

Prayer and Your Spiritual Needs

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Matthew 6. We have spent many many weeks over the course of this summer examining the implications of this prayer and it is our delight to be able to turn to it one final time. It's always with a bit of sadness to move on and recognize that you're leaving a passage behind, a passage with great implications, to realize that it's time to move on. Today we take our final look at Matthew 6:9-15. Beginning in verse 9, Matthew 6, Jesus said,

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.' 14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Now here in this prayer, the Lord is teaching his disciples about what prayer is. It's presupposing that someone has actually been converted to the Lord Jesus Christ; that someone has recognized their sin; that now on the other side of the cross, someone has recognized that Christ died for them on the cross, he died to pay the price for their sins, that the Father raised him again to show that he had accepted the sacrifice of Christ; and that it is only through faith in Christ, a forsaking of self, a forsaking of the world and embracing Christ, that any person can be saved and reconciled to God. What Christ is giving us here is the pattern of prayer that is for those who have turned to him in that way. And what do we see in this? Well, there are so many different ways that you could think about this prayer and approach it, but ultimately as we go into this final section of it here this morning, what I would want you to see is this: that this is a prayer that reflects a profound humility of soul. A profound humility of soul. This is not a prayer to be taken lightly onto the lips of those who are not redeemed. This is not a prayer to be casually chanted in a liturgy that is repeated week after week after week without any thought being put into it. We need to stop and think about the significance of what this prayer is saying and what it is communicating to us and, indeed, what the very act of prayer is at its very essence.

Prayer in its essence is an act of humility. It is an act of a lesser one coming to a greater one. It is the act of a creature coming to its Creator. It is the act of one who knows that he has been given life by God and is now coming to the one who graciously bestowed that gift of life. It is an act of one coming in dependence, one who says, "Father, give me my daily bread. Father, I am dependent upon you for my mere existence." It is the opposite of the spirit of the age, the spirit of the world that would congratulate a self-made man, one who would boast in his accomplishments and one who would call attention to himself and say, "Look at me and look at what I have done." True prayer is the absolute opposite of that. It is the act of a creature coming to his Creator and in the section of this prayer that we're going to look at now, beloved, what you're going to see is that it is an act of a sinner approaching his Redeemer, a sinner approaching his Savior.

So there are multiple layers of humility that are assumed and woven throughout this prayer. "I come as one who has been made to the one who made me. I come as a sinner to the one whose law I have violated in need of grace, in need of forgiveness." And going even further to that which would most attack our sense of self-sufficiency, "I come as one who is vulnerable to forces beyond my control." Now, beloved, that is the spirit of prayer that our Lord is teaching us and cultivating in us and so we must see not only the words which Jesus teaches but the spirit of prayer, the attitude of heart, the attitude of mind, the disposition of life that would drive us to pray in this manner. So Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'" "God, as I come to you, my heavenly Father, as I come to you, I start with you and your glory. That is far more important than anything pertaining to my life. So I speak first to who you are, I address you, I address your will, I address your kingdom, and I seek that before any thought of my own comes to my mind, any thought about my own life and circumstances and desires. Father, you are preeminent in my heart and it's reflected in the way that I pray. I want you to be glorified. I want your will to be done. I want your kingdom to come and that matters to me transcendently above all else. That's why I ask it first, Lord," is the spirit that we're taught in this prayer. Then as we saw last week, we come in a spirit of dependence. Look at verse 11, "Give us this day our daily bread." "Father, I come to you dependently asking you to provide for everything that I need in life. And Father, I do it not in a spirit that I deserve this, not that I demand this as an entitlement, I ask it as a gift of your grace. You are my Father. I ask it. I appeal to the love of my Father to provide for me. And Father, I have to ask for it in a spirit of asking for grace because here I am, a sinner who has fallen short of your glory, who has rebelled against you," as we see in the passage to come. So there is just this profound sense of humility that marks it all out for us that informs the way that we pray, and if we keep that in mind as we go into these final four verses, it will serve us well as we think about how it is that we are to approach our God.

