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DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE

Some of Jesus Christ's major teachings are recorded in the sermon on the mount, recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7. One main focus in those three chapters is on explaining the **spiritual intent** of the laws of God. Another main focus is on giving **additional laws**, laws that had not been spelled out in Old Testament times. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus Christ said the following:

Think not that **I am come** to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but **to fulfill**. (Matthew 5:17)

This statement first of all identifies Jesus Christ as a Lawgiver! It is only lawgivers who have the power to do away with existing laws. Anyone who is not a lawgiver cannot make such a statement about destroying or not destroying laws. So in this verse Jesus Christ is identifying Himself as someone who has power over laws.

The law of God is the subject of Jesus Christ's statement in this verse.

Next, the Greek verb "pleroo" here translated "to fulfill" means "**to complete** by filling up something". When something is full, then nothing more can fit in. There is nothing more that can be added to it. When this verb "pleroo" refers to something abstract like a set of laws, which obviously cannot be literally filled with something, then this verb means "to complete".

Jesus Christ's statement "I am come to complete the law" tells us that after His ministry **no more laws would be added to the laws of God**, because with His teachings the laws of God for mankind will have been completed. It tells us that after Jesus Christ's ministry there would not be anyone who would have the authority to either make new laws or to do away with existing laws.

That is what the words "**fulfill**" or "**complete**" tell us. After Jesus Christ's ministry no more new laws could be given by anyone, and neither could any existing laws be done away.

This is important for understanding Jesus Christ's later statement regarding "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" correctly. Notice that later statement:

And I will give unto you **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

Those "keys", which Jesus Christ gave to the leadership of His Church, **do not convey any power or**

authority to either make new laws, or to do away with existing laws. Those keys only convey the ability **to open up understanding** regarding the correct meaning and application of **all of the existing laws of God**. Keys cannot bring anything new into existence, and neither can they take anything that already exists out of existence. “Keys” cannot change laws.

Keys can only open and close something. The second part of verse 19 then explains the consequence of having received keys which open understanding. The consequence of having given the leadership of His true Church the keys to correctly understanding how God’s laws are to be applied is that Jesus Christ then also gave those leaders the authority **to make binding decisions** based on that correct understanding.

Let’s get back to Matthew 5:17.

The first part of God’s laws had been given by God through Moses in Old Testament times. And the second part of God’s laws was given by Jesus Christ Himself during His ministry. There are no additional new laws to be found anywhere after Jesus Christ’s ministry. That is, we don’t have any additional new laws recorded after the Gospel of John.

So all of the laws of God are recorded in exactly **two sections** of the Bible. The first section consists of the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy, the books that were written by Moses. And the second section of laws consists of the four gospels from Matthew to John, which record the details of Jesus Christ’s ministry.

All other books of the Bible can and do talk about laws from those two sections. But none of those other books introduce new laws of God, laws which have not been stated in either the five books of Moses or in the four gospel accounts. All other instructions in the Bible found outside of **those nine books** are based on the laws and principles presented in those nine books. For example, there are no new laws found in the Book of Psalms or in any of the Prophets.

I am mentioning this because, amongst other things, in Matthew 6:5-15 Jesus Christ laid out specific instructions for **praying** to God. What we need to understand is that **these instructions for praying are a part of the laws of God**. Understanding this correctly has some very serious ramifications.

When Jesus Christ told us how to pray, **He was not making a request or a suggestion**! He was giving us a command! And the statement “give us **this day** our daily bread” in Matthew 6:11 shows us that God expects us to pray every day. Tomorrow we are to ask God for tomorrow’s needs.

Let me repeat that: **God expects us to pray every single day! That’s the law of God**!

In plain language: A part of the law of God is the instruction that we are to pray to God every day. And when we do not have the established habit of praying every single day, **then we are not keeping God’s laws as we are expected to keep them**. Not having the habit of praying **every day** is not any less serious than not having the habit of keeping the Sabbath. Do we understood that?

