

DAILY MEDITATIONS ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

by Pastors of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America

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DEC
Lord's Days 49 - 52

The Third Part - Of Thankfulness

Of Prayer

Lord's Day 49

Question 124. Which is the third petition?

Answer. [a] "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"; that is, grant that we and all men may renounce [b] our own will, and without murmuring [c] obey Thy will, which is only good; that so every one may attend to and [d] perform the duties of his station and calling, as willingly and faithfully as the [e] angels do in heaven.

[a]: [Matt. 6:10](#)

[b]: [Matt. 16:24](#); [Tit. 2:12](#)

[c]: [Luke 22:42](#)

[d]: [1Cor. 7:24](#); [Eph. 4:1](#)

[e]: [Psa. 103:20](#)

December 3 - LD 49, Day 1: Praying God's Will Be Done
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Matthew 6:10 " ...*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*"

About the third petition, there is considerable confusion among Christians. What do we mean by God's will? Is God's will, as Reformed Christians teach, always accomplished? If so, why do we need to pray for God's will to be done? Does Jesus teach here that God's will is done in heaven, but not done in earth?

It is important to remember as we consider this petition, that the Bible speaks of God's will in different senses. If we understand that, we will see that there is perfect harmony between God's sovereignty and our need to utter this prayer to God.

First, the Bible speaks of God's will of decree. That will is what God has determined to be done in history. Other terms include God's good pleasure or God's counsel. That will of God is always accomplished. No man is able to resist or thwart that will of God. Nebuchadnezzar was compelled to make this confession in Dan 4:35, "...he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" That will of God includes everything that occurs in history, whether good or evil.

That will of God is always performed in heaven and on earth.

Second, the Bible speaks of God's will of command or precept. That will is what God has commanded His creatures, especially human beings, to do. That will is revealed to us in the Law of God. That will of God is very rarely performed. None of the wicked ever perform that will, for their life is a walk in disobedience (Eph 2:2). Even believers attain only a small beginning of this new obedience. That will, of God's command, is, however, perfectly done in heaven, although rarely on earth.

Sometimes, Christians speak about God's revealed will and God's secret will. Much of God's counsel is secret. We know God has a counsel, but we do not know the details. God's commands are revealed. He reveals to us how we must live. Therefore, our calling is not to pry into God's secret decrees, but to obey God's revealed will—even if our obedience means that we suffer loss, inconvenience and even persecution.

One more thing we must add to our explanation of God's will. God does not have a will by which He desires things which He has not decreed. Some theologians have misused this *distinction* in God's will to teach a *contradiction* in God's will. It is not true, for example, that God has decreed to save only some, but that He desires to save all. God does not desire things which He knows will never happen, having decreed that they will never happen.

There is a twofold relationship between God's will and our prayers. First, God decrees even our prayers as necessary means to fulfill His purposes; and second, we pray that God would enable us more and more to obey God in His will of command.

Obeying God's will is difficult. Let us pray for grace to obey.

December 4 - LD 49, Day 2: Father Knows Best
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Luke 11:11 *"If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone...?"*

God, who is our Father, has a will. That will is, as we have seen, God's purpose concerning all things—His will of decree—and God's commandments to us—His will of command or precept. About that will, LD 49 says, it is "only good."

With respect to His children, God's will is always and only good. God, our Father, delights to shower us with blessings; He delights to show Himself the abundant Provider, the gracious Preserver, and the merciful Saviour. God's decrees concerning us are good. He has decreed our salvation, our everlasting blessedness. He has decreed that we should be with Him forever beholding His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Our comfort is that everything which God has planned for us—wealth and poverty, health and sickness, prosperity and adversity—serves our salvation and His glory, and since God has decreed all, none can overthrow His good purpose for us (Rom 8:28). God's will of command is good for us too. God's law is not grievous, but is a good guide for our life. In keeping God's commandments and walking in obedience, we find blessedness, whereas the ungodly who walk in disobedience find misery.

Since God's will is only good, our will is only good insofar as it is in harmony with His will. When God's purposes thwart our happiness, and when God's commands are contrary to our desires, God's will is still good. We struggle often to recognize and confess that. What we see as great evils—hunger, poverty, disease, bereavement and death—God sends upon us for our good. God never sends trials upon His children out of hatred, ill will, or spite; God never causes us a needless tear; God never gives more than we can bear. We confess this as Reformed believers—the difficulty is in truly believing it.

When we are tempted to despair, we must remember the very simple truth: our Father knows best, and His will is "only good." Do I not have what I want—whether possessions, good health, opportunities or relationships? My Father knows that I do not need those things right now. He knows best; His will is "only good." Do I have what I do not want—trials, difficulties, disappointments and pain? My Father knows that I need to pass through this sorrow right now. He has carefully designed this dark valley for me, and He promises to be with me as I go through that valley. His will is "only good."

Jesus illustrates this from everyday life. Even fathers, whom Jesus calls "evil" (Luke 11:13) know how to give good gifts to their children. Will our Father, who is only good, always wise, infinitely powerful and glorious, give evil gifts to His children—stones for bread; serpents for fish; scorpions for eggs?

The problem we have—and this is why we must utter this petition in our prayers—is that we do not *want* Father's will. We are so self-willed that we want only our own will, which is not "only good." "Father, let thy will, which is only good, be done. Father, thou knowest best."

December 5 - LD 49, Day 3: Renouncing Our Own Will
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Matthew 16:24 “...*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*”

When we utter the third petition, “Thy will be done,” we are praying thus: “May Thy will happen; may it come to pass that Thy will is performed *by us, in us, in our lives.*” We are not praying that God’s decrees will be accomplished—God’s decrees are always, infallibly and effectually accomplished. We are praying that God’s commands will be obeyed—by us.

This means that we do not have the natural power to obey God’s will. Augustine, the great theologian of grace in the early church, understood this when he prayed: “Lord, give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt.” The unbeliever cannot obey the will of God; indeed, he cannot even desire to obey God. When the unbeliever, who willfully disobeys God, prays, “Thy will be done,” he is guilty of gross hypocrisy. Let us never pray, “Thy will be done,” while we disobey God.

We struggle to utter the words of this third petition sincerely, because we are self-willed by nature. We want *our* will to be done, and only if God’s will suits our will, do we obey Him. We might never utter these words in our prayers, of course, but often our thought is: “*My* will be done!”

That is why LD 49 interprets the third petition this way: “Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will...” Jesus teaches us self-denial in our prayers. Self-denial is that most difficult of Christian callings. People will give up many things and they will tolerate a lot even for the sake of religion—but they will not deny *themselves*. Self-denial means that we say “no” to ourselves. Jesus graphically describes this as taking up our cross. On that cross we are called to crucify ourselves—our desires, our plans, our ambitions, our pride, and everything which would hinder us in performing God’s good will.

Can you do *that*? Can I do *that*? That is why we need to seek God in prayer.

When we pray in a way acceptable to God, we say something like this: “O Father, I am so weak, so sinful. I can hardly manage to think a good thought. O Father, the desire is there, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. O Father, give me Thy grace and Holy Spirit. Incline my heart to keep Thy commandments and to fear Thy name. I know that Thy will is better than mine, but my flesh wants to assert itself. I find it so hard to give up everything, to account all things as dung, that I might have fellowship with Thee. Crucify within me, O Father, the lusts of my flesh, my evil desires, and enable me to perform Thy will—not mine—for Thy glory.”

If you know that struggle—your will versus God’s will—then pray the third petition.
Let God’s will be done in us.

December 6 - LD 49, Day 4: Cheerful Submission to God's Will
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Philippians 2:14 *"Do all things without murmurings and disputings."*

Yesterday, we examined the third petition from the perspective of God's will of command. We pray for strength to renounce our own will, and to obey God's will. LD 49 also addresses the third petition from the perspective of God's will of decree, namely, that we pray for grace to submit cheerfully and without murmuring to God's will of decree. Remember that God's will of decree will happen whether we are cheerful or not, but we must pray for submission.

The sin which LD 49 exposes is murmuring. "Grant that we...may...without murmuring obey Thy will." Although LD 49 speaks here about "obeying God's will," it is profitable for us also to apply this to God's decree. Murmuring was the great sin of the Israelites in the wilderness—when they had no water, they murmured; when they had no food, they murmured; when they did not like the leadership of Moses, they murmured. This murmuring was the fruit of discontentment and unbelief—they did not like God's provision and they did not trust God to provide. God judged His murmuring people. He killed many of them with fiery serpents (Num 21:6) and the carcasses of the complaining Israelites fell in the wilderness. The New Testament warns us against this sin of murmuring (I Cor 10:10).

