

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—

Lesson 59—What do we pray for in the third petition? Q. 103

Having sought the *glory of the Father* in *God's name* being hallowed, and the *glory of the Son* in *God's Kingdom* being advanced, now we're taught to seek the *glory of the Spirit* in *God's will* being done. Boston, "As by the coming of his kingdom, his name is hallowed, so by doing his will, his kingdom comes, or is advanced, and we own him to be King, Heb 13.21. So all these three petitions meet in one great desirable point, viz., the glory of God. This is the scope of them all."

- I. This third petition is a prayer grounded on *the testimony and promise of God*, that such is His grace to His children, that He works in us by His Spirit both to work and to will for His good pleasure, Phil 2.13; Ps 110.3. In this prayer we acknowledge several things:
 - A. We acknowledge the will of God to be impeccably right and unfailingly best, Dt 32.4; Dan 4.37.
 - B. We acknowledge that His will is to be *known* and can be known from His Word, 2Tim 3.16-17.
 1. The whole will of God in Scripture may be reduced to two things: *faith* and *practice*, what we're to *believe* and what we're to *do* (WSC 3). And within what we're to do, are found two parts: the *precepts* we're to gladly *obey* and the *providences* to which we're to cheerfully submit, Jer 11.4; Acts 13.22.
 - C. We acknowledge that once *known*, His preceptive will is to be gladly *obeyed*, Rom 6.13; 2Cor 5.15; Tit 2.11-14; Heb 13.24; 1Pet 1.15-16. Here we pray that we might rejoice in His *sovereignty* over us.
 - D. We acknowledge that once *known*, His providential will is to be cheerfully *submitted to*, Ps 135.6; Dan 4.35; Mic 6.9; Ps 39.9; 1Sam 3.11-13, 18; 2Sam 15.24-26; 16.9-11; Acts 4.23-29. Here we pray that we might rejoice in His *providence* over us.
 - E. We acknowledge that *by nature* we resist the will of God and are sinful creatures who don't deserve to enjoy the peace and joy of abiding in the will of God, so that what we pray for in this petition is that God would graciously work this *in us* by His almighty Spirit who indwells us, Phil 2.12-13.
 - F. We acknowledge that what we desire and long for is be further conformed to that obedience and acquiescence that we'll enjoy in heaven and which the angels already enjoy, Rev 14.1-5.
- II. The essence and substance of this petition is for *the grace of self-resignation*: the grace to *resign our will to God's*, in all things, at all times, and with all our heart.
 - A. God alone can do what He pleases, Ps 115.3; Isa 46.8-11.
 1. When man determines to do his own will, He robs God, as far as in him lies, of the Crown and Prerogative of having His will done. He rushes upon the throne of God, snatches the Crown from His head, and commits the greatest treason and injury against Him. For a man that will have his own will, attributes to himself, that which is a privilege and right of divinity itself.
 2. Hence the critical and vital lesson our Lord gives us here in this third petition, that we are to pray for the grace of self-resignation to the will of God in all things.
 - B. Hence there are several reasons why this self-resignation is *necessary* for us.
 1. First, because it's *only by this* that the glory of God is advanced.
 - a) In other words, the glory of God prayed for in the first petition consists in having the will of God done as prayed in the third petition. And moreover, since we've been created *and* redeemed to advance God's glory, it's a great sin to have a will different than God's.
 - b) The most excellent sacrifice we can offer to God *as creatures and children* is the *resignation of our will to His*. When our will is our daily burnt offering, there's no greater offering we can make and no greater way to acknowledge our entire resignation to Him and our great joy in His will being done in our lives.
 - c) Horneck (*The Crucified Jesus*), "A man can give nothing to God that is more pleasing to Him, than his will; and in giving Him his will, he gives Him all his contentment, his love, his honor, his health, and his wealth, for he leaves all these to His disposal."

