

LORD'S DAY 49

124. Q. What is the third petition?

A. *Thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*
That is:
Grant that we and all men
may deny our own will,
and without any murmuring
obey Thy will,
for it alone is good.¹
Grant also that everyone
may carry out the duties
of his office and calling²
as willingly and faithfully³
as the angels in heaven.

1. **Matthew 7:21** Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Matthew 16:24-26 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

2. **1 Corinthians 7:17-24** But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him

not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. ²⁰ Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. ²² For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

Ephesians 6:5-9 Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶ not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. ⁹ And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

3. **Psalm 103:20-21** Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. ²¹ Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure.



In this Lord's Day we deal with the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, "*Thy will be done.*" Scripture often speaks about the will of God. "[God] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of **His will**" (Ephesians 1:11). Of David and of his great son, Jesus Christ, it is said, "*I delight to do **Your will**, O my God, and Your law is within my heart*" (Psalm 40:8; cf. Hebrews 10:7). From these two texts we see that the word *will* is used in two different ways:

1. The first (Ephesians 1:11) refers to **God's concealed will** according to which **God** acts. We can define this concealed will of God as "**that will of God which He has not made known to man, a secret plan which determines what God will do.**" This concealed will of God deals with matters like God's plan of election, and God's plan of providence. We don't know what the future brings for God has not revealed it to us. But God knows, for He has planned all things from the beginning.

We often use the petition "*Thy will be done*" with respect to God's concealed will. We have our hopes and desires, but we realise that God may have something else planned. For example, we may suffer from a serious disease and we desire healing. We ask for healing in prayer, but realise that it might not be God's will for us to be healed. In the end we want God's will to be done, because God knows what is best for us. Thus we pray, "*Lord, please grant healing. But not my will, but Thy will be done.*" It is good that we pray as described above. But we should realise that this petition does not refer to God's concealed will.

2. The second text (Psalm 40:8) refers to **God's revealed will**, according to which **we** must act (cf. Psalm 40:8 / Hebrews 10:7). We could define this revealed will of God as "**that will of God which He has made known to man, a revealed plan which determines what we must do.**" This will of God deals with how we are to live our daily life. This will is revealed to us in Scripture, and summarised in the Ten

Commandments. It is to this revealed will of God that this petition refers.

If this petition deals with God's revealed will (His commandments), why do we ask God "*Thy will be done.*" God is not the one who is supposed to do it; we are! Why do we pray to God? Why don't we simply do God's will? The reason we pray this petition to God is because there is a contrast between our natural will and God's will.

Because of his depraved nature, man takes delight in things that God hates. Christ said to the leaders of the Jews, "*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do*" (John 8:44). Paul said that by nature *we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others*" (Ephesians 2:3). Through the fall into sin our will has become corrupt. Even more, our will has become enslaved to evil. As the apostle says, "*You were slaves of sin*" (cf. Romans 6:17). The result was that we became children of wrath, condemned to eternal punishment.

It is only through the grace of God in Jesus Christ that our will is set free from the dominion of sin. "*But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life*" (Romans 6:22).

Though we have been set free from the dominion of sin, remnants of the old nature still cling to us. As a result, we find that sinful desires still arise in our heart. We are still inclined to evil. Thus the contest between God's will and ours is not yet over. Throughout our life we will have to fight against our sinful inclinations. As the Catechism teaches us, we must deny our own will. We must sacrifice our sinful desires, and do what God desires. This sacrifice is not easy, which is why we bring this petition to God in prayer. We ask God to give us the ability to deny our own will and do His will.

The fall into sin not only affected our heart and will. Our mind also became darkened by ignorance. We lost the knowledge of

God and His will. As a result we can only know God's will if He reveals it to us.

How does God reveal His will? In the Old Testament there were four ways (cf. 1 Samuel 28:6):

1. by ***dreams***, such as to Abimelech (cf. Genesis 20:3); to Pharaoh (cf. Genesis 41:1); to Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 3:5); to Daniel (cf. Daniel 7:1); to Joseph (cf. Matthew 1:20). Also by ***visions***, such as to Samuel (cf. 1 Samuel 3:15); to Ananias (cf. Acts 9:10); to Peter (cf. Acts 11:5); John (cf. Revelation 1-22).
2. by the use of the ***Urim*** and ***Thummim***, two stones which the High Priest kept in the breast piece of his high priestly garment (cf. Exodus 28:30). By these two stones God guided His people and revealed His will (cf. Numbers 27:21).
3. through ***prophets***, whom He inspired through the Spirit so that they knew and spoke God's will to the people (cf. Jeremiah 35:15); also Agabus (cf. Acts 21:10).
4. through the ***Scriptures*** which God wrote (e.g. the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God) or which the prophets or apostles wrote through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

In the new dispensation the will of God is revealed to us solely through the Scriptures. We do not have prophets who are inspired any longer as the prophets of old were inspired, who received dreams and visions or spoke with God or with an angel. Neither do we have anything comparable to the Urim or Thummim. With the end of the apostolic era the will of God was fully revealed in the Scriptures, which becomes for us the only norm for daily life.

