
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

LECTURE 5: THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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Presented in 14 Lectures called
THE BEAUTY OF PRAYER

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Lecture 5

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Welcome to lecture number five in the series on the Beauty of Prayer. We now wish to focus upon the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, and that is, "Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." Many people, when they consider this petition, draw a comparison to what the Lord Jesus endured in the garden of Gethsemane. There you know the Lord Jesus was in great turmoil because it was there and then that He felt the terrible torment of God coming towards Him. It was there that He was struggling in great darkness, and He was exceedingly fearful because He knew what was in store for Him. He had to endure the wrath of God, and that will be unleashed against Him in all its fullness. His soul was so burdened that He told His disciples in Mark 14 verse 34, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death." It was then that He prayed, Mark 14 verse 36, "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt," and so the Lord Jesus denied Himself. He said there, "Not My will be done, but Thy will be done, oh, My Father."

That is now often viewed as an interpretation of this third petition, and people understand this petition to mean that we must learn in our lives that we would deny ourselves and that God's will would be done in our hearts so that people learn to pray 'not My will, but Thy will be done.' Well, certainly there are days in our lives that we go through certain struggles, that we would like to go in a certain direction in life, and that we are taught by God to see that not our will, but His will be done; and so, there can be days in our life that we do not understand God's guidance, and then there is a need for humility and that we also pray, "Lord, not my will, but Thy will be done."

That is a prayer of self-denial, and that is perfectly necessary and legitimate and true, but yet, that is not the full interpretation of this third petition. We can say it is a part of this petition, but the real meaning of this petition is that we will pray in this petition that we and other people learn to do the will of God positively. So, it's not in the first place that we learn to deny ourselves, but it is, positively, that we learn to live according to God's will in all of our lives.

What does God want us to do? It is God's will for us that we would love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. It is God's will that we would love our neighbor as ourselves. This is what the Lord Jesus explains in Matthew 22. This is God's will, His revealed will for our lives; and so, when we pray, "Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven," we are praying that people would learn to live according to God's will, that they would learn to live according to God's revealed will, that they would love God in everything they do and their neighbor as themselves. It is a positive prayer. It's a prayer that will take our life long because continually, we need to learn to walk in the ways of God.

This petition starts then by referring to Heaven, “Thy will be done as it is in Heaven.” So, God’s will is done in Heaven, and what does that mean “in Heaven”? Who are in Heaven? That’s where the angels are and that’s where God’s redeemed church is, but in Heaven, there the angels continually are listening to God. They are obeying God. They’re always obedient and faithful to do that what God tells them to do. Just as the angels are always obedient to God, so the Lord Jesus tells us that we also on Earth should always be doing the things God wants us to do, and so this petition refers to practical matters in daily life. We are referring here to our daily calling. The Lord wants us to live according to His will and that we would do that with all diligence. Then again, we think of the angels. They, without any murmuring, obey His will. We also should do that, that we would follow His beckoning, His will, His direction, that we would obey God just as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in Heaven.

We see an example of living according to God’s will in the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole of His life was focused upon God, but we see that already as a child. When the Lord Jesus was a boy of 12 years old, He was in the temple and He loved to be there. He was there three days, and He spoke with the teachers and He asked them questions. They asked Him questions. Oh, it was His desire and love to be in His Father’s business. He spoke with the doctors of the law. It was His delight. When His mother and Joseph were anxiously looking for Him, He had to return to Nazareth and then He would no longer be able to stay in the temple. He had to obey. It was God’s will for Him at this stage of His life.

We read in Luke 2 verse 51, “And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject unto them.” He was doing the will of God that He was called to do. There in Nazareth, He had daily work. He was a carpenter’s son, and so He would be trained as a carpenter. This was His calling, and He accepted it. He had to work in that dusty village, that back wood village of Nazareth, far away from the house of His Father, but He did it without murmuring. He did it with devotion. He was dedicated to the work the Lord gave Him to do, and we may be assured that the Lord Jesus was a good carpenter, that He performed good work because He knew this is God’s will for Him. So you, in your daily work, are called to do that well and to do that in a diligent manner.

