

PRAYER

Praying to Properly Condition Our Heart, Part 2

January 28, 2018 - Matthew 6:12-15

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.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:13)

Temptation

temptation, generally an enticement to do evil, the term is used in the Bible to convey two somewhat different ideas. The first is that of ‘testing’ or ‘proving by testing,’ to determine the depth and integrity of one’s commitment to God (see, e.g., God’s command to Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice in Gen. 22:1-19; also the

testing of Job in Job 1-2). In the nt, some of the writers thought of persecution as a 'testing' in this manner (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:3-9). The intent of this testing is ultimately to strengthen the person's faith and devotion to God.

The second nuance of temptation is more in line with modern popular understandings of the term, namely, an enticement toward sin leading to a deliberate act of evil against God or one's neighbor. The biblical writers are careful, however, to make it clear that God does not 'tempt' humans to do evil (e.g., James 1:12-15) and in fact makes available the resources necessary to resist temptation (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:13). The familiar petition in the Lord's Prayer dealing with temptation probably should be understood as 'Do not allow us to go into temptation' (Matt. 6:13a), as the original Aramaic likely would have read. It is quite possible, moreover, that the reference is to 'testing' rather than to 'temptation' as this is popularly understood.

A quite different aspect of 'temptation' or 'testing' in the biblical writings is that of human beings attempting to put God to a test, usually for the purpose of testing God's plans or purposes (e.g., Judg. 6; cf. Matt. 12:39) or, even more, to determine whether they can manipulate God (e.g., Ps. 95:8-11; cf. Matt. 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12). Such activities stem from a lack of trust in God and his promises. This understanding seems to be involved in the most famous of all temptation accounts, the temptation of Jesus by Satan (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).

All of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) have accounts of Jesus' temptation, although only Matthew and Luke give any details (John's Gospel has no such account). In each Gospel, the temptation takes place immediately after Jesus' baptism, which is interpreted as his commissioning for the messianic ministry, a ministry to be characterized by servanthood (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; cf., e.g., Mark 10:45). The temptation is not for Jesus to prove his divine Sonship to himself. Such Sonship is never questioned in the nt. Rather, the temptation or 'testing' is implicitly presented as Jesus' struggle over whether to obey God's call to be a servant-messiah or to interpret messiahship in the traditional terms of power, strength, and conquest. Such a struggle can be detected throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, where it is made clear that the disciples never really understood Jesus' commitment to a servant ministry.

In the biblical writings, therefore, temptation or testing has these two nuances: the strong inclination of humankind toward evil when it is known that God wills good and testing situations that may demonstrate one's commitment to God and God's ways and even strengthen one's faith. In each, if people overcome temptation, i.e., pass the test, their faith has been enhanced and their character strengthened (e.g., Rom. 5:3-5). **See also** Persecution; Sin; Suffering. J.M.E.¹

¹ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed., pp. 1032–1033). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

6:13 Jewish parallels suggest that “Do not bring us into temptation” may be idiomatic for “Do not let us be overcome by temptation” or “Do not let our faith be tested beyond what it can bear.” James 1:2–3, 13–14 shows that “temptation” can have a negative or positive purpose—the one an enticement to sin, the other the strengthening of faith. God pursues only the latter, and Satan only the former (see 1 Co 10:13).²

6:13. Parallels with ancient Jewish prayers, and possibly the Aramaic wording behind this verse, suggest that the first line means: “Let us not sin when we are tested”—rather than “Let us not be tested” (cf. 4:1; 26:41 in context; cf. Ps 141:3–4). Some scholars have suggested an allusion to the final time of suffering here, which was expected to precede the coming kingdom. Because Jewish prayers were commonly used in liturgical contexts that ended with a statement of praise, later texts’ addition of the benediction (“Thine is the kingdom ...”) to the original text of Matthew is not surprising.³

(7) Believers recognize their spiritual weakness as they pray for deliverance from **temptation to evil** (cf. James 1:13–14).⁴

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

² Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1415). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

³ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Mt 6:13). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). Matthew. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 32). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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).⁵

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

⁵ Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: The Sermon on the Mount* (Mt 6:7–15). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.

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.⁶

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

⁶ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew* (pp. 148–149). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

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, (μὴ εἰσέλθῃς,) *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.

Deliver us from evil. The word *evil* (π ο ν η ρ ο ῦ) 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.⁷

⁷ Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Vol. 1, pp. 327–329). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.