

PRAYER

Praying to Properly Condition Our Heart, Part 1

January 28, 2018 - Matthew 6:12

The Lord's Prayer

5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread,
12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

12. *Forgive* (see on 12:31) recognizes that sinning puts people in the wrong with God and that only he can cancel out the offense and pardon it. The offense is here seen as a *debt* (in Luke 11:4 we have “sins”), which recognizes that we owe to God our full obedience. When we do not pay it we are debtors to God, and only he can remit the debt. The prayer for forgiveness is qualified by *as we also have forgiven our debtors*. This must surely be taken as an aspiration rather than a limitation, or none of us would be forgiven; our forgivenesses are so imperfect. But the prayer recognizes that we have no right to seek forgiveness for our own sins if we are withholding forgiveness from others, and perhaps

even that we cannot really seek it (cf. Buttrick, if anyone says, "I'll never forgive you!" that person "is not penitently aware of his sins, but only vengefully aware of another man's sins"; Robinson remarks, "The spirit open to receive love is of necessity open to bestow love"). *We also* is emphatic; it underlines the significance of forgiving action on the part of those seeking forgiveness. *Have forgiven*⁴⁷ expresses more than a resolution for future action. The person seeking forgiveness must first have taken forgiving action with respect to those who have sinned against him; "as 5:23–24 shows, mere good intentions are not enough" (Schweizer). We should notice that it is *debtors* that are forgiven, not "debts." Both, of course, are involved, but it is the person on whom the emphasis falls. *Debtor* may be used of literal, monetary debts (18:24), or it may be used metaphorically of various kinds of obligation, and of those who owe something to people (here) or to God (Luke 13:4). Sin may be viewed in any one of a variety of ways. Here it is seen as arising from the fact that we have obligations to God. When we fail to do what we should, we owe God a debt and are in need of help, namely the cancellation of the debt because we cannot repay it.

13. The big question here is the meaning of the word I have translated *temptation*. The word has the basic meaning "test," and, when used of Satan's testing of people with a view to their failing in the test (see the note on the corresponding verb, 4:1), it comes to mean "temptation." It has usually been understood in this way in this prayer (*KJV*; so *NIV*, etc.). But in recent years there has been an increasing tendency to interpret it as pointing to the fiery trial associated with the coming of the End, and it is taken that way in translations like "do not put us to the test" (*REB*). Against this is the absence of the definite article (there is no "the" in the Greek); the expression seems to point to testing in general rather than one specific test. In any case, no evidence seems to be cited that the word, by itself, signifies the test at the climax of all things. Others understand it as a time of trial rather than of temptation, "do not bring us to hard testing" (*GNB*). The eschatological meaning is unlikely, but a prayer that we may not undergo difficult tests is a possibility. On the whole the traditional view that the word means "temptation" seems most probable, though not, of course, in the sense that the worshiper may feel that God will present him with temptation (cf. Jas. 1:13). God tempts no one. But the worshiper knows his own weakness and in this prayer seeks to be kept far from anything that may bring him to sin.⁴⁹ *But* is the strong adversative; it sets the following course of action in marked contrast to the preceding. There is a question whether we should take the final expression in the verse in the sense "the evil one" (*NIV* and most recent translations) or "evil" (Knox): the Greek could mean either. It is argued that in the first century it is more likely that the evil one would be in mind than a general reference to evil, but the translation "evil" may be supported by appeal to 5:39 where the expression cannot mean "the evil one." It could also be contended that to take it as meaning "the evil one" would make the two parts of the verse say much the same thing and further that this would mean there is "no express prayer for deliverance from moral evil" (Glover). Perhaps the decisive point is one made by Hill: "since neither Hebrew nor Aramaic uses 'the evil (one)' to denote Satan, it is probably better to regard the word as neuter...." Either way of taking the expression makes good sense, but on the whole it seems that the reference is to "evil."

