

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are currently discussing the doctrine of sanctification and, more particularly, the means of grace. We have been discussing the topic of prayer for some time and are in the midst of examining the Lord's Prayer. Dr. Spencer, would you like me to begin by reading the Lord's Prayer again?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that would be good.

Marc Roby: Very well, we are examining the version found in Matthew 6:9-13 which reads, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Spencer: That's wonderful. We have covered the preface and the first five petitions, so it is time to look at the sixth and last, petition, which is, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Marc Roby: I know that some versions of the Bible, including both the King James Version and the English Standard Version, just say deliver us from *evil*, rather than the *evil one*. Can you explain the difference?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, either translation is possible, although I think the evil one is more likely<sup>2</sup>. The Greek word is in the genitive case and the ending can be either masculine or neuter, but there is a definite article in front of the word, which makes the evil one more likely.

The most important thing to say about this though, is that it doesn't really matter which translation we use. We are told in 1 John 5:19 that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one." We noted a few weeks ago in Session 207 that there are only two kingdoms on earth; the kingdom of Satan, which is temporary and contingent, and the kingdom of God, which is eternal and absolute in its sovereignty. Even the evil that comes from within us is the vestige of our being in Satan's kingdom prior to our conversion, so, in a sense, everything that is opposed to God and his kingdom – in other words all evil – comes, ultimately, from Satan. Therefore, whether we say deliver us from evil or deliver us from the evil one doesn't make much difference.

Marc Roby: Alright, that is a reasonable explanation, and it is a very minor point anyway. What would you like to say about this petition?

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<sup>2</sup> e.g., see William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd Ed., Zondervan, 2009, Exegetical Insight on pg. 64

Dr. Spencer: I want to start by making sure we notice a subtle point. The prayer asks that God not *lead* us into temptation. It does *not* ask God to not tempt us, which would be an unbiblical request. We read in James 1:13-14, “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.”

**Marc Roby: You’re right, that is a very subtle difference. God may lead us into situations that bring temptation, but he himself does not tempt us.**

Dr. Spencer: While it is a subtle difference, it is nevertheless a critical difference. God has ordained everything that comes to pass, including human sin and the sins of the devil and his demons. God is absolutely sovereign and can prevent any individual sin at any time. We are told in Psalm 135:6 that “The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.” And even though he is sovereign *over* sin, he is never the direct *cause* of sin. There is great mystery surrounding this distinction but it is, nonetheless a critically important distinction. We can never blame God for sin.

**Marc Roby: We see God’s sovereignty over sin very clearly in the book of Job. When God held up Job before Satan as one who is blameless and upright, one who fears God and shuns evil, we read in Job 1:9-10 that Satan replied, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has?” We can obviously draw the conclusion that Satan was unable to bring Job trouble prior to this time.**

Dr. Spencer: That is clearly the case, yes. But then God does give Satan permission to bring Job trouble, although he sets limits on what Satan can do. There is a drastic difference though between God’s objective in allowing these troubles and the devil’s objective in causing them. God was making his own glory manifest and was proving Job to be upright and blameless. But Satan was trying to destroy Job and discredit God. We read in John 10:10 that Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

**Marc Roby: And, of course, Satan is the thief. He is trying to steal God’s glory and destroy his people.**

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. We are also told in John 8:44 that the devil, “was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

**Marc Roby: I don’t think he is a pleasant fellow to be around.**

Dr. Spencer: Most definitely not.

**Marc Roby: And the apostle Peter also gives us a stern warning about the devil. In 1 Peter 5:8 he commanded, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”**

Dr. Spencer: That is an important warning. We have real, powerful enemies in Satan and his demons. Many modern professing Christians seem to think that Satan is an old fairy tale or

something, but he is very real and we need to be self-controlled and alert or we will suffer needlessly. We are like soldiers in battle. If we are inattentive and negligent, we can suffer great harm, even death. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us and empower us if we want to be victorious over the three enemies every Christian has; the flesh, the world and the devil.

**Marc Roby: And all three of these enemies, ultimately derive from the devil as you argued a few minutes ago.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they do. But getting back to the illustration from Job again, the purposes of God are radically different than the purposes of Satan. God *does* allow his people to be tempted at times, but his reasons for doing so are entirely good. He wants us to grow in our faith, which requires that it be tested.

**Marc Roby: I have never met a student who actually enjoys tests.**

Dr. Spencer: Nor have I. But if we aren't tested, we can never be sure that we have really learned something well enough to put it into practice. But if we have been tested and passed the test, we are encouraged and strengthened. Paul wrote in Romans 5:3-5 that we "rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

**Marc Roby: And the sufferings that God ordains for us serve the purpose of building us up in our faith.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they do. God builds us up and he purifies us through suffering. This idea is clear throughout the Old Testament and is carried on into the New Testament. God doesn't bring trouble for no reason. But sometimes the very same trial is intended both as judgment for some people and as a way of purifying others.

For example, the prophet Isaiah begins his prophecy by presenting God's charge against his people. He tells them they have forsaken God, they have rebelled against him. And then we come to the well-known passage in Isaiah 1:18-20, where we read, "'Come now, let us reason together,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

**Marc Roby: That passage is both comforting and terrifying in equal measure.**

Dr. Spencer: That's true, but there are two different groups of people being spoken to. The difference is not that one group is righteous and the other is not, they are all sinners. The difference is in God's attitude toward them. He chose to save some, but not all, and so the horrible destruction being foretold against Jerusalem will have an opposite effect on these two groups of people. First, there are those who continue to resist God and rebel against him; they will be devoured. But then there are those who are willing and obedient; their sins will be made as white as snow, in other words, they will be saved.

