

## The Lord's Prayer: Prayer of Protection

Romans 7:5

Colossians 2: 20-23

John 8:1-11

This morning we're going to consider the last line of the Lord's Prayer: *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.* Now you might be saying to yourself, that's not the last line of the prayer. There's one more. What about: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." That doxological statement (or statement of praise to God) *is* part of the prayer that we pray each week, but it only appears in one translation of the Bible – the KJV. Unfortunately, the KJV is not the most accurate translation of the Bible. I know there are some who love the KJV, and its language is beautiful; however, since its translation in 1611 there have been older original manuscripts discovered that do not contain some of the verses contained in the KJV. That last line of the Lord's Prayer is one such line. Therefore, in the interest of preaching the most accurate scripture, I'm not including that last line in this series.

Whew! Now, back to our topic for this morning. As you read the passage, it should be fairly obvious to you that we are praying for protection from temptation. It's an important subject – one that touches every one of us – most on a daily basis. So what do we need to learn about temptation?

In the original language, the word for *temptation* is *peirasmos* (pi-ras-mos'). Its meaning includes the notion of proving one's true self. Some versions of the Bible translate this idea as *testing*. Actually tempting and testing could be considered two sides of the same coin.

God does not tempt us. We know this from James 1:13:

*Remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else.*

It is only the influence of evil that causes us to be tempted. Notice I didn't say the Devil is the only source of our temptation. Why? Listen to the next verse in James:

*Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.* (James 1:14-15)

There is evil that is inside each of us, and there is evil which is inside of the Enemy as a result of, or is intensified by, the Fall of Adam and Eve.

Testing and tempting may seem similar to us when we are in the midst of experiencing them, but not only are their sources different, but their purposes are different. A temptation is meant to entice you into doing something that will weaken your relationship with God. Be assured, friends, that God will not turn his back on you if you succumb to temptation and sin. However, the guilt and the shame you feel will cause you to break contact. Perhaps you've had the

experience of doing something against another person. Then, because of your guilt and shame over your behavior you spent a great deal of effort trying not to come into contact with that person. Temptation has as its purpose weakening your relationship with God.

On the other hand, God *will* test you. Why? Because tests are meant to strengthen you. A spiritual test can point out areas of weakness that need attention. Ultimately, tests strengthen us because they help us learn more vividly that we need to depend less on ourselves and more on God. Remember depending on ourselves will land us in the midst of temptation according to James. Therefore, the only one we can trust to lead us in the right direction is the Lord.

As I think about the two phrases that are put together in this line of the prayer, I don't believe they are separate ideas. Rather, the second phrase, *deliver us from evil*, is actually a plea that qualifies the first phrase, *lead us not into temptation*. If temptation is bad and based in evil, and if testing is healthy and sourced in God, then we need to pray for tests and not temptations.

Perhaps the plea to deliver us from evil is actually a plea that what has presented itself to us as a temptation can be transformed into a test, if God will purify the evil from it and redeem the situation for his own glory.

The activity of struggling with something difficult is not a bad thing.

Consider this:

In the opinion of Pastor John Townsend, "Being tempted and struggling with temptation is a sign of life. Life means that there is an internal struggle where part of you really wants to follow God. You really want to be in His path ... do it His way ... know Him deeper and get more connected to Him. And the other part of us pulls us the other way toward the darkness. Like a seed or plant that wants to grow up and is struggling to break out I believe struggling with temptation is a sign of life. In fact, I believe that people who don't struggle are in worse shape than those of us who are struggling. Because there's death inside. If there's no struggle there's no life."

So, struggling is not a bad thing. The only danger is whether we are struggling with a test or a temptation.

As we pray that God would transform our struggles with sin into a test that will strengthen our relationship with him, what else should we do?

The first thing to get over is the idea that you can just stop doing something that tempts you. It's a great idea: "Just don't do it."

But there are a couple of problems with that mentality.

1. Temptation strikes us at our weakest point. Temptations don't play fair. They don't hit you when you're strong, when you're victorious and you're ready to go. Temptation hits you when you're hurt. When you're under stress. When you have a relationship problem that is really bugging you. When you have an emptiness inside your heart that can't be filled. When you've got financial problems, medical problems, family problems. That's when the temptations start really coming at you and cut you off at the knees.

2. The second reason you can't just stop a behavior on your own has to do with the Law. Romans 7:5 reveals to us, "*Our sinful passions were aroused by the law.*" That sounds kooky. On the other hand, how many of you have had a hankering to do the very thing you were forbidden to do. You're not alone. So did Adam and Eve.

3. Willpower is overrated. I'm sure all you willpower freaks are discouraged by this but willpower is an overrated concept. Willpower is ok. But it doesn't sanctify you and it doesn't save you from temptation. Just look at Adam and Eve's willpower...oops.

So, if we cannot help ourselves by our own wills to overcome temptation and sin, then what do we do?

1. Pray that God would protect you and transform the situation. In so doing, you reconnect with him as the source of your strength and grace. Check it out...here's the big picture: The goal of our life is not to stop doing bad things. Do you really want someone to ask you at age 99, "How was your life," and your only reply is, "Pretty good. I didn't do a lot of bad things." Is that really what you want on your tombstone – Here lies Ross Carter. He didn't do too many bad things.

The real goal of our life is to be in relationship with God. Remember, temptations aren't about getting you to do bad things. It's much bigger than that. Temptations are about getting you to cut yourself off from God. Evil wants us cut off from the source of our life. So, the first thing you and I need to do when confronted with a situation that tempts us is...go to God.

I want you to remember something very important. In our Wesleyan tradition we practice activities we call Means of Grace. The Christian practices such as, worship, Bible study, fasting, praying, to name a few, are intended to help you stay in close relationship with God. This is why I encourage you to do those things so much. Because the closer you are to God, the shorter the run back to him when you get in trouble. The sheep that's in the flock or on the edge of the flock is much safer than the one who has strayed off by themselves.

2. The last thing I want to say about what you should do when confronted by temptation is this: Run away!

Flee the temptation. Get out of Dodge! The temptation is bigger than you are. That's why you're being tempted. It's stronger than you are. You can't just stand and fight! 2 Timothy 2:22 says, "*Flee the evil desires of your youth.*"

Friends, there are going to be temptations in your life. Success in facing them depends on you and on your relationship with your Lord. So, I encourage you to pray every day, "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil." God is always faithful when we pray within his will.

I hope that over these past few weeks you have come to realize that every phrase of The Lord's Prayer reveals some potent aspect of prayer and our relationship with the Lord of our salvation. As you pray this prayer in the future, remember it can be prayed as a whole, or each phrase can be used separately, as a compass pointing the direction to a lifetime of peace – peace in your own heart, peace between you and those around you, and peace between you and God.