Last week we saw his teaching on prayer and our physical needs, this morning we're going to see what our Lord has to say about praying about our spiritual needs and you can break this down into two component parts, I believe. First of all, Jesus teaches us to be mindful of praying for pardon from our sin. Pardon from our sin. Secondly, as we will see, protection from Satan, our adversary. Pardon from sin and protection from Satan and woven into all of this, my brothers and sisters in Christ, woven into all of this is a spirit of

utter denial of self, an utter denial of merit, an utter denial of entitlement. You see, it's when you start to embrace deeply your position as one who has been created and you embrace deeply that you are one who is sinful, only then can the true spirit of prayer that is expressed here in Matthew 6 ever begin to flow from your heart. Jesus isn't simply teaching you words to say and recite. I know I'm repeating myself but this is the last opportunity I have to say it here in this context anyway. He's not simply giving you words to recite, he's teaching you the way that you should think about yourself in the presence of God. And fundamental to that, as we kind of look at this in an overview way before we get to the text itself, fundamental to that is recognizing and embracing and freely confessing before God and before men that you are a sinner who has fallen short of the glory of God, there is nothing good in your heart, you have never done an independent act of good that would merit any favor from God whatsoever. That is the starting point. You are starting from a position of demerit and a position of need of grace from God when you approach him and this is fundamental to your life experience.

What does the opposite of that look like? What would be a symptom of not having an attitude like that? You say, "Well, you know, I prayed to receive Christ 20 years ago and so I know I'm a Christian." Well, okay, we've dealt with that so many times that a single time prayer that doesn't impact your life and mind is not an indication that you have been saved. We're all on the same page on that, right? Good. I'm glad to hear that. An attitude of resentment in life is contrary to one who says, "I'm in need of grace." One who says, "I'm entitled to this and I'm angry because I didn't get that and I'm mad at the world because my life has not gone the way that I want," is coming from a spirit of one who is self-righteous and thinks that they deserve certain things out of life and ultimately believe that they are entitled to certain things from God. That is absolutely contrary to the Spirit of what true Christianity is. True Christianity is found in the spirit of Luke 18 where the tax gatherer said, "Lord, be merciful to me, the sinner." The one who was pounding his chest to give physical relief to the tension in his soul. "God, I am a sinner who has violated your law. I am guilty before you. My conscience condemns me. There is no human relief to the troubles of my soul. And so I come not because I deserve anything from you, Lord, I come asking for grace for undeserved favor, for mercy from the hand of you because, Father, I know I don't deserve it on my own."

That is the fundamental spirit of what it means to be a Christian, a turning from self, a rejection of sin, and a call to the mercy of God as he has expressed it in our Lord Jesus Christ. And if that isn't somewhere in your heart and if you're not more overwhelmed with your sin against God than the sins that you think other people have committed against you, you really need to examine whether you're a Christian or not because Christianity is first and foremost a vertical perspective, a perspective on who you are in your individual responsibility, what you have done to violate God. You have not loved him with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind as he has commanded. You have not glorified him perfectly in your life. You have sinned against him in your thoughts, words and actions and until that is fundamentally secure in your mind and established in your thinking that if you are to be with God at all, it will be as a result of his grace, not of your deserving, no matter what else you've heard about the Bible or whatever has come out of your mouth in prayer in the past, if that's not fundamental to your thinking and

disposition, beloved, you haven't entered into Lesson 1 of Christianity 101. A bitter heart, as we're going to see, is absolutely fundamental to true Christianity. A resentful spirit, an ongoing anger at life and an ongoing bitterness and a fundamental, "I didn't get what I wanted, not only am I miserable, I'm going to make everybody miserable around me," that is absolutely foreign to the spirit of true Christianity. So these things search our hearts at a very great and profound level.

So, first of all, Jesus teaches us as his disciples to ask for pardon from sin. Let's look at verse 12 with me here. Matthew 6:12,

12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Scripture teaches in Romans 3 that there is no one righteous, not even one, that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and so as we've already established here this morning, salvation is a gift received through faith in Christ, not a reward for your good behavior. That's very essential to understand just as a fundamental matter. Now as we address believers from God's word now, here's what you and I have to remember as well: Scripture teaches us as believers that we ourselves sin as we go through our lives. James 3 says that we all stumble in many ways. In many ways. I like to say that I know a lot about you simply from reading my Bible. I know that you sin in many ways in your life. I may not know the details but I know that you struggle with sin, that angry words come out of your mouth, and that other things that you would be ashamed to have known on a Sunday morning when the people of God gather together. I get that. I also like to say that if you read your Bible, you know a lot about me too because it goes both ways. We're all humbled by our sinfulness. We're all humbled and convicted by what Scripture exposes about the reality of our hearts.

