

As we continue our study of the Lord's Prayer let's take a moment to think about the organization of this prayer. The Lord's prayer has seven petitions, which is significant in itself. The number seven is the number of God's Covenant with man. Three is the number of God, He is the triune God. Four is the number of Man. You bring God and man together and you have seven, that is what God's covenant does.

So in this prayer the first three petitions all deal with God—His Holiness, His Kingdom and His Will and all the spiritual blessings God gives so we can relate to and enjoy God. The last four petitions deal with the things we need for our life in this world. We pray for our food and all our physical needs. We pray for forgiveness from our sins and that we will forgive others. In that, we are praying for our relationships. Forgiveness is needed to restore and preserve our relationship with God and with others. Then the last two petitions are prayers for God's protection from all the dangers and evils we face in this world. Our text once again is from Matthew 6:9a & 13

“In this manner, therefore, pray: ... *And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.*”

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Today we will focus on the first of these. Jesus teaches us to pray,
“Lead us Not into Temptation.”

-I- Understand this Prayer

We need to keep in mind what Jesus' brother, James said in our Scripture reading, “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.” Js 1:13 When Jesus tells us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” He is not suggesting that God might lead us into temptation and we should plead with Him, please don't do that. Not at all! God's whole purpose is to save us from sin and and its effects. A better way to understand this petition is that we are praying for the Father to lead us so that we don't give in to temptation. You might say we are asking Him to lead us away from temptation.

Psalm 23 says the same thing in a positive way. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, ... He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His names sake.” Ps. 23:1 & 3b. When He leads us in the paths of righteousness we will not go in the path of temptation. In this prayer Jesus wants us to beware of temptation. The “Not” is very emphatic in the Greek sentence, as if we are horrified at the destructiveness of temptation and pray, “Of all things, Lord lead to avoid that.”

-II- We also need to Recognize our great NEED for this Prayer

Probably the most dangerous position to be in is to think you don't really need to pray this petition. I've heard people say, “Oh, you don't need to worry about so and so, they have a very strong faith.” Isn't that exactly what Peter thought? “Oh, no Lord, I'll never deny you.” The Apostle Paul warns us, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” If we think we are strong enough to resist temptation, we are in grave danger of falling. We should never put our confidence in the strength of our own faith. Rather let us see the real danger of temptation and pray this petition daily.

We need this prayer daily because we are faced with temptations every day and they are deadly. They seek to destroy our soul and life with God. God described this very well when He told Cain, “Sin lies at the door and its desire is for you.” Gen. 4:7 Sin is like a ferocious lion lying in wait,

waiting for the opportunity to pounce on us and devour us. Of course that Lion is the devil who is constantly prowling around "seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8

But the people of the world make sin look and sound very harmless and even the greatest good. The world has a way of making all the sins of the flesh sound like the greatest pleasure. As the old song says, "It can't be wrong when it feels so right." The world has also mastered the art of making God's commands sound like the real evil. They portray God's commandments as totally unreasonable and describe them as hate speech and prejudice against those who are simply being their true self the way God made them.

And of course, this is all the more dangerous because our own sinful nature already delights in those sins. One of the worst pieces of advice that the world gives is to "Follow your heart." That might sound like good solid advice. "Don't let anyone else tell you what to do, your heart knows what is good and right for you." But remember what James said in our Scripture reading, "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." Where are those desires but in our heart. Our natural sinful heart is drawn to the wrong things.

There are countless examples in the Bible of believers who gave in to the desires of their heart and were lost. Judas succumbed to his love of money and sold his Savior for 30 pieces of silver and lost his soul forever. Many Israelite men were enticed by the Moabite women to join them in their sexual orgies in worship of the Moabite gods, and the Lord God destroyed them all. Ananias and Saphira were enticed by the desire for recognition and honor, and they dropped dead before the Lord. Still today, many former Christians have been drawn away from the faith to follow their heart and give in to temptation. So yes, we need this prayer.

-III- Finally we need to Know How God Answers this prayer.

