

The Larger Catechism

Question 193

193. Q. What do we pray for in the fourth petition?

A. In the fourth petition, (which is, *Give us this day our daily bread*, [1253]) acknowledging, that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them; [1254] and that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us, [1255] nor we to merit, [1256] or by our own industry to procure them; [1257] but prone to desire, [1258] get, [1259] and use them unlawfully: [1260] we pray for ourselves and others, that both they and we, waiting upon the providence of God from day to day in the use of lawful means, may, of his free gift, and as to his fatherly wisdom shall seem best, enjoy a competent portion of them; [1261] and have the same continued and blessed unto us in our holy and comfortable use of them, [1262] and contentment in them; [1263] and be kept from all things that are contrary to our temporal support and comfort. [1264]

Scriptural Defense and Commentary

[1253] **Matthew 6:11.** Give us this day our daily bread. [1254] **Genesis 2:17.** But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. **Genesis 3:17.** And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. **Romans 8:20-22.** For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. **Jeremiah 5:25.** Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you. **Deuteronomy 28:15-17.** But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store, etc. [1255] **Deuteronomy 8:3.** And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. [1256] **Genesis 32:10.** I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. [1257] **Deuteronomy 8:17-18.** And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. [1258] **Jeremiah 6:13.** For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. **Mark 7:21-22.** For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. [1259] **Hosea 12:7.** He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. [1260] **James 4:3.** Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. [1261] **Genesis 43:12-14.** And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. **Genesis 28:20.** And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on. **Ephesians 4:28.** Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12.** For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. **Philippians 4:6.** Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. [1262] **1 Timothy 4:3-5.** Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. [1263] **1 Timothy 6:6-8.** But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. [1264] **Proverbs 30:8-9.** Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me

with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

Introduction

In our western world, it may seem difficult to pray for the fourth item in the Lord's Prayer. How can we pray the fourth petition which is ***Give us this day our daily bread...***? We have food in the pantry, money in the bank, stores galore, and a "safety-net" of a sort to take care of us. Is this merely a pious petition with little connection with current condition?

Our inability to feel the true need exhibited in this petition betrays what is so wrong with us. In our hubris, we assume that *what is* is the same as *what it ought to be* and *what it will be*. That is, we presume that our good estate is what is owed.

In this petition, we come to terms with our finitude and dependence upon God. No matter what our political persuasion, we tend to think we have certain rights, certain inalienable rights. Though our *Declaration of Independence* makes this point clear, we must not confuse it with what the Bible teaches.

Vos makes this point very clear and we would do well to listen to it. He asks, "Is it true that all men have an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" Then he offers this answer:

This is only true within the limited sphere of civil society. Human beings have a civil right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness without unjust interference on the part of their fellow men. Even within the sphere of human society the right of life or liberty may be taken away as a judicial penalty for the commission of crime. A man who has committed murder no longer has a right to life and liberty.

When we speak of man's relation to God, it is definitely *not* true that all men have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Whatever rights human beings might have had, have been forfeited by sin; first by Adam's sin, which is imputed to all mankind; and then by each person's own sin, so that no human being has any rights which he can claim over against God. Man has no rights which God is bound to respect. (Vos, 562)

Vos is correct. Once we understand this, we look at life differently and the fourth petition will have more force and urgency in our prayers. If we do not see this correctly, we will be bitter, despondent, and defiant against God. He will be viewed as our enemy and the omnipotent foe who wields His power malevolently against us. We will feel trapped, powerless, and an unspeakable sense of despair will grip our hearts. We will never rightly pray *Give us this day our daily bread*.

We Have Forfeited

In asking for daily bread, we are admitting that we have forfeited everything. That is, we have to ask for daily bread because we cannot assume that we are entitled to it. As the LC states, we are ***"acknowledging, that in Adam, and by our own sin, we have forfeited our right to all the outward blessings of this life, and deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them..."***

Many elements of this point have been developed in our study of the LC #28 ("What are the punishments of sin in this world?"). We come into the world with sin (Adam's and our own); therefore, God owes us anything. Justice demands punishment; the blessings in this life are free

displays of God’s patience, benevolence, longsuffering, love, etc. We “deserve to be wholly deprived of them by God” — that is what we deserve (see LC #28). Our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments can all be cursed, deservedly! Ridgley says, “If he should deprive us of all the conveniencies of life, and so embitter it to us that we should be almost inclined to make the unhappy choice which Job did of ‘strangling and death, rather than life;’ there would be no reason to say that there is unrighteousness with God.”¹

