

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are currently discussing the doctrine of sanctification and, more particularly, the means of grace. We have been discussing the topic of prayer for some time and are currently examining the Lord's Prayer. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: By first reading the Lord's Prayer again.

Marc Roby: Okay. We are examining the version found in Matthew 6:9-13 which is, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."¹

Dr. Spencer: And we have now covered the preface, which is "Our Father in heaven," the first petition, which is "hallowed be your name", the second petition, which is "your kingdom come", and the third petition, which is "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". And we've noted that all three of these petitions deal with God. The prayer is theocentric, meaning God centered.

But the prayer does not ignore man. We now move on to the fourth petition, which is very much concerned with man. It says, "Give us today our daily bread." Now, I think it is obvious that this isn't referring just to bread. Bread is a synecdoche, a part of something being used to represent the whole.

Marc Roby: In other words, the fourth petition is really asking God to provide for all of our daily needs.

Dr. Spencer: Yes. And we do need to be careful to say needs, as you did, not wants. God doesn't promise to provide everything we might want in this life. Paul wrote to his young protégé Timothy saying, as we read in 1 Timothy 6:6-8, that "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

Marc Roby: And as Christians we have great reason to be content no matter what our earthly circumstances are. We're told in Hebrews 13:5, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

Dr. Spencer: I can't imagine a better reason to be content. This world is not our home. We are strangers here, just traveling through. We are ambassadors in enemy territory so to speak. God knows what we need and it is proper to pray for our needs, and even for things we want but don't need so long as they aren't sin. But our focus cannot be on this life. We should be able to join

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with the psalmist and declare, as we read in Psalm 73:25, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.”

Marc Roby: In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told us, in Matthew 6:19-20, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Dr. Spencer: And he said that because our eternal home, our *real* home, is in heaven with God, it is not here on this earth where we have to deal with all of the troubles brought about by sin. A Christian should never feel completely satisfied and at home here in this sinful world.

But, with that warning about being content and having a heavenward focus in mind, let’s return to the fourth petition. Question 105 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What do we pray for in the fourth petition?”

Marc Roby: And the answer given is, “In the fourth petition, which is, (*Give us this day our daily bread,*) we pray, That of God’s free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.”²

Dr. Spencer: The wording here sounds a bit strange to modern ears, but by “competent portion” they mean a portion that is adequate for our needs. This prayer focuses our attention on the fact that we are absolutely dependent upon God for everything. He gives us life and he provides for our daily needs. We should never take these things for granted.

We live in an age of entitlement. Many people are being brought up to believe that they somehow *deserve* to be provided not only with everything they need, but with much more.

Marc Roby: Yes, and they often think it is the place of government to provide these needs.

Dr. Spencer: Unfortunately, that’s true. But the reality is that we should all have the attitude of the patriarch Jacob. When he was returning to Canaan after an extended time of self-imposed exile in Paddan Aram, he prayed to God for protection because he was afraid of the hostile reception he might receive from his brother Esau.

Marc Roby: And he had reason to fear since he had tricked his brother Esau, who was the firstborn, out of his father’s blessing.

Dr. Spencer: That’s quite true, although it is also true that it was God’s will for Jacob to be the prominent one, rather than his older brother.³

But, getting back to what I was saying about his attitude, we read in Genesis 32:10 that in his prayer he said, “I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups.”

² The Westminster Shorter Catechism, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012, pg. 45

³ See Genesis 25:23

Marc Roby: That is the antithesis of the modern entitlement view.

Dr. Spencer: And it in no way negates the fact that Jacob had worked hard to obtain all that he had. In fact, his father-in-law, for whom he had worked 20 years⁴, had cheated him in a number of ways. But rather than focus on how *he* had been mistreated, Jacob understood that he was a sinful rebel himself and didn't deserve any of the good things he had received, even if they did come as a result of his own labor.

Marc Roby: We spoke in an earlier session about the fact that a Christian should always be filled with thanksgiving.

Dr. Spencer: And that includes thanksgiving for the fact that we have the ability and opportunity to work and provide for ourselves. We should not take such things for granted.

But, returning to the catechism's statement of what we are praying for when we ask God to provide our daily bread, in addition to asking God to provide for our material needs, the catechism says that we are asking God that we may enjoy his blessing as well. No material provision is worth anything unless God blesses it. The proof text that the catechism cites for this part of the answer is Psalm 90:17, where we read, "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands."

Marc Roby: That's a wonderful psalm and that verse is the concluding verse. It was written by Moses, the preeminent man of God.

Dr. Spencer: And it is probably the oldest of all the psalms as Spurgeon noted. He wrote that "Moses sings of the frailty of man, and the shortness of life, contrasting therewith the eternity of God, and founding thereon earnest appeals for compassion."⁵

Marc Roby: Yes, that's a good summary. Our appeals for God's help would be pointless if he were not the eternal Creator.

Dr. Spencer: It is a great psalm, which I encourage our listeners to read and meditate upon. Moses notes the just anger of God and, in Verse 12, he says, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

When we earnestly and sincerely pray for God to provide our earthly needs, it tends to promote humility, an awareness of our dependence on God, and thankfulness, and to cause us to consider the purpose of life. In other words, to number our days aright and gain a heart of wisdom.

Marc Roby: Is there more you would like to say about the fourth petition?

Dr. Spencer: Yes. I'd also like to look at what the Heidelberg Catechism says. Question 125 of that catechism asks, "What is the fourth petition?"

