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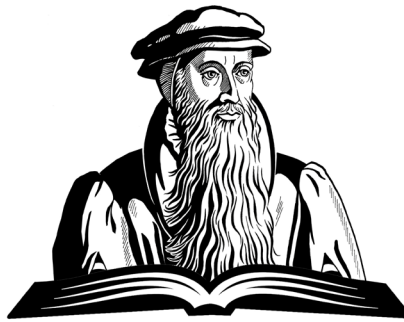
Shorter
CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #56

**The Lord's Prayer:
The Third Petition**
Catechism Question 103



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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Lecture #56

The Lord's Prayer: The Third Petition

Question 103: *What do we pray for in the third petition?*

Answer: *In the third petition (which is, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven") we pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.*

In this life, we see the evidence of many people prioritizing their own desires, and their own wills. Not only does this cause friction between individuals, whether in a family, or among nations—people saying, "I want this," and the other one saying, "No, I want this," everyone pitting their own will against the other—it gives evidence of a primary problem. We would rather have our way, not only than another's way, but even our way rather than God's way. We would pit our will against his. We see this beginning in the garden. God had expressed his will to Adam and Eve, and he said, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." And instead of honoring God's will, they sinfully chose their own way, and turned against God.

Well, with this in mind, we turn our attention to the third petition in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Christ is teaching us to desire God's will above everything else, including our own will. In fact, we can say that he is teaching us that our will should be that his will is done.

Well, to help us understand this petition, we have Question #103 of the *Shorter Catechism*: "What do we pray for in the third petition?"—"In the third petition, (which is, *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*) we pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven." Well, the petition is found in Matthew 6, verse 10, and Luke 11, verse 2. The word "will" refers to the desire or want that someone has. Therefore, to ask that God's will be done, is to say that we desire—remember, prayer is the offering up of our desires—and so we're saying, "Our will, our desire, is what he wills, what he desires. Well, there's much that is in here, so let's get into our lesson.

And we'll look at three points: first, *The Focus of Our Desire*; secondly, *The Activity We Desire*; and thirdly, *The Ability to Fulfill Our Desire*.

So first, *The Focus of Our Desire*. When we ask, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," we have a focus. We focus our desire upon something in particular. What it is we desire in this petition? Well, we're focusing on God's will. This is the focus of our desire in this petition. His will refers to God's desire, what he wants, what pleases him. The beauty of this petition, as we've already mentioned, is that we're saying that our will, or our desire is focused on God's will, his

desire. We desire what he desires. We want what he wants. This is the focus of the petition.

But how do we know what God wants? Some people think if we just think long and hard about it, eventually it will become clear. But we remember that God has given us his Word. He's revealed his will, his wants, his desired, if we can speak that way, in the Bible. Just as by your word, you communicate to others what you want, what you desire, so God is communicating to us his desire in his Word. His will, in other words, doesn't have to be found out by long and arduous searchings, but rather, by a reading and meditating upon his Word. Well one way we know what God wants in his Word is by his holy commandments. We've already looked at the Ten Commandments, but you can go back to them and read them. And as you do so, you'll gain a clear understanding of what God's will is. What is his revealed will for us regarding the use of his name, "all whereby he makes himself known"? It is that we take it not in vain—we use it with reverence. What is his will for us regarding the Sabbath day? It's that we remember it and keep it holy, that we keep from our own words and works, and thoughts, and give ourselves to all his holy worship, and works of necessity and mercy. What is his will for us toward our parents and other authorities? It's that we would honor them, not only with our outward actions, but with our words, and thoughts and desires. You see, the Ten Commandments give us a clear summary of all his holy will. Surely, there are particulars given to us in the rest of Scripture, which make it more specific to us, but the Ten Commandments gives us a summary of his holy will. So when we pray, "Thy will be done," our focus can be looking upon the Ten Commandments.

But another way that God makes known what he wants in his Word is by his promises. His promises tell what he's willing to do and give. This should lead us to pray that he would fulfill his promises and perform his gracious Word and will. What an encouragement this is for our prayer! As we're reading God's Word and discover his will and his promises, we can turn them back to him, and say, "This is your will. God, you promised this. Would you bring it to pass?"

For instance, God promises that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). Well, we can take that, and go to God, and say, "God, you promised, this is your will that you would forgive sinners who confess their sins to you. So now I come and I confess my sins, and I pray, let your will be done. Forgive my sins, as you promised." Or you can take that with every promise. And as we understand it rightly and faithfully, we can come to God by his promises, and say, "Thy will be done."

We can look at many other specific things in the Bible—warnings, and encouragements, and so many other things. But fundamentally, we know what God wants by the Bible. This is one reason the Bible is important to us. It tells us God's will. Not only does it tell us how we should live, but it tells us his will as to how we are to be saved—by the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. It tells us that his will is that we would be saved by his Son. And so, you'll remember that Christ was baptized, and there, the voice of the Father was heard, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He's highlighting Jesus Christ. And in his Word, he tells us that all men everywhere are called to look to him and be saved. You see, his will is being made known to us. He's telling us that it's his will that sinners should be saved by Christ.

