

## —Westminster Shorter Catechism—

### *Lesson 60—What do we pray for in the fourth petition? Q. 104*

This fourth petition begins the second half of the petitions Christ teaches us to pray. Having seen the importance of praying *first and primarily* for God to be honored and glorified in the work He's doing in the world, we're now taught to pray *secondly and subserviently* for our needs to be met as co-workers in His work. And the first thing Christ teaches us to pray for is our *provision*.

#### **A Prayer for Provision**

- I. What is meant by *bread*?
  - A. All temporal blessings.
    1. The only limitation is our apprehension of what we need for our calling and God's knowledge of what will promote our efficiency, Js 4.15; 1Tim 4.4-5.
  - B. All spiritual blessings.
    1. Here, as in the Lord's Supper, *bread* signifies the nourishment which Christ gives by the Spirit to sustain us in our several positions and duties in the Church, Rom 15.13; Eph 6.11-12.
    2. We're praying to be supplied with all the *grace* we need to serve God well in our calling and with the provisions He gives us. It's not enough to have the goods if we don't have the grace to know how to use them honorably and faithfully to God's glory rather than selfishly and sinfully to our own pleasure, Js 4.3.
  - C. A competent portion, Pr 30.7-9.
    1. *A competent portion*, expressed in the answer of the Catechism, is a comparative expression. It varies along with the varying circumstances and characters of men. Hopkins, "Cedars require more sap than shrubs."
    2. The prayer is for "all things that are needful to support us in, and equip us for, the eminent life into which God has lifted us. For deprived of the means of doing our work and fulfilling the duties and opportunities of our office would be to us the taking away of life itself" (Whyte).
    3. What we pray for is that God would give us *but that which is our own*, both by our diligent labor and His free blessing.
      - a) Being content with food and raiment (1Tim 6.8) is not a call to be content with crumbs for dinner and a bed sheet for clothing. Many of God's saints have been blessed with much (Job 1.3; 1Tim 6.17-19). Paul's charge is that we learn to be content with *our portion*, which is not to be measured by its quantity or comparative size, but by recognizing that what we have or enjoy is what the Lord sees fit to give us for His glory and our good. Whether that be more or less than another's portion is irrelevant and never to be a passing thought. If we can learn to be content *with our own*, how blessed and peaceful will we be! Phil 4.11-13.
      - b) But once we conclude in our own heart and mind that we must have "so much" or that we must have "what another man has," then there's no end to the violence, oppression, deceit, and sacrifices we'll make to have it, Js 4.1-2. Once we set our heart on a higher condition than God's given us, there's no end to the misery we'll bring on our own heads, because try as we may, we can never raise our condition above what God's appointed for us.
        - (1) And if we're bent on doing so, there's no stopping us until one of two things happens: either we plunge ourselves into the pit of destruction or God in His mercy stops us short and calls us back from the brink, 1Tim 6.8-10.
    4. The lesson we learn here is clear: the source of our discontentment with our portion from God is not its meagerness compared to what others have, but our own immoderate desires in light of what we have.

- II. What is meant by *daily*?
- A. Our need is absolute and continuous, and we can only appropriate small portions, and at intervals, of God's bounty, Lk 11.3. Just as God gave Israel their manna daily, so He gives us our provisions in small batches, as we have need, and as we ask. He does this to teach us humility, dependence, trust, and thankfulness, and to kindly provide the means by which to sustain regular fellowship and communion with Him. Were it not for our daily needs, we'd know nothing of daily prayer. If God gave us all we needed all at once, we'd forget our God and serve ourselves.
  - B. We must trust both God's *means* and God's *measure* of provision for us. It may come from corners and persons which we thought it never would, and at times and in ways we thought it never could. Our confidence is in His faithfulness to provide as our Provider, and not in the provision itself. For He can fill little means with great blessings, packing a stockpile of blessings into a few kernels, as easily as He can evacuate great means of all blessing, leaving nothing but husks to feed upon.
- III. All our provision comes by grace and mercy as a blessing from God, Gen 32.11; 2Sam 7.18-2; Ps 8.3-4.
- A. It is the gift of God, undeserved and constant, 2Cor 4.6-7.
  - B. Without the strength which God's provision affords us, we cannot continue in life, grow in grace, resist temptation, or perform any service. But with His provision, and with His blessing upon it, we can do all things, Ps 19.13; Pr 15.16; Jn 15.5.
  - C. Praying for God to provide and knowing that He must give all that we need, does not remove from us the responsibility to work and plan for what we need. But after all our labor for today and storing up for the future, we are still to acknowledge all of it as His free gift, both the bread we get by labor, the strength by which we labor, and the future return on any investment for the morrow.

