

The Lord's Prayer

Session 5

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Immediately after forgiveness the Prayer turns our attention to temptation and evil, so we can't consider the time that follows our forgiveness as being without problems or danger. In fact as Christ taught us, Christians can expect difficulties, troubles and trials: "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also." (John 15:20 NIV)

The Greek word used here, *peirasmos* and translated "temptation", means trial or test or temptation, so the word can be used in both the positive sense of trial and the negative sense of temptation.

In 1 Corinthians 10 verse 9 Paul condemns the idea of putting God to the test and yet a few verses later he is writing of temptation more generally. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is the clearest statement of what *peirasmos* had come to mean in the early church: No *peirasmos* has overtaken you but that which is normal to the human race. God is faithful: he will not allow you to be tested beyond your strength. He will make, with the *peirasmos*, also the way out, so that you are able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13).

This can only refer to much more general "temptation," within which the temptation to put God to the test is one, but only one.

Who, then, is the author of this "temptation" of 1 Corinthians 10:13? Paul does not say directly, but the context strongly implies that it is the evil one. Despite the apostle's firm conviction regarding the sovereignty of God, such "testings" come from "the Satan" (1 Corinthians 7:5). The word *peirasmos* occurs in Paul's letters only in 1 Corinthians 10:13; Galatians 4:14; and 1 Timothy 6:9). 1 Corinthians 10, therefore, might in part be seen as a practical commentary on part of the Lord's Prayer.

What Paul, in effect, is saying is trust God to lead you out of your moment of testing without succumbing to it – that is, to deliver you from the evil one. Those who pray the Lord's Prayer are designed by Jesus to be those who remain faithful to the God who intends to remain faithful to them.

As we saw, the Greek word *peirasmos* translated "temptation" can mean either enticement to sin or the trials and testings we go through as Christians. In respect of the first of these, enticement to sin, Satan is always tempting us to sin and disobey God. The encouraging thought here is that Jesus knows all about these temptations. He was tempted for 40 days in the desert and no doubt throughout his life. Jesus knows all the temptations we can meet: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15 NIV)

Let's remember how Jesus dealt with his temptations – by turning back to God's word. Jesus was surely steeped in the scriptures and we need to study them and make them part of our

lives in order to resist the temptations that will surely come our way. We also need to remain close to God in prayer and in communion with him.

At this point we need to be clear that these enticements are from Satan and not from God: “When tempted, no-one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” (James 1:13-14 NIV)

James is very clear about where our temptations come from and how they unfold.

So, why do we pray “lead us not into temptation”? I think the answer lies with the other meaning of temptation we looked at, trials and testings. It’s interesting that just before the passage from James I just quoted, he says:

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12 NIV)

As we read the book of Job it seems clear that God permitted Job to be put to the most severe testing. Unfortunately the book of Job does not tell us why this was so, merely that it happened – but near the end of the book, in chapter 42, we do get a clue:

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”” (Job 42:5-6 NIV)

We see that Job ended the experience a better and Godlier man.

We don’t know why God sometimes allows us to go through these trials; we can only trust that our loving and all powerful God knows what he’s doing. Perhaps when we pray “lead us not into temptation” we are really praying that God will not find it necessary to put us to the trial or time of testing. In any event when we are tested or tempted we can turn to God, find his presence and rely on his mercy and love to keep us safe and sound.

Deliver Us From Evil

Here, Jesus reminds us of evil’s existence and reality. Along with most of the Western reformed church, I believe this is a separate petition from the one about temptation that we’ve just been looking at. There is a connection, we are tempted to do evil and are tempted by evil, but I believe there is not such an intimate connection as some such as Calvin and Karl Barth contend.

We see that what we’re to be delivered from could either be personified evil (as implied in Matthew’s text where the Greek has a “the” before evil) or evil in general (as in Latin translations of the Bible where the language doesn’t use the “the” prefix). This issue has been much debated, but I’m going to follow Calvin and not spend time on this issue as I believe it includes both – which is perhaps implied by Paul:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” (Ephesians 2:1-2 NIV)

Jesus was very aware of the devil and the damage he can do. Satan was one of the chief angels created by God, but he rebelled against God along with perhaps a third of all the angels and was cast out of heaven Isaiah speaks of this (Isaiah 14:12-15) as does John in Revelation:

“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in

heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” (Revelation 12:7-9 NIV)

Satan is called by several names in the Bible – dragon, serpent, accuser, father of lies, devil and so on because he has many tricks and roles. Satan was completely defeated by Christ on the cross as Jesus and Paul tell us:

[Jesus said] “Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.” (John 12:31 NIV); and

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Colossians 2:15 NIV)

but, pending Christ’s return at the end of the age, the devil continues to create mischief for us and on earth generally.