To pray daily is a part of God's laws, because that is an instruction Jesus Christ, the Lawgiver, spelled out when He magnified and completed the laws of God, as recorded in the four gospels.

Yes, there can be exceptional circumstances. We can be on an intercontinental flight spanning two days, or otherwise be on a journey, or we are dealing with emergencies for an extended period of time, etc., and there might be a day here or there where we don't have the opportunity to pray privately on our knees before God. Those occasions are not the concern. When thinking about such difficult situations, we should always keep in mind that **the exception does not nullify the rule**.

So to be quite clear:

When we do not pray daily to God, then we are not keeping the laws of God as we are **required** to keep them! We are falling short.

And not praying daily is not really very different from not keeping the Sabbath. Do you understand that? Do you assign a greater importance to keeping the Sabbath, than you assign to praying every day? **Why?** And if you do, you are being partial, and you have forgotten Matthew 5:19 and James 2:10.

Whosoever therefore shall break **one of these least commandments**, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but **whosoever shall do and teach *them***, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and **yet offend in one *point***, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)

"Praying to God on our knees every day" is most definitely "one point" of the law of God. And some of you who will be reading this article are currently not doing that, are you? You can feel guilty for a day or two, after which time your conscience will most likely stop bothering you. Or you can make a commitment to change, permanently, for the rest of your life, to get on your knees before God every single day that God allows you to live from hereon out. But commitments don't come easy, do they?

The Greek word translated as "least" in Matthew 5:19 is "elachistos". This word means "**very small**, **smallest**". So what if, theoretically speaking, the instruction to pray every day is "the smallest of all of God's laws"? Does that mean that we can treat it more casually than God's other laws? Certainly not.

Next, what did Jesus Christ mean by "**these** least commandments"? He was not referring to the ten commandments in Exodus 20. He was referring to **all of the laws He expounded in Matthew 5-7**. That is what "these least" refers to. One of "these least commandments" deals with praying daily. And in these three chapters of Matthew, Christ presented a number of laws that we are expected to observe, **in addition to** the ten commandments.

Let me mention why these added laws in Matthew 5-7 might be referred to as "these least

commandments". The basic laws of God, the big great principles of laws had already been given in the days of Moses. In most cases "these least commandments" (and they are "commandments"!) are largely **a fine-tuning of the laws** given by Moses, explaining specific applications for the laws already spelled out in the Old Covenant. For example, praying every single day is one specific application of loving God above all else (see Deuteronomy 6:5).

So to be quite clear:

Praying every single day is one of these additional commandments.

If we are not willing to commit half an hour or more every day to God, then **that calls our conversion into question**. I mean, what is the point of keeping the Sabbath and the annual Holy Days, if we are not going to pray to God every day? If we're not prepared to commit to giving about 30 minutes (or more) every day to God, what's the point of being in the Church of God?

What's the point of being a Christian? That type of situation (i.e. of privately not being willing to give some of our time to God on a daily basis) is exactly what God was referring to in Ezekiel 33:31 ... people wanting to be in God's Church, but without giving God either some of our time, or **not giving God our minds**.

And they come unto you as the people come, and **they sit before you** *(*i.e. they attend Church every week*) **as*** **My people**, and they hear your words, but **they will not do them**: for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their heart goes after their covetousness. (Ezekiel 33:31)

This verse applies to every single member of God's Church who has not established the habit of praying every single day. Let's not beat around the bush. So **if** over the decades that you have been attending the Church of God you have not established the habit of praying to God on your knees every single day, **then this verse is speaking about you**! And it means that **you are almost certainly not converted**. Let's call a spade a spade.

We need to understand that the greatest predictor of people leaving the Church of God is that **they don't pray daily**. Oh, they pray now and then. But as a regular habit like eating or sleeping every day? Their prayer life isn't on that level. **But it should be**!

ESTABLISHING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The commitment that God demands from us is not just: keep the Sabbath and the Feasts and Holy Days, tithe and don't eat any unclean foods. By themselves **none of those specific things establish any kind of relationship with God**.

