

Praying for God's Care in Times of Temptation

Heidelberg Catechism 4

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Bible Text: Matthew 6:13

Preached on: Sunday, January 14, 2024

Hope Reformed Church of Powassan

Services presently held at the

Powassan Sportsplex

Powassan, ON

Canada

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We're going to be focusing this afternoon on the phrase from the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not to temptation but deliver us from the evil one," and as we read in our catechism, as it's explained, and as we also read from 1 Corinthians, we know that there is something to this life that it can be like a spiritual minefield. We can be thankful that in Canada, we do not have minefields. I have seen a number of pictures from the war in Ukraine where there are thousands of square kilometers now that have mines under the ground, explosives with a little trigger that if somebody steps on them, that could be severely injured, that could even be killed. And so along the sides of the road, imagine if you couldn't go for a walk and step in the ditch, imagine if you could not just walk across a field without fear and they have those signs with the skull and crossbones warning people, "Don't walk in this ditch. Don't go through this forest. Don't go this way." And those minds, of course, are hidden. That's the whole point. The little trigger on the mind. And it seems, doesn't it, even evil in a sense, devious on many minds, looks like two blades of grass. Comes out of the ground, just looks like two little blades of grass and if somebody steps on that, they're done.

Well, we ought to think of our lives in this world as something like a minefield, spiritually speaking, that there is an enemy out there and that God in his sovereignty has allowed Satan to test and to try us, and that our lives indeed are ones where we need to be aware that we need help, that we need God's help, that we need to pray for the Father's leading, that we need to pray for the Father's deliverance, that we need to pray for God's care in times of temptation. And here now we live in a time where this is not getting easier, is it? If you think of the metaphor of a minefield or the metaphor of enemies, here now we have internet first crept into people's homes and then into their pockets. And not just internet posing a minefield of lustful stories, but now we see antisemitism growing, we see all kinds of trends of conspiracies and hatred being stirred up against different people, and then we can think not just of the internet, but our own hearts. And so we wrestle against the world, the devil, the flesh, and how we need to be aware, eyes open, and part of having our eyes open and being aware and being strengthened is praying for the Father's care in a time of temptation. First, we'll look at the Father's leading; second, the Father's deliverance.

Now, as we pray for the Father's leading, and as we pray, "Lead us not to temptation," does that mean that we are praying with the hypothetical possibility behind that, that God could tempt us, or God could somehow lead us into sin? No, he does not do that. That's not what this prayer is about. James 1 verse 13, "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. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." And as we also read from 1 Corinthians 10, we need to take personal responsibility when we take Satan's lures. We have absolutely no justification to blame God or even ultimately to blame others.

You know that there's a bit of a battle over this in Christian culture and the example that's often given is, is it the fault of the woman who dresses in a certain way, or is it the fault of the man who looks on her with lust? We all must take responsibility for our own sin, our own lust, our own desires, or even our own immodesty, our own desires to track the attention of others. And here is the thing, James says very clearly, each one is tempted when he's drawn away by his own desires. We must take responsibility when we slip into sin. And so God is not in the business of putting out lures. God is not in the business of putting out temptations. God is not in the business of causing people to sin. We must take responsibility.

Now we have to understand that the word temptation in the Bible is actually, and the concept of temptation is actually a little broader than we might think. Temptation in itself is not necessarily evil, or test, perhaps you could think of the idea of test. The test itself is not evil. Now you can even think of testing as we think of it, you could buy a new car or test out a car before you buy it, that test is not evil, or a driver's test that you go through or an exam at school or you you buy a new bike or a new bow and arrows and you go out and test them. The idea of testing is to expose flaws in something or weaknesses or to expose where you need to grow or where you need help or where you need to learn how to pray. And you see God does set out a proving ground and he does set out a testing ground and he does put tests before us, but we must draw a distinction that he's not the one who's causing the sin.

He puts out many tests throughout the scriptures. The original fruit in the garden, a test, and yet one that Adam and Eve were responsible for breaking. God tested Abraham, Genesis 22, called him to take Isaac up the mountain, and we know that God provided a lamb, God provided an escape in the end, and so God may even put us in a test that just seems inescapable and impossible to the very end and yet he calls his people to obey him, to be loyal to him to the very end of a test, no matter how hard it may seem, even if it's Abraham being called to sacrifice his only beloved son. God always gives an escape in tests. There's no situation, there's no sequence of events that would lead us, or to where God would actually lead us over the cliff, or God would lead us to step, as it were, on the mine in the end. 1 Corinthians 10, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it." God provided that on the mountain with Abraham. He still provides it and here is my main point, if we fail a test, it's because we failed to see the

exit, we failed to see God's provision. And in many cases, we've sort of given into lust, we've given into cowardice, we've given into something else, and therefore, we've missed his exit, we've missed his way out.