Murmuring is a temptation for us, which is why we need to pray "Thy will be done." Sometimes, murmuring can be internal, so that we never utter a murmur in our words. The danger is that we become bitter in our spirit—bitter against life, bitter in our circumstances and bitter against God. At other times, we can utter angry, impatient words, as we struggle to submit to a trial God has sent upon us. We are even tempted to curse God, as Job was. All such murmuring is sin. Satan wants us to question our Father's goodness. We may never do that!

LD 49 explains this in these words: "that so every one may attend to and perform the duties of his station and calling." Each person is in a particular position in life *according to the will of God*. It is the will of God that some are married while others (at least for a time) remain single. Submit to the will of God cheerfully and without grumbling, and perform faithfully the duties of marriage or singlehood. It is the will of God that some have children while others (despite longing and praying for children) remain childless. Submit to that will, too, and perform faithfully the duties of your station and calling. God places some in positions of authority, and others He places under those authorities. We may seek in all lawful ways to change our situations, but we must not fret, complain, grumble, doubt the goodness of God or envy the position of others.

Murmuring against God is a rebellious spirit, and when we sense that spirit within us we must pray, "Father, Thy will be done. Break my stubborn will. Break my self-will. Mould my will to agree with Thine."

December 7 - LD 49, Day 5: Praying Without Doubting
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

I John 5:14 *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”*

Some object to the third petition because it seems to express doubt. Such people would argue that we should ask boldly and confidently, and therefore we must not add to our prayers “if it be Thy will...” That, they say, neutralizes the prayer—it adds an element of doubt, as if we are not sure whether God will give us what we ask.

However, this is a grave misunderstanding. It is entirely fitting and appropriate for us to add “if it be Thy will” to our petitions, simply because we do not know what God’s will is.

There are some things for which we do not need to add this petition: “Father, forgive my sins.” We who have faith in Jesus Christ know that God has promised to forgive our sins. “Father, gather, defend and preserve Thy church.” We know that God has promised to save His church. “Father, destroy the kingdom of darkness.” We know that God has promised to do that also.

But there are other more specific petitions for which we have no promise. Perhaps we are praying for the conversion of a friend. We do not know what God’s will is, so it is fitting we add “if it be Thy will” to our prayer. Perhaps we are at the sickbed of a loved one. Through tears, we beseech God to heal our dear one, but we add “if it be Thy will” to our prayer. We do not know the number of the days determined by God for our loved one. What we do know is that God’s will for us, even when He takes a loved one in sickness and death, is good.

There is a world of difference between asking in childlike humility and demanding that God give us what we want. Certainly, we come boldly, with confidence, into the very presence of God, but we come to *God*. We cannot demand anything of Him; we cannot manipulate Him; we cannot by much speaking persuade Him to give us what He is not pleased to give.

Another great evil in prayer is to pray for something which God has revealed He will *not* give. That is to tempt God. Our prayers must be according to God’s will in this sense too—we must pray for those things which please God. For example, we should pray for grace and the Holy Spirit, but we should not pray that God give us good examination results when we cheat or do not study or that He prosper us when we steal. Furthermore, we should avoid the pious-sounding sham, “I have been praying about it, and I feel that...” or “Let me pray about that...” When God has revealed that something is *not* His will, we should *not* pray about it—except for grace to resist the way of disobedience. We must never use prayer as an excuse not to obey a clear command of Scripture—that is to mock God in a most shameful manner.

We should make it our business to discover God’s will from the Bible, and having discovered it, we obey. If we struggle with obedience, we pray, “Lord, incline my stubborn, foolish, rebellious, sinful will to obey Thy commandments. Thy will be done!”

December 8 - LD 49, Day 6: "...As in Heaven..."
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Psalm 103:21 *"Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure."*

Jesus in the third petition makes a contrast between the will of God in heaven and the will of God in earth: "in earth, as it is heaven" (Matt 6:10). The will of God, both of His decree and His command, is always perfectly performed in heaven. There is no disobedience in heaven. Even the disobedience of the devil—remember that Lucifer was dissatisfied with the station and calling God had given him—was decreed by God. The reprobate angels were cast out; among the elect angels, there is no disobedience.

What do angels do? Angels are God's ministers—they are His servants, attending to Him. Angels are God's messengers—they are sent to do His bidding, to bring tidings to the earth. Angels are God's hosts—they are His soldiers, who fight in spiritual warfare against the spirits of wickedness and who bring God's just vengeance on the wicked. Angels are God's worshippers—they praise Him without ceasing.

Angels also have their own calling and station. Some are cherubim; others are seraphim. Some are mere angels; others are archangels. Within the angelic ranks there is no envy and no dissatisfaction. No angel ever questions God's will, and certainly no angel refuses to carry out God's will.

LD 49 reminds us of this and urges upon us the angels for a pattern—"as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven." Psalm 103 teaches us about this. "Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word... that do his pleasure" (v20-21).

We must contrast the angels' obedience with our obedience. Often we disobey. The angels never disobey. Often our obedience is halfhearted and reluctant. The angels obey God willingly and swiftly. We often murmur against one another, desiring to change our position for theirs. The angels never murmur. When God says to an angel, "Go," he goes, and he does not complain that he was sent on an errand. When God commands an angel, "Worship me forever," the angel does not get bored with worshipping God. When Gabriel was chosen to bring glad tidings to Mary concerning the coming of Jesus, the other angels did not become envious that they were not sent, nor did Gabriel become proud that he was chosen for such an assignment.

That is the kind of obedience at which we must aim. "Lord, make my obedience of Thee as eager and faithful as that of the angels. May Thy will be done in me and by me as it is in heaven."

December 9 - LD 49, Day 7: Christ Praying the Third Petition
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Matthew 26:39 *"...nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."*

Yesterday, we looked at the pattern of willing obedience to the will of God shown by the angels in heaven. But there is one higher pattern—that of Jesus Christ.

Christ came into the world to do the will of God. In the volume of the book of God's decree and revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures was God's will for Jesus Christ (Psa 40:7-8). So zealous was Jesus for the will of God that He said to His disciples, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Never did Jesus transgress the will of God. Never did Jesus even *will* to transgress the will of God.

God's will for Jesus was that He suffer and die for our sins and bear His wrath on the cross. This was eternally decreed concerning Him—the serpent would bruise His heel (Gen 3:15); He would be "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities" (Isa 53:5); He would be "cut off, but not for himself" (Dan 9:26); He, the Shepherd would be smitten with the sword of the LORD (Zech 13:7). When His enemies came to arrest Him, Peter tried to defend Him, but Jesus responded: "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matt 26:54).

Yet, Christ, too, struggled with this petition, more than we ever will. He was not tempted to disobey, but He shrank back in horror at the prospect of drinking the cup of God's wrath. In heaviness of heart, He asked the Father, if it be possible, that the cup might pass from Him, but He added those crucial words, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt 26:39).

In Gethsemane, Christ deliberately and consciously renounced His own will—the will that there might be some other way—to God's will. What self denial! What submission! What love! What obedience!

Never was the third petition more difficult to utter than in Gethsemane, but He uttered it.

And because He uttered it, we have grace to utter it too.

All our self will, murmuring, rebellion and disobedience was laid on Christ who carried them to the cross and suffered the penalty of death for them. And grace, spiritual strength and every measure of the Spirit which we possess were purchased for us by the sacrifice of Christ.

From Christ we have an everlasting supply of grace, which we can request from the overflowing fountain of all good. Thus we come to the Father, with this petition on our lips: "O Father, subdue my will, work Thy will in me, let Thy will be performed by me. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

The Third Part - Of Thankfulness

Of Prayer

Lord's Day 50

Question 125. Which is the fourth petition?

Answer. [a] "Give us this day our daily bread"; that is, be pleased to provide us with all things [b] necessary for the body, that we may thereby acknowledge Thee to be the only fountain of all [c] good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even Thy gifts, can [d] profit us without Thy blessing; and therefore that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures and place [e] it alone in Thee.

[a]: [Matt. 6:11](#)

[b]: [Psa. 145:15](#); [Matt. 6:25ff](#)

[c]: [Acts 17:25](#); [Acts 14:17](#)

[d]: [1Cor. 15:58](#); [Deut. 8:3](#); [Psa. 127:1,2](#)

[e]: [Psa. 62:11](#); [Psa. 55:22](#)

December 10 - LD 50, Day 1: Praying for Necessities for the Body
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Matthew 6:11 *“Give us this day our daily bread.”*

The Lord’s prayer could be divided into two parts, each with three petitions. The first three petitions focus on God—the honour of God’s name; the coming of God’s kingdom; and the doing of God’s will. The second three petitions focus on our needs—our need for daily bread; our need for the forgiveness of sins; and our need for deliverance from evil.

The first of these three is bread. As creatures, we need bread.