2. Second, because *nothing* comes to pass without God’s providence.
 - a) Our sicknesses, poverty, exile, losses, crosses, troubles, accidents—all which foolish men ascribe to chance or fate, are all governed by His almighty hand and sent at His command. That means, to not conform our will to God’s will in these cases is a tacit denial of His providence.
 - b) Even the afflictions and miseries inflicted upon us by the devil and wicked men is from the Lord. He has no hand in their sins, but He certainly has a providential hand in the affliction itself, Job 1.12.
 - c) It is therefore one great design of the Spirit in Scripture to teach us how to refer all things, even the most displeasing and contemptible to our flesh, to God’s providence. The premier example is our own Lord in Jn 18.11 and, in service to Him, Job, His type, Job 1.20-21; 2.10. Though the Chaldeans and the devil were the instruments of his affliction, Job acknowledged God’s hand in it all and ultimately behind it all. Self-resignation to the will of God is the only way to enjoy a happy outcome in all our afflictions.
3. Third, because as nothing comes to pass without God’s providence, so whatsoever befalls us is governed by infinite Wisdom and comes upon us for wise and holy purposes.
 - a) *This* is the great motive to self-resignation. As the whole world is governed by the infinite wisdom of God, so is man in particular, and especially the one who fears Him, Ps 4.3; 1Pet 3.12. And whether God’s commands anything be done, or wills anything be suffered, it is ever and always for the noblest and holiest purposes, even His own glory and our eternal salvation.
 - b) And, truth be told, man can give no better greater demonstration of his wisdom than in denying his own judgment and will and submitting to the wisdom and will of God over him. Because man’s most excellent wisdom is utter darkness to God’s. The wisest Reason, which is God’s, can do nothing contrary to wisdom or contrary to good and right, even when His works seem utterly contrary to our reason and sense of good.
4. Fourth, because without this self-resignation, not only do we act utterly contrary to our chief end, but we act directly contrary to our own happiness.
 - a) Horneck, “He that does not resign his will to God’s will in all things, must necessarily fall into discontent when any trouble surprises him. **For** he will either look altogether upon the second causes, whereby his misery comes, which will make him quarrel with the dog and at the stone that hit him; *or* he will imagine that he might have prevented it, and that it was nothing but his own carelessness and imprudence that caused it, and that will make him fret and fume; *or* he will imagine that he has not deserved such an affliction, and that will make him repine with discontent; *or* he will compare his present afflicted state with the more happy condition of his neighbors, and that will fill him with great murmurings and complaints; *or* he will do little more than bemoan his wretchedness, and that will fill him with depressing thoughts; *or* he will measure his happiness by worldly prosperity, and that will unavoidably bring the sorrow of the world upon him. **But**, a person that has resigned his will to the will of God, can think nothing so strange as all that. *This one thing*, that *his affliction is the will of God*, will hush and quiet all his heart, compose his thoughts, assuage the bitterness and grievousness of his wounds, lessen his grief, cause cheerfulness in his soul, fortify his mind, and make him say with David, “I am mute; I do not open my mouth, for it is you who have done it” (Ps 39.9).”

III. Thomas Boston

- A. With reference to the *preceptive* will of God, this petition imports something confessed, professed, and desired.
 1. *We confess* that the will of God is not obeyed on earth as it is in heaven and that there is in all men an utter indisposition and unfitness for the will of God’s precepts, Rom 8.7.

2. We *profess* that it is the grief of our hearts that God's will is not obeyed by ourselves and others, and that He by His grace is able to reform and frame our souls to the doing of His will, Ezk 36.26.
 3. We *desire* that by His grace He would remove our spiritual blindness to know His will and our weakness and perverseness, causing us to obey and do all His will, Ps 139.23-24.
- B. With reference to the *providential* will of God, this petition imports something confessed, professed, desired, and consented.
1. We *confess* our natural aptness to quarrel, repine, and murmur against the methods and disposals of Providence, Num 14.1-4.
 2. We *profess* our grief that our hearts are so cross to Providence, Jer 31.18-19.
 3. We *desire* grace sufficient to entirely and thoroughly reform us to comply with the will of God in all things, Ps 39.9; 1Sam 3.18.
 4. We *consent* to the will of God, and a sincere yielding of our heart unto it, Acts 21.14.

Inferences

- I. These first three petitions teach us that the *priority* in all our prayers is to be the honor and glory of God, both in our lives, in His Church, and in the world.
 - A. We may, and indeed must, pray for ourselves and our many needs, asking our heavenly Father for all those things He sees fit to be good for us and which will enable us to be co-laborers in His pursuit of His own glory, His own Kingdom, and His own will in the world (as seen in the remaining petitions).
 - B. So that we're to offer all our petitions for all things whatsoever cheerfully *in the service of and subordinate to* the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.
- II. Let us pray fervently for this grace. The more we advance in the grace of self-resignation, the more perfect we are and the more happy we are.
 - A. Our Christian immaturity and childishness is seen in nothing more than in our refusal to obey God's precepts and our unwillingness to submit to God's providences. And contrariwise, this is one of the greatest marks of maturity and the key to happiness and contentment, when we are resigned to the will of God, Acts 13.22; Phil 4.6-7, 11-13.
 - B. He that lets his own will die and lets God's will live in him, he alone enjoys peace, rest, and happiness in every station of life. Nothing can disquiet him. All is well, for God's will is done.
 - C. Horneck, "All our inquietude rises from our resisting the will of God. As long as we are loath to do what God would have us do and unwilling to suffer what He would have us suffer, it cannot be otherwise but that peace will be a stranger to us. Whatever happens in the world is nothing but the accomplishment of God's designs, and the soul that would always have that done which God would have done, can wonder at nothing that happens to him, because it is his will as well as God's. However, if we are loath to resign ourselves to His will, we have reason to fear His anger; and if we resist His will, or are unwilling to submit to it, He will do His will upon us, whether we will it or not. If we cheerfully submit, He will treat us as His children; if not, He will use us as His slaves. Therefore the advice of Eliphaz in Job 22.21-22 is the safest rule we can follow, *Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart.*"