

# The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

## Chapter 24: The Lord's Prayer, Part 2

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### The Third Petition

Just as the first petition leads logically to the second, so the third logically follows the second. The coming of the kingdom is intimately connected with God's will being done: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). "The will of God to which reference is made is clearly his 'revealed' will, expressed in his law. It is that will which is done in heaven, but not yet to any great extent on earth. On the other hand, the will of God's 'decree' or 'plan from eternity' is always being realized both in heaven and on earth (Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11), and cannot be the subject of prayer."<sup>1</sup>

This petition tells us a number of important things. First, the gospel of Jesus is not antinomian, but rather results in a greater obedience to God's precepts. Paul says that the purpose of his ministry in word and deed was "to make the Gentiles obedient" (Rom. 15:18). As the gospel leavens society and people believe in the Savior, they are renewed by the Holy Spirit and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. The coming of the kingdom means that people are justified by the Redeemer and are delivered from the pollution of sin (cf. Rom. 6:5-7). As the kingdom progresses and the earth is leavened with the gospel, the earth will become more and more like heaven, for people will be willingly subjecting themselves to God's authority.

In the Garden of Eden, Eve rejected God's will in order to follow the desires of her own heart. This resulted in the fall of the human race. The essence of sin and rebellion against God is human autonomy in ethics: men would determine for themselves what is good and what is evil. Because of sin and depravity men do not want to be told what to do by God. Thus they invent from their own imaginations false religions, erroneous philosophies and humanistic laws. They suppress the true knowledge of God in every aspect of their lives. With the death and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the kingdom with power, all of this rebellion is being progressively turned back. The coming of the kingdom means the coming of the King's laws, statutes and ordinances. To embrace the King involves bowing the knee to Him and His law-Word.

Second, the more that people on earth submit to the Redeemer and obey His laws, the more that earth will be like heaven—peaceful, loving, harmonious and joyful. The idea that is common in evangelical circles that Messiah's kingship will not be victorious in time and on earth; that God's moral precepts in the Older Covenant have nothing to do with our day; that the coming of the kingdom is wholly future and that there is no point in polishing brass on a sinking ship, is totally contrary to the Lord's prayer. So contrary, in fact, that the older, more consistent dispensationalists believed that the Lord's prayer had nothing to do with Christians. They believed it was for a Jewish remnant during the distant future "great tribulation" period. Such a

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<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 331.

view is so absurd and obviously unscriptural that even most modern dispensationalists regard it as a fantasy.

Third, this petition teaches us the importance of teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God in churches. If the earth is to be more like heaven by the observance of God's will, then it is important that the people of God have a good understanding of Scripture, theology and biblical ethics. The idea that is common in our day that doctrine and a deep study of God's moral law are unimportant is the exact opposite of the intent of this third petition. How can earth be like heaven without heavenly doctrine? How can people live according to God's will when they do not bother to know what that will is? God requires obedience with faith and faith requires knowledge of God's Word.

The flip side of this aspect of the third petition is that doctrine, ethics and worship (ordinances) that are not from heaven; that are not thoroughly based on God's Word are not in accord with this petition. The angels in heaven do exactly what God has commanded without wavering. They do not depart to the right or the left. They also do not add to or detract from God's revealed will. There are no ceremonies or ordinances in heaven that have been created by their imaginations. When men make up their own ethics, theology, ceremonies or worship ordinances, they are working against God's heavenly will. They are working directly against the third petition. "As a watch is set by the dial, so our obedience is right when it goes by the sundial of the word. If obedience has not the word for its rule, it is not doing God's will, but our own; it is will worship.... There is in many a strange itch after superstition: they love a gaudy religion and are more for the pomp of worship than the purity; which cannot be pleasing to God. To thrust human inventions into sacred things, is doing our will, not God's; and he will say... 'Who hath required this at your hand?' Isa.i.12"<sup>2</sup> If we are to live consistently with the third petition, then we must obey God's will—sincerely, consistently, promptly, fervently without complaint and we must be exceedingly careful not to corrupt that will with our own ideas or human pragmatism. If God's name is to be hallowed, then we must reverence His law and the worship that He has instituted. The kingdom of God can only advance when the church obeys God's will and frees itself from human traditions, superstition, will-worship and the trinkets of Babylon. "It is the ardent desire of the person who sincerely breathes the Lord's Prayer that the Father's will shall be obeyed as *completely, heartily, and immediately* on earth as this is constantly being done by all the inhabitants of heaven."<sup>3</sup>

## The Fourth Petition

As we move from the first three petitions, which regard God, His kingdom and will, to the second three petitions, which deal with believers and their particular needs, we need once again to point out the comprehensive nature of these petitions. They are designed to deal with all of our physical and spiritual needs. They show our utter dependence upon God for everything. They give us the structure to deal with all areas of life as long we fill in all the details and flesh out these requests. These words which are few and simple take in all our daily needs. Daily bread, daily mercy and daily protection are exactly what every man needs. He who possesses them is truly rich in God's sight. He who is wise and spiritual will not be ashamed to pray for them every day. "The child of God, no doubt, is fully justified before God, and all things are

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, 157.

<sup>3</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 331.

working for his good. But it is the life of true faith to apply daily for fresh supplies of all our wants. Though the promises are all ours, our Father likes His children to remind Him of them.”<sup>4</sup>

The first request of the second division regards what is necessary for our bodily existence on this earth: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt. 6:11). Luke’s account reads, “Give us day by day our daily bread” (11:3). Bread in the ancient world was the staff of life. It was and still is in many cultures the foundation of the people’s daily sustenance. Without the wheat and barley harvest, starvation would have been inevitable. Thus, it is proper to regard “bread” in this petition as representative of food in general. In fact, “bread” should be regarded as a term for all of our physical needs in life. There are a number of significant things about this petition.