Perhaps, we might wonder about this. Is it proper to ask God for such common things as bread, and should we ask for bread before we ask for the forgiveness of sins? We must not think that way. Christ encourages us here to bring our mundane needs to the attention of our heavenly Father. That the prayer which our Saviour taught us contains this petition shows us how merciful our Father is. He remembers that we are dust. He remembers that we need bread—physical food—to keep body and soul together. It is not, therefore, “unspiritual” to pray for “mere” bread. Without bread, we cannot serve God—we cannot hallow His name; we cannot promote God’s kingdom and we cannot perform His will. In fact, if we do not use our daily bread for those purposes, it would be better for us not to have bread. Unlike the angels, we depend on food, and God permits us, and indeed requires of us, that we ask Him for our necessary food.

But we may ask *only* for bread. We may not ask for luxuries with our bread. Christ commands us to ask for bread, because bread stands for the necessities of life. The common people of Christ’s day ate a rather simple diet of bread, fish, figs and olive oil. This was a healthy diet—and certainly enough to live on—but it was not luxurious. In every age, bread is the basic foodstuff of life.

With our bread, other things are implied, which in our age are deemed to be necessities. The basic needs of a human being are four—food, clothing, shelter and warmth. With these four things we can survive, and with these four things we must be content. In practice, this means that a modern person needs to be able to afford food and drink, rent and basic utilities (such as electricity and heating). Perhaps, we could add to that list things like transport (so that we can get to work and to the shops to buy food and other necessities) and medicine when a person becomes ill.

But we must be careful not to add too much to that list. Wants so easily become “needs.” A foreign vacation is not a need; a cottage by the lake is not a need; a Mercedes Benz car is not a need; designer fashion clothes are not needs. We do not ask for luxuries, and when God is pleased—as He often is—to give us luxuries, we are thankful for them, but we do not demand them, nor do we become discontent when God withholds them from us.

We ask for bread. We need bread. With bread we are content.

**December 11 - LD 50, Day 2: God's Providence in Supplying Our Bread
by Rev. Martyn McGeown**

Genesis 3:19 *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground..."*

Did you ever consider how bread comes to our table, and therefore how God answers our prayers to give us our daily bread? In the Old Testament, for some forty years, God caused bread miraculously to fall out of heaven for His people, but He does not supply manna in that manner today. When we ask God for "bread," much is implied.

First, in our prayer for our daily bread, we ask God to prosper the entire economy for the sake of God's people, so that we can eat and be supplied with the necessities of life. God has created us as interdependent creatures. God's providence governs everything that is involved in bringing the humble loaf of bread to our tables. In many nations today, agriculture is a multibillion dollar industry, but other industries are involved too.

Even in Jesus' day, this was understood. The farmer relied upon the weather. If the weather was too wet or too dry, or if there were pests, such as locusts, caterpillars, cankerworms and palmerworms (Joel 2:25), the harvest would fail. That we have modern inventions does not make us immune from famine. If the farmer's crop fails or is insufficient, there can be no bread. Therefore, part of our prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" includes a prayer for good weather—not so we can enjoy ourselves at the beach, but so that we can eat.

Modern farmers have other concerns too. The oil industry, for example, which supplies the fuel to run the machinery to harvest the grain, is necessary for bringing bread to us. Then there is the transportation industry, by which the grain is brought to factories to be made into bread, and by which the prepared bread is transported to the shops, where the consumer buys it. Therefore, we need to pray for the smooth running of society, so that the bread can reach us.

Indeed, without a flourishing economy there will be insufficient employment and people will not be able to work to earn the money necessary to buy bread. "Give us this day our daily bread" is not answered by God dropping bread on our tables pre-sliced out of heaven!

Second, in our prayer for daily bread, we ask God to supply us with jobs, so that especially the husbands and fathers may support their families. It is God's will that we eat in the way of our working: "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen 3:19); "if any will not work, neither should he eat" (II Thes 3:10). Therefore, the Christian husband and father must pray, "Father, give me work, work sufficient for me and my dependents, work sufficient for me to help the poor; and Father, give me diligence in my work, and the physical and mental ability to work."

A lazy man may not—must not—pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." He must repent of his sloth, and "with quietness...work, and eat [his] own bread" (II Thes 3:12).

Let us remember all that is involved in bringing bread to us, and pray accordingly.

December 12 - LD 50, Day 3: Our *Daily Bread*
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Luke 11:3 “*Give us day by day our daily bread.*”

The fourth petition does not simply concern bread, but *daily* bread.

This reminds us that we must pray every day for our bread. Daily bread means enough bread measured out in an amount sufficient to feed us for one day. Christ is teaching us in this petition to look to God every day for a fresh supply. We never get to the point where we become *self sufficient*. We must never make the mistake of the rich fool in the parable who said, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19). He did not pray for daily bread; he did not even pray for yearly bread!

The Israelites learned the lesson of daily bread in the wilderness. Every day, God supplied fresh manna from heaven, but only enough for one day. God commanded the people to gather only enough for one day, and He warned the people that they may not store it up or hoard it. The only exception was the Sabbath day—then they could gather enough for two days to avoid working on the Sabbath. The Israelites disobeyed. Some tried to hoard the manna, but it bred worms and stank. God did this to teach them that they must rely on Him daily for their needs. The Israelites were slow to learn.

We also find it difficult to learn this lesson, because most of us do not live from one day to the next wondering where the next meal will come from. Most of us have cupboards and freezers stuffed with provisions which could last for weeks and even months. We find it difficult, therefore, sincerely to pray for daily bread, but that does not change the petition: God might give us more than daily bread, but Christ instructs us to pray *only* for our daily bread. The danger we have is that, whereas we gladly receive an abundance from God’s hand, we become accustomed to plenty and will become discontented and grumble when God reduces our rations later.

Nevertheless, we must not feel guilty when God gives us more than daily bread. We must not squander it foolishly, but be wise, faithful stewards of it. It is not wrong for us to use prudent foresight—to buy our groceries in advance and to plan for the more distant future—but we must not hoard God’s provision selfishly and live like misers. Even in our affluent society, we *do* live on daily bread—how easily we can lose everything we have stored up for the future: a thief, a power cut, a fire, a flood, and it is all gone!

Do not, in an age of abundance, lose sight of this truth: we rely on God for every morsel of food *every day*. The wise man Agur understood this: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov 30:8-9). God knows exactly how much food we need each day. Let us trust Him and pray.

Give us this day our *daily* bread!

December 13 - LD 50, Day 4: Seeking God's Blessing with Our Bread
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Proverbs 3:33 *"The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just."*

As soon as our children are old enough to utter the words, we teach them a simple prayer, "Lord, bless this food and drink. Forgive my sins. For Jesus' sake. Amen." So familiar is this prayer to Reformed families that it is often called "Lord, bless."

This is a good and appropriate prayer. In this prayer, we teach our children that their food will not profit them without God's blessing. That is why we ask God to bless our food and drink. LD 50 expresses this idea: "that we may thereby acknowledge ... that neither our care nor industry, nor even Thy gifts, can profit us without Thy blessing." Therefore, the important thing is not so much the food, but *the blessing with the food*.

But what is a blessing? The word is so commonplace in our Christian vocabulary that we can lose sight of its meaning. The word "bless", both in the Hebrew and Greek language, means to make a pronouncement upon someone or something. It means especially, therefore, to speak *good* concerning or good upon someone or something. A blessing is a good word. Specifically, a blessing is *God's* good word, His speaking good upon or concerning something or someone. For example, God blessed man when He first made Adam and Eve: "So God created man... And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful..." (Gen 1:27-28); and God blessed the Sabbath: "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it..." (Gen 2:3). God spoke a good word upon them.

Now, the blessing of God is the blessing *of God Himself*. Ultimately, only God can bless—your food can nourish you, but it cannot bless you; your house might shelter you, but it cannot bless you; your clothes might keep you warm, but they cannot bless you; your friends and family might comfort you and give you companionship, but they cannot bless you. And whom God blesses, He saves. God's blessing is not like a lucky charm, or a well-meaning wish that nice things might happen to us. God's blessing is the effectual, powerful Word of His favour, pronouncing good upon us and causing us to be blessed.

Therefore, when we pray in connection with the fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," and when we teach our children, "Lord, bless this food and drink," we are asking God so to use the food which He gives us that it might profit us spiritually, that it might do us good—real, spiritual, eternal good.

And we pray that with confidence. God has promised to bless us; God delights to bless us; God will not withhold His blessing from us. All things (including our bread) serve our salvation and work together for our good (Rom 8:28).

With His blessing—*only* with His blessing.

