

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

Matthew 6:13

We have been expounding on the Lord's Prayer for some time now. And today, we will look at the last petition of the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 6:13, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray to God in this way.

Matthew 6:13. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

This petition follows naturally from the preceding one where we asked God for forgiveness. Because when we ask for forgiveness, we also need to ask God to keep us from falling into the same faults again. So if we are genuine in our petition for forgiveness, we must also ask God to keep us from sinning again. And hence, the Lord Jesus tells us to pray, *Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

This natural link between v. 12 and v. 13 is pretty obvious. What is not that obvious is the meaning of the request, *Lead us not into temptation*. What exactly are we praying for?

Temptation common to man

If we try to explain it, we quickly realize that we are faced with several problems when we consider other verses that deal with temptation. Take for example 1Corinthians 10:13. In this well-known verse, Paul says this.

1Corinthians 10:13. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

Here Paul speaks of temptation as an experience that is common to man. These are the temptations that all human beings face. No one can avoid them because they are part of the very nature of this world. Paul says in Ephesians 6 that we wrestle against principalities and powers, spiritual powers. And he urges us to stand strong in the Lord against the schemes of the devil. The forces of evil in this world are all around us and they are working with the intention to make us stumble. It is a fact of life that we are being tempted all the time.

And Paul goes on to say that God will make a way out for us because we are His children. He is going to protect us. He always provides a way of escape by giving us the strength to walk through the temptation.

The danger of temptation

Now if this is so, how can we make any sense of the petition, *Lead us not into temptation*, when temptation is all around us? We are already in temptation. We live in a world full of temptations. To *lead us not into temptation* must be an utter impossibility. What do you think?

In this prayer, we are dealing with the spiritual danger of temptation for the Christian. No one has been in the church for very long without realizing that from time to time, believers do fall into temptation, even those whom we regard highly. We should never underestimate the danger of temptation. It is not something to fool around with. Temptation is designed to destroy you. The intention of the devil, when he tempts you, is to tear you apart like a roaring lion. And so, Peter says in 1Peter 5:8, *...Be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*. Roaring lions don't come around to give you a show. They come to tear you apart, to devour you, to destroy you. So understand the great danger of temptation.

But what does it mean to pray to God not to be led into temptation when we live in a world where we have to face temptations all the time? Here we have to understand the nature of temptation, the kind of temptation that the Lord Jesus is talking about here.

Two types of temptation

Temptation has two distinct meanings. And we must distinguish clearly between these two different aspects of temptation if we want to understand Jesus.

One aspect of temptation is the one that is spoken of in 1Corinthians 10:13. *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man...* There are many temptations, but no particular one has taken you which is not common to man. Paul is talking about temptations in general, the kind of temptations that we face in our everyday life. It is the temptations in the plural.

The Lord Jesus uses the word 'temptations' in this sense in Luke 22:28 when He says to His disciples, *But you are those who have continued with Me in My temptations*. The Lord Jesus makes reference to the many temptations that He had to face in His ministry. We read in the gospels that His enemies tried to tempt Him with tricky questions. The letter to the Hebrews says that He was tempted in all points such as we are tempted (Hebrews 4:15). This is referring to the general temptations of life.

But there is another type of temptation, more specific in its meaning. It is the temptation which is used in the sense of bringing you down spiritually, of destroying you spiritually. It is the temptation in the singular. Remember the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. This kind of temptation was designed to destroy Him spiritually, to knock Him out. It is not the kind of temptation in which a scribe tempted Jesus with a tricky question, trying to set Him up. It is temptation in the ultimate sense with the danger that it causes you to sin in such a way that your faith collapses, a temptation that might cause you to apostasy. And this is what Jesus has in mind when He teaches us to pray, *Lead us not into temptation*.

Temptation and apostasy

In case you think that I am the only one thinking in this way, let me quote from the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, under the article 'to tempt'. Commenting about Matthew 6:13, the article says,

'Here God, having been asked for the forgiveness of sins, is asked not to allow his church to come into the kind of Satanic temptation which

would lead them to fall away, but to rescue them from the power of the evil one ... Everyday temptations as well as the eschatological tribulations and temptations to go astray ... are summed up in the prayer: *Lead us not into temptation.*'

Did you get it? This NT theology dictionary says that the petition in Matthew 6:13 is a plea to be spared from the kind of temptation which can lead a believer to fall away, to go astray, to apostasy. So we are talking about a situation in which you might not come out of it in one piece if the devil can help it.

The apostle Paul also uses the word 'temptation' in this specific sense of spiritual disaster. In 1 Timothy 6:9, we read this.

1Timothy 6:9. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Here the temptation is designed to make you fall into sin in such a way that it plunges you into ruin and destruction. When you fall in this way, there is no turning back. It is a temptation from which there is no return. This is what Satan tried to achieve when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness for forty days.

Another example of this is in 1 Thessalonians 3:5. Here again, we are talking about temptation in the ultimate sense.

1Thessalonians 3:5. For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter (i.e. the devil) might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.

Paul was not afraid that they would be tempted in a general sense. He said already in 1 Corinthians 10 that everybody is going to be tempted. But he was afraid of one particular type of temptation: that you should be so tempted by the devil that you are spiritually destroyed, and therefore, 'that our labor would be in vain.' That means to say, 'We have worked to bring you to Christ for nothing because you left the Lord. All our work is in vain because you have been destroyed spiritually.'