So the question here is not whether you sin, Scripture tells us that and Scripture cannot be violated. It's not whether you sin at all that we're dealing with. That's not the question. The question is what do you do with it when you do? How do you respond to God when you find yourself in sin? And here in Matthew 6:12, Jesus teaches us what to do. He teaches us to go to our heavenly Father and to pray in this spirit, look at verse 12 with me again, "Father, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." He's picturing sin as a debt. What is a debt except that it is something that you owe to someone else. You as you go through your Christian life, you as you walk through life, you owe God your obedience. He is entitled to obedience and as a Christian, he is doubly entitled to your obedience. He is entitled to your obedience because he is your Creator and a creature owes to its Creator obedience and gratitude and worship as the one who has given him life. For us as Christians, we owe our obedience in a double way as our Redeemer, as our Savior. He has a double claim on our lives. He created us and he redeemed us. He made us, he shed his blood at Calvary in order to save us from our sin and guilt and with those dual obligations running toward God, we still fall short. We still stumble in many ways, Scripture says. Well, what do we do with that? And here Jesus says you go to God and you confess it freely before him and you say, "God, I'm asking you to release the debt, to forgive the debt that I have against you. It's my debt to you. You hold the deed to it, as it were. It is in your power, it is your prerogative, I'm asking

you in humility to forgive me of my debt of sin against you." What this confession is doing is this: it is a confession that is seeking forgiveness in your daily life as a Christian.

There are those who have taught from time to time that Christians should not confess their sins, after all, Christ paid for all of our sins once for all at the cross and therefore we should not confess sin, that it is not something that we should do. They frame it as though it were a diminishment of our trust in the ultimate sacrifice that Christ made. The only problem with that is that that's not what Jesus said; that that is not the teaching of Scripture at all.

Why do we confess our sins if we've already been forgiven fully through faith in Christ? We confess them for a couple of reasons, you could say. First of all, we confess our sins in order to cleanse our conscience. If you have any sensitivity to sin, you know something of what it's like to have, "Oh, how did I say that? How did I do that? That was wrong. I should not have done that. That was against Scripture. It was a violation of love to someone else and here I am and that is what I've done and I can't deny it." Well, where do you find relief for your conscience from that? You go back to the cross, you go back to Christ, you go back to your heavenly Father and you say, "Father, forgive me of this sin. I know that Christ has died and paid the price but here I am, Father, in my daily life I find that there is still dirt clinging to me. I ask you to wash it away and cleanse my conscience from that." It also allows the restoration of joy of your fellowship with your Father. You say, "Father, I strayed here. I want to be back in a right frame of mind before you and a right frame of life. Father, forgive my debts so that that could be the reality. Straighten what I have made crooked. Father, mend what I have broken."

So you call out to God in that way and you do this consistently over time. You do this as a pattern of life. Why? So that you – oh, beloved, this would change so much for so many people – so that you do not get comfortable with sin; so that you do not get used to your foul mouth; so that you do not get used to your hard and bitter heart; so that you do not accept it as though that were an acceptable way of Christian living and you remind yourself time and again, "Father, I have sinned against you. I soften my heart before you. I confess what I have done wrong and I ask you to cleanse me from this guilt."

Now, let's be clear about something: once a person has truly been redeemed and truly been saved, there is a sense in which God never holds your sins against you ever again. His eternal wrath has been fully turned away by Christ. His judgment has been completely satisfied. His wrath has been poured out on our Lord Jesus at the cross. So we're not in danger as Christians of experiencing that eternal wrath ever again. God will not bring it up in that manner. But as we walk through this life, we still need to deal with the remnants of sin that pop up in our lives. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins," and it's the idea of an ongoing pattern of sin, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So what is Christ teaching us here among other things? He's teaching you this: he is teaching you to walk in a careful manner, to examine your life as you are going through, as you're walking through life, to humbly examine yourself to see if you fall short of what God would have you to be as measured by his word, and when you find that you do – and you

will – you bring it to God in confession. "God, wash me of this. Cleanse me from this. Restore my joy. Restore my clear mind." And in that way, beloved, you honor God, you glorify God even in your confession of sin, recognizing his authority, recognizing his prerogative and priority over your life, recognizing the authority of his word. "Father, I have violated this. I ask you to forgive me once more and restore me to that fellowship that I have violated."

