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Matthew 6:13 - 6:15 (Part 6)



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides insights on the last petition of the Lord's Prayer found in Matthew 6:13-15. He emphasizes the importance of asking for God's help in delivering us from temptation, even when facing difficult trials where the desire to commit a sin is strong. He encourages Christians to grow stronger in resisting temptation and becoming trusted warriors for God. Gregg notes that all humans have a tendency to serve their self-interest and sin, so prayer is essential for leading a holy life.

Transcript

Today we come to the last petition in the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, which is in Matthew 6. The prayer is found in verses 9-13. And the last petition is found in verse 13, where we are instructed to pray these words. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. This is perhaps one of the most difficult of the petitions in this prayer to understand. For the simple reason that we are asking God not to lead us into temptation, and yet, what is this presupposing? Is this presupposing that if we did not pray this, God would lead us into temptation? Doesn't it say in James 1 that God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man? It is not God's role to tempt me to sin, so why should I ask him to not do so, since he doesn't tempt people to sin? Well, there's a number of ways to work with this phrase, and it has troubled people many times because of this very problem I suggest.

Now, one thing we can observe is that even though God does not tempt us with evil, he sometimes does lead us into the place where temptation will be encountered. That doesn't mean that God is tempting us, it means that he is allowing us to be tempted by the enemy. We can see this very plainly, for example, in Luke chapter 4, in the opening verses, where it says that the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Now, here Jesus was certainly being led by God, and where was he being led to? He was being led into a condition and a place of temptation. Now, if this is what we understand

Jesus' words to mean, then we would be praying that God would not do this to us, do not lead us into a place of temptation. And yet, that doesn't seem really appropriate, because Jesus indicated that temptation and tests and trials and stumbling blocks are an inevitable part of life.

And to tell you the truth, if I must face temptations, I'd rather be led into them by God, that is, I'd rather have him decide which temptations I will face than to simply have them thrown at me randomly. I would desire to follow God, even if that trail went through a place of temptation, because I know that it is he that is leading, and therefore the temptation that I'm going to face will be not greater than I can endure. I am told that in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, in verse 13.

In 1 Corinthians 10, 13, it says that no temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond that which you are able to endure, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape, that you may be able to endure it or escape it. Now, by the way, this is only a promise to Christians. This is not a general promise to non-Christians.

This is a promise made to the people of God to whom this epistle is written. If you are a Christian, if you're trusting in God for your salvation, then we are promised that God will not allow you to be tempted beyond that which you are able to endure. At least he will not lead you to.

Now, we know for a fact that sometimes Christians fall into temptation and sin. Does this mean that God did not keep his promise here? That God did allow them to be tempted beyond what they're able to endure? No, that's not what it means. What it means is that God did provide a way of escape, and it was not absolutely necessary for them to fall into temptation, but that person neglected that way of escape and walked right into temptation on their own and found themselves in a condition beyond that which God ever intended them to be in, in a place where they could be tempted beyond which their natural strength could not endure and could not overcome, and therefore they fall.

But we do know this. If God leads me on his path, and his path leads me into a circumstance of temptation, let us say I'm led into a situation where I will cross the path of somebody who will provide some kind of temptation in my life. Is it impossible that God would lead me that way? No, of course not.

God leads Christians and even led Jesus right into the path of temptation. Should I wish that that would not happen? Well, if it shouldn't happen, I don't think God would do it. I think that's part of God's dealing in my life.

He teaches my hands to war this way. He allows me to face temptations so that I might grow stronger in resisting them and become more of one of his warriors that can be trusted in even more dangerous situations. It is a training ground.

We know that God does protect baby Christians from certain temptations that he will allow them to face later on. We have a picture of this when God led the children of Israel out of Egypt. We're told specifically he did not take them along a certain route because he didn't want them to face enemies at that early point which would demoralize them and they might turn back to Egypt.

But later on, after they'd followed God for 40 years, he did allow them to face many enemies and to fight many battles. But God doesn't want those who are weak to face temptations that are greater than they can handle. And he doesn't want those who are strong to never face any temptations.