That is God’s will in our daily lives, but then there’s also obedience in spiritual life because we learn to do the will of God and live according to His directions. Reality is that we are fallen creatures. We have fallen away from God and, therefore, our will has become perverted. We desire to do our own will and not God’s will. I am inclined to hate God and my neighbor, and so I rebel against the will of God. That’s my nature, my corrupt nature. Now our will must be changed. The entire mechanism inside of us leads us in the opposite direction away from God, and now God’s Holy Spirit must enter our lives and He must lead us in the direction of God. The Holy Spirit gives people a new heart. He removes the heart of stone, gives them a heart of flesh, and so people receive God’s Holy Spirit in their lives and then their will is changed. That enmity between God and them is broken. Their will is curbed, and now they long to do the will of God. They are moved by the love of God.

This is all by the work of God’s Spirit. God’s Spirit shows you your depravity and guilt, and the Holy Spirit renews you. And has that already happened in your life? Who leads your life? Who leads your will? Who directs you? We’re either being directed by the Prince of Darkness or by the King of kings. Is God leading your life? Has He renewed your will? Ask God for His Holy Spirit to work powerfully in you. You cannot change your own heart. You cannot renew your own will, but God can do it. He can renew you. When God’s Spirit enters your life, what happens then? Well, then you cannot live on as you used to live. You see that you miss God. You become restless. You need to live according to God’s will.

You see this, and the Holy Spirit is thereby drawing you with bonds of loving kindness, and He leads you to pray, “Teach me, oh, Lord, to do Thy will.” You don’t trust your own insight anymore. You don’t want to do your own will anymore. You need God to strengthen you, and you see that you are weak. You need His grace and that not only once, but throughout your life, for repeatedly we are inclined to go our own way, but we need to go in God’s way. That’s why Psalm 86 says, “Unite my heart to the fear of Thy name” (verse 11), because by nature our heart is like the fingers of our hand, and our heart is directed into all kinds of various directions, but now all these fingers must come together that we learn to do God’s will: “Unite my heart to the fear of Thy name.” Then the image of the Lord Jesus is laid upon you, and you display the fruits of the Holy Spirit. You delight to do His will, and on Earth that is only a beginning. You will perfectly learn to do God’s will when you are with the Lord in glory. There your will will be renewed.

If we resist this God and shake off His call upon our lives, know that you will surely perish. Those who resist God and refuse to do His will and go against Him and do not deny themselves, they will surely perish. Oh, it's such a blessing to surrender to this God. It's such a blessing to learn to forsake your own will and to do His will. It is so blessed when the Lord takes over your life, and He teaches you to walk according to His ways. Then you pray continually, "Teach me to do Thy will, oh Lord."

As we see that so often we go against God, then confess this before Him. Maybe you failed, maybe many a time. Don't rest in your failings, and don't stay away from God. Don't fall short of Christ, but confess your failures and seek His grace to do His will in your life. When we are called to pray, "Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven," then we are praying that we personally would learn to live according to God's will. That is a lifelong struggle, but then we are also praying for other people and that's a Christian calling to pray for one another. We are then praying that God's will shall also be done in the lives of other people. Again, we do not mean that God's sovereign guidance and ruling will take place in their lives because God's governing rule will take place regardless, but we are praying that other people will learn to bow for God's will, that they will more and more learn to surrender their lives unto the Lord God. That is what we refer to as intercessory prayer.

We must be men and women of prayer. John Bunyan portrays this beautifully in his majestic work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. There he shows us a picture of a man who was portrayed on a painting and his eyes were lifted up to Heaven. The best of books was in his hand. The law of truth was written upon his lips. The world was behind his back, and he stood as if he pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over his head. This is a picture of a Christian. He does not live for the world anymore. He abides by God's holy revelation. He is a man of prayer.

A Christian should pray for people around him. Before everything else, a Christian must pray, and so we pray for God's work in our own lives and hearts, but we also pray that God's work would take place in the lives and hearts of people who are around us. We find this repeatedly emphasized in Scripture. Prayer is a certain power. The Apostle Paul was convinced of the power of prayer, although it's all grace, although we have no power, but we are calling upon God, Who has all power, to teach other people to live according to His will. People, your own family, maybe your husband or wife, maybe your parents or your children, maybe others around you, others you are acquainted with, others you witness to, God is able to change their lives that they also learn to do God's will, that they do this gladly and joyfully. God can change their hearts. He is willing to hear prayer.