Now, let's get even more personal here in verse 12. Look at it again with me, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Boy, there's a showstopper. There is a showstopper. "God, forgive me after the pattern in which I have forgiven others in my life," is the nature of the prayer. Why does he tell us to pray that way? Is the idea that, "God, I forgave Jim and now you need to forgive me. I forgave one, you owe me one." Of course not. That's not what he is saying at all. But why does he tell us to pray, "God, forgive our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"? Oh beloved, beloved, what this does fundamentally is it guarantees the integrity of your confession. It guarantees the integrity of the request for forgiveness. Mark it, mark it, mark it, mark it, mark it: the person, the man or woman who understands that God has forgiven his eternal debt at Calvary, the person who understands that is a person who will freely, gladly extend forgiveness to others when they sin against them on a horizontal way. This is fundamental to Christianity. The person who understands that God has forgiven him, the person who has truly been forgiven is someone who will gladly extend forgiveness to others.

Look at verses 14 and 15 where Jesus amplifies this aspect of the prayer. He says in verse 14,

14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

You see, a true Christian is willing to forgive because he understands a greater debt has been forgiven of him. Do you understand your sin against God in that perspective? We talk about this from God's word in so many different ways because sooner or later I trust that the Spirit of God will shine a light on your darkened mind and on your darkened heart if you've never really truly come to Christ and so we have to talk about this in so many different ways in order to make it plain.

Now, we could say it this way: I understand, I'll assume that as you have gone through life that people have sinned against you, people have wronged you, they have cheated you, they have hurt you, they have abused you, they took advantage of you in a vulnerable time in your life. Well, we'll just assume that as being true. We are walking through a fallen world, it's inevitable that it takes place, and we say that with a sense of compassion and weeping with those who weep and a sense of sympathy, acknowledging that those things were wrong when they happened to you. Beloved, you've got to get past that if you're going to be right with God. You've got to get past that. You've got to realize something more significant, that no matter how great a human sin against you may have

been in the past, you must understand that your sins against God are a matter of eternal consequence, that there is eternal guilt attached to that and your sins against God are greater in cost, greater in severity, greater in deserving judgment than anything that anyone has done to you. You must start from that perspective. Look, God is eternal, God is holy, God is your Creator. Christ died for sinners. God has revealed his moral law and you haven't kept it and to violate an eternal vertical relationship brings eternal guilt that transcends the human consequences of a human violation of a human relationship. You must understand, you must have a perspective on your own life and on your own sin that no matter what someone has done to me, my right-thinking starts with, "I have sinned against a holy and eternal God," and that's where my thinking begins so that, so that, so that, so that ultimately you become more concerned about the way that you have sinned against God than the way anyone has sinned against you. Only then are you bringing a God-centered perspective to your own sin. It's such a waste of time to be talking about this eternal holy violation of the character of God and for someone to say, "But you don't know what So-and-so did to me," to which I respond, look, we're not talking about human elements here. We're talking about you alone before a holy God. Have you perfectly obeyed him in every thought, word and deed? No? Then let's start there. Let's deal with that. That's the point of the Gospel and the one who is praying in accordance with what Jesus teaches here in Matthew 6 realizes, "God, the real issue here is my guilt before you and so I am asking you to forgive me. And incidentally, Father, I release the things that I have held against others in myself."

Now, this is painful but necessary to think about. You know, there were so many times, I think I have worked through most of them, not aware of any that I haven't, I was such a bitter and angry young man before I came to Christ and I was mad at him and I was mad at her and I was mad at dad and I was mad at the world. A bitter and angry young man and Christ saved me and over time I started to have a new perspective on all of those things and I realized, you know, when I was mad at her, do you know what the reality of it was? My own sin contributed far more than anything else to that. I look at my dad, "Oh, I'm mad at my dad!" I'd be glad to have him alive just to be mad at him one more time. Mad at my dad, dad did this, dad did that, dad disappointed me, blah blah blah blah. You've heard it from 10 million people, haven't you? Do you know what the truth is? The truth of the matter was I did not honor my father like he deserved. That was the truth of the matter. I was a distant resentful son and I gladly said bad things about him and throughout the course of my youth. That was the real problem, it was my sin against him, not his against me which was ultimately my sin against God, not his failures or shortcomings toward me.

