

# Seeking the will of God

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Ps. 68: 1, 12

Ps.115: 2, 5)

Ps. 40: 3

Ps. 25: 2, 4, 5

Hymn 47: 4, 8, 9

Scripture reading: Mt.16: 24 – 28; Rom.12: 1, 2

Text: LD 49

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The gospel of the kingdom is about God's power and dominion unto life; His power and dominion unto salvation. And we enter this life-giving dominion of God only through Christ. The ultimate goal of this kingdom will be reached when God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15: 28). It will be the fulfilment of all God's promises, and it will be the fullness of salvation and glory, when God will be all in all. It is another way of saying that God will be with us as our God – with us all and in us all – to be God to us.

You may ask: What does that fulfilment of the covenant have to do with the third petition? Well, the first three petitions are in a sense **one** petition. God's Name will be hallowed in the same measure that His kingdom comes, and to the same measure that His kingdom comes we will be brought to submission and obedience to the will of God. To the extent that we obey the will of God, to the same extent Christ's dominion is seen in our lives. In Christ and through Christ all things are brought to this ultimate goal: the glory

of God in the kingdom of God where all are subject and obedient to the will of God.

That will be the peace of the Messianic kingdom when even the wolf and the leopard, even the lion and the cobra, shall do no harm; because the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD and in complete harmony with His will.

His rule and dominion will be complete, for He will not only rule over us, but also in us. He will so completely fill us that **His** will shall be **our** will. He will not only be something in some of us, but everything in all of us. That is the ultimate goal of our salvation in Christ, and the ultimate goal of history itself: the coming of God's kingdom where His rule and dominion will be over all and in us all.

That is gospel – the gospel of His kingdom.

The absolute and total dominion of God's kingdom will have come when each and everyone in His kingdom will bow in worship before the throne of God – ready and willing to do His will.

God's will, which alone is good and holy and righteous, is the norm and the end to which all must conform. And thus the petition "Your will be done" is not an addendum or afterthought added to the glory of God. No, when Christ brings us into subjection and willing obedience to the Father, it is the climax of salvation. When we do God's will we experience the glory of Christ's dominion.

Thus you see, brothers and sisters, how this petition: "Your will be done" is seeking the fulfilment of all God's promises.

We find this petition in a framework where all things are directed to God and to the majesty of His glory in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. For this

purpose Christ died, and for this purpose He was raised from the dead: that we may live unto God and glorify Him in obedience to His will alone.

Thus we pray: Our Father in heaven, execute all **Your** pleasure! In your power and wisdom, execute your good and holy will, for **You** know what is best and **Your** will alone is good.

With regard to ourselves we pray: Help us to deny ourselves and to seek and to do not our own will, but Your will alone. Father, sanctify and renew me, that I may find all my delight in obeying Your will. Give me a new heart, that your law may be to me as sweet as honey. Help me to hate and to flee from all that displeases You. For Your will alone is good.

And so we see how the petition for the coming of God's kingdom, where God will be all in all, flows over in the next petition to do His will alone.

Our theme will be...

## **Praying for God's will to be done**

We note...

1. The necessity of self-denial
2. Seeking God's revealed will
3. Seeking for the perfection of His will

In the first place we look at...

### **The necessity of self-denial**

By nature our own will wars against the will of God. And this will remain so until our own will is crucified with Christ.

In order to do God's will, we have to put to death our own corrupted will. But self-denial is also more. Our Lord Jesus did not have any sin. He had no

corrupted will which had to be put to death. Yet He had to deny Himself in submission to the will of His Father.

Before Christ entered His suffering on the cross, He prayed to His Father, saying:

“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”.

Even though Christ's will was good and perfect He denied His own will in order to do the will of His Father. Our Lord Jesus did not need any sanctification. His will was already in perfect harmony with the will of His Father. Yet, He had to learn obedience by the things He suffered – Hebr.5: 8.

There in the Garden we see Him as a man in the anguish of hell, sweating blood, crying to God for help. And in that suffering we see Him subjecting Himself to the will of the Father. Although His whole being cries for relief, He does not want any relief if it is not the will of His Father.

This afternoon we read from Mt.16 where the Lord says:

“...If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up His cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (verses 24, 25).