First, the term “bread” stands for the basic necessities of life and not the luxuries of this world. By this, Jesus is teaching his disciples to be temperate in their desires and requests for material necessities. Because our physical well-being is necessary to serve God and attend to our spiritual well-being, we need to pray for the necessary material supports of this life. Contrary to the modern prosperity gospel, which is syncretistic and heretical, we do not see our Lord telling His disciples to pray for riches, luxuries and mansions. Rather, they are instructed to pray for “bread.” Since the 1950s in America, a dangerous teaching within the Charismatic movement has arisen called the Word of Faith movement (also known as Positive Confession), which teaches that the central purpose of Christianity is not spirituality, but rather is prosperity (i.e. physical, financial and material blessings). People are told that if they have genuine faith and they audibly speak their request (actually, these are more a demand or order than a request), that God *must* give them what they want. “Word faith writings carry such titles like ‘How to Write Your Own Ticket with God,’ ‘Godliness is Profitable,’ ‘The Laws of Prosperity,’ ‘God’s Creative Power Will Work for You,’ ‘Releasing the Ability of God Through Prayer,’ ‘God’s Formula for Success and Prosperity,’ ‘God’s Master Key to Prosperity,’ and ‘Living in Divine Prosperity.’”<sup>5</sup> Many evangelicals have adapted the prosperity teaching, omitting many of its most crass and heretical aspects, yet retaining the central idea that God exists to serve, pamper and glorify us instead of the other way around.

The Lord’s prayer, which is the clearest, most organized and systematic method of prayer in Scripture, gives not the slightest indication that God wants all of us to be rich. In fact, it is clear that we pray for basic necessities so that we can serve and glorify God. This makes perfect sense, for the Bible does not teach that everyone should try to get rich or that great riches are automatically a blessing from God. Paul even warned Timothy to withdraw himself from teachers “who suppose that godliness is a means of gain”; that we should be content with just having “food and clothing”; that “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare...for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:5, 8, 10; cf. Jude 11-16; 2 Pet. 2:1-19). Those who teach that prayer is a hotline to riches and great possessions are simply catering to covetousness, which is a sin of the flesh (cf. Eph. 5:5-7). We should heed the words of Agur who prayed, “Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God” (Pr. 30:8-9).

Second, the Lord’s prayer, in both Matthew and Luke, emphasizes that we pray for what we need daily or day by day. We are to ask for what is needed for each particular day. This is consistent with our Savior’s teaching on worry in the same sermon where Jesus says, “Do not worry about tomorrow” (6:34). Christians are to live by faith in God in the present and must trust

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<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1858] 1986), 2:5.

<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 266.

His divine providence and goodness every single day. This does not mean that we do not consider the future or make plans and preparations for it, but that we fervently serve God and commune with Him in the present. That is, we do not neglect present duties for a hypothetical faithfulness in the future. We must trust God for our material needs each day. God gave the Israelites their allotment of manna in the wilderness each particular day instead of in one large sum. The manna could not even be stored for future use. This obviously was designed to teach them to daily trust God. We are to daily “renew the desire of our souls toward God, as the wants of our bodies are renewed; as duly as the day comes, we must pray to our heavenly Father, and reckon we could as well go a day without meat, as without prayer.”<sup>6</sup>

This point teaches us a very important lesson about the Christian life. The means of grace and sanctification are not something that happen in one moment. Believers are not zapped and given a second work of grace or entire sanctification all at once, but are to learn to practice godliness and dependence upon God every day of their lives. God wants us to learn to continually lean on Him and progress in the faith a little each day. This shows that Jehovah likes us to come to Him. He likes to listen to us and answer our prayers daily. This demonstrates God’s love; that He truly is a Father to us and genuinely has our best interests in mind. “The God who made heaven and earth, and orders the stars in their courses, likes to hear our lisping praises, likes to hear our petitions. That is because God is love; and that is why, though He knows all about our needs, it gives Him great pleasure, if we can so put it, when He sees us coming to Him to ask for our daily bread.”<sup>7</sup>

Another important thing to note regarding “this day” is that it teaches us to live every day as if it were our last. How would you act if you believed that this day was your last on earth? Would you be careless about your walk with Christ? Would you spend your last day indulging yourself? We really have no way of knowing whether we shall live tomorrow or one week or many years. If we treat every day as a possible final day then we will live a life of mortification now. We will be sober and serious about our walk with the Savior now. There are multitudes of people who always promised themselves that they would repent and serve the Redeemer tomorrow. But tomorrow never came. Don’t be a self-deluded fool. Believe in Christ and bow to Him now, before tomorrow. Do not play Russian roulette with your own soul.

Third, this prayer is an acknowledgement that God, and God alone, gives us the necessities of life. In our economic life, we are to look to God and not man or the state as our provider. In modern times communists, socialists and welfare statistes teach men that they need to trust in the benevolent father-state for all their needs. They want men to believe that the state is sovereign and has the ability to provide through government manipulation and controls of the economy. In most nations people have largely bought into this deception. They willingly bow the knee to the coercion of the state and praise the state’s bureaucratic wisdom as the root cause of prosperity. When the economy fails, the administration in power takes the blame and is condemned by the general populace as an incompetent deity. Simply put, faith in God and His law-Word (which greatly limits the power of the state and gives economic freedom under law) has been replaced by faith in man (i.e. faith in the economic experts and governmental bureaucrats). This is a form of idolatry that is little different than the apostate Israelites praying to Baal deities for rain and crops. Only God can truly bless His people. God alone is the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17). A people that trust in God will not worship the state.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:75.

<sup>7</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2:70.

“The greatest of men must be beholden to the mercy of God for their *daily bread*.”<sup>8</sup> The modern secular humanist who, following the enlightenment, looks to the state as the predestinator and provider of mankind does not pray “Thy kingdom come,” but rather “*My kingdom come*.” One’s view on the provisions of life reveals ultimately one’s view of God.

Fourth, this petition for our daily physical needs tells us something very important about prayer as it relates to valid secondary agencies. When we pray for bread we do not sit around and wait for bread to miraculously appear on our doorstep. If we did, we would all starve. Instead, we pray for God to meet all of our needs and then go out and work diligently to provide for our families. There are certain areas of life such as the spread of the kingdom, personal sanctification and the development of our economic life that we are totally dependent upon God, yet God expects us to work hard and use every lawful means available to succeed in these areas. Christian faith looks to God and gives Him the full credit for success in these areas; yet, in these spheres of life, faith results in good works, in diligent labor. “God’s bounty and man’s toil must combine.”<sup>9</sup> When it comes to these basic physical necessities, prayer without appropriate work is ineffectual. When we pray this prayer, we recognize two basic realities—that, without Jehovah, we can achieve nothing and that, without our effort and obedience to God’s word in these areas, God will do nothing for us. Consequently, we must constantly pray for God to bend our hearts and cause us to obey.

