

James 1:13-25 *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸ Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. ¹⁹ So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

Tonight we focus on the last two petitions of the Lord's Prayer. We pray that our God would not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil. And while Luther separated these two petitions for consideration in the catechism, we must recognize that they ask for similar things. In both we are asking that our God would protect and shield us from the attacks of the Evil One. In the first place, we ask that we would not be overtaken by temptation into sin. In the second, we ask God's protection from whatever calamity the Evil One might wish to send our way.

Perhaps the second of these petitions is easier to pray than the first. We are always ready to let God shelter and protect all from all manner of evil. This has become a constant prayer of the faithful in this country particularly ever since 9/11. We pray that God would shield us from another such disaster and that he would protect our troops as they serve in this time of conflict. And it is well that we should pray these things as God directs us to pray in this prayer and throughout Scripture. As Psalm 46 reminds us, "God is our refuge and our strength, an ever present help in trouble." And so we do well to ask Him for His protection against any evil, be it war, disease, drought, or any other such evil.

But perhaps praying, "Lead us not into temptation" is not also always as easy. For if we are honest, we admit that our flesh likes to be tempted, even to give into temptation. Oh to be sure, we wish to be led away

from things that really don't tempt us at all, but those things with which we struggle, we don't mind being tempted once and a while. A gossip surely loves to hear talk of the last scoop. A lustful person does not mind the occasional temptation of an alluring woman or man. A lude person cannot shy away from a dirty joke or two. As our reading for the night reminds us, we are tempted when we allow ourselves to be dragged away by our own fleshly desires. And this is one of the reasons God has given us such a petition to pray in His prayer. It teaches us to pray as we ought, not as our flesh desires. It teaches us not only what to pray but also how to think and live. We pray that God would give us such holy desires that we would flee not only sin itself, but the very temptation to sin. Everyone knows that a recovering alcoholic should not hang out at a bar and that a person trying to lose some weight should not frequent the all-you-can-eat buffet. But yet with other temptations, we tend to do exactly the opposite. We tend to surround ourselves with those things that tempt us and then act surprised when we fall. But through this pray we ask God to stop this ineffective way of going about fighting temptation. We ask Him rather than allowing us to be carried into temptation; he would deliver us from it.

We admit to God tonight that at times we have not truly wished for Him to keep us as pure as He would have us. And tonight we pray anew that He would deliver us, protect us from all things harmful. We pray not only that He would protect us against calamity and terror, but also against the sin that so easily entangles. The church has typically ended the Lord's Prayer with the words, "For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory, Amen." These words are the way in which we confess to God that all of the things for which we have prayed, we know He is more than able to fulfill. After all His is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Tonight, we pray anew that God would lead us away from all evil and we pray with the confidence not only that He can, but that He will. He will deliver us from the evil that has been in our life through the forgiveness of sins won for us by Christ on the cross. He will shield us against all temptation to sin through power of his Spirit which He gave us in our baptism. As James says, He has made us in Baptism such that when we look at ourselves in Christ we see the law of freedom from sin, rather than bondage to it. And He will protect us from all other evil by His mighty outstretched right arm. As James says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

Indeed tonight again we rejoice that although we change all too often like the shadows, our God does not change. Even when we are faithless and welcome temptation, He remains faithful and forgives us of our sin as we repent. And when we are afraid and weakened by all the evil in our world, He remains strong and powerful to save. It is God himself that make us worthy to pray, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our transgressions as we forgive those who trespasses against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Amen.”