

Sermon 34, Pray Like This, Pt. 9: Lead Us Not Into Temptation, Matthew 6:13a

Rev. 3:10, Bulletin verse

But let us rise and say to God, *Lead us not into temptation* — that is to say, into the evils of this world — *but deliver us from evil* which holds sway in this world.--St. Gregory of Nyssa

We are then led into temptation when such temptations befall us as we are not able to resist.--Augustine

No sooner was Christ out of the water of baptism, but he was in the fire of temptation." — Thomas Watson

"If you saw a wolf worry your child, would you not pity your child? You cannot pity it so as Christ doth tempted ones." — Thomas Watson

Outline

- I. The Nature of Temptation: A Testing
 - A. A Testing of our Grace, Gen. 22:1
 - B. An Inciting Us to Sin, Matthew 4:3
- II. The Power of Temptation: A Test We Cannot Pass Unaided
- III. The Subtlety of Temptation
 - A. It Appeals to Your Taste
 - B. It Attempts to Prevent or Pervert Duty
 - C. It Looks Pleasant
 - D. It Makes Holiness Look Ugly
 - E. It Appeals to Necessity
 - F. It Attacks Faith
- IV. The Sources of Temptation
 - A. The World
 - B. Our Flesh
 - C. The Devil
 - D. God's Providence, James 1:13
- V. The Benefits of Temptation
 - A. It Reveals Our Neediness
 - B. It Humbles Us
 - C. It Drives Us to Pray

- D. It Teaches Us to Long for Heaven
- VI. Overcoming Temptation
 - A. God's Leading Providence
 - B. God's Word and Spirit
 - C. God's Salvation
 - D. Our Efforts
 - E. Our Prayers

Proposition: Temptation tests grace and incites to sin. We are powerless against it, and so must pray for God's help in conquering it!

While I was in seminary, I heard a sermon on patience. The preacher admonished us that we should be careful about praying for patience, because God might give us something to be patient about! Then, on a roll, he added that we should be equally careful about praying for humility, because we might get humiliated, courage because we might get scared, love because we might meet some hateful people, and on and on. In fact, for every virtue this preacher could name, he could think of a way in which that virtue could and would be tested.

That sermon really spoke to me. I came away thinking, "You know, no matter what good character quality we pray for, God can give us trials that make it hard to exercise that virtue. But there is one prayer which can't be flipped around, one prayer that has no possible downside." What was that prayer? What is the only thing you can pray that doesn't leave your newfound virtue open to some kind of testing? You guessed it: "Lead us not into temptation." This, the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, has no downside. No matter how much God doesn't lead you into temptation, He can't then turn around and lead you into temptation — at least, not while still answering this prayer.

However, beyond seeing that this is the only negative petition in the Lord's prayer, the only one where you ask that something not happen, and therefore the only one with no downside, I want us to think more about what temptation is, and what it might mean to be led into it. What I hope to show you is this: temptation is incitement to sin. We are powerless against it. And so we need to pray for God's power to protect us from temptation!

I. The Nature of Temptation: A Testing

We begin by examining more deeply the nature of temptation. What is it? Well, the word in Scripture is used for both testing (what we might call a "trial") and for incitement to evil. One of these is a trial of grace; the other is a stirring up of sin. Job 7:1 in the Septuagint translation asks, "Is not man's life on earth a state of trial?" And so many of the church fathers took it. But we have to make the distinction between testing for grace and enticing to sin. Both can be called "temptation" or "trial."

A. A Testing of our Grace, Gen. 22:1

“And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am” (Gen 22:1 KJV). So the King James Version renders the first verse of Genesis 22. Why? Because in Hebrew (as in Greek), the word for “tempt” means to “test” or “try” as well as to incite to evil. But in Genesis 22, what was God trying to do? Was He trying to get Abraham to sin? No. He was testing Abraham's faith, to see how much Abraham trusted Him. Many, many of the hard and bitter things that happen to us are from the hand of our loving Father as a testing of our grace — not because He needs to know whether our grace will stand the test, but because He wants to show us (and perhaps Satan too) that our grace is real and our faith is strong.