Fifth, this petition is wider than our own selves, for we ask God to give bread to “us,” not to “me” only. As we pray for our own needs, we are also to focus on the needs of others, especially Christians. There are many believers in this world who live in situations where food, shelter and clothing are difficult to come by because of poverty and oppressive civil governments. We need to include these brethren in our prayers. The corporate nature of this petition teaches us not to be self-centered or selfish in the way we pray. It reminds us that we are part of a wide body of believers all connected by the blood of Christ and the Spirit of God. We pray and work diligently so that we will be in a position not only to take care of our own families, but also to help others.

Sixth, this prayer for our physical, bodily needs is an implicit refutation of Gnostic, neo-platonic and dualistic systems of philosophy that regard the physical realm as inherently evil and unworthy of any regard whatsoever. God’s creation, which is physical as well as spiritual, is good and ultimately will be redeemed by Jesus Christ. The salvation that our Lord wrought is comprehensive and even includes our physical bodies. On the final day, our dead bodies will be resurrected, transformed and glorified. “The Bible contradicts the idealistic, spiritualist axiom. It does so in every respect—cosmologically, anthropologically, and eschatologically—and with all the ethical implications.”<sup>10</sup> The Savior rose from the dead in the same physical body in which He died, so that believers, both body and soul, would be forever redeemed. Consequently, we need to respect our bodies and take good care of them. Various forms of asceticism where the body is starved, whipped and mistreated flow from Greek paganism and not Scripture.

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:75.

<sup>9</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:219.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Milic Lockman, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 86.

## The Fifth Petition

Those who hallow God's name must trust Him for physical as well as spiritual necessities. Thus they are to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (v. 12). Verses 14 and 15 contain some explanatory comments on this petition: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Note, that this petition is connected to the preceding one by the conjunction "and," indicating that the confession of sins should be the daily routine of believers. Consequently, Christians should view daily confession and pardon as just as crucial to one's well-being and personal happiness as having sufficient food and clothing.

Before we consider the elements of this petition, we need to answer an objection that is often raised in connection with it. If we are justified (i.e. declared righteous in the heavenly court) the moment that we believe in Jesus and all of our sins—past, present and future—have been washed away, forgiven or pardoned and the perfect righteousness or law-keeping of Christ has been imputed to us, then why do we pray for our sins to be forgiven repeatedly throughout life? There are a number of reasons why we are to pray for forgiveness every day.

First, believers in both the Old and New Testaments are commanded to confess their sins. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Pr. 28:13; cf. Josh. 7:19; Ps. 51:1-3). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). "No prayer of mortal men could be complete without confession of sin. Prayer which does not seek for pardon will fail, as the Pharisee's prayer did. Let proud men boast as they please, those who are in Christ's kingdom will always pray, 'Forgive us our debts.'"<sup>11</sup>

Second, although we were justified the moment that we believed and all of our sins were imputed to Christ on the cross, we still must *experience* daily forgiveness because we continue to sin in time. From one perspective, we are already fully redeemed, for Jesus has paid the price in full by His atoning death. But from another perspective, we *experience* the merits of Jesus' death daily. When God views us judicially He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ. Yet, He requires us to acknowledge and confess every known sin as it occurs in our lives. We need to *experience* the forgiveness of sin each day. Our faith in Christ is not a one-time act, but continues through life and is always clinging to Him and depending on Him for forgiveness.

Third, that our Lord's merits are applied to us through time is demonstrated by the Savior's work as a high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. John writes, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn. 2:1). If a believer commits a sin, he still remains a child of God. However, the Holy Spirit is grieved by sin (Eph. 4:30) and a believer's fellowship with the Father is disrupted. Thus, we need to acknowledge our sin and appeal to God through our Advocate—Jesus Christ. Confession is an expression of faith in Christ's blood and high priestly work. It is crucial to our sanctification, as well as our assurance of salvation. When we confess, we trust in the completed, perfect work of Christ, that "He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 2:2). Ryle writes, "The justification of every believer no doubt is a finished and perfect work, and one admitting of no degrees, no increase and no diminution. The moment a man believes on Christ, he is as much justified as St. Paul or St. John, and cannot be more justified if he lives to the age of Methuselah. But all this is no reason why he should not

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<sup>11</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 68.

daily confess his sins, and daily seek fresh application of Christ's blood to his conscience. In fact, it is the life of faith to do so."<sup>12</sup>

## Forgive Our Debts

As we look to the first part of this petition, we need to examine the meaning of the phrase "forgive us our debts." Therefore, we need to answer two questions. What is meant by the word "debts"? And what does it mean to forgive?

The word translated "debts" (*opheilema*) is based on the original Aramaic word spoken by Jesus *hobha* which refers to "debt" or "sin." "In the ancient Greek *opheilema* is common for actual legal debts as in Rom. 4:4."<sup>13</sup> Luke, writing to a predominantly Gentile audience, uses the word "sins" (Greek, *hamartias*). *Hamartias* emphasizes that we have "missed the mark" of God's perfect standard, while the word "debts" focuses on the fact that when we sin we do not render to God what is due to Him. All men owe to God a perfect obedience. It is called a "debt" because, when we sin, we are guilty of violating God's majesty and holiness. Sin is a serious thing because, by it, we act as if we were not under subjection to God. Sins are called debts "because on account of them we owe satisfaction to the law and justice of God: the proper debts we owe to God are love, obedience, and gratitude; and in default of these, we owe the debt of punishment."<sup>14</sup>

In our Lord's further explanation of this petition in verses 14-15, He uses the general term "trespasses," which literally means a "a false step." (This may explain why the Anglican Church mistranslates the words "debts" as "trespasses" in their prayer book.) The Bible is crystal clear that sins, which are in a spiritual sense debts owed to God, can never be paid by our own works or contrition (see Rom. 3:23; Mt. 16:26). Everyone who does not look to Christ must pay for their sins in hell. The payment, however, and the sinning in hell never ends (cf. Mt. 18:8, 34; 25:46; Mk. 9:43-49; 2 Th. 1:7-9; Jude 6; Rev. 14:11; 19:3; 20:10). The word "debts" or "sins" is plural because we repeatedly fall short of God's perfect moral law in our lives.