Did you know that?

The proof is that there are very many people in various churches of this world, who don't really have a relationship with God, but who actually observe some of those things. Some observe the Sabbath. Some tithe regularly. Some don't eat any unclean things. Some even try to observe God's Feasts and Holy Days. But those things are simply not what establishes contact with God.

Why not?

Those things are not ways of communicating with God. They are important, certainly. But they don't establish any communication with the mind of God. To have any kind of relationship with God, **we must communicate with God**! And the three ways to communicate with God are: prayer, Bible study and fasting.

When we understand that those specific laws (keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, etc.) do not in any way establish a line of communication with God, then we should also be able to understand that people outside of God's Church who observe some of those laws are not really Christians, because observing these laws does not give them any contact with God.

What's the point of someone keeping the Sabbath, but never studying the Bible (and I don't mean superficially "reading" the Bible; I mean actually "**studying**" the Bible), and **never praying** to God on his knees in the privacy of his home?

What's the point of someone keeping all of the annual Feasts and Holy Days, but never studying the Bible, and **not praying** to God on a daily basis?

What's the point of someone tithing faithfully, but never getting down on his knees in **personal prayer** to God? (I'm not talking about people who are physically not able to get on their knees.)

What's the point of someone very meticulously avoiding pork and all unclean foods, but not studying the Bible, and **not praying** to God on a daily basis?

What's the point of obedience to all of these laws, when we make no attempt to speak to God (i.e. in private prayer), and when we're not interested in having God talk to us (i.e. through seriously studying the Bible)?

God does not talk to you if you just "read" the Bible. It is only when you "study" the Bible that God will actually "talk" to you. To study the Bible means that you are looking for a better understanding, and for specific answers. It is not a matter of fulfilling a duty (which is what "reading" the Bible amounts to). It is a matter of **looking for information and understanding**.

All of the laws of God are part of the right way of life. But prayer and Bible study are much more than that.

They are the means that enable us to actually communicate with God, to make contact with the mind of God. And they are commanded just as much as are the other laws of God. In Matthew 5-7 Jesus Christ was giving additional laws for the people of God. **He came as a Lawgiver**, exactly as Moses had already indicated (see Deuteronomy 18:15).

We need to understand very clearly that true Christianity must be built on a foundation of **regular communication with God**. Obedience to all of God's other laws (Sabbath, tithing, etc.) is simply the vehicle that makes personal contact with God possible. If we knowingly don't observe God's laws, then contact with God is not possible.

Let me repeat that:

All of God's other laws (Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing, etc.) are only the vehicle that make contact with the mind of God possible. But none of those laws actually establish contact with God.

As the man who had been born blind, and who had been healed, said:

Now **we know that God hears not sinners**: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and does His will, him He hears. (John 9:31)

People who make no effort to obey God's laws simply don't have the ability to communicate with God. They can get on their knees and pray, but if they are not willing to keep the Sabbath and all of God's other laws, then God will not listen to their prayers (see 1 John 3:22). So yes, keeping all of God's laws is extremely important.

This obedience opens doors to access to God for us. But **this obedience does not take us through those open doors**. We then have to walk through those open doors ourselves. And regular daily prayer and Bible study are the way we can walk through those open doors. Regular prayer and Bible study reveal our desire to walk through the doors, which doors our observance of God's other laws has opened for us.

Put another way: Obedience to God's laws (Sabbath, etc.) gives us the leaves. You know, the leaves that the Jews in New Testament times had. They kept all of these laws. But that obedience doesn't give us the important fruits. Those fruits require regular daily contact with God, through prayer and Bible study.

Without regular prayer and Bible study direct communication with God is simply not possible.

Now let's look at the prayer outline that Jesus Christ presented in this context of giving new laws for Christians to also observe.

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

I trust you already understand that Jesus Christ did not present this outline, so that we would endlessly repeat it. God is not looking for us to approach Him with **some poem we have learned off by heart**, or with some prayer that Jesus Christ composed for us. When we pray God requires us to actively use our own minds. God wants to see **what is going on in our minds**, not how well we can memorize prayers that someone else has composed.