You see, the problem is not that the tests in themselves are bad. The tests are actually good for us. They're not evil in themselves. Maybe you can understand this with the idea of sheep and a shepherd. If we picture ourselves as a sheep, and we picture this prayer where we're praying, "Lord, please be my shepherd, please guide me and keep me near to You, that I may not sin against You," we're admitting we're vulnerable, we're weak, and it's that very prayer that God delights to answer. And so, to pray this prayer, "Lead us not to temptation," what it needs to come with is a certain humility and admitting that, "I'm like a sheep that can so easily go astray, that I need Your guidance, O Lord, I need Your help," and then the Lord delights in his sovereignty already having planned it, to answer those prayers for his grace and for his glory ultimately; to give escapes again and again and again, to give ways out, to give help. And what a comfort this actually is because it's obvious our life is full of tests. We know God's sovereign but there's a great comfort in knowing that God does answer this prayer. He does give exit doors, so to speak. He does give wisdom to his children. And what's the way to answer this often? It's to dig down into the treasures and the riches of God's word. It's to be enlightened by his word, which opens eyes. The metaphors are in the Psalms, which is a lamp to our path and a light to our feet. It's to be meditating on the Bible, the scriptures. It's to be under preaching. It's to have eyes open so that when we go through the minefield more and more as we grow in grace and if we have the humility to take advice from an older generation and to learn from Christians of the past and the humility to learn from God's word, more and more, this prayer is answered, that we begin to see the dangers and we begin to avoid them for God's glory.

And so we can actually expect as Christians to face tests, adversity, maybe even for some of us, thorns in the flesh like Paul faced, or times where we live in a country that's falling apart, or the difficulties of sickness. We all go through those kinds of things. Or times where God allows leaders to fall away. And those hard trials and those tests are in all of our lives but if they cause us or if they, sorry, if we cause ourselves in the midst of them to wander over to sin, to try to find an easy way out or a wrong way out or a lustful way out, that's our sin. That's our responsibility. And so we should pray, "Lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," that the Lord, and by the way, it very much relates to the next phrase, "but deliver us from the evil one." We'll get to that in a moment; you can't really pull these phrases apart, we have to know them in their context. But this should cause us to pray as the psalmists did, as the godly did, again and again and again, "Lord, be my guide. Lord, be my help. Lord, do not take Your Spirit away from me. Lord, help me." You can even think of somebody like the wise man Agur in Proverbs 30, who actually prayed, undoubtedly knowing his own weaknesses, "Give me neither poverty nor riches--Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God." Here was a man who had the wisdom to pray, "Lord, help and keep me in this world where I don't fall off this side or that side when it comes to poverty or riches. Help and guide me, O Lord, in my life that in all things I would seek You."

And so we are praying when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation," for the Father's leading that though we would go through hard tests and trials, that we would not fall prey to the evil one, and now we'll move to that next. So this is not a prayer that we'll never have a test, will never have a trial. Those things in the Old Testament, we read 1 Corinthians 10, are given for our example. We expect to go through tests and trials, but we expect them for our purification and for our growth in wisdom and for our escape. But then the next phrase is, "but deliver us from evil." Deliver us from evil, the Father's loving deliverance. As we pray this prayer, we've seen again and again phrase after phrase that we're really praying to our Father King or our Father Lord, our Father Master who's in control of all things, who's mighty to save and who's able to answer his children's prayers and here we pray, "Deliver us from evil." Now the word for deliver here is not necessarily the most common word in the New Testament. It's similar to words for like save and salvation. It's similar, but it's different. It's a word that fits very closely with the idea of having a king or a prince or a provider, a leader who would guide his people, and that was one of the things, and we talked about this to the children in Sunday school this morning, that God's people in the time of Judges needed so badly. They needed a king like David to unite them, but especially to protect them and to guide them and to rule over them and to drive away their enemies so there weren't those raiding marauders of Ammonites and others coming in and taking their food and attacking them, Amalekites, Philistines, but that they would have a king or a prince who would protect and guide his people.

