

The Lord's Prayer

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Matthew 6:9-13

The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray for what we need from God and understand how to think about ourselves. Temptation is the hook that lures the fish to death, the shiny-looking thing to draw you away from Christ. Evil will overcome the proud and prayerless, so say your prayers and be delivered.

Lead Us Not

Asking the Lord not to lead us into temptation may sound like God will tempt us in the sense of pushing toward sin. James says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (Jms. 1:13-14). The Lord doesn't tempt, but He does test, and testing matures your faith: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (Jms. 1:2-4). By walking humbly, you can count trials all joy because pride didn't lead you into it in the first place. Our faith will be tested so we want to be ready to resist temptation. This petition recognizes our vulnerability. We are the kind of creatures that need to be reminded daily that we are prone to sin. We sing in *Come Thou Fount*, "Prone to wonder Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above." The Lord will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear and will always provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13), but if you're going to resist, you need the wisdom of this prayer. Let him who stands take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12; cf. Prov. 7:26).

From Evil

While Satan is not the equal opposite of God, and evil only exists as a perversion of good, the Christian faith insists on the existence of evil. Alexander Solzhenitsyn said the line between good and evil runs right through every human heart. You need to be delivered from the world, the flesh and the devil, that is, the evil within as well as the evil without. Sin is ultimately irrational—it makes no sense. We know God exists and He is by definition good, therefore choosing rebellion cannot bring happiness. When Milton's Satan says he would rather rule in Hell than serve in Heaven, he assumes he will rule in Hell and enjoy it. Neither assumption is safe, but you see how he gets there. What assumptions are driving your sins? It's what we think that allows to continue in sin and so must be renewed in our hearts and minds. The evil we see all around us—in families, schools, on our streets, in companies, hospitals, the government—all occurs because people choose it. They want it. Christ's disciples must seek deliverance from it, to be in the world but not of it.

A common translation of this petition reads "deliver us from the evil one." Satan is called the father of lies, and it's fitting to view him as endorsing all evil. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis says, "There are two equal opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelief in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight." Liberal Christianity leans toward the first error, believing we're basically saved, if we need to be saved at all, by being good people. These churches preach sermonettes for Christianettes where the pastor gets up to share what he/she feels. It sounds so humble and it flies because there is no sense of mortal danger, no evil in us as defined by Scripture, to warn about. But God's word is a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces (Jer. 23:29), hard words that make soft hearts. Soft words make hard hearts, flattering people who then continue in sin. Christians who are more committed to the Bible can fall into Lewis' second ditch, taking too much interest in

The Lord's Prayer

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Matthew 6:9-13

spiritual beings. There's a lot you can't know, and knowing about wicked spiritual beings won't do much to protect you. Solomon says to focus on our own hearts: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). Good habits are good, but remember that the religious leaders who rejected Jesus read and memorized Scripture, and they could pray eloquently like nobody's business. But their heart was far from Him.

Deliver Us

In the Lord's Prayer we ask God to deliver us from evil, to give us victory over it. This is different than asking to just get by, be decent, or do your "best." In the Lord's Prayer we ask for this great deliverance for *us*. The Church is delivered from evil. God told Cain, "And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). These are the only two options. Rule or be ruled. Be delivered or give in. Asking God to deliver you means seeking Him for the means of that deliverance: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). If you were the devil, how would you lure you away from Christ? Don't ignore those sins and weaknesses but seek deliverance. John Owen warns, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." Deliver us from evil. These things change over time. Young men want to be cool, old men want to be comfortable. Young women want to be desired, older women are tempted to worry and control. This prayer turns our hearts to seek Christ's deliverance for what will, apart from Him, lead us into disaster. The Lord loves to deliver His people. He lifted Joseph up from slavery, false accusation, prison, and certain death. He is the God of the exodus, the lions' den, and restoration from exile. He restores the years the locusts devoured. Look back at the times God saved you from your own sin, from the sins of others, from where you would have gone and from the places you did go but His grace brought you out.

Christ the Faithful

In the wilderness, Israel had bread from heaven and water from the rock, but Christ had neither. He fasted for 40 days and was tempted at all points like we are but resisted: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Rather than enabling us to fall, His compassion empowers us to stand, and even to stand up after we have fallen and come boldly to the throne of grace. The first conclusion from this is to thank the Lord. Aren't you glad your salvation doesn't depend upon your resistance? But second, resist because you love Him. It's hard to give in to sin when thinking of Christ's resistance for us, knowing we are victorious in Him.