

"LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"

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

This prayer is one of constant movement. The first section of it, which has to do with God, moves from the inner shrine of worship to the outer sphere of service. The second part, which has to do with ourselves, moves from the outer place of material necessity right down to the inner realm of spiritual conflict.

As we repeat this prayer, we go down the ladder. But even as we cry to God, dependent on Him for every necessity, we are not at the bottom. We still have to see ourselves as sinners, and discover with strong conviction our deep need. "Lead us not into temptation"--here we touch the very depths, for not only are we sinners, but we are desperately afraid that we should be even more sinful.

It is a picture of our growth in Christian experience. In the early days of Christian life we cry, "Our Father," as we enter into that new relationship through faith in Jesus Christ, being born again by His Spirit. We can call God "Our Father."

Then we begin to worship Him; we seek to be used by Him and become concerned about doing His will. We quickly discover how dependent we are upon Him in every detail of our lives, and we begin really to understand what sin is. We are humbled as we go on in the Christian life. The flesh is still with us and it wars against the Spirit. We discover that we have entered a tremendous conflict. We must give ourselves in utter surrender to God, and enter into the warfare with complete dependence on the grace of God if we are to triumph. Some day we will rejoice to see the Saviour through whose power we have won.

"Forgive us our debts"--that concerns the past. But now we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," and that concerns the future. Forgiveness is the beginning, but not the end. It is the first thing about the Christian life.

John related the story of the woman who was brought into the presence of Christ and charged with adultery. He did not pronounce harsh judgment upon this shame-stricken woman. When her accusers, made cowards by their own consciences, slunk away one by one, leaving the sinner alone with the Saviour, His word to her was one of pure compassion, "Neither do I condemn thee." There was pardon for her black sin, forgiveness for her sinful past. But having forgiven her, Christ did not let her go without laying a command upon her. This forgiven woman was not at liberty to return to her old life of folly and shame. Dismissing her, Christ said, "Go, sin no more." The forgiven person must not return to his old life of sin.

After forgiveness comes the life of struggle and conflict against the world, the flesh and the devil. After the blotting out of the sinful past comes the earnest striving to keep the record of the future clean. The struggle, the conflict and the battle come after pardon has been bestowed. When Christ whispers into our ears the gladsome message, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," He lays upon us also the command, "Go, sin no more."

"Forgive us our debts" is a prayer that God will blot out the record of past sin. "Lead us not into temptation" is a prayer for protection in the future. The man who has truly repented of his sin wants not simply the past to be blotted out, but also grace to shun sin in the days to come. He wants not only to be delivered from the penalty of sin, but he also longs to be emancipated from its power. Do not let the freeness of forgiveness lead you to think lightly of sin. In the early days of Christianity some interpreted the freeness of forgiveness as a license to sin. They tried to persuade themselves that they were doing God a favor by continuing their old wicked practices, as the greater their sins were the

finer their opportunity of seeing God's forgiving love displayed. They sinned, so they said, that grace might abound. How false was the notion that sin was light, trivial and cheap, and that pardon was free. Sin light? Sin cheap? Sin trivial? Look at the cross of Christ! Measure the enormity of sin by the sacrifice of the cross. It cost God the life of His own Son to deliver us from it.

"There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in."

Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! for by every sin of ours we crucify the Lord afresh, and put Him to an open shame. The program of the Christian life is not sin and pardon, day after day, but pardon, sanctification and godly living. There is something radically wrong with us if sin has as great a power over us today as it had ten years ago. Repentance is never genuine and sincere unless it creates within us a hatred and loathing of sin. We have never been truly forgiven if we can go on sinning the old sins day after day; for we never hear Christ say to us, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," without hearing Him add this charge, "From henceforth sin no more."