The word, "debt," teaches us a number of things about prayer. First, we approach God with a deep sense of our own unworthiness. By acknowledging our sins, we assume a position of humility and need. In and of ourselves, apart from the person and work of Christ, we know that we have no claim upon God and we are totally unworthy of God's friendship and blessings. When people approach God with a proud spirit, as if God owes them something, then they pray not like a Christian, but like a Pharisee.

Second, we approach God with a full realization that our guilty, sinful condition is real. The Lord's prayer is an honest prayer. It deals with reality as it is. The Bible explicitly recognizes the problem of remaining sin in the believer. The Christian does not pretend that he is perfect. He recognizes the truth about himself and pours his heart out to God on this matter with the full knowledge that Christ has washed away his sin and delivered him from the power of it. Prayer is such an amazing means of grace, not only because God answers prayer and comes to our assistance, but also because prayer focuses our attention on areas that we want to change. The praying man does not stagnate and backslide because, in forming his petitions, he sees his true self and his daily spiritual needs.

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<sup>12</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, 2:9.

<sup>13</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 1:54.

<sup>14</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 1:59.

Third, we approach God with an acknowledgment of our debts and a sincere desire to forsake them because we know that God has promised mercy to those who do so (Pr. 28:13; 1 Jn. 1:9; 2:1-2; cf. Josh. 7:19; Ps. 51:1-3). A daily acknowledgment of debts, coupled with a daily dedication to the mortify sin in our lives, is important if we are to avoid backsliding, high-handed or presumptuous sins. Thus David prayed, "Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless" (Ps. 19:13).

Fourth, the biblical acknowledgment of debts before God shows faith in Christ because it is an admission that we (i.e. our own selves) can do nothing about the guilt that sin brings. We know that we are utterly dependent upon Jesus Christ and His redemption. Genuine faith looks away from one's self to the Mediator. It lays hold of His perfect, sufficient, vicarious, sacrificial death and His perfect righteousness.

The non-Christian really has no proper way to deal with guilt. Consequently, (generally they have three unbiblical ways to deal with guilt) one response is to deny guilt altogether. Some atheists will argue that there is no such thing as sin and, thus, guilt is purely an illusion. Others acknowledge that guilt exists; but, not understanding the true nature of God or sin, believe that man can pay back the debt through repentance, good works, charity and acts of penance. This results in the age old error of salvation by works or human achievement. We have already seen that only Christ can deal with guilt and not we ourselves. Still others acknowledge guilt, but confine it to a subjective feeling of guilt. Therefore, they think that all that is necessary is to eliminate the feelings of guilt. Consequently, people look to psychiatrists, psychologists, eastern mystics, scientology, alcohol, drugs, sex, possessions and so forth to ease their guilty feelings. All such things, however, do not deal with true guilt as defined by Scripture, which is an objective record of debt kept by an all-knowing, thrice-holy God. Real guilt can only be removed by the blood of Christ and, when this occurs, often feelings of guilt subside. Are you looking to Christ to remove your guilt forever and give you peace with God? "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18).

With an understanding of our sins or debts, we come to the matter of forgiveness. The word, "forgive" (*aphes*), means literally to send away, or dismiss. This idea is expressed beautifully in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." In Isaiah it is expressed as a blotting out: "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins" (43:25). The Bible speaks of God covering our iniquities (Ps. 85:2); washing them away (Ps. 51:2); and not imputing them to us. "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin" (Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:7-8). All of these terms teach that God pardons or remits our sins. To be specific, theologically, forgiveness refers to the fact that sin, both as guilt and the liability of punishment that is connected with guilt, is completely removed by Christ's sacrificial death. This petition assumes vicarious atonement, justification and the fact that salvation is all of grace from start to finish. God forgives us completely and perfectly because Jesus rendered a full and perfect satisfaction to God the Father on the cross.

We noted earlier that, when a person truly believes in Jesus, he is immediately justified and his sins (past, present and future) are remitted and Christ's righteousness is imputed to him. Thus, every believer is justified once and for all (Jn. 5:24; Rom. 8:1). But, because of our flesh (Rom. 8:1, 5; Gal. 5:17), the old man (Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), the body of sin (Rom. 6:6), or the sin

remaining in our members, we all still commit sins in thought, word and deed, by omission and by commission, every single day. This does not mean that we all live a habitual lifestyle of sin (1 Jn. 1:6; 2:3) or that we commit scandalous sins every day. Yet, we all sin (1 Jn. 1:8). Our daily failings to meet God's perfect standard do not and cannot overturn our standing in Christ as a justified Christian. True believers cannot lose their salvation (Phil. 1:6). Nevertheless, our sins can still offend our heavenly Father. "They cannot destroy the believer's union with God, but they can interrupt and weaken his communion with God. Therefore, the believer is daily to confess his sins and to pray for God's pardon for his daily failings."<sup>15</sup>

## As We Forgive

The fifth petition is unique in that we ask God to forgive our sins "as we forgive our debtors." This connection between God's forgiveness and our forgiving of others is sometimes misunderstood. Jesus is not teaching here that if we forgive others we somehow merit God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness is not grounded on the fact that we forgive others. This would be a variant of salvation by works and would contradict the teaching on salvation in the whole Bible. God's Word repeatedly teaches that we are forgiven and declared righteous based not on our own deeds, but solely on the merits of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).

