

The Lord's Prayer

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The following is a series of short devotional reading on the Savior's example of prayer taught to His disciples in response to their asking for Him to teach them to pray as John taught His disciples (Luke 11:1, 2). These articles originally appeared on the radio devotional "A Word from the Word."

Luke 11:1-12

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one." And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? "I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (New King James Version).

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	Pg. 2
<i>Let Your Name Be Holy</i>	Pg. 2
<i>Let Your Kingdom Come</i>	Pg. 3
<i>Let Your Will Be Done</i>	Pg. 3
<i>Give Us Our Daily Bread</i>	Pg. 4
<i>Forgive Us Our Debts</i>	Pg. 4
<i>As We Forgive Our Debtors</i>	Pg. 5
<i>Lead us not into temptation</i>	Pg. 6
<i>Lead us not into temptation," Part 2</i>	Pg. 6
<i>Deliver Us from Evil</i>	Pg. 7
<i>Deliver Us from Evil," Part 2</i>	Pg. 7
<i>The Doxology of the Lord's Prayer</i>	Pg. 8
<i>The Doxology of the Lord's Prayer – Part 2</i>	Pg. 8

The Lord's Prayer; Introduction

I have been interested lately to hear several people mention an interest in prayer in their daily living. This is good if a proper understanding of what prayer is attends this interest. Many see prayer as a kind of wishful affirmation. You visualize something that you really want and then you repeat to yourself, "This (whatever it is) is mine! I claim it—name it and claim it." Many have the notion that prayer is this kind of thing.

Still others regard prayer as a means of twisting God's arm—talking Him into something that He might not otherwise have thought to do, or attempting to change His mind. Then, we think that in order get a hearing, one must be "good." This means that we have to try to clean up and get "worthy." Of course, there are others who secure the aid of those deemed more spiritually acceptable to God, particularly the "saints" who have passed on to heaven, to put in a good word for them, since they have immediate access to God. Sadly, these concepts of prayer are unbiblical and pagan.

The Bible teaches that prayer is the means whereby we communicate with God, who rules and governs His creation, because we need Him. Not to pray argues that one is self-sufficient and, thus, has no reason to communicate with God. However, the fact is that we are all completely at His mercy. As Paul said, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. . . . So that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him . . . for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:24-28). That is what prayer is about. It is feeling after God as those who recognize that they have nothing, being wholly dependent upon Him as Maker and King. John the Baptist reminded his hearers, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven" (John 3:27). Prayer, then, is an expression of dependency.

We know that prayer is not intended to change God's mind or to inform Him of something He did not know, for Jesus made it clear that "your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). Why, then, should we pray? The answer is simply that God commands us to do so. "In this manner, therefore, pray [an imperative]" (Matthew 6:9). "Pray [an imperative] without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Proper praying is submissive dependency—waiting upon God to fulfill His will in us.

Biblical praying also requires childlike reverence and trust in God as the ground of all our praying. God is designated as a Father to His children, which denotes a loving, accepting, and wise attendance over us as a parent who thoughtfully regards the needs and wants of his children.

Do you pray? Jesus is our great example. "[He] often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed" (Luke 5:16). Real, biblical prayer is a mark of one's relationship to God. Sadly, many attempt to pray, but they neither know for what to pray or how to pray for it (Romans 8:26) because they do not have the Holy Spirit promised to those who are in Christ. If you do not know Christ as Savior and Lord, then you will not know God as Father; so you cannot really pray. Think about it.

"Let Your Name Be Holy"

Praying is very difficult for most Christians; therefore, twice (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4) Jesus gave to the disciples a model prayer to use as a template for their own prayers. This model prayer is made up of seven petitions; two groups of three and four respectively. The first three relate to the cause of God and the last four relate to our own daily concerns. They teach that our primary duty in prayer is to disregard ourselves and to give God the preeminence in all things. We cannot pray aright unless the glory of God is dominant in all our desires. Too many prayers are rather selfish concerns aimed at making our own lives more comfortable.

I would warn you that God may answer a foolish and selfish prayer, but, as He did with Israel, He may give you your request, but send leanness into your soul (Psalm 106:15). Israel's prayer gave no thought to the glory of God. Thus, we are instructed to cherish a deep sense of the ineffable (indescribable) holiness of God, and all our prayers should reflect a longing for the honoring of His holy name. We must never ask God to bestow anything on us that would contradict His holiness.