When we pray *Give us this day our daily bread*, we are acknowledging we don’t deserve it because we have forfeited every right all the blessings in this life. Not only do we deserve to be deprived of them but we also deserve to have become a curse to us: **“to have them [i.e. “the outward blessings in this life”] cursed to us in the use of them**. Meaning, every good thing we enjoy and use can rightly be used to curse us. Israel sinned so God kept the blessings from them (it did not rain): “Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you.” (Jer. 5:25)² God can withhold what is commonly good to us (in this case “rain”); He can also use them to our hurt (cf. the covenant curses in Deut. 28:15-17). God said that “all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you” (Deut. 28:15). These curses parallel the blessing enumerated in vv. 3-6; they are the counterparts. “The reason for this direct contrast is clear: obedience and disobedience to the covenant have exactly the opposite consequences.”³

If the Old Covenant was so strict, how much for humanity outside of the covenant of grace? It is reasonable to conclude that disobedience negates all blessings so God can curse any thing we use because we are all in the state of sin (apart from Christ). When we pray for our daily bread, we remember we have forfeited it and God can curse it to our harm. Should we not ponder the significance of this? That means every good thing can turn on us. Our cars, relationships, medicine, money, skills, circumstances, etc. may all seem promising but if the Lord does not bless them, they may in fact be used as a curse against us. Israel was cursed with the meat in their mouth — they wanted those good things so God gave it to them (Num. 11:19-20, “You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, “Why did we come out of Egypt?””). We must not assume and presume that all the blessings we have will work for our good; if the Lord blesses them to our benefit, then we rejoice. We cannot assume because of our monetary wealth, perfect bill of health, untiring industry, etc. that all will be well. We deserve to have all of them turn against us!

They Cannot Sustain Us

Though this could easily fit into the previous section, it is worth pondering on its own. The LC states that the outward blessings of life cannot sustain us: **“and that neither they of themselves are able to sustain us...”** In our health conscious age, we tend to think that medicine, right diet, regular exercise, healthy habits, etc. will all work for our good and will sustain and maintain our health. We assume that these outward blessings of life are calculated and created to sustain us in and of themselves. Good stewardship requires that we make good use

¹ Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity, Volume 2* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 629.

² Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah* (EBC 6; ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), n.p.: “As Creator, God has control over the rain as he does over the sea (cf. Deut 11:10-17). The withholding of seasonal rains was attributable to their sinfulness (v.25).”

³ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Deuteronomy*, EP Study Commentary (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2006), 437-8.

of all the good things of life for our benefit — God may very well bless those efforts. Yet, there is no inherent energy or efficacy in them to work in us for our good.

The divines used an interesting verse to support this most important point: “And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” (Deut. 8:3) Forty years in the wilderness compelled them to trust in the Lord. “In the desert, he [God] was the only source of life, and the most important factor in Israel’s existence. The entire episode is an indictment against self-sufficiency: without Yahweh the Hebrews would not have survived the wilderness.”⁴ Currid is correct. But more can be said about this verse.

When the people were hungry, God fed them manna; the provision of manna was not simply a miracle, but it was designed to teach the Israelites a fundamental principle of their existence as the covenant people of God. The basic source of life was God and the words of God to his people; *every utterance of the mouth of the Lord* (v. 3) was more basic to Israelite existence than was food. This principle did not mean that the Israelites were to expect at all times the miraculous provision of food, as in the instance when God provided manna. Normal circumstances would involve the normal acquisition of food supplies. But if the command of God directed the people to do something or go somewhere, the command should be obeyed; shortage of food or water, lack of strength, or any other excuse would be insufficient, for the command of God contained within it the provision of God.⁵

Still, there is more to this than what the commentator just stated. The older commentators understood the point better: “*Possessing no nutritious properties inherent in it, this contributed to their sustenance, as indeed all food does (Matthew 4:4) solely through the ordinance and blessing of God. This remark is applicable to the means of spiritual as well as natural life.*”⁶ Think about it, the nation was sustained by manna for forty years. What nutritional value was there in manna? We do not know but it was blessed by God for the nourishment of the entire nation. They had to trust God to meet their needs — not in what they assumed they needed. “The general import is, of course, that the Lord wanted to teach Israel to trust, not in anything created, but only in the Creator.”⁷ We too often trust in the blessings of life to sustain us as if they possessed inherent effectual power. Without God’s blessings, they cannot. Therefore in this petition, we recognize that without God’s blessing, food, clothing, relationships, finances, work, etc. will do us no good if he does not effectually use them for our benefit!

