



A BIBLE STUDY ON MARTIN CHEMNITZ

*The “Second Martin” Who Faithfully Detailed the
Doctrines of the Reformation*

“Our Father, Who from Heaven Above”

(TLH 458; LW 431; LSB 766) (Matt. 6:9–13)

Which doctrine, then, or which word, ought a minister set before the church of God? “Neither his dreams, nor the visions of his heart, or whatever seemed good and right to him; also not human traditions or ordinances. But let him who teaches in the church teach the Word of God, so that the heart of the ministry is and remains this: ‘I have put My words in your mouth,’ and as Augustine aptly says: ‘Let us not hear in the church: I say this, you say this, he says that; but, Thus says the Lord.’” — Martin Chemnitz (Question 34 from his *Enchiridion*)

By God’s grace, Martin Chemnitz made good use of the good gifts given to him: his investigative skills, the lessons learned studying under Luther and Melanchthon, his unrestricted access to one of the finest libraries in Europe, his skills in the biblical languages, but especially his ability to present with clarity complex doctrines that had been discussed and debated by Christian theologians for the last 1,500 years. He was respected, both inside and outside the Lutheran Church in Germany, as a theologian and author who avoided the extremes of other contemporary theologians. His most famous writings — *Loci Theologici*, *The Two Natures in Christ and Examination of the Council of Trent* — remain definitive commentaries for confessional Lutheranism today.

While Chemnitz was trained under Luther and Melanchthon, he never became a university professor. He was ordained in 1547 after which he preached, taught and served God’s people as a parish pastor until his death in 1586.

The hymn “Our Father, Who from Heaven Above” was written by Martin Luther in 1539. It is one of only two hymns of which a draft has survived in Luther’s own hand. Here Luther teaches on the clear commands and promises given in the Lord’s Prayer. He ends his discussion of the First Petition of the “Our Father” in the Large Catechism with these words: “Likewise, we should pray for ourselves who have God’s Word but are not thankful for it, nor live like we ought according to the Word. If you pray for this with your heart, you can be sure that it pleases God. For He will not hear anything more dear to Him than that His

honor and praise is exalted above everything else and that His Word is taught in its purity and is considered precious and dear.”

STANZA ONE

Our Father, who from heav’n above / Bids all of us to live in love / As members of one family / And pray to You in unity, / Teach us no thoughtless words to say / But from our inmost hearts to pray.

Both Luther and Chemnitz faithfully taught that Christians can only call upon God as “Dear Father” because of and through Christ. The Lord’s Prayer is given as a gracious gift by Christ to the Christian Church. We always pray the Lord’s Prayer following our Lord Christ — and also all the saints He has taught (Luke 11:1).

1. For those who believe in the Gospel of Christ, the “Our Father” is not just another ordinance or command that forces Christians to pray hollow words over and over in the hope that God might hear us. Luther explains in the Small Catechism that it is meant to encourage us to believe that because of Christ, God the Father is our dear, heavenly Father — and that because of Christ, we are His dear and precious children. How had the Roman Catholic Church made praying the Lord’s Prayer into a good work that merits God’s blessing? How is this completely different than praying the Lord’s Prayer as a free response to Christ’s work of redemption?

2. The world believes that prayer to heaven only works when the individual believer is sincere enough. But, as Chemnitz points out, in faith we pray “our” Father and not “the” Father. Why is our own human sincerity not enough when it comes to praying to God in a way that pleases Him? Why is confidence and assurance that God is already kindly disposed to us in Christ the critical element in true Christian prayer? How is this first modeled in Christ’s prayers to His Father?

3. Everything hangs on the commands and promises of God in Christ. This is what Chemnitz helped articulate in the Formula of Concord. Review Article V of the Formula

of Concord (1577). Reflect on C.F.W. Walther's statement that "rightly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and of theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience" (Thesis III of Walther's Evening Lectures on Law and Gospel).

STANZA TWO

Your name be hallowed. Help us, Lord, / In purity to keep Your Word, / That to the glory of Your name / We walk before You free from blame. / Let no false teaching us pervert; / All poor, deluded souls convert.

While the first stanza unpacks the introduction of the Lord's Prayer, the second stanza is based on the First Petition, "Hallowed be Thy name." Note again that the hymn emphasizes the corporate nature of the Lord's Prayer as a gift which is kept, used and treasured by all true Christians on earth.