What our Lord is saying is that a true Christian repents of his sins and obeys the teachings of Christ. The person who does not have mercy on another but comes and admits guilt and asks for forgiveness is not exhibiting faith in Christ by his good works. He is blatantly disregarding and disobeying the Redeemer's teaching. A professing Christian who is completely unwilling to extend forgiveness to a brother that admits his fault and asks for forgiveness should not expect to be heard by God at all. This point is brought out more clearly in Matthew 18:23-35:

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all." Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all." And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

The point of this parable is that the man who was completely unwilling to forgive his fellow servant was not a true believer at all. God only forgives those who have faith and truly repent. One of the evidences of faith in Jesus and repentance toward God is a willingness to forgive.

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<sup>15</sup> Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), 570.

Paul emphasizes this teaching in Ephesians 4:32: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). A professing Christian who does not imitate Christ, in having a spirit of forgiveness and who does not forgive out of appreciation for the mercy he has claimed to receive, is not exhibiting the genuine fruit of conversion. Vos writes,

We are not merely “exhorted” to forgive because we have been forgiven, we are *commanded* to forgive, as a matter of duty. If we are not willing to forgive others, we should question the reality of our own Christian experience. If our life does not produce the *fruits* of salvation, what ground have we for assurance that we are saved? Genuine love of the brethren is an evidence that a person is truly saved: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14). The person who is unwilling to forgive his brother abides in death; that is, the person who does not love his brother is unsaved. Therefore the Bible teaches that the person who is unwilling to forgive his brother is himself unforgiven by God. Forgiving our brother is of course not the *ground* of God’s forgiving us; rather, it is the *evidence* that God *has forgiven us*. Where there is the real root, there will also be the fruit; if there is no fruit, then the real root is absent.<sup>16</sup>

With all this in mind, let us note the following about forgiving others. First, the word debtors must be defined by the immediate context and the parallel in Luke. Jesus is *not* saying that we have a moral obligation to release Christians from financial obligations toward us. Debts do not refer to money, but to sins done against us. “*Our debtors* are those persons who, by unjust designs, or words, or actions, have done us an injury. All sins, indeed, are committed against God, as the supreme Lord and lawgiver. But some are also committed against men, as the objects to which the sins immediately relate.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, when we sin against someone, we are debtor to him. We need, to the best of our ability, to make restitution and ask for forgiveness. And if someone sins against us, they need to admit their guilt, attempt to make restitution when appropriate (e.g., sins of physical violence causing bodily harm or sins involving property; or even sins involving false witness, etc.) and ask for forgiveness. Our Lord’s teaching about debtors in the Lord’s prayer is consistent and harmonious with His teaching on Christian reconciliation in Matthew 5:23-23 and 18:15-20.

The concept of sin as debt is important because it emphasizes the need for confession, restitution and reconciliation between Christians. This aspect of the fifth petition teaches us that there are to be no loose ends in the church; sins, whether on our part or the part of others, are not to be ignored and overlooked. The Lord’s prayer presupposes the necessity for reconciliation between believers. If reconciliation and genuine forgiveness do not come about through biblical means, then Christians are not acting like Christians and hatred and bitterness will fester in the body of Christ.

Second, we are required to forgive our debtors. What does our Lord mean when He says, “forgive”? Forgiveness means that we no longer hold the sin against the person who sinned against us. This means that we do not dwell on it anymore or hold a grudge against that person. In fact, we are to act as though the sin never even occurred. We do not bring it up anymore to the person who sinned, to other people or even to ourselves. Paul says that we are to forgive like Christ. “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Herman Witsius, *The Lord’s Prayer*, 321.

anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you must do also” (Col. 3:12-13). The person who forgives lays aside all thoughts of anger, bitterness, revenge and malice and replaces them with thoughts of mercy and kindness. All negative thoughts and words must give way to a spirit of brotherly love.

Sadly, many professing Christians have a bad record on forgiving others. There are some who write off those who have sinned against them and refuse to seek reconciliation. Such people are not exhibiting the spirit of Christ at all. Others are happy to extend forgiveness verbally when the offending party apologizes and asks for forgiveness. But, they do not really mean it in their hearts and thus do not put the sin behind them. Consequently, the sin is brought up again and again and the penitent believer is damaged by continued gossip and bitter speech. Such behavior is anti-Christian and unloving. Still others only forgive in a half-hearted, partial way. They keep their mouth shut and do not malign the penitent; but, they also do not actively extend love to the person as they used to. When we forgive, we must really forgive. We must forgive fully, not partially. We must cast the debts of the penitent into oblivion. We must fully restore fellowship and actively love the other Christian.

It is very important that believers seek true reconciliation and not merely sweep unresolved conflicts under the rug. It is quite common today to encounter people in the church who have been offended by something, but act as if nothing is wrong whatsoever. If these people are asked if anything is wrong, they would even say, “No, everything is fine.” But on the inside they are angry and full of malice. Instead of communicating, being honest and seeking reconciliation they clam up, cut off fellowship and leave the church. They are so full of pride that they are simply too good to remain in a church where people sin against them. Such people mask their pride and lack of love with talk of piety. But, in reality, they are hypocrites who do not love the brethren.

We should avoid these great errors that are common in churches by focusing on our own failings. When we think of all the wrongs and sins that we have committed against God and the amazing fact that we have been forgiven because of Christ, we must forgive. Forgiveness can only flow from a humble heart, a heart that is conscious of its own sinfulness and unworthiness before God. The proud man cannot forgive injuries because his estimation of himself is far too high. He needs to be clothed with humility (cf. 1 Pet. 5:5) and see his own continued need of forgiveness.

A willingness to forgive those who have sinned against us is the condition of our assurance that God has forgiven our sins. If we want to pray with faith that God will answer our prayers, then we must forgive our brothers from the heart. A believer who is happy and quick to forgive others has real evidence of a work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. He can have a strong confidence that his own sins have been forgiven by the sacrificial death of Christ. Jesus emphasized this point in His ministry because the tendency of our sinful flesh is not to forgive. Professing Christians who do not forgive are hypocrites and often do great harm to the local church. “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mk. 11:25-26). Jesus does not permit broken relationships in His body. The forgiveness that He established between God and man must deeply affect relationships in the church. The church of Christ is to be a haven of love and forgiveness. We all need to remember this when we are tempted to hold a grudge against a penitent brother in Christ.