Thus, when your child dies, that's a testing of your grace. That's a loving Father asking you if you can trust Him when you lose the most precious person, the one you love best in all the world. When your car is totaled, your bank account emptied by an identity thief, your home's peace violated by an intruder, that is God's way of testing you, trying your grace and so glorifying Himself when your grace is found to be everything that it should be.

B. An Inciting Us to Sin, Matt. 4:3

But, of course, when these trials come to us, they often seem to us tailor-made to stir up our corruptions and incite us to sin. That's generally how we think of temptation, and we are not wrong to generally think of it as *an attempt to get us to sin*. One of Satan's titles is The Tempter, and one of the things he does best is try to convince people to sin. “Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, ‘If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread’” (Mat 4:3 NKJ). That was a temptation. That was an attempt to get Jesus to sin, to get Him to stop trusting God for His food and start trusting something else — in this case, to start trusting Satan's advice.

We ask in this petition to be kept from both forms of temptation. We don't want God to leave us to try us and see what's in our heart, as He did to Hezekiah. We want Him to remain with us. Just as we don't long for the test, even in a class in which we're doing well, so we don't long for temptations, even for temptations that will demonstrate our grace to a watching world. We therefore are commanded to pray to God to keep us from temptation in general, both the testing of our grace and the inciting of our corruption.

II. The Power of Temptation: A Test We Cannot Pass Unaided

Why must we pray against temptation? Ultimately, because we are fallen humans with total weakness of will. We don't have the strength we need to endure trials, testings, and temptations — not in and of ourselves. Like Oscar Wilde, who said, “I can resist everything except temptation,” so we can resist everything . . . except temptation. When Christ told Peter that Satan wanted to have him and sift him, what did He add? “But it's okay, Peter. I know you love me and that this temptation will not be a problem for you”? No. Christ prayed for Peter not to succumb to that temptation, because without prayer, he would have succumbed. “If Peter who had true grace, and Adam who had perfect grace, could not stand against temptation, much less can any stand by the power of nature,” wrote Thomas Watson on this passage. Part of the definition of temptation, then, as it applies to fallen human beings like ourselves, is that we don't have the

wherewithal to resist it, not in ourselves, not of ourselves. Do you seriously believe that if Satan were to really go all out on you, as he did on Christ, that you would be able to say, "No thanks, Satan. Not today"? Do you imagine that you could resist the blandishments of thousands of demons working together with the strongest forces the world has to offer? I mean, think about the last sin you committed. Chances are, it was a pretty small sin. It might be an embarrassingly lame sin. But I would guess that you did it under very little provocation and very little temptation. If you can't resist a tiny temptation like that, what makes you think that you will be able to resist a full frontal attack by the devil and a legion of demons?

If we take temptation the other way, as a testing of grace, then it's even more obvious that you can't pass the test from your own resources. You have to have grace in order to pass a grace test, and by definition grace comes to you from outside yourself. So whether you think of temptation as inciting you to sin, or only as testing your grace, on both counts victory over the temptation requires God's help. When you think of temptation, then, you shouldn't be thinking "Temptation is something I can beat." You should think of temptation as "something I can't possibly conquer on my own." Temptation is not a fistfight with a local small-time criminal. Temptation is you with nothing but your bare hands going up against an Apache helicopter. It can fly 150 mph; you're pretty good if you can run at 1/20th of that speed. It has twin 30mm cannons; you might be able to throw a couple of rocks. And so on. Don't think of temptation as something easy to beat. Temptation, to a fallen person like you or me, means that we don't have a snowball's chance in Hell.

III. The Subtlety of Temptation

We can see this when we think about the subtlety of temptation. These are taken from Thomas Watson's commentary on the Lord's Prayer, where he lists more than 25 ways in which Satan's temptation are subtle. I have only picked a few which I think are applicable to us this morning.

