

THE THIRD PETITION

Lord's Day 49

The Lord's Prayer, stanzas 4 & 10

Reading: Psalm 103

Psalter 325, stanzas 1, 2, 3 & 4

Psalter 444, stanzas 8 & 9

Psalter 366, stanzas 1, 2 & 3

Beloved, the subject matter which we wish to consider at this time, you may find in Lord's Day 49 of our Heidelberg Catechism.

Question 124: Which is the third petition?

Answer: **"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"**; that is, grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good; that so everyone may attend to and perform the duties of his station and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.

Lord's Day 49 fixes our attention to: *the third petition*. With God's help we wish to consider three thoughts:

In the first place, *a prayer for submission*—it speaks of submitting ourselves to God.

In the second place, *a prayer for obedience*—we read of obeying without murmuring;

In the third place, *a prayer for faithfulness*—it speaks of a willingness and faithfulness in our station and calling.

Our first thought, *a prayer for submission*. The third petition of the perfect prayer reads as follows: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The first question we must look at is: What actually is *God's will*? What did the Lord Jesus refer to when He laid that prayer on the lips and in the hearts of His disciples? It is not so straightforward to say what God's will is. Let me mention a few examples from God's Word to clarify it—a few questions. Try to answer each question in your thoughts.

Did the Lord want Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, or did the Lord not want him to do this? Did Adam act according to the will of God, or did he act against God's will? The second question: Did God want Joseph to be sold as a slave and sent to Egypt—

yes or no? Did the brothers act *against* God's will or *according* to His will when they threw Joseph in the pit and later sold him to the Ishmaelites? Now a question from the New Testament: Was it or was it not the Lord's wish that Judas Iscariot would betray Him? You must have felt in your heart that your answer could be 'yes' three times, yet, you would do no injustice if you would answer 'no' three times. God willed Adam's fall. It would never have happened, if it was not God's will. But it is also true that when Adam ate from that tree he acted against the express will of God. Did the Lord want Joseph to be sold into Egypt? Yes, otherwise it never would have happened. Did the brothers act against the express will of God? Yes, they did! Thus it was with Judas' betrayal of the Lord Jesus. By doing this Judas acted against all the commandments of God. He sinned against God; he sinned against his neighbor and he sinned against himself. Yet, on the other hand, it is undoubtedly true that Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus according to "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

Now we can understand why our old theologians made a distinction between the will of God's *decree* and the will of God's *command*. This is not a form of subtlety, with which the old theologians are reproached today. The contention is that such a distinction is not even found in the Bible. But that is not true. According to God's holy Word we have to make a distinction between the will of His decree, which we also call God's *secret* will, and the will of His command, which we also call God's *revealed* will. If we do not make this distinction, then we will never understand that God's Word at one time, when it says that God wills something, means that God has *decreed* something and at another time that He has *commanded* something. We must remember that God has no two wills that compete with each other! That can be so with *us*. The people of Israel were reproached by Elijah that they "halted between two opinions". Sometimes conflicting desires can live in our soul; but God's will is *one* perfect will.

The will of God's command and the will of His decree are not in conflict with each other. Even though there might be, in our opinion, an unsolvable contradiction, yet it is so, that the Lord has but *one* Divine will. We have to remember that part of God's will is hidden from us (the will of His decree) and that part of this will is revealed to us (the will of His command). Moses said that the hidden things are for the Lord our God and the revealed things are for us and for our children. That also pertains to the will of the Lord.

"Thy will be done". Right away the question arises: Which will is meant here? Does the third petition speak about the will of God's decree or about the will of His command?—mostly about *the will of His command*. That becomes clear when you read the answer of the instructor. The answer says: *and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good*. You realize that we cannot obey the will of God's decree. The will of God's decree is developed and is carried out, whether we want this or not. It was the old church-father Cyprianus who put it into words,

briefly and to the point. His statement is quoted in the Book of Treasures of Ursinus. He says: “In this prayer we do not ask whether *God* will do what He wills, but whether *we* may do what He wills.”

And yet, I would not want to *exclude* the will of God’s decree totally. Although the full emphasis in the explanation of our Heidelberg Catechism is based upon the will of His command we cannot exclude the secret will of God.

It has been so beautifully put into verse:

*Thy will be done, Thy will alone,
On earth below as round Thy throne.*

Does this have to do with the will of decree or with the will of command? It has to do with both.

*Thy precepts are all wise and true;
Thy holy will we pray to do.
May all then humbly stand in awe*

These lines have to do with the will of God’s decree. But when it is followed by:

And gladly keep thy perfect law.