This part of the fifth petition calls for serious self-examination. Do we have consciousness of our own need for forgiveness from God that leads to humility? Are we seeking a full reconciliation with those we have offended or who have offended us? Are we immediately willing to forgive those who have sinned against us, who admit their guilt and ask for forgiveness? When we forgive others do we really forgive biblically and completely? Do we forgive from the heart as well as with the lips? If we cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, then where is our Christianity? If we cannot say yes, then can we be assured of God's forgiveness? No, we most certainly cannot. Let us determine, then, to fully repent in this area and let us determine to truly forgive our penitent brethren. This is one of the best ways to imitate Christ and please Him. "God's free forgiveness of sins is our highest privilege in this world. God's free forgiveness will be our only title to eternal life in the world to come. Then let us be forgiving during the few years that we are here upon earth."<sup>18</sup>

## The Sixth Petition

After we pray that God will forgive our sins that have occurred in the past, we next look to the future and ask God to protect us from temptations too difficult for us handle. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Having confessed our sins, we want the Lord to help us not to commit sin again. The sixth petition has a negative and positive element.

Negatively, we ask God not to lead us into situations of severe testing. The Greek word rendered "lead" is, in every instance outside the Lord's prayer, rendered "bring into" (Lk. 5:18-19; Ac. 17:20; 1 Tim. 6:7; Heb. 13:11). This aspect of the sixth petition is a recognition that God is in absolute control of all events and that trials in a believer's life do not come without His approval.

The word temptation (*peirasmon*), depending on the immediate context, can refer to "temptation" or to "testing" (i.e. a trial). In modern English "temptation" refers to a solicitation to commit a sin or evil deed; while a "testing" denotes not a *direct* solicitation to evil, but a trial that can strengthen and benefit the Christian. The old English and the translators of the King James Version often simply use the word "tempt" for both a righteous and unrighteous trial. Thus, the first time the word tempt is used in the King James Version is Genesis 22:1 where it says that "God did tempt Abraham." This, of course, was not a solicitation to commit evil, but a holy trial of Abraham's faith. Since James says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone" (1:13), we are asking God not to bring us into a trial that our level of Christian maturity will not be able to withstand. "When we meet with temptation, we should realize two things: a) It is not God that is tempting me, but Satan, or my sinful heart, or both. b) Yet this temptation has been foreordained by God as part of his plan, and it is God that has permitted this temptation to come to me, for his own wise purposes."<sup>19</sup> Some may argue that this is a fine distinction with very little difference. But it is a distinction that the Bible is careful to make, for God is not the author of evil, nor can be.

A key to understanding this petition is the great promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." This promise is essentially what we are to pray:

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<sup>18</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Mark* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 175.

<sup>19</sup> Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, 576.

that in the course of providence, as God does test the sincerity of our faith, He will not place us in a situation that due to our particular weakness and the severity of the temptation would cause us to fail. From God's perspective it is a test, but Satan and his minions will use such occasions for direct solicitations to sin. God knows the state of our hearts. He knows our weaknesses and the areas in which we have failed in the past. Thus, we ask God for our own spiritual benefit to control our inner weaknesses and our outer circumstances.

This petition does not contradict the biblical teaching that believers benefit from trials that God sends our way. As James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience..." (1:2-3). However, it does recognize that, due to our remaining sin and the different levels of our faith, there are tests that we cannot endure. "Temptations are to be prayed against, both because of the discomfort and trouble of them, and because of the danger we are in of being overcome by them, and the guilt and grief that then follow."<sup>20</sup>

The fact that this petition comes immediately after we have asked for and received forgiveness of sins is significant. This proves that God's forgiveness does not lead to antinomianism and an excuse for sinning, but instead to a renewed dedication to overcome that which led to sin and caused us to fall. When our sins are forgiven, our love and dedication to Christ is strengthened. Thus, our response is to immediately request not to become ensnared by temptation, so that we do not once again offend our Savior by our behavior. "Lord, protect us from the solicitations of Satan and the corruption of our own hearts. Protect us from the deception of the devil, the vain allurements of this world and the carnal affections of our own hearts. Protect us from all circumstances that would hold us fast in a strong temptation, a temptation that we are not yet able to endure."

This petition assumes that our union with Christ is the foundation and ultimate cause of our sanctification (see Rom. 6:1-8:14). It stands upon the fact "that we have no strength for living a holy life, except so far as we obtain it from God. Whoever implores the assistance of God to overcome temptations acknowledges that, unless God *deliver* him, he will be constantly falling."<sup>21</sup> This is a petition for God and Christ as our mediator to continuously work for our sanctification. It is set in a negative form, yet it presupposes the positive: that based on Jesus' work the Holy Spirit will lead us into the path of righteousness. We are to daily cast ourselves upon the throne of grace for spiritual victory. It is very careless and extremely unwise to neglect this aspect of the Lord's prayer, for our continued spiritual well-being depends upon God's work in us and His control of events around us.

While the first part of this petition is negative and relates to keeping out of temptations or trials that will injure us, the second part deals with deliverance when we do enter severe trials: "But deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13). The phrase "from evil" (*apo tou pornrou*, literally "from the evil") can be translated as neuter, as in the KJV ("from evil"), or masculine ("from the evil one"; i.e. the devil). Although a number of excellent commentators prefer the masculine, the neuter best fits with the comprehensive nature of this petition. Thus, all situations of severe temptation and moral evil are included. Consequently, the second part of the sixth petition teaches us a number of things about God's deliverance of us.

First, we pray to be delivered when we enter a severe temptation or trial. We pray that God would give us strength to endure the time of testing and we ask God to use His providential control of the situation to remove the temptation or at least alter it so that we can overcome it.

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<sup>20</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:75.

<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 1:328.

