

Catechism Sec. 19: Legitimate Needs In Prayer

by B. S. Poh

Q87. What do Christians pray for in the fourth petition?

A87. In the fourth petition (which is, “Give us this day our daily bread.”) Christians pray that they may receive from God a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy His blessing with them¹⁻³.

Notes: The phrase, “of God’s free gift they may receive a competent portion”, has been changed to, “they may receive from God a competent portion”.

- 1. Prov. 30:8-9, Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches— feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny You, and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.*
- 2. 1 Tim. 4:4-5, For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*
- 3. Psalm 90:17, And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.*

Comments

1. Three points may be noted. Firstly, “daily bread” speaks of basic needs that comes regularly. What we *want* may not be what we *need*. We do not pray merely for a supply of needs to barely survive but to live a reasonably comfortable life. When God blesses with abundance, we must be careful not to think too highly of ourselves. Nebuchadnezzar was struck low when he claimed credit for his successes (Dan. 4:28-36). Abraham was rich, but was not drawn away by his riches (Gen. 14:23; 22:21). Jacob acknowledged God’s goodness for his riches (Gen. 32:10). It may be difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, but it is never impossible (cf. Matt. 19:24). The dangers of greed and lack of contentment are ever present with the rich as well as the poor.
2. Secondly, to pray for our “daily bread” on a day to day basis shows our dependence on God. When studying the eighth commandment, “You shall not steal”, we learned that wealth may be given (as a gift or an inheritance), or earned. Some Christians have greater ability than others to generate wealth, for which they must be thankful. It is legitimate and, in fact, a responsibility to use our talents well for God’s glory. The danger here is sinful self-confidence, in which God’s sovereignty is overlooked and one fails to trust in Him (James 4:13-17).
3. Thirdly, we desire God’s blessing to accompany His provision. This means that we give generously to needs and to further God’s kingdom, since “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Christians have always been on the forefront of practical and financial aid in times of disasters and in meeting needs. We do so not to gain merits with God or the praise of man, but because of the consciousness that we are unworthy sinners saved by God’s grace. We, therefore, desire to love God with all our being, and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31).

Q88. What do Christians pray for in the fifth petition?

A88. In the fifth petition (which is, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”) Christians pray that God, for Christ’s sake, would freely pardon all their sins¹ because, by His grace, they are enabled from the heart to forgive others².

Notes: The phrase, “which they are the more readily encouraged to ask”, after “pardon all their sins”, has been left out.

1. *Psalm 51:1-2, 7, 9, Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.*
2. *Mark 11:25-26, And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.*

Comments

1. An unforgiving heart cripples a Christian in his spiritual growth and service to God more than he realizes. We are here reminded of the necessity of forgiving those who may have badly offended us and caused us much harm and pain. While there are biblical ways of handling offences between Christians, which extend to some measure to offences involving non-Christians, it is not always possible to settle things well (Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5:4-5). This is especially so when there is no reciprocal desire for repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. What is important is that we have a forgiving heart towards those who have cause us offence, knowing that God has freely forgiven us our sins, in Christ (Matt. 18:21-22). The offender will benefit from our forgiveness only if he repents (Luke 17:3-4). Matthew 6:14-15 does not mean that our salvation will be jeopardized by our lack of forgiveness for others. Rather, it means that those who are saved will want to forgive others. It may be hard to do so but, with God’s help, it is possible.
2. Justification is a once for all act on the part of God, forgiving us our sins, and treating us as righteous in Jesus Christ, at the point of our conversion. Sanctification, however, is a continual process by which God works in the believer the desire and ability to live a righteous life. A major part of our sanctification is constantly praying to God for forgiveness of our sins, committed knowingly or unknowingly (Job 1:5; 1 John 1:8-10). In other words, we not only repent of our sins at the beginning of the Christian life, but continually throughout our Christian life. We have the confidence that God will forgive us, for Christ’s sake.

Q89. What do Christians pray for in the sixth petition?

A89. In the sixth petition (which is, “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one) Christians pray that God would either keep them from being tempted to sin^{1,2}, or support and deliver them when they are tempted^{3,4}.

1. *Matt. 26:41, Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*
2. *Psalm 19:13, Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.*
3. *1 Cor. 10:13, No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

4. *John 17:15, I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

Comments

1. The expression, “do not lead us into temptation” is a “litotes”, i.e. an affirmation of something by saying its opposite (e.g. Rev. 3:5). The expression means “lead us in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:24). God does not maliciously lead His children into temptation but, by His sovereign will, He may allow temptation to come to them (cf. Job 1:12; 2:6). Satan is the source of all temptations, with which he aims to destroy believers (John 8:44; 1 Pet. 5:8). God permits such temptations in order: (i) to show forth His glory in the preservation of His people (Job 1:22; 2:10); (ii) to strengthen the faith of His people (Luke 22:32); and (iii) to chastise His wayward children (Heb. 12:3-11; Psalm 66:8-12). To be tempted to sin is not the same as falling into sin. Before one falls into sin, he is drawn away by temptation, i.e. he is troubled by the temptation, which may ensnare or entangle him (James 1:13-15). When ensnared, we have “fallen into temptation” (Matt. 26:41). It is never pleasant to be ensnared by temptation. We are now in danger of sinning - in thought, word and deed - over that temptation.
2. How do we handle temptations? First, we must avoid temptations. This is where prayer comes in. Temptations are in the world, from the devil, but they need not succeed in tempting God’s children. Second, we must flee from the temptation that manages to tempt us, while resisting the devil (1 Cor. 6:18; 10:14; James 4:7). God always provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). Third, when entangled with a temptation, take drastic actions of getting out of it by praying urgently while taking definite measures to put an end to that temptation (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). Fourth, if the temptation cannot be removed, watch and pray that you do not succumb to sin (James 1:12; Matt. 26:41). God’s grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Over and above all these steps, Christians must be pro-active in strengthening themselves and avoiding occasions of temptation, instead of always fighting a defensive battle. This can be done only by attending to the means of grace, in company with other believers (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22).

Q90. What does the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer teach His disciples?

A90. The conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer (which is, “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”) teaches His disciples to take encouragement in prayer from God only¹, and in their prayers to praise and thank Him^{2,3}, and in testimony of their desire and assurance to be heard, to say, Amen⁴.

Notes: We have changed “to praise Him” to “to praise and thank Him”, while leaving out the phrase following, which is, “ascribing kingdom, power, and glory to Him”.

1. *Dan. 9:18-19, O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”*
2. *1 Chron. 29:11-13, Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank You and praise Your glorious name.*
3. *Phil. 4:6, Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*
4. *Rev. 22:20, He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

Comments

1. The “power of prayer” is not in ourselves - not in our spiritual-mindedness, our self-discipline, nor the fact that others are praying with us. Instead, it is in God Himself - who hears, is pleased with His children drawing near to Him, and who is ever ready to grant their petitions, for Christ’s sake (Dan. 9:23; Rom. 8:32; John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23-24). Praise and thanksgiving should be found often in our prayers, without which our hearts quickly become stale and morbid from frequent repentance, petitions and intercessions.
2. When we say “Amen”, meaning “So be it”, do we actually believe that God will answer and, in fact, has answered in His own ways? We should be saying a hearty “Amen” whenever the person leading us ends his prayer (1 Cor. 14: 16). The “John Sung style” of prayer (popularized by him, although not started by him) in which everyone prays at the same time, is not in accordance to the teaching of Scripture (1 Cor. 14:16 cf. vv. 27, 31). [John Sung (1901-1944) was a famous evangelist from China who preached widely in South-east Asia.]

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