Over and over again you go back in life and you realize, if you're thinking about it from a vertical perspective, you realize my sin is what really contributed to the cause here. The common thread to all of my bad relationships, all of the things that caused me pain and regret and anger in the past, do you know what the common thread of every one of them was? Me. I was the common thread to all of my bad relationships. It's true of you too. You've got a lot of bad relationships? You start by looking in the mirror. Start by looking up, looking at the mirror and take responsibility for your own sin, confess it before the Lord in a sincere brokenness that says, "Father, yes, I contributed to this. In fact, the truth

of the matter is it was much more my fault than someone else's." Before you ever start casting accusations at others, especially those close to you, don't do that. It's not godly. It's not right. Jesus said, "Why do you try to take the speck out of your brother's eye and not pay attention to the log that is in your own eye?" Look at there. He says it. We're going to see this again in chapter 7, Matthew 7:3, you don't even have to turn the page probably, and I hear pages turning. "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

You know, I would give anything on a human level, I would give anything to go back 30 years and practice that with my father and say, "Dad, for all of the difficult things that were in our relationship, I take the blame. It was me." I'd give anything to go back and do that. You see, beloved, when you are convicted of your own sin in your heart, then you're not so quick to point fingers at others. And sometimes that resentment is a picture of someone that has never been saved, sometimes it's a picture of someone who in their early days of Christian living need to start to realize the implications of the Gospel and how it starts to fundamentally turn your perspective on everything. On everything. And rather than casting blame, you want to accept the blame. This is pretty personal, isn't it? This is where God's word takes us. This is why we study God's word carefully, it's because it exposes our hearts, it identifies sin and it shows us the path forward. Here is the path forward in verse 12, "Father, forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Father, all of this multiplied stuff, I write it off. I just write the debt off. I forgive them. I'm not going to hold it against them. I'm not going to be bitter anymore. Now Father, I ask you to be gracious to me."

Here's another way to look at it, another angle for you to consider it, beloved, as you think about the human things that have ticked you off in the past. Here's the way that you want to think about it, here's the way that you want to think about it: how gracious do you want God to be to you? Matthew 7:2 says, "in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." Do you want to be stingy in your forgiveness and reconciling spirit in relationships with others? Is that the measure in which you want God to do with you? Think carefully about this, beloved, the consequences of this are vast. You want to be hard and demanding on all of your relationships and, "I'm going to get the last drop out of this," is that the spirit with which you want God to deal with you? Is that the spirit in which – you're a Christian, let's say, is that the spirit with which God has dealt with you? Was he hard and demanding when Christ spilled his blood on the cross? Was he hard and demanding when Christ said, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing"? Was he hard and demanding when he loved you first when you had no designs on him? Then the answers to all of those questions are obvious, aren't they, for the true Christian? They are obvious, aren't they? Well, if it's obvious, then we just have to realize that that spills over into the way that we deal with others and it changes our whole perspective on the way that we feel like we have been wronged.

Look at Ephesians 4. As you're turning to Ephesians 4, you might remember in the Gospels Jesus told the parable of the one who went to the king and said, "King, forgive me of my great great debt." The king forgave him and then that man who had been forgiven went out and went to somebody who owed him about three months wages and said, "Pay back what you owe!" and Jesus utterly condemned the spirit of it all. You see, the New Testament knows nothing about a hardhearted Christian, a hard spirited Christian who is unwilling to forgive others in their lives.

Ephesians 4, I said, verse 31, where the Apostle Paul speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit said, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." The spirit of the New Testament is this: you need forgiveness for your sins. If God has forgiven your sins, then you should be willing freely to forgive those who have wronged you because God has forgiven you a greater debt than anyone owes to you and that is the spirit of true Christianity. A true Christian is willing to forgive others and to be reconciled. Beloved, a forgiving heart is a mark – mark it, mark it, mark it, and that seems to be the word for the day – a forgiving heart is a mark that you truly know God as your Father and it shows that there is no barrier in you, in your attitude, to you asking for forgiveness from him. "Father, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." There should not be this big disparity in life.