⁴ Currid, *Deuteronomy*, 198.

⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 185.

⁶ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (1871, Accordance electronic ed. Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 1996), n.p.

⁷ J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Ed M. van der Maas, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 127.

same word (παρέδωκαν) is used as in Rom. 1. Rather than God giving them over, they give themselves over (ἑαυτοὺς παρέδωκαν) to sensuality—one sin plunges us into the next. We must remember that every step towards sin may lead us unto the next; there is never a guarantee that one sin won't escalate to another. This is the ploy of a wicked heart and one in which we too often indulge. A man may reason that he will partake of only one isolated sin but he fails to recognize that God may judicially allow him to fall head long into the excesses of each sin.

Outward Punishments

The outward punishments are listed in the following manner: **“or outward, as the curse of God upon the creatures of our sakes, and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments; together with death itself.”** The outward punishments include many things men take to be “normal.” The weakness and brokenness of the creature are considered to be natural. Death itself is a common fact of life and one in which everyone legitimately partakes because we are all creatures; it is deemed to be constitutive to our essential nature. Yet, after the fall, men began to die and the toil of labor along with man's alienation from the creation are expressions of God's outward punishments: Genesis 3:17-19 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Romans 8:20-22 teaches us that the creation was subject to “futility” or “vanity.” So the LC says that God's punishment includes **“the curse of God upon the creatures of our sakes, and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments; together with death itself.”** The creation does not “work” like it is supposed to; animals attack and are alienated from us; the plant world is wild; the insect world harasses us, etc. Though they all serve a function in God's created order, they are not all friendly to our existence. In other words, that which is natural is not necessarily beneficial to us (a fact one must consider when he ponders dietetic issues).

Death of course is the surest sign of God's punishment wherein the spirit is rent asunder from the body. We must never take death to be a matter of course; it is a grim reminder of our fallen condition and God's punishment (Rom. 6:23 teaches us that the wages of or our just desert for sin is death). However, for the believer, death is no longer punitive but is viewed as a sleep (1Th. 4:15). Physical death may be part of God's fatherly discipline or simply a passage unto eternal glory. “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Ps. 11:15)

The LC also enumerates various other external punishments and ones which every man faces on a regular basis. The list includes **“and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments.”** Our bodies suffer from sickness, and manifold expressions of weakness; ultimately, sickness has come upon humanity because of our sin. Our **“names”** refer to our reputation or character. God punishes different men and women by allowing their persons to be besmirched; we are always quick to complain of the injustices

done against us. Let us remember that we do not deserve a good name; any high reputation one might receive from “good” men are the blessings of God. Remember our Lord, they hurled insults at Him (3:23) and believers will be maligned: “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!” (Mt. 10:25) Searching for recognition, to have a good name is not an evil thing but it can turn out to be an idol (e.g., we can easily become men pleasers). Let us seek humbly to have a good conscience before God and men.

Our “**estates**” are subject to God’s punishment. God can give and take away and every man’s estate, position, possession, etc. may be disposed of by God and no man can question Him. This punishment perhaps reveals more about where our hearts are than any other. As if that was not enough, we are also taught that our “relations” are also the subjects of God’s outward punishment. Afflictions upon a man, woman or child are many in this area. Parents can be the means of bringing much evil to their children; children can be the source of much heart grief and tear filled nights. A wife may be the source of a husband’s woes; a husband can be the single most painful affliction in a woman’s life. Here let us thank the Lord for any and all good relationships we have within the immediate family and also recognize that no family shall be perfect here because enough sins exist in each of us to be the reason for God’s discipline in our relations. “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1).

And lastly, we can see the hand of God’s judicial displeasure in our “**employments**.” These can make us richer or poorer; more comfortable or more in need, etc. God may well blast all our efforts and all our efforts may be in vain. What shall we say to Ridgeley’s words? “Yet, when we meet with nothing but disappointments or want of success in business; when whatever diligence or industry we use, appears to be to no purpose; when adverse providences, like a torrent, sweep away all that we have in the world; and when poverty comes upon us like an armed man, our condition is to be reckoned no other than a punishment of sin.” (1:432)

In reflecting on this searching LC answer, we must bow down in humble reliance upon our heavenly Father. He who is righteous and absolutely sovereign in all His ways is our heavenly Father. The bitter edge of afflictions must be seen in the light of the goodness of our heavenly Father. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him...* (Job 13:15).