

THE LORD'S PRAYER Chapter 7 The Sixth Petition

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Transcript

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Chapter 7

The Sixth Petition

"And lead us not into temptation"

Matthew 6:13

This sixth petition also begins with the word and, requiring us to mark closely its relationship with the preceding petition. The connection between them may be set forth thus. First, the previous petition concerns the negative side of our justification, while this one has to do with our practical sanctification; for the two blessings must never be severed. Thus we see that the balance of truth is again perfectly preserved. Second, past sins being pardoned, we should pray fervently for grace to prevent us from repeating them. We cannot rightly desire God to forgive us our sins unless we sincerely long for grace to abstain from the like in the future. We should therefore make it our practice to beg earnestly for strength to avoid a repetition of them. Third, in the fifth petition we pray for the remission of the guilt of sin; here we ask for deliverance from its power. God's granting of the former request is to encourage faith in us to ask Him to mortify the flesh and to vivify the spirit. Before proceeding further, it may be best to clear the way by disposing of something that is a real difficulty to many. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man" (Jas. 1:13). There is no more conflict between the words "And lead us not into temptation" and the expression "neither tempteth He any man" than there is the slightest opposition between the teaching that "God cannot be tempted with evil" and the recorded fact that Israel "turned back and tempted God" (Ps. 78:41). That God tempts no man means that He neither infuses evil into anyone nor is in any wise a partner with us in our guilt. The criminality of our sins is to be wholly attributed to ourselves, as James 1:14, 15, makes clear. But men deny that it is from their own corrupt natures that such and such evils proceed, blaming their temptations. And if they are unable to fix the evil on those temptations, then they seek to excuse themselves by throwing the blame upon God, as Adam did: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12). It is important to understand that the word tempt has a twofold significance in Scripture, though it is not always easy to determine which of the two applies in a particular

passage: (1) to try (the strength of), to put to the test; and (2) to entice to do evil. When it is said that "God did tempt Abraham" (Gen. 22:1), it means that He tried him, putting to the test his faith and fidelity. But when we read that Satan tempted Christ, it signifies that Satan sought to bring about His downfall, morally impossible though it was. To tempt is to make trial of a person, in order to find out what he is and what he will do. We may tempt God in a legitimate and good way by putting Him to the test in a way of duty, as when we await the fulfillment of His promise in Malachi 3:10. But, as is recorded for our admonition in Psalm 78:41, Israel tempted God in a way of sin, acting in such a manner as to provoke His displeasure. "And lead us not into temptation." Note the truths that are clearly implied by these words. First, God's universal providence is owned. All creatures are at the sovereign disposal of their Maker; He has the same absolute control over evil as over good. In this petition an acknowledgment is made that the ordering of all temptations is in the hands of our all-wise, omnipotent God. Second, God's offended justice and the evil we deserve are avowed. Our wickedness is such that God would be perfectly just if He should now allow us to be completely swallowed up by sin and destroyed by Satan. Third, His mercy is recognized. Though we have so grievously provoked Him, yet for Christ's sake He has remitted our debts. Therefore, we plead that He will henceforth preserve us. Fourth, our weakness is acknowledged. Because we realize that we are unable to stand against temptations in our own strength, we pray, "And lead us not into temptation." How does God lead us into temptation? First, He does so objectively when His providences, though good in themselves, offer occasions (because of our depravity) for sin. When we manifest self-righteousness, He may lead us into circumstances something like Job experienced. When we are self-confident, He may be pleased to suffer us to be tempted as Peter was. When we are self-complacent, He may bring us into a situation similar to the one Hezekiah encountered (2 Chron. 32:27-31; cf. 2 Kings 20:12-19). God leads many into poverty, which though a sore trial is yet, under His blessing, often enriching to the soul. God leads some into prosperity, which is a great snare to many. Yet if sanctified by Him, prosperity enlarges one's capacity for usefulness. Second, God tempts permissively when He does not restrain Satan (which He is under no obligation to do). Sometimes God suffers him to sift us as wheat, just as a strong wind snaps off dead boughs from living trees. Third, God tempts some men judicially, punishing their sins by allowing the Devil to lead them into further sin, to the ultimate destruction of their souls. But why does God tempt His people, either objectively by His providences, or subjectively and permissively by Satan? He does so for various reasons. First, He tries us in order to reveal to us our weakness and our deep need of His grace. God withdrew His sustaining arm from Hezekiah in order "that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). When God leaves us to ourselves, it is a most painful and humiliating discovery that we make. Yet it is needful if we are to pray from the heart, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe" (Ps. 119:117). Second, He tests us in order to teach us the need of watchfulness and prayer. Most of us are so stupid and unbelieving that we learn only in the hard school of experience, and even its lessons have to be knocked into us. Little by little we discover how dearly we have to pay for rashness, carelessness, and presumption. Third, our Father subjects us to trials in order to cure our slothfulness. God calls out, "Awake thou that sleepest" (Eph. 5:14), but we heed Him not; and therefore He often employs rough servants to rudely arouse us. Fourth, God puts us to the test in order to reveal to us the importance and value of the armor He has appointed (Eph. 6:11-18). If we heedlessly go forth to battle without our spiritual panoply, then we must not be surprised at the wounds we receive; but they shall have the salutary effect of making us more careful for the future! From all that has been said above, it should be clear that we are not to pray simply and absolutely against all temptations. Christ Himself was tempted by the Devil, and was definitely led into the wilderness by the Spirit for that very end (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12). Not all temptations are evil, regardless of the aspect in which we view them: their nature, their design, or their outcome. It is from the evil of temptations that we pray to be spared (as the next petition in the prayer indicates), yet even in that

we pray submissively and with qualification. We are to pray that we may not be led into temptation; or, if God sees fit that we should be tempted, that we may not yield thereto; or if we yield, that we be not totally overcome by the sin. Nor may we pray for a total exemption from trials, but only for a removal of the judgment of them. God often permits Satan to assault and harass us, in order to humble us, to drive us to Himself, and to glorify Himself by manifesting more fully to us His preserving power. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (Jas. 1:2, 3). In conclusion, a few remarks upon our responsibility in connection with temptation are appropriate. First, it is our bounden duty to avoid those persons and places that would allure us into sin, just as it is always our duty to be on the alert for the first signs of Satan's approach (Ps. 19:13; Prov. 4:14; 1 Thess. 5:22). As an unknown writer has said, "He who carries about with him so much inflammable material would do well to keep the greatest possible distance from the fire." Second, we must steadfastly resist the Devil. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines" (Song of Sol. 2:15). We must not yield a single inch to our enemy. Third, we are to go to God for grace submissively, for the measure He grants us is according to His own good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). You are to endeavour, indeed, to pray, and use all good means to come out of temptation; but submit, if the Lord be pleased to continue His exercise upon you. Nay, though God should continue the temptation, and for the present not give out those measures of grace necessary for you, yet you must not murmur, but lie at His feet; for God is Lord of His own grace (Thomas Manton).

Thus we learn that this petition is to be presented in subservience to God's sovereign will.

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