture.

***Is the Canon Closed?***

Can we add to Scripture? Or, to ask this another way, is the totality of Scripture, commonly referred to as the Biblical canon, closed or open?

The answer is no, we cannot add to scripture. The canon is closed. God has ceased giving personal words and inspiring more Scripture. The canon is closed. Scripture is “profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be ***complete***.” My emphasis here is on complete. This passage tells us that Scripture is enough. It is sufficient for a believer to grow in the way God intends. No other communication from God is needed.

And that’s good because no other communication from God happened after God utilized the early church, namely the Apostles of Christ, to finish and close the canon. Let me explain: In the years following Christ’s ascension, Christians progressively agreed upon the authoritative writings of the New Testament. In order to qualify as New Testament Scripture, it was understood that there needed to be Apostolic authorship attributed to that writing.

Dr Michael J Kruger says, “The apostles had the very authority of Christ himself. They were his mouthpiece. As such, their teachings, along with the prophets, were the very foundation of the church. Paul describes the church as “built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets” (Eph 2:20). If the church wanted to know the true Christian message, they would always need to look back to the teaching of the apostles.”

When the canon was progressively agreed upon, it was because the common books of the New Testament were attributed to the Apostles themselves who had authority given to them by Jesus Christ.

Another scholar says, "The criterion which ultimately came to prevail was apostolicity. Unless a book could be shown to come from the pen of an apostle, or at least to have the authority of an apostle behind it, it was peremptorily rejected, however edifying or popular with the faithful it might be." - J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines

It’s worth mentioning here that I’m not going into the depths of how the Old Testament was formed. In short, we accept the Old Testament writings that Christ would have recognized as authoritative.

Our Baptist forefathers from church history have made these points this way: 2 LBCF 1.1 “The Holy Scriptures are the only sufficient, certain, and infallible standard of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience…the Lord was pleased at different times and in various ways to reveal himself and to declare his will to his church. To preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and the world, the Lord put this revelation completely in writing. Therefore, the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary, because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased.”

Don’t miss that last point “the Holy Scriptures are absolutely necessary, because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people **have now ceased**.”

The bottom line is this: *Scripture alone is sufficient for Christians. We don’t need anything else to find extra information about God.*

We at Disciples Church affirm this historic, protestant truth. God no longer communicates in various ways, His words for mankind are in Scripture. We go there and read them to “hear” from God. We do not hear from God in prayer. We do not need to stress over if we heard the voice of the Lord or not. He doesn’t speak that way, instead He revealed His will for us in Scripture. What a BLESSING Scripture is!

***Apostolic Succession***

I want to speak briefly about what is called apostolic succession. You may have heard from Roman Catholic’s that the Apostle Peter was the first Pope. According to Roman Catholic Church doctrine, the Popes are essentially an unbroken line of so-called apostles that precede all the way back to Peter. This false doctrine also leads us to believe that the Apostles had the authority to name successors. However, scripture clearly shows that the sovereign Christ and only Christ chose the Apostles. Since the Apostles were prophets, then the false Roman Catholic understanding goes that their successors (Popes) can continue to define the meaning of (as well as what is and isn’t) scripture. The Roman Catholic Church falsely claims that these successors can also speak new words from God to men on earth. This is called speaking ex cathedra; in this case they claim the Pope speaks infallibly *from* God.

I wanted to bring this up because it’s common in Roman Catholicism to understand that their Catholic doctrine is progressively changing and growing. This is no different than many other religions who have acting so-called prophets who can change the core fundamental beliefs, such as Mormonism, for example. This belief is dangerous, unbiblical, and must be opposed!

Perhaps you see the issue here. If 2Tim 3:16-17 is true (and it is) then God’s word, and only God’s word is enough! We must look to Scripture to *know* what to believe!

***Who is our Authority?***

Let’s turn a corner now and consider who our authority is. Are we to find final authority from within Scripture or outside of Scripture? And, what does this have to do with communication to God in prayer?

The fundamental issue with humanity is this: We sinfully want more certainty than what we believe God’s word provides, or we want something that feels more personal, so we look for it somewhere else.