Now, one final word about that as you turn back to Matthew 6: God will not take away true salvation from a believer. He will not revoke his eternal gift in Christ if you are in him. But beloved, as you're thinking about this, understand this, Hebrews 12 teaches that God does discipline us when we sin and if you are unwilling to forgive someone in your life, you're in Christ but you're unwilling to forgive, you must understand that you can expect the chastening hand of God to come upon your life because he will not tolerate as a forgiving God, as the one whom our lovely Lord Jesus Christ offered himself up at the cross, spilled his blood, took the wrath of God in his body, took our sins in his body and paid the price that we could be forgiven of all of our sins against him, that gracious and merciful God won't tolerate one of his children getting settled into patterns of resentment and bitterness. And if that's you, then you need to understand that if you're not willing to deal with this, you can expect the chastening hand of God to come upon you. For some of you, that may be an explanation for why you have so many difficulties in your relationships. At root, you're just a bitter angry person unwilling to extend the forgiveness to others that you claim that you have received from God. I'm just being candid here. We're just being biblical. I need to hear this as much as you do.

So we need pardon from sin. We come to God and we ask for it with a sincerity of spirit that has examined our own life and relationships and says, "God, it may be imperfect but I'm trying to forgive the others around me. I want to let that stuff go. I accept my responsibility in the broken relationship. Now Father, deal with me in mercy according to the infinite mercy that was shed at Calvary." Okay? We could almost stop right there and as we pivot from that, we just ask God to seal it to our hearts and to carry it out in our lives.

The second point for this morning: protection from Satan. Protection from Satan and if you've been with us on Tuesdays and so many of you have, I'm very excited and happy about that, the past two Tuesdays as we have been studying systematic theology, we've looked at the biblical teaching on Satan and on demons and we've seen that we're in the midst of a very real battle against very wicked and powerful spiritual foes that we cannot see; that Satan designs to wreak havoc upon us, to lead us into deception, to disrupt relationships, to bring division into the church, to bring us into sin and temptation that would wreck our lives, destroy our testimony and leave us as impotent witnesses for Christ. That's part of his desire. Well, Jesus takes that into account as he teaches us here in Matthew 6:13. He says,

13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

And that word "evil" has the article in the Greek. It could be translated "the evil one." Of all the elements of the Lord's prayer, I would venture to say, my friends, that this is the one that we neglect the most. It is a symptom of our self-sufficiency and our misplaced self-confidence that we live this way without this being one of our conscious elements of prayer.

Matthew 6:13, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." What is this prayer teaching us? Well, in an overview fashion, Sinclair Ferguson says this, and I quote, he says, "The final petition of the Lord's prayer assumes that the children of God realize their weakness and vulnerability and therefore seek the protection of God from evil." This prayer is a recognition, "God, there is an evil world around me, there is an invisible world of demonic forces that are arrayed against your people that I cannot see, smell or touch. God, I know from your word that that realm exists, I know that it's a threat and it's hostile to me. I can't see it, God, I ask you again today to protect me from it. Not only that, I live in a world environment that is designed to promote sin and temptation in my life. God, I ask you to protect me from that evil. God, I recognize that there is evil within me," the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7, "there is evil in me, the one who wishes to do good. God, protect me from that as well." And what Jesus has done here if you think about it is this, everybody I know is paying attention so that's good, what Jesus has done here is this: now that we have confessed the sins of our past whether immediate or more distant, now that we have confessed our past sins, we pivot and look to the future and we say, "God, I've dealt with sin up to now, now I am asking you as I go forward, protect me from evil, protect me from that which would cause me to stumble." So we ask God to do that.

Now, beloved, look, do you think that your heavenly Father is disposed to answer that prayer in a favorable way? If God saved us in order to conform us to the image of Christ, if he saved us and delivered us from the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of his beloved Son, isn't it obvious that God is more than willing and ready and able to protect us in response to this kind of praying? "God, protect me from evil. Protect me from the evil one." Of course it's a prayer that God wants to answer. Of course it's one that we can look to with confidence that God would respond.