No one can follow Christ without denying himself. To take up your cross does not mean simply that you will have to bear some difficulties. No, to take up your cross means to die to yourself. Following Christ we do not only share in His sufferings in general, but we also share in His cross; that is: in His death. Our old man has to be crucified with Christ. You have to lose your life in order to save it.

It is necessary to deny your own will and to put to death your own desires because of our corrupted nature. The desires of our flesh is enmity against God (Rom.8: 7; Gal.5: 16, 17). It is not possible to follow Christ or to do the will of God while you are still governed by your own will and your own desires.

To do the will of God, my will has to die; and to do His pleasure, my desires has to be put to death. And thus the apostle Paul says:

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” – Gal. 2: 20.

But there is also more to self-denial and to the taking up of our cross. As we saw a moment ago, even Christ who had no corrupted will, had to deny His

own will in seeking the will of God. Brothers and sisters, even if we had a perfect will without sin, then our will would still have to be subject to the will of God. Thus it will be in the kingdom of God. When Christ comes in His glory we will be changed. On that day we will be made perfect. And thus we will enter the full reality of God's kingdom with a perfect will – a perfect will that will remain subject and obedient to the will of God forever.

Understanding this, there still remains another aspect to self-denial. When the fullness of God's kingdom has come then we will have no cross to bear anymore. But the fullness of the kingdom has not yet come. We still have to share in the sufferings of Christ. We also find ourselves in a melting pot where our faith is tested and tried in every way. And in all these sufferings and trials our Father is teaching us obedience to His will – submission also to His secret will. We do not always understand why certain things are happening with us, because the reason is hidden in God's secret will – just as the exact cause of his suffering was hidden from Job. We cannot fully understand or comprehend God's ways and all His dealings with us. Yet we pray: Your will be done!

Denying our own wisdom, we trust in the wisdom of God. Denying our own pleasure, we know that God's pleasure is good. He knows the best. And thus we entrust ourselves in His hands to do all His pleasure, no matter what the cost may be for us in this life. Loving Him and trusting Him, we gladly deny ourselves with these words: Your will be done.

Without self-denial we cannot pray this petition. For with this petition we ask the Lord to destroy the desires of our flesh that war against His will. Yes, we ask even more. We ask Him to crucify us with Christ, that we may no longer live, but Christ in us.

Self-denial is the most basic application of the first and great commandment to love God with all our heart, with all our soul and mind, and with all our strength. To love Him above all things and to seek His will alone, demands nothing less than to die to yourself. Father, destroy my own mind and heart and create in me a new mind and a new heart, so that I may have no emotion or desire except that which is according to your will.

Dear congregation, this is no pity or shame. It is the glory of God's kingdom. It is the fulfilment of God being all in all.

When we pray this petition all our desire is focussed on God and His glory. In this petition we ask nothing for ourselves. We ask for the will of God to be done no matter what the cost may be for ourselves.

Thus the petition also applies to the longsuffering and perseverance of faith.

In this regard we have a classic example, as we said already, in the example of Job. We see his godly submission to the will of God when he says:

“...The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1: 21).

And again when he said to his wife:

“...Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?...” (Job 2: 10).

When we experience prosperity, the petition “Your will be done” is an easy request, but do you also submit yourself to the will of God in adversity and in suffering? Look at Israel in the desert. Are we not quick to complain when things are not going our way, or when the ways of God seems to be dark to us?

We confess in Lord's Day 10 that we should be patient in adversity as we trust that all things are in the good hands of our Father. It is a childlike trust that our Father knows best, and that His will alone is good, and therefore we can also patiently submit to it when we have to endure hardships and trouble.

But are we not often like Israel in the desert grumbling and complaining against God, and arguing with those whom He has set over us?

Let us pray this petition not only in good times, but also in bad times. Let us submit ourselves to the will of God in whatever adversity He sends us in this life of sorrow. And whenever we may experience suffering for the sake of Christ, let us learn to deny ourselves in submission to His will.

Father, Your will, and not mine.

Brothers and sisters, this applies both to God's revealed will and to His secret will. Submitting ourselves to His revealed will, we are to obey all that He has commanded us. Submitting ourselves to His secret will, we are to put our life in His hands even when we cannot understand or comprehend His ways with us.