Then it refers again to the will of God’s command. Can you hear how explicitly the matter is comprehended in our rhymed version? It also refers to the will of God’s command.

In the first words of the answer to question 124 we read about the will of God’s decree: “Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will.” Do we also have a will? Do we still have a will? Did we not lose our will in Paradise? No! We remained rational and moral beings—that is to say, creatures with an understanding, with reasoning and with a conscience, with morals, and a knowledge of good and evil. Our will, which at one time was free, has become enslaved. Erasmus, the great humanist of the sixteenth century, once wrote a book about the free will. Luther wrote a booklet over against this book about ‘the slavish will’. Our will has become enslaved and is sold under sin. Our will places itself over against the will of God in everything, also over against the will of God’s decree. Our will opposes itself in everything against the will of God’s decree and against the will of His command. We still maintained a will, we did not become animals, but our will became totally corrupt. We still have a will, but we keep this will over against God’s will. It is because of our wretched state in the Fall of man, that we in every respect do not wish to do what God wants us to do.

We are not in agreement with the will of God's decree. That reveals itself when the hand of the Lord and God's counsel leads us in ways that go against flesh and blood. Then we notice what enmity lives in our heart over against God's ways. But our will also is opposed to the will of God's command, against His express command. We do not recognize the Lord anymore, not in His conduct or in His command.

We do not like to hear people speak about this. Many would rather speak about our helplessness than about our unwillingness, but believe me; it is based on God's Word when we say that our unwillingness to serve God is just as great as our helplessness. The Lord says in His word that we *will* not come unto Him that we might have life in His Name. Christ has said of Jerusalem " ...how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." In one of the parables the laborers said of the son that the King sent to them: "We will not have this man to reign over us". We place our will over against God's will.

"Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will." That is the prayer of the new life. The life of grace begins by falling prostrate before God. We find this so clearly illustrated in Saul of Tarsus when, before the gates of Damascus, his first question was: "Who art Thou Lord?" when that heavenly light made him fall to the earth. And then his second question was: "Lord what wilt Thou have me to do?" Immediately our own will begins to renounce itself. Is there anything more difficult then to renounce our own will? Boys and girls, you also have your bosom sins; you know what things you love to do of which you know deep down in your heart that it is sin in God's eyes. And now the Lord demands from you that you break with those bosom sins and never commit them again.

Then our will comes to stand over against God's will. Then we experience the infinite hatred we have against God, for we will never renounce our own will. You know yourself fill in what you are attached to, what you cherish, what you love. Boys and girls, you know yourself how you spend your time, what you love to do most of all, those thing that are against God's Word and against God's will. Then that feeling wells up inside that we will never give up those things. Then that Divine will stands over against our will. Then we perceive how our state of death triumphs and how powerful our enmity is towards God. Even if we get to be a thousand years old, we will never let go of sin, except the Lord with His Spirit and with that awe-inspiring power of His Divine majesty comes along and mollifies and humbles our heart. Then it goes of itself. Then there is a bowing before God, then there is a surrendering unto God. Then all sins are destroyed. Then we would like to destroy sin with root and branch. Then we begin to hate, avoid and flee from sin.

"Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will." These words point especially to the will of God's command, but *also* to the will of God's decree. We wish to say something

about the last part first. In the lives of God's people there comes not only an asking: "What wilt Thou have me to do?" no, there also comes a *bowing* under God's guidance. It can cause much strife *before* they are in agreement with God's guidance in their lives. I have to think of Asaph in Psalm 73. He was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked and had to say that he was chastened every morning. But when God took him by the right hand and brought him into His sanctuary, he became as a beast before God. Do you know how Asaph came forth out of the sanctuary then?:

Thy counsel through my earthly way

Shall guide me and control,

And then to glory afterward

Thou wilt receive my soul.

Then he was in agreement with the will of God's decree concerning his life. Then from the cups full of water that have been pressed out of him, he does not wish to have anything taken away, not even a drop. Occasionally the Lord will reveal something of the will of His decree unto His children. That does not happen very often. The will of God's decree is hidden from us. And yet we read in God's Word that the Lord said: "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" We also read that the Lord will make known His secrets unto the prophets. At times the Lord would take one of His children apart and He would reveal something of the will of His decree regarding world events. This can happen, though we need to be wary and cautious with this. I have to think of Paul when he was on his way to Jerusalem after his mission journeys. He came to Caesarea and lodged with Philip the evangelist, who had four daughters who did prophesy. There came an old prophet from Judea, named Agabus. That man took Paul's girdle, bound his own hands and feet and said: "Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Then there arose great confusion in the house of Philip, and the disciples did their best to change Paul's mind from continuing his journey to Jerusalem. After all, the Lord had revealed something of the will of His decree! But we read that Paul said: "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Thy will be done", also the will of God's decree. We read in Acts 21: "and when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, the will of the Lord be done." That is being subject to the will of God's decree, being subject to God's hidden counsel. What a beneficial fruit in the life of the Church!

