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## Praying for Help in our Office and Calling

Preached by Rev. W. Bredenhof on Sunday, December 18, 2005 (Afternoon)

Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-14; Psalm 40; Belgic Confession: Article 12

Text: Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 49

Beloved congregation of Christ Jesus,

When it comes to angels, it seems that one of two extremes tends to dominate. On the one hand, we have people who basically put angels in the place of God. Angels are over-emphasized to the point where they may even be worshipped. For example, one Roman Catholic website suggests praying to your so-called guardian angel: Angel of God, my Guardian dear, to whom His love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen. I doubt that we ever get anywhere near this extreme. More than likely, we're often at the other extreme. We acknowledge that angels exist – the story of Christ's birth and the events leading up to it are filled with angels, for instance. But in the here and now of daily life, we rarely talk about or think about the fact that angels are there and that they're at work around us. More often we minimize the existence and work of angels.

The Bible doesn't allow either of these extremes. And that's reflected in our confessions. Let's just look at the Belgic Confession for a minute. If we look at Article 12 and just look at the title, we find that it's about "the Creation of All Things, Especially the Angels." We have one paragraph about creation in general and then two full paragraphs about angels. We read here, "He also created the angels good, to be his messengers and to serve his elect. Some of these have fallen from the exalted position in which God created them into everlasting perdition, but the others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their first state."

The Heidelberg Catechism also acknowledges the existence and work of angels. We find this in Lord's Day 49. When the Lord Jesus added the words "on earth as it is in heaven," to the third petition, he was making a reference to the angels in God's presence. The angels have an office and calling before God. In the words of the Belgic Confession, they are his messengers (the word "angel" means messenger) and they serve the elect. The angels willingly and faithfully serve God. The Lord Jesus teaches us that their obedience to God's will is a model or example for ours. In the third petition, then, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray for help in carrying out the duties of our office and calling in the same way as the angels in heaven. So, our theme this afternoon is this:

**The Third Petition: Praying for help in our office and calling.**



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We pray to do God's will in this:

1. Cheerfully
2. Constantly
3. Completely

### **1. We pray to do God's will in our office and calling cheerfully.**

Before we go any further, we should be clear about our definitions. The one thing that needs to be defined clearly in the third petition is the meaning of the concept "God's will." God's will can be understood in two different ways. In the Bible, God's will can be his sovereign, secret will. God wills that something will happen and then it happens. We find this meaning of God's will in passages like Ephesians 1:11 where we read that God works all things "after the counsel of his will." The context of predestination in that passage very clearly indicates that God's sovereign secret will is meant there. The other meaning of God's will is what we have in the third petition. This is God's moral will, or as some would call it, his perceptive will. This is what God commands us to do in the Bible. Most of the time when the Lord Jesus talks about the will of God, this is what he means. We see it, for instance, in Matthew 12:50, when the Lord says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." It's the same here in the Lord's Prayer. When we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we're referring to God's revealed will for us.

And this will for us includes our office and calling. Office and calling simply refers to the God-given position that we have in life with the duties that go along with that position. Any given person can have a variety of offices and callings. Some of these are shared by many of us, some of them are shared only by a few. But we have this in common that all of us, without exception, have some kind of office and calling in life. It doesn't matter how old we are. It doesn't matter whether we're married, widowed, or single. God has given each one of us a task and place in life. The third petition teaches us to pray about this.

The Lord Jesus teaches us to pray for help in fulfilling our office and calling with a certain attitude. This attitude is captured by the Catechism with the adverb "willingly." When we do something willingly, we do it cheerfully. We're glad to be able to do whatever it is that we're called to do. In this respect, the Catechism captures the attitude of the angels in God's presence. Psalm 16:11 tells us that God is surrounded by the fullness of joy. The angels were created good and by God's grace a host of them remained the way they were created. In other words, the angels in heaven carry out the duties of their office and calling cheerfully. They gladly serve God.

And so we should serve God in our office and calling the same way – and the third petition teaches us to pray for God's help in doing this. When we try to apply this to our lives concretely, there are different directions we could go. Let's take the direction given to us in what we read from Psalm 40. This is a Psalm of David. In the New Testament, in Hebrews 10, some of the words of David are put directly in



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the mouth of the Lord Jesus. In all of this, we find Scripture shining a bright light on the prophetic office of Christ. And in turn, that also says something about our office as prophets. As believers, we share in Christ's office as a prophet. We have been anointed with his Holy Spirit to be prophets – and that's something that applies to each one of us.