But the command is a hard one to obey. In a world so full of trial and temptation, so full of seductions and enticements to evil, how hard it is for poor, weak men to obey the command, "Go, sin no more." In a world that presses in upon us on every side, that spreads its glittering prizes before our eyes to tempt us, how hard it is to be unworldly, to hold earth's best gifts cheap, while we set our affections on things above! To obey that command, we need help and strength. The task is too difficult for us. It is more than we can do in our own strength. So we cast ourselves on the Lord saying, "Have pity on our weakness, and bring us not into temptation." It is a cry to God that He will not permit the world to overcome us, and drag us again to sin.

All of us know something of temptation. We have had more or less to do with it from our youth. It is a part of the personal experience of every one of us.

What is temptation? As used in the Scriptures, the word has two common meanings.

I. Temptation Is An Inducement To Evil.

It is an appealing invitation to take the wrong road. Human life is beset with temptation. No one is exempt from it. No moment of the day is free from it. Incitements to sin abound. Invitations to enter the broad way meet us at every turn. Wherever man is, there is temptation. There is no escape from it. Never a day passes but in some way or other an appeal is made to our lower nature, and we are urged to yield.

II. Temptation Is A Test Or Trial.

This is the meaning that it has in our text. Such tests, when met along the path of duty, are intended for our good. They are to minister to our strength and to our growth in Christ-likeness. They are to do for us what the sculptor does for the rude block of marble. The presence of evil in our world, the inducements to evil that abound, looked at from God's standpoint, are tests of character and strength.

This verse implies the weakness of man. "Lead us not into temptation," into testing, because we are so prone to break down under the trial. The attack of temptation from without is made formidable by the weakness and treachery within. It is because we know our own weakness, how liable that we are to break down under any severe test, that we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." There is in all of us a bias toward sin, an inclination toward evil. It is easier for us to do wrong than to do right. To do evil is easy; you have only to shout with the crowd or to swim with the stream. But, to do

right is hard; you must swim against the current, you must dare to stand alone. It is just this that gives temptation its power and makes it terrible. Nobody is strong enough to resist every allurements.

The experience of God's forgiving mercy makes a Christian realize his own weakness. It also causes the child of God to long to be holy. No Christian can be anything but a hypocrite unless the outcome of his experience is an intense desire for holy living.

When a child of God looks up into the face of his Father, he hungers and thirsts after a pure and a godly life. He hates the things that he used to love, and he loathes the things to which once he was wedded. He seeks to discover the secret of walking with God in victory.

No wonder this petition, "Lead us not into temptation," finds a place in our hearts daily. How we dread to meet the enemy, for we know how weak we are! Unless the Lord matches the onslaughts of Satan with His omnipotent strength, we will go on in defeat.

What is the source of temptation? Some might think that the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," implies that God tempts His children, that He leads them into circumstances which are calculated to trip them. Is that true? No! James 1:13 says, "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." God never invites any man to take the lower road. Yet many wrongs have been wrought by those who claimed divine authority for their deeds. Temptation is always dangerous, but it is never so deadly dangerous as when we persuade ourselves that the voice that calls us to take the wrong road is that of God. An invitation to do wrong never comes from God. We never stand at the forks of the road, but that God is there, wooing us to take the right turn.

Let us ever remember that temptation, in itself, is never sin. We sin only when we yield to temptation. What, then, is to be the deepest dread of every forgiven person? What is your deepest dread? From what do you shrink more than from all else? Some are afraid of microbes and germs. Some are afraid of suffering. Some are afraid of poverty. Some are afraid of discomfort. Some fear unpopularity and criticism. Some are afraid of death. But the one thing that we ought to fear is sin. That was the case with the early Christians immediately after Pentecost. Persecution was abroad, but when they bowed in prayer, for what did they ask? Not for deliverance from shame or death. "And now, Lord, behold their threatening: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." Their one gripping fear was that, in the face of a great opportunity, they might fall into the terrible sin of cowardice.

We should pray, "Lead us not into temptation," with the full assurance that if we give God the ordering of our lives, He will be our sufficiency and make us conquerors, and more than conquerors through Him Who loves us. The Christian life is to be one of victory. Listen to these glorious promises from His Word: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it." "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation." "I will keep you also in the hour of temptation." He can be counted on absolutely. He will never fail us nor forsake us.