We pray for spiritual courage, prudence, and perseverance to withstand the terrible snare of a severe temptation. It was a God-given inner strength that caused Joseph to flee from such a temptation (Gen. 39:7-12). We pray that God's sovereign hand will rescue us by overruling the world, subduing our flesh, and restraining Satan and all of God's enemies. We can pray this prayer with confidence because God has promised us that with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape so that we can bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

This petition, by way of application, teaches us that we should do everything that we possibly can to avoid placing ourselves in situations of temptation. A person who is careless or who deliberately exposes himself to temptations can only pray this prayer as a hypocrite. "For persons acting in the manner, to say, 'Lead me not into temptation,' is to mock God."<sup>22</sup> Thus, we must treat temptations as exceedingly dangerous because temptations are the gateway to sin. If we know our sinful natures and how quickly we may fall, then we will watch carefully against all circumstances and occasions of temptation. We must act as if our flesh was like highly explosive gun powder and temptations like sparks. We must keep a safe distance from them at all times.

Second, when we do fall into sin we pray that God would deliver us out of it. We ask God to deliver us from the evil of sin in our lives. We pray that God would convict us of our sin, subdue our lusts and give our regenerate nature ascendancy over the remaining corruption in us. If we fall, we want to ask the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to repent and forsake that sin immediately. Because of the old man (our flesh), our lives are a constant struggle against sin. We often find ourselves doing that which we hate and falling back into old sinful habits. Thus, we pray for God to keep our carnal natures under control. We want the Holy Spirit to limit the old man's activity. We petition God to help us put to death our sinful members and live consistently with the reality of our victory over the power of sin, by virtue of our union with Christ (Rom. 6:4-10). If we do not look to Christ and pray for deliverance in such situations, we will backslide and place ourselves in danger of apostasy. When we fall and the Spirit mercifully brings us to repentance, we need to learn from our experience not to make the same mistakes that led us into sin previously. Therefore, we pray that God in His infinite mercy would further sanctify us and use our occasion of falling for future improvements.

Third, we ask to be delivered from the assaults of the devil and his minions. Satan hates Christians and goes about as a roaring lion seeking to devour them (1 Pet. 5:8). In the Bible he is called "the prince of this world" (Jn. 14:30), for he is the leader of all in opposition to God. He is the father of the evil world system that exists. He is the liar, the great deceiver (Jn. 8:44) who appears as an angel of light to deceive God's people (2 Cor. 11:14). The devil is called the strong man (Lk. 11:21) because of his great power (cf. Rev. 12:3-4). Satan has thousands of years experience in tempting people to sin. He has long experience in destroying souls and helping to bring about new heresies to wreak havoc in the church. Although he does not have power to compel the human will; nevertheless, he is an expert at manipulating circumstances to tempt men to fall. He studies his enemies and does all he can to stir up their corruptions and excite their unlawful lusts. It was Satan who worked on David's heart to number the people (i.e. the men of war) of Israel (1 Chron. 21:1). He also put the idea into Judas's mind to betray Jesus (Jn. 13:2). "Satan, in tempting, uses many subtle policies to deceive. We read of the depths of Satan (Rev. ii.24), of his devices and stratagems (2 Cor. ii.11), or his snares and darts. He is called a lion for his cruelty, and an old serpent for his subtlety."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, 1:252.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, 262.

When we pray to be delivered from the evil one, we can pray with faith and assurance because Satan is a defeated foe who has been chained by Christ's redemptive work (Rev. 20:1-3). Moreover, he is a finite being and can do nothing without God's permission (Job 1:12). Further, Christ is our high priest who is able to aid us when we are tempted because He was tempted and was victorious over sin and the devil (cf. Heb. 2:18). The Redeemer overcame every single temptation placed before Him (Heb. 4:15; 5:7 ff.). His complete victory over temptation and human suffering makes Him the perfect high priest because He can identify with our predicament and He has true compassion for us when we suffer. The victory of the cross makes the Lord's intercession for us totally effective. Jesus helps us by forgiving our sins and He gives us the ability (i.e. the power that flows from His redemptive work [Phil. 3:10; Rom. 6:14]) to fight and overcome temptation. Thomas Watson writes,

Christ succours them that are tempted by "interceding for them." When the devil is tempting, Christ is praying. The prayer which Christ put up for Peter when he was tempted, extends to all his saints. "Lord," said Christ, "it is my child that is tempted; Father, pity him." Luke xxii 32. When a poor soul lies bleeding of the wounds the devil has given him, Christ presents his wounds to his Father, and, in the virtue of those, pleads for mercy. How powerful must his prayer be! He is a favourite. John xi 42. He is both High Priest and a Son. If God could forget that Christ were a Priest, he cannot forget that he is a Son. Besides, Christ prays for nothing but what is agreeable to his Father's will. If a king's son petitions only for that which his father has a mind to grant, his suit will not be denied.

Christ succours his people, by taking off the tempter. When the sheep begin to straggle, the shepherd sets the dog on them to bring them back to the fold, and then calls off the dog; so God takes off the tempter. He "will with the temptation make a way of escape," he will make an outlet. I Cor. x 13. He will rebuke the tempter. "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." Zech. iii 2. It is no small support, that Christ succours the tempted. The mother succours the child most when it is sick; she sits by its bedside, brings it cordials; so, when a soul is most assaulted, it shall be most assisted.<sup>24</sup>

## The Conclusion to the Lord's Prayer

The conclusion of the Lord's prayer reads, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Mt. 6:13). Most modern commentaries, based on rules of textual criticism developed by the modernists in the nineteenth century, do not regard this postscript as genuine. The general idea is that this ending made its way into the Lord's prayer because it was the practice of the Greek churches to add this conclusion to all prayers in public worship. But regarding this idea, it seems to make a great deal more sense that the Greek churches used this ending in their prayers because it was first found in the Lord's prayer. Regarding the genuineness of this ending Witsius writes, "It is manifestly found in the most ancient and most approved Greek copies. This is not denied by those who choose to hold the opposite view."<sup>25</sup> It also is found in the *Didache* (c. A.D. 110) and the expositions of Chrysostom, Euthymus and Theophylact. Moreover, it is similar to other doxologies in Scripture (cf. 1 Chron. 29:11, 12; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16; Jude 25). Although it is not found in the earliest Latin manuscripts, the Latin is a translation. The Greek was the fountain, while the Latin is but a stream. Moreover, the longer ending is found in the ancient Syriac and Arabic versions. The ending also is in perfect harmony

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 287.