We need not fear Satan and his demons, provided we remain close to Jesus, and yet Christ taught the disciples to pray for deliverance from evil. He also prayed for us himself after the Last Supper:

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” (John 17:15 NIV)

Although Satan is ultimately defeated he remains active in the world and causes us problems.

Satan also dulls people minds to the gospel message and opposes the ministry of evangelism. He also creates mischief within churches – look at the message to the churches of Smyrna, Philadelphia and Pergamum in Revelation.

This is why we must pray for God to deliver us from the evil one and his evil manoeuvrings.

Apart from Satan’s wiles, there is anyway much evil within our hearts:

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean’.” (Matthew 15:19-20 NIV)

and

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV)

The image of God in which we were created has been marred by our sinfulness – and Satan wants to keep it that way.

Evil is frequently deeply stored within us:

“..... the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45 NIV)

The evil in human beings can be manifested as evil *thoughts* (Matthew 9:4), evil *motives* (Matthew 22:18) and evil *words* and *deeds* (Matthew 15:19). This evil is connected with the sinful self, or the “flesh” as it’s often called in scripture. We need to deny this side of ourselves, take up the cross and follow Christ:

“Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9:23 NIV)

Much of our world is also evil. Satan and his evil forces are actively at work in every sphere trying to lead mankind astray. As Christians we need to be countercultural. We need to work actively against this evil and suffer the persecution which will surely come:

“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15:19 NIV)

remembering that Jesus prayed for his disciples:

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” (John 17:15 NIV)

and assured them he had overcome the world:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NIV)

But, until the second coming, we continue to live in this fallen world – waiting patiently and working to help God to redeem many and make the world as much like the kingdom as possible. In our resistance to evil we depend on Jesus the Victor as we pray “deliver us from evil”. As Rudolf Schnackenburg said “Because the prayer is offered in the faith that God’s kingdom is coming, fear of the power of evil is eliminated.” So, we say with the psalmist, “I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). The one who dealt decisively on the cross with Satan and evil generally will one day remove every smallest piece of evil from around us and from within us.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever

The modern version of the Prayer ends with this doxology, these words of praise. As we’ve seen they derive from the *Didache* and are not present in early manuscripts of Matthew’s gospel. As we’ve said the *Didache* is an early text which had wide acceptance in the early church and thus carries significant authority (unlike the later Gnostic texts), although it doesn’t have the full authority of scripture. Whatever its origins the doxology makes sense both theologically and liturgically. The prayer both begins and ends with God and it’s appropriate that it should end with praise of God.

We’ve already looked at the kingdom of God and its significance and here we focus on its permanence. At the time the Prayer was given the Roman Empire was near the peak of its power, yet it soon began to crumble and was eventually destroyed. All earthly empires eventually fall. Not so with God’s kingdom, that’s eternal.

This was revealed to Daniel:

“And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever.” (Daniel 2:43-44 NIV)

God also revealed to Daniel that Christ and his kingdom would bring all earthly kingdoms to an end:

“While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.” (Daniel 2:34-35 NIV)

The rock represents Christ and his kingdom. All other kingdoms will fall at the feet of the King of Kings whose kingdom will be eternal.

It is this truth we remember as we come to the end of the Prayer.

God is all powerful and incomparably glorious. In his prayer after the Last Supper Jesus used the words “glory” or “glorify” nine times suggesting that the glory of God which he shared with the Father was a key thought in his mind as he prepared for the cross. The glory of God is a key theme in scripture generally, because it refers to who God is and his majesty and magnificence. The Shorter Westminster catechism begins with the declaration that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. There is nothing else we can do that will make us more fulfilled.

Those who truly follow Christ will know where the true glory is. They like Paul will reject all the false glitter of this world and instead seek the glory of Christ alone:

“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” (Philippians 3:7-9 NIV)

The things of God – his kingdom, his power and his glory – are forever, because God is forever. He’s eternal. We can’t really imagine what that means because it’s impossible in our present universe. But we know it exists in God’s kingdom. He’s infinite and eternal. The real wonder is that God has invited into the blessings of his kingdom and the eternity that goes along with that.

We end the Prayer with “Amen”. This word was traditionally used by the Israelites who used it to mean “And so be it”. It’s an agreement in faith to all that has been prayed. By saying Amen together when we pray the Prayer in church we collectively agree to all that the Prayer means and brings and we do so with a shout of joy. Also Jesus is our “Amen”:

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” (Revelation 3:14 NIV)

So, Jesus is the last word that follows all our praise and worship, all our prayers and petitions. We often end our prayers with “In the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord”. When we end the Lord’s Prayer by saying Amen we are reminded of the one in whose name we pray, the one who is our Amen. We long for his return as we say “Amen”.