

VICTORY FOR THE NEXT TIME
Matthew 6:13

There is something strange about this final petition of THE LORD'S PRAYER. The problem rests in the Greek word translated "temptation," which means to test or to prove. It is translated "trial" or "temptation" in the New Testament, depending on the context. But either way you read this word in this petition, it still seems a little weird. **James 1:13** says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." So why would Jesus teach us to ask God not to do something that God would not do anyway? Likewise, **James 1:2-3** says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." God uses trials to test our faith, build our character, and strengthen our commitment. God even commands us to rejoice when trials come, because we know that God is at work in and through our trials. So why would Jesus teach us to ask God not to do something that is, in fact, one of God's chief tools for making us more like him?

Either way you read this petition, it does not make sense, logically or theologically. But that gets me to my point. This petition should not be isolated from the one who prays it. This petition is not a precise theological statement. It is the natural cry of a life that has experienced the devastation of sin. This petition is not to be prayed with our heads, but with our hearts. This petition is not meant for the theological scholar. It is meant for the forgiven sinner. Verse 13 begins with the conjunction "and," which connects verse 12 to verse 13. In verse 12, we are taught to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Then after we have received pardon, restoration, and forgiveness, then we are taught to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This is a prayer of one who knows what it means to fall into sin. This is a prayer for one who knows what it means to have the grace of God to pick you up and wash you up and give you another chance. This is a prayer for one who looks back at a past life of sin, looks at a new life in grace, and decides that you never want to return to the past life of sin. So after you receive the forgiveness of God, you pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

- **The prayer for forgiveness is about our past sins. The prayer for deliverance is about our future sins.**
- **The prayer for forgiveness is about yesterday. The prayer for deliverance is about tomorrow.**
- **The prayer for forgiveness is about actual sins. The prayer for deliverance is about potential sins.**

We are to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." And we are to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Not only do we seek pardon for the last time, we also seek victory for

the next time. Christians approach God in prayer desperately desiring spiritual victory over the power of sin.

A Sunday school worker was teaching her first grade class. Her subject for the day was sin. She wanted the kids to know about the different types of sin that can be committed. So she asked the students, "Does anyone know what sins of commission are?" A little girl answered, "That's when you do something your mommy told you not to do." "Very good," said the teacher. "Now, can anyone tell me what a sin of omission might be?" A little boy waved his hand. She called on him. And he proudly announced, "Sins of omission are all the sins you're supposed to commit but haven't got around to yet?"

Unfortunately, this is how a lot of Christians think. We think it is only a matter of time until we commit certain sins. Some of us will say, "This temptation to have illicit sex is just too powerful!" Or, "The pressure to drink or do drugs is too hard to resist. I am going to cave in any time now! I do not know how long I'll be able to hold out! But I want you to know that sin can be resisted. You do not have to sin today, no matter what you did yesterday. Not only can we resist sin as Christians, but we can also grow spiritually stronger every day. We can overcome trials and temptations. You can have victory the next time you face a trial or temptation. But you cannot do it in your own strength. So Jesus teaches us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Do you feel like you have fallen and can't get up? Are you tired of being overcome by trials and temptations? Do you want victory the next time? Well, let's walk about this text and examine how praying this petition can help us gain victory over the power of sin.

I. CONFESS THE SINFULNESS OF YOUR FLESH.

When Leonard da Vinci was painting his masterpiece, The Last Supper, he selected as the person to sit for the character of Christ a young man, Pietri Bandinelli. Years passed before the great picture was completed, and when one character - Judas Iscariot - was missing, the great painter noticed a man in the streets of Rome whom he selected as his model. With shoulders far bent to the ground, having an expression of cold, hardened evil, the man seemed to be a model that was terribly true to da Vinci's conception of Judas. Once in the studio, the model looked around, as if recalling incidents of years gone by. Finally, he turned and with a look half-sad, yet one which told how hard it was to realize the change that had taken place, he said, "Maestro, I was in this studio twenty-seven years ago. I, then, sat for Christ."