December 14 - LD 50, Day 5: Our Bread Unprofitable Without His Blessing
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Psalm 69:22 *“Let their table become a snare before them...”*

LD 50 in a very striking manner makes a distinction between God’s gifts and His blessing. In other words, LD 50 acknowledges that a person can receive gifts from God’s hand, but with those gifts *not* receive God’s blessing. This has very important implications for the question of what God gives to the wicked—for the doctrine of “common grace.”

The doctrine of common grace is that God has a favourable attitude towards the wicked, that He blesses the wicked. This favour or blessing (grace) which God supposedly has for the wicked—that is, the reprobate wicked, whom God has eternally rejected from salvation—manifests itself in the good gifts which God gives the wicked in this life. Nobody can deny that God gives the wicked many good gifts. Often, He gives to the wicked more than He gives to His own children, but it does not profit the wicked without His blessing.

Remember what God’s blessing is—the effectual word of His favour (grace) speaking good concerning, and pronouncing good upon, His people. How, then, could God bless the wicked? How could God speak good concerning, and pronounce good upon, the wicked? The Bible teaches a sharp distinction between God’s people and the wicked. God loves, blesses and has favour upon His own people, but God hates, curses and is angry with the wicked. This is a hard saying—something fearful—but we believe it. “They that be cursed of him shall be cut off” (Psa 37:22); “The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked...” (Prov 3:33); “Depart from me, ye cursed...” (Matt 25:41).

If the blessing of God is wonderful, the curse of God is awful, but just.

The curse of God is the opposite of His blessing. To curse means to speak evil concerning or upon something or someone, or to speak against something or someone. God’s curse is not the word of His favour or His grace, but the word of His disfavour or His wrath. God’s curse is upon the wicked—and that curse makes even those gifts, which God gives the wicked in His providence, serve their condemnation.

That is the prayer of imprecation in Psalm 69, a prayer which is on the lips of Jesus as He hangs on the cross. Jesus prays against the enemies of God, that God might curse them. That curse will make “their table become a snare before them” (v22) and make a trap “that which should have been for their welfare” (v22). Paul quotes this in Romans 11:9. Therefore, for the wicked, the abundance of good things—food, clothing, shelter, money, health—which they receive from God’s hand only serves to destroy them. Those good gifts are the means whereby God places the wicked on slippery places that He might cast them down into destruction (Psa 73:18).

The issue, therefore, is not how many gifts God gives a person, but *why and with what attitude and purpose* God gives them. If you are found in Jesus Christ, all things are a blessing to you. If you are not a believer in Christ, flee to Him—lest He curse you even in your gifts!

December 15 - LD 50, Day 6: Eating Our Food Under the Cross
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Galatians 3:14 *“That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ...”*

God will not bless the wicked—even in the good gifts He sends them. God will not curse His people—even in the afflictions He sends them. But how can we account for this difference? How can we confidently pray for daily bread with God’s blessing, when we are as wicked and depraved as the reprobate are? What right have we to expect that God would bless us?

The wicked man has no right to the bread which he receives. He lives as an unwelcome guest in God’s house, which is this world. God feeds such a man, but not out of love. The wicked man uses the good gifts of the world, but he has no right to them. Every morsel of bread which he eats he steals. Furthermore, the wicked man uses the goods of this world against God and in the service of sin. The wicked man is unthankful for the gifts of God, does not use them to serve his Creator, and does not even acknowledge the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Thus the wicked man demonstrates his awful wickedness and God is justified in condemning him.

But what about us? Do we not also sin as we eat and drink? Should we not therefore also expect to be cursed in our daily bread? The truth is that something as earthly and commonplace as our daily bread comes to us from the cross. We have no right to eat our bread with God’s blessing without the cross. We can eat our daily bread in good conscience only because our sins have been forgiven in the blood of our Saviour. Otherwise we would be in exactly the same position as the wicked man whose daily bread is a curse to him. What a humbling and sobering thought—I have this morsel of food, and I may eat it with the assurance of God’s blessing, not because I deserve it, not because I worked for it, but because Christ shed His blood for me to have it. *“That we may thereby acknowledge [our Father] to be the only fountain of all good, and that neither our care nor industry, nor even Thy gifts, can profit us without Thy blessing.”*

Christ was cursed so that we would be blessed—even in the eating of our daily bread. The effectual and powerful word of God’s wrath (God’s curse) was directed towards Christ. God pronounced evil upon Christ; God spoke against Christ; God spoke evil concerning Christ. The blessed Son of God was cursed because of our sins. Christ took upon Himself our guilt and placed Himself in the position of cursing. God turned His face against Christ and thrust Him away from Himself into unspeakable misery. Christ’s soul had to taste the bitterness of that curse. *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that that hangeth on a tree”* (Gal 3:13).

Think about that as you eat your daily bread. Then you will begin to understand how even our food comes to us from the cross of Christ. We eat under God’s blessing—Let us pray confidently for it.

**December 16 - LD 50, Day 7: Acknowledging God the Only Fountain of All Good
by Rev. Martyn McGeown**

James 1:17 *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...”*

In the fourth petition, Christ reminds us that God, who is our Father, is the source of all good things, even of our daily bread. Prayer, as we saw already in LD 45-46, is a confession of our utter dependence upon God. If we did not need things, we would not pray. That we pray is proof that we need things and that God is the only source of the things that we need.

We need to be reminded—daily—of this dependence upon God.

LD 50 mentions other things which might distract us from trusting God.

First, our “care.” Our care is our worry. Jesus commands us: “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ...your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matt 6:25, 32). Paul writes, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil 4:6). When we worry, we waste valuable energy on a fruitless pursuit. When we are tempted to worry, let us pray.

Second, our industry, or simply, our work. We imagine that by working hard, we earn our own bread, and we hardly acknowledge that it comes from God. He gives us the opportunity and the ability to work. We must not trust in our own work—for salvation or for our daily bread.

Third, the creature. The fourth petition is designed so that we might “withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it alone in [God].” We are naturally prone to trust in the creature, instead of in God. This is a form of idolatry, and how easy for us it is! We see the creature, and we forget that the creature is but an instrument—a secondary cause—in God’s hand. When the creature fails, we are prone to panic. We must therefore turn to God *before the creature fails*. We must withdraw our trust from every creature—including ourselves. God must not be our last resort, but the one to whom we turn at all times.

Prayer is an acknowledgement or a confession. We have nothing; we need both natural and spiritual gifts. God alone can and does give these things to us. He is the “only fountain of all good.” We deserve nothing at all, but He is pleased to give them to us for Jesus’ sake.

“Father, give.” This is never a demand, but a humble cry to God, who knows our needs and richly supplies them. “Father, give.” This is not a loan which we ask of God, but a free and unmerited gift. And when Father does give, we thank Him for His gifts.

And, as we receive our daily bread, we receive His blessing, and in that blessing we are strengthened to serve Him through the bread which we receive.

“Father, Thou only fountain of all good, give us this day our daily bread—with Thy blessing.”

The Third Part - Of Thankfulness

Of Prayer

Lord's Day 51

[Question 126](#). What is the fifth petition?

Answer. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors [a]; that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners our transgressions, nor that depravity which always cleaves to us [b]; even as we feel this evidence of Thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbour [c].

[a]: [Matt. 6:12](#)

[b]: [Psa. 51:1](#); [1 John 2:1,2](#)

[c]: [Matt. 6:14, 15](#)

**December 17 - LD 51, Day 1: Necessary to Pray for Forgiveness
by Rev. Martyn McGeown**

I 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.”*

The fifth petition concerns forgiveness of sins. It is sometimes disputed. If Christians are already forgiven, so the argument goes, why do we need to pray for the forgiveness of our sins? Such objectors contend that we need only to ask God for forgiveness once—at the point of our conversion—and we never need to pray for forgiveness again.

But this is a mistake. The saints of God have always felt the need to utter this petition, and we understand our need also. This is not because we fear that God will not forgive or because we doubt that God has forgiven us. Rather, we pray because we are confident of God’s forgiveness—God is our Father, and, as we shall see, we have good grounds for our prayer—and because we desire to have the joyous experience of forgiveness in our hearts and lives.

It is not enough that we *be* forgiven. When we utter this petition, we desire to *know* that we are forgiven. We desire, as the publican, to go down to our houses justified (Luke 18:14). We desire to be conscious of our justification.

Besides that, while it is true that all of our sins are forgiven finally and completely, we keep falling into sin; we keep incurring guilt; and we daily increase our debt. Jesus likens our situation to a man freshly washed who, while walking in this world, gets his feet dirty. He requires a regular foot bath (John 13:10). The life of the Christian is one of daily turning from sin in repentance and daily turning to God in Christ in faith. Thus the Christian is one who is a sinner, yet forgiven; forgiven, yet sinning.