<sup>25</sup> Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations on the Lord's Prayer*, 371.

with the teaching of the Lord's prayer, as well as the theology of the Sermon on the Mount. As Calvin says, "It is surprising that this clause which agrees so well with the rest of the prayer, has been left out by the Latins: for it was not added merely for the purpose of kindling our hearts to seek the glory of God, and or reminding us what ought to be the object of our prayers; but likewise to teach us, that our prayers, which are here dictated to us, are founded on God alone, that we may not rely on our own merits."<sup>26</sup> Given these and many other considerations, we believe that Christian churches should use the King James Version (which is based on the Received Text or *textus Receptus*) or at least a faithful modernization of the Authorized Version in the church's liturgy, exegesis and exposition.

The conclusion of the Lord's prayer, which takes the form of a doxology, exalts God while comforting His people. It is a pastoral doxology that encourages our faith and stands as our foundation of hope. It is fully consistent with the gospel, for it takes our eyes off our own weakness and infirmities and places them squarely on the triune God of Scripture. Our faith is lifted up as we consider the glorious attributes of our covenant God and the accomplished redemption of Jesus Christ. Thus, we conclude our prayer by not looking to, or relying on, our own power or works or experience; but we focus our faith on God and the work of Christ. Thus, Calvin says that the postscript was added to make us bold to ask and confident of receiving. He writes, "This is [a] firm and tranquil repose for our faith. For if our prayers were to be commended to God by our worth, who would dare even mutter in his presence? Now, however miserable we may be, though unworthiest of all, however devoid of all commendation, we will yet never lack a reason to pray, never be shorn of assurance, since his Kingdom, power, and glory can never be snatched away from our Father."<sup>27</sup>

When we say the conclusion of the Lord's prayer, we are not only exalting God and giving Him all praise, but we are also making a confession of our faith. This is the God we trust and serve. This God is an impregnable foundation against doubt, ambivalence and fear. He can and will accomplish exactly what He sets out to do. In this conclusion we find three things that are affirmed of God followed by the word, "amen." We will briefly consider each thing in turn.

First, there is an acknowledgment that the kingdom belongs to God. This reference to the kingdom is important, for the second petition was "Thy kingdom come" (Mt. 6:10). We look to the only true God who is absolutely sovereign over all things whether material or spiritual. God rules over His whole creation. Not one atom or molecule is outside of His complete control. We can take comfort that there is no such thing as chance or pure contingency in God's universe. There is no reason at all to worry that God's enemies will get the upper hand. God is in control. He cares about us and can answer our prayers.

Moreover, because of His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection, the Mediator has been declared King over all things in heaven and on earth (Rom. 1:3; Mt. 28:18). Messiah the Prince is seated in heaven at God's right hand and rules the new creation—the kingdom of grace. God "has put all things under His feet to the church" (Eph. 1:22). Consequently, when we pray, we look to the Redeemer with the eye of faith believing that we have been purchased with the blood of Christ, sanctified by the Spirit and that Jesus rules over us for our own best interest. His Spirit subdues the desires of our sinful flesh which war against us and molds our hearts so that we live in obedience to His rule. By regeneration and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, Jesus brings people from every nation into a voluntary obedience to His law-Word. The Savior King is our precious high-priest who continually makes intercession for us. As we pray we must

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<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 1:329.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 2:915-916; 3:20.47.

continually look to God as He is revealed in Scripture and the redemptive kingship of Christ and, as we do, our speech will break forth in praise and adoration.

Second, we acknowledge God's power. We strengthen our faith and encourage our hope by acknowledging God's infinite power to carry out His will and answer our prayers. "*Yours is the power* to maintain, support and advance Your kingdom." God has the might to protect His own and we can take comfort that no one is able to snatch us out of God's loving hand (cf. Jn. 10:28-29). By that power, God is able to subdue and conquer Christ's enemies. He is able, by virtue of Jesus' redemptive work, to subdue our sinful habits and desires and present us a spotless bride to Christ. By His power, He preserves us from the assaults of hell and from our own selves. We have every reason to trust in God and praise His holy name. "You have a mighty arm; strong is Your hand, and high is Your hand.... For You are the glory of their strength" (Ps. 89:13, 17).

Third, we glorify God: "Thine is the glory." We acknowledge that the triune God alone possesses infinite holiness and perfections, that He alone, because of His nature, deserves worship, praise and service. Jehovah dwells "in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). We also glorify God for His marvelous works of creation, especially His wonderful work of redemption. We cast our crowns before God for His creation, providence and recreation of all things. "Thou are worthy to be acknowledged, worshipped and adored by all classes, from the highest to the lowest, FOR EVER AND EVER; while they spend that endless eternity not so much enjoying their blessedness, as in celebrating thy praises and admiring thy glory."<sup>28</sup>

The Lord's Prayer closes with the word "amen," which comes from a Hebrew term meaning "truly" or "faithful." Here it carries the connotation of "let it be true" or "let it come to pass." Thus the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! The LORD do so; the LORD perform your words which You have prophesied" (28:6). We see in this petition Jeremiah's strong desire expressed with a bold assertion of faith. "Lord you truly possess the kingdom and the power and the glory. Let everyone of these petitions be answered in accordance with your infinite power, majesty, grace and mercy." The word "amen" beautifully ties everything that precedes it together. It reveals our confidence that God both hears and answers our prayers. "The 'Amen' at the end of our prayer is like the signature at the close of a letter, a token or evidence of our sincere belief and desire. At the same time it forms a fitting and properly solemn conclusion for our prayers, and is therefore an indication of reverence."<sup>29</sup> "It is good to conclude religious duties with some warmth and vigour, that we may go from them with a sweet savour upon our spirits."<sup>30</sup> It is important that when we say "amen" at the end of our prayers that we do so thoughtfully and not mindlessly. "Amen" is a confession of our trust in the God of truth, the Holy One who delights in our petitions and is happy to answer our prayers on account of Christ.

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<sup>28</sup> Herman Witsius, *The Lord's Prayer*, 378.

<sup>29</sup> Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, 589.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:76.