

Lord's Day 52

127. Q. *What is the sixth petition?*

A. *And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

That is:

*In ourselves we are so weak
that we cannot stand even for a moment.¹
Moreover, our sworn enemies—
the devil,² the world,³ and our own flesh⁴—
do not cease to attack us.*

*Wilt Thou, therefore,
uphold and strengthen us
by the power of Thy Holy Spirit,
so that in this spiritual war⁵
we may not go down to defeat,
but always firmly resist our enemies,
until we finally obtain
the complete victory.⁶*

¹ Ps. 103:14-16; John 15:1-5.

² II Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:10-13; I Pet. 5:8.

³ John 15:18-21.

⁴ Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:17.

⁵ Matt. 10:19, 20; 26:41; Mark 13:33; Rom. 5:3-5.

⁶ I Cor. 10:13; I Thess. 3:13; 5:23.

128. Q. *How do you conclude your prayer?*

A. *For Thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory, for ever.*

That is:

*All this we ask of Thee
because, as our King,
having power over all things,
Thou art both willing and able
to give us all that is good,¹
and because not we
but Thy holy Name
should so receive all glory
for ever.²*

¹ Rom. 10:11-13; II Pet 2:9.

² Ps. 115:1; Jer. 33:8, 9; John 14:13.

129. Q. *What does the word Amen mean?*

A. *Amen means:*

*It is true and certain.
For God has much more certainly
heard my prayer
than I feel in my heart
that I desire this of Him.¹*

¹ Is. 65:24; II Cor. 1:20; II Tim. 2:13.

LORD'S DAY 52

THE SIXTH PETITION: THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

Text: Lord's Day 52
Reading: II Thessalonians 2

Hymn 2 : 4, 5
Hymn 22
Psalm 141 : 1, 7, 8
Hymn 47 : 7, 8, 9, 10
Psalm 138 : 4; Hymn 60 : 5

Introduction: Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

We come now to the last Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism, containing an explanation of the sixth petition and of the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer. There is a lot of material in this Lord's Day, and it is sometimes desirable to deal with the various items in separate sermons, but there is also a clear line in this Lord's Day which we may emphasize in this service. All this material forms a unity and there is a prevailing theme, namely, *the perseverance of the saints*.

It is a fitting conclusion for such a prayer. Here is where our petitions become praise and our requests become thanksgiving, for God will grant us to see the great day of our Lord Jesus Christ! We will make it across the finish line, because the Lord will bring us across!

This is the tremendous and final *comfort* of the Church of Christ. The Catechism started in Lord's Day 1 as the book of "the only comfort", and now it also concludes in this same vein. The final comfort is that the Lord will grant us not only justification (forgiveness of sins) but also *glorification* (eternal blessedness)!

It is noteworthy that not only the Heidelberg Catechism, but also the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort end with the same confession concerning the perseverance of the saints. In Article 37 of the Belgic Confession we confess that the Lord God will cause us "to possess such glory as the heart of man could never conceive. Therefore we look forward to that great day with a great longing to enjoy to the full the promises of God in Jesus Christ our Lord".

In the Canons of Dort, the entirety of chapter V is devoted to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. There we confess (Article 3) that God is faithful and mercifully confirms us in the grace once conferred upon us and powerfully preserves us in that grace to the end. We also confess that this doctrine [of the perseverance of the saints] is hated by Satan, ridiculed by the world, abused by the ignorant and the hypocrites, and opposed by heretics, but that the Bride of Christ has always most tenderly loved and constantly defended it as a treasure of inestimable value (Article 15).

The Church has *always* cherished this doctrine, the Canons say. But this doctrine will be of particular value and comfort in "the latter days". This prayer which looks to the *end* of time also reckons with the great *crisis* which will come about before the end arrives. We see that also in the way the sixth petition is worded. I summarize it as follows:

Christ teaches the Church of the latter days to pray for the perseverance of the saints.

- 1. the ultimate petition of the Church**
- 2. the final certainty of the Church.**

1. When we speak about "the perseverance of the saints", we may never take this to mean that *we* will persevere in and through *ourselves*. That is the way in which many do understand it. For example, Arminians or Methodists will also speak of the perseverance of the saints, but then as something which we ourselves must achieve and which depends upon our own effort.

If "perseverance" indeed would depend on us or our effort, it would become a very questionable matter.

Indeed, the confession of the perseverance of the saints in Arminian circles is not a matter of *certainty*, but one of *possibility* alone. The reason for this is that perseverance is not regarded as a *gift of God* but as a *work of man*.

But we confess that God is the only One who can cause us to persevere. This is why we must *pray* for it. If we have this perseverance within ourselves as one of our possibilities, we do not have to pray for it. But because we know that we do not have this power in ourselves, we must pray for it!

“Perseverance” is a gift of God. We know that by faith in Christ we may be *assured* of God’s gifts. But we may not wrongly take God’s gifts for granted. Then we would despise God’s grace. God’s gifts are received only upon prayer. We need to ask the Lord for them. We may never say that the perseverance of the saints is something which is guaranteed for us anyway, so we don’t have to ask for it anymore. Instead we should say that if ever there is one gift of God for which we need to pray, it is for the perseverance of the saints! More than ever in the history of the Church, this petition is for us the *ultimate petition*.