### Inferences

- I. While we must learn to be content with little, it's not wrong to pray for more. The key is, when we pray for more, for advancement or promotion, our *intent* must be that whatever God gives will be used for His glory, and our *desire* must be that if God gives more He'll increase our fruitfulness with it.
- II. We must never ascribe our success in the world to our own wit or work, but must always recognize that whatever success we enjoy in life and labor is a gift from His hand that can be taken away in a moment without warning.
  - A. Even the best of saints are sometimes called in life to build up what it pleases God to tear down before their eyes and to put all the reward of their labors in a bag with holes.
  - B. We must give to God all the praise for all we enjoy and bless Him just as much when either it's taken from us or we're taken from it. Everything is a mercy and must be held with an open hand. Nothing is promised as a permanent and irrevocable blessing but Christ and the salvation we have in Him. Therefore we must never put our stock in our provisions but only and always in our Provider.
  - C. And when we see the increase of troubles and increase of responsibility and accountability that comes with more, we can easily be content with less.
- III. The blessing of God upon our provisions is ultimately what we pray for here.
  - A. Sometimes God will lessen our provisions and sometimes He will increase them, depending on what will make us most fruitful in our calling—since we're held accountable as stewards of what we have, not of what we don't; but what we seek in the petition is that God will be pleased to bless what we have, both in making it fruitful and in making us good and honorable stewards of it for His glory.
  - B. One of the things so deeply rooted in our hearts that neither religion, nor reason, nor experience can pluck it up, is our belief that there's happiness in having much. Only God's grace can help us make this instead the rule of our desires: daily bread for our daily needs along with the grace to use it well and the blessing of God to make it a blessing to us.
  - C. \*Let us pray to be cured of that *short-sightedness* which keeps us from preparing for an eternity we must soon enter and of that *earthly-mindedness* which keeps us from letting go of a world we must soon leave.

- IV. By putting *our* interests after *God's* interests in the order of the petitions, Christ is teaching us the fundamental principle that as all things are *from Him*, so all things must be *for Him*.
- A. In seeking first *His* Kingdom, all *our* needs will be met, and with them, we'll have the grace to use all His provision for His glory and not our own. We're to seek *God's honor* and leave Him to see to *our welfare*.
  - B. We must not miss the wise placement of this petition in the prayer.
    1. Out of six petitions, there's only one for temporal things; all the rest are for spiritual things. That's five to one.
    2. There are three petitions which concern the glory of God and only one which concern our temporal needs. That's three to one.
    3. And of the three petitions which concern our own good, two are for our spiritual good and only one for our temporal good. That's two to one.
    4. What does it say of our maturity, then, when so much of our prayers to God are taken up with the matters of this one petition? A close study of our Lord's prayers in the Gospels and Paul's prayers in the Epistles will go a long way towards teaching us moderation in our petitions for temporal things and help us pray more for God's glory and our spiritual concerns. How often do we mind earthly things, when our Lord only lends a passing thought to them, comparatively, in this instructive prayer?
- V. Let us be content with the measure God sees good for us to have in every hour.
- A. Though others have more than us, yet others have less. Compared to some we may feel poor, but compared to others we are rich. God never promised each of us an equal portion, but only a sufficient portion, Mt 6.33.
  - B. And though a man may have more than you, don't forget that your *blessing*, and what Christ purchased for you, is not this much or that much of anything, but the assurance of the blessing of God upon what you actually have.
  - C. Look for that blessing and let it be the *immeasurable* measure of your richness and happiness and you'll never envy or covet another man's blessings again.
  - D. The true temper of a Christian is that whatsoever is our own lawful provision from God, and whatsoever is the success God is pleased to put upon it, what we live and rely upon is the providence of God, and not our own. —If we have much in reserve, we trust no more in those reserves than if we had nothing; and if we have provision for today and nothing for tomorrow, we trust no less in God than if we had thousands stored up for tomorrow. Our resolution is this: "Whether I have much or little, I live upon God's provision from day to day, for He is my Shepherd and therefore I shall not want what He knows I need."