No matter who you are, you are still capable of sin. Even though you may be born again, your old nature has not yet been erased. You are still a sinner.

And life is a test. And if the right solicitation of money, work, success, fame, recreation, sex, alcohol, drugs, or food come along, we are liable to fail the test. We are like a little boy living in a world of many signs that say: **Wet paint**. Our nature wants to touch them all. We have not arrived spiritually, and we will never be free of the danger of sin until we are with the Lord. So Jesus teaches us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

- **We make this request confessing our intrinsic helplessness.**
- **We make this request as a statement of self-distrust.**
- **We make this request to safeguard us from a false sense of security and self-sufficiency.**
- **We make this request pleading with God to provide what we do not have within ourselves.**
- **We make this request appealing to God to place a watch over our eyes, ears, mouths, feet, and hands – that in whatever we see or hear or say, and in any place we go and in anything we do, he will protect us from our own sinfulness.**

Picture it. A little child is playing when his ball rolls into the traffic. Obviously, the child is tempted to run and get it. The child never sees the danger and never thinks about getting hurt. The child just wants to retrieve the ball. But a wise and loving parent sees the danger and holds the child's hand to keep him from darting into traffic. In the same manner, we pray: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." It is our way of saying, "Lord, keep me from running into traffic." There is a old hymn that says:

**I AM WEAK AND I NEED THY STRENGTH AND POWER
TO HELP ME OVER MY WEAKEST HOUR
LET ME THROUGH THE DARKNESS, THY FACE TO SEE
LEAD ME, OH LORD, LEAD ME**

**LEAD ME, GUIDE ME, ALONG THE WAY
FOR IF YOU LEAD ME I CANNOT STRAY
LORD LET ME WALK EACH DAY WITH THEE
LEAD ME, OH LORD, LEAD ME.**

This is what it means to pray, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." It is to recognize our utter weakness, frailty, and limitations. It is to confess your tendency to get lost, and to beg the Lord, "Lead me."

2 Chronicles 26 records the downfall of King Uzziah. When you begin to read the chapter, you would not think it is about Uzziah's downfall, because the chapter begins by reporting his conquests, accomplishments, and success. Spiritually, politically, militarily, and financially, Uzziah was a success. But then came a turning point in his life. **2 Chronicles 26:15b-16a** reports: "And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction." As long as Uzziah was weak, God helped him. But when he became strong, he stopped depending on God, and defied the Lord. When he died, God struck him with leprosy. And this king who had the world at his feet was banished from his own kingdom, because whenever we are left to our own devices, we inevitably destroy ourselves.

Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." **1 Corinthians 10:12** says, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." And **Galatians 6:3** says, "For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."

II. RECOGNIZE THE STRENGTH OF YOUR ENEMY.

1 Samuel 28 records the peculiar story of King Saul who, in his desperation, sought out psychic help in order to hear from God. The ironic thing is that King Saul had outlawed all mediums. But now he decided to see one. In desperation he visited a witch in Endor. Although the witch was a charlatan, people believed she talked to the spirits of the dead. And she laughed all the way to the bank. So Saul went to her and said, "Call up Samuel!" - the dead prophet of God. The old woman, having gone through her routine often, began to get out her bag of tricks. Then, to her horror, Samuel actually appeared. She screamed. You would too. It was rather traumatic to have all her presuppositions shattered so quickly, to be confronted with a reality that she could not explain.

Likewise, Christians today are often devastated time after time, because we disregard the clear teaching of the Bible on the reality of evil, the person of Satan, and the strength of the enemy. And when we encounter the enemy, we are not prepared to deal with the reality. But I serve notice on you today that we are up against a real, powerful, and experienced enemy.