So, when we read or sing the words of Psalm 40, we think first of all about Christ. With that thought in mind, consider verse 8, "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." A couple of things to note here. First of all, "I desire" can also be translated as "I delight." "I delight to do your will." Second, note that God's will here is his law. Like so much Hebrew poetry, we have this thing called "parallelism" in this verse. The parallel is between "your will" and "your law." So, the context here shows that God's perceptive or moral will, the will revealed in his Word, that's what's in view here.

So, David first wrote these words about himself. We know that his desire to do God's will was imperfect. David's life was filled with inconsistencies. But David's Son, Jesus Christ, perfectly fulfilled these words. He earnestly and cheerfully always delighted to do God's moral will. He obeyed the law perfectly and he did it for us. His obedience is given to us. We also share in his Holy Spirit. We are given new hearts that also delight in doing God's will. There is still inconsistency, sure, but there is growth. More and more we cheerfully want to be God's prophets.

And this is what we see in verses 9 and 10. These verses speak about David and, most importantly, about Christ. But these verses also speak about our office as prophets. God calls us to proclaim righteousness – both among God's people and outside. God calls us to not seal our lips, but to speak! God calls us not to hide his righteousness – which for us is in Christ – but to speak at every opportunity he gives us! He calls us to speak of his faithfulness and salvation – again a pointing to Christ. He calls us to let his love and truth ring out – both among God's people in the great assembly – we would say, "in the church," and outside. We are called to be God's prophets and to be willing and cheerful in this office and calling.

The problem is that sometimes we're filled with fear. What will people think of me? Sometimes our pride gets in the way. This can even happen when we're talking to fellow believers. Just as an example, we're told in Scripture to talk about God's works, but yet many of us still talk about luck. Why do we talk like that when we confess that we believe in God's providence? Why when we're anointed as prophets to confess his name? There can be all kinds of reasons and all of them remind us of our need to pray in the spirit of the third petition.

We need God's help to carry out the duties of our office and calling in a cheerful way. We are sinful and weak human beings. And that impacts our office as prophets, but also every other office that God has given to us. When we pray the way the Lord Jesus taught us, we acknowledge our weak and sinful condition and we look to God for help and strength.

Let's now look at how...



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## **2. We pray to do God's will in our office and calling constantly.**

You don't have to think about it very long to realize that doing God's will constantly flows out of his doing his will cheerfully. If something is a delight to us, we don't mind to keep on doing it. In fact, we want to keep on doing it!

It's certainly that way with the angels in heaven. You can be sure that their goodness means that they constantly serve God. Last week, we read Revelation 7. That passage mentions the angels serving God in his temple. It also mentions the people who have come out of the great tribulation, those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Revelation 7:15 tells us that all these join the angels in serving him day and night.

Back when our family lived in Fort Babine, we had to drive every week to Smithers to get our groceries and mail and everything else. Along the way, we passed this place in a mountain pass, the place was called Dry Creek. It was called that because, for most of the year, there was no water in it. It was just a creek bed with a bunch of rocks and boulders in it. It was only for a short time in the spring – in May and June in those parts – that this creek would have water running in it. That creek only ran once a year – that's a picture of what the Christian life is not supposed to look like!

We should be praying that God would give us strength in our office and calling so that we do his will constantly. No fits and starts, but consistently, 24/7. With the help of Deuteronomy 4, let's think about how that will look in one specific office and calling that many of us share: that of being parents.

Now, I'd note that this passage speaks to more than just parents; it also speaks to grandparents. Brothers and sisters, if you're a grandparent, you have a special place in the lives of your children's children. That's not just a sentimental thing, it's Biblical. Look at verse 9 of Deuteronomy 4: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your hearts as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them." Other translations will put it more explicitly: teach them to your children and your grandchildren. So, if you're a grandparent, God has given you a special office with respect to your grandchildren.

That special office is the same as the one we have as parents: that of being a teacher. The LORD wants us to teach our children about his deeds. We see that clearly stated in Deuteronomy 4. In Deuteronomy 6, we find that the LORD also wants the parents among his people to teach his law to their children. In other words, God wants us to teach his will, his revealed will, to our children and our grandchildren.