**Gen 3:1** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

What does the serpent say? “***Did God actually SAY…?”***This is really interesting. What grounds does Satan use to upset humanity? He interjects doubt into the reliability of what God has revealed. Satan, in essence, is saying: “The revealed truth of God is not reliable or certain and thus you must look to something else for assurance.”

If you’ve ever studied history, you will see an evolution of fallen man’s beliefs about authority. Some cultures, like our own, believe that authority is internal. It’s common for people in 21st century America to believe that there is no external authority that can tell us what to believe or do.

However, biblically and realistically, ultimate authority is extrinsic. It is outside of us. Man is finite and God is infinite and He has authority over us. During the reformation it was widely accepted and understood that there was a vast chasm between the Creator and the creature. However, during the Enlightenment, man centered reason became the measure of all things, not God centered reason. Now, I’m not saying that reason is bad. In fact, reason presupposes a creator God. We can have no reason without God. You cannot have a universal law without a universal law giver!

God created reason and intends for Christians to be among the most astutely reason-oriented people. But, God never intends for reason to trump His authority. If we adopt reason as our god, we are left with a woefully inadequate worldview.

But why?

Let me give you an example. One may say, “It is reasonable to euthanize persons who are mentally disabled because they add no objective value to humanity.” This is what Nazi Germany believed. Hitler’s Third Reich called those with disabilities to have “life unworthy of life” and to be “useless eaters.” They argued (among other things) that those with disabilities only took precious resources from the whole of society and didn’t contribute. Science can detail how many resources we have and how many people will consume them, but it cannot give us a moral answer to the questions, “Should we kill people who cannot contribute in the common ways to our society?” or “What is the value of human life?”

You see, science and reason cannot give us moral and ethical answers. We need more than mere man centered reason to live. We need the revelation of God, which He has given to us in Scripture!

What we see today is the belief that I am my own god. Some may not be so bold to say that out loud, but it is what plagues fallen man.

Now, if you were to ask most American teenagers or young adults who their authority is, most likely they would say, “no one” or “myself.” The recent movements of the radical left have seen common structures of authority ripped apart. No longer is patriarchy or hierarchy a good and right thing, it is evil and must be resisted. No longer are separate gender roles a functional part of society, they are evil and must be resisted. No longer is the nuclear family a good and right thing, it is evil and must be resisted. No longer is marriage to be exclusively between a man and woman, but it can be whatever we, collectively as a society, desire it to be.

We see this reasoning used in the abortion debate. It’s a woman’s right to choose what to do with her body. In that statement is the idea that the woman is supreme in her choices and no one, not even God, can determine what she may or may not do with her body. This line of thinking, God-discarding thinking, is insanity. Make no mistake, these sinful trends (and there are many more I could cover) are due to the rejection of extrinsic authority.

We are a society that has so lost our understanding of authority that we have now asserted our own autonomy (or so called self-determining will). We think we’re in charge. We claim to rightfully judge truth. We decide what’s right and wrong. It is terribly destructive and sad.

All this to say, we should absolutely look to Scripture as all authoritative because it is the absolute words of God. The Scripture is our source for truth in all things.

Now that we’ve established that God is our authority and that He has chosen to reveal His words to us through Scripture, let’s ask the catechism question again:

***How has our Authority commanded we communicate to Him?***

I took time this evening to build our foundation so that we would look to scripture to rightly answer this question. How has our Authority commanded we communicate to Him? In persistent prayer.

Where do we get this answer? Is it from Popes? Or the fallen-cultures idea about things? No. We get it from God’s word!

Here are a few scriptures: **Romans 12:12** “be constant in prayer.”

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** “pray without ceasing…for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

**Colossians 4:2** “Continue steadfastly in prayer”

Our primary means of communication to God is through prayer. We speak to God in prayer. Don’t miss a key word in our answer: persistent. We’ll discuss this reality more later but be sure to note it.

What is the concept here? Be constant. Pray without ceasing. Do so steadfastly.

So in our first Q&A, it’s important to know that:

1. God speaks to us by the word’s historically laid down as Scripture, not any other means.
2. God has commanded the saved to communicate to Him in prayer.
3. This prayer is to be constant/persistent.