However, when we look at our confession, you will note that it does not focus on God's secret will, but on the revealed will of God. This is according to Scripture. For whenever we are called to seek God's will, it is His **revealed will** as spelled out in His commandments that is set before us. To seek His will is to seek obedience to His holy law.

Thus, in explaining this petition, Lord's Day 49 says:

“...Grant that we and all men may deny our own will, and without any murmuring obey Thy will, for it alone is good...”

It is not only a petition to deny yourself and to submit yourself to the will of God, but a prayer for sanctification in order to obey the will of God. And thus we note in the second place that this petition is about...

## Obeying God's revealed will

We do not pray that the Spirit may teach us the will of God through a mystic experience. Nor do we pray that Spirit may cause the will of God to be done while we remain passive. No, when we pray “Father, Your will be done” then we are consciously and actively seeking to **do** His will, to **obey** God's revealed will as spelled out in His commandments.

This prayer is a petition for sanctification and instruction in order to obey the will of God. When we pray “Your will be done” we pray this petition with an open Bible.

There is indeed in our own day a certain kind of mysticism that also starts to creep into Reformed churches. The slogan of many theologians in our day is this: “Follow Christ, and don't be too fussy about the detail of the law. Forget about careful obedience to the law; just follow Christ! Do not stick to the law, just live in the style of the kingdom”.

To the simple this may sound very pious. Is Christ not the fulfilment of the law? And is Christ Himself not the one that we must follow?

This may even sound to be very Christ-centered. But dear congregation, can we separate God from His law? Or can we follow Christ without obeying Him?

We don't have the time to look at the roots of that heresy now, but what is the result?

The result is that the will of God becomes a mystic concept. Then no one knows anymore what exactly the will of God actually is. Then the congregation is encouraged to seek the will of God through experiments. And the will of God becomes a relative matter. Then the will of God becomes a subjective matter – a matter of feeling and experience and experiment. Then the only assurance that you are still doing the will of God is when the rest of the congregation is also doing the same!

Where does this error start? It starts when the will of God is separated from the law of God. And when the law itself is stripped of all its detail, so that the will of God becomes a mystic concept. Then the Holy Spirit has to guide us without instructions.

Brothers and sisters, God did reveal His holy will for our lives. His revealed will for our lives are spelled out in His law. All the detail of the law still serves to instruct us in the way of life. The Holy Spirit still uses the detailed instruction of the law to sanctify our lives and to conform us to the will of God.

When we pray “Your will be done”, we pray with an open Bible, with our finger on the law of God. Father, teach me Your will. Instruct me in your will, that more and more my feet may be guided by **Your** word alone. Give me discernment and spiritual understanding that in the course of my daily life I may know and understand what is pleasing to You.

We also read this afternoon the first two verses from Rom.12.

“...by the mercies of God...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.”

The Lord will teach us His good and acceptable and perfect will only through the instruction of His word. We will find no righteousness or obedience outside the precepts of His law. Christ did not teach us any other will of God. He saved us unto obedience – obedience to His clear and revealed will.

**That** is the will of God that we are called to seek and to obey. And for **this** we pray: Our Father in heaven, sanctify me through the blood of Christ, and

renew me through Your Word and Spirit, that I may **know** your will, **understand** your will, and **obey** your will.

It is therefore not a prayer that things may go its way, and that we may happily drift along, and that the Spirit may guide us with a mystic experience. It is a war cry with the sword of the Spirit in our hand. It is a pleading with God in a context where the kingdom of God is set over against the kingdom of Satan. It is a petition for the hallowing of God's name and the coming of His kingdom in a dark world where there is no light to be found except in the clear instructions of God's word.

And then the Lord adds these words: "...on earth as it is in heaven". With these words the perfection of God's heavenly kingdom is set as example for His kingdom here on earth. We note that in the third place...

## Seeking the perfection of God's will

In heaven the Lord Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God.

Before the throne of God and of the Lamb the saints are gathered, together with the holy angels, in constant praise and worship (Rev. 4 and 5). And there the angels stand – willing and ready to obey His word. Already in the Old Testament we read about this obedience of the angels. Think of the words of Psalm 103:

"The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all. Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the LORD, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure. Bless the LORD, all His works, in all places of His dominion..." – Ps.103: 19 – 22.