So far is it the case that a daily forgiveness of sins is necessary, that a daily forgiveness of sins is more necessary and more urgent than daily bread. That the petition for daily bread precedes the petition for the remission of debts does not mean that forgiveness is less important. Better to be a starving beggar than to be deprived of the forgiveness of sins! Remember poor Lazarus: he longed for the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table, but he had something which the rich man, who fared sumptuously every day, did not have. Lazarus had the forgiveness of sins (Luke 16: 19-26).

In the way of uttering this petition, “Forgive us our debts,” we receive that blessing also. What a necessary petition this is! Without the forgiveness of sins, the holy God is a terror to us. Without the forgiveness of sins, we are barred from the kingdom of God. Without the forgiveness of sins, we cannot even begin to fulfill God’s will. Without the forgiveness of sins, our daily bread is a curse to us.

How miserable to be without the forgiveness of sins! How blessed to know that God forgives our sins, even ours!

December 18 - LD 51, Day 2: Our Debts
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

II Kings 4:1: “...*the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.*”

In the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, our sins are called debts. A debt is an obligation to pay something we owe, but which we have not paid. To be a debtor who is unable to pay puts a person in a very difficult situation—he is at the mercy of his creditors. In the ancient world, creditors were not known for their mercy.

The widow in II Kings 4 was in such a predicament. Her husband had died, leaving her responsible for the household debt. The creditor was hounding her for the money she owed, but she had no source of income. Moreover, the interest (usury) on the debt was steadily increasing. Her cruel creditor demanded that she make full payment, and if not, he threatened to sell her and her family into slavery, and confiscate her possessions. Thus she cries unto Elisha the prophet: “Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen” (v1). By a miracle, Elisha provided the widow with the means to pay back her creditors (v2-7).

Thus we see how miserable debt is. It causes anxiety, sleepless nights, fear when the mail arrives or the telephone rings. Sometimes when debt spirals out of control, a person’s house will be repossessed. In former days, there were debtors’ prisons for delinquent borrowers.

We are spiritual debtors before God. We owe God an amount which we have not paid and which we cannot pay. Our debt is not money—God has no need of money. Our debt is a debt of *love*.

As human beings, who were created in our first father in the image of God, we are obligated to love our Creator. We owe God lifelong, perfect obedience in love. In short, we must love God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must devote everything we have to the service of God. That obligation is upon us every moment of every day. Adam and Eve, before the fall, gladly performed that obligation—without sin. But when Adam and Eve fell—and when we fell in them—they (and we) ceased to perform that obligation. In fact, because of the fall, they (and we) became totally corrupted and depraved, so that we are spiritually unable and unwilling to fulfill that obligation.

However, as LD 4 taught us, while the fall destroyed our ability to obey, it did not destroy our *obligation* to obey. When a person has taken out a loan, but then his financial circumstances change for the worse, the bank does not relieve him of the obligation to pay back the loan. So God does not relieve mankind of the obligation to love Him—God is still glorious; God is still worthy of all praise and devotion from His creatures.

Alas, we cannot pay. Therefore our prayer is—and can only be—“Forgive us our debts.”

December 19 - LD 51, Day 3: The Misery of Indebtedness
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Psalm 130:1,3: *“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD ... If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”*

Psalm 130 uses two powerful illustrations of the misery of debt. The more we understand them, the more we appreciate the great blessing of forgiveness, and the more we understand the urgency of our prayer, “Forgive us our debts.”

The first illustration is that of a drowning man, sinking ever deeper into the depths of the sea. Great is the terror of the man gasping for breath as he is sucked under the water to his death; he panics, desperately trying to tread water to keep himself afloat. That sea in Psalm 130 is not a physical sea of deep water, but a powerful symbol of sin. The idea is of the depth of depravity or the ocean of guilt in which a person is perishing. In desperation, the psalmist cries out to the only one who can save him, Jehovah his God.

The second illustration is that of a guilty man before the judge. “If thou ... shouldest mark iniquities ...” (v 3). The psalmist’s iniquities are on his mind and conscience. They are deviations from the law of God—the twisted, perverse, fallen nature of mankind, and all of the sins which proceed from that corrupt nature. Picture the judge sitting at the bench, with his pen in his hand. Will he mark the iniquities of the psalmist? Will he mark *our* iniquities? To mark iniquities means to write them down and to treat us on account of them. What an awful possibility—that God could mark our sins against us and then punish us because of them!

If God did that—marked our iniquities—He would be perfectly just to do so. We do owe Him obedience, and we have not paid. We do deserve to be punished, and we have not undergone that punishment, punishment which awaits the wicked in hell, whose debts are not forgiven. The thought is fearful—who shall stand? The answer is solemn—*no one* would stand, because there is none righteous.

The awful truth is that the majority of people live in the world unconcerned about the debt which they owe. They have no consciousness of sin. They have deceived themselves that their sins are not at all serious, and that God will not take sins seriously. They see no need to pray the fifth petition. Blind and dead they are in their sins!

But the child of God knows his sin. He knows that he sins daily, and that his sins are serious. Thus he is urgent in his plea: “Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” (Psa 130:2)

Are you drowning in debt? Does your conscience condemn you before God’s judgment throne?

Pray to your Father, “Forgive us our debts.”

December 20 - LD 51, Day 4: Forgive!
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Micah 7:18: *“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”*

What do we mean—and what do we ask God to do—when we ask, “Forgive”?

Forgiveness, along with grace, mercy, and blessing, are common words in a Christian’s vocabulary, but we lose much of the sweetness of these words by our imprecise and vague ideas of these great truths.

The word “forgive” in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, means to lift up or to carry away. The idea is of a heavy, crushing burden. We struggle under a heavy load of guilt and shame, but God lifts that burden and carries it away, so that we experience blessed relief. That is the teaching of Micah 7:18: “Who is a God like unto thee, that *pardoneth* iniquity...?” The same truth is celebrated in Psalm 32:1: “Blessed is he whose transgression is *forgiven* ...” Another word for forgiveness, also found in Micah 7, is to pass over (“*passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage*”). The idea is not to look at sin, not to regard it, and therefore not to treat the sinner according as his sins deserve. It is the opposite of marking transgression, which we considered yesterday in Psalm 130. A third Old Testament word for forgive is to cover, also found in Psalm 32 (“...whose sin is covered”). Again, the idea is that God covers over sin so that He does not see it—He covers it over by means of a sacrifice. In that sense, He blots it out.

In the New Testament, the most common word for forgive means to send away or to release. In terms of debts, to forgive means to send the debt away, to remove from the debtor—from us—the obligation to pay. Imagine the relief of a debtor who receives a message from the creditor—“I have removed from you the obligation to pay. You no longer need to concern yourself with the debt. I have wiped your debts clean.” Jesus speaks of this in Luke 7:41-42: “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both...” That is forgiveness, except here the debt is sin, and the one who forgives is God.

Therefore, we see what we are asking in the fifth petition.

We are not asking that God should ignore our debts, and pretend that we do not have any debts. We are not asking God to deny His own justice. Not that! We are asking that God not make *us* pay in full what we owe Him—we are asking that someone else pay for us instead. We are also not asking that God give us more time to pay Him back what we owe Him. We are not promising that, if God be lenient, we will do better in the future. We are not trying to bargain with God. Not that! We confess the debt, but we are asking that, seeing we can never pay, God not make us pay. That is a bold, almost a staggeringly impudent request—but we make it on good grounds.

And the wonder is that God not only forgives—relieves us of the obligation to pay, sends away our debt, carries away the burden of our sins—but that He did so by sending His Son to pay our debt, and sends the Spirit into our hearts to assure us that we are forgiven.

Let us pray, then, with confidence, “Forgive us our debts!”

December 21 - LD 51, Day 5: Impute Not to Us Poor Sinners
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Psalm 32:2: *“Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity...”*

LD 51 interprets the petition “Forgive us our debts” as “Be pleased for the sake of Christ’s blood, not to impute to us poor sinners...” Thus, LD 51 interprets the fifth petition, rightly, in terms of justification.

Impute is a legal term which we encountered in LD 23. It means to reckon something to the account of another, so that legally that thing belongs to the person to whom it has been imputed. In Scripture, guilt or innocence (unrighteousness or righteousness) can be imputed, or money can be imputed to a person’s account. For example, in Philemon 18, Paul writes, “put that [Onesimus’ debt] on mine account,” that is, impute it to me, so that I become legally obligated to pay for it.

A debtor might echo the words of LD 51 to his creditor, “Impute not to me, a poor debtor, the obligation to pay what I owe.” But here the debt is not money, but sin (or the obligation to perfect obedience and the obligation to satisfactory punishment for imperfect obedience, which we have not paid and which we cannot pay). Thus, the one praying the fifth petition asks, “Impute not to me, a poor sinner, my transgressions nor my depravity.”