⁴ See Genesis 31:38

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2016, Vol. 2, pg. 60

Marc Roby: And the answer is, “*Give us this day our daily bread. That is: be pleased to provide for all our bodily need, that we may thereby acknowledge Thee to be the only fountain of all good, and that without Thy blessing neither our care and labor nor Thy gifts can profit us; and, therefore, that we may withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it alone in Thee.*”⁶

Dr. Spencer: I like that answer because it explicitly says that in praying this petition, we are acknowledging God to be the source of all good and that if his blessing is not upon us, nothing in this world can profit us. In other words, nothing will matter eternally if we are without God’s blessing.

Marc Roby: In Mark 8:36 Jesus asked the rhetorical question, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”

Dr. Spencer: And the answer, obviously, is that it doesn’t profit us at all. If we spend this life as the richest and most talented and adored person in the history of the world, it will not help us one iota when we die. If we go to hell, those riches and pleasures will be forgotten immediately and replaced with eternal torment and regret. We will realize that we failed to do the one thing that is really important in this life, which is to be reconciled to God.

Marc Roby: Which is only possible through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s right. And so the catechism goes on to say that when we pray this way and recognize our absolute and complete dependence on God, we will withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it in God alone. And when the catechism says “creatures” here, it means anything or anyone in this material universe, since everything in this universe was created by God.

As our Pastor is fond of saying, “Your money cannot save you. Your degrees cannot save you. Your good looks cannot save you.” In fact, nothing *in* this world can save anyone. We all die and face judgment and as we are told in Acts 4:12, “there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Marc Roby: And praise God that he has made the way of salvation available to us. Without God’s merciful provision of Jesus Christ as our Savior, we would all be justly condemned.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is the unpleasant truth. But, before we wrap up, there is one last thing about this petition, which is interesting and worth noting.

Marc Roby: What is that?

Dr. Spencer: The Lord’s Prayer is only recorded in two places in the Bible. The fourth petition says, as it is recorded in Matthew 6:11, “Give us today our daily bread.” Then, in the parallel passage in Luke 11:3 it says, “Give us each day our daily bread.” Now, these both say basically the same thing in slightly different ways, but they both ask for our *daily* bread. And that word *daily*, in the original Greek is very interesting; it is ἐπιούσιος (epiousios). These are the only two

⁶ G.I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1993, pg. 224

occurrences of that word in the Bible and there is only one known occurrence of it in extra-biblical literature of the time.⁷

Marc Roby: That would, undoubtedly, make it difficult to translate with certainty.

Dr. Spencer: It does make it difficult, yes. The translators have to look at how the word is constructed from other Greek words and how it is used. The point simply is that we are not absolutely certain what the word meant to the original audience. It has been suggested that, rather than daily, it might mean, for example, “necessary for existence”⁸. And, according to G.I. Williamson, “Some have even taken the whole phrase to refer, at least primarily, to ‘the bread of life’ – in other words, the believer’s spiritual bread.”⁹

Marc Roby: Which, of course, alludes to Jesus’ statement recorded in John 6:48, that “I am the bread of life.”

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. And while we can’t rule that meaning out entirely, it would seem to me to be unlikely as the primary meaning. And whether the word means daily, or necessary for existence, either one fits well and doesn’t change the overall meaning of the petition. It is also possible that both the physical and spiritual meanings are intended. No matter what however, the petition expresses our need for God to provide for us. It is based on a humble realization that we are completely dependent on him.

Marc Roby: The apostle Paul, while speaking in Athens, approvingly quoted the Cretan poet Epimenides when he said that in God, “we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)¹⁰

Dr. Spencer: Which is an obvious, but profound truth. In fact, it is indicative of the main difference between a born-again Christian and an unbeliever. A born-again person recognizes that he is a creature and that God is the Creator. This is *the* fundamental distinction. There is nothing else as important.

Marc Roby: We’ve spoken of that Creator/creature distinction many times.

Dr. Spencer: And we’ve done that because it is fundamental to the faith and goes completely against the grain of the secular world. God is the only eternal, necessarily existent, independently existent, self-sufficient, perfect, infinite, omnipotent and omniscient being. We are created, contingent, finite beings. It wasn’t all that long ago that you and I didn’t exist outside the mind of God and it wasn’t all that long ago in terms of God’s view that mankind didn’t exist.

We simply *must* grasp this incredibly important point. And we must then also understand that we are sinners. We are rebels and children of rebels. God is justifiably angry with human beings.

⁷ G. Kittel, (Trans. By G. Bromley), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II, Eerdmans, 1964, pp 590-595

⁸ W. Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd Ed., Revised and augmented by F.W. Gingrich and F. Danker, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979, pg. 297

⁹ Williamson, op. cit., pg. 224

¹⁰ See the study note for this verse in *The NIV Study Bible*, 1985, Zondervan

Marc Roby: And that means we have a huge problem.

Dr. Spencer: We have an immense problem. A problem that no mere man could possibly solve.

Marc Roby: And so, praise God for Jesus Christ, the unique God-man. He alone not only *can* solve the problem, he *has* solved the problem.

Dr. Spencer: And that is why we are doing these podcasts. There is nothing in this life that comes even remotely close to the importance of knowing God and being reconciled to him. It is the fool who says in his heart there is no God. It is the beginning of wisdom, on the other hand, to fear God, which, of course, requires that you know he exists.

Marc Roby: And this fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer is an excellent reminder and acknowledgment of the Creator/creature distinction.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. And before we close for the day, I want to point out that with this session we have now completed four full years of this podcast without missing a week!

Marc Roby: That's incredible. And we haven't yet gotten through a basic treatment of the six loci of Reformed Theology!

Dr. Spencer: Well, there's a lot to cover there. But look at it this way, no matter how much we learn about God and his works in this life, we will continue to learn more and more throughout all of eternity in the next life!

Marc Roby: Now that's a wonderful thought to close with, so let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. And we will do our best to answer you.