

The Lord's Prayer

(Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13)

"And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"

This petition cannot well be considered apart from that which immediately follows it: "but deliver us from the evil one." Both together form a fitting climax to this wonderful prayer, for they indicate, if used understandingly, the soul's desire for purity of heart.

There are two senses in which the word tempted is used in the Bible. The apostle says: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (James 1:2). Again he says: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (v. 14). Now it is evident that the apostle would not exhort men to count it a joyful thing to be drawn away of their own lust, and enticed into sin; therefore the temptations spoken of in verse 2 are different from those in verse 14.

The temptations of verse 2 are those which are successfully met, and which leaves the individual stronger than ever. It is the trying of faith. In Ephesians 6:16 we learn that "taking the shield of faith" we "will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." The office of a shield is to protect the person. If a "fiery dart" is received upon the shield, the person at whom it was aimed receives no injury; he does not feel it. The trials (temptations), then, which work patience, and which strengthen, are those which are instantly repelled and meet with no response in our heart.

The other temptations, of verse 14, are those which come from within our heart. The sin presents itself, mind goes out towards it, and longs for it. It may be that the actual act is never committed, but since "the devising of foolishness is sin" (Prov. 24:9), the one who only in imagination does the sinful act is in the sight of God accounted guilty. Such temptations as those are natural to every human being, "for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders" (Mark 7:21).

The petition "do not lead us into temptation," must be understood as meaning, "suffer us not to fall into temptation;" and it must also be understood as referring to the second class of temptations (those described in James 1:14),—those which proceed from within our heart. The reason is (1) that we are not to ask freedom from trials, but rather to count them a blessing, and (2) that God cannot and does not lead people into sin. The prayer, then, is "suffer us not to fall [or to be overcome by] into foolish and hurtful lust, but deliver us (keep us back) from evil."

This cannot mean that God will not allow a man to act out the evil that is in him, for that would be impossible; if evil is in the heart, it must show itself, and we are expressly told that at one time God left a man to do what his heart prompted him to do. The man was Hezekiah. After he had been healed, the Babylonian ambassadors came to

congratulate, and he showed them all the treasures of his kingdom. (2 Kings 20:12, 13). This action was prompted by pride. (2 Chron. 32:24, 25). The historian, speaking of this, says: "However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). We must therefore conclude that the petition "do not lead us into temptation" does not mean that God is to interpose his mighty power to miraculously preserve us from the wickedness that is in our own hearts.

There can be but one conclusion, and that is that this prayer implies a renunciation and hatred of sin, and a desire to have the heart cleansed from it, and to be strengthened again not allowing it [the sin] to pass the shield of faith, and gain access to the heart. This is the only way that temptations can be instantly repelled, since, as we have read, evil thoughts are natural to the human heart.

It was to effect this that Christ came into the earth. It is not enough that we be freed from the guilt of sin,—from past transgressions,—but we must be freed from the love of sin. Paul says that Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal. 1:4). This "present evil age" does not mean the physical creation, "for all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). Again we read that he "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:14).

This is what God wants to do for us; it is what we are to ask Him to do for us, for He will not do it against our will. What is there to hinder His doing it? Nothing, if we offer the prayer in all sincerity, "do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." We cannot cleanse ourselves from the defilement of sin, however much we may desire to be freed from it (Prov. 20:9); but if we do earnestly desire to be kept from sin, God will work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil 2:13), and that will be to make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is good. (Heb. 13:21).

But while this is in one sense a passive state, in that it is an entire yielding of self to God, it is by no means a state of inactivity. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). "Strive to enter through the narrow gate" (Luke 13:24). There is to be a constant watchfulness against the insidious assaults of the enemy. A reaching out after God implies a drawing away from sin.

This part of the Lord's prayer cannot be uttered from the heart, except by one who with the psalmist can say, "I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law" (Ps. 119:113). And this cannot be done until the individual realizes that fellowship with God is the only thing to be desired,—that the loving-kindness of God is better than life. Every man in the world will have just what he wants. If he loves the pleasures of sin, he will be left to its lusting enjoyment; but if his heart and his soul cry out after God, the promise is that he shall be filled.

The Signs of the Times, (May 19, 1887).

"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY" - "WHEN YOU PRAY, SAY"