This fact is understood in the very first petition: "Hallowed be your name." *Hallowed* is an old Middle English word that means "to set apart as being sacred." It is a desire for God's matchless name to be revered, adored, and glorified. In the Greek, it is a passive imperative—a command to let something be. In other words, we are commanded to let God cause His name to be held in the utmost respect and honor, and that its fame will spread abroad and be magnified.

His *name* is simply another way of saying God, Himself, or His reputation among men. "They that know your name [that is, your wondrous perfections] will put their trust in you" (Psalm 9:10). The Divine name sets before us all that God has revealed to us concerning Himself as in such names and titles as the Almighty, the Lord of hosts, Jehovah, our Father and any other designation in which He has disclosed Himself to us. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name" (Psalm 96:8).

The puritan, Thomas Manton, wrote: "In this petition the glory of God is both desired and promised on our part; for every prayer is both an expression of a desire and also an implicit vow or solemn obligation that we take upon ourselves to prosecute [to take action on] what we ask. Prayer is a preaching to ourselves in God's hearing: we speak to God to warn

ourselves, not for His information, but for our edification.” This means that we mock God if we address Him in pious words but have no intention of striving with our might to live in harmony with what His holy name implies.

That this petition is first is seen in the fact that the glorifying of God’s great name is the ultimate end of all things. All other requests must be subordinate to this one and be in pursuance of it. The example of our Lord is seen in His request as He faced the cross: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify your name” (John 12:27, 28). Our prayers must do the same.

“Let Your Kingdom Come”

Twice in the Gospels (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4), Jesus gave to us a model prayer to use as a template for our prayers. This model prayer is made up of seven petitions. Last week, we looked at the first petition, “Hallowed be your name.” This petition is ground of all the other petitions. No prayer has any virtue unless it is rooted in the desire that God’s name—all that He has revealed to us concerning Himself—should be properly represented by those who own their faith in Jesus Christ. Any praying that is selfish in nature and fails to honor God, may be granted, but with severe negative spiritual consequences as per Psalm 106:15: “He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.”

The second petition follows the first as the means whereby the first petition is fulfilled: “*Thy kingdom come.*” Two questions come to mind with this petition. First, what kingdom is in view here? Second, what aspect of the kingdom yet future does this petition address?

Of course, the pronoun, *thy*, can only refer to the “Father” to whom this prayer is addressed. God is the Creator and Sustainer of His creation, which He providentially, carrying all things to the end for which He made them. The Bible says that “He is Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24). However, it does not always appear to us that He is ruling all things, because we cannot see Him. Also, many things that happen in the world do not fit our conception of what a just and loving God would permit. That is why faith is so vital. We must trust in His infinite wisdom to dispose of all things in accordance with His holy will.

There is one aspect of His kingdom that is now clearly functioning in the world. It is the spiritual kingdom of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as He told the Jews, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed . . . the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” (Luke 20:20, 21). The Gospel Kingdom is the rule of Jesus Christ in the lives of His people. Thus, when we pray, we are to regard this fact and desire that our request should both further His kingdom and glorify His name by others seeing what is granted in our prayers.

The petition, however, suggests that a future *coming kingdom* is in view—“*Thy kingdom come.*” With respect to the sphere of God’s grace here on earth, it means we are to pray, “Let your gospel be preached in the power of your Spirit; let your church be strengthened; let your cause on earth be advanced and the works of Satan be destroyed!”

With respect to God’s internal kingdom—His spiritual reign of grace within the hearts of His people, we are to pray, “Let your throne be established in our hearts; let your laws be administered in our lives and let your name be magnified by our walk.”

With respect to God’s kingdom in its future glory, we are to pray, “Let the Day be hastened when Satan and his hosts shall be completely vanquished, when your people shall be done with sinning forever, and when Christ shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied.” This must be the longing of every child of God, grieving over the lack of spiritual interest in so many, and craving for God’s glory to be clearly evident all around, as “when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

“Let Your Will Be Done”

We have looked at the first two petitions of the Lord’s Prayer as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). The first three petitions relate to the Father in heaven. (1) The first petition is that His name should be hallowed, that is, His glory is to be asserted by us. (2) The second petition is that His kingdom would come as the way that His glory is manifested. His kingdom is now invisible and spiritual with King Jesus reigning over His people. (3) The third petition is “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In this petition, we find the means of bringing His kingdom in, that is, by our doing His will on earth through personal obedience. By doing His will, we hallow His name and we acknowledge His kingdom.