And so it is part of God's guidance in our lives that he grows us up and strengthens us by giving us measured amount of exposure to testing. And it's like if you're a bodybuilder or something or you're training for a marathon and maybe you don't run 20-something miles the first time you go out to train for it. You maybe start out running three miles or five miles or less, but you build up.

And likewise, God wants us to face certain challenges. Without these challenges, we'd never grow stronger. So why should we pray that God will not lead us into temptation if in fact such leading may be part of his revealed design? What is the meaning of this prayer? Well, I believe that we have in this prayer a poetic form.

If you're looking at a Bible other than the King James Version, and I'm not saying you shouldn't be looking at the King James, I'm just making an observation here. The King James Version is the only Bible I'm aware of that does not set poetic passages in poetic form. What I mean by that is in the King James Version, every verse is set up just like every other verse.

Each verse is like its own separate paragraph. Most modern translations, including the New King James, have certain passages that are not set up like regular paragraphs. They're set up like poetic verse.

If you wonder what I mean, just turn, for example, to the Psalms, or to Job, or to almost any passage in the Prophets, and you'll see that many passages there are in the form of poetic verse the way they're laid on the page, rather than just simple paragraphs. If that is the kind of Bible you have, and you look at Matthew 6, you'll see that the Lord's Prayer is also set out in verse. And the reason is, it has many of the forms about it of Hebrew poetry.

And one of the principal features of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. That is, the same thing is said twice, two parallel sentences or clauses, which kind of amplify on each other, or clarify each other, or simply emphasize each other. And so you'll see, for example, the statement in verse 10 of Matthew 6, Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

It could be argued these are parallel thoughts. Your kingdom come means the same thing as your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. When God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven, that is when His kingdom has come.

So you see in Hebrew poetry, you'll see it very clearly, for example, in the Psalms, often the same idea is expressed twice in a row, in slightly different words. And that being so, that is a poetic device for emphasis and for clarification. That, I think, is what we have in Matthew 6.13, where it says, Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

That is to say, do not lead us into temptation is clarified, or completed, or emphasized, by the second clause in that, which is, deliver us from the evil one. Now, if that is true, then what the first clause probably means is this. As you are leading me, God, you may lead me to a place of temptation, but don't just lead me into it.

Deliver me out of it as well. Don't just lead me there. Don't lead me into the place of temptation.

Lead me through it to the other side. And that is what is, the thought is completed by the statement, but deliver us from the evil one. The idea is, I can't be delivered from the evil one unless I'm somehow subjected to a confrontation with him.

When I'm confronted with the evil one, that's when I need to be delivered from him. When I fall into a pit is when I need to be pulled out and delivered from that pit. And I need to be delivered from temptation only if I am in it.

If I'm facing temptation, I need deliverance from it. And so, the prayer is not, don't let me be tempted, but don't just lead me into temptation, but deliver me out at the other side safely too, so that the evil one who tempts me will not succeed in bringing me down, will not succeed in destroying me. This is, I believe, what is meant by this request.

That I am to pray that although the leading of God may take me into the path of temptation, and this may even be something God desires for me to be tested with, yet my prayer is that he won't just lead me into it, but he'll deliver me out of it as well. That I will be led in and through the experience of temptation, not just into it and left there. And that is, I believe, what the prayer is.

The idea is, whatever temptations you may wish for me to face, please take me safely through them so that I don't succumb. Please deliver me from the clutches of the enemy. Do not abandon me in the temptation.

Now, what is presupposed here is that temptation is a phenomenon that we need God in order to resist. I feel terribly sorry for the people of other religions who know that certain things are wrong, that they're tempted to do, and yet they don't have God in their life. They have maybe a belief in some divine being, but because they are not followers of

Jesus Christ, they don't have a personal, intimate, indwelling experience with God himself to strengthen them.

They face temptations, and they even have standards of behavior which mean to them that they need to resist those temptations, but they have to do so in their own strength. I have learned from experience that temptation cannot be resisted in our own strength, at least not all temptation. I will not deny that there are some temptations which seem to be not too difficult to overcome, but every person faces frequently temptations which they themselves cannot fully overcome.