And this teaching is to be something that goes on constantly. Deuteronomy 4 says that God's people are not supposed to let these things slip from their hearts so long as they have blood running through their veins and arteries. The command to teach the children and grandchildren comes right alongside of that. Deuteronomy 6 makes it more explicit when it says, "Talk about them (God's commandments) when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." In other



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words, we should be constantly teaching our children and grandchildren about God's will. We should take every opportunity that he gives us so that our covenant children know their God, that they know his will for their lives. This is part of what we promised at the baptism of our children, "do you promise as father and mother to instruct your child in this doctrine, as soon as he/she is able to understand and have him/her instructed therein to the utmost of your power?"

The teaching office we have as parents is filled with challenges and difficulties. I think one of the greatest challenges in today's world is the busyness that surrounds us. Perhaps you've heard of Corrie Ten Boom, well-known for her book "The Hiding Place." She once said, "Beware of the barrenness of busyness." Busyness can end up destroying you and your family. We can fill up our lives with all kinds of tasks to the point where relationships suffer: our relationships with our children and grandchildren, and more importantly, their relationships with their covenant God. Other challenges include not having had parents ourselves who modelled the teaching office for us. In that case, we may have no idea or maybe very little of what it looks like to teach our children and even grandchildren. We have to start from scratch and figure it out for ourselves. That can be challenging. I could add other challenges, but you get the point. This teaching office of being a parent and grandparent and doing it constantly is not something that comes naturally to us.

For this reason, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray for God's help. He wants us as parents and grandparents to be leaning on him for the strength we need to be faithful and constant covenant shepherds of the little sheep. Without constant prayer, we cannot be constant in carrying out this office or any other office for that matter. The challenges remind us that we cannot do it in our own power. And that holds true also for striving to do God's will completely. That's our last point...

### **3. We pray to do God's will in our office and calling completely.**

Cheerfully and constantly belong with willingly and faithfully. So, does completely. If you're faithful in doing something, you're going to do it completely. When we pray along the lines of the third petition, we're asking God to help us carry out his will completely, also with respect to the duties of our office and calling.

In this regard, think of the angels in heaven again. Psalm 103:20 says, "Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his Word." Note that it doesn't say, "who obey his Word, at least the parts they agree with." No, the Bible is clear that the obedience of the angels to God's will is complete, whether the task they're given is unpleasant or glorious. An angel of the LORD struck the firstborn in Egypt dead. An angel of the LORD did the glorious work of proclaiming Christ's birth to the shepherds – and he was joined by a huge crowd of his fellow angels all praising God. Angels, no matter what job they're given, always obey God's Word completely.



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According to the third petition, our obedience to God's will is to follow the same pattern. That's true in our general office of all believers, as prophets, priests and kings. In that general office, we have not only the pattern of the angels in their complete submission to God's will, but also that of our Lord Jesus. He was completely obedient and his complete obedience inspires and compels our desire to do God's will as prophets, priests and kings. We're overwhelmed with thankfulness and love for what he's done and so we also commit ourselves to complete submission to God's will.

And that's also the case with more particular offices we might hold. We already talked about being parents and grandparents. But we have other offices as well. Some of us are special office-bearers in the church, elders and deacons. Some of us have the office of being a husband or a wife. Others are in the special place of being teachers for our children in a Christian school. God has made some of us into mentors and leaders through things like GEMS and Cadets. Some of us have the simple office of being a child. We all have a place and station in life where there are duties attached. It's God will for us that we carry out those duties completely, no half-baked jobs allowed!

We know that's a challenge in today's world, a world where efficiency is the key word. In the manufacturing world, it's generally recognized that products will have defects. Companies want to produce products in the most cost-effective way, the way which will produce the most profits for the company. This means that some products will have defects. Large companies plan for that, in fact they probably couldn't make the profit they do if every product was perfect. It shouldn't be like that in the Christian life. The sad truth is that it often is. Our sinful nature compromises the end product. We don't give God the willing and faithful obedience that we ought to. And for this reason, we need all the more to be calling out to him for his help. We recognize the call to complete faithfulness. We also recognize our own sin and weakness. By the power of the Spirit working in us, we desire to move forward in our walk with God so that we can bring him more praise with our lives – that we would look more like the angels, and even more importantly, like Christ our Saviour.

Loved ones, God's will for us is clear. But it is not easy. As redeemed people, we have the Holy Spirit who lives in us. He leads us to call out to our Father for help. We have the Lord Jesus, our Saviour. He teaches us to ask for God's help in doing his will. And through it all, we can be confident that God will give more grace. He will help each one of us in whatever place we are in our lives. He will more and more transform us into the people he wants us to be. He'll do all that until the day we will be those, who in the words of Revelation 7, "are before the throne of God, serving him day and night in his temple."  
AMEN.