We need to know that God does NOT answer this prayer by taking away our sinful nature with its sinful desires. Have you ever struggled with some particular sin that you just can't seem to break away from? You pray and pray for God to help you overcome that temptation, but you still struggle and fall into that sin. Why isn't God answering your prayer?

Actually God is answering your prayer, but perhaps you don't recognize His answer or know how to use it. Do you remember what God told Cain after He said, "Sin lies at the door and its desire is for you?" God said, "But you should rule over it." Our sinful nature is always going to be there in this life, but you should rule over it. To rule over those sinful desires is to exercise self-control, but self-control doesn't come from our self. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, as Paul says in Eph. 5:22-23

But the Holy Spirit doesn't just give you more self-control when you ask, He gives us tools to develop self-control. Since temptation comes from our own desires, it's really all about how we think about things. We are tempted when we think of something as good and desirable.

The First tool is what we have been talking about already. With His law and the many examples in Scripture God shows us the true nature and danger of temptation and sin. God begins leading us away from temptation by showing us the true nature of that thing we find desirable. He shows us that it is a deadly trap. Satan is using it to try to destroy your soul and your life with God. So when you are tempted by something, stop and think, this thing I am considering is Satan's tool to destroy me. That will begin changing the way you think about it.

The next weapon in the arsenal that God gives us is His grace and forgiveness. Even though we recognize the danger of sin, our sinful nature can be very strong and still lead us to desire that sin. Remember our Scripture reading last week (Rom. 7)? Paul described this very thing. He lamented

that he didn't do the good he wanted to do, "but what I hate," ... "that I keep on doing." He concluded, "What a wretched man I am." Don't you just hate it when you do that? Why can't we improve? Then we start having fears and doubts about our faith. How can I be a child of God when I do that? Do you ever feel like that? Then thank God that He is answering your prayer to lead you away from temptation. When you hate the fact that you do those things God is leading you away from temptation. He is leading you to repentance. He is leading you to see the truth about yourself that you are a wretched sinful being, that you are truly helpless against sin and hopelessly lost without Him. He is leading you to God's grace and forgiveness, leading you in the paths of righteousness given by Christ. As Paul concludes, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Then comes the relief, "Thanks be to God—through Jesus our Christ our Lord!" Rom. 7:24-25

That amazing grace and forgiveness in turn strengthens our new man to delight in God's will and pleasure. When you find joy and relief that Jesus Christ has "Rescued" you from your wretched body of death, that strengthens the desire of the New Man which delights in the law of the Lord.

You see it comes down to how you think again, or more literally what part of you is allowed to do the thinking—your old man or your new man. That's why Paul urges us, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." Phil. 4:8-9 In other words keep your thoughts focused on what is good and right. Jesus is the ultimate good and truth. When we focus our thoughts on Him throughout the day through devotional reading and prayer and thinking about Him, then God is leading us away from temptation. We are not going to be tempted to sin when we are thinking of how much Jesus loves us, how He saved us and how He leads us into all good.

Our other Scripture readings show us how God gives us other believers to encourage us and to call us to repentance when we do fall. God has given us watchman to warn us. These are pastors, parents, Christian teachers. He has also given us the example of fellow believers and good Christian role models we can look up to. Paul tells us to follow His example. God uses these examples to lead us away from temptation. Let's all be conscious of being a positive help to each other in our struggle against sin. That's one reason a Christian School is such a blessing for children, they are removed from many of the bad influences of the world and have more positive influences to follow.

Thinking about what is good and holy also means avoiding situations that will place you in temptation. A recovering alcoholic can't go into a bar and pray, Lord lead me not into temptation. He needs to stay away from places where alcohol is being consumed. The same is true for every other sin. You know your own weaknesses and the sins you struggle with. If there are things that you see or hear that take your mind back to those sins, don't go there. Don't put yourself in that situation. Avoid it all together.

God has many ways to lead us away from temptation and He gives you many tools to use to resist temptation. Don't just pray, Lead us not into temptation and wonder why it's not working. We will never be free from sin in this life. That's why we need Christ's forgiving grace every day. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't worry about sin. Rather pray this petition and take up the tools God gives and use them and the Holy Spirit will lead us away from temptation to live a joyful life following His will. Amen.