Clearly, this is a petition for mercy, not a petition based on what we deserve. If God did impute our transgressions to us, He would be just. They are, after all, *our* transgressions, not His. Similarly, if a creditor insisted on payment from a delinquent debtor, he would be just to impute debt to his debtor. The clearing of a debt is mercy, not something a debtor can demand.

Two things, we ask God not to impute to us. First, we beseech God not to impute our transgressions to us. Do not account us guilty before Thee for all of our sins—our lies, our thefts, our murders, our idolatry, our blasphemy, our disrespect toward our parents, and so many more sins in thought, word, and deed. Do not mark those sins against us with a view to punishing us for them. What a bold request to make before the Judge! Second, we beseech God not to impute our depravity to us. Do not account us guilty before Thee for “that depravity which always cleaves to us.” We are polluted, wicked, and depraved by nature, but, Lord, do not hold that against us. An even bolder request!

But there is more. In not imputing guilt to us, God gives us something even more wonderful. It is one thing not to be guilty—to be exempt from punishment. It is quite another to be positively righteous—to stand before God as spotless and holy as God Himself!

In this fifth petition we ask for Christ’s righteousness, about which we will learn in our next meditation.

December 22 - LD 51, Day 6: For the Sake of Christ's Blood
by Rev. Martyn McGeown

Romans 5:9: "... *being now justified by His blood ...*"

In the fifth petition, we ask not only that God would send away our sins, that He would remove from us the obligation to pay, but also that, in not imputing to us poor sinners our transgressions and sinful natures, He would account us positively righteous in His sight.

To understand the enormity of that request, consider an earthly example. A poor widow owes a creditor ten thousand dollars. Which widow would have the audacity to make this request of her creditor: "Do not make me pay the ten thousand dollars. Remove from me the obligation to pay back that money. And credit to my account the positive balance of one million dollars"? That is what we ask—in spiritual terms—in the fifth petition.

Forgive our debts. Cancel them; send them away; tear them up. Make it so that we do not have to pay. But, Father, do not stop there. Go further! Credit to our account perfect obedience, so that we become positively and legally worthy of eternal life. Let us stand before Thee as those who have never had any sin, who have never sinned, and who have kept the law perfectly.

That is implied in LD 51. When we ask God not to impute to us poor sinners our transgressions and sinful natures, we mean, *do* impute something positive to us. And all of this is based on the work of Christ—"for the sake of Christ's blood."

In Scripture and in the Catechism, Christ's blood stands for everything in His life, and especially in His death, which He has accomplished for our salvation. Christ's blood is His death on the cross, where He personally took legal responsibility for our debts—for the debt to God's justice which demanded our punishment; and for the debt to God's law which demanded perfect obedience and righteousness.

The debt which we owe has been paid. Nothing has been ignored or overlooked. When God sends the burden of guilt away from us and lifts it off our shoulders, it is because He has placed it on another, namely on His Son, Jesus Christ. When God is pleased not to impute to us, poor sinners, all our transgressions and our sinful natures, it is because He imputed that guilt to another—and Jesus Christ paid the full penalty. When God no longer demands from us perfect obedience to His law, it is because He already demanded, and has received to His satisfaction, that perfect obedience from His own, only begotten, dearly beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Thus we see that on the last day, God's record books will be perfectly balanced. Every sin will be punished; no debt will be ignored; no transgression will be overlooked. Some will be forgiven, and others will be eternally condemned.

What will God see when He looks at your record? Will He mark your iniquities against you? Will He see the mark, "Balance outstanding"? Or will He see stamped in blood, "Paid in full. Fully satisfied"? Believer, your debt is paid; unbeliever, you must flee to Christ, lest on the last day you be found a debtor!

**December 23 - LD 51, Day 7: Our Firm Resolution to Forgive
by Rev. Martyn McGeown**

Matthew 5:7: *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”*

The fifth petition has two parts. *“Forgive us our debts...”* We have considered that. *“...As we forgive our debtors.”* This we must still consider.

We are debtors to God, but our neighbours are debtors to us. How we treat those who sin against us speaks volumes about the forgiveness we have received—or claim to have received—from God. We must carefully understand the relationship between our forgiveness of our neighbour and God’s forgiveness of us. One is not the condition of the other. God does not promise to forgive us *on condition that* we forgive our neighbours. Rather, our forgiveness is the fruit of God’s forgiveness—if we have received forgiveness, we will forgive our neighbours. If we do not forgive our neighbours, we show by that wicked behaviour that we have not received God’s forgiveness.

To illustrate this great truth, Jesus told a parable. A debtor owed his lord ten thousand talents—an enormous sum! The creditor commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all his possessions. Terrified, the debtor asked for mercy: *“Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all”* (Matt. 18:26). The lord mercifully forgave him his debt—ten thousand talents! However, immediately after leaving the presence of the merciful lord, the erstwhile debtor meets another servant who owed him an hundred pence—a paltry sum, especially in comparison to the ten thousand talents which he owed his lord. The fellow servant begs for mercy, but his cries are not heard, and he is cast into prison until he pays the debt (v28-30). The situation comes to the attention of the master, who, in punishment for the debtor’s refusal to forgive, delivers the debtor to the tormentors (v34).

From this parable we learn a few important truths about forgiveness. First, in comparison to the enormous sum we owe God, our neighbour who wrongs us owes us very little. Second, one who has a cruel and merciless attitude toward his penitent neighbour shows that he was never forgiven by God. Third, the forgiveness of our neighbour must take the same form as the forgiveness we receive from God. We must send away the neighbour’s sins; we must resolve not to treat him as his sins deserve; we must not permit that sin to affect our relationship. We must declare to our neighbour who sins against us and asks for forgiveness, *“I forgive you. I forgive you because Christ forgave me. Your sins against me I will remember no more.”*

That is hard—it means we swallow our pride; we take a loss, because we relinquish the right to revenge and the right even to remember that sin or to hold a grudge. But how much harder was it for Christ to forgive us—He bled and died to procure our forgiveness!

Thus, forgiveness is the blessed fruit of forgiveness. Forgiven sinners forgive other sinners, or as LD 51 puts it, *“we feel this evidence of Thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.”*

Have you sinned against your brother? Seek forgiveness. Has your brother apologized to you? Forgive him, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.

The Third Part - Of Thankfulness

Of Prayer

Lord's Day 52

Question 127. Which is the sixth petition?

Answer. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil [a]; that is, since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment [b]; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil [c], the world [d], and our own flesh [e] cease not to assault us, do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes [f], till at last we obtain a complete victory [g].

Question 128. How dost thou conclude thy prayer?

Answer. [h] For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever [h]; that is, all these we ask of Thee, because Thou, being our King and almighty, art willing and able to give us all good [i]; and all this we pray for, that thereby not we, but Thy holy name, may be glorified for ever [j].

Question 129. What doth the word Amen signify?

Answer. Amen signifies, it shall truly and certainly be; for my prayer is more assuredly heard of God than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of Him [k].

[a]: [Matt. 6:13](#)

[b]: [Rom. 8:26](#); [Psa. 103:14](#)

[c]: [1Pet. 5:8](#)

[d]: [Eph. 6:12](#); [John 15:19](#); [Rom. 7:23](#); [Gal. 5:17](#)

[f]: [Matt. 26:41](#); [Mark 13:33](#)

[g]: [1Thess. 3:13](#); [1Thess. 5:23](#)

[h]: [Matt. 6:13](#)

[i]: [Rom. 10:12](#); [2Pet. 2:9](#)

[j]: [John 14:13](#); [Psa. 115:1](#); [Phil. 4:20](#)

[k]: [2Cor. 1:20](#); [2Tim. 2:13](#)

**December 24 - LD 52, Day 1: The Prayer for Deliverance from Evil and from the Evil One
by Rev. Arie den Hartog**

Read: Galatians 5:13-21

With this meditation we begin the consideration of the sixth petition of the perfect prayer which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us. To understand the urgent need for this petition, we need to understand our need as Christians for deliverance from the twofold power and destruction of our sin. The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray for deliverance from the guilt of our sin. Sin makes us guilty before God. That we are guilty before the righteous and holy God means that we deserve to be condemned by Him. Our sins are so serious that they make us worthy of God's everlasting judgment of hell fire. In praying the fifth petition, we pray that the atonement which Jesus offered for us on the cross might cover the guilt of our sin and be applied to us personally. We pray that the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ might be imputed to us by His wonderful grace, even as we believe in Him and trust in Him.

The sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray earnestly for deliverance from the power and corruption of our sin. Born from fallen Adam and Eve, we have inherited a totally depraved nature. The corruption of sin makes us ugly, abominable, and loathsome in the sight of God. We cannot possibly live in the presence of the holy and blessed God as long as we are corrupt and wicked.