Well, his Word tells us how to worship him rightly. It tells us what we should sing to him. It tells us how the sacraments should be administered and observed. It tells us how to pray, and why to pray. It tells us of the hope he would have us, as believers, to enjoy through Christ. You see, the Bible is a rich treasury of the will of God. And so, our focus is upon his Word.

But he also has a purpose or a desire for every detail of life that he's already planned out. Go way back to the beginning of the *Catechism*; you'll remember the Question, "What are God's works

of providence?”—“God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions” (Question #11). His providence, of course, is one way whereby he carries out his decree. So we can speak of God’s providence as the carrying out of his will. He’s made a plan, and his plan is then carried out. And so this is a part of our focus. We admit there’s a great mystery to this, but we acknowledge that God is in control of all things. And so, we can gladly submit to him even in difficult situations.

You’ll remember that Paul was troubled by an affliction he had, which he called “a thorn” in his side. And he went to God, and he prayed that God would deliver him of this: “Take this from me, remove this from me.” And yet, God’s word to him was “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). In other words, God’s will was that Paul would submit in God’s all-wise and good, though difficult, will of bearing this affliction. And yet, he would do so by depending upon his grace. And so, even in our troubles, we can learn to submit to God’s will by relying upon his grace.

And yet, as Paul would write, in Romans 8, we also have this assurance—verse 28: “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” You see, we have an assurance, that even though difficulties come to us, God will work it together for good. This is what gave Joseph the ability to say to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, “As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50, and verse 20).

So when we pray, “Thy will be done,” without even looking at what God has revealed as his revealed will, we’ll also focus on what God has determined, and how it’s carried out in providence. And we’re asking, “Lord, let your will be done; not mine, but yours. Give me grace to submit and to live upon you, as you have promised in your Word, but let your eternal purpose be carried out to your glory.” So we’re focused on God’s will.

But second, *The Activity We Desire*. In this petition, we’re not simply thinking about God’s will, we’re not merely studying God’s will. Instead, we’re asking, “Thy will be done.” This means we’re asking him to provide particular help—help for us to obey his will, to submit to his will. Certainly, we want to, and we need to learn God’s will. If we’re going to do his will, we must understand his will. So when we ask this, we’re certainly asking he would teach us his will by his Word and Spirit. However, we’re not simply asking, “teach us thy will.” We’re asking that he would give us such grace, as that not only we individually, but we as his people together would do his will. Notice how the *Catechism* expresses this: “We pray, That God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things.”

Additionally, we’re not content to obey him in some things. We want to obey him, as the *Catechism* rightly expresses it, “in all things.” We’re asking that he would give us such grace that we would honor all of his will. We can understand something of the importance of this when we look at James chapter 2, and verses 10 and 11. James writes, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” So notice, basic to James’s point is the truth that God’s will includes all that he has commanded—all he has revealed. Well, this should lead us to pray that all his will would be honored by us and by his people, and even throughout the world. This is why the *Catechism* uses that simple expression, “in all things.” And it’s in the petition, “Thy will be done,” without qualification, without limiting it, whatever your will is, O God, we’re asking that it be done. We’re not only interested in being kept from lying, and thus telling the truth, by God’s grace, we also

want God to give us grace that we would have no other God's before him, that we would not covet, that we would not make for ourselves any graven image, and so on. We want all of God's will to be done.

You'll also notice those words that Christ includes, "in earth, as it is in heaven." We delight to think of the angels carrying out God's will. And what a comfort it is to know that though there are many failures in this world, in that world above, there is perfect and glad obedience. The *Catechism* is helping us to see something that Christ is helping us to pray. As we think about how perfectly the angels carry out God's will, we're saying, "That's how I want my own soul. That's how I long for our brothers and sisters to carry out your will, O God, even as the angels do in heaven." In heaven, the angels gladly carry out his will without doubting, without hesitation, without grumbling, without complaining. You'll notice how the angels are described in Psalm 103, verse 20: "Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." Notice, they not only know his commandments, they do his commandments. They listen to and are attentive to the voice of his word. They're focused, fixed upon him, and so, as soon as God gives a command to an angel, the angel goes and does it. This is what we're to desire. We're to desire to listen to his Word, yes, but to listen with faith unto obedience.