In the form in which the prayer is commonly used it concludes with the doxology “for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.” This is lacking in the oldest MSS (in Luke as in Matthew), though it has considerable early attestation. But it may be argued that it is unlikely that a first-century Jewish prayer should conclude without a doxology and that its absence in many MSS may be because it was simply assumed, while in others it was explicitly included. On the whole it seems probable that it was a liturgical addition made early in the life of the church, but we should not regard this as certain. The case for the doxology is stronger than many students assume.

14. *For* introduces a reason for praying in the way Jesus has just outlined: first, those who forgive in the way suggested in the prayer will find forgiveness themselves, whereas those who do not forgive will not be forgiven. The conditional implies nothing as to the fulfilment or otherwise of the condition; it simply suggests a hypothetical possibility. *Men*, of course, is quite general and has no particular reference to adult members of the male sex; it means “people.” *Offenses* are activities in which other people really take action against us in some way; forgiveness of such sins is not automatic. But Jesus expects it of his people, and he assures them that such forgiveness means that the forgiveness of God is certain. It is not that the act of forgiving merits an eternal reward, but rather it is evidence that the grace of God is at work in the forgiving person and that that same grace will bring him forgiveness in due course.

15. *But* is the adversative conjunction that introduces the other side of the coin. The change that puts *offenses* in the second clause in this verse instead of in the first clause as in verse 14 is largely stylistic, but it perhaps emphasizes the activity of forgiving rather than the nature of the offenses. Forgiveness is important for the followers of Jesus, whereas the nature of the offenses committed against them is not. Jesus is saying that to fail to forgive others is to demonstrate that one has not felt the saving touch of God.

Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (pp. 147–149). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

5. *Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors*

Of the six petitions in this prayer, this one alone is blessed with an extended commentary. At the close of the prayer Jesus returns in vv. 14–15 with additional explanation. What does this petition mean? Some have tried to restrict its relevance to the OT, but salvation preceding the cross was no more conditioned upon obedience than it is now. Salvation always has been and always be by faith alone. Furthermore, this prayer is given to and is meant to be prayed by *believers*. It is our heavenly *Father* to whom we pray. This is not the prayer of a lost sinner seeking eternal pardon. The forgiveness in view here is not that initial remission of sins that inaugurates the Christian life. Jesus is not referring to that once-for-all forgiveness that constitutes the flip-side of justification, for which we pray but once. Rather, this prayer for forgiveness is one of confession on the part of a child who seeks from his/her heavenly Father, not the creation, but the restoration of communion. The goal of this

prayer is not salvation but the renewal of its joy and power and the spiritually reinvigorating experience of comfort and consolation.

We see this principle in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Mt. 18:23–35) where a man expects forgiveness as a matter of course but refuses to extend similar mercy to those in his debt. The point was that “God forgives only the penitent and that one of the chief evidences of true penitence is a forgiving spirit. Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling” (Stott, 149–50). In other words, *how can I expect God to do mercifully for me what I callously refuse to do for my brother?*

6. *And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil*

How do we reconcile the notion of God leading us into temptation with what James wrote: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone” (1:13).

If we interpret the word “temptation” to mean a trial or test to which our faith is often subjected, we must acknowledge that God does indeed lead us into such an experience (see 1 Cor. 10:13; James 1:2–4; consider the experience of Abraham). And are we to pray for escape from those tests which James said we are to consider “pure joy” (1:2), tests that the Lord employs to cultivate in us perseverance, proven character, and hope (Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Pt. 1:6–7).

The way to interpret this petition is by addressing both parts: not only the “lead us not into temptation” but also the “deliver us from evil.” The strong adversative “but” implies that what we desire in the second half of the verse is the antithesis to what we seek to evade in the first half. In other words, rather than leading us into temptation we ask God to deliver us from evil. The second half of the petition defines positively what the first half states negatively. The temptation into which we ask God not to lead us is synonymous with “the evil one” (the definite article is present) from whom we desire to be delivered.

Carson suggests that perhaps this is an example of *litotes*, in which a point is made by negating its contrary. He writes:

“‘Into temptation’ is negated: Lead us, not into temptation, but away from it, into righteousness, into situations where, far from being tempted, we will be protected and therefore kept righteous. As the second clause of this petition expresses it, we will then be delivered from the evil one” (70).

Another possibility is suggested by Robert Stein. He believes that behind the words “lead us not” is an Aramaic expression which “rather than asking God not to lead the Christian into temptation, is asking him not to allow him to succumb to temptation” (*Difficult Passages in the Gospels*, 73). Thus, whereas Stein takes the word

“temptation” in its negative sense, he understands the petition to be a request that God enable us to resist it when it comes. “Let us not succumb to temptation,” therefore, is the preferable way of interpreting the prayer. Stein also believes that this interpretation of the expression is compatible with the second half of the request:

“In both petitions the believer is seeking God’s aid in times of trial and the request is made for divine deliverance from trial or evil. If it is understood as a request that God not permit the believer to succumb to temptation, this petition in the Lord’s prayer no longer poses any difficulty” (73–74).

Conclusion:

Although it is doubtful that the original text of the Lord’s Prayer ends with the words, “For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen,” it is certainly theologically appropriate.

Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: The Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 6:7–15). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.

12. *And forgive us our debts.* Here it may be proper that we should be reminded of what I said a little before, that Christ, in arranging the prayers of his people, did not consider which was first or second in order. It is written, that our prayers are as it were a wall which hinders our approach to God, (Isa. 59:2,) or a cloud which prevents him from beholding us, (Isa. 44:22,) and that “he hath covered himself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through,” (Lam. 3:44.) We ought always, therefore, to begin with the forgiveness of sins: for the first hope of being heard by God beams upon us, when we obtain his favour; and there is no way in which he is “pacified toward us,” (Ezek. 16:63,) but by freely pardoning our sins. Christ has included in two petitions all that related to the eternal salvation of the soul, and to the spiritual life: for these are the two leading points of the divine covenant, in which all our salvation consists. He offers to us a free reconciliation by “not imputing our sins,” (2 Cor. 5:19,) and promises the Spirit, to engrave the righteousness of the law on our hearts. We are commanded to ask both, and the prayer for obtaining the forgiveness of sins is placed first.

In Matthew, sins are called *debts*, because they expose us to condemnation at the tribunal of God, and make us *debtors*; nay more, they alienate us entirely from God, so that there is no hope of obtaining peace and favour except by pardon. And so is fulfilled what Paul tells us, that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:23,) “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God,” (Rom. 3:19.) For, though the righteousness of God shines, to some extent, in the saints, yet, so long as they are surrounded by the flesh, they lie under the burden of sins. None will be found so pure as not to need the mercy of God, and if we wish to partake of it, we must feel our wretchedness. Those who dream of attaining such perfection in this world, as to be free from every spot and blemish, not only renounce their sins, but renounce Christ himself, from whose Church they banish themselves. For, when he commands all his disciples to

betake themselves to him daily for the forgiveness of sins, every one, who thinks that he has no need of such a remedy, is struck out of the number of the disciples.

Now, the forgiveness, which we here ask to be bestowed on us, is inconsistent with satisfaction, by which the world endeavours to purchase its own deliverance. For that creditor is not said to *forgive*, who has received payment and asks nothing more,—but he who willingly and generously departs from his just claim, and frees the *debtor*. The ordinary distinction between *crime* and *punishment* has no place here: for *debts* unquestionably mean liability to punishment. If they are freely forgiven us, all compensations must disappear. And there is no other meaning than this in the passage of Luke, though he calls them *sins*: for in no other way does God grant the pardon of them, than by removing the condemnation which they deserve.

As we forgive our debtors. This condition is added, that no one may presume to approach God and ask forgiveness, who is not pure and free from all resentment. And yet the forgiveness, which we ask that God would give us, does not depend on the forgiveness which we grant to others: but the design of Christ was, to exhort us, in this manner, to forgive the offences which have been committed against us, and at the same time, to give, as it were, the impression of his seal, to ratify the confidence in our own forgiveness. Nor is any thing inconsistent with this in the phrase used by Luke, *καὶ ἡμεῖς*, *for we also*. Christ did not intend to point out the cause, but only to remind us of the feelings which we ought to cherish towards brethren, when we desire to be reconciled to God. And certainly, if the Spirit of God reigns in our hearts, every description of ill-will and revenge ought to be banished. The Spirit is the *witness* of our adoption, (Rom. 8:16,) and therefore this is put down simply as a mark, to distinguish the children of God from strangers. The name *debtors* is here given, not to those who owe us money, or any other service, but to those who are *indebted to us* on account of offences which they have committed.

13. *And lead us not into temptation.* Some people have split this petition into two. This is wrong: for the nature of the subject makes it manifest, that it is one and the same petition. The connexion of the words also shows it: for the word *but*, which is placed between, connects the two clauses together, as Augustine judiciously explains. The sentence ought to be resolved thus, *That we may not be led into temptation, deliver us from evil*. The meaning is: “We are conscious of our own weakness, and desire to enjoy the protection of God, that we may remain impregnable against all the assaults of Satan.” We showed from the former petition, that no man can be reckoned a Christian, who does not acknowledge himself to be a sinner; and in the same manner, we conclude from this petition, that we have no strength for living a holy life, except so far as we obtain it from God. Whoever implores the assistance of God to overcome temptations, acknowledges that, unless God *deliver* him, he will be constantly falling.

The word *temptation* is often used generally for any kind of trial. In this sense God is said to have *tempted Abraham*, (Gen. 22:1,) when he tried his faith. We are *tempted* both by adversity and by prosperity: because each of them is an occasion of bringing to light feelings which were formerly concealed. But here it denotes inward *temptation*, which may

be fitly called the scourge of the devil, for exciting our lust. It would be foolish to ask, that God would keep us free from every thing which makes trial of our faith. All wicked emotions, which excite us to sin, are included under the name of *temptation*. Though it is not impossible that we may feel such pricks in our minds, (for, during the whole course of our life, we have a constant warfare with the flesh,) yet we ask that the Lord would not cause us to be thrown down, or suffer us to be overwhelmed, by *temptations*.

In order to express this truth more clearly, that we are liable to constant stumbling and ruinous falls, if God does not uphold us with his hand, Christ used this form of expression, (μη εἰσενέγκης,) *Lead us not into temptation*: or, as some render it, *Bring us not into temptation*. It is certainly true, that “every man is tempted,” as the Apostle James says, (1:14,) “by his own lust:” yet, as God not only gives us up to the will of Satan, to kindle the flame of lust, but employs him as the agent of his wrath, when he chooses to drive men headlong to destruction, he may be also said, in a way peculiar to himself, to *lead them into temptation*. In the same sense, “an evil spirit from the Lord” is said to have “seized or troubled Saul,” (1 Sam. 16:14:) and there are many passages of Scripture to the same purpose. And yet we will not therefore say, that God is the author of evil: because, by “giving men over to a reprobate mind,” (Rom. 1:28,) he does not exercise a confused tyranny, but executes his just, though secret judgments. ... romans 9 and hardening heart of pharoh????

Deliver us from evil. The word *evil* (π ο ν η ρ ο ũ) may either be taken in the neuter gender, as signifying *the evil thing*, or in the masculine gender, as signifying *the evil one*. *Chrysostom* refers it to the Devil, who is the contriver of every thing evil, and, as the deadly enemy of our salvation, is continually fighting against us. But it may, with equal propriety, be explained as referring to *sin*. There is no necessity for raising a debate on this point: for the meaning remains nearly the same, that we are in danger from the devil and from sin, if the Lord does not protect and *deliver* us.

For thine is the kingdom. It is surprising that this clause, which agrees so well with the rest of the prayer, has been left out by the Latins: for it was not added merely for the purpose of kindling our hearts to seek the glory of God, and of reminding us what ought to be the object of our prayers; but likewise to teach us, that our prayers, which are here dictated to us, are founded on God alone, that we may not rely on our own merits.

Matthew	Mark
6. ¹⁴ For if you shall forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you shall not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.	11. ²⁵ And when ye shall stand praying, forgive, if you have any thing against any one, that your Father also, who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you shall not forgive, neither will your Father, who is in heaven, forgive you your trespasses.

Here Christ only explains the reason why that condition was added, *Forgive us, as we forgive*. The reason is, that God will not be ready to hear us, unless we also show ourselves ready to grant forgiveness to those who have offended us. If we are not harder than iron, this exhortation ought to soften us, and render us disposed to forgive offences. Unless God pardon us every day many sins, we know that we are ruined in innumerable ways: and on no other condition does he admit us to pardon, but that we pardon our brethren whatever offences they have committed against us. Those who refuse to forget the injuries which have been done to them, devote themselves willingly and deliberately to destruction, and knowingly prevent God from forgiving them.²

Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, pp. 325–330). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

6:12	
NASB, NRSV	“have forgiven”
NKJV, TEV, JB	“forgive”

There is a Greek manuscript variation at this point related to the TENSE of the second use of the verb, “forgive.” The AORIST is found in MSS \aleph^* , B and Z and the Vulgate. All other MSS have the PRESENT. The term meant “to send away” or “to wipe away,” both of which express OT metaphors relating to forgiveness.

“debts” The parallel in Luke 11:4 has “sins.” First century Judaism used “debts” as an idiom for “sins.” Sin puts us under obligation to the God of righteousness and holiness.

“as we also have forgiven our debtors” This is an AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE. As God forgives believers they are able to forgive others! One sign of our personal relationship with God through Christ is that we begin to emulate His actions.

6:13	
NASB, NKJV	“do not lead us into temptation”
NRSV	“do not bring us to the time of trial”
TEV	“do not bring us to hard testing,”
JB	“do not put us to the test”

This is a NEGATIVE AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE. This grammatical construction meant “do not ever begin an action.” There has been much discussion about this verse as compared with James 1:13, concerning God’s agency in testing. There is a play on the connotation of two Greek words translated “test” or “try.” The one here and in James 1:13

has the connotation of testing for the purpose of destroying [*peirasmo*]; the other has a connotation of testing for the purpose of strengthening [*dokimazo*]. God does not test believers so as to destroy but to strengthen. See Special Topic at 4:1.

Possibly this referred to the intense governmental and legal trials of that day (cf. 26:41; Mark 13:8). C. C. Torrey in *The Four Gospels*, pp.12, 143 translates it as “keep us from failing under trial” (cf. Luke 22:40).

NASB	“from evil”
NKJV, NRSV, JB	“from the evil one”
TEV	“from the Evil One”

It is impossible grammatically to determine whether this term was MASCULINE or NEUTER. This same form referred to Satan in 5:37, 13:38, and Jn. 17:15. This same ambiguous form appears in 5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38; Jn. 17:15; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:18–19.

The Doxology of verse 13b is not found in (1) the parallel of Luke 11:2–4; (2) the ancient Greek uncial manuscripts \aleph , B, D, or (3) the commentaries of Origen, Cyprian, Jerome or Augustine. There are several forms of this doxology in the different Greek manuscripts of Matthew. It probably was added from 1 Chr. 29:11–13 as the Lord’s prayer began to be used in liturgical ways by the early Church. It was not original. Roman Catholics omit it because it is not in the Vulgate. A.T. Robertson commented on this text in his (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, “The Doxology is placed in the margin of the Revised Version. It is wanting in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts. The earliest forms vary much, some shorter, some longer than the one in the Authorized Version. The use of a doxology arose when this prayer began to be used as a liturgy to be recited or to be chanted in public worship. It was not an original part of the Model Prayer as given by Jesus,” p.55.

6:14–15 Verses 14–15 are the conclusion to the Model Prayer. They do not assert that our actions earn our salvation, but they do give evidence of our salvation (two THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES). They are not the basis, but the results (cf. Matt. 5:7; 18:35; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:36–37; James 2:13; 5:9). As we pray this prayer “our Father” we must live out this familial truth in our dealings with covenant brothers.

6:14 “transgressions” This is literally “to fall to one side.” This meant, as do *most* of the words for sin in Hebrew and in Greek, a deviation from a standard, which is the character of God. It implied a conscious act of crossing a set boundary.

Utley, R. J. (2000). *The First Christian Primer: Matthew* (Vol. Volume 9, pp. 54–55). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.