And what's going on here? Well, this prayer is a recognition that God orders and orchestrates our circumstances. He is the God of providential control and some situations are more prone to expose us to temptation than others so this prayer comes from someone who in humility, going back to what I said at the start, someone who in humility does not trust himself. "Lord, I am prone to wander. Lead me so that I can maintain a righteous life. But Lord, if you allow temptation to come, deliver me in the midst of it. Strengthen me so that I could continue to live righteously before you because, God, you are holy, God, I seek your glory and I realize I glorify you through a life that honors you rather than sins against you. So just keep me from temptation because, Father, if temptation comes, I know what I'm likely to do, I'm likely to fall, I'm likely to sin, and so, Lord, just keep the temptation away from me so that I never go there, so that I never violate you in sin."

Now, you see a reflection of this, of how this works in Matthew 4. You might say, "Well, Scripture says in James 1 God doesn't tempt anyone. Why do we even need to pray this?" Well, look at Matthew 4:1 and you can see the leading of God, how that sometimes works out. Matthew 4:1, "Jesus was led up by the Spirit," by the Holy Spirit, "into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him," and you know how the story unfolds from there. The Spirit led Christ into the circumstances but it was Satan who did the tempting. So it's an asking of God, this prayer is, this element of the Lord's prayer is, "God, as you lead my life, I pray that you would lead me into ways that would protect me from temptation." Notice it is not God doing the tempting. It was not God but Satan who tempted our Lord. It was not God but Satan who tempted Job in the Old Testament. It was not God but Satan who demanded to sift Peter as wheat. So we recognize that there are these evil forces that are arrayed against us and we're just saying, "God, protect me from them because if you don't, I will fall. God, I need help from you in order to live the life that you would have me to do."

This prayer is the opposite of Peter's pride prior to the cross. Look at John 13, beginning in verse 36. Christ had told his disciples that his departure was near. "Simon Peter said," in verse 36, John 13:36, "Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, where are You going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.' Peter said to Him, 'Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.'" You know what happened. Soon after that, a servant girl said, "Peter, weren't you one of the men with Jesus?" He said, "No, no, no!" and he denied it with curses three times. So soon after he had boasted, "Lord, I'll lay down my life for you," Peter wouldn't even be honest before a servant girl who asked him about his association with Christ. Peter was full of pride as he boasted about his willingness to follow after Christ.

Now, I daresay that we have some in our room who are filled with that kind of pride of Peter. You think you stand strong for Christ, you think you've got it all together, you've got your routine down and you keep your devotions and blah blah blah. We should never think that we are too big, too big, too righteous to fail and to fail miserably. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not

fall." And it is sometimes the mark of younger Christians, a little bit too full of themselves and a little bit too empty on life experience, to think that, "I can handle it. Whatever the Lord brings, bring it on!"

I remember praying, again as a young Christian this time many many years ago, so foolish, so ignorant, just ashamed to say this before you but it's the mark sometimes of an overzealous young Christian, "Lord, I want to be closer to you. Bring some trials that will do that for me." And the Lord brought a trial that lasted about seven years that nearly broke me, taught me never to pray that way again. Do you know what the mark of a prayer like that is, "Lord, bring the trials," that sounds really spiritual, that sounds like someone who is really earnest, the only thing that that prayer is is just full of pride. "God, bring the trials because I can handle it." The biblical approach to thinking about these things is this, "Lord, if I enter into a very difficult trial, I am likely to fail, I am likely to doubt you, I am likely to sin against you because I am so weak and I am so prone to wander and sin against you." So the biblical approach is not, "Lord, bring it on! Lord, send Satan after me because I can handle it." Jesus teaches us just the opposite. "Lord, keep it away. Keep me away from it. I'm so weak. I'll fall in a moment, Lord, if you don't continue to strengthen me. And Lord, what really matters to me," now we are praying the way that Jesus would teach us to pray, "Lord, what really matters to me is I want to be close to you. I want to walk with you. I want to be intimate and obedient and submissive to you. And Lord, if trials come, it's going to bring out the worst in me. So God, I ask you in your grace to protect me from evil and if you see fit to allow it then, Lord, I ask you to strengthen and help me in the midst of it because, Lord, I need your protection if I'm going to succeed."