A. It Appeals to Your Taste

First, temptation appeals to your taste. The Devil (assuming he is tempting you), or your flesh, or the world, don't try to get you to do something you have a natural distaste for — not at first! Oh no. If you don't like being mean, then you won't be tempted by domestic violence; you'll be tempted by an ungodly passivity. If you despise gluttony, then you won't be tempted to eat too much Haagen-Dazs; you might be tempted to anorexia. And so on.

B. It Attempts to Prevent or Pervert Duty

Temptation is also subtle in this: it directs itself to get you to not do what you should do. We tend to think of temptation as something really obvious, like a sudden internal motion toward suicide, or perhaps the Devil saying, as he did to Christ, "Fall down and worship me." But really, you are much more likely to encounter temptation in little things. You will be tempted to skip church because you feel tired. You will be tempted to let fly a hasty or harsh word because your spouse already knows the answer to the question she just asked, and she knows that really annoys you. You will be tempted to shorten your prayer time because you really want to see that movie. And so on. Temptation tries to get you to fail to do what you should do. Barring that, it tries to pervert

it — so that you pray, but only so that you family will see you. You come to church, but only because you had to bring the snack and it looks really bad if you don't show up with the snack. That is, you come out of pride. And so on. Temptation tries to take the right thing and turn it into hypocrisy.

C. It Looks Pleasant

Like the forbidden fruit to Eve, temptation looks good. Venting your feelings by yelling at your kids, spending “just a few minutes” looking at pictures of scantily clad women, having that extra beer when you know you've already had enough — all of these things seem really attractive at the time. That's one of the subtleties of temptation.

D. It Makes Holiness Look Ugly

Further, temptation makes holiness look ugly. Rather than seeing how attractive true holiness is, temptation makes you think of holiness as nothing but scrupulosity that can't enjoy a good time. Remember H.L. Mencken's definition of Puritanism? Temptation tells you that really walk with God and enjoys Jesus Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit is boring, uncomfortable, ridiculous, and dull. What's really appealing is sinful pleasure x, y, or z.

E. It Appeals to Necessity

In our day and age, this device of Satan's has a new lease on life. What could be a better excuse for sin than that it is necessary? Where does this manifest itself? Well, think about the business world. Maybe your boss tells you to lie to a client. If you don't, you lose your job. “Well,” you can rationalize to yourself, “this is a sin, but it's necessary. If I lose my job I'll lose my house and maybe my children will go hungry!” Or perhaps your boss tells you that you will need to work next Sunday. What do you say? “No, I'm sorry, boss, but I can't do that?” Or do you use the same kind of reasoning to determine that it is necessary to profane God's holy day by working?

What about sports? Have you bought the lie that it's necessary for your child to play on Sundays, in order to get on the best teams, win the best tournaments, participate with the best coaches? Is it really worth skipping worship in order to be in a sport? “Oh, it's necessary for the sake of a college scholarship,” you might tell yourself. “College costs can be financially crippling.” Well, on factual grounds that arguments fails — 97% of high school athletes never get college scholarships. Furthermore, it fails on ethical grounds as well. It is nothing but a temptation to you to put sports ahead of God. It is simply one of Satan's tricky ways of getting your family to put God second and something else first.

This same argument, that some sin or other is “necessary,” can be and is constantly used to justify all kinds of heinous things. It is no more necessary for you to work on Sunday than it is for a mother to hire a doctor to kill her baby. It is not more necessary for you to let your child play sports on Sunday than it is for a politician to take bribes. Don't be fooled by the subtle temptation that tells you sin is necessary. It isn't. It never has been.

F. It Attacks Faith

Well, sin is subtle in that it attacks faith. It doesn't always mount a frontal attack on love, or peace, or the other virtues. No, the virtue temptation hates the most is faith. When Satan desired

to sift Peter, what did Jesus pray? That Peter's faith would not fail. Now, why did He pray that? Because He knew that Satan would attack Peter's faith most of all.

It doesn't seem nearly as bad to doubt whether everything in the Bible is true and certain and factually accurate as it does to shoot your neighbor in the face, or to deliberately be cruel to your father in front of a room full of people. But Satan hates faith the most. Faith is what brought you out of his kingdom in the first place, and faith is what keeps you in God's kingdom (instrumentally speaking).