And so we need to know something here about the character of God, that God is our King who can and does have the resources to deliver us, to protect us, to watch over us. And he has his angels even, we hardly know the tiniest bit about this, who he gives charge over his children and who are able to beat back the forces of evil. And here again, he delights to answer prayers like this and to even help us in spiritual warfare because it gives glory to his name. And so the Lord has arranged things in his creation and in this world so that a prayerful people's prayers are answered. It gives him glory when we pray for help, and then he delivers, when he sends his angels, or he sends his messengers, or he sends even friends and others, and he works in mysterious ways to deliver us. And there's a sense here in this word of deliverer, of a mighty strong one who can pull somebody out of danger. We're praying here, "Father, pull me away, drag me away, guide me, even forcibly in a sense, away from evil, the evil one." The idea of evil is dark. Evil in the context is the evil of rebellion against God, going the way of Satan, the evil that leads to alienation, sadness, and the consequences of sin.

And so we must pray for deliverance, first and foremost, from the power of darkness, from the spiritual wickedness that is in high places, but even more deliverance from Satan, even in a personal way, the evil one. Deliverance from the mouth of the lion. It is this picture that's also used the word here of Lot who was delivered from Sodom. Do you remember how those angels came and they pulled Lot really almost forcibly out of Sodom? That's the kind of thing that we're praying for, "Lord, drag me out of this plight. Drag me out of this trouble. Drag me away from Satan, from the worst of evil, from the vile things our world and our culture are falling into." You see, one of the keys to living

in a sodomite culture, a wicked culture like the one around us, a culture where evil is called good and good is called evil, is that we would be on our knees and that we would be praying, "Lord, I am in myself unable. Forgive me, be merciful to me. Drag me away and pull us out of these things. Deliver us like You even pulled Lot out of Sodom. Help us, guide us, watch over us." And that means that what stands in between us and slipping into Satan's clutches is ultimately only God, his power. And so we must be praying. We must be praying that we would not stumble, that we would not dishonor God, that he would guide us along the pathway, that we would not ruin our own lives or fall into sin. The reality is, you see, that on the minefield that is spiritual life, Satan is active. He exploits, tests. He worms his way in, snakes his way into tests, and as it were, he ups the ante. He ups the stakes. He tries to pull in those directions of wickedness. Even our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 4, was tempted by Satan, driven by the Spirit into the wilderness and there Satan came in a dry time, a time of fasting, a time of difficulty, and he came and he tried to tempt the Lord Jesus to shortcut after shortcut after shortcut. Really, that's what the temptation of the Lord Jesus is, it's to shortcut the cross. It's to shortcut his ministry. It's to shortcut hunger. And Satan comes and says, "That'd be a nicer way. That'd be an easier way." He comes to you and he says, one way or another, through media, even his own whispers, he casts doubt and he says, "Wouldn't it be easier just to take this or that?" Often to take the easy way out. "Wouldn't it be easier," Satan says, "to just take that forbidden fruit, gain that knowledge to be like gods, knowing good and evil?"

I think what's being underestimated by many Christians in our time is the thought, in an unqualified way, that technology is neutral. Be careful with that. Now, technology in itself may not be sinful. A car may not be sinful or a telephone or something like that, but as we see the way our world is using information and technology and media, more and more there is this delusion that we can be like gods knowing good and evil, we can somehow use this to build our own identity, to build something greater than humanity. And I don't want to be in any way try to be prophetic about things like AI, but be careful how you use the internet. Be careful how you know these things. We were never meant to know all things. We were never meant to try and grasp in this fallen world in our own ways after immortality or after new identities or making names for ourselves or building towers, so to speak, like Babel. And it seems that there's a great danger in our age that technology is being turned to a temptation factory, really, temptation factory, where people seem to think they can find all that they want, whether through AI or internet or something else.

But you see, these are the lies of Satan. There's a place for technology, to use technology, and it can be helpful and useful, but what Satan always does is says, "Here's a smoother path, here's an easier path, here's a way of rising up yourself and getting higher." But the first answer to Satan's lies often is yes, to take the challenging, straight and narrow way that the Lord puts before us, that he outlines in his word, and to cry out for help humbly, praying in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Father, "Deliver us from evil, keep us along that path, keep us, deliver us from the evil one." We must understand what the Lord Jesus Christ did, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross was a battle. It was a battle where he took on evil and where he took on temptation and he took on the

temptation to give up and to give in, and he took it on perfectly. And instead of taking, so to speak, the forbidden fruit, he went to the cross and he died there. A perfect sacrifice. He had victory over evil. And the only way, you see, to be delivered from the evil one is to begin with him, is to begin with Jesus Christ. It's to trust in him. It's to look to him. It's to look to his work and be delivered.