The Apostle Paul emphasized prayer. We find that repeatedly in Romans 15:30, "I beseech you, brethren, . . . that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." Paul himself needed prayer. He needed to be taught to do God's will. He needed to be led further in the ways of salvation and so also in Ephesians 6:19-20, praying "for all the saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly . . . that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." In 2 Thessalonians 3:1, "Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may have free course." Hebrews 13:18, "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." Paul needed prayers of people around him because he believed God would hear such prayer, and so he himself prayed much for other people around him. This is a Christian's calling to pray for other people that they would be converted, that they would learn to do God's will.

This is a personal prayer that we must know in our private lives, but besides this, this prayer that people would learn to do God's will is also a prayer offered up by the church, and that's why we should come together as congregations to pray that other people would learn to do God's will. The Lord delights to see His people gathered together for such prayer, and we find this beautifully worded in Psalm 87. We read there in verse 2 the following words, "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob."

What does this text mean? What are the gates of Zion? That is the place of the official corporate gatherings of the people of God. These gates were wide. They were broad. People could gather there. To sit in the gate of a city meant that such a person was a member of the city council, for instance, Lot. He sat in the gates of Sodom, and Boaz gathered 10 men around him to be seated in the gates of Bethlehem as he wanted to secure Ruth to be his bride. The gates of Zion, they formed the gathering places of God's people, and so this refers to the public worship services of the church. There prayer is offered. Corporate prayer is offered together by the people of God.

The expression "dwellings of Jacob" refers to the individual homes of the people of God. There also they offer prayer to the Lord, and that prayer is effectual, and the Lord hears such prayer. They do not pray in vain, but Scripture tells us that the Lord has a special delight in the prayers of His people when they are gathered together

in official worship services, and so this text, “The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob,” is a great encouragement that churches would meet together for corporate prayer. These prayers are to be for the extension of God’s kingdom and that sinners would learn to do God’s will, that people would be gained for Christ, that their hearts would be renewed, that His Word would enter their lives so that God would be glorified.

Is this not what the Lord Jesus meant in Matthew 18:19, “That if two of you shall agree on Earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven.” This shows again the need for communal, corporate prayer. The Lord has a delight that His people would come together in unison to offer prayer before the Lord. He hears such prayers.

Also, this petition, “Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven,” belongs to our personal prayers, as well, that we would personally strive in prayer, that we learn to do God’s will, but that also other people close by and far away also learn to do God’s will. This prayer is essential. This prayer is necessary. It’s hard work. It takes time. It takes self-denial, but it’s most important because God hears prayer, and He incorporates your prayers in His plan of salvation. Your prayers make a difference.

You see, we cannot change one person. We cannot convert one sinner. That’s God’s work, and God will do it. He will do marvelous things while you are just watching, while you are not even involved, but you have prayed for it. God hears, and He does it also in His own way, at His own time, but God hears prayer. There are numerous examples in church history, and maybe you know that of your own life, how you were praying for conversion of someone else and the Lord heard that prayer because the Lord is faithful. As you pray to Him, He is listening. He takes your prayers seriously, and He’s more than able and more than willing to grant you your request and, therefore, pray with expectation. We think of that text from 2 Chronicles 16:9, “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole Earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.” That means God looks for those who look unto Him, who pray for things to happen that they cannot do themselves. Therefore, pray with expectation.

Pray also with zeal. Pray in the awareness that you are calling upon the greatest power in existence, the power of God Almighty, and that He has promised to hear such prayer. Be earnest in your prayers. Take the Kingdom of Heaven with violence. Think of Jacob pleading with the Lord at Peniel in Genesis 32:26, “I will not let thee go, unless thou dost bless me.” Think of Daniel pleading in Daniel 9:19, “Oh Lord, hear; Oh, Lord, forgive; Oh Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, Oh my God: for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name.” Pray also with faith, for in Mark 11:24 we read, “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Pray in faith.

