

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 7, 2010 The Prayer of the Christian Soldier

Dear Radio Friends,

We are at war. Those are frightening words, words that put terror and fear in the hearts of any people. The reality of war wakes up a nation. It puts a people on high alert. It shocks them into awareness.

Well, dear believers, we are at war. And this war is far more severe than any earthly war. The enemy is stronger than any earthly army. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12).

Today we come to the sixth and the last petition in the Lord's Prayer, in which Jesus teaches us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." To understand it, we must recognize this reality, that we are involved in a spiritual battle. This petition is a prayer for soldiers on the battlefield. It is the prayer of every Christian, because every Christian is a soldier.

This war exists because of the great difference, the great spiritual separation, that God has created between His people and the world. God announces this at the very beginning. Immediately after Adam and Eve fall into sin, in Genesis 3:15 God says to Satan: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." Here God tells us how we should view history—as a long battle between two armies. And every man, woman, and child stands either in the army of Christ, opposed to Satan and the world, or with Satan in opposition to God. So, first in understanding this petition, we recognize that we are at war.

Then, second, we recognize our enemies. The Bible identifies them as the devil, the world, and our own flesh. The devil is the greatest enemy of God. He is a ferocious and a blood-thirsty enemy. He is described in the Scriptures as the great red dragon. He is the one who, with his tail, swept away a third part of the angels of heaven in rebellion against God. He is the one who was cast out of heaven. Immediately he began his assault on man, on Adam and Eve, in the garden. The history of this world is Satan's attempt to go against God by drawing God's people, God's soldiers, away from serving Christ to serve him. Satan delights in the falls of God's people.

In his assault, Satan has two strong allies. There is, first, the world. The world refers to the totality of wicked, unregenerate men, who do not submit to the word and the rule of God, but are under the rule of Satan, whose goal is to bring down the church and the people of God by attacking them. This is real. Listen to the mocking of the world against the church. You witness the intolerance of the world for the word of God, and for those who believe it. That is a part of this great battle. This is the world hurling its weapons at the church, attempting to bring God's people down.

Then, too, the world refers to all the things the ungodly find acceptable and in which they find their delight, which things are against the word and the will of God and are unacceptable to Him

and are an abomination to Him. They are wicked customs. They are wicked entertainments. They are a wicked way of life. The world refers to the whole philosophy and direction of mankind that ignores God and His word.

But the devil has another ally, a stronger ally within each of us. It is our old man of sin, our sinful nature, which is ever with us, till the day that we die. Our own flesh joins in the battle against us. Our own natural heart loves the things of this world, loves the way of sin. Our own natural passions and inclinations are for the world and its way of life. In our flesh the battle is the strongest. There the enemy comes with the greatest strength trying to bring us down.

So we recognize that we are at war. We identify our enemies. But we must also understand the strength of our enemies. These are not just earthly enemies who would take away our physical life. No, these are spiritual enemies, and their goal is the destruction of our soul. The devil and the world want our soul. They use spiritual weapons. Their great weapon is temptation. Temptation is powerful because it makes being on the opposing side look attractive and desirable. Temptation is the tool of the devil and the world by which they entice us to sin by making sin look attractive and pleasurable to us, by making us think that sin is the thing that we need in order to be happy.

And here you see the battle within ourselves. Your nature and mine, our flesh, is attracted by what the devil proposes as good. We have a natural inclination to sin.

So we must recognize one more thing in this battle. And that is our own weakness. We are so weak that we cannot stand for a moment in the face of temptation. We do not like to be weak. We do not like to think of ourselves as weak. We want to be strong. That is true physically. There is the strength of the body. There is the strength of will. There is the strength of knowledge. There is the strength that comes from experience. The young want to be independent. They are strong. The old want independence, too. They do not need help. But in the face of *this* enemy, we are weak, you are weak, I am weak.

Psalm 103 describes us this way, that God knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. Man—his days are like the grass. Dust and grass. That is humbling. It takes us back to our creation—what we are. We are dust. We did not call ourselves into being. We did not give ourselves our strength. We are like the grass, green and healthy, but then short-lived. As the sun comes, we yellow and wither. We are cut down and we fade away.

That is true spiritually as well. In John 15:5, Jesus says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, that same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." You take a fruit-bearing branch and you cut it off a tree—what good is it? That is us without Christ. We like to be strong. But we are powerless. We can do nothing in ourselves.

So we must pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." There are two parts in that petition. First, we are taught to say, "Lead us not into temptation." Now, usually, those words will raise a question. On the one hand, the Bible says in James, chapter 1, that when we are tempted, we should not say that God is the One who tempts us. Then, on the other hand, we are taught here to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

First, we should understand that when James says that no man is tempted by God, he means that

God, who Himself is not tempted with sin, Himself is never attracted to sin, will not put sin in front of us as something that is good for us. So that when we do fall into sin, we cannot say, ""Well, God caused me to fall into sin.""

But, second, we understand this: that God is the sovereign, not only over us but also over all the circumstances of our life. And, indeed, over every circumstance and every creature in this creation. That means that Satan and his ability to tempt are also under the control and restriction of God. Satan does not have the freedom to attack whenever and whomever and wherever he wants with temptation. No, God controls the timing and the intensity of every temptation that comes to us. You read the book of Job, the first chapter, and you discover that Satan is the agency that brings the trials into the life of Job to tempt him. But God controls the circumstances of Job's life and the actions of Satan. He controls the timing and the intensity of all our temptations.