The prayer outline in Matthew 6 is just that, **an outline of subjects** that we can speak to God about when we appear before God on our knees. That outline is **to guide us** in directing our thoughts into specific areas of importance when we pray. But it is not intended to be memorized and repeated endlessly.

Several decades ago, back in the 70s and 80s, I used to visit people as their pastor. And we would discuss their spiritual lives. Occasionally in response to my question whether they were praying regularly, some people would say something like: “oh, **I pray all the time**, when I’m working, driving, shopping, washing the dishes, etc. I talk to God all day long”. The correct reply to such an answer is: so you’re telling me that **you don’t actually believe in obeying Jesus Christ’s instructions**, do you? The shocked person might reply: what do you mean and why do you say that?

The answer then is: let’s read Matthew 6:6.

But you, **when you pray, enter into your closet**, and when you have **shut your door**, pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees **in secret** shall reward you openly. (Matthew 6:6)

And then the reply to the person’s question is: I mean that you don’t actually believe in practicing Matthew 6:6.

Jesus Christ’s instructions here for how we are to pray are very clear. We are first to find a place where we are private. Typically that involves shutting the door, so that other people cannot interrupt us. Then we are to pray in secret **without any other distractions** interfering with our communication with God.

Praying all day long is great, **provided that** such praying is **only a supplement** to the time we spend on our knees in total privacy. But it doesn’t work, and it doesn’t count (!) if such “all day praying” is supposed to replace private time on our knees.

Nobody can survive on a diet that consists exclusively of supplements, getting bunches of vitamins and minerals and enzymes, etc. People would die on such a diet. First we need to have a decent diet, and then we can consider adding supplements. The same is true with having a personal relationship with God. **First we obey Matthew 6:6**, and then we can supplement that with praying all day in our various activities.

The problem with praying all day is that there are clearly distractions all around us while we are driving,

working, shopping, etc., and that means that we do not give God our total, undivided attention when we pray in such circumstances. **Praying is not an activity for multitasking**! That's what Matthew 6:6 tells us.

Giving God our undivided attention is the reason for going to a private place and shutting the door. And if we choose to not pray in private on our knees before God, then praying all day as a multitasking activity isn't going to be an acceptable alternative.

Next, let's look at Matthew 6:8.

Be not you therefore like unto them: for **your Father knows what things you have need of, before you ask Him**. (Matthew 6:8)

In praying to God we can pray for ourselves, and we can pray for other people. As far as praying for ourselves is concerned, God knows exactly what we need, before we even say the first word to God. And that raises some interesting questions.

If God already knows exactly what kind of help we need in which area of our lives, **why** does God then still want us to pray to Him and present our requests/petitions to Him? A little later at the same occasion Jesus Christ provided part of the explanation for this question. Notice Matthew 7:7.

Ask, and it shall be given you; **seek**, and you shall find; **knock**, and it shall be opened unto you: (Matthew 7:7)

These instructions (ask, seek, knock) certainly apply to praying. The next few verses make clear that these petitions need to be made to God. And that means that these things apply to our prayers. We are to approach God and ask for help, etc. And when we seek answers, we likewise need to approach God.

As Jesus Christ then explained:

For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. (Matthew 7:8)

When we have established a right relationship with God **through private prayer and study**, then God will respond to our requests. But if we do not have regular contact with God, if we don't pray regularly and if we don't study the Bible, then God may not answer our requests.

When Jesus Christ explained this principle of God the Father dealing with us like a human father responds to requests from his own children (that's verses 9-11), then it obviously presupposes that we are applying the earlier given instruction to pray daily. **Matthew 7:7-8 only applies to people who have established the habit of regularly appearing before God in private prayer**.

So why does God require us to ask for the things God already knows we need?

