

## **“OUR LORD’S PRAYERS FOR US.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**February 16, 2014, 6:00PM**

**Sermon Texts: Romans 8:31-34; Hebrews 7:22-25; I John 2:1-2**

**Belgic Confession Article 26**

### **Introduction.**

This evening we come to Article 26 which concludes another major section of the Belgic Confession, the section that affirms what we confess from Scripture to be true about the person and the work of Jesus.

Articles 16 to 26 are all Christology or the study of Christ.

Article 16 salvation is planned.

Article 17 salvation is promised, Mother Promise

Article 18-21 salvation is accomplished.

Article 22-23 is our justification.

Article 24-25 is our sanctification.

The first paragraph of Article 26 offers a very brief summary of what we have already covered.

Jesus the righteous (Article 20-23) became man (Article 19) having united in one person both the divine and human natures (Article 18) that we might have access to God.

The person and work of Christ are all about reconciling us to the Father that we might have access to God again.

We have moved from the discussion of Jesus’ glory in heaven before the incarnation, and from His humiliation being born a human, living, suffering and dying; to now consider His exaltation in heaven at the right hand of the Father as the chief intercessor for the people of God.

Having once offered Himself for all in the sacrifice of Himself, He now offers Himself in prayer for all. Both of these offerings are the work of the priest. He offers the sacrifice for the sins of the people and he offers prayers to God for the needs of the people.

## **Middle Ages.**

So why is this article on what seems like a lesser doctrine so long? The two longest articles in the Belgic Confession, this one and the one on the Lord's Supper, address two doctrinal corruptions that had crept into the church.

You can probably tell that there is a particular issue that this article makes a big point of addressing. This was the Reformation and there was a lot of controversy with the Roman Catholic Church of the time.

The one here has to do with our access to God through prayer.

During the Middle Ages the understanding of Jesus as our only mediator and advocate began to be changed and added to and diluted.

During the Middle Ages many aids to prayer and to approaching God were introduced. Prayers to saints and to Mary, candles, images, statues, beads, confessionals, and indulgences. Through all of this God ended up becoming less accessible rather than more accessible.

One of the motivations behind these practices was a sense that God was too holy and pure to be approached directly. People felt their sins disqualified them from approaching God even through Jesus. They were too unworthy so they looked to human saints.

Sometime during the Middle Ages the practice of worshipping and praying to saints began. Each country and even cities began to have their special saints. Rome was protected by Peter and Paul. Ireland had St. Patrick. England had St. George. There were saints for special days like last Friday honoring the martyred third century St. Valentine.

Another motivation was that our needs are so many and varied that we need many advocates. There were saints for every occupation. St. Christopher is the patron saint of travelers and drivers, St. Joseph for carpenters, St. Luke for doctors, one saint for eye problems, another for stomach issues, another for giving birth and yet another for pain. It was said that these saints had greater access to God for each particular need they represented.

Of course the saint above all saints was St. Mary. She was in a class by herself and prayers were always to be offered to her. She was believed to have special access to God as the mother of Jesus. The rosary beads include saying the Hail Mary prayer:

“Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

Attempts had been made to correct some of the abuses and superstitions but it wasn't until the Reformation that the voices became united and strong in confronted unbiblical practices. The Roman Catholic Church tried to correct some of the abuses but at the same time continued to approve the practice.

The Reformation said the practice detracted from the honor and glory that was due to Christ and Christ alone as our mediator.

Article 26 (paragraph 3) affirms we have no reason to fear God's majesty or holiness. No one has done more for us to remove the wrath of God and appease the justice of God. And no one loves us more than Jesus has loved us.

Article 26 (paragraph 4) affirms Jesus has all power and authority and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He can hear every concern, and He is heard by the Father for every concern.

“Who will be heard more readily than God's own dearly beloved Son?”

***So what should we do with all the saints?*** We should do with them what Hebrews 11 does with them. We should thank God for their lives and for the example they set and for the faith they displayed often in very trying times. When we contemplate the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us it should strengthen us and give us greater courage and boldness.

Jesus honored Mary, but He didn't elevate her. When told His mother and brothers were waiting to see Him, He said who is my mother and who are my brothers, these are my mothers and brothers.

