

The Larger Catechism

Question 195

195. Q. What do we pray for in the sixth petition?

A. In the sixth petition, (which is, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*, [1273]) acknowledging, that the most wise, righteous, and gracious God, for divers holy and just ends, may so order things, that we may be assaulted, foiled, and for a time led captive by temptations; [1274] that Satan, [1275] the world, [1276] and the flesh, are ready powerfully to draw us aside, and ensnare us; [1277] and that we, even after the pardon of our sins, by reason of our corruption, [1278] weakness, and want of watchfulness, [1279] are not only subject to be tempted, and forward to expose ourselves unto temptations, [1280] but also of ourselves unable and unwilling to resist them, to recover out of them, and to improve them; [1281] and worthy to be left under the power of them: [1282] we pray, that God would so overrule the world and all in it, [1283] subdue the flesh, [1284] and restrain Satan, [1285] order all things, [1286] bestow and bless all means of grace, [1287] and quicken us to watchfulness in the use of them, that we and all his people may by his providence be kept from being tempted to sin; [1288] or, if tempted, that by his Spirit we may be powerfully supported and enabled to stand in the hour of temptation; [1289] or when fallen, raised again and recovered out of it, [1290] and have a sanctified use and improvement thereof: [1291] that our sanctification and salvation may be perfected, [1292] Satan trodden under our feet, [1293] and we fully freed from sin, temptation, and all evil, forever. [1294]

Scriptural Defense and Commentary

[1273] **Matthew 6:13.** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. [1274] **2 Chronicles 32:31.** Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart. [1275] **1 Chronicles 21:1.** And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. [1276] **Luke 21:34.** And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. **Mark 4:19.** And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. [1277] **James 1:14.** But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. [1278] **Galatians 5:17.** For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. [1279] **Matthew 26:41.** Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. [1280] **Matthew 26:69-72.** Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. **Galatians 2:11-14.** But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? **2 Chronicles 18:3.** And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth gilead? And he answered him, I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war. **2 Chronicles 19:2.** And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. [1281] **Romans 7:23-24.** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? **1 Chronicles 21:1-4.** And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it. And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. **2 Chronicles 16:7-10.** And at that

time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand. For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time. [1282] **Psalm 81:11-12**. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. [1283] **John 17:15**. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. [1284] **Psalm 51:10**. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 119:133. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me. [1285] **2 Corinthians 12:7-8**. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. [1286] **1 Corinthians 10:12-13**. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. [1287] **Hebrews 13:20-21**. Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. [1288] **Matthew 26:41**. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. **Psalm 19:13**. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. [1289] **Ephesians 3:14-17**. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love. **1 Thessalonians 3:13**. To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. **Jude 24**. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. [1290] **Psalm 51:12**. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. [1291] **1 Peter 5:8-10**. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. [1292] **2 Corinthians 13:7, 9**. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.... For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong; and this also we wish, even your perfection. [1293] **Romans 16:20**. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. **Luke 22:31-32**. And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. [1294] **John 17:15**. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. **1 Thessalonians 5:23**. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

In the fifth petition, we recognized the need for *God's forgiveness of our sins* and in this sixth petition, we recognize our need for *God's protection from our sins*. The petition assumes many things and therefore this petition may surprise you. It is not as simply, "God, protect me from sins."¹ It says, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. It suggests that God is somehow related to our temptations and that we must petition God to deliver us.

The sixth petition assumes that the world is hostile and that we are not equal to the task. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign and in this hostile world, God orders all things in the midst of seeming chaos and evil. We can't "wish" away the difficulties or project a "positive" outlook on life to avoid the conflicts and temptations. Those things come to us and the petition unapologetically assumes God is somehow behind all of these things yet without sin.

¹ The Heidelberg Catechism #127 defines it this way: "'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;' that is, since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment: and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, do thou, therefore, preserve and strengthen us by the power of thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, until at last we obtain a complete victory."

God and Temptations

The petition is asking *God* to not lead us into temptation. The LC explains it this way: **“acknowledging, that the most wise, righteous, and gracious God, for divers holy and just ends, may so order things, that we may be assaulted, foiled, and for a time led captive by temptations...”** That is, God, for various reasons, can order temptations into our lives. Is there any biblical warrant for such a thing? Let me give two texts that support this (2Chron. 32:31; Deut. 8:2). In 2Chronicles 32:31 we read, *“And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.”* Hezekiah was left to his own self to respond to the Babylonian envoys. He had been healed of his sickness (v. 24) and envoys were sent to him to inquire about his sickness (cf. 2K. 20-12-13) and the miraculous sign given by God. Hezekiah gladly received them and his willingness to show his military supplies and armory “implies his readiness to form an alliance...”² There were repercussions to all of these things but what is important to us is the phrase “God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart...” Matthew Henry’s words are helpful in explaining this verse: “God, by the power of his almighty grace, could have prevented the sin; but he permitted it for wise and holy ends, that, by this trial and his weakness in it, he might know, that is, it might be known (a usual Hebraism), what was in his heart, that he was not so perfect in grace as he thought he was, but had his follies and infirmities as other men. God left him to himself to be proud of his wealth, to keep him from being proud of his holiness.” Yes, God could have prevented this sin but chose to withdrawal to allow Hezekiah’s heart to act out.

A similar but less forceful text comes from Deuteronomy 8:2, “And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.” God humbled Israel in the desert through all the difficulties. Would those years in the desert compel them to trust God and keep His commandments? They needed to learn that man did not live by bread alone but “by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (8:3). Though these difficulties (e.g. hunger) were not temptations per se, they did test their hearts. The point here is simply that God ordered the external circumstances to test them so as “to bring out into the open that which is hidden, for His own glory and justification and for the *heil* [salvation] of those who are His.”³

Our good God can **“for divers holy and just ends...”** order these events. It may be for sanctification, humbling, the purpose of weaning us from self-dependence, creature dependence, etc. God has His purposes and they are holy and just because He Himself is holy and just. We are also told that God **“may so order things, that we may be assaulted, foiled, and for a time led captive by temptations...”** **Assaulted** means that temptations actually do come to us — they cannot be avoided, they are upon us. **Foiled** means that we are undone by the temptation; it defeats us as we succumb to it. And **“for a time led captive...”** means that the temptation has led to sin and that we are under its sway “for a time” (e.g. David and Bathsheba). This is not a permanent “bondage” per se but the power of sin will molest and compel us. God can order all these things as He sees fit. Ridgley explains that God orders these things either *objectively* or *permissively*.

² *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (ed. D. A Carson et al.; Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 380.

³ J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Ed M. van der Maas, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 127.

He does it objectively, when his providential dispensations, which in themselves are holy, just, and good, offer occasions of sin. . . . God leads into temptation permissively. This he does when he does not restrain the tempter, which he is not obliged to do, but suffers us to be assaulted by him, and, at the same time, denies the aids and assistance of his grace, to prevent our compliance with his temptations. Hence, when we pray that he would ‘not lead us into temptation,’ we desire that he would prevent the assault, or fortify us against it, that, through the weakness of our grace, or the prevalency of corruption, we may not comply with the temptation.⁴

Ridgley’s explanation supports what all Calvinists have traditionally maintained. God can actively allow things to happen (like Israel in the wilderness to humble them, cf. Deut. 8) or permissively allow events to transpire and persons to act. God sovereignly rules all things.

The Assumptions in Temptations

Before positively explaining what the petition entails, we must come to terms with what the temptations assume. On account of these theological assumptions, we are compelled to petition God to lead us not into temptation.

1. *The petition assumes we have enemies.*

We have enemies without and within. The LC states “**that Satan, the world, and the flesh, are ready powerfully to draw us aside, and ensnare us...**” Satan opposes us and will do much to cause us to sin. This is the way Ursinus explains the phrase:

When the devil is said to lead us into temptation, it means that God permits him to entice and solicit us to sin. We are here in this petition taught to pray for deliverance from both of these forms of temptation. We therefore pray, 1. That God will not tempt us for the sake of trying us, if such be his will and pleasure, or if he does tempt us, that he will give us strength to endure the temptation.⁵ 2. That he will not permit the devil, or the world or the flesh to entice us to sin, or if he does permit us to be tempted, that he himself will be present with us, that we may not fall into sin. This, therefore, is the true sense and meaning of this petition, *Lead us not into temptation*—suffer us not to be tempted above that which we are able to bear; neither permit the devil to tempt us in such a way that we may either sin, or wholly fall from thee.⁶

We do not wish to be tempted. We are too weak to stand and without the Lord’s sustaining grace, every temptation of Satan will undo us. We should not seek to be tested or tempted — this prayer has that in mind. Before going on to develop Satan’s role in temptation, as an aside, let us note the important advice John Newton gave in this regard. The young John Ryland believed he needed temptations to preserve him from growing cold and indifferent. Newton shot back: “And

⁴ Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity, Volume 2* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1855), 645.

⁵ In English, we use the word “test” when God is actively or permissively involved. Passages in Scripture often do not make that kind of distinction. The word for *temptation* in Mt. 6:13 (πειρασμόν) is used as *trials* (πειρασμοῖς) in 1Peter 1:6.

⁶ Zacharias Ursinus and G. W. Williard, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 654.

I advise you to be cautious how you indulge a desire to be exercised with Satan's temptations, as supposing they would be conducive to make you more spiritual, or would of course open you a way to great consolations." What was Newton concerned about? Isn't Ryland's desire a noble one? Not really. He wrote to the young minister these wise observations: "He who knows our weakness, and the power of our adversary, has graciously directed us to pray, that we enter not into temptation. Have you considered what the enemy can do, if he is permitted to come in like a flood? In one hour he could raise such a storm as would put you to your wit's end."⁷ We must be well aware of the fact that we are utterly feeble and should not ask for temptations (whatever the form).

Getting back to Satan's role and method in tempting us, allow me to give two weighty quotes on this matter. Herman Witsius gives a full sobering account of how the devil works — episodes taken from Scripture.

He attacked David, that invincible king, who had gained celebrity by his victory over the huge giant, and over so many fierce nations, and more than once overthrew him [1Chr. 21:1]. Not only did he stir up the perfidious [i.e. deceitful] Judas to a heinous crime, and make him the betrayer of the best and kindest of masters; but he attacked Peter, who, till then, had been a powerful adversary,—strove hard "to sift him as wheat," and after large, express, and confident promises, drove him to deny three times his beloved Lord [Lk. 22:31]. He manifests the same disposition towards all who are the servants of God and of Christ, attacking them at one time with the cunning of the serpent, at another with the fierceness of the lion, "seeking whom he may" ruin and "devour." [1Pet. 5:8] In whatever direction we move, we have the strongest reason to suspect that, under the herbs and flowers, this deceitful and cruel serpent lies concealed.⁸

These accounts in Scripture remind us that the evil one is alive and well during our pilgrimage. He does not rest or sleep and we cannot stand up to him on our own strength. These are not fairy tales — they are accurate accounts of spiritual warfare. He wants to sift (σινιάσαι, Lk. 22:31) and devour (καταπιεῖν, 1Pet. 5:8) — there is no mercy in him. I offer one more extract to further unpack how Satan works and affects us. We need to be well aware of his devices.

That tempter has his stratagems, which, without suffering great injury, it is hardly possible for us to detect. The Apostle Paul calls them "the devices," [2Cor. 2:11]⁹ "the wiles;" [Eph. 6:11]¹⁰ and Christ calls them "the depths of Satan." [Rev. 2:24]¹¹ It is astonishing with what power and efficacy he everywhere acts on the minds of wretched mortals. (1.) He enters into a man, so as to seem a domesticated enemy. [Luke 22:3; John. 13:27] (2.) He throws evil thoughts into the heart [Jn. 13:2], and "fills the heart" [Acts 5:3] to do evil. (3.) He "blinds their minds." [2Cor. 4:4] (4.) And with all "subtlety." [2Cor. 11:3] (5.) And with the greatest success. [Eph. 2:2] (6.) So that he frequently

⁷ John Newton, *Wise Counsel - John Newton's Letters to John Ryland Jr.*, ed. Grant Gordon (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009), 38; also in *The Works of The Rev. John Newton* (New York: Williams & Whiting, 1810), 1:233.

⁸ Herman Witsius and William Pringle, *Sacred Dissertations on the Lord's Prayer* (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1839), 348-49.

⁹ οὐ γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὰ νοήματα ἀγνοοῦμεν ("for we are not ignorant of his designs")

¹⁰ τὰς μεθοδείας τοῦ διαβόλου ("the schemes of the devil")

¹¹ τὰ βάθη τοῦ Σατανᾶ ("the deep things of Satan")

“prevails,” [1K. 22:22] and takes some of them “captive at his will.” [2 Tim. 2:26] All this is plainly taught us in scripture.¹²

¹² Herman Witsius and William Pringle, *Sacred Dissertations on the Lord's Prayer* (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1839), 349.