With that foundation, let’s move on.

**Q102. What is prayer?**

Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God in praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and expressing our requests to Him while submitting to His sovereign will.

Now we turn to what prayer is. Let’s read our catechism question and answer.

Q102. What is prayer? Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God in praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and expressing our requests to Him while submitting to His sovereign will.

***Introduction:***

What is prayer? In the most basic sense, prayer is a type of communication from us to God. Simply saying a general hello to God or uttering God’s name in vain does not qualify as prayer.

The anatomy of prayer can really be broken into two predominant categories.

1. God-exalting
2. Man-benefiting

All prayer falls into these two categories. Our prayers are God-exalting; we are praising and worshiping Him for who He is and what He has done.

And our prayers are man-benefiting. What do I mean by that? These are prayers of asking, or prayers of supplication for our neighbors or ourselves, as well as the reality that a Christian is benefited in the God-exalting portion of the prayer as it encourages our faith and sets our minds on Him—that is GOOD for us. It is man-benefiting.

***Pouring out our hearts***

Now, the act of prayer, which is separate from the function of prayer is an act of worship. Any time we engage with God in both praise & supplication, this is an act of worship. Our catechism question is preceded by a few words that are particularly chosen and important. It says, “Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God.”

Prayer is not simply dry communication; again it is pouring our hearts out to God.

Stop for a moment. What does it mean to pour our hearts out to God? Let’s make this personal for a moment. If you have a child, what does it mean for your child to pour their heart out to you the parent? Typically that means that your child will bare his/her deep and authentic thoughts, feelings, burdens, joys, and desires to you. There is a transparency here. There is a desire to tell and be known. There is a want for relationship.

These are also prerequisites to true prayer. We see in: James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

If our heart is self-seeking or is disinclined to truly ask or worship God, then we are not glorifying God in that prayer. James is getting at our attitude in prayer. If we pray to God with selfishness or bitterness and disbelief that He is who He says He is, then God is not glorified *in* the prayer. We would be profaning all that Christ has accomplished for His elect! Instead, we are exhorted to come to God with humility and praise and rejoicing and love. A genuine heart for God above all else.

There is an intentionality with prayer that qualifies the act to actually be prayer.

The justifying imputed righteousness of the Christ frees us from sin to love God in our worshipful prayers to Him as *loved* slaves. If a person comes to God as a *bitter* slave comes to a taskmaster, then there is a foundational breakdown or misunderstanding.

Now that we understand what prayer is and what qualifies as prayer, let’s look at our catechism answer again:

*Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God in praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and expressing our requests to Him while submitting to His sovereign will.*

We will tackle each of these topics: praise, thanksgiving, confession of sin, asking of God, and submitting to His will.

***Praise***

What is praise? Specifically, what is or what does it mean to praise God?

Let us look to scripture! Turn with me to Psalm 145, we are going to read the entire Psalm.

Psalm 145

Ps 145:1 I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

Ps 145:2 Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

Ps 145:3 ​Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

Ps 145:4 One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

Ps 145:5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

Ps 145:6 They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.

Ps 145:7 They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

Ps 145:8 The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Ps 145:9 The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

Ps 145:10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you!

Ps 145:11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power,

Ps 145:12 to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Ps 145:13 ​Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.]

Ps 145:14 The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

Ps 145:15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

Ps 145:16 You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Ps 145:17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

Ps 145:18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

Ps 145:19 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them.

Ps 145:20 The LORD preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

Ps 145:21 My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.

When we pray, we ought to praise God. And do we not see David doing this in this Psalm? It drips with His heartfelt praise for God.

We do not rejoice *primarily* for what God gives us. We are told to give thanks in all circumstances. Praise is more than just thankfulness that we have received this or that. Praise is acknowledgement, thankfulness, and awe toward God for who He is. When we are praising God, we are surrendering to Him and worshiping Him for His attributes. We love God because He is righteous and almighty and sovereign and gracious.

