

“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY”
LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION
Matt. 6:13 with 1 John 3:7-10

Please review this week’s catechism question.

Did you meet anyone new after worship service this past Sunday?

INTRODUCTION

If your sins are forgiven and you are declared perfectly righteous and promised eternal life with God and none of this can ever change by what you do or don’t do and it is all given to you not because of anything that you have ever done but solely because of what Jesus Christ has done, then what reason can there be to live a good, moral, Christian life? Why not go on enjoying the pleasures of sin and go to heaven, since you are not going to heaven because of what you do or don’t do? What possible reason can there be to not keep on sinning?

In this final petition of the Lord’s Prayer we are asking God to keep us from sinning. Don’t miss the logic of what Jesus is saying here. All those who are freely forgiven of their sins, daily ask God to keep them from sinning. Jesus assumes that all of his disciples pray this way. We don’t think that because we are forgiven it doesn’t matter whether or not we sin. Why is it that all of Christ’s chosen people, while being freely forgiven of their sins ask him to keep them from sin? What is the motive? 1 John 3:7-10 is one of the scores of passages that give the primary reason as to why it is that those who are freely forgiven through Christ seek to not sin. John wrote this letter to make clear how you can recognize true Christians and a true Christian church. This letter seeks to clarify how to distinguish between a true work of God and what is merely words.

STUDY

1. Read 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7 and 5:1. What is a main metaphor John uses in his letter to describe the Christian life?

It is the metaphor of birth. In 2:29 John tells us that because God is righteous in his nature then you can know that everyone who does what is righteous has been born of God. It is in the genetic code that all who have been born of God are going to do righteousness because they have God’s life in them and God is righteous. In 3:9-10 he says the same thing from the negative direction. He says that those who have been born of God do not and cannot go on sinning because they have been born of God. God’s seed, which is another word for his very nature, dwells in us and so we cannot go on sinning.

2. Each occurrence of the verb “to bear, to give birth to” is in the past perfect tense and in the passive voice, i.e., “has been born”. What is significant about the use of this tense? Describe how physical birth illustrates what this verb means spiritually.

This verb tells us that there was a point in time in the past when these people were born of God. However, it didn’t just happen to them once but they are in a continuing state of “being alive”. In addition, because it is a passive verb it means that they were given birth, they didn’t cause their birth. Everyone who lives has been physically born of his or her mother and father. As I have said many times, you did not decide to be born. You did nothing to contribute to your birth. You were born at a point in time and you continue to experience the effects of that birth in that you are alive. How do we know when a baby is alive? It cries, moves, eats, goes to the bathroom. We know that life is given by the effects we observe. This is exactly the logic that John uses repeatedly in this letter. Once I was born physically I could not keep myself from growing to this height. I could not stop from looking like my father. Once I was born and given life, then I breathed and grew. I am my father’s son and so there are certain things that are going to be true of me.

3. According to 1 John 3:7-10 what are the signs of life in all those who have been born of God? What are the signs that show a person is sharing in the life of Satan?

Those who live righteously are righteous in their nature because God is righteous in his nature. When God gives you birth you are given his nature and he is righteous by nature, therefore you do righteousness.

It is natural to do so and is the evidence you have the life of God in you. Every true child of God is growing in their practice of righteousness. In v. 8, he says that everyone who is in the habit of sinning, in whom there is no break from sin, is of the devil. The reason is because the devil has been sinning from the beginning of the world. Either you have divine life and are growing to sin less or you have the life of Satan and you never stop sinning. The children of the devil can be seen by the fact that they continually, non-stop live in sin. They break God's laws and have no interest in not breaking God's laws. They don't ever live by faith in the promises of God or live to the glory of God. The children of God are known by the fact that they are in the process of keeping God's laws more and more by faith to the glory of God.

4. Why does John warn them in v. 7 not to be led astray?

The warning to not be led astray is due to the fact that many would have you believe that you can be God's child and not practice righteousness. Many reason that if it is impossible for me to stop sinning and if I am forgiven of all my sins because of what Christ did, then why should I bother with trying to not sin? It's like a pastor I once knew who committed adultery. He was found out and confronted by his Christian friends. They asked how he could engage in this behavior for two years while preaching the gospel. He said, "I just figured I wouldn't get any rewards in heaven." He planned to go to heaven because of what Jesus did. The only motive he could think of for not sinning was getting "extra" rewards in heaven. As there was no chance he would go to hell and as the extra rewards offered could not compare with the pleasure he was experiencing, he could think of no reason to not go on committing adultery.