Our second thought, a *prayer for obedience*. "Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will." This Lord's Day focuses particularly on the will of God's command, because now the words *obey Thy will* are used. We have mentioned

already: when it involves the will of God's decree, it does not apply to obedience. We can never disobey that will—nobody can.

Jehovah's counsel stands secure,

His purposes of heart endure,

For evermore they stand.

When we consider the will of God's decree, then it only concerns being subject unto it and being in agreement with it. But now in our second thought it relates to the will of God's command. Then the instructor asks God to grant us, that we may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey His will.

You will say: "How do we know what the will of God's command is?" The will of God's command is held forth unto us every Sunday morning—they are the Ten Commandments. The will of God's command is recorded in God's Holy Word, in the Bible. This is where we become acquainted with God's will. It is very clear and distinct. The will of God's command says: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." That is the will of God's command. "Thy will be done. (...) Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good."

An unconverted person will never do this. The Lord places His will over against our will. That is true for all of us, great or small, young or old. The Lord is very clear in this. Also today the Lord says to every one of us that we have to break with sin. Boys and girls, you may not go to the tavern; you may not give your heart to sports. You may not give your heart and your time to television and to the filth or the senseless pastime on the internet. You may not throw away your heart to drinking or to pop music. Boy, girl, man or woman, I want your heart. I want you to live before Me. I want you to love, fear and serve Me. I want you to walk in My commandments. The Lord is clear in that. That commandment, God's revealed will, also comes unto us today, pious or impious, religious or irreverent, young or old. Thy will, the will of Thy command, Thy revealed will *be done*: "Grant that we and all men may renounce our own will."

Were you ever able to *renounce your own will*? Were you ever able to bow under God, so that you began to abhor sin? So that you began to hate sin and flee from them? Do you know when that happens? That only happens when we begin to see that God is of more value to us than the whole world. Slavish fear, the fear of hell and of death will never convert us unto God. Never. But if we may see something of the love of God in our life, how worthy He is to be loved, served, admired and feared, then the bands of sin break in a miraculous way, without us realizing how. Then we fall in love with God in a holy way, with His service, with His institutions

and with His Word. When people fall in love they can give up everything else. Thus it is in nature. But it is a thousand times more so in grace, when a sinner may fall in love with the fear of God and with the communion with God, and with the service of the Lord. Then it goes of itself. Then those brass fetters of sin slip from our hands. I'm not saying that sin *also* gives you a bill of divorcement at that moment, but you give sin a bill of divorcement, even if there were no heaven for a reward or hell for punishment. Then it is only because God is worthy.

Have you ever perceived something of that desirableness and of that worthiness to serve God? If we have never seen anything of that, then we are like the oldest son in the parable, who was so angry when his father killed the fatted calf for his younger brother. He said: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee (...) yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." Have we ever seen something of that? Then there will also be a submission. Then we will renounce our own will and obey God's will, which is only good. We read that God said to Abraham that he had to go to the land of Moriah and offer his only son Isaac, whom he loved. Oh, how can that be? Abraham had waited twenty five years for this son. He received Isaac when he was one hundred years old, and now the Lord said that he was going to take that boy again in such a terrible manner. Abraham has to sacrifice him on mount Moriah. Ah, the Lord had not decreed that Isaac would die there on that mountain. In the will of His decree God had decreed that Isaac would live. But in the will of His command the Lord ordered Abraham to go to the land of Moriah. Do you know what the Lord wanted to know? I am speaking as a man now, because the Lord knew it already. But do you know what the Lord wanted to know?—who Abraham loved the most: whether he loved the Lord more than his child. God wanted to try Abraham. It took Abraham three days to make this journey to mount Moriah. There on Mount Moriah, when Abraham stood with his sword lifted up over his son and revealed by his actions that God was more important to him, even more so than his own child, the Lord said: "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me." You see, that is "Thy will be done (...), without murmuring obey Thy will."