David says God's throne is established in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all. There He commands His angels, and from there they go forth to do His word. And so Lord's Day 49 explains the words "on earth as it is in heaven" to mean:

"...that everyone may carry out the duties of his office and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven".

That is to say: with a perfect obedience to the word of God.

Brothers and sisters, we know how far we fall short of this obedience, and we know that we will never reach such perfect obedience in this life as the holy angels in heaven, yet, this perfect obedience has become all our desire and the goal to which we press on.

When you were still young and inexperienced in the faith, you were not able to discern the will of God as clearly as you do today. It may happen, for example, that a young believer does not understand that his time belongs to the Lord, or that his wallet belongs to the Lord. And thus, while he may have the intention to serve the Lord, he does not yet understand how the word of God applies to every aspect of his life. But as he grows in the knowledge and understanding of the will of God, his whole life is more and more directed and sanctified by God's revealed will. And the more we grow in this, the more we long for the perfection of God's will.

It is not only a growth in the height of perfection, but also a growth towards the full expand of the kingdom where every centimetre of our life, every aspect of our living, is more and more brought in submission and obedience under the dominion of God. And thus we come to seek the will of God not only for Sundays, or for certain religious hours in the week, but in all we do and in every motive of our heart.

To seek the will of God is then the same as to seek the coming of His kingdom wherein God will be all in all. We pray for that perfection when God will be everything in everyone. We pray for that glory when the good and perfect will of God will have full and unhindered dominion.

How then do we apply this heavenly doctrine to the ordinary walk of every day?

LD 49 speaks of the duties of our "office and calling" – the office and calling of each believer. God is just as much our employer as He is the employer of angels. At home, at school, at work – everywhere we find ourselves employed by the King of heaven and earth. In each sphere of life God calls us to a task, to perform His will behind the school desk, behind your lap top, in the kitchen or in the office, during work hours and after work. Whatever your task may be, it has to conform more and more to the good and perfect will of God.

When John the Baptist was preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Luke 3), the people asked him:

"What shall we do then?"

And he answered them:

“...He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise”

Then the tax collectors also came to him and said to him:

“Teacher, what shall we do?”

And he said to them:

“Collect no more than what is appointed for you”

Then the soldiers asked him:

“And what shall we do?”

And he said to them:

“Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages”

It is in these ordinary and practical things of life that we should seek the will of God. It is in these ordinary things of our daily life that God take pleasure. It is in such things that the coming of the kingdom is seen. It is in these things that we are to seek the will of God.

If a housewife may ask: “And what shall I do?”, the answer may be just as simple:

“Love your husband, and raise your children for the Lord”.

If a business man may ask: “And what shall I do?”, the answer is not too complicated:

“Seek the wellbeing of our client, and do not make unjust profit”

And thus LD 49 explains the petition to do God's will with these words:

“Grant also that everyone may carry out the duties of his office and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven”.

When the tax collectors and the soldiers came to John the Baptist, he did not tell them to quit their jobs and to become builders and bakers, but that they had to do their task as tax collectors and soldiers faithfully in accordance to God's will. These were the tasks to which God called them.

In speaking of our office and calling the Catechism does not refer to a professional career, but to the task and calling of each believer. That does not have to be a well paid job. You have a task also on your sickbed, or when you are retired, or when you lost your job. You may be without a job, but never without a task and calling.

Brothers and sisters, when we are gathered here on a Sunday, you may feel close to heaven, and experience that you are a colleague of the angels in heaven – employed by God. But what about Monday when you return to your ordinary task and calling? Are you then also seeking to do your daily task as the angels in heaven – faithfully and in complete obedience to the will of God?

Let us confess that we fall far short. When your client is difficult, and the work is pressing, and your time is short, and your mobile rings, and the traffic is jammed, and all is happening at once; your children are nagging in your ears while the food is burning – then it is not easy to meditate on the example of angels in heaven. Sunday, yes, Sunday you will come to that again! But, brothers and sisters, if we understand our office and calling, then we are also praying during the week: “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.

Unto this obedience Christ saved us. And while we are yet far from heavenly perfection, we pray: Father, sanctify us in Christ our Lord; renew us by the power of Your Spirit, that more and more we may know and understand and obey your will, for it alone is good.

Amen.