5. How do we know that 3:7 & 9 does not mean that Christians do not ever sin, but always, at every moment, do righteousness? (Consider 1 John 1:8-10)

We know that John is not saying that Christians never sin but always do righteousness because in 1 John 1:8 & 10, he says that anyone who claims to not sin is lying and calling God a liar. He says, in v. 9, using

a present tense verb, that we continually confess our sins, not that we don't sin.

6. How does the birth and growth metaphor help us to understand why it is that Christians vary from one another in their practice of righteousness? Why do some Christians struggle more with sin than other Christians?

While not all true Christians are equally skilled in the practice of righteous living, all practice righteousness. The birth metaphor is helpful here. My grandson Max cannot walk, talk, do the dishes, read a book or run a mile or any number of things that I can easily do. What's the problem with Maxwell? Doesn't he know that every one who is born is supposed to be able to talk and walk? Why doesn't he talk? How come he can't even crawl? He must not be alive because he can't do what I can do. Wrong, he needs to grow, right? I am not more alive than Maxwell. I do not possess more life. I have never added to the life I possessed at birth. The life I was given then has caused me to grow. However, it has been a process through time with which I cooperated. It is the same in spiritual life. Everyone who has been born of God immediately upon being born is sinning less but he is not sinning as little as he is going to 30 years later. And yet he is going to keep on sinning until the day he dies.

7. What are the works of the devil that Jesus destroyed and how did he do that?

The works of the devil are the promotion of sin in the world. It is his goal to deceive people into believing that sin is better than righteousness. By promoting sin he dishonors God and destroys God's good creation. Jesus, by his life, lived always to the glory of God. He always believed that knowing and loving God was better than sin and so he overcame all temptation. In addition, by dying for our sins he destroyed the power of the devil to subject us to God's wrath by sin. Finally, by his death, he secured the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we now have new hearts that trust God and love him, rather than sin. All who belong to Christ are free from both the guilt and power of sin because of what Christ did.

8. If we have divine life and “cannot go on sinning” then why does Jesus command us to ask God to keep us from temptation and not let the evil one harm us?

There is an inevitable connection between being the recipient of divine life through Christ by the Holy Spirit and how you live and how you pray. Everyone who has been born of God shows that they possess divine life by their sinning less and their obeying more over time. They make this progress by asking God to do make the life he planted in us to grow. Yet, as we saw last week, we never come to the place in this life where we are sinless. Obedience to the law of God is not the cause of our having divine life but rather the effect of having God’s life and yet it is never a perfect obedience. When we daily pray that God would not lead us into temptation but deliver us from the devil we are expressing this divine life that is within us. Like a child asking his father to help him tie his shoes or learn to ride the bike or swim or shoot baskets so we are asking our heavenly Father to help us to learn to practice the righteousness that he has planted in us. Children are able to do these things because of the life that is in them. They need assistance to practice and perfect what is already in them. That is, in essence what we pray for. We ask God to keep us from sin and to assist us in practicing righteousness.

We must ask God to keep us from temptation and deliver us from the devil because we have been born of God.

9. How does this petition relate to the one which precedes it? What do these two petitions together tell us about ourselves and our relationship to sin?

When we ask God to not lead us into temptation but to rescue us from the devil we are admitting to our weakness. It is significant that this request follows right on the heels of our asking God to forgive our debts. It is like we are saying to our Father. “Let me tell you about all the ways I have failed to bring glory to your name, establish your kingdom and do your will. I have failed miserably at the thing I want most desperately to do. You know how weak I am so please make sure that no circumstances come into my life that will finally overwhelm me and cause me to abandon you. You know how susceptible I am to

temptation so direct my steps away from those places and people where I will be tempted to sin and be overcome.” When we are praying this prayer right it is out of a great sense of our weakness and incompetence. There are no competent Christians, just incompetent Christians who rely upon their omni-competent Savior.