4. This stanza contains a plea that of His mercy, God would give us the ability to "keep" His Word. While other Protestant church bodies understand "keep" as "obey under penalty of punishment," the Scriptures and the Lutheran Reformation understand "keep" as primarily "honor," "treasure" and "hold as precious." How does this affect our understanding of salvation and the nature of the true Gospel?

5. In what ways is this petition of the Lord's Prayer closely linked to our Baptism? How is the Lord's Prayer a prayer of all the baptized that the Word would do its saving work throughout the world unhindered by attempts to twist and pervert the Bible and the Sacraments?

STANZA THREE

Your kingdom come. Guard your domain / And Your eternal righteous reign. / The Holy Ghost enrich our day / With gifts attendant on our way. / Break Satan's pow'r, defeat his rage; / Preserve Your Church from age to age.

This petition links the preservation and final consummation of the Lord's kingdom of grace and the preservation of all who are brought into that kingdom. The petition also looks forward to the end of Satan's raging against God's kingdom of grace on the Last Day.

6. Luther presents the biblical distinction between God's kingdom of power and His kingdom of grace. How is this a helpful distinction in understanding the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer?

7. The Holy Scriptures end with the prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus" (REV. 22:20). God's kingdom comes in His Holy Word and the Holy Sacraments — as all believers wait for the consummation of all things on the Last Day. Reflect on the

statement that wherever Christ is present to bless, there is God's kingdom of grace (Luke 17:20–21).

8. We pray that the true Christian Church on earth would be preserved through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. How does this petition parallel what we pray in Luther's Morning Prayer?

STANZA FOUR

Your gracious will on earth be done / As it is done before Your throne, / That patiently we may obey / Throughout our lives all that You say. / Curb flesh and blood and ev'ry ill / That sets itself against Your will.

Luther continues to remind us in the Small Catechism that in the same way God's name is already holy and God's kingdom comes, so God's will is done whether we pray for it or not. The same reality is true for our daily bread (Fourth Petition).

9. Why is the distinction "among us also" a critical one for Luther in his Small Catechism and for our understanding of what we are praying for today? Who is Luther talking about in the phrase "Curb flesh and blood and ev'ry ill / That sets itself against Your will"?

10. How does Scripture and the Small Catechism characterize the will of God in Christ? Why does Luther frequently describe God's will as good and gracious? Why does the devil desire to tempt us with the belief that God's will is not at all good and gracious?

11. In his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, Chemnitz writes, "Temporal or bodily gifts must be asked for with the condition or moderation: 'If it be the will of God and if they will further the glory of God and our salvation.'" Why is this distinction important?

STANZA FIVE

Give us this day our daily bread, / And let us all be clothed and fed. / Save us from hardship, war, and strife; / In plague and famine, spare our life, / That we in honest peace may live, / To care and greed no entrance give.

The Fourth Petition continues this recognition of God's gifts given to undeserving sinners for the sake of Christ. The unbelieving world knows nothing of gracious gifts — it robs God of the glory He rightly deserves for giving and preserving life in this world and for providing redemption for the entire fallen human race.

12. Luther writes in his Large Catechism, "It is a brief and simple word, but it has a very wide scope. For when you mention and pray for daily bread, you pray for everything that is necessary in order to have and enjoy daily bread. On the other hand, you also pray against

everything that interferes with it.” What is he saying here? How is this reflected in stanza 5?

13. How are the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion suggested in this stanza? Why has the Christian Church from the earliest times placed the Lord’s Prayer close to Christ’s Words of Institution?

STANZA SIX

Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore, / That they may trouble us no more; / We, too, will gladly those forgive / Who hurt us by the way they live. / Help us in our community / To serve each other willingly.

The Fifth Petition can be understood in the way of the Law, but also in the way of the Gospel. While we certainly cannot expect God to forgive our sins if we refuse to extend forgiveness to other weak and fallen people, God would have us believe that hidden in this petition is a gracious promise that God will give and strengthen our ability to forgive others in the same way He has forgiven us.