**Marc Roby: It is foolish in the extreme to resist and rebel against God. You can't possibly win.**

Dr. Spencer: It is foolish, but most people do it. And the only reason Christians don't continue to do it is that we have been born again. That is the only reason we are willing and obedient. It is God's work of regeneration that produces the difference. We aren't born again because we are willing and obedient, we are willing and obedient because we have been born again.

**Marc Roby: Yes, you can't put the cart before the horse.**

Dr. Spencer: That's one way to put it. We need to be clear about the cause-and-effect relationship. But getting back to the passage in Isaiah, the prophet goes on to explain how God will bring about these opposite effects in the people. But before I read the rest of the passage, I need to explain to those listeners who may not know, that the term dross refers to the impurities in metals, like silver or gold, that form kind of a scum on the surface when you melt them.

**Marc Roby: That's not a pretty thought.**

Dr. Spencer: Impurities are never pretty, whether they are in metals or in human beings. And in Isaiah 1:25-28 God says, "I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. ... Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.' Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the LORD will perish."

**Marc Roby: Yes, I see your point. The two groups of people are clear there. The "penitent ones" will be redeemed with righteousness, but the rebels and sinners, those who forsake God, will be broken and perish.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes. The same temporal trial, in this case the destruction of Jerusalem, can bring judgment on the wicked and can purge sin for those who repent. In Isaiah 59:20 we read, "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,' declares the LORD." This Redeemer being prophesied by Isaiah is, of course, Jesus Christ. And when God said in the earlier verse that the penitent ones would be redeemed with righteousness, I think he was referring to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

**Marc Roby: The Bible makes it clear throughout that we can't be saved by our own righteousness, if for no other reason than that we have none!**

Dr. Spencer: Very true, our so-called righteousness is always tainted by sin. We are saved on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. But we are also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ as we read in Romans 8:29. That is the process of sanctification, which we have been discussing for some time now. And God uses trials and troubles as a part of that process.

**Marc Roby: Albeit not a particularly pleasant part of the process.**

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<sup>3</sup> See E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Comp., reprinted 1997, Vol. 1, pp 89-90

Dr. Spencer: No, they aren't pleasant at all. But just as lifting weights can build up physical muscle, so also, we can build up spiritual muscle by overcoming temptations. And God never tests us beyond what we are able to bear. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we read, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Marc Roby: That is a great encouragement. But it doesn't say that God will keep us from all temptations, nor does it say that he will grab us by the hand and yank us away from harm, it just says that he will provide a way out.

Dr. Spencer: And it is up to us to look for that way out and take it. And often the way to get out of temptation is to avoid it in the first place. The book of Proverbs speaks about this. In Proverbs 7:4-9 we are told, "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,' and call understanding your kinsman; they will keep you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words. At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in."

Marc Roby: Yes, that is a clear warning, the young man couldn't have been tempted if he didn't go down that street. We must think before acting and avoid temptation as far as we possibly can.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we should. Being prudent and careful in how we live is one of the prime means God provides us to avoid falling into Satan's traps. Someone with a lust for alcohol is well advised to stay out of bars for example. We must know and obey the Word of God and the more we do that, the more spiritual muscle we develop and the greater our ability to be victorious in the Christian life.

Many Christians forget that Christ himself suffered tremendously, not just on the cross.

Marc Roby: Isaiah 53:3 famously tells us that Jesus Christ, "was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering."

Dr. Spencer: And we are told in Hebrews 5:8-9 that "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him". Notice what that verse says – he became the source of eternal salvation for a certain group of people. Not for everyone, but for those who obey him.

Marc Roby: Although we must keep the cause and effect straight again. Our obedience is the *result* of our having been born again, not the *cause* of it.

Dr. Spencer: Oh, that's right. But the point I want to make here is that we must obey our Lord Jesus, even when doing so causes suffering. God is burning away the dross to conform us to Christ. We must joyfully submit to his perfect, loving lordship just as Jesus himself did when he went to the cross. James 4:7 gives us a great promise. It says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Marc Roby: Yes, that is a great promise. Satan is much more powerful than we are, but if we submit ourselves to God, doing our best to walk in obedience, God says that Satan will flee from us.

Dr. Spencer: And the promise is true. But we have to be careful, it doesn't say we won't have to fight and we won't have trouble. It just guarantees us ultimate victory. The Westminster Shorter Catechism keeps this balance. Question 106 asks, "What do we pray for in the sixth petition?"

Marc Roby: And the answer given is, "In the sixth petition, (which is, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,*) we pray, That God would either keep us from being tempted to sin, or support and deliver us when we are tempted."<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Spencer: Yes, notice the balance. We are asking God to *either* keep us from temptation, or, if it is his good purpose to allow it, we ask that he support and deliver us. In other words, that he strengthen us by his Word and Spirit to enable us to be victorious even as we go through the trial. Even Jesus prayed for strength to get through trials.

Marc Roby: Yes, we see that clearly in his prayers in the garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion. We read in Matthew 26:39 that "he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"

Dr. Spencer: And if Jesus needed to pray for help with temptation, how much more do we need to pray!

Marc Roby: I can say "amen" to that!

Dr. Spencer: One more thing I want to mention before we close for today. The first three petitions in this prayer all focus on God. And we noted before that even the fourth and fifth petitions, which are "Give us today our daily bread" and "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" are theocentric because they recognize that we are totally dependent on God for our daily needs and for forgiveness. And this sixth petition is also theocentric because it recognizes that God is sovereign over all the affairs of our lives, including any temptations, and that we need his help to walk uprightly. So, the entire prayer is truly God centered.

Marc Roby: And that is a perfect place to end for today. Let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We will do our best to answer.

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<sup>4</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012, pg. 46