

Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 22:39-46

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil – Mt. 6:13

This final petition in the Lord's prayer demonstrates to us that this prayer is not without its difficulties. We had to address a minor difficulty in the previous petition by noting that forgiveness leads to our willingness to forgive others. Forgiveness must always be viewed as grounded in Christ's atoning death. Forgiveness must never be viewed in terms of something that we earn by our willingness to forgive others. The petition *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors* must be viewed in the broader context of the entire gospel. And what we're taught by that petition is that forgiveness of sins leads to a transformed life and the first principle of that transformation is seen in our ability and willingness to forgive those that have done us wrong. To say that you've been forgiven but that you're unwilling to forgive others says in effect that you've nullified the forgiveness that you thought you had. So that's something of a minor difficulty that is not terribly difficult to clarify.

When you come to this last petition you immediately face another difficulty. *Lead us not into temptation* the petition begins. When you think of temptation you generally think of enticement to sin. It was the devil that enticed Eve to sin in the garden of Eden. And the first thought that comes to mind is *would God ever lead us into temptation?* Do I really need to pray for something that would never occur? We know from James 1:13 that God would never lead us into sin. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* We cannot blame God for our sins. Sin occurs, as James goes on to say in v. 14 when we are drawn away of our own lusts and enticed. *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

It is the devil who is twice referred to in the New Testament as the tempter. It was the devil that tempted Eve in the garden of Eden. It was the tempter that came to Christ in Mt. 4 and suggested to Him that He *command that these stones be made bread*. All right, then – we know that the power of our flesh and its vulnerability to lust – we know that the devil is the tempter, not God. Again we're faced with the dilemma – what does this petition mean *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*. We know that we don't have to pray to God to not do the work of the devil – the very notion is blasphemous.

It's at this point that commentators point out that the word *temptation* is a word that can also mean *trials*. So we read in 1Pet. 4:12 *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But here another difficulty arises. We're told that we're not to consider these trials in life to be strange. Indeed James goes so far as to say My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations* (James 1:2).

When we view temptations as trials then we are able to say that the hand of God is definitely in that matter. Christ promised His followers trials and tribulation. *In the world ye shall have tribulation* (Jn. 16:33). You see, then, the difficulty this poses to our petition

in the Lord's prayer. If we're to count our trials as not being strange – if we're to go so far as to count ourselves blessed in our trials – then what are we being taught to pray by this petition – *lead us not into temptation*. Aren't we praying for God to go against the statements in His word? *Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease?* – the hymnwriter asks. And on the surface of the words of our text it might seem that this is what we're taught to pray. *Lead me not into temptation but carry me to the skies on flowery beds of ease.*

It is at this point in my study of these words that I become disappointed with the approach of some commentators who suggest that it is good and proper and right for us to pray *lead me not into temptation*. And they explain the words this way – although trials are our portion they are not something that we desire. They are not something that we would willingly launch ourselves into – which then suggests to us that we are being taught to pray something that Christ may or may not see fit to answer.

I find this to be an altogether unacceptable explanation of the petition. It makes a waste of time out of prayer and it presents a wrong view of Christ's willingness to hear and answer prayer. I've been saying all along with regard to this prayer and other prayers that we find in the Bible that it is by utilizing these prayers that we can be sure that we're praying in the will of God and can expect, therefore, that God will hear and answer.

To those that take the view of this petition that God may or may not hear and answer and that we must ultimately submit to His will – I wonder how willing they would be to apply that kind of reasoning to the previous petition – *forgive us our debts* – as if to say maybe God will but maybe He won't forgive us – we must be willing to submit to His will. You begin to see, I trust, some of the difficulties that surround this petition – *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

I think the best way to analyze this petition is to view it in action which is why I read from Luke 22. In the setting of the garden of Gethsemane you find Christ fervently engaged in prayer and you find the disciples unable to watch with Christ in that hour of trial. On the first occasion He says to them *pray that ye enter not into temptation*. A little later He returns to them and finds them sleeping and says to them in v. 46 *Why sleep ye? Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*

I believe that this passage provides for us an important key to understanding the meaning of *lead us not into temptation* because we find in the garden of Gethsemane prayer being utilized and prayer not being utilized and we're able to see the consequences of both. Let's look, then, at this petition:

Lead Us Not Into Temptation, but Deliver Us From Evil

And I'd like to endeavor in my analysis of this petition to view in terms of our need, our expectations and the lessons we may draw from it.

I. Our Need for This Petition

In the cross reference to Luke 22 which we find in Mt. 26 – Christ gives the reason why we must pray and why we must utilize this petition *lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*. We read in Mt. 26:40,41 *And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*. Here, then, is an important clue as to why we need this petition – the flesh is weak. The flesh is vulnerable to sin. Our carnal natures possess neither the resolve nor the desire to continue with Christ when the furnace of affliction is heated up.

You remember Peter's bold claim to Christ? – *Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended*. Christ then predicts Peter's denial of Him to which Peter responds (Mt. 26:35) *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee*. Likewise also said all the disciples.