Our prayers need to be peppered with constant exultations to the Lord not because He has made our lives easy or difficult. Our love for the Lord transcends our circumstances. This is why Job can say in Job 13:15a, “​Though he (God) slay me, I will hope in him.” Even though God has ordained our lives difficult, we understand that He is who He is. He is the universal providential governor who holds the scepter of justice and mercy!

We marvel at God because He is due that glory. His glory is the sustaining power that should drive our prayers!

***Thanksgiving***

November’s Thanksgiving is a uniquely Christian holiday. But, have you ever asked why? We are thankful because of all of the inhabitants of the earth; we have been chosen and saved by, and reconciled to the one true merciful God!

Those who do not know Christ have nothing lasting to be thankful for. We have much to be thankful for- temporary things, but more importantly ETERNAL things! This gets to the heart of the gospel for us. You’re either dead in sin or alive in Christ. If you are alive in Christ, be thankful!

Ps 107:1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

Why should we be thankful? His steadfast love endures forever!

If you stand as an elected and loved son of God, then how can we not well up with thanksgiving in our heart as we read Ephesians 1:2-9.

Ephesians 1:2-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ.

Prayer for the Christian is worshipping God and thanking God for who He is and what He has done for you, with an emphasis on eternal things. Thank Him for your new birth, thank Him for total forgiveness, thank Him for growing you in ease and difficulty, and thank Him for eternal communion with Him. Amen!

***Confession of Sin***

**1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

It is a necessity that we confess our sins in prayer, not as a means to justification, but as a display of being totally forgiven. We know that Christ *has* forgiven us. We stand legally pardoned before the throne of grace! So, why do we need to confess a forgiven sin?

Forgiveness is sure for the Christian, which is true. Christ’s work at Calvary was accomplished and finished for all sin past and present. But, God has ordained that we know our sin *as sin* and confess our transgressions as a means for progressive sanctification and growth with the body of Christ (the church) as well as with our relationship with the triune God.

We are called to hate sin and persevere in our faith until we are called home by God. When we confess our sins, we understand that our sin is no longer a private affair. We’ve acknowledged it before God. We’re calling what we’ve done sin and we’re actively looking to the cleansing gospel to understand our freed nature from indwelling sin. We thusly turn from our sin and walk in righteousness, not by our power, but by the indwelling Holy Spirit in us.

***Expressing our requests to Him***

Typically, when we pray, it is very easy for us to fall into a lopsided prayer life. We typically just ask God for ‘stuff’. Dear Lord, please heal my Dad, Amen. Dear Lord, please give me a PlayStation 5 for Christmas, Amen.

It is imperative that we not treat God like the genie in the bottle. If that is our relation to God, then we woefully misunderstand His relation to us. God is ultimately for God. The creator and sustainer of all things is not submitting to the creatures’ whimsical desires. He does not serve you in this way. Does that mean that our loving Father does not love to give us all things? Sure, we know that He does good things, but it’s for His ultimate glory. As we covered in the introduction to this section, we ought to be asking with pure motives, not sinful motives.

We see this in: Matt 7:7-11 “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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

It is important to note here that when we ask God for things, our loving father loves to give us plenty. We see this clearly from the passage—especially if you read it with an eternal mindset.

Let me ask the parents here a question: How often do you give your children candy when they ask for it at their bed time? I’m assuming that you love them and that you love to give them plenty of things, correct? But why do you withhold the candy at bed time? We withhold out of love because we know that it will not profit them. And so does our God withhold many of our requests. We often ask from ignorance and thusly we do not receive what we do not need.

Let us understand that when we pray to our loving Father, He only gives us what is in alignment with His will. Not what we absolutely want. To be clear, God does test us by giving us trials and difficult circumstances that *we need* but may not desire in the moment. In these times of trial, let us humble ourselves and confess the truth of Romans 8:28, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

***Submitting (Yielding) to His sovereign will***

Finally, we get to submission.

As the Lord’s prayer says, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done.” We ought to have hearts that yield to God’s will. He is gracious and omniscient and omnipotent. Who are we to assert our will over His? All of our prayer and our heart in prayer must be in submission to His sovereign will.