10. Why does Jesus tell us to ask our Father not to lead us into temptation? If we didn’t ask would he lead us into temptation? According to James 1:13-15, where does temptation and sin come from?

Temptation is not sin, it is the occasion of sin. We give into temptation because we want to. Therefore, when we ask God to not lead us into temptation we should never think that we are, by our praying, stopping God from leading us into sin. The prayer is phrased in this way because we recognize that God is in control of all things. Everything that happens in the world is under his sovereign control. There are no accidents. He knows our weaknesses and he is the one who sovereignly ordains the course of our lives. We are asking him to have mercy upon us and not permit to come into our lives those things that he knows would destroy our faith.

It is very informative to realize that the same word that is translated temptation is also translated trial (Compare Matt. 6:13, Luke 4:1 with James 1:2, 1 Peter 4:12). God we are told sends trials into our lives but they are sent by him, not to lead us into sin but to purify our faith so that we will sin less. Therefore we are asking God to not send trials that will become temptations to sin. Only he knows what those trials might be and so we trust him to direct the course of our lives so that all that comes to us builds our faith rather than destroy it. We are requesting that God take note of our weaknesses and our propensities to sin and that he direct the course of our lives in ways that keep us from the snares and pitfalls that he knows we will not be able to resist. We are asking him to give us strength so that when we are tempted we will not surrender to the temptation and thus sin against him. The person who is daily praying this prayer knows that the circumstances that come into their life cannot harm them.

We must ask God to keep us from temptation and deliver us from the devil because we are weak but he is strong.

11. Why is it important to ask God to deliver us from the evil one? How is the devil seeking to harm us? See Ephesians 2:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5, 1 Timothy 4:1-4, 2 Timothy 2:24-26, 1 Peter 5:8-9, 1 John 3:8 & 4:1-4.

The reason that Jesus tells us to ask God to rescue us from the evil one is because Satan is the one who stands behind all temptation. Satan's power against us is to get us to sin. Sin exposes people to the wrath of God. Satan is out to ruin God's good name and spoil his creation and so he is out to get us to believe that sin and its pleasures are better than God and the eternal pleasures he offers to all who trust in him. What we should fear from Satan is not that he will possess us and turn us into raving lunatics or make us sick. Rather, what we are to fear from him is that he will deceive us and so we will sin and inherit death rather than life. We should fear Satan because he is a master at making sin and false teaching appear more attractive than truth and righteousness.

He has two primary weapons that he uses against us, to get us to sin. First, he uses lies and false teaching. He persuades us that the pleasures of sin are better than the pleasures of God. He sends out false teachers to lead us into believing false things about God and his world and so we end up worshipping a false god. His other weapon is hardship or trials such as persecution, sickness, accidents, disobedient children, financial ruin, hunger, destruction of property by natural disaster, etc. His goal in sending the hardship is to get us to call into question the goodness and power of God and so deny Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:5, 1 Peter 5:8-9). Just as I have shown you dozens of times that God is the one who sends hardship into our life for many good purposes, so Satan, at the same time sends the same hardships for evil purposes. His goal is to destroy our faith in this good and powerful God so that we will be sent to hell for our unbelief and anger towards God.

12. What would it look like for God to answer our prayer for him to rescue us from the evil one? (Compare Matthew 24:24)

What we are asking God to do when we ask him to rescue us from the evil one is to enable us to understand the truth of his word and to believe what we understand. We are asking God to give us a living faith in his word. The only way that Satan can harm us is to get us to believe a lie either through false ideas, false teaching or sending trials to destroy our faith. There is a very important statement by Jesus in Matthew 24:24. He says, "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible." Satan we are told in 1 Timothy 4:1-2 and 1 John 4:1-4 is the one who sends false teachers. He aims to deceive the elect. However, notice that Jesus says that the elect cannot be ultimately deceived. One of the means that God uses to preserve the faith of the elect in the face of this overwhelming barrage of false teaching is through our asking him to deliver us from the evil one. God answers us by assuring us of the truthfulness of his word and by enabling us to trust and love what he promises more than we trust and love the promises of sin and of a trouble free life.

We must ask God to keep us from temptation and deliver us from the devil because Satan is a powerful and cunning enemy.