And so when we pray this prayer, the answer will be humble people bending the knee, bowing and praying for deliverance in Jesus Christ, but then praying again for his Spirit, that his Spirit would come. You know, when we pray this, "Lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," and when we pray every phrase of the Lord's Prayer, you could read of this in Luke 11, we're ultimately praying for the Holy Spirit. When the Lord Jesus explains the Lord's Prayer in Luke 11, the promise at the end when he gives the parable of the man who's bothered again and again by a friend and the man who's bothered for bread, he says, "If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, surely will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" And so when we pray this, we're praying for the Holy Spirit and if you pray this in truth, you know what's gonna happen? If you pray the Lord's Prayer in truth and you pray this phrase, "Lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," for a bit, at least, you might feel rotten, convicted, because when the Spirit comes, he convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Eyes are opened to sin in our own sinfulness, in our own weakness, and it's not easy to get the answer to this prayer, because it shows us how weak and needy and flawed we are.

At first it's not easy, but then it becomes most comforting. It begins with submission to God and the Spirit convicting, but then the Spirit also gives comfort and strength and wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit is given that eyes begin to be opened. And I would say especially young people, realize this, your parents and older ones in the church, they may not seem to be with it to you, they may seem to be out of touch. You may wonder why they say what they say, and maybe there are words they even annoy you as they try to warn you about temptations and about Satan's work and they try to warn you about the evil one, but some of them in that older generation, their eyes have been opened for longer and they've seen something of the minefield and they're trying to show you and tell you these are the dangers. Don't go towards the temptations. In part to the answers of God's prayer, is to give us an older and a wiser generation. One of the things we should admit in our church is sometimes we've lacked that. We don't have that older generation as much as we need it.

And so let's double down on praying this. Let's double down on praying the Lord's Prayer in its essence and its meaning in all of the phrases, because it's a prayer really that God would give us what is not natural, spiritual maturity, spiritual strength, that we would be delivered from evil. We started with the idea of a minefield. Spiritually speaking, that minefield is so real. When you dig down, you begin to realize the minefield's in your own heart. It really is. Yes, the internet can affect it and the trends of our age, but if you are humble and honest, there it is in your own heart. The mines are there. And so when we pray this prayer, we need to be praying also for cleansing and for help and for self-awareness and realizing that there's such dangers, dangers to slip into in our hearts bad

motives, pride, Phariseeism or a certain legalism. On the other hand, to slip into the pride of what we call Antinomianism, falling into lawlessness and thinking that it's supposedly love, that everybody should just do what they want to do. And the danger is on both sides there is the devil pushing and pulling. He'll pull you one way or another. You can think of how the Lord Jesus, he called the Pharisees sons of the devil in their pride. They were tempting people. They were being used by the devil to pull people in a direction of not humble, needy, prayerful religion, gospel religion, where Jesus has saved us from our sins, but they were pulling people towards pride, selfishness, doing it their own way. And then there are others pulling the other way, but then in our own heart, many of us are inclined one way or the other, aren't we? And I would encourage you, examine your heart, pray this prayer, and realize that the Lord will answer this prayer also by beginning to shine a light in your heart, how much you need the work of the Spirit, how much we need cleansing, and the good news is he does this. The Holy Spirit works in and through us, and he works through his people, bringing comfort and help and accountability, guidance and cleansing. And so let us be praying this prayer faithfully, "Deliver us. Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank You that You teach us to pray in Your word. We know that we often do not pray as we ought. So we thank You that Your Spirit intercedes for us in our weaknesses. And we thank You that Your Son ever lives to make intercession at the right hand of God the Father. Please forgive us in His name only, for the times that we gave in to temptation. But please guide us the paths of truth and righteousness. We pray for a growing love for Your law, a growing love for Your word, a growing love for the ways of truth and righteousness that You would instruct us. Please convict us by Your Holy Spirit where we have erred and wandered. Please guide us then and comfort us that we would have the consolation that is in Christ that He covers those sins. We pray that each one here would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves and so be saved, but then also that we would walk in the Spirit. We ask, O Lord, that You would bless us in this coming week and that You would give strength in all that we need to do. We pray this for Jesus' sake only. Amen.

So we'll now sing in response to God's word from Psalter number 203.