- **An enemy that attacks our bodies.**
- **An enemy that binds our minds.**
- **An enemy that causes our persecution.**
- **An enemy that controls our politicians.**
- **An enemy that deceives our thinking.**
- **An enemy that divides our relationships.**
- **An enemy that hinders our ministries.**
- **An enemy that tempts our flesh.**
- **An enemy that undermines our faith.**

We need God to deliver us from the evil one who would harm us in a traffic accident on the way home. We need God to deliver us from the evil one who would destroy our health with disease and germs. We need God to deliver us from the evil one who would hurt us in ways we do not even think about. So Jesus teaches us to pray, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." In teaching us to make this request the Lord seeks to bring us to a place where we recognize the strength of our foe. Mark it down. We will never have spiritual victory over the power of sin unless we are able to recognize, engage, and stand against the enemy of our souls.

All too often we present salvation as some sort of helpful solution to everything that ails us.

- **Lonely? Come to Jesus and get fixed.**
- **Alcoholic? Come to Jesus and be delivered from your addiction.**
- **Confused? Join the church and find all the answers.**

In such a presentation of the gospel, salvation is pictured as the resolution of all your problems; the way to fix whatever ails you. But this petition reminds us that salvation in Christ is an adventure, a journey, and a larger drama. Making the request acknowledges the beginning of problems that we would never have had had we not met Christ and enlisted with Christ's people. The forces of evil do not relinquish their territory without a fight and, in being saved, God's newly won territory is you. You become a virtual battleground where the living God fights the powers. What you are up against, in being saved, is not simply your personal faults, failures, and foibles. You are up against what the New Testament calls "the principalities and powers." The principalities and powers may never appear as evil or coercive. That is because the powers often masquerade as freedoms that we have been graciously given or as necessities that we cannot live without. We are often deceived by the powers disguising themselves as the White House. The Pentagon. The media. The economy. Hollywood. Wall Street. Madison Avenue. But I stand to tell you that the principalities are real, cosmic, organized, pervasive, subtle, and determined. **Ephesians 6:12** says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Mark it down. Christianity is a battleground, not a playground! It is a fight, a war, a struggle. **ISAAC WATTS** captured the situation precisely when he wrote:

AM I A SOLDIER OF THE CROSS? A FOLLOWER OF THE LAMB?
AND SHALL I FEAR TO OWN HIS CAUSE OR BLUSH TO SPEAK HIS NAME?

MUST I BE CARRIED TO THE SKIES ON FLOWERY BEDS OF EASE,
WHILE OTHERS FOUGHT TO WIN THE PRIZE AND SAILED THROUGH BLOODY SEAS?

ARE THERE NO FOES FOR ME TO FACE? MUST I NOT STEM THE FLOOD?
IS THIS VILE WORLD A FRIEND OF GRACE TO HELP ME ON TO GOD?

SURE I MUST FIGHT IF I WOULD REIGN. INCREASE MY COURAGE, LORD!
I'LL BEAR THE TOIL, ENDURE THE PAIN, SUPPORTED BY THY WORD.

III. TRUST IN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF YOUR FATHER.

The Old Testament book of Job majors on the sovereignty of God. Job experienced hell on earth. But before his trouble began, the book affirms that God is in charge. Read Job 1:7-9. In verse 7, Job suffered the attack of Satan. But God was in control of the conversation of Job's suffering. And God had the last word. This is just a reminder of **MARTIN LUTHER'S** conclusion: "**The devil is God's devil.**" Mark it down. Satan is real. Satan is powerful. But Satan is defeated.

- **God is in control.**
- **God cannot fail, lose, or be defeated.**
- **God is sovereign.**
- **God is infinite.**
- **God is God all by himself.**
- **God is God without our permission.**
- **God has the last word.**
- **God reigns alone on the throne of the universe.**

So Jesus teaches us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And we make this request trusting the sovereignty of our Father in heaven. We come to God confidently knowing that he is ready, willing, and able to save, rescue, and deliver. It does not matter what the test, trial, trouble, temptation, or tribulation may be. God has the power to bring you through, bring you up, and bring you out. **Romans 16:20** says, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." **2 Thessalonians 3:3** says, "But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one." **1 John 4:4** says, "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."