Now we can see what Jesus is saying in the Lord's Prayer. When we say, *Lead us not into temptation*, we are not just talking about the general temptations that are around us. We are talking especially about that kind of temptation from which there is no return. And we are asking God, 'Don't let us to be led into a situation in which temptation overwhelms us in such way that we fall away from the faith.' It is a prayer for spiritual protection and for deliverance.

The battle for the soul is being fought in our hearts. I hope that you realize that it is a very real battle. The devil means business. And if you don't mean business, that's when he is going to get you.

Our responsibility in temptation

Now I want to emphasize the fact that spiritual protection and deliverance from temptation is never without respect to your will. In other words, when we pray to God, *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one*, we can certainly expect God's protection in times of temptation, provided that we do our part to follow Him. God works the way out, but we have to follow behind Him. Otherwise nothing is going to happen. You will simply stay where you are. And if you are in temptation, you will remain in temptation and bear the consequences of it.

Let's look again at 1 Corinthians 10:13. Let me read that verse again.

1Corinthians 10:13. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

This verse is unfortunately too often quoted in isolation from its context. We know very well this verse. But do we know the following verse? I'm afraid not. If we quote v. 13, we have to quote v. 14 also, because these 2 verses are connected together with the conjunction 'therefore'. There is the promise in v. 13 that God will make a way out of temptation. Then Paul says in v. 14, *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry*. You want a way out from temptation? Then, you flee from idolatry. That's our part, our responsibility. Don't put yourself in trouble. Don't push God to the limit. Don't test God. Never quote 1Corinthians 10:13 as though God is obliged to protect you from falling into temptation when you have decided to remain in temptation.

From temptation to sin

In fact, if you do fall into temptation, don't blame God. Don't even blame the devil. Blame yourself. The book of James is very clear about that. Listen to James, in James 1:13.

James 1:13. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

When you are tempted, don't try to rationalize your action, don't justify your wrong behavior and say, *I am tempted by God*, for God does not tempt anyone. If you fall into temptation, look at yourself.

James 1:14. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

A person falls into temptation because he is drawn away by his own desires and lusts. James is telling us that the source of any temptation is not from the outside, but it is within you. And it starts with the desires of your heart. God created man with desires. And there is nothing wrong about desires. The problem arises when the desires are focused on the wrong things, on the things of the flesh and of the world. When you allow these desires to influence you, that's the beginning stage of temptation. And when you begin to go after these desires, even if it is only in your mind, that's when sin is born.

James 1:15. When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.

The temptation of king David

Remember what happened to king David. One night, as he was walking on the roof of his house, he saw a woman bathing. Her name was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. We are told that she was very beautiful, and David was strongly attracted to her. At this point, no sin was committed. Being attracted to someone, in of itself, is not sinful. Then, look what happened. *David sent and inquired about the woman* (2Samuel 11:3), with the obvious intention of sleeping with her. And eventually, he did and she became pregnant. You see, David's sin started when he allowed his sexual drive to lead him to sleep with Bathsheba.

Do you see how this incident illustrates so well the truth about temptation that we read in James 1:14-15? *Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires... Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.* So remember, the origin of temptation is within man, in his desires, not outside of him. When you understand that, you will understand also that the forces of evil have no power to tempt you unless there is a corresponding desire within you to respond to that temptation.

It is at this level that Satan goes about to attack us. He makes his way into our desires to tempt us to sin. And I can tell you where he is going to attack. He usually attacks you at your weakest point. There is a basic principle in the military that you don't attack the enemy where he is strong. You attack him where he is weak. This is true of all warfare, including spiritual warfare. Satan always looks for the weak point in you to come in. So know yourself. Know where your weak points are. And commit them to the Lord so that Satan doesn't make use of them to bring you down spiritually.

Watch and pray

The matter of our responsibility in spiritual protection is also seen in Matthew 26:41. There Jesus said to His disciples, *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* The person who prays, 'Lead me not into temptation', is also the person who watches and prays that he doesn't fall into temptation. Notice the two actions, *watch and pray*. That is to say, we have our responsibility, that is to watch. And when we pray, God will do His part by providing the spiritual resource that we need to resist temptation. Prayer is not an excuse for carelessness. Prayer is not an excuse for spiritual drowsiness. We have the responsibility to be alert, vigilant.

This word 'watch', in the Greek, is the same that we find in 1Peter 5:8 which I quoted already. *Be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* We are to be vigilant, watchful of the tactics of the devil. And Satan challenges us not so much through spiritual intimidation, but by way of deception, tempting us to respond to the desires of the flesh. Because he knows our weakness, that although the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. Carnal weakness has been the cause of the downfall of many Christians in every generation.

So we see the picture that the Lord Jesus is showing to us in this last petition of the Lord's Prayer. We are God's representatives in the world. We are the light in the midst of darkness. And the darkness is trying to engulf us. We read in John (John 12:35) that the darkness tries to overtake us. And we pray to God, 'Deliver us in the midst of this evil.' And we can have full assurance that when we pray in faith for deliverance from the evil one, God will safeguard us until the end.