When people attempted to honor or elevate Peter or Paul, they immediately pointed them to Jesus.

**Acts 10:25-26** When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.”

**Acts 14:11-15** And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of

men!” 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. 13 And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, 15 “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.

Their God is also our God, their mediator is also our mediator.

### **Our Mediator and Advocate.**

Human history is filled with countless attempts to get to God in some other way than through Jesus.

This is why an article on the intercession of Christ focuses so much attention on Christ being our only mediator and advocate.

Jesus is the perfect high priest and the perfect mediator between us and the Father. Because of Jesus we need no other advocate and we need no one else to pray for us. Jesus as man knows our sufferings and temptations. Jesus as God can hear all our prayers and can provide all our needs.

**John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

To suggest another is to rob Jesus of His glory. No one else is worthy.

**John 15:4-5** Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

### **Our Intercessor.**

God of course could just see our needs and meet them without us ever saying a word. He knows what we need not only before we ask, but even before we know we have the need.

But God has chosen in His relationship with the human race to wait to act in response to our requests.

God created our lives to be dependent on Him for everything. We cannot have life apart from God. As a fish is made for water so are we made for God.

One of the most amazing privileges of the new covenant is that everyone of us, not just priests or pastors, but every one of us may enter the temple and walk up to the veil and put it back and step into the Holy of Holies and approach the mercy seat and make intercession to the Father through the blood of the Son.

The highest and best prayer that we can possibly pray is prayer that is offered in Jesus' name. No prayer prayed to a created creature can rise higher than a prayer prayed to Jesus and in His name.

This is why when we pray we most often pray in Jesus' name. He is our mediator, our advocate, our open door and access to the Father. We don't come in our own name or in our own merits but in the name and merits of Jesus.

We are encouraged to pray to Jesus because He knows us better than we know ourselves and because He suffered and was tempted as we are (paragraph 7).

And further to encourage us even more, let us approach with confidence because of His blood and finished work.

What more do we need? Come as you are and pour out your heart to God in Christ.

### **What does Jesus pray?**

The word intercede specifically refers to someone making specific requests and petitions for someone else. Jesus continually and eternally lives in the very presence of the Father and ever-lives making specific requests and bringing specific petitions to the Father on our behalf.

Hebrews says that Jesus ever-lives to make intercession for us. He practices what He preaches, He prays without ceasing. Do you ever wonder what Jesus prays sitting there at the right hand of the Father. John 17 is an excellent insight into the kind of prayer Jesus prays for us.

“Jesus' prayer in John 17 seems to be an indication of the things He prays for. He asks that all of His saints would be preserved in the faith (v. 11), that we would be protected from Satan and evil (v. 15), that we would be sanctified in the truth and

thus progress in holiness (v. 17), that we would all be unified with one another (v. 21), and that we would one day all be with Him to behold His glory (v. 24). The focus of Jesus' prayers is that we would live out the full extent our salvation, and that we would be kept from falling away so that we will one day be where He is" (Matt Perman).

We can also read the Holy Spirit inspired prayers of the Apostles to get another glimpse into the prayer language of heaven. Prayers that we continually grow in grace, faith, hope, love and joy.

From our text this morning we know that as Jesus prayed for Peter when he was tempted, so He prays for us when we are tempted.

### **Application and Conclusion.**

Does your mind wander in prayer? Do you sometimes fall asleep while praying? Do you ever run out of things to pray or don't know what to say?

None of those things ever happens to Jesus. He ever-lives to make intercession, He prays incessantly, without ceasing, He always knows exactly what to ask the Father, always has just the right words for each and every need.

This doctrine should be a particularly great comfort to all God's children.

In the words of Louis Berkhof:

"It is a consoling thought that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life; that He is presenting to the Father those spiritual needs which were not present to our minds and which we often neglect to include in our prayers; and that He prays for our protection against the dangers of which we are not even conscious, and against the enemies which threaten us, though we do not notice it. He is praying that our faith may not cease, and that we may come out victoriously in the end. (Berkhoff, *Systematic Theology*, p. 403)

"If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me" (*Robert Murray M'Cheyne*, p. 179).

It is a comfort when we tell someone we are praying for them. But consider the unimaginable comfort of knowing the Jesus is praying for you and He is praying for you all the time.