Another writer said this and I quote, "As Christians grow in holy living, they sense their own inherent moral weakness and rejoice that whatever virtue they possess flourishes as the fruit of the Spirit. When did you last pray, 'Father, protect me from evil'? Is it not a mark of spiritual carelessness and insensitivity to the spiritual dimensions of human existence when such prayers are neglected?" We are far too self-confident. The one who has seen his sins says, "Lord, protect me from evil." The one who has seen something about the biblical teaching on Satan and demon says, "Lord, that is frightening. Protect me. Help me. Keep me."

And what this passage has taught us is, among other things is this: Christ addresses, Christ invites, as we saw last week, Christ invites us to make our physical existence an aspect of our prayer life. "Father, give us this day our daily bread." But as we follow Christ in the school of prayer, as we follow Christ through the Sermon on the Mount, we start to realize that God's real concern is much broader than that and it goes to the spiritual realm of our existence. You are more than the physical creature that you are. God graciously provides for our bodily needs and for the needs of this life but, beloved, you must understand and cultivate it into your mindset, cultivate it into your praying that there is a whole spiritual dimension to life that is the proper subject of my prayer and attention. "God, forgive me of my sins. God, protect me from evil." You can have a booming business and be spiritually bankrupt, right? You can have everything that you need and a freezer stocked and a 401(k) bursting at the seams with the goodness of the

American capitalistic system and be a beggar before God. Jesus teaches us not to think about life on simply the superficial physical realm but to think about it vertically, to think about it in humility and say, "God, I appeal to you for forgiveness, for pardon from sin and for protection from Satan because, Lord, that is where the real realm of existence is taking place."

Some manuscripts, go back to Matthew 6 as we draw this to a conclusion here. In the NASB you will see in brackets at the end of verse 13,

Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

I believe the ESV simply omits that. The difference is in the fact that the oldest, the best manuscripts don't all include that phrase and so that's why it's put in brackets, probably not part of what Jesus originally taught at this time. The words are true, we are simply saying that the evidence is that Jesus probably didn't say it as part of his teaching right here.

With that said, those notes provide a closing note of worship and submission that are quite appropriate for us in prayer and let's just walk through it one last time. It's hard for me to pivot away from this prayer and think about next week. "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." God, your glory, your will, your kingdom, that's what matters to me. Verse 11, "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Father, my physical and spiritual existence, I look to you in dependence. I ask for your provision. I ask for your mercy. I ask for your protection. Protect me like a mother hen brings the chicks under her wing. God, deal with me that way. Why? Why do I pray this way? Father, I remember this is all about you ultimately. This is about your kingdom. This is about your power. This is about your glory. It all belongs to you and so I lay myself before you as an agent having sought your glory as I have prayed, as one of your children saying, "Father, help me through this life that you have given to me as I pray. It all belongs to you and therefore, Father, in that spirit of worship, I pray."

Brothers, sisters in Christ, whether you're walking through pleasant or difficult circumstances in the days to come, remember this simple thought: if down the road as inevitably comes you are struck by unexpected circumstances that leave you disoriented, "I did not see this coming, I don't know what to do," you don't have to sort all of that out in the moment, just remember this simple thought, that in the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9 through 15, Christ has given you a pattern of prayer that you can follow with confidence no matter what life brings to you; that in this prayer Christ has given you the spirit, the themes of prayer that allow you to interact with God knowing that your prayers carry the promise of his blessing and his answer because this is how Christ has commanded us to pray. "Pray then in this way. Father, in these circumstances, I seek your glory. Father, in these circumstances, I seek your provision."

It's really not complicated. It's really not complicated and the blessed assurance that comes to our heart in light of this is that God answers us when we pray according to his will. Isn't that sweet? Isn't that wonderful to know, not only that Christ has reconciled us to God through his blood but that he has given us a pattern of prayer that assures us of being well received in the throne room of the universe when offered in the name of our Lord. God answers us when we pray according to his will. Christ has showed us how to pray in a way that is attainable and plain and waiting for you to do.

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, our dear Lord, but deliver us from evil. All these things we pray because Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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