All of these are ways in which temptation is extremely subtle and devious, hard to even see, much less conquer.

IV. The Sources of Temptation

Well, we have seen what temptation is and what it is like. Where does it come from?

A. The World

It comes from the world. The world offers us all kinds of opportunities to be sinful, whether it's by the shows we watch on our cable package, or by the causes we support, or by the things we do, the world is run by sinners for sinners and it often rewards wickedness. Do you want status? The world offers it. Do you want significance? The world seems to offer it too. Do you want money and power? The world definitely offers them. Do you want pleasure? Where else will you get it but the world? A whole galaxy of restaurants and nightclubs and concert halls and theaters is out there, just waiting to cater to all of your desires.

B. Our Flesh

The flesh, too, has plenty to do with stirring up our inbred sinfulness. You are a fallen creature, and your natural bent, ever since the fall, is to do the wrong thing. Even if you are doing something outwardly good, you don't want to do it because you love God with your whole heart; you want to do it because of what's in it for you, even if what's in it for you is only a clear conscience. But the flesh loves ease and comfort and pleasure. The flesh loves doing what God says not to do. The flesh loves sin in general; how else could we explain the fact that all people are born knowing what evil is and able to do it? You don't have to teach your children to lie. You don't have to teach your children to hate and yell. They are born with a sinful nature that knows how to do all those things.

C. The Devil

As we already saw, Satan is called the Tempter. He loves to get you to sin, because that is his way of attacking Christ, whom he passionately hates. Satan is able to suggest ideas to you, and is probably really good at guessing what you're thinking. He's been in the tempting business for thousands of years.

D. God's Providence, James 1:13

Finally, we come to God's Providence. God doesn't stir up our corruption, as I already said; nonetheless, He frequently leads us into situations where our grace is tested and where we have the opportunity to do evil. God is not inciting us to do evil in these situations. His goal is not to get us to sin, and His test is not designed to make us sin. When we sin in the midst of a test, we

sin against God. From another angle, we continue to affirm that our sin was part of God's plan all along. But we must never say that God is trying to make us sin: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" (Jam 1:13 ESV). That is, He doesn't tempt to evil. He does test our graces, as He tested Abraham's graces so long ago.

If you turn back a couple of pages in Matthew, you will see that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into temptation — or at least, led Him into the wilderness so Satan could tempt Him there. That is probably what Jesus is referring to when He says, Pray to not be led into temptation. You don't want the Spirit taking you out into the wilderness so you can be tempted by Satan. You want the Spirit to keep you in situations and places and states of mind where Satan will have no advantage, where temptation will roll off you like food residue off teflon. That's what this petition is all about. Do you want to be exposed to temptation? Do you want to fight that Apache helicopter? No way! You want to be protected. You want to take as few tests as possible; you want the world, the flesh, and the devil to stay as far away from you as possible.

V. The Benefits of Temptation

Yet we must not overlook the benefits of temptation.

A. It Reveals Our Neediness

Being tempted in either or both senses of the word reveals our neediness to us. When you're taking the test is when you learn how much of the material you've actually mastered. When you're in an unbelievably provoking, or tempting, situation, then you see how much you need God's grace to enable you to pass the test. Believe it or not, but this is a blessing. This is a way in which God shows you your emptiness so that you will appreciate His fullness.

B. It Humbles Us

At the same time, temptation humbles us. The fact that you could be attracted by the idea of that sin, the one you thought you left behind a long time ago, will make you more gentle with those around you who succumb to sin, and humble you in God's sight. You will realize that you aren't quite such a wonderful holy person as you think you are when you see how close you came to failing the test of temptation altogether.

C. It Drives Us to Pray

And so, temptation makes us pray. If you know God, and you are being tested as to how strong your faith is, you will go to Him constantly in prayer for help. You will need His aid more than you've ever needed anything before. That's why this petition comes into the Lord's Prayer. If we know how weak we are, we will constantly be praying against temptation. "Lord, don't put me in a position where I can take money and no one will notice. Lord, don't put me in a place where I can look lustfully and no one will see. Lord, deliver me from this desire to lash out in anger at those who are making my life miserable!"