They were sure of themselves, weren't they? And then the hour of trial came – the time of temptation, if you will. Christ is apprehended and arrested and for a brief instant it looks like Peter will make good on his claim. He does draw his sword and manages to cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant. But in Mark's gospel it says in 14:50 that *they all forsook him, and fled*. And then Mark provides an interesting detail about this panic stricken desertion of Christ. He writes in v. 51 *And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked*.

In the end the shame and reproach of immodesty was deemed more desirable than staying with Christ. Do you begin to see what's at stake in this petition *lead us not into temptation*? When the time of temptation came – the disciples, who had not watched and prayed with Christ were not equipped for what came upon them and as a result they fled – they deserted Christ.

The thing to remember, here, is the humanity of Christ. Christ knew the danger too. Indeed, He knew better than His fleeing disciples what awaited Him. But unlike those fleeing disciples Christ had watched and prayed. The thing to note, then, is the contrast between Christ's actions and the actions of His fleeing disciples. Their faith gave way to fear. Christ's faith gained for Him the courage to go forward in the will of God. He was delivered from the temptation of abandoning the will of God and He went forward to meet the challenge of accomplishing our redemption.

Do you see, then, the meaning of *lead us not into temptation*? It arises from our need of persevering faith. It arises from our inherent weakness. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*. As the subjects of Christ's kingdom our desire is to be faithful and fruitful in our service to Christ. This can't be accomplished in our own strength. We are as dependent upon Christ to keep us as we're dependent upon Him to save us initially.

Now, we are fortunate in that we have never known the furnace to be as hot as those disciples knew it in the garden of Gethsemane. I dare say that our lives have never been in danger on account of our professions of faith. We know that in other parts of the world that is not the case. Persecution against Christians today is as hot as it's been in any time of history. Here is a petition we would do well to remember when we think of our persecuted brethren – *Lord, lead them not into temptation, but deliver them from evil.* Don't allow them to be swallowed up by their trials. Draw near to them in order to enable them to endure for thy glory and deliver them from their tormentors.

And lest you conclude that the absence of persecution makes this petition not directly applicable to you – you should remember the parable of the sower in Mt. 13. In that parable Christ not only cited persecution as something that could offend and cut off a man's endurance. He also cited something that we can readily relate to as being equally dangerous to pulling us down. *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful* (Mt. 13:22).

Here is the American temptation, if you will. Here is the thing that kills Christians in our culture. It is with regard to the deceitful things of this world that Christ's word should come to you with full force – *watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation.* And how many have to sadly acknowledge that their worldliness makes them as sleepy toward spiritual things as those disciples who slept in the garden of Gethsemane?

They lull themselves to sleep by the same rationale that characterized the church at Laodicea. *I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.* That's what the church at Laodicea thought. Christians that reason the same way will fail to watch and pray lest they enter into temptation. They won't think that they need to pray and so they'll fail to fortify themselves in the grace of God. I wonder if they know how delighted they make the devil? I wonder if they can detect the devil's confidence in the claim that he'll make for their children? They themselves may go through life as carefree as the man in the parable who tears down his barns to make them bigger and counsels himself to rest and take his ease in his labors.

Those who become swallowed up to the world fail to see their need to fortify themselves or to fortify their children and as a result they and their children become vulnerable to destruction. Job knew the potential for such a thing. I love the example that Job sets for us in this regard. Job, we're told in the first chapter of that book, offered burnt offerings for his children every day. This was before the time of his testing came. This was during the time you might say when he was tested by the riches of the world and those riches did not distract Job from his parental duty to pray for his children.

This petition is given to use, then, on account of our need. Not only do we need forgiveness of our sins – but we also need God's enabling grace to keep us from being swallowed up by the temptations of afflictions or the luring temptations of the world. May

our hearts be stirred to watch and pray – especially during the seasons when you mistakenly think that such watching and praying is not necessary.

We see, then, this petition from the perspective of our need. Would you think with me next on:

II. Our Expectation in This Petition

This is another matter that needs to be clarified. *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* What are we expecting from the Lord in this petition? What does the answer to this prayer look like?

We know that we're not praying to be exempted from our trials. Christ is not teaching us to pray for exemptions. As I said in my introduction – some take that approach to this petition. We know that we will experience trials but that shouldn't prevent us from praying that we won't have to go through them anyway but when we pray we should pray with the willingness to submit to God's will which is tantamount to saying we may pray with assurance that the likelihood is strong that this petition will not be answered. What a lame explanation for this petition.

We do know, of course, that trials are to be our portion. The Christian life becomes a life of trial. When the Lord delivered the Israelites from Egypt and brought them into the wilderness it was for the purpose of knowing their hearts – knowing their love for God – knowing whether or not they would follow in the obedience of faith. Trials serve the purpose of revealing to ourselves our own hearts.

