



His Word Is Truth!

This article is written by Pastor Tom Eckstein of Concordia Lutheran Church in Jamestown. "His Word is Truth" will appear in this paper every 3rd Monday.



Today we conclude my series on The Lord's Prayer as found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. This article will focus on the following words of The Lord's Prayer: **"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."** These words of Jesus confuse us at first. *Simply put, why should we ask God to "lead us not into temptation" if God never tempts anyone to do evil anyway?*

For example, James 1:14-15 reads: **"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by**

evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Here we clearly see that we only have ourselves to blame when we find that we sinfully desire the temptations of the devil and eventually act on those desires.

Martin Luther realized that Jesus' words "lead us not into temptation" could be misunderstood as though God might tempt us to do evil, and so he wrote this explanation of Jesus' words in his Small Catechism: **"God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are**

attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory."

However, even after we consider the above clarifications of Jesus' words "lead us not into temptation," we can't avoid the fact that those words seem to imply that God WOULD lead us into temptation on some occasions. The answer to this problem is to recognize that the Greek word in Matthew 6:13 translated as "temptation" can also mean "testing" or "trial." In other words, Jesus is NOT asking us to pray that God would not tempt us to do evil – *which He clearly does not!* Instead, Jesus is asking us to pray that God would not lead us into a time of "testing" or "trial" without also delivering us from such a time.

The Scriptures are full of examples where God will allow believers to go through periods of suffering and trial in order to strengthen their faith and help them mature. For example, we see this

happening with Job (see Job 1:6-22) and the Apostle Paul (see 2nd Corinthians 12:7-10). In Ephesians 6:10-18 we clearly see that God allows Christians to "do battle" with the devil while also giving us protection (also see 1st Corinthians 10:13). **We can be sure that we have victory over the devil because Jesus' Himself defeated the devil in our place!! (See Luke 4:1-13 and 23:35-47)**

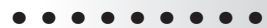
But what does Jesus mean when He says "lead us not into a time of testing" if it is clear from Scripture that God sometimes intends to do just that to strengthen our faith? The answer is that a better English translation of Jesus' words could read: "Lead us not only into a time of testing, but also deliver us from the evil one!" *The terms "only" and "also," even though they do not appear in the original Greek, are implied.* This is a common literary device in Hebrew poetry, and Matthew 6:13 also has this structure.

An Old Testament

example of this device of Hebrew poetry is Psalm 51:16, where David writes: **"You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it."** The bare statement "You do not delight in sacrifice" is obviously not true because God commanded that sacrifices be offered in faith as pictures of Jesus and His sacrificial death for our sins. Instead, David's words should actually be translated: **"You do not only delight in sacrifice..."** In Psalm 51:17 David goes on to stress that God ALSO wants people to have hearts of repentance and faith when they offer sacrifices, and then God will delight in them being offered (see Psalm 51:19).

Therefore, Jesus' words in Matthew 6:13 should read: **"Lead us not only into times of testing, but also deliver us from the evil one."** The Good News is that God CAN and WILL do exactly what we pray for in these words! Jesus is hereby teaching Christians to expect

God to lead them into times of "testing" and "trial" to bless them with mature faith – *with the promise that God will also deliver them from the evil one (see James 1:2-4 and 4:7).* 1st Peter 5:8-9 reads: **"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..."** *Jesus has given us the victory!! (See 1st John 4:1-4)*



Please read the next "His Word is Truth" on Monday, September 15th! Pastor Eckstein will begin a new series on Holy Baptism and Infant Baptism.

For more resources about Christian teaching and issues, go to Concordia Lutheran's web page: www.concordiajt.org

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