First of all, this forces us to seek direct contact with God. We have to approach God in prayer with our petitions. That is good for us. It also means that we should never assume that God will give us things without us asking God. Asking God for specific things (e.g. for understanding some doctrinal difficulty, etc.) shows God what we are thinking and how we use our minds.

For example, God gave Mr. Armstrong (he died 37 years ago this year) understanding in all those matters where Mr. Armstrong himself was searching for understanding and for answers. But God did not give Mr. Armstrong understanding of subjects and questions, when Mr. Armstrong himself did not make any serious attempt to come to a better understanding.

In some areas Mr. Armstrong simply accepted beliefs and explanations based on certain assumptions and on his own personal bias; and therefore he never looked into those specific questions in a serious way. And **in those areas God did not give Mr. Armstrong any understanding**.

Matthew 7:7-8 applies to God's top servants, just as much as it applies to all the rest of us. For example, after the death of Moses Joshua was God's top servant. Yet when the men of Gibeon tricked Joshua into making an alliance of peace with them, clearly being deceitful and devious, Joshua and all Israel believed the lies the men of Gibeon told them (see Joshua 9:3-6). **It seemed obvious** to Joshua that the Gibeonites were telling the truth, and therefore **Joshua did not approach God to ask for advice**.

Joshua and all Israel didn't ask God, and so God did not give Joshua the understanding that the Gibeonites were lying to him. And so **Joshua**, God's top leader at that time, **made a major mistake** (i.e. he made an agreement with the Gibeonites), and that mistake subsequently caused Israel significant problems.

The lesson here is:

When God's servants make major mistakes, even when those mistakes are made innocently, then that can cause significant problems for God's people!

Joshua's mistake was made innocently, but the consequences adversely affected the people of Israel for generations.

Similarly, some teachings and beliefs seemed so obvious to Mr. Armstrong that he never actually examined them personally. Once we today actually examine those things more closely (e.g. the difference between the Hebrew words "chag" and "mow-ed", etc.), it becomes clear that our past understanding was flawed.

So when God instructs us to ask Him for understanding in very specific areas, that shows God if **we are willing to examine our own assumed ideas**. If we are sincerely asking God for specific understanding, it means that our minds are open to the possibility that our present understanding may be wrong. **Sincerely asking for understanding requires an open mind**.

We can ask other people questions when we are insincere, and we aren't really looking for the truth. For example, people ask a question to try and expose a flaw in the other person's position. They don't really want the truth; they are only trying to show that their own position is right, and the other person's position is wrong.

For example, people who believe that Jesus Christ was originally one of the created angels (a heresy) will ask some trick question about Psalm 110:1, which verse shows God the Father speaking to Jesus Christ, who is also identified as God in this psalm. It is clear that such a question is totally insincere, because when the answer shows that their position is wrong, such people just come up with other objections. They don't acknowledge that you have disproved their position. That shows that their question was insincere.

Yes, we can approach other people with questions that are insincere. But **we cannot do that with God**. There's no way that we can ask God some trick question while we are praying on our knees. We would know that we are being hypocritical, and that God can see our hypocrisy. So our own minds will have to be open to new understanding if we really approach God with a question.

There was one man who did approach God with an insincere question.

He already knew the correct answer, but he was hoping for a different answer. That was the false prophet Balaam. When Balaam approached God the second time with the same question, God gave Balaam the answer he wanted to hear ... and then almost killed Balaam, when Balaam acted on that second answer. You're familiar with the story in Numbers chapters 22-24.

The other side of that issue is that when we deep-down don't really want to change, then **there are certain questions that we will simply not ask God**, because we suspect that God's answer may be something we don't really want to hear. That's called hypocrisy! Have you yourself ever said to someone: "**I don't want to know that**"? That's a blatant hypocritical statement.

For example, people who insist on believing that God requires us to bring **seven** annual offerings, although the Bible clearly states that we are to bring **three** annual offerings, will simply not ask God in prayer: Father **please show me** whether I should be bringing three or seven offerings each year.