When Job went through his time of testing he came away in the end with increased knowledge of God's grace but in the process he also learned much more about the corruption of his own heart. And God is pleased to show us these things not that we may be swallowed up in defeat but that we might rather learn all the more to magnify His grace. I love the counsel that Elihu gives to Job near the end of the book. He says in Job 34:36 *My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end, because of his answers for wicked men.*

We would do well to pray, therefore, not that our trials will be removed but that God's purpose in grace will be accomplished in our trials. And I suppose it wouldn't hurt if we prayed that God's purpose would be accomplished quickly although God knows best what the timing in our trials should be. I have prayed on occasion not that the Lord would remove the storm that He sees fit to send my way – but that I might perceive Christ crossing the stormy sea to be with me. I believe that this kind of praying reflects the spirit of our petition *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

Now it's always good when you can tie a petition in prayer to a promise that's given in God's word. I believe we can do that with regard to the petition we're analyzing this morning. And I believe that by understanding and appreciating this promise we are better able to understand what to expect from God when we pray *lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

The promise that corresponds to this petition is given to us in 1Cor. 10:13 *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [is] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [it].*

Here is a promise that is tied to God's faithfulness. When we make the connection between this promise and the petition *lead us not into temptation* we certainly come away with something much more solid and much more precious than a lame petition that may or may not be granted.

What this promise tells you is that God is able to keep you from falling and God is able to lift you up when and if you do fall. I love the way Micah expresses his confidence in God in Mic 7:8 *Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD [shall be] a light unto me.* We need never doubt that God will always be for us and be with us no matter what circumstances in life seem to be saying to us.

And God will never allow you to be tried above what you're able to endure. You may doubt that at times. You, in all likelihood, will not agree with God on what you're able to endure. We tend to be easy on ourselves when it comes to what we think we're able to endure. But what this promise from God teaches us is that in spite of how hot you feel the furnace to be and in spite of what you feel is your inability to bear up in the time of testing – God knows what you can and can't handle as well as what you need in order to be equipped to serve Him acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

{Story of the Covenanter who prayed to be delivered from torture}

And so the Lord will hold you up. He will minister to you the same way that Christ was ministered to by an angel in the garden of Gethsemane. We're told that an angel appeared strengthening Him. Here was the answer to His prayer. Here was the result of Christ watching in prayer facing the challenge of caving in to despair.

And so you can expect that He'll give you the strength you need for the time of testing that you may, as Job, come forth as gold and that you may, as Christ, go forward to do God's will no matter how difficult going forward may seem.

We see, then, our need for this petition – our flesh is weak. We see what to expect from God in this petition – we are not taught to expect that we'll be exempt from trials but we are taught to expect that He'll hold us up and sustain us. Would you think with me finally on:

III. The Lessons of This Petition

There is a lesson in this petition that pertains to the sovereignty of God. The very words *lead us not into temptation* recognize that God is the One who leads us. It is in keeping with His sovereign rule and His wisdom that He designs our trials. This is clearly demonstrated in the book of Job. The devil can go no further than what he's allowed of

God. God set the boundaries for the trial. God determined the duration of the trial and God determined the depth to that trial.

You can be assured, therefore, that however sudden your time of testing seems to come upon you – it hasn't caught God off guard. And however long your time of testing seems to last – the duration of your trial is not due to the devil gaining leverage over God – the duration of your trial is traceable to God's purpose in grace for your life. And however deep your time of testing seems to run – the boundaries for your trial are measured to you by the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. He is the same One that says in His word that He's faithful and will not allow you to be tempted above that ye are able. You cannot stray into a temptation that is beyond His control.

So we have the lesson of God's sovereignty in this petition. We also have the lesson of the importance of prayer. Christ prayed and His prayer was answered and He was strengthened and enabled to go forward to accomplish His mission of redemption. The disciples, on the other hand, slept. They were exhorted to watch and pray that they enter not into temptation but they failed to heed the exhortations and as a result they fled when the hour of temptation came.

We must, then, see the importance of prayer. We must keep ourselves fortified with God's grace and God's enabling power. We are entirely dependent upon God to uphold and sustain us and the moment we think we can coast or sleep because we're taken up with a sense of our own self-sufficiency – at that moment we become vulnerable to fall.

We gather, then, from this petition the lesson that we are not to pray or expect that we'll be exempt from trials – we are taught, rather, to face our trials in the power of prayer. We can expect that God can and God will uphold and sustain and strengthen us – we learn from this petition in the Lord's prayer that He'll do this in answer to our prayers. And we can count on His faithfulness to see us through our trials.

This is one of those petitions, then, that calls for careful scrutiny and analysis. We need to understand what it means and what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that our sin is God's fault – don't ever draw that deduction from it. God cannot be tempted with sin, neither does He tempt any man. Sin takes place when we're drawn away by our own lust and enticed. God has no part in that.

Neither does this petition mean that we should expect or seek God for exemption from trials. If God has promised us trials then it makes no sense to pray against God's promises. This petition does teach us that we must go forward in the power of prayer. We must watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. We can expect that as we lay hold of God and seek Him for enabling power to uphold and sustain us that He'll prove Himself faithful to us and guide us safely home.

May the Lord encourage you, then, to a right use of this petition and may He so minister His word to your hearts that you'll take the matter to heart and devote yourself to a watchful and prayerful attitude toward God as you endeavor to advance the cause of His Kingdom.