Be also particular in prayer. Be particular when you lay needs of other people before the Lord, when you see how hardened they may be, when you see how indifferent they may be. Lay it all before God. A person who is so engaged in prayer will be a wall of fire around a country, around a church, around a family. A prayer of some child of God who is all alone, maybe in prison or maybe bound to his home, when he prays, that prayer can be of such a force by the grace of God. The enemies of the gospel fear such prayer. That’s why the devil assaults and attacks people who are engaged in prayer.

The queen of Scotland, in the day of the Protestant Reformation, was afraid of the prayers of John Knox, the Scottish godly reformer. She was more afraid of his prayers than of a whole army of soldiers. The son-in-law of John Knox was also a minister, John Welch. He was known to get up in the middle of the night and to plead with God in prayer, and his wife at one occasion was afraid that her husband would catch a cold, and she followed him into the room into which he had withdrawn himself. She heard him pleading in broken sentences, “Lord, will Thou grant me Scotland.” He was praying that God’s will be done, that Scottish people would learn to do the will of God. He was praying for their conversion, and that’s what this prayer actually means, “Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.” ‘Lord, convert sinners.’

Let us know such boldness in our prayers. You may pray for things you think are too wonderful, too amazing, but [they are] what God will do to those who wait upon Him. Let us therefore know boldness in our prayers, and let us seek souls for our hire and that salvation would be overflowing through God’s work. Especially pastors should pray that sinners would learn to do the will of God. How we see it in Scripture that especially pastors were men of prayer, how Samuel pleaded with God for the people, and he did not want to give this up. Although the people were disobedient and were unwilling and were often in rebellion against the Lord, still Samuel saw it as

his task to continually pray for the people of Israel that they would learn to do the will of God. In 1 Samuel 12:23, we hear Samuel praying, “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way.” Samuel continued on teaching the ways of the Lord, and he coupled his teaching with private, personal, fervent, bold prayer. Samuel did not want to stop praying, for he saw this as his most important work: intercessory prayer.

We think of another example of a man of God, Jeremiah, who prayed for the people of Judah. He suffered greatly under their wickedness, but he did not neglect to pray for them until the measure of their iniquity was so full that the Lord told them that he should no longer pray for these people in Jeremiah 7:16, “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me: for I will not hear thee.”

We find an example in Hezekiah, the glorious, good king of Judah, when he was in great need because the Assyrians had surrounded the city of Jerusalem. Then he asks the prophet Isaiah to pray for the people, but we also see that he himself went into the temple, and he laid down the letters that the Assyrian king had given to him telling him that he should not trust in God, and he laid it all before the Lord, and he prayed and he interceded, and he prayed that God would deliver His people, keep them from harm, and that God would be honored. He prayed for the wellbeing of the people of Judah and so we see it in the life of Daniel, that he prayed for the people.

We see it so often in the lives of the apostles, that they prayed for the people. We see that, for instance, in Acts chapter 6, they were kept so busy by ministering to the needs of widows that they realized that their main work would suffer, that was prayer and abiding in the Word of God, and so they told the congregation to choose seven men who would be full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, that they would care for the needs of the widows. The apostles said in verse 4, “We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.” They saw it as their main task to be engaged in prayer.

Think of how the Apostle Peter went up unto the roof as was his custom to pray. It was around noon when he was praying, and what did they pray for? They prayed that God’s will would be done in their own lives and the lives of other people, that people would be converted, because pastors should have a raging thirst for sinners’ souls, that so God’s Kingdom would come, that so sinners would learn to do God’s will, and that God’s name would be glorified.

See how the Apostle Paul prayed extensively for the churches. He did not only lead personal prayer for himself. He did not only ask other people to pray for him, but he himself prayed extensively for the churches. When you read his epistles, you must see and come under the deep impression of how much he must have prayed. In 1 Corinthians 1:4–5, “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ.” In Philippians 1:4, “Always, in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.” In Philippians 1:9, “And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.” Paul was praying that their love would increase. He was praying that they would do God’s will.

The same in Colossians 1:9, “We do not cease to pray for you, and we desire that you might be fulfilled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” 2 Thessalonians 1:11, “Also we pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.” He was praying that these Christians at Thessalonica would be faithful to God, and so he was praying for the extension of God’s Kingdom and that people would learn to do the will of God. All God’s children should lift up this prayer, “Lord, teach people to do Thy will. Teach me to do Thy will, that Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.” Thank you.