14. Chemnitz — and the first of Luther’s 95 Theses — emphasized what the Bible clearly reveals: Every day of the Christian life is one of repentance. Concerning this petition and our old, fallen nature, Chemnitz writes, “We neither fear God nor are we affected by the fear of God’s wrath. Therefore, when we pray for the forgiveness of our sins, we ask that God by His Spirit would drive out of us all security. We ask that the Law will uncover all our hidden or covert sins. We beg that He would take from us our stony and impenitent heart and give us a living and repentant heart so that we may acknowledge and detest our own sins.” Why do we pray this petition daily?

15. Again, we pray the Lord’s Prayer with all true Christians on earth. We plead for the forgiveness of “our” sins as “we” forgive others who sin against us. Why is the corporate dimension of this petition so easily lost in our individualistic and fragmented world today?

STANZA SEVEN

Lead not into temptation, Lord, / Where our grim foe and all his horde / Would vex our souls on ev’ry hand. / Help us resist, help us to stand / Firm in the faith, a mighty host, / Through comfort of the Holy Ghost.

In his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, Chemnitz distinguishes between being tempted and being led into or overwhelmed by temptation.

16. Reflect on the distinction Chemnitz presents when he writes: “The understanding of the phrase ‘to lead or carry into temptation’ is central to understanding the meaning of this petition. It may best be understood by

studying its use. The Scripture speaks of the assault or sending of temptation, saying, ‘No temptation has seized you except what is common to man’ (1 CORINTHIANS 10:13). Scripture says to ‘Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds’ (JAMES 1:2). This does not merely mean to fall into temptation but rather to run into, to bite upon temptation. What Paul says is more serious. He says that men fall into temptation as if it were a snare, ‘fall into temptation ... and many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction’ (1 TIMOTHY 6:9). ‘Pray that you will not fall into temptation’ (LUKE 22:40), lest unknowingly, ... you are surrounded by temptation that may overcome you, may even drown you.”

17. Discuss what Chemnitz writes at the end of his commentary on the Sixth Petition: “Now this petition contains a general confession for the weakness and infirmity in this life in the whole Church, that is the children of God. When we pray that we may not give in to temptation nor be overwhelmed by it, we acknowledge and confess that by our own strength we are not able to resist any temptations. We acknowledge that this is the work of God’s grace. We acknowledge that after we have received new spiritual strength through our rebirth, God’s grace and strength directly follow.”

STANZA EIGHT

From evil, Lord, deliver us; / The times and days are perilous. / Redeem us from eternal death, / And, when we yield our dying breath, / Console us, grant us calm release, / And take our souls to You in peace.

As Luther explains in his Large Catechism, the original Greek for the Seventh Petition of the Lord’s Prayer can be translated: “Deliver us from the evil one.” This is what Jesus prays in John 17:15.

18. In his commentary on the Seventh Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Chemnitz cites the old Lutheran prayer: “God, either deliver them, stop their misery, or preserve them by giving them patience.” What is insightful about such a prayer? Why is this petition also a corporate petition prayed by all the faithful on earth?

19. Reflect on these concluding words of Chemnitz: “Therefore, when we say, ‘Deliver us from evil,’ we desire that our heavenly Father would keep us from an evil death. We ask for his deliverance so that we may not ‘die the death of the uncircumcised’ (EZEKIEL 28:10) or the death of sinners. This would be the worst of all (PSALM 34:22). We ask that we may not die carelessly in our sins, unprepared without repentance (JOHN 8:24), but that He would grant us a godly and saving end of this life. We ask to die in the Lord (REVELATION 14:13).”

STANZA NINE

*Amen, that is, so shall it be. / Make strong our faith in You,
that we / May doubt not but with trust believe / That what
we ask we shall receive. / Thus in Your name and at Your
Word / We say, "Amen, O hear us, Lord!"*

"Amen" is not a word expressing our human wish or desire. It is a faith-enabled response to the confidence of undeserved promises received. Luther's explanation of this word in the Small Catechism is well-known: "I should be certain that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven and are heard by Him. For He Himself has commanded us to pray this way and has promised that He will hear us. Amen, amen; that is, 'Yes, yes, it shall be so.'"

20. Faith cannot say "Amen" to what is not revealed through the prophets and apostles of Holy Scripture. "Amen" joins our prayers and confessions to the praying and confessing Christian Church throughout the ages. Why is this same word used to conclude both the Lord's Prayer and the Creed — and our response to receiving the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper? Why is this little word so powerful and important?