D. It Teaches Us to Long for Heaven

Finally, temptation teaches us to long for Heaven. If earth contains everything you want, the sum total of your dreams and desires, then good for you. You don't need Heaven, and you won't get

there. But if your life on earth is hard, is a time of trial and tempting and testing, then you will long for Heaven, where your graces will not be tested and you won't have any corruption to be stirred up and tempted to sin. In Heaven, it is impossible to sin. You will not be able to do the wrong thing in Heaven. You will not be exposed to situations in which you've failed in the past. Your wife won't say that thing she always says that drives you nuts. Your dog won't eat that thing he always eats that makes you so upset. Your heart will have no desire to lie, or covet something that's not yours. Do you long for this place? Do you want to be free from temptations? Do you feel the burden of sin and trial? Then pray for God's Kingdom to come, for Heaven to be realized.

VI. Overcoming Temptation

Well, in addition to the benefits and dangers of temptation, we need to talk about how to overcome temptation.

But didn't say at the beginning of the sermon that you can't overcome temptation? Sort of. I said that *on your own* you can't overcome temptation. But with God, you can do anything. You can even overcome temptation when you have His help.

A. God's Leading Providence

The first help against temptation is God's providence. This is what will lead us away from temptation. This is our first line of defense against temptation. God will not put us in a place where the temptation is more powerful than His assisting grace in our hearts. He won't expose you to a terrorist putting a gun to your head and telling you to worship Allah without simultaneously giving you enough grace that you have the ability to say, "No, I won't do that. I will not worship that false God."

B. God's Word and Spirit

The second way we overcome temptation is through God's word and Spirit. Jesus used the Word, which is the sword of the Spirit, to great effect in His battle with Satan. Quoting and believing scripture, and asking the Holy Spirit for His help, is ultimately the only way you are going to overcome temptation. God's word is more powerful than you — not as a magic charm, but as something you can understand and cling to in your fight against sin. Since temptation is ethical, it requires understanding. You are tempted to do something you know to be wrong. But understanding God's word, and believing it, and quoting it, will help you to fight the temptation.

C. God's Salvation

God saves us from our sins. That's not necessarily immediate, but it is total. He will deliver us from temptation too. "Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth" (Rev 3:10 ESV). That verse may refer to the Great Tribulation, but even so, it illustrates a principle: God will protect us from temptation as part of our salvation. He will keep us from falling away. He wouldn't take the trouble to save you and then turn around and let you sin yourself out of His grip. Christ died to save His people, and the power of that death includes the

power to deliver you out of temptations. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2Pe 2:9 KJV). Do you imagine that He knows how, but won't do it?

D. Our Efforts

Yet at the same time, our salvation requires that we exert effort. If you want to be safe from temptation to sexual immorality, don't go on the web without a filter and tracker. Don't go to a nightclub. Don't go to a brothel. It should be obvious to all of us that those are places of sexual temptation.

If you want to be safe from temptation to steal, don't put yourself in situations where it will be easy for you to take what's not yours! And on and on. Obviously, you can't do this with everything. You can never avoid temptation altogether — you can't get rid of your parents so that you won't be tempted to disobey them. In addition to avoiding tempting situations, you have to exert effort to not succumb to the temptation.

E. Our Prayers

Similarly, Jesus taught us to pray for deliverance from temptation. He wants us to be safe from evil. He wants us to hate everything evil. But He has set up the world so that we have to ask Him for that. He will deliver us from evil — but He requires that we ask. He will deliver us from temptations — but He wants us to pray for that deliverance.

So pray for deliverance from temptations. Pray that God will lead you away from testing of your graces and stirring up your corruption. This prayer has no downside. It is one of the best and safest things you can ask for. If Christ overcame Satan's temptations for you, then trust that He will overcome them in you. He will. He knows how to do it. So pray that He would. Amen.