Man is not able to discern the will of God simply by reading the Bible. For man does not only suffer from ignorance of mind; his mind is impaired. Perhaps an example would explain this better. Our mind might be compared to a computer. As the result of the magnetic field caused by a lightning storm, a computer might lose all

its data, without the computer itself being damaged. In this case the computer could be reprogrammed simply by using the disks. But if the computer circuitry was blown by a power surge caused by lightning, then the computer itself has been damaged and needs to be repaired by a technician before it can process data again. If man's mind only suffered from a loss of memory, all he would need was a Bible. But as it is, man's mind has become impaired by sin. A Bible alone will not be sufficient to restore a proper understanding of the will of God. The mind itself must be restored by the Spirit of God. Thus, in addition to the Scriptures, man depends upon the Holy Spirit to discern what is the will of God. As Paul says, we must be "*transformed by the renewing of [our] mind that [we] may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*" (Romans 12:2). We must take up the prayer of the psalmist: "*Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness*" (Psalm 143:10).

When we say that God reveals His will to us in the Scriptures, we do not imply that Scripture gives us a detailed description of how to live our lives. Rather, Scripture gives us basic principles which we must apply to the specific situations of our lives. For example, Scripture does not command us to establish schools for our children. But what Scripture does teach us is that our children must be taught the doctrine of God's Holy Word, and all things in conformity with it. In our society education has become systematically regulated by the government. We honour both Scripture and our government by establishing Christian schools which meet government standards, and also honour the principle of instructing our children in the fear of the Lord.

Because the Word of God does not address each concrete situation of life, we find that there is some variance and diversity in applying the principles of Scripture. People will apply these principles in different ways.

The Catechism also speaks about our "*office and calling.*" What do these mean? The

idea of *office* refers to **a special position or task that one receives from God**. As Christians, we share in the **office of all believers**, which is the three-fold office of prophet, priest and king. We will not deal with these here, since we have already described the duties of this office in Lord's Day 12. Within the church we have the **special offices** of ministers, elders and deacons.

Furthermore, the Catechism speaks about our "*calling*." Another word which means the same (a synonym) is "*vocation*" (from the Latin *vocare-to call*). This refers to the task that we have been given within God's kingdom, whether that be banker or baker, teacher or preacher.

By referring to our office and calling, the Catechism effectively highlights the need to do God's will in all aspects of our life. Doing God's will is not just a Sunday occurrence, but embraces our whole life. In church life and in every day life, on Sunday and on Monday through to Saturday we are to be guided by God's revealed will.

The Catechism describes the manner in which we must do God's will, namely, "*without murmuring*" and "*willingly*." We will only do God's will when our hearts are filled with love and thankfulness towards God for the grace which He has shown to us in Christ Jesus. That is clear from the summary of the law - "*You shall love the Lord your God ... and you shall love your neighbour as yourself*." Scripture teaches us that God has no pleasure in the obedience which we render if it is rendered grudgingly, or with complaints and murmuring (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:9; Psalm 50:7-14; Ephesians 6:6; 1 Peter 5:2). Only that obedience is acceptable to God which is done out of love and gratitude.

The Lord Jesus gave us His angels as an example to follow. Undoubtedly, Christ had Psalm 103 in mind when He composed this prayer. For in that psalm we read, "*Bless the LORD, you His angels, ... who do His word, heeding the voice of His word*" (v. 20). Our prayer is that we may display the same faithfulness as the angels as they serve God.

Lastly, it is necessary to speak about our **conscience**. Our conscience is that faculty which enables us to distinguish right from wrong. There is a saying: *Always let your conscience be your guide*. But that is not a Scriptural saying. By nature our conscience is corrupt. The natural man has lost all sense of right and wrong. Even we, who are regenerated by the Spirit of God, cannot simply rely upon our conscience in determining what is right and wrong because of the remnants of the old nature that still clings to us. We must always submit our conscience to the Scriptures. Ultimately we must be directed, not by what *we think or feel* is right, but by what *Scripture says* is right. Not our conscience, but Scripture must be our guide.



Questions:

1. In what two ways is the word "*will*" used in Scripture?
2. Define what we mean by the concealed will of God? What does God's concealed will deal with?
3. Does this petition "*Thy will be done*" refer to God's concealed will? Sometimes we use this petition with reference to God's concealed will. When we do, what do we mean by it?
4. What is God's revealed will? What does God's revealed will deal with? Where is God's will revealed?
5. Since we are the ones who are supposed to do God's revealed will, why do we pray "*Thy will be done*"? Why don't we just do it? What has Christ done for us with respect to our natural will?
6. Why is it necessary for God to reveal His will for us?
7. In what four ways did God reveal His will to His people in the old dispensation?
8. In what way does God reveal His will to us in the new dispensation?
9. Can we come to know the will of God simply by reading the Bible? What is needed in addition to the Scriptures? What does Paul say in Romans 12:2?
10. Does Scripture give us a detailed description of how to live our lives? What does it give? What is the result of this?
11. What does the Catechism mean by our "office." Which office do all Christians have? Which are the special offices?
12. What is meant by "*calling*"? What does the Catechism highlight by saying that we must faithfully carry out the duties of our office and calling?
13. In what manner must we do God's will? What is required before we will do God's will in an acceptable manner?
14. What example do we have in doing the will of God? What does Psalm 103:20 say?
15. What is our conscience? Is the saying, "*Always let your conscience be your guide*" a good saying? Why (not)?