And then we should understand that temptations put us in a very vulnerable situation. We are weak. And in temptation, Satan is very close by, presenting us with an easier, a more attractive, a more exciting way than the way of obedience to God. In temptation, he is telling us to abandon God, to disobey God. Temptations come on the strongest when we are in trials and difficulties in life. Then Satan is tempting us to forsake God, to say that we do not love Him. And we are weak. So we must pray, ""Lord, lead us not into temptation."" But we understand that sometimes God will lead us through tempting circumstances and trials. Not to make us to sin, but to try us and to build our Christian character. That is where God was in Job's temptations. And that is where He is in our trials, too. Not tempting us to sin, but testing us to make us stronger, to increase our commitment to Him.

But, you see, the normal Christian does not run into temptation. He prays, ""Lord, if it be possible, increase my Christian character without those temptations. I'm weak. Lead me not into temptation.""

But then we also pray, ""Deliver us from evil."" We mean that, when God puts us in tempting situations, we pray for Him to meet us there with His grace. Evil can refer either to Satan himself or to all the evil that is under his direction. And we pray for God here to prepare us for the times of temptation, to give us the strength of resistance in temptation, and to provide us an escape, so that we are not overwhelmed by temptation. ""Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.""

We see here the importance of *sincerity* in prayer. That is, our life must match our prayers. Our prayers must flow out of Christian living. It makes no sense for the Christian to pray this petition and then to flirt with sin. A child plays with fire. An infant has no fear of flames. But they do not know any better. The mature Christian ought to know better. If we know the reality of this war, if we know our weakness, if we know the enemy's strength, if we know the destruction that sin can bring, we will flee from temptation. We will not see how close we can get to it without getting burned. In I Corinthians 10:14, 15, Paul says, ""My dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men,"" and he means that the wise will avoid temptation. In Proverbs 7 it is the fool who flirts with the whore. Wisdom is to avoid temptation.

And so, as we pray this petition, we must be disciplined in our living, as any good soldier is. We

must prepare ourselves for spiritual warfare by prayer and out of the Word of God. We should not be comfortable and relaxed in tempting situations. We should be vigilant and on our watch and on our guard against temptation. Jesus says, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." That is victorious Christian living.

It does not mean that we are never tempted. It does not mean we will never fall into sin. But we are prepared because of our constant watchfulness. This is what it is to live this petition. We need that consistency in our lives.

Now how does God answer this petition? In several ways.

First, God does it by giving His Holy Spirit. Now, I do not mean that God gives the Holy Spirit again, as some extra blessing. But every born-again child of God already has the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He is almighty, as God is almighty. And we have, in regeneration, as Christians, the power of God within us. This is our ally in the battle against sin.

Second, God answers this petition by giving us His Word. In Ephesians 6 we read of the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The Spirit and the Word always go together. The Word gives us the power to face temptation. The Word awakens within us the life of the Spirit. Christ faced temptation. In His hour of temptation, how did He resist the devil? This is what He said, three times: "It is written. It is written. It is written." When we believe that God's Word is true and that the devil's word in the temptation is a lie, then we resist the devil. Then we overcome temptation. Then the devil will flee from us.

That means that you must know the Word of God, you must study the Word of God. And you need to memorize the Word of God. You need to put yourself under a faithful preaching of the Word of God. That is why God gives us preaching. It is to feed our souls. It is to equip us in the battle against sin. It is to refuel us each Lord's day for another week in the battle. The preaching is God's answer to this prayer.

But also, you must be in the Word in relation to the specific temptations in your life. The psalmist says, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." Learn this verse, or others. Do you struggle with pride? Then learn what the Word of God says about pride and let this be the weapon. "Pride goeth before destruction and haughtiness before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). Do you struggle with anger? Proverbs 14:29: "He that is slow to wrath is of a great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly." Is your struggle with lust? Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:28 that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Do you struggle with the proper use of your tongue? Learn this word from Proverbs 21:23: "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles." These are swords, these are weapons to use against the enemy.

Another way that God answers this petition is by giving us each other as Christians. As with other petitions, notice that this petition is a corporate petition. It is one that we pray together as Christians: "Lead us not into temptation." God gives us Christian brothers and sisters in the battle against sin and Satan and the world. We need to give each other support in this battle—not only by not tempting one another to sin, but by confessing our weakness to one another and praying for one another. James says, "Confess your faults one to another and pray

for one another."''

As we pray this prayer, God will give us strength against sin. And God will care for us in such a way that we are never put in a position where it is impossible for us not to sin. That is His promise in I Corinthians 10:13: ""There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."" The apostle is saying that God knows our tempting situations. Others have gone through them before, and God has always provided the strength. As a child of God you do not, in temptation, have to sin, because God, in answer to this prayer, always provides an alternative, an out. And He gives us strength to bear and to resist temptation.

There is one other thing that we receive in answer to this petition. And that is final victory in this battle. That is promised to us already before we begin the fight. There is a sense in which this battle has definitely already been won. The head of the serpent has already been crushed. That was the promise of Genesis 3:15: ""I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; thou shalt bruise his heel; he shall crush thy head."" That is what happened at the cross. Christ defeated Satan at the cross. And now, today, Satan is on death-row. He is awaiting his final and eternal destruction. In that day there will be complete and absolute victory. And the battle with sin will be done. That is part of God''s answer to this prayer.

But that does not come yet in this life. Let me warn you against expecting it in your life. The battle against sin is lifelong. And it is ever as difficult as it is for you today. But there is an end—in the coming of Christ for you, be that in your death, or be that in the second coming of Christ at the end of the world. Then, there will be complete victory.

Then, finally, the old man will be put down forever. Then your ties to this wicked world will be severed once and for all. They you will be taken forever out of the reach of Satan, and all your enemies will be put under your feet. We fight today with that day in view.

Let us press on in the battle with sin. Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the power that comes through the Spirit and the Word to resist temptation. Give us the grace to stand fast in this battle against sin, to persevere to the day of Jesus Christ. We ask it for His sake, Amen.