Our good Father knows best and we ought to submit to his sovereign decree in our entire life! Yes, ask. Ask all the time. But do not demand! We do not judge God as if he was a man! Instead, let us rest in the finished work of Christ and be content with what our Father wills to give *or not* give to us, or gives but later takes away.

***Application:***

I’m assuming that many of you, myself included, have a fairly hot-cold relationship with prayer. I have seasons where I pray often, and then I have seasons where I pray little. I have seasons where I pray with heart-felt exuberance and then I seasons where my prayers are distant and dry. I have seasons where I know exactly what to pray for and I have seasons where I can’t for the life of me think of anything to pray about.

Let me give you (and myself) some advice here.

***Scripture is Sufficient***

Stop seeking out extra words from God that aren’t in Scripture. Many of you have heard of Jesus Calling by Sarah Young. Don’t read these types of books. Why? Because she claims to hear from God. By her claiming to hear from God, she is nullifying 2 Timothy 3:16-17. She is essentially saying that all Scripture is not complete and sufficient. We should guard our hearts from devotions that try to fool us into thinking we can learn more *about* God or His will from outside of Scripture.

To be clear here, I’m not saying that we shouldn’t be reading a book where a studied author exposits or teaches the text. We are all exhorted to teach Scripture, not just read it aloud. But, in general we need to stay away from authors who claim to hear from or speak on behalf of God.

***Pray Often***

Secondly, be in prayer often! We are exhorted to be praying constantly, so pray constantly. It is not a useless proposition. God has planned and decreed that you would cry out to him before the foundations of the world. And thusly you see His heart for you in this sovereign decree. God commands us to cry to him, as a child to a father. He assures us that He will hear us, and comforts us in our weaknesses!

***Pray with Sincerity***

Let our prayers be heartfelt and sincere. Take the extra time when in communication to God to stop yourself and focus yourself so that you really can be true to Him and His word.

Let us enter into solemn worship with Him in that moment. Let us praise him for who He is!

***Pray with Discipline***

Let us seek daily moments where we can set aside a few minutes here or there to go to God in prayer. I had a discipline where I would pray on the way to and from work. This bought me 10-20 minutes of daily prayer! I confess that I have fallen out of this habit, but I am confessing this so that I may again be held accountable and get back to work. We should be looking for moments to seek God out in prayer.

***Pray with Expectation***

I’m not referring to an expectation that if I believe it, God will achieve it. This is not a prosperity type of expectation. Pray with an expectation that our interaction with God will yield an abundance of godly fruit. If God’s aim is to progressively conform us to Christ’s image and our good Father does not withhold gracious gifts for us, then it is His good pleasure to grow in us spiritual fruit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Do you have a gentleness problem? Seek God’s face, pray to him with unceasing vigor and diligence! Plead with him to teach you to withhold and calm your anger and grow in gentleness. And, by the grace of God, in His sovereign timing, he will grow you in gentleness!

***Pray to the Trinity***

While the typical approach to prayer is to the God the Father, we can also have prayers steeped in the Trinity. Thank the Father for sending the Son into the world! Let us thank the Father, Son, and Spirit for making a covenant to purchase and apply our salvation before the foundation of the world! Let us thank the Son for dying for our sin! Let us thank Christ for being our mediator between God and man! Let us thank Jesus for procuring our salvation! Let us thank the Spirit for dwelling in us and comforting us! Let us thank the Spirit for praying for us when we don’t know how to pray!

You see, we can grow in richness when we think theologically about prayer. Praise God!

***Pray with Reverence and Respect***

God is our Master. God is our King. Do not walk into the presence of the King flippantly. Let us have a reverence and respect for His majesty. Think of and praise Him for His divine attributes. God is all-wise, all-knowing, all-reaching, sovereign, Holy, all-powerful, Triune, etc. You can dwell on these characteristics of God in prayer to help you praise Him more fully!

***Pray as a beloved Son and Daughter***

Understand your position as an heir and a son. Know the gospel. Know that we were ruthlessly sinful deserving eternal wrath and without God’s work we would have perished without hope.

Eph 2:4-5 “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved.”

Praise Him!

Let’s pray.