That is a question they will simply not ask God, because in their hearts they know that the answer is going to be the one they don't want to hear. And so instead of sincerely asking God for understanding on this specific question, they will just resort to reasoning their way to "seven", and **actively argue against the biblical statements** that say "three". But they will not in private prayer sincerely ask God to show them the correct answer. That's hypocrisy, isn't it?

Now we've all done this type of thing at one time or another in our lives. We are convinced of one specific position, and we will not ask God for understanding regarding those Scriptures that contradict our own position. I say that we have all done this because during our time in the Church of God we have all had to come to better understanding regarding some or other belief.

Our understanding has changed since the 1940s and 50s and 60s. Can you recall the booklet "1975 in Prophecy"? Our understanding back then was seriously wrong. We have to keep growing, and growth requires change. And change requires us to reject any false beliefs we used to have.

Unless we are willing to get on our knees before God and sincerely ask the tough questions with an open mind, and accept the possibility that we may have to change in some way, God is simply not going to give us any answers to such tough questions.

Okay, let's move on and look at the prayer outline which Jesus Christ gave in Matthew 6.

THE PRAYER OUTLINE

We'll start with verse 9.

After this manner therefore pray you: **Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name**. (Matthew 6:9)

This is the way to open our prayers. We acknowledge God and His status, and His power and plan. The Greek word translated "hallowed" is "hagiazo", and it means "to sanctify, **to set apart for a holy use**, to make holy". In other words, human beings should only use God's name with reverence and great respect.

But that's not the case in our world today.

Today people use God's name very flippantly and without any respect at all. Think of the common American expression "oh my God" or the Spanish expression "ojalá", both of which are used without really thinking of God in heaven. And neither expression shows any respect for God. Other languages have similar expressions that take God's name in vain.

That will change when Jesus Christ returns. Then God's name will truly be set apart, to be only used with great reverence. Thinking about expressions like this should make us realize how habitually vast numbers of people misuse God's name in our world today in a great range of circumstances, in situations ranging from pleasant surprise to shock to disappointment to fear. In these types of situations people reflexively refer to God, while in fact not thinking about God at all. And their exclamations are always made in a disrespectful, shallow way.

These opening statements in this prayer outline are intended to establish contact between God and us, like an introduction, establishing that we are talking to the Supreme Ruler of this entire universe.

Let's look at the next statement.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth, as *it is* in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

Thus far we haven't told God why we are coming to Him in prayer. Our requests can wait. The topic of this specific statement will reflect our understanding of God's will. In order for God's kingdom to come, certain things still have to happen. Praying "Your kingdom come" amounts to asking God to start the millennium. But certain things must happen before then.

Clearly God's will is not being done on earth today.

Currently this earth is filled with violence and perversions, basically as it was in the days of Sodom. The way we pray "Your will be done on earth" is to ask God to remove specific evils from our environment, things like schools perverting the minds of young, impressionable children, things like sexual depravity, violence and brutality, etc.

For some of us one area affects us more directly than other areas. And we should include such specific areas of personal concern in our prayers. For other people other areas may be more immediate in their environment. And so they should include those other things in their prayers, when they are thinking about God's will. This part of the prayer basically expresses the feeling of "the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations" that are so prevalent in our world today (see Ezekiel 9:4).

God's will is being done in heaven right now. And we are to pray for the time when God's will is also going to be carried out everywhere here on earth.

Now for the next statement.

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)

Having been introduced to God, acknowledging His great power, and having focused on God's plan and purposes, now we come to **the first category of our requests**.

When Jesus Christ said to Satan that "man shall not live by bread alone..." (see Matthew 4:4), He used the word "bread" to refer to "all physical food", because He contrasted "bread" with the words that "proceed out of the mouth of God".

So this request in effect says: give us this day **our daily foods**. Physical food is one of our daily needs.

This section in the prayer is devoted to asking God for all of our **daily** needs. And asking for daily needs to be met obviously implies that tomorrow we will have to ask again, and then again on the next day, etc. Therefore this one statement in the prayer expresses the command that **we are to appear daily before God on our knees**.