For we live in *the latter days*. This prayer is particularly prayer-instruction for the latter days. The expression “latter days” is the Biblical term for the last dispensation leading to the end of time. The latter days begin with the triumphant ascension of Christ and the casting out of the devil from heaven (Revelation 12). The “latter days” therefore denote the time when the devil has come to the earth in great wrath and relentless anger. It is the time when the hour of great *trial* comes upon all the earth. As we read in II Thessalonians, the “man of lawlessness” and “the son of perdition” shall reveal himself. With signs of pretence and display of wickedness the power of Satan is unleashed. A great delusion shall come upon all nations, *and the temptations* become unbearable. Then this petition will become the ultimate petition for the Church. “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”. If God does not hang on to us now, in these latter days, if He does not grant us the perseverance of the saints, we will never make it! The Church could never stand on its own. How much less

when all the forces of evil are now unleashed in one last frontal attack?

The Catechism understands quite well the urgency of this petition. It gives us a very clear portrait of the situation.

First the Catechism tells us *about ourselves*. It says that “in ourselves we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment . . .” This means that in ourselves we do not stand even the slightest chance of survival. We are utterly vulnerable, completely helpless, always in peril of defeat. There is not one moment of which we can say: I can do it on my own! We cannot cope with the world’s temptations and the Satan’s schemes.

We sometimes speak of “weak moments”. We say, “Oh well, I did that in a weak moment”. Possibly then we also have “strong moments”. But this weakness is never a matter of a momentary lapse. Instead, it is with us *all the time*, no matter what moment, day or night. Sometimes we think that we can go to places where temptations are apparent, for example, to bars, dances, or discos. We think that “we can handle it”. But the Catechism is Scriptural and realistic when it says that we are *so weak* that we cannot stand *even* for a moment! That we cannot “stand” means that we have no power to resist. It means that we will give in, yes, that we will be completely wiped out! The original German text even has a word which indicates that our *existence* is at stake. We cannot exist for one moment on our own. We are in *mortal* danger. We have no natural defense, no inward resistance, and no outward means. We are always at the point of being completely run over!

Then the Catechism tells us about *our enemies*, about the devil, the world, and our own flesh, who do not cease to attack us! The devil is the main culprit. He is the prince of darkness, the ruler of this world. With “world” is meant the entire earthly arsenal which Satan has at his disposal to lure us and tempt us. And if that is not yet enough, there is also our *own* flesh, our natural and sinful weakness. We have the enemy outside and inside the gate.

Please notice that the Catechism speaks of *sworn* enemies. A sworn enemy is one who is bound by oath. He attacks unceasingly. He never quits until he has destroyed you! These enemies wish to make us captives

to sin and children of wrath. They seek nothing less than our eternal destruction! Sworn enemies never quit and do not grant you a moment of rest!

Do you understand the urgency of this petition? We pray, “Wilt Thou, therefore, uphold and strengthen us . . .” Hold us up, O God when our enemies bear down on us; strengthen us when weaknesses assail us, and do this “by the power of Thy Holy Spirit so that in this spiritual war we may not go down to defeat, but always firmly resist our enemies, until we finally obtain the complete victory”.

Spiritual war, that’s what it is. It is a fight to the finish, a battle which lasts our entire life! It is a *spiritual* war, a battle of the spirits, and therefore we indeed need above all the help of the *Holy Spirit*. He will enable us to stand, resist, and overcome! It is a war, and we are in constant danger, always under attack, and ever facing the snares and traps of the devil. From Psalm 141, we sang:

“*Destroy their trap, LORD, do not fail me,
And of my perils be aware
Let them be caught in their own snare,
While I escape to hail and praise Thee*”.

The dangers are so varied and so refined that often we do not even see them. Time and again, before we know it, we are ensnared, so that we need to cry, “Lord, lift me up and lead me on!”

For those who know their own weaknesses and the enemies’ strength, and who ask for God’s daily pastoral and preserving care, this is indeed the ultimate petition.

“Lead us not into temptation”. We need not make the point here that *God* does not tempt us! The Lord’s Prayer does not say, “Tempt us not”, but, “*Lead* us not into temptation”. God *leads* our lives according to His divine wisdom and sovereign grace, and we ask Him to lead us away from the temptations *of the devil, the world, and our own flesh*. Lead us out, for “deliverance” is “exodus”.

In His grace, God must grant us the perseverance of the saints. That is the ultimate petition. I may add to this the warning that if we ask God not to lead us into temptation, we should then also not bring ourselves into temptation. It is, of course, ridiculous to pray this petition and then to go out to *places of worldly temptation*,

like bars, dances, theatres, and to go about with those who do not wish to serve the Lord! If you let your mind be dominated by worldly media and your ears filled with diabolical rock music, it will be quite ineffective to pray this petition. Whoever goes out looking for the devil and the world should not ask the Lord for His protection!

This warning is in place. Still, we are dealing here in Lord’s Day 52 with a petition and not with an admonition. The thrust of this Lord’s Day is that in true faith and with sincere hearts, we ask the Lord to grant us perseverance, for of ourselves we cannot stand! This is the ultimate petition for all of us and it is also the final certainty of the Church. So we come to the second point.

2. There is still a question about the conclusion of our prayer, which reads, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen”. This conclusion shows that when we pray this last petition—and that includes then also the preceding ones, but especially this last one—we are not taking “a shot in the dark”.

No, we are at the right address with our prayer. “All this we ask *of Thee*”, and of no one else! And there are some simple reasons for this. There is a sharp contrast here between those sworn enemies, mentioned in answer 127—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—and “the kingdom, the power and the glory”. Let me just demonstrate this briefly, for here the final certainty of the Church is crystallized in Jesus Christ!

It is the *devil* who thinks that he has, or at least who wants to have the kingdom. He is striving to be king of all and to rule over all. Is he not called “the ruler of this world” and “the prince of darkness”? Did not this devil, with all his nerve, in the greatest of all temptations, say to our Lord Jesus Christ, “If you worship me, I will give you all the kingdoms of this world, and their riches”? Christ was led right into that temptation, and He withstood it, saying, “It is written, you shall serve only God”.

The kingdom is not Satan’s, but is Christ’s. It is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who *does* govern all things. In all the trials and temptations of the latter days, the *final certainty* of the Church begins with the knowledge that everything here is in the hands of God in Christ!

The *world* always seeks the power, the ability to execute authority and to manipulate. The world is always involved in an immense power struggle. In the world it is the “law of the strongest” or “the survival of the fittest”. But we know, “Thine is the power”! The real, sovereign, supreme, and omnipotent power lies with God and His Christ, slain as a lamb, but risen from the dead, and now standing *invincible*! The almighty power of God is given to Jesus Christ and He uses that power to gather His Church out of a hostile world.

And my own *flesh* always seeks the glory. All men are in a quest for self-glorification. Spurred on by that ancient lie of Satan, people aspire to deity, but the Church knows that to God belongs the glory, and to Him alone. He will *reveal* that glory, especially on the day of days. The earth will be *filled* with His glory!

Whereas Satan, the world, and our evil flesh have their hour, their time under the sun, and their moments of seeming success, the kingdom and the power and the glory belong to God *for ever*. Eternal kingship, power and glory belong to the Lord alone.

This is the final certainty of the Church in the latter days, and Christ teaches us to mention this in our prayer. No matter how dark it will become, things will never get out of God's hand. The Catechism says: “. . . as our King, having power over all things, Thou art both willing and able to give us all good”. So our prayer becomes a confession and our petitions are turned into jubilation. God who is willing and able to grant us all good, will grant us even the *perseverance of the saints*.

Therefore we end our prayer not with a question mark but with an exclamation mark, with the word *amen*. Amen means, “It is true and certain” (answer 129). This word is a very important and a true word for the Church of the latter days. Amen means that God has heard! The moment I pray, He has heard. I may not always feel this. I may not have prayed with the necessary concentration and intensity. I may even have prayed in the weakness of faith, but *my prayer is heard*! Christ said that we must conclude our prayer with the confession that it is true and certain. For the final certainty of the promises of God is the crowning touch upon the prayers of the Church.

In the latter days we will need this certainty. There will be so many struggles, failures, and shortcomings, and the enemy will wax so terribly strong. Yes, the last temptations will be many. The hour of great trial will come over all the earth. Yet, even as he sketches this ominous reality, Paul writes to the Thessalonians: “But we are bound always to give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this He called you through our Gospel so that you may *obtain the glory* of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Thessalonians 2:13, 14).

The great temptation is coming and is now. The grand delusion is spreading all over the world. But our confidence is that the certain glory will prevail all over the *new* world!

We must now conclude this series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer. We have understood that “praying” is not just asking God to give a few things *for this life*. Ultimately, prayer means that in faith we see Christ descending as our King with all power and in unsurpassed glory. Prayer is knowing that I will be there on that great day, for it is true and certain. Out of the great tribulation come the saints, who by God's grace have persevered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

At the end of each prayer, Christ leads us to the ultimate petition. The times are grave, so we say, “lead us not into temptation”. But we pray in the final certainty that the victory is assured, “for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever”.

And the Church of the latter days constantly says, “Amen”. Amen is a word of the *congregation*. “Let the AMEN sound from His people again”. It is not just the word of the minister. It does not just indicate the end of a sermon or a prayer, but it is a word that should resound throughout the building, for it captures and echoes the final certainty of the Church of the latter days, of the people whose certainty is, “LORD, though I walk ‘mid troubles sore, Thou wilt restore my faltering spirit . . . Yea Thou wilt finish perfectly what Thou for me hast undertaken!” (Psalm 138:4, *Book of Praise*). This is true and certain, without a doubt.

Let the “amen” sound from His people again, and again, and again. AMEN.