Even as born again believers, we have a sinful nature against which we must wrestle all our life long. We will not be fully delivered from our corrupt sinful nature until our vile bodies are put in the grave and we are raised again with new bodies, wholly delivered from the corruption of sin and gloriously changed to be fashioned after the glorious body of Christ. Paul speaks of this in Phil 3:21.

The child of God who has the Spirit of Christ in his or her heart desires to be made more and more holy, until finally he is made perfect as God is perfect, and holy as God our heavenly Father is holy.

The remaining corruption of our sin is a power of evil in our very nature. We are called to struggle against this sinful nature. We are not to yield to the inclination of our sinful nature for even a moment. The presence of this sinful nature is the cause of an on-going mighty spiritual battle within us. When our Lord taught us to pray the sixth petition, "Deliver us from evil," He was making us aware of the reality of this sinful nature in us and the power of this sinful nature to destroy us. We cannot deliver ourselves; we need the help of our God. Experiencing the reality of this struggle within himself, the inspired apostle Paul cried out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

The words of the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer can also be translated according to the original language of the Bible as "the evil one." So then in this petition we are praying for deliverance from the power of the devil himself, who is the author of all evil. Not only is he the author of all evil in the world, but he is also the author of the evil within our sinful natures. This is a fearful reality. In Ephesians 6:12 the inspired apostle Paul warns us that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

In the sixth petition we are taught of the great need for deliverance from the power of the devil in our lives. Do you know the great urgency of this prayer to God?

December 25 - LD 52, Day 2: The Prayer for Deliverance from a Threefold Enemy
by Rev. Arie den Hartog

Read: Ephesians 6:10-18

The sixth petition reminds us that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare with a threefold enemy. These three enemies are working together for our spiritual ruin and destruction. To understand the urgency for praying this petition every day, we need to know this threefold enemy.

It is easy to imagine that our greatest enemy is a physical enemy. We might imagine our greatest enemy to be some human person that hates us and wants to destroy us physically. We might imagine him or her to be a fellow student at school who is trying to make greater educational and career achievements. We might imagine our enemy to be a person in society trying to ruin our reputation and turn attention to himself. We might imagine our enemy to be a fellow worker in our occupation trying to get an advantage over us, a higher salary, or a promotion in the company. We might imagine our greatest enemy to be any person who competes with us for riches, glory, and honour in the world. We might imagine that our enemy is some fearful, even unknown, criminal.

The Word of God tells us we have a far greater enemy. We are engaged with this enemy in a spiritual warfare for our eternal soul. Peter tells us in I Peter 5 that the devil is real and has great power. He goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He is the great deceiver who tempts us to sin against God and His commandments. He wants us to leave the Christian religion altogether, to rebel against God, and to join the world in its enmity against God. He may come to us in sheep's clothing, but in fact inwardly he is a ravening wolf seeking to tear us apart and devour us (Matt 7:15). In the sixth petition we pray for spiritual knowledge and discernment, so that we can recognize the works of the devil and his temptations. We pray for spiritual strength to fight against the devil and his whole dominion of demons and evil devices. The devil is very powerful. He cannot be resisted nor overcome by human or earthly might, but only by spiritual strength and power. We need to receive this spiritual strength from God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to us and works in us to overcome our sin, resist the devil and to triumph over him.

The devil uses the world to tempt us and entice us to sin. The devil tempted Jesus with the deceitful words, that if only Jesus would bow down to him, the whole world would belong to Jesus and be His inheritance. The devil has many devices in this world to tempt us. This is all the more true in our time. He can use the modern day media of the movie theater, the computer, and the worldwide internet. By these means the devil places in our minds and hearts the desires and thinking of the world's philosophy. The devil may seek to attract us to a life of immorality with the promise of its sinful pleasure and the satisfaction of the lusts of our sinful nature. The temptations of the devil are very powerful. We need to realize this. We can only resist and overcome the devil by the power of God.

Our third enemy is our own sinful nature. We have this sinful nature even as Christians. Deeply residing in this nature are all kinds of inclinations, desires, and lusts for sin. The devil, by using the wicked world, can appeal to that sinful nature, lead us into sin and away from God, and to our own personal spiritual ruin. How needful is the prayer of the sixth petition for every Christian!

December 26 - LD 52, Day 3: We Cannot Stand Against Our Mortal Enemies Even for One Moment
by Rev. Arie den Hartog

Read: 1 Peter 5:6-11

The sixth petition which our Lord taught us in His perfect model prayer is an urgent petition. We must never begin a single day without earnestly praying this petition. A petition earnestly prayed to God arises out of the heart of the child of God who is fully aware of the danger he is in and the power of the enemy. We will hardly see our need of praying the sixth petition if we do not understand or live in the fearful consciousness of this.

The Catechism speaks of three enemies that are engaged with us in a constant spiritual battle. These enemies are “mortal” enemies. A mortal enemy is one who purposes to kill and destroy us completely. The devil’s purpose is not to entertain us, but to destroy us. He deceives man into imagining that sin is pleasure that can be enjoyed without consequences, without the judgment of God. After he has completely deceived a person, he blinds and leads him to his own ruin and destruction. The destruction that he leads men to is not merely personal ruin, shame and trouble in this life, but the awful and eternal destruction of hell.

To pray the sixth petition, we must be conscious of our complete dependence on God and His grace, strength and salvation. No one else but God alone can save us from the enemy.

The devil is very powerful. He is not almighty, as God is. But he is very powerful. Furthermore, his mode of operation is deceit. The Bible speaks of the wiles of the devil. The wiles of the devil are his subtle tactics. Peter in the passage we read speaks of the devil going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. If he is not able to make us fall into sin by using one approach, he will try other approaches until he has fully accomplished his treacherous purpose to destroy us.

On the other hand, we are weak in ourselves. Our weakness is due to the reality of our sinful nature. In fact, we have no power at all to deliver ourselves from the devil and sin, because our sinful nature fully agrees with the devil and is wholly given over to the philosophy and deceitful temptations of the world. The Heidelberg Catechism states that we cannot even stand for one moment over against the devil. We are in great need every day, every moment, of the power, grace and Spirit of God to deliver us.

The wonderful truth of the gospel is that Christ has triumphed over the power of the devil and all the powers of sin and temptation in the world.

Christ merited the grace and power of salvation as our Lord on His cross. This power was first given to Christ when God raised Him up from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above the principalities and powers in this world and in the world to come.

When we pray the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, we must think of the blessed truth that Christ now works this power in us and makes us partakers of His own victory over Satan and the power of evil. Jesus gives this great power and triumph to all of His saints who earnestly call upon Him in faith and prayer.

December 27 - LD 52, Day 4: The Prayer for Deliverance from Temptation
by Rev. Arie den Hartog

Read: James 1:12-21

Temptation is a strong appeal to our sinful natures to draw us away from God and to lead us into a life of evil. This evil is presented as though it were actually something good, something that can give us innocent pleasure and satisfaction. On the other hand, remaining faithful to the Lord and His commandments is presented as something evil and burdensome. The devil, working in temptation, presents the way of the Lord as though following this way will in fact cause us to miss some great good and pleasure in our lives in the world, or perhaps pass by opportunities for great riches, real lasting glory or honour in the world.

The words of this petition present some difficulties to our understanding. These words do not mean that God is the author of temptation. We know that God does not tempt us with sin. James tells us this: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man" (Jam 1: 13).

The wording of the sixth petition does teach us that God is sovereign even over temptation and does sometimes give us over to temptation to chasten us for our own sin of pride or self-reliance. There are some classic biblical examples of this. David was led into the temptation of numbering Israel so he could become proud and trust in the greatness of his own armies to deliver Israel from the evil of all enemies. Peter was led into the great evil of boasting in himself that he was actually stronger than all the other disciples of the Lord. He was led into the temptation of denying His own beloved Lord and falling grievously.

The devil alone tempts us. He tempts us by appealing to the evil lusts that reside in our sinful nature. Read what James has to say about this. The devil can tempt us only when we are drawn away of our own lust, and enticed to agree with him in his temptation. If God does not deliver us from temptation, the lust of our own sinful natures will bring us down to death. The devil constantly assails us with temptation, virtually from the moment we awake in the morning to the time we close our eyes and sleep. He tempts us in every sphere of our lives, even while we are in church.

We yield to temptation long before we fall into sin. Let no one imagine that as long as temptation has not led us into actually doing some great evil in our lives, we have not yet fallen. One of the crucial things we must understand about sin is that sin begins with the heart and the thoughts of our minds. As soon as we have given in to temptation in our hearts and begun to desire that which the devil presents to us in a temptation, we have already fallen. If we continue in this desire, it will lead us to sinful purposes and plans, and finally to sinful works in our lives. These evil works will bring upon us the wrath and judgment of God.