The problem is that today **many of us have enough food in our fridges and freezers and in our pantries** to last us for weeks, or even for a month or two. Such people are in fact in a similar position to the man who intended to build extra large barns to store all his grain.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; **take your ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry**. (Luke 12:19)

With that attitude this man obviously did not look to God to provide all his needs on a daily basis. He was complacent and self-sufficient. And he certainly wasn't prepared for the fatal heart attack he would have that very night (see verse 20).

People who do not pray on a daily basis are just like this man in Luke 12:19. That is because they likewise clearly don't see the need to appear before God on a daily basis, to request God's help with all of that day's needs. Their pantry is full, and for them it is sufficient to appear before God once a week or once a month.

Food is our most obvious and most immediate daily need. But there are also many other things that we need every day. We need to have some form of housing; we need to have clothes to wear and we need protection in all our daily activities. We also need to find favor in the eyes of the people with whom we will interact this day. Millions of people have died in accidents, proving that those people did not have God's protection.

In this section of the prayer we should respectfully ask God for help with all our varied needs for this day. Do we have any fears, worries, concerns? This is the place where we need to ask God for help and guidance with these things.

Let's look at the next statement.

And **forgive us our debts**, as we forgive our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

This statement is to ensure that we appear before God with **the right attitude**. When we come to God to ask for help and guidance, it is imperative that we have the right attitude. If we have grudges or resentment or bitterness or hatred towards certain other people in our hearts, then God is not going to drop the resentment God could (theoretically) hold against us for breaking His laws.

It's a case of us needing to treat other people in the same way that we would like God to treat us.

This statement also starts with the assumption that we will indeed have debts and failings before God. It's not a question of whether or not we have sins. It is only a question of: **are we willing to freely acknowledge our sins** and failings to God? In this regard it is also not sufficient to present the general statement "please forgive all my sins" to God. God's reply to a such a statement is: **what sins are you talking about?** We need to be specific. So note the following point:

If we ourselves cannot think of specific wrongdoings or failings or careless neglect or wrong speech, etc. on our part, **then "please forgive all my sins" is a meaningless request**!

It is a hollow statement when we ourselves can't even think of what sins we are referring to. We ourselves clearly knowing exactly what it is that we want God to forgive must always be **the foundation** for any appeals to mercy and forgiveness. If you yourself cannot think of anything specific that you would like God to forgive you, **why are you asking for forgiveness?**

Yes, certainly, God already knows all our sins and failings. But **do we ourselves also know them?** Or are we oblivious of some of our failings and shortcomings?

Insensitive people and self-righteous people are easily oblivious of some of their own sins. Consider the self-righteous man who wanted to get into the first resurrection (i.e. he wanted to attend the wedding supper without a wedding garment).

And He said to him, Friend, how did you come in here not having a wedding garment? **And he was speechless**. (Matthew 22:12)

This was a self-righteous man who **had attended God's Church** and who expected to be in the first resurrection. He had in fact been unrepentant throughout his time of attending God's Church. **He had never really seen his own sins**. He was totally clueless as far as identifying his own weaknesses and shortcomings is concerned.

And if he had ever in prayer to God said "please forgive my sins", he would not have been able to name any specific sins to which his statement was supposed to apply. He had simply said that statement because "that's the thing we are supposed to do when we appear before God, right?"

Understand the following:

We do not receive forgiveness for sins which we ourselves have not identified and then mentioned to God in prayer.

It reminds me of the attitude some of my Catholic teenage friends used to have in the Catholic school which I attended, when they would say: I've got to go to weekly "Confession", and I need to have some sins to say to the priest. **What can I tell him this time?**

Now this part of the prayer is also supposed to be a **daily** petition to God, because these are the things we are supposed to pray about every single day. It means that God expects us to examine our own attitude on a daily basis. But if we ourselves cannot think of anything that we need to have forgiven, then we should not say “and forgive my sins”. Otherwise it would be a fake statement, like with some of my Catholic friends over 60 years ago artificially finding small things to confess to the priest.