This petition, asking that his will be done, consists of two parts. First, we are, in a sense, to ask for a spirit of obedience. Our personal obedience makes it manifest that His kingdom has come to us, for it is useless to call Christ King if we fail to obey His commandments.

The second part contains a statement as to the manner in which our obedience is carried out—on earth as it is carried out in heaven. This brings us to ask, is not God’s will always being done? The answer is yes and no. There are two distinct aspects of the will of God. One is His secret or “decretive” will, as the theologians refer to it. This aspect of God’s will is always done because it is God who does it. We read, “The LORD of hosts has sworn: ‘As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. . . . For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?’” (Isaiah 14:24, 27).

God's decretive will involves His work in creation, providence, and salvation. The last (salvation) troubles people most, but God says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Paul concludes, "So then it [salvation] depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy . . . for who can resist his will?" (Romans 9:13, 16, 19).

The second aspect of the will of God (and that which applies to this petition) is His revealed or "preceptive" will, that which defines our path and duty—what He wants for us to do. The difference is seen in the contrast of two verses. First, God says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose" (Isaiah 46:10)—His secret will. But then we read, "The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves" (Luke 7:30)—His revealed will. If we do not recognize the difference between them, we see contradictions where they do not exist.

Everyone does the secret will of God, whether one cooperates or fights against God's revealed purpose. Peter told his audience at Pentecost, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan . . . of God, you crucified and killed" (Acts 2:23). Think about this carefully. The people, by putting Jesus to death, thought they were preventing Him from carrying out His plan, but they were actually advancing it. They did it willingly. God did not coerce them and they will face the judgment of God for it. The Bible commands you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but you may, like the Pharisees, reject His purpose. However, know this, He will come to take vengeance "on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thessalonians 1:8). God, we pray, "Thy will be done on earth."

"Give Us Our Daily Bread"

The Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer takes us from those things that focus on God's program in the world—His glory, His Kingdom, and His will—and turns us to what we must ask for ourselves. The last four petitions are divided into two categories; that which relates to our physical needs, and that which relates to our spiritual needs. The fourth petition falls into the first category—that which deals with the body. It is the only one and that tells us that, while our physical life is important, it is not nearly as important as those things that relate the soul. Jesus warned us, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Several questions come to mind when we consider this request for daily bread. (1) Why is this desire for the temporal put before the spiritual? (2) What is meant by the term "bread"? (3) In what sense can we ask for bread if we already have some? (4) How is bread a divine gift when we purchase it with our own earnings?

Why ask for bread before forgiveness? I believe that our Lord put this request first two reasons. First, as Matthew Henry put it, "Our natural [well being] is necessary [for] our spiritual well-being in this world" We need to satisfy the physical in order to seek spiritual well-being. Second, asking for the things we can touch and see develops our faith to believe we can also receive those things that we cannot see.

But what does the term "bread" mean here. Certainly, we need more than just bread. The Bible uses *bread* as a generic term that is inclusive of all the necessities of life—food, shelter, clothing, and whatever else we must have to sustain life. However, inherent in the term is also a warning that we should be content with essentials and not be longing after luxuries. This idea seems difficult to grasp where luxuries are so often mistaken for essentials. I am convinced that the spiritual poverty of our times is directly related to the abundance of our delicacies. Also inherent in the request for bread is the health and appetite to go with it, for bread does us no good if we cannot benefit from its nourishment.

Combining the third and fourth questions, and putting four before three, let us consider why we ask for bread from God when we purchase it regularly with our own earning? Not only that, we usually do our shopping weekly or biweekly, not daily, so, why ask for it, then, when it is readily available in our pantry? Our Lord is concerned that we understand our need to see our constant dependence upon our Maker "for life, breath, and all things," as Paul tells us, "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). His gives and sustains all life, thus, all we get, even by our own labor and industry, comes directly from His hand.

Sadly, sin has blinded the eyes of humankind to this need to understand our utter dependence upon God for all things. Paul tells us in Romans that when our forefathers knew God, "they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Romans 1:21). What an awful fix!—blind and ignorant of the very One who makes life even possible. Horrible judgment is prepared for those who cannot, with humble and grateful hearts, supplicate God in childlike reliance upon His faithful supply. And, if we cannot trust Him for our bodily nourishment, how shall we ever seek Him for spiritual nourishment?

"Forgive Us Our Debts"

The fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer is linked to the fourth petition with the conjunction *and*, suggesting several things. First, without pardon for sins, our bodily needs will do us no good. "Our daily bread," as Matthew Henry aptly stated, "doth but fatten us as lambs for the slaughter if our sins be not pardoned." The fact is, our sins are so many and so bad that it is but the mercy of God that we can even begin to enjoy the good things of life, for we certainly do not deserve even one mouthful of bread. Indeed, our sins are great obstacles to our petitions: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His *face from you, so that He will not hear*" (Isaiah 59:2).

The second thing implied in the connection of these two petitions is that if we can trust God for the supply of our needs, certainly we may trust Him for our salvation, which involves the forgiveness of our sins. These sins are viewed here as debts—undischarged obligations that we owe to God. All people owe to God sincere and perfect worship together with earnest and perpetual obedience (Romans 8:12). We cannot ask to be released from this obligation, but we can pray, rather, to be acquitted from our failure in them. Our sinful disposition makes full payment of the debt impossible for us. Jesus, however, was given to satisfy His people's debt to God through His glorious *redemption*—a financial term that signifies the satisfaction of a debt on behalf of another.

This metaphor of debt applies, not only to our ruin, but also to our remedy. Since we are bankrupt, deliverance must come from without us: the Lord Jesus took upon Himself the office of Sponsor and rendered full satisfaction of the debt on behalf of His people (Hebrews 7:22; Psalm 69:4; Job 33:24). In the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs us to ask that God will not lay to our charge the sins that we daily commit against Him (Psalm 143:2). We are taught to plead that God will accept the satisfaction of Christ for our sins and that He will look upon us as righteous in Christ.

In this petition we beseech God for the continuance of His pardon. As with our daily bread, although we have a plenty on hand, we beg for a continuing supply of it. So it is with our sins that require a continuing supply of forgiveness. We should also plead for the sense of forgiveness or assurance of it. The effect of the assurance of forgiveness is inner peace and confident access to God (Romans 5:1, 2).

Forgiveness is never to be demanded as something that is due to us, but we should request pardon as a mercy. John Brown, the commentator, has said, "To the very end of life, the best Christian must come for forgiveness just as he did at first, not as a claimant of a right but as a suppliant of a favor." In addition, asking for forgiveness is not a reflection upon our complete justification, but an evidence of our sanctification (Acts 13:39; John 5:24). This truth, instead of leading one to the conclusion that he need not pray for the remission of his sins, supplies him with the strongest possible encouragement to do so. It is a motive to watchfulness and faithfulness, implying a felt sense of sin, a penitent acknowledgment of it, a seeking of God's mercy for it, and a realization that God can righteously pardon us.

"As We Forgive Our Debtors"

Dispensational teachers see the Sermon on the Mount as belonging to a future Jewish kingdom and not for our age. As a proof of their position, they will argue that this fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer makes one's forgiveness of others the condition of his forgiveness from God. In other words, if I want God to forgive my transgressions, then I must be willing to forgive those who trespass against me. They support this view by showing that believers of this grace age are to base their forgiveness of others on that fact that they have been forgiven. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

I reject this view for several reasons. First, the Sermon on the Mount does not pit one dispensation against another but rather corrects the false views of righteousness held by the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus sets forth His standard of righteousness in the New Covenant age as Moses was given God's standard of righteousness for the Old Covenant age. It is not a new standard, but rather a clarified and applied standard to be written on the hearts of His people. It is the righteousness that Jesus secured for His own through His sinless life and sacrificial death by which they are justified. It is also the practical righteousness that they, by Holy Spirit power, are to pursue in their sanctification.

Second, our works or failures are not now nor ever have been the condition of salvation, of which forgiveness is certainly an element. Those references, which seem to read as conditional, must be understood in the light of grace—God's free and independent right to give salvation to the undeserving. One example of an apparent condition appears in the very context of Matthew 6:12. Just a few verses later, Jesus said, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14). I contend that this verse (v. 14) further supports the argument of verse 12. Rather than presenting a condition that we must meet in order to be forgiven of God, it presents an argument that we may use to assure us of God's forgiveness. Let me explain.

In our justification all sins, past, present, and future, are fully and finally forgiven us through the redemption that is in Christ (Romans 3:24, 25). This in itself presents a problem. Since I am already a Christian and thus forgiven (Colossians 2:13), why must I keep asking forgiveness? The difficulty arises from a failure to distinguish between the purchase of our pardon by Christ and its actual application to us (2 Peter 1:9). Our present and future sins are not remitted until we repent and confess them to God (1 John 1:9). This is a necessary part of our sanctification. David begged God's forgiveness (Psalm 51:1) even after Nathan assured him, saying, "The Lord also has put away your sins" (2 Samuel 12:13). The same principle applies to us.

How can I be certain that God will forgive me? Jesus gives us an argument of logic. We are to reason with God from the lesser to the greater. If I, a weak and sinful man, have forgiven those who offend me, certainly God who is perfectly holy and righteous and who has freely provided a Savior for me, will surely forgive me when I ask Him. Also, we are to argue from the condition of those who may expect pardon from us. Am I not ready to forgive an offending neighbor? Surely God is more ready to do so than I.

One may object that there are many Christians who are unforgiving. Just so, for God's gracious work in the transformation of His people frees them from the bondage of corruption that manifests itself in an unforgiving spirit. If I hold such a

spirit, how can I believe that I have been forgiven of God for Christ's sake? No, rather, the assurance of my forgiveness rests in evidence of God's change wrought in me that frees me to forgive! Thus, I may pray, "Father, forgive me my debts to you, in the same way that, because of your grace, I have forgiven those who were indebted to me."

"Lead us not into temptation"

As we consider the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, we need make a few observations. First, there is the conjunctive, *and*, that connects the fifth and sixth petition. The connection joins them in a common theme that will be apparent. Five has to do with sins committed; six has to do with potential sins. Five evokes a grateful praise for sins forgiven; six evokes a fervent plea to keep us from committing sin. Five seeks the removal of the guilt of sin; six seeks the removal of power of sin.

Second, the sixth petition raises a difficulty, for James 1:13 clearly tells us that God tempts no one to sin, yet this petition seems to imply that He does. The difficulty is resolved in a careful reading of both texts. Our petition does not say that God tempts us, but only that He leads us into temptation. Our problems with temptation and sin are self-generated, according to James 1:14: "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." The world, the flesh, and the devil prey upon our own desires, luring us to act upon our lusts.

Since God is in control of all things, He may either intervene or not in the temptation process; but at no point does He either tempt us or cause us to sin. However, in our sanctification, we must learn the discipline of self-denial and mortification of the sinful deeds of the body. Therefore, as in case of Job's trials, God may permit evil to befall us. He will allow Satan and the flesh to lure us into sinful acts. We, then, respond to our failure with conviction, remorse and repentance, if we are truly His children. This process is very humbling and painfully revealing of our inward corruptions. By these means we also learn to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation. We learn to pray, "Please, Father, lead me not into temptation; do not permit Satan or my flesh to draw me away from righteousness and fellowship with you. I do not want to lose the joy of my salvation, having to experience the awful misery of sorrow for sin."

Third, temptation has a twofold usage in Scripture. It may refer to directly provoking sinful actions, or it may refer to proving or testing in order to expose one's love and loyalty. God does directly tempt people in this sense. For example, we read in Judges that God did not drive out the remaining heathen nations from the Promised Land. We read that these nations "were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses" (Judges 3:4). God tested Abraham in Genesis 22 to prove loyalty to God. Satan, on the other hand, provoked Jesus to sin in Luke 4. The difference is clearly the motivation behind that temptation. God was interested in Abraham's good, while Satan sought to destroy God's purpose in sending His Son.

When we pray that we not be lead into temptation, we are acknowledging that God will test us, but we fear the process. While we recognize that He has only our best interest in mind, yet we know ourselves to be full of the remains of sin. It is also implied that plead His mercy in what He wills for us in the test. We have already prayed that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Oh, that He may find us strengthened by His power in the inner man that we may stand in the evil day.

"Lead us not into temptation," Part 2

Forgiveness of past sins is not enough for us. We must also be delivered from future sins. Justification is the remedy for past sins. Sanctification is the remedy for future sins. The humble believer is self-distrustful because he is conscious of remaining tendencies to sin and the weakness of his own flesh in restraining them. This makes it necessary for him to pray that God will not bring him into temptation.

As we noted in the last lesson, James 1:13 teaches us that God does not directly tempt anyone to sin. Our English translations uniformly use "lead" to translate the Greek word *eisphero*. This term is better translated "to bring"—"*bring* us not into temptation." The Southern Baptist theologian, John Broadus, in commenting on this passage, wrote: "The thought here is of God's so ordering things in his providence as to bring us into trying circumstances, which would put our principles and characters to the test. This providential action does not compel us to do wrong, for such conditions become to us the occasion of sin only when our own evil desires are the impelling cause (James 1:14, 15)."

This focus of temptation is the revelation of inward character and disposition. The same circumstances that may lead one to sin will lead another to manifest strength of piety. So, knowing our weakness, we are to pray that, in the process of our sanctification, His providence will not bring us into temptation that might provoke sin in us. However, when, in spite of our prayers, He does so, we are to rejoice (James 1:3).

Much is made of temptation's having two meanings: (1) provoking sinful actions, and (2) proving or testing. Temptation is simply pressure to do something. What actually matters is the intention of the tempter and the character of the tempted. Also, much is made of God's part as to whether He is active or merely passive, permitting the temptation. The fact is, God does what He wills to do for His glory and our good. Since God is interested in holiness above all else, He uses temptation as a means of strengthening believers in the inner man. That process might involve one's sinning, by which he is brought to experience the cycle of the shame of guilt, remorse, repentance, confession, and absolution or release. By this method, the Holy Spirit reinforces holiness. If we really belong to Him, we need not fear falling into sinful ways, for He will never

permit that. His discipline always “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11). He disciplines us in order that we may share his holiness.

His providences, though good in themselves, do offer occasions for sin due to our depravity. For example, His affliction of Job revealed Job’s patient endurance—“the patience of Job”—but it also revealed his self-righteousness. God’s allowing Satan to sift Peter revealed Peter’s self confidence (Luke 22:31). His testing of Hezekiah showed the king’s self-complacency (2 Chronicles 32:27-31). Therefore, we are led to plead with God, knowing that “the flesh is weak.” We cry out, as David, “Hold me up, and I shall be safe” (Psalm 119:117). By these means, we are taught to “watch and pray that [we] may not enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41).

“Deliver Us from Evil”

We now come to the seventh petition in the Lord’s Prayer, which is also the last of the four petitions asking for our own needs to be met. The first of the last four petitions is for providing grace—“give us our daily bread.” The second is for pardoning grace—“forgive us our debts.” The third is for preventing grace—“and lead us not into temptation.” The fourth, and the one before us today, is for preserving grace: “but deliver us from evil.”

As we examine this seventh petition, we must first ask, what is meant by “evil”? A Bible dictionary defines evil as that which is not in harmony with the divine order of things. The Bible generally uses the term to designate anything “bad.” It is often contrasted with *good*, such as “good and evil” (Genesis 47:9; Isaiah 5:20).

There are two basic types of evil: (1) *calamity*, the outward and physically destructive aspects of sin (Psalm 7:5; Proverbs 1:33; Numbers 13:32; Exodus 5:19, and (2) *wickedness*, the inward and spiritually destructive aspects of sin (Deuteronomy 4:25; Psalm 26:5). Thus, we may consider evil as having more to do with the immediate and long-term effects of sin and may include those things which come in the aftermath of sin, including the judgment of God.

Evil is the great problem of theism. How can we reconcile God’s goodness and holiness with His permitting of evil to exist in the world? The Lord is good, so evil is the direct opposite of His person and nature. In His infinite wisdom, however, the Lord uses the evil that has come from sin to advance His good purposes (Isaiah 45:7), as in Joseph’s case (Genesis 50:20). Evil is only temporary in God’s plan, and is not a coequal force to be kept in balance with good, as New Age philosophy contends. Paul shows the temporary nature of evil in that all nature groans under its burden, waiting for the redemption of body, at which time evil shall be banished forever (Romans 8:18-22)

So, what is meant in this petition, “Deliver us from evil”? As we observed in the previous petition, there is a conjunctive (but) linking the two—“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” As we noted before, God sovereignly uses sin to further His purpose in our holiness. Since God is not the author of sin, it is actually the evil wrought by sin that He uses. So we are to pray that He will preserve us from the effects, both moral (wickedness) and physical (calamity).

Satan’s favorite device is play on our self-indulgence in order to dishonor God and offend His people, as in David’s sin (2 Samuel 11). Our natural response is to cover our sin, but unconfessed and suppressed, sin becomes comfortable to the conscience. Therefore, God chastens us with evil to make us uncomfortable. If we are not on guard, Satan will turn the conviction either into despair or cause conviction to harden our hearts. Thus, our Lord teaches us to regularly “watch and pray that we do not enter into temptation,” and also to pray that God will “deliver us from evil.”

“Deliver Us from Evil,” Part 2

As we discovered in our first look at the sixth and seventh petitions, God is not the author of sin, nor does He tempt us to sin. This brings us to ask, “How does God ‘deliver’ us from evil?” First, we must keep in mind that our salvation requires perseverance in holiness. We do not persevere in holiness either to obtain salvation or to keep it; perseverance in holiness is in the very nature of salvation, itself. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Perseverance is not our work, but it is the work of God’s Spirit, who works to produce holiness in us. This work may require our being lead into sin so that we may experience His loving discipline that results in holiness (Hebrew 12:10).

Our own inherent tendencies to lust and sin are strong and accretive. They are the culprits which God provokes, usually by telling that we are not to do something. Thus, we sin, and sin always leads to more sin, alienating us from God. So, we need a challenge for us to mortify the flesh in order to resist temptation. We need to understand how weak is our flesh in order to employ His power to overcome.

God says, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you” (Isaiah 59:2). Real believers cannot abide such a condition. They must repent and humbly return to God. They also understand the awful effects of sin, which leads them to pray, “Deliver us from evil.” The request to “deliver” implies salvation, for at no time is anything left to us.

What we are trying to say here is best illustrated by Peter in Luke 22:31-34. Peter was about to fall into sin by denying Christ. Jesus informed him that his fall was due to Satan’s demand to have him, “that he might sift you like wheat” (v. 31). Note here that the Lord not only knows that Satan will tempt Peter, but that He will not prevent it. Why? Peter must learn that he cannot trust in himself, as evidenced in his confident self-accretion: “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison

and to death” (v. 33). I do not question Peter’s sincerity, but it was his flesh speaking. When the temptation came, he denied the Lord three times (vv. 54-62).

Where, then, does “deliver us from evil” fit in? First, Jesus will deliver Peter by (1) informing him of his danger (2) and of the Lord’s intervention (“I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail”—v. 34), then, He will warn Him to “Watch and pray . . . [because] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). He will let Peter fall, but He will deliver his faith, preventing Peter’s full and final apostasy, which a denial would mean (“If we deny Him, He also will deny us”—2 Timothy 2:12). He also gave Peter hope that he would repent and return to active service. Repentance is a gift of grace (Acts 11:18). It is “*When* you have returned to me,” not “*if* you will return to me.” Jesus did not let Peter drift away, but actively pursued him and restored him, as recorded in John 21:15-19.

Finally, the Lord indicated Peter’s place of future service: “strengthen your brethren.” It is interesting that Peter believed himself to be stronger than his brethren, for he said, “Even though all [these disciples] may fall away because of You, I will never fall away” (Matthew 26:33). Jesus is saying, “Okay, your heart is right, but your flesh is weak. You need to learn to live by my strength, so for now you will fall, but when you are recovered, you will strengthen them.” This is what we are to understand when we pray, “Deliver us from evil.”

The Doxology of the Lord’s Prayer

“For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13)

The Lord’s Prayer is the quintessence of all prayers and contains everything that constitutes a prayer. Our Lord opens the prayer by honoring the Father in exalting Him in His rightful position: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,” or “let your name be treated with reverence.” Jesus honors the Father by holding forth the ends that He has purposed in eternity: “Let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” He honors the father by demonstrating utter creature dependence on Him, as seen in the four requests for daily needs, forgiveness of sin, avoiding temptation, and keeping from sin and the harm that it brings. Finally, our Lord honors the Father by praising His glorious attributes in a doxology closing the prayer.

This doxology teaches us that we must not only ask of the God those things that we need, but that we must also render to God those things that are due to Him—praise and adoration. We are duty bound to love God with all our being, as expressed in the first commandment. His glory is to be our single aim in life: “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). So, even what we need should be a means to glorify His name with the thanksgiving of our lips. Dependence and gratitude are indeed hallmarks of Christian character. This fact is evidenced in all biblical examples of prayer (Philippians 4:6; Psalm 22:3).

This doxology may be regarded in a threefold way: first, it is as an expression of holy and joyful praise. This is the duty that we were created for. The Westminster Catechism asks: “What is the chief end of man?” The answer: “The chief end of man is to fully glorify the Lord and to enjoy Him forever.” Sadly, our pursuit of pleasure in sinful ways has robbed God and cheated us. Jonathan Edwards stated: “The end of the creation is that the creation might glorify Him. Now what is glorifying God, but a rejoicing at the glory He has displayed?” As the Lord acts to answer our prayers, we respond with joyful praise and thanksgiving, which glorifies God.

Second, the doxology is a plea and argument to enforce the petitions. If God is glorified in the display of His power in providing for us, then we may use it as an argument to plead as we make further request. If I can argue that God’s providing for my daily needs will make me happy, grateful, and motivated to serve Him, I know that He will hear me. This is a powerful argument to lay before God and a powerful check upon our my petitions as to their proper end and motive.

Third, the doxology is a confirmation and declaration of confidence that the prayer will be heard. (1)The doxology acknowledges His sovereign rule over all things—“yours is the Kingdom.” If the King cannot rule in His own domain, not one can. (2) The doxology acknowledges His power to do whatever He pleases—“and the power.” “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). “I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). Certainly, if God so wills, He can do anything. That affords great confidence. (3) The doxology acknowledges His end with regard to His mighty acts—“and the glory.” If we can show that our petition is suitable to His ends, then we know He will hear us and grant to us what desire (1 John 5:14).

The Doxology of the Lord’s Prayer – Part 2

The doxology of the Lord’s Prayer teaches us that God is not a glorified heavenly genie that waits upon us to lavish us with our every whim. Rather, our prayers are to secure for us those things that are needed in the work of His will on earth advancing His Kingdom. We pray, “[Let] your Kingdom come . . . for the Kingdom and the power are yours and the glory is yours.” Thus, the Lord reminds us that our sincere and Spirit-enabled worship is what we owe to God, even as we seek the supply His grace for our needs. He is seen here as the Alpha and Omega. We recognize Him as our Father in Heaven and as our King and Lord on earth.

This brings us to ask, what does the Kingdom of God entail? Actually, there are several aspects of the Kingdom. First, God’s Kingdom is already established in His providence because “He is Lord of heaven and earth” (Acts 17:24), and “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (Daniel 9:17). In the realms of the natural and supernatural,

angelic and human, God rules every detail in accordance to His will. He says, "I am God, and there is none like me . . . saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose . . . I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it'" (Isaiah 46:9-11). We pray, "May we always acknowledge that all things come from your hand, so that we humbly submit to your will in whatever befalls us."

Second, the Kingdom involves the spiritual rule of Jesus Christ in lives of His people now. Jesus and his disciples came preaching "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). He said to the Jews "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed . . . the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." (Luke 20:20, 21). The parables of Matthew 13 concern the advancement of God's Kingdom in this gospel age, between the first and second comings of Christ, which Paul also understood this when taught the new churches "saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). We pray, "Let your gospel be preached in the power of your Spirit; let your church be strengthened; let your cause on earth be advanced and the works of Satan be destroyed!"

Third, the Kingdom involves the future earthly rule of Jesus Christ on earth. The phrase, "Thy kingdom come," may be viewed as both a prayer for the advance of His Kingdom now and a plea for the establishment of His millennial Kingdom at the end of the age (Revelation 20). Psalm 2 speaks of the rebellion on earth when the rulers cry; "Let us break [the Lord's and His Christ's] bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us" (v. 2). The Lord's reply is to laugh and say; "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion" (v. 6). This is a future event, unless we take Zion to be figurative of the church, however, we read of Christ's rule; "You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel" (v. 9). This will take place in the future, as shown in Revelation 12:5. The Psalm closes with a warning to the rebellious peoples and nations: "Be warned . . . Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled" (vv. 10-12). This warning is the work of church through the gospel. We pray, "Even so, come Lord Jesus, for the Kingdom is yours."