When we yield to temptation, the world mocks us and at times even blasphemes the name of God. Jesus Christ, Who has saved us by His great love for us, is deeply grieved, and His name, which we as Christians bear, is dishonoured. When we are led into temptation, we are for a time estranged from God in our lives and can no longer experience the great blessings of salvation and communion with Him. We need to pray daily that God will deliver us from all temptation!

**December 28 - LD 52, Day 5: Strengthen Us by Thy Holy Spirit
by Rev. Arie den Hartog**

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-23

In the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, we are taught to pray for the strength of God to deliver us from evil and from the evil one. This strength comes to us through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

The Christian life is a constant spiritual warfare. Every true child of God knows this. The devil and the world in which we live constantly oppose us. We may not even for one moment yield to our enemies. If we do so, in the thoughts and intentions of our hearts, as well as in our words and deeds, we bring shame to the name of the Lord. Furthermore, yielding in this warfare will result in damage to our Christian life. We should be greatly concerned about this. The reason why the sixth petition is often not prayed is that many Christians are not concerned enough about the issues just mentioned. In this, they show that their love and devotion to God is weak. If we love God we will desire to be delivered from all remaining sin and to be made perfectly holy as God our Father is holy.

In prayer, we acknowledge God to be our God. This God is the blessed triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father desires in His great love that we are perfect in our soul, body and spirit as He is. Jesus the Son of God gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin, not only to blot out the awful guilt of our sins but to deliver us from the power and corruption of sin. It is noteworthy that in the entire Lord's Prayer the first person plural is used. We do not pray only for ourselves. We pray also for our fellow saints. Jesus gave Himself in order to cleanse not only certain individuals who were given to Him in the love of His heavenly Father, but also His beloved church. The purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ was that His beloved church might finally be presented in heaven as His glorious bride without spot and blemish, perfectly holy and exceedingly glorious.

We are delivered from the power of sin and spiritual warfare against evil and the devil by the Holy Spirit. Christ works in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. No other power can deliver us from the power of sin, only the wonderful, mighty, sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit.

In the sixth petition we earnestly pray for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We pray for His constant strengthening work in us. How wonderful is His power! He is the mighty power of God, and with Him is the blessed hope of final and glorious deliverance from sin and the devil.

As long as we sincerely pray the sixth petition, we need not despair in the midst of the ongoing battle with sin. Our final victory will definitely be accomplished through the mighty operation of the Spirit of Christ in our hearts.

We long for the glorious perfection of the work of God in our hearts and complete victory over all sin. For this we pray earnestly, confident that the Lord will indeed hear us, actually deliver us, make us perfect, and save us to give us everlasting life and glory.

**December 29 - LD 52, Day 6: Praises to the King of Kings
by Rev. Arie den Hartog**

Read: 1 Chronicles 29:11-17

Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer always to make God central in our prayers, and then also in the whole of our lives. In His perfect model prayer He teaches us in the very first petition, to pray for the hallowing of the name of God, so that His name might be glorious in all the earth.

God should be central in our prayers. This is not commonly the chief concern of prayers made by Christians, and sometimes also not in our own. Many Christians, and we also, sometimes make our own needs the concern of our own prayers. Central to many of our sinful prayers is the demand that God gives us what we want ourselves, as though God must listen to our every demand and serve our every need.

All of our prayers must praise God's greatness and glory. Our prayers must always be centrally about God, His kingdom, His sovereign will, and the glory of His name.

The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer is often called a doxology. A doxology is an exalted expression of praise and honour to God. All glory, honour and power belong to God. In our prayers we acknowledge the truth of God and desire that this truth be always revealed in the world. When David had finished preparing for the building of the temple, he stood before the nation of God's chosen people and praised God with a doxology similar to the one found at the end of the Lord's Prayer.

God is King over all the universe. He created the universe by His almighty power. He created all the creatures in this vast universe for His own pleasure and glory. Do we sincerely know this to be true, and do we show in our whole life that we truly believe this? All creatures must serve the glory of God, but only man can do this as moral and rational creatures. He can do this consciously and willingly, knowing the greatness of God, His Creator and sovereign Lord. If we believe that the universe as a kingdom belongs to God alone and we owe the service of our whole life, our obedience, and attribution of glory to God alone; we pray for this. We must not give this praise and glory to any other.

In the doxology of the Lord's Prayer, we also confess that God has given the kingdom to His beloved Son Jesus Christ. After Christ's death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, and exaltation to God's right hand in heaven, God bestowed the kingdom on Him. Because of the unity of the Father and the Son, the kingdom belongs to God alone. The dominion over this kingdom is exercised, realized, and revealed in its glory in the beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In Rev 19, Jesus appears in a vision which prophesies of His final coming at the end of the world in triumph and glory. He has the name "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." This is the truth concerning Jesus which we shall know perfectly in heaven and express continually before Him in songs of praise and adoration.

Prayer is the highest expression of praise to God when we pray with knowing and sincere hearts. Of course, all of our activity must be in harmony with this profound truth. The psalmist in Psalm 115 says it well when he declares, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake." (Psa 115:1)

Let us pray that all our prayers might be in adoration, worship and consecrated love for God.

**December 30 - LD 52, Day 7: The Blessed Assurance and Confidence We Have in Our God Through Prayer
by Rev. Arie den Hartog**

Read: John 15:7-16

In our last meditation, we emphasized that our Lord taught us to conclude our prayer with a doxology of praise. The doxology of the Lord's Prayer is an exalted one. We confess in our prayer that the kingdom, power and glory belong to God forever and ever. This God is our God for Jesus' sake. When we pray we must not do so in doubt and unbelief, but in the full confidence of faith, and with blessed assurance in our hearts.

Believing this doxology to be absolutely true, we have the ground for confidence and assurance in our God. The Heidelberg Catechism comments on the doxology of the Lord's Prayer. When we pray to God as our almighty King, we are assured that He is able and willing to give us all good things. What an amazing thing this is.

God is the absolutely sovereign King of the entire universe, being over all creatures great and small, ruling over all things, so that all things finally serve His purpose and good pleasure. There is no power in all the universe that is not under the control of God. Not even the devil or the whole host of wicked powers of evil in the world are outside God's control. God is sovereign over all the mighty forces of nature. We often feel ourselves to be powerless against the mighty forces of nature and all the powers of darkness. We cannot stand against them, and we greatly fear their destructive power in our lives. But we have confidence in our God.

We pray for the reality of this confidence in our hearts and God answers prayer. We are not to be afraid or anxious about any part of our life in the world, no matter how dark our life seems or how powerful our enemy might be. God is King over all forever and ever.

God is almighty in His power. There is nothing too hard for Him. He does whatsoever He pleases, and He is able to work all things for our good and final salvation. There is no power, no matter how great and seemingly overwhelming to us, that can resist the power of God successfully. There is no enemy, no trial, or no trouble so great that He cannot or will not deliver us from it.

Not only is God almighty to save us from enemies and the greatest forces in the universe that might otherwise threaten our destruction, we can also be sure that He is willing to save us. His love for us in Christ assures us of this.

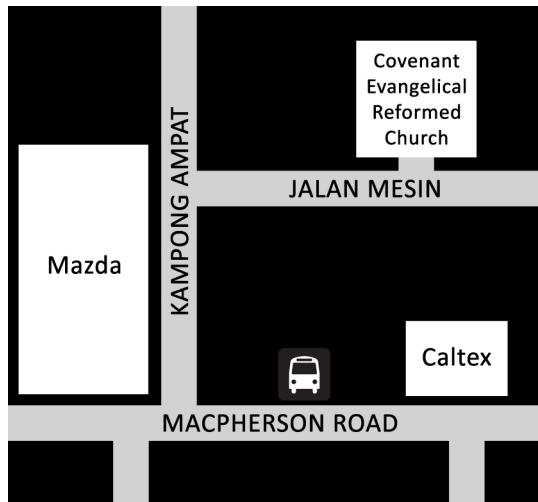
The doxology of the Lord's Prayer assures us also that God is eternal. Before the mountains were brought forth,... even from everlasting to everlasting, He is God (Psa 90:2). He never changes. We are constantly changing. The world in which we live is constantly changing and this can be distressing for us. Nothing in this world is certain. But our God is absolutely steadfast. He is the unchangeable and the steadfast rock of our salvation.

God never changes in His own infinite glory, majesty and goodness. We are dependent on His goodness and faithfulness. We are born as helpless infants, entirely dependent on others to care for us and protect us. We grow, if the Lord wills, to the age of youth and strength. A few years later we grow old and weak. God remains forever the same, faithful and almighty to accomplish our final salvation and glory.



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