We also read in this answer, *we and all men*. Does this answer not touch you? So that is not just: Lord, grant that I may renounce my own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, but the instructor wants to say: "Lord, Thou art worthy that the whole world would obey Thee." How can the instructor say this? Because of the words '*on earth*' in the third petition. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Not: as it is done in my life, not: as it is done in my heart, not: as it is done in my family, but: Thy will be done *on earth*. In the third petition the Lord wants to teach His children that the earth would be filled with God's fear, as the waters cover the bottom of the sea. We perceive a longing in these words—*we and all men*. If the Lord receives the highest place in our personal life, and there is maybe a beginning of that renouncing of your own will, and an obeying of God's will, then it grieves you that the earth is

filled with violence and that not everyone fears the Lord. The Preacher says: “Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”

The church may never relinquish the thought that the Lord has a right to *all* people. We have a tendency, especially in these evil days, to withdraw ourselves into our own little corner. We are thankful if we may keep our own schools; if we may keep our own church, if people don't bother us too much and if we may, in our own little circle try to live according to God's Word and God's ordinances. But that is a temptation for which the church may not fall. Actually something echoes here of what we read in article 36 of our Confession of Faith: “We and all people.” God has a perfect right to the earth and to the world, which are His, in all her fullness. Therefore God's Church has to exhort a world, sunken in guilt and sin, to return to God and to keep His commandments. Let there be no silence among those who make mention of the Lord, even in the terrible times in which we live, when our people permanently part with God and with His Word, (that is how it appears). Then God's Church must witness to the world: “Return, return!”

Today, in the Netherlands, euthanasia is lawfully regulated. Someone who cannot see the value of his life anymore and wants to ‘step out of it’ (as they word it) may appeal to the doctor. There is a faction in our society that wants to break down our schools and that want to force us to place teachers in front of our students who mock with God's Word and practice an ungodly lifestyle. Then it will penetrate our churches. We will then be forced to have women in the office of elder or deacon, punishable by persecution. These are not gloomy assumptions that I present to you. Observe for yourself the signs of the times—they continue. Then it can be so tempting for us to back into a corner. As long as they do not harm us there... And as long as we can keep ourselves in the safe shelter of the church and we may still hear the pure preaching. Then we may go outside the church but no longer speak. Not speak up anymore in the meeting halls of our government, or in the press, not speak up anymore in public... No, says our Book of Comfort: “We and all men.” That will become more and more difficult in the future. Satan becomes more and more insolent in the United States and Canada and God's Church becomes more and more fearful and afraid. May the Lord give us strength to that end. “We and all men.”—In the church and in the world. God has a right to our nation. God has a right to our government. God has a right to our country.

Our third thought, *a prayer for faithfulness*. We have come to the words: “That so everyone may attend to and perform the duties of his station and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.” This is what our Book of Comfort says in connection to the addition of the third petition, those familiar words: “*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” What does the Lord mean to say with these words? Sometimes it is explained as if the Lord would say: “Thy will be done in heaven *and* on earth.” But that is foolishness. We do not

have to pray whether God's will may be done in heaven, do we? No, we do not have to pray for that. But it says: *on earth as it is* in heaven. What did the Lord Jesus mean to say with this when He taught His disciples this prayer? How Ursinus and Olevianus sensed this to perfection: as Thy will is done in heaven, in a perfect way, that something of that may reflect on earth, in our lives, in our church life, in our secular life. Yes, as in heaven Thy will is done without any opposition, grant that we may be like those faithful ambassadors before Thy throne, who diligently wait upon the Words of Thy mouth. We read of this in Psalm 103: 20: "Bless the LORD, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word."

"As Thy will is done in heaven." Who are they that do God's will in heaven? In the first place the anointed Prince, Who sits on the right hand of His Father. He accomplished the decree, because the pleasure and counsel of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. Do you know who also do God's will in heaven? That is the blessed Church, the saved. They may experience what it is to obey God's will without disagreement. There Jonah does not flee from the presence of the LORD; there Moses does not disagree with the Lord, there no objections are raised against God's will, but there they serve Him day and night in His temple. There they serve God with all their heart. Also the angels who remained standing do God's will. And it was those *angels* the Lord Jesus meant in particular, when He laid this prayer on the lips of His disciples. The angels! In Hebrews 1 they are called ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. They do His will faultlessly before the throne. The petitioner asks if something of that faithful service of the angels may be revealed in his life.

Let us sing of that from Psalter 444, the verses 8 & 9.

