

## Running to or from Temptation?

Matthew 6:13; James 1:13-15

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Temptation to sin can be very strong, but it is resistable by God's grace. God is stronger than any temptation you face. But to resist temptation we cannot run to it, but must run from it. We cannot enjoy it, but must grow to hate it no matter how attractive it may seem. This is illustrated in the ancient, mythical poem composed by Homer, the *Odyssey*. The main character, Odysseus, was returning to his wife, Penelope, having won the Trojan War. But in order to reach home, he had to sail by a certain island that had brought many ships and crews to destruction. It was not the tide, the weather, or the rocky coastline that had proven so destructive.

No, it was the Sirens, mythical creatures who had led countless sailors to lose their mind and to jump to their watery grave through their beautiful singing. In order not to suffer the same destruction, Odysseus sealed the ears of all his crew with wax, but had himself tied to the mast so that he could hear the beautiful singing and yet not plunge himself to his grave. He suffered temporary insanity, but not death.

Like Odysseus, Christians want to enjoy the attractive and alluring temptation of sin that could lead to much misery, but don't want to suffer the consequences that follow from yielding to the temptation. When we flirt with temptation to sin ("look but don't touch", "fantasize but don't realize"), expose ourselves to temptation to sin, believing we will be able to restrain ourselves before actually falling into the sin, what we learn so often is how weak we truly are as we fall into sin because we did not take heed to all of the warning signs (flashing red lights and bells). Temptations are attractive and attack us at our weakest point. That is why we need to understand this Sixth Petition in the Lord's Prayer.

Our main points are: (1) Keep Us from Temptation ("And lead us not into temptation"); (2) Give Us Grace to Overcome Temptation ("but deliver us from evil").

### I. **Keep Us from Temptation ("And lead us not into temptation").**

A. As Jesus taught us to seek forgiveness when we sin from our merciful Father that we may enjoy His communion and blessing and not incur His loving (yet severe) fatherly discipline (in the Fifth Petition, Matthew 6:12), so Jesus now calls us to pray that we would so hate and despise those sins for which we have sought forgiveness that we would not want to be tempted with them, but rather delivered from them (the connective conjunction, "And").

1. If we truly desire God's fatherly forgiveness and repent of those sins, we will also earnestly desire to be set free from those sins, and even from the temptation to commit those sins. We will not only hate the sin, but also the temptation that entices us to that sin.

2. If we claim to hate the sin, but do not hate the temptation that leads to that sin, we will continue to fall into that sin. Until we learn to hate the temptation to sin as much as we hate the sin itself, we will fail and not succeed to overcome the sin. That is where the battle must be fought. It probably means we do not really hate the sin as an offense committed against our loving Father, but only hate the consequences and misery that sin brings.

B. When we pray, "And lead us not into temptation", does it not assume that our Father does lead us into temptation? Why would we pray that He not do something that He does not or cannot do? Does our Father lead us into temptation? There is a sense in which He does not lead us into temptation, and a sense in which He does.

1. How God does not lead us into temptation.

a. God does not actively, directly, or immediately tempt or entice any one to sin (James 1:13-15). As our *Confession of Faith* states (5:4): God “neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.”

b. The temptation to sin may arise from within the sinful heart (the flesh) or may it arise from outside the sinful heart—from the world or from Satan. But even if it arises from the world or from Satan, it is the flesh (the sinful desires within) to which those temptations appeal.

2. How God does lead us into temptation. God leads us into temptation providentially and passively.

a. **Providentially.** Our Father orders and works all thing after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11)—that includes all circumstances and people (all means and second causes) by His providence so that all evil and even temptation serves His holy and eternal purpose in revealing His justice to the wicked—in punishing sin and the sinner (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12—through the papal antichrist), or in revealing His grace to His beloved children—in using temptation to humble us, to reveal our weakness, to instruct us in the way we should walk, to grow us in hating sin and loving righteousness, and to chasten us as a loving Father (James 1:2-4,12—though we are to hate temptation as it entices us to sin, yet we are to rejoice that God uses temptation for our good). We can rejoice that God revealed the faith of Joseph through the temptation that he faced when he fled from his master’s wife.

b. **Passively.** Our Father sovereignly, wisely, and for our good permits us to be tempted when He could have powerfully restrained it had He chosen to do so (Job; Peter in Luke 22:31-32).

C. Is it a sin to be tempted? Not necessarily. Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). All His temptations came from without (from the world and the devil) because Jesus had no sinful corruption within to lead Him into temptation.