Next, actually saying things to this effect in our prayers to God (i.e. asking God for forgiveness for specific things) means that we are confessing that we have weaknesses and failings. This section of the prayer deals with **honestly examining ourselves before God**. This type of self-examination is a requirement for receiving forgiveness from God. And it includes examining our own attitude towards other people, specifically towards the people we don’t really like.

This self-examination of our own attitude towards the people we may not like, people who may have offended us, is extremely important. The next verse concludes this prayer outline. And then the next two verses after that return the focus to the statement “and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”.

Here are those two verses.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But **if you forgive not men their trespasses**, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

This is one of the most important things for us to understand about praying to God. **Our attitude towards other people determines how God will deal with us**. This means it is extremely important that we examine our own attitude towards other people on a daily basis. When we hold grudges towards other people, then that has an adverse affect on our relationship with God.

Any grudge we hold against anyone means that we don’t recognize ourselves as the servant of God who owes God “ten thousand talents” (see Matthew 18:24-34). By comparison, what anyone else may owe us is no more than “a hundred pence”, i.e. a very small amount of money. When upon repentance God forgives our debts, then anything anyone may say or do to us is by comparison nothing more than small change.

Holding grudges and not forgiving other people is a sign that we don’t really appreciate just how much God has forgiven us. This too is something we should think about on a daily basis. So the statement in verse 12 of this prayer outline is amplified by the statements in verses 14-15.

BRING US NOT INTO TRIALS

That brings us to the last verse for this prayer outline. It presents a number of points.

And **lead us not into temptation**, but **deliver us from evil**: For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:13)

The verb translated “lead” in this verse is “**eisphero**”, consisting of the preposition “eis” meaning “into”, and the verb “phero” meaning “to bring, to carry”. This verb is not the Greek verb for “to lead”. Rather, this verb simply means “bring”.

The Greek verb for “**to lead**” is “**ago**” and compound words formed from “ago”, such as “apago, diago, exago, periago, cheiragogos, hodegeo”, etc. None of these Greek verbs is used in this context. So this statement here does not refer to “leading” in any way. Rather, “eisphero” refers to “bringing”.

The English verb “**to lead**” **implies an intention**. The one doing the leading has a specific destination in mind; he has a goal in mind. Leaders on a journey know where they want to take us. So the one doing the leading has a motive in mind. By contrast, the verb “to bring” is much more neutral. The verb “**to bring**” **does not imply any motivation or predetermined destination** for those who are “brought” somewhere.

So for a start this verse should say “**bring us not into** ...”, rather than “lead us not into ...”. This is acknowledged by a number of other translations (ASV, NRSV, Lexham English Bible, ERV, etc.), which all use the verb “to bring” in this verse.

That “brings” us to the word translated as “temptation”. Now the English word “temptation” in this context is a problem, because James 1:13 says in plain words:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for **God cannot be tempted with evil**, **neither tempts He any man**: (James 1:13)

We human beings clearly are frequently tempted to do something that is wrong. But that temptation to do wrong **never comes from God**. So where does it come from? The next verse explains.

But every man is tempted, when he is **drawn away of his own lust**, and enticed. (James 1:14)

It is typically **our own desire** to have the things that other people have, and to do things that we should not do, that tempts us to sin. This desire arises in our own minds, and it is in our minds that we are tempted. If we give in to those selfish thoughts and that selfish desire in our own minds, and then act on those thoughts, then we sin (that’s verse 15).

But **God had nothing to do with those selfish thoughts** appearing in our minds. We ourselves produced those selfish thoughts which then tempted us. This means that the statement “and bring us not into temptation” is not an appropriate request to present to God. I mean, why would we ask God to not do something that we already know God will never do anyway?

So the word “temptation” is really not acceptable in this request to God.

The Greek noun here translated “**temptation**” is “peirasmos”, which is formed from the verb “peirazo”.

To understand the meaning of this Greek verb “peirazo”, let’s examