**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-037. LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And lead us not into temptation."*

*Matthew 6:13*

The petition of the previous clause has to do with the past, this with the future; the one is the confession of sin, the other the supplication which comes from the consciousness of weakness. The best man needs both. Forgiveness does not break the bonds of evil by which we are held. But forgiveness increases our consciousness of weakness, and in the new desire which comes from it to walk in holiness, we are first rightly aware of the strength and frequency of inducements to sin. A man may by mere natural conscience know something of what temptation is, but only he understands its strength who resists it.

The sense of forgiveness and the new desires and love thereby developed, lead to the falling of the mask from the deceitful forms that gleam around us. He who is forgiven has his eyesight purged, and can see that these are not what they seem, but demons that lure us to our destruction. It is true that the sign of the Cross compels the foul thing to appear in its own true form. Then started up in his own shape the fiend. The love which comes from forgiveness and the new sympathies which it engenders are the Ithuriel's spear. What a wonderful change passes upon the siren tempters when we believe that Christ has pardoned us, and have learned to love Him! Then the fishtail is seen below the sunlit waters.

Forgiveness is one of the chief means of teaching us our sin. The removal of all dread of personal consequences, which it effects, leaves us free to contemplate with calmed hearts the moral character of our actions. The revelation of God's love which is made in forgiveness quickens our consciences as well as purges them, and our standard of purity is raised. The effort to live rightly, which is the sure result of God's love believed, first teaches us thoroughly how wrong we are. We know the strength of the current when we try to pull against it. Looking to God as our Father, our blackness shows blacker against the radiant purity of His white light.

Forgiveness does not at once and wholly annihilate the tendency to transgress. True, the belief that God has forgiven supplies the strongest motives for holiness, and the new life which comes to every man who so believes will by degrees conquer all the lingering garrisons of the Philistines which hold scattered strong-posts in the land. But though this be so, still the purifying process is a slow and gradual one, and evil may be forced out of the heart while yet it is in the blood. The central will may be cleansed while yet habits continue to be strong, and the power of resistance, new-born as it is, may be weak in act though omnipotent in nature. All sin leaves some tendency to recurrence. The path which one avalanche has hollowed lies ready for another. It is true, on the one side, that no purity is so bright and no obedience so steadfast as that of the man who has been cleansed and reclaimed from rebellion. But it is also true that, on the road to that ultimate purity, a pardoned man has to struggle daily with the bitter relics of his old self, to wage war against evils the force of which he never knew till he tried to resist them, against sins which were all sleek, and velvety, and purring, as long as he fondled and stroked them, but which flash out sharp claws when he would fling them from their dens in his heart. Forgiveness does not at once conquer sin, and forgiveness leads to deeper consciousness of sin. Hence the order of petitions here. Following on the prayer for pardon, comes that for shelter from and in temptation which arises from deep consciousness of our own weakness and liability to fall.

Temptation has two parts in it--the circumstances which lead to sin, the desire which is addressed by them. There must be tinder as well as spark, if there is to be flame. Fire falling on water or upon bare rock will kindle nothing. God sends the one, we make the other.

The Prayer:--

**I. Expresses our recognition of God as ordering all circumstances.**

There is the general faith that His Providence orders our lot, and the specific that God orders and brings about temptations.

To tempt is to present inducements to sin, but a secondary significance is to do so maliciously, and with desire that we should fall. It is in this secondary sense that James denies that God tempts any man. We tempt ourselves, or evil tempts us. But God does tempt in so far as He presents outward circumstances which become occasions of falling or of standing, as we take them. He sends temptations, He sends trials, and the two only differ in name, and in what is implied in the word, of the disposition of the sender. Christ was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted. If God does not in malice tempt, still He does in mercy try. God sends trials; we make them temptations.

**II. Implies that our chiefest wish is holiness, our greatest dread sin.**

* This is the only negative petition.
* What would be our deprecatory prayers? Lead us not into sorrow, loss, poverty, disease, death?
* How we fill our prayers with womanish shriekings and fears!
* This petition can come only from a man whose will is resigned and fixed on God. One thing he fears, and that is to sin.
* The one thing to be desired is not outward well-being, but inward character.
* Think of our lives: what do we dread most?

**III. Expresses our self-distrust.**

It is from consciousness of our weakness that we pray thus. The language at first sight seems to breathe only a wish to be exempt from temptation. If that were its meaning, it were contrary to Christ's teaching and to the whole tenor of Scripture. But such a wish is included in it, and corresponds to one tone of mind, and to what ought always to be our feeling. We rightly shrink from temptation because we know our own weakness. That is the only allowable ground; if we do it from indolence, or dread of trouble, we are wrong. If flesh shrinks from pain, we are carnal and walk as men. If we desire simply to have a smooth path, then we have yet to learn what our Master meant when He said, In the world ye shall have tribulation. His servants should count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations.

But if we rightly understand our own weakness, we shall dread to meet the enemy, because we know how often circumstances make all the difference between saint and sinner.

**IV. Expresses our reliance on God if temptation comes.**

I take to be tempted as being presentation of inducement to sin. I take to enter into temptation as the further step of consenting to it.

Perhaps there may be hovering in the words of the petition a half-conscious allusion to a captive being led into a prison.

What we should chiefly desire is that God would lead us not into, but through and out of, temptation. To pray simply for exemption from trial is--

**(a)** To ask what is impossible.

All scenes of life, all stages, both sexes, all relations, all professions, are and ever will be full of inducements to sin.

Whether any given circumstance will tempt you or not depends on what you are. If there is nothing adhesive on you, it will not stick.

**(b)** To ask what would not be for our good.

* Effect of conquered temptation on the Christian life.
* Effect on character. The old belief that the strength of a slain enemy passed into his slayer is true in regard to a Christian's overcome temptations.
* Effect on grasp of truth.
* Effect on consciousness of relation to God.
* Effect on Future.

So then we ought to desire not so much exemption from temptation, as strength in it.

And He will always be at our side to grant us this.

We should seek not freedom from furnace, but His presence in it; not to be guided away from the dark valley, but through it. His prayer is our model; His life is our pattern, who was tempted though He were the Son; His strength is our hope. He is able to succour them that are tempted.

We identify ourselves in such a prayer with all who have sinned, and knowing that we are men of like passions, and that we may fall like them, we cry lead us not.

He who offers this prayer from such motives will best and most willingly meet temptation when it comes. The soldier who goes into the field with careful circumspection, knowing the enemy's strength and his own weakness, is the most likely to conquer. It is the presumptuous men, confident in their own strength, who are sure to get beaten.