1. When temptation comes from without, i.e. from the world or the devil (as it did with Jesus), temptation is not our own sin (it is the sin of others—whether individuals or the devil). In this case it comes upon us unexpectedly and not because we were looking for it.

2. However, temptation is our sin when we tempt ourselves to sin, or when we place ourselves in a situation where we know we will be tempted to sin as with the young man in Proverbs 7. When temptation arises from our own sinful heart to do evil, then the temptation is our own sin. We are the tempter through our own lusts and sinful desires (James 1:13-15).

3. Satan is neither omniscient nor omnipresent and cannot look into our soul (God alone knows our heart). However, Satan can suggest temptations to our mind and can present temptations to our eyes and ears, but he is limited to doing only what God permits him to do (Job). Satan and His fallen spirits observe our weaknesses. It is important that you know what Satan can and cannot do so that you do not deify him, but also that you do not underestimate his cunning and deceptive power to dazzle your heart with that which your heart may sinfully desire and express in word and deed. The world also presents its own temptations and is used by the devil. Though success is a blessing from God, it may also be a temptation to our pride from which we must flee. Though owning a home or a nice car/truck/boat may be a blessing from God, it may also be a temptation to our covetousness to not be content with this blessing, but to want more. Though family and friends are a blessing from God, they may become a temptation to our supreme love for Christ and His truth.

4. We pray, “And lead us not into temptation” because we hate falling into sin. We hate bringing shame and reproach upon His holy name. We hate leading others to follow us in sinning against the Lord.

## II. Give Us Grace to Overcome Temptation (“but deliver us from evil”).

A. Whereas the first part was stated in the negative (“And lead us not into temptation”), the

second part is stated in the positive by way of contrast (“But deliver us from evil”).

1. Understand that temptations are resistable by God’s grace—God’s sovereign work of grace is irresistible in God’s effectual call, but temptations are not irresistible—they can be resisted by the child of God who is a new creation in Christ and has the power of the Almighty Spirit dwelling in him/her. You are enabled by the power of God to say, “No”, to the tempter (whether from within or from without).

2. Many (even within churches) promote the idea that sexual desire for someone who is not your spouse is not sinful as long as that sexual desire is not realized (or sexual desires for someone of the same gender are not sinful as long as they are not realized—one may have a same-sex orientation in which one justifies tempting oneself). But this is contrary to the teaching of Christ (Matthew 5:27-28).

3. There may be a battle over temptation between the Spirit and the flesh, but never allow the enemy to deceive you into thinking that that it is ok for a temptation to have mastery over you as God’s child. Our desire as God’s children is that He alone have mastery over us. The power of temptation and sin have been broken once and for all (Romans 6:14). Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). Temptation is not irresistible, for you are commanded to resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7)?

#### B. How God delivers you from evil.

1. He delivers you from temptation by doing what Jesus did when He was tempted—using the sword of the Spirit, memorizing it, putting it in conspicuous places (Matthew 4:4), and calling him the father of lies (John 8:44).

2. He delivers you from temptation by understanding that temptation promises satisfaction, fulfillment, riches, success, but delivers misery, discontentment, and broken fellowship with God and man (in the family and church). Temptation is not your friend. It is a deadly enemy that wants to destroy you and those you love. That is how you must view it.

3. He delivers you from temptation when you do not tempt yourself, wallow in the temptation, feed, or nurse it—and flee from it (as did Joseph, if not physically, then mentally, 2 Timothy 2:22).

4. He delivers you from temptation by you developing a plan to flee temptation when it comes—and it will come. What can you avoid that makes you susceptible to temptation—places, people, books, TV, websites (use filters)? What steps can you take? Faithful communion with Christ in prayer and the Word (fasting). Memorization and meditation on the Word. Accountability and prayer with a trusted brother/sister. Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.

5. He delivers you from temptation by giving you hope when you are overcome by discouragement and despair that there is no hope for you in facing that temptation because it has been your downfall so many times in the past. Perhaps you think you have sinned away all hope. Perhaps you think the enemy is just too strong. Hope is not built upon your strength, but is built upon God’s strength and faithfulness to His own promises—He cannot lie. When your hope is in the arm of flesh, overcoming that temptation will be hopeless. However, when your hope is in the almighty arm of God, overcoming that temptation will become a certain, confident expectation. Wallowing in hopelessness and despair is exactly where the enemy wants you. You become more vulnerable to temptation, not less vulnerable (“What does it matter? Who cares?”).

6. The victory in overcoming sin in your life and mine begins with this petition (“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”). Our union with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection is our victory. Just as certain as the guilt and condemnation of sin being paid for, so the power of sin has been broken. That is our certain hope.

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