"As the angels do in heaven"—thus our forefathers explain the addition to the third petition: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The angels in heaven serve the Lord faultlessly. It is their delight to be at His beck and call. We have sung of it from Psalter 444 verse 8, "*That do His word, obedient to His call.*" Those angels stand there by thousands and millions before God's throne. They all focus on *one* thing. They do not look at each other, but the angels look at the hand of the Lord. When the hand of the heavenly Master moves for a moment, then they are ready to do His will with delight. So perfect. There they go! No one sees them—no one hears them, but they are there. They carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. Or they take one of God's children and carry them in their hands, lest they dash their feet against a stone. Or they go down to earth and come into the garden of Gethsemane to speak with their Prince and Commander about His coming death and resurrection. There they go. Just *one* hint from the hand of the Lord and they roll away the stone from the grave and sit upon it and tell the glad tidings to the sorrowing women. There they go and sing by thousands in the dark fields of Bethlehem about God's honor, of His good pleasure, and about peace that will come on the earth because of the Child that was born.

Do you see it? It is complete! Ah, the suppliant says, Lord, may something of this show in my life. That I might be similar to those spotless spirits before Thy throne. So often it is different. My life is full of murmuring and disagreement. So often I am in conflict with Thee.

And then the instructors become very practical. Then they begin to speak about the duties of our *station* and our *calling*. Not everyone has a calling, perhaps not all of us have a station or a calling, the way we sit here, but we all have a task, also our children. The instructor means *the place where God placed you*. It is now the desire of this suppliant to be there, where God has placed him, whether it is in an office as servant of the Word, as elder, as deacon, or whether it is your occupation, as carpenter, mason, nurse, housewife or whether it be as child in school, to daily show something of that pure, spotless image of the angels before God's throne. To be as willing and as faithful as the angels. Then you realize that there is no place for those who go on strike. That there is no place for slackers, for sighing and murmuring workers. In official work there is no room for sighing, only to do the work faithfully and willingly. The angels were not only willing to sing God's praises to the shepherds, but they were also willing when one of them, in the dark of night in Egypt, had to kill all the first born and when they had to kill 185.000 men of the army of Sennacherib king of Assyria. They were *also* willing at that time. But now to willingly remain in the place where God has placed you, in difficult ways and in prosperous ways and be prepared to accept the place that God has given you. That is something of the practice of sanctification. Often it is so different in our lives—then we are not satisfied with our occupation; then we are not in agreement with our work. Then we go to our job every morning sighing and sullen and at night we come home sighing. There are many people that do their work in this way. Yet the Form for the Confirmation of Marriage speaks of a calling wherein God hath set you. What experiences have we of this? Young people, do you complain when you have to go to school. Do you do your homework with many complaints? So often we are not faithful and willing. What reluctance there is at times in the heart of man against the work that lies upon our shoulders. What an aversion to the place where God set us. We can be so jealous of others, who in our eyes, have work that is so much better and nicer... this gives so much disloyalty and so much unwillingness. How little we then show of the image of the angels before the throne! Sometimes, when we go to our work, we have more of the devil in our heart than of the angels.

But when the fear of God may show in our lives, then we have a longing in our daily life, in our daily work, and in our office to renounce our own will, and without murmuring go the way pointed out by the Lord. Then we may bow at times to the words: "*And Thou wilt guide my feet, by Thy own counsel sweet.*" What is left then?—only guilt! What is our life, when we compare ourselves with the angels? Guilt and more guilt! The most exercised among us will have to say: Lord, I do not resemble the angels at all. So often I carry the sign of the other angel, the one who wanted to be equal with God, and who was averse to Thy commandments.

We have spoken about the angels. Their ways and actions are an illustration, a mandate, a mirror for God's Church. That is true, but... the angels cannot *comfort* us when we are burdened with all our debts, also regarding this petition.

But then I want to direct you to Another, to that blessed Surety. We may not leave from here without having pointed Him out to you. Oh, how this Surety had to run that race for thirty three years in the smoke of sin here on earth and carry the anger of His Father—and why? To redeem from death hell-worthy ones, depraved ones, those who have never sought or asked after Him, and to possess them as His bride, and to again adorn to perfection the honor of His Father. And when He stands at the end of the way, and He is in the garden of Gethsemane, then the fear of death overwhelms Him, the anguish of hell, and the bands of darkness. Then His human nature feared for that dreadful course that He had to take upon Himself. Then He said: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." "Thy will be done." That willing Surety, Who endured the cross and despised the shame. In the letter to the Philippians Paul writes that He is more than the angels, because the angels are always obedient before the throne, but the angels never had to suffer and die. But He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

People of God, seek much for His communion. By faith seek to live out of Him, so that something of His willingness may reveal itself in your life and He may be formed in you, also in your office, also in your calling. *Amen.*