Of course, this is how Christ describes his people, as a people who hear his voice and follow him. Notice, in John 10, verse 27, Christ says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." You'll notice, his people, likened unto sheep, hear his voice and follow him. They're not just hearing and saying, "Well that's his will," but they're not following him. But they also have the privilege of knowing him, being known by Christ. And so, it reminds us that this is an expression that flows out of fellowship with Christ. And as we come to the Father, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," it's in the fellowship of Christ that we seek so. Well, the more we grow in grace, the more we want this to be true of us and others. And therefore, we pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Well third, *The Ability to Fulfill Our Desire*. Some people think that obeying God's revealed will is easy. Some people think that gladly submitting to God's will or providence is no difficulty. And certainly, we can say that God's will is clear and ought to be obeyed. We can say that we ought to submit to God's will; there ought to be no complaint. However, we've learned that apart from God's grace, we cannot begin to obey or submit to him as we ought. We need God's grace. This is why we ask him for it. "Thy will be done." Notice how the *Catechism* picks up on this important point: "We pray, That *God, by his grace*, would make us able and willing." We're appealing to him to help us graciously. We need God's grace in order to make us able and willing. Of course, unconverted people can do much by way of outward performance. They can do some things outwardly, but we're not interested in merely an outward form of obedience. We don't just want the appearance of doing what's right. We don't want that while our hearts remain bitter or self-righteous. Rather, we want to obey and submit with sincerity, and faith, and love, and delight, even as the angels in heaven. And this obedience can only come to pass by God's grace. What an encouragement then that we read, "God worketh in [us] to will and to do of [all] of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Perhaps you're familiar with Ephesians 2:8, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." Well, in Ephesians 2, verse 10, Paul writes, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Notice, it is only by God's grace, through Christ, that we are able to do what is right. Christ

himself told us this in John 15, verses 4 and 5, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” In order to bear fruit, to obey joyfully, we must have the gracious supply of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we acknowledge that our ability to obey and submit demands God’s grace. Moreover, we ask that God would extend this grace to us, to make us willing and able.

It’s another example of coming to God by his grace for yet more grace. What a beautiful truth true religion holds forth. We don’t work ourselves up in our own power, in order then to simply be a little bit more helped by God, but in all that we are, we rely upon God, and we approach God by his grace, not by our merit, not by our works, but rather, by his grace. And we come to him according to his will, his revealed promises and truth, and we call upon him by his grace through Jesus Christ, that he who is now our Father, would yet give us more grace. What a beautiful thing this is! We then ask him for this grace, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”

Well, as we close, once again we have great help given to us in this petition. Doubtless, if you’re a believer, you struggle with your own sin. It saddens you, shames you. You learn God’s Word, and in some sense, your understanding increases far more quickly than your obedience. This grieves us. What should we do? Well, we take up this petition, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Oh, God, I see how slow I am to obey. I see how sluggish I am, how bitter I can be, though I put an outward form on. I put smiles on my face when I sing your praise. Though I’m diligent to read your Word, yet my heart struggles with it. Certainly, we need to pray and confess our sins. But we may also come, and we must come and say, “Therefore, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Make my soul, and make the souls of my brethren more earnest to obey all your holy will, and to do so gladly.” As sin is any want or conformity unto or transgression of the law of God, and we discover this sin, it makes us see where God’s will is not being done. But that also teaches us then what we ask for. “Lord, where it’s not being done, make it done.” Well, here is something to encourage us in prayer then.

Here’s something you should remember. Every time you learn something new about God’s will in the Bible, you should turn it into prayer, and ask God, “Thy will be done.” If you gain new insight regarding a commandment, you should thank God for that, but you should also say, “Lord, don’t only let me understand it, but by your grace through Christ, make me to do it, and to do it gladly and gratefully as the angels do without complaint in heaven.”

Moreover, each of us will encounter trials and afflictions in this life. Here’s a petition for us. The Bible teaches us that it’s right, of course, to pray that God would deliver us from our troubles. And yet, as his providence carries on toward us, we also have to remember that we need to submit to him and rely upon his grace. And so, when we encounter difficulties, as we ask, “Lord, here is my desire, that you would deliver me, yet, ultimately, God, your will be done.” We need faith for this. As Joseph was able to discern God’s good will and providence, so we need faith to do the same, and to come under his trials; to trust him in the difficulty; to remember that, as our Shepherd, he leads us even in the valley of the shadow of death—that he’s with us. His comfort is provided to us. And so, we’re willing then to say, “Thy will be done.”

Well finally, here’s encouragement to the believer, because one day, God’s will, will be perfectly done in you. What a joy it is to think of that. “The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness” (Question #37). Here is the personal and perfect fulfillment in every believer. At death, our wills will be entirely perfected to delight in what God delights in. At the resurrection, our bodies and souls, reunited and glorified together, will then perfectly keep his holy

will. Our perfect enjoyment of this will be because of his grace and the redemption given us in Jesus Christ. Take hope then, believer, because you've struggled in this life and see some growth, you ought to remember, there's a day coming when there will be no longer growth against sin, but perfection against sin, and your will, will be gladly satisfied in God's will being done perfectly in and through you, because of his grace through Jesus Christ. So pray, and hope, and as you grow in this life, remember, there's day coming when this will be perfectly realized not only in you, but in all believers everywhere. Oh, what a cause then there is to give thanks to God for Jesus Christ!