I'm not talking about temptations to murder, necessarily. There are many people who never know God who are never seriously tempted to murder, or what little temptation ever occurs to them, they can overcome it. I'm just talking about all temptation.

You see, the temptation to be proud, the temptation to be jealous or envious, the temptation to covet something, the temptation to lust, the temptation to anger. These are temptations too. If you want to tell me that without God's help you can overcome all those temptations and never be angry, never be proud, never envy, never lust, then you are making a claim that I believe I'd have to doubt because I've known too many people.

I think I've known thousands of people, and I do not believe there's any that I've ever met who has overcome all temptations. Even Christians have not overcome all temptations, much less people who make no profession of Christianity. And the reason is because without Jesus you cannot overcome sin in your life.

Without Jesus you can overcome some behaviors. There are certain behaviors that you can take some kind of psychiatric drug for, or you can go through a 12-step program, or you can simply increase your willpower and quit smoking or something like that. There are certain behaviors you can quit even without being a Christian, but you cannot overcome sin, which is the basic orientation towards self-satisfaction as opposed to pleasing God.

Sin is where you obey what you want to do rather than what God wants you to do. And that tendency is deeply rooted in our nature, to satisfy myself. And even if I'm a philanthropist and not a Christian, even if I am somebody who really likes to help other people, in general my motivation to do this is likely to be very selfish.

I like to help people partly because it makes me feel good, and that's good, but also partly because I like people to know that I'm the kind of person who helps people. They'll think well of me. They'll think I'm a generous person.

I'll make a name for myself. Maybe there will be a monument named after me someday. It's selfishness.

It's not God-centered. That basic tendency to serve self-interest is in every human being,

and that is the sin that so easily besets us. And when we are tempted to indulge this sin, the sin of jealousy, the sin of pride, the sin of anger, or whatever, the sin of greed, that temptation one way or another is going to overcome us unless we are delivered from it by God Himself.

You know, when Joseph, the husband of Mary, was told by an angel that Mary's pregnancy was not due to her unfaithfulness to Him, but was a miracle of God, and that the child that she was going to bear would be the Messiah Himself, the angel told Joseph in Matthew chapter 1, His name should be called Jesus because He will save His people from their sins. Jesus taught in John chapter 8, verses 32 through 34, that if a person commits sin, they are a slave to sin. You can't just walk away from your sin.

You can't just decide, I'm never going to sin again, and then you won't. No, you don't have that power. You are a slave of sin, and you need to be delivered from sin.

The fact that you're a slave to sin is seen as that when you're tempted to do a thing, you do it instead of resisting that temptation. You need to be delivered from the evil one. You need the power of God.

You need Jesus to save you from your sins, as the Scripture said He would do. And therefore, this prayer presupposes that no one can really resist sin consistently without God's help. Therefore, whenever I pray, I'm to pray, God, help me.

Deliver me from the power of the enemy. Don't only forgive me for the sins I've committed in the past, which is the earlier petition, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, but help me not to add sin to sin. Many people think that their Christian life, that the normal Christian life, is simply a matter of asking God to forgive you, and then going out and sinning again, and asking God to forgive you, and then going out and sinning again, and asking God to forgive you again, and sinning just as much as a Christian, as you did before you were a Christian, but just the difference is you ask for forgiveness.

If you've seen that bumper sticker, Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven, there is some truth in it, but there's also something rather tragic about it, because it is true that Christians are not perfect, and that Christians' imperfections can be forgiven, by God, that is. However, it should not be the case that we say Christians are not perfect, they're just forgiven, as if to say there's no difference between the imperfections of a Christian and the imperfections of a non-Christian, the only difference is they're forgiven. You see, a Christian should be becoming more perfect.

Jesus said, be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. Christians are supposed to be better than they were before they were Christians. They're supposed to be overcoming sin in their life.

Christianity isn't just a continuation of the same sinful life as before, with the difference being that we ask God to forgive us every day, and so we're clean and we're going to heaven, although we still live just as sinful as before. No, Jesus said we can pray for forgiveness, but we also have to pray for deliverance from temptation, which means that we get through a temptation without sinning. We're delivered out of it.

So what we're praying for is not only that God will forgive us our sins, but also He'll cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and that our life will be a life that is not characterized by sin. Now, there are some Christians who teach that you can reach a point where you'll never sin again in this life. I do not necessarily hold that doctrine.

In fact, I do not hold that doctrine. And if there are some people who do hold that doctrine and who can succeed in living up to it, then more power to you. I do not wish to criticize you.

I will say this, though, that James, in his epistle, said, In many things we all stumble. Even James himself, the apostle, still included himself among those who do sometimes stumble. We do stumble into sin from time to time.

We do fall to temptation. But it's only because our guard is down. It is never necessary, because God will always provide a way of escape if we look for it.

But the thing is we need to be praying about it. You who have a sin in your life that you cannot overcome, maybe you're a Christian, and yet you still are struggling against a particular sin. Maybe you're still struggling with alcohol.

Maybe you're still struggling with violence, domestic violence in your life. Maybe you're struggling with a lustful habit. Maybe it's pornography.

Maybe it's masturbation. Maybe it's some other thing that you know about and nobody else knows about. Now, you might say, But I've prayed and I've repented and I've asked God to stop and I've made myself accountable and I've done all kinds of things and I still fall into this.

Okay, I can understand that easily enough. Sin is in us. Even though we're saved, we can fall into sin.

But, you know, I would ask you, Are you praying every day and praying with conviction and meaning it? Father, do not lead me in temptation, but if I am in temptation, deliver me out of it successfully. The implication to this is that God will pull us through the experience of temptation without the necessity of our falling, if we are praying. And praying doesn't just mean uttering words.

It means that we are presenting our case to him as persons really in need, sensing a need, and depending on him to come through for us. When the disciples Peter, James,

and John were in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus, just before he was arrested, when he was praying there, and he was praying that he would be, you know, we don't know everything he was praying. The only recorded prayer that is there is that if it were possible, the cup would pass from him.

However, he said, Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. But the disciples kept falling asleep. And Jesus gave them this command in Matthew 26, 41.

He said, Watch and pray. Now, by the way, watch means stay awake. They didn't.

They fell asleep. But he said, Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. Now, what he's saying is you are going to be facing temptation that is very strong.

You can't anticipate what it is now. You don't have a clue what's coming up in a few minutes here. I do.

But I'm telling you, you're going to need to be strong. There's temptation coming your way right now. And you need to stay awake and pray so that you don't fall into this temptation.

Now, what Jesus was implying is if you do stay awake and pray, you will overcome this temptation. You will have the resources from God that you will not have to fall into this temptation. But if you don't stay awake and pray, then every likelihood is that you will succumb.

You will fall. You will be tempted, and you will fall because you have not prayed. You did not stay awake and pray.

And that's what Jesus is illustrating here. When you pray, say, Deliver us from the wicked one. Do not lead us into temptation.

And clearly what we're praying for is our own strength to live a holy life. Notice this. There are three petitions in the Lord's Prayer that we are authorized to pray.

One is for our basic physical needs. Give us this day our daily bread. Another is for forgiveness for the sins that we have committed where we have fallen short of the glory of God.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who have become indebted to us. And the third is to pray for holiness, to pray that God will give us the strength to have victory over every temptation so that we can actually live a holy life. This is part of our everyday praying.

There's many churches and many Christians who don't really have any real vision for holiness. All they care about is I've got to get to heaven, and that means I need to ask God to forgive me for my sins, and then I'll go to heaven. Well, there's more to it than

that.

God wants us through our prayers and through the other resources He's given us to overcome sin in our lives so that we don't sin anymore, not as a habit. We may stumble into sin on occasion, and then we, of course, have to repent and get up and do better next time, but we don't sin as a habit. Your life is not supposed to be just a life of continuing in sin just as you did before you were unsaved, but being forgiven.

You need to overcome sin in your life. That's why you're still here. That's why God didn't just rapture you as soon as you got saved.

He has work to do in your life, and part of that is teaching your hands to war against sin. And you need to pray. That's the first weapon of your warfare is to pray that God will deliver you from sin.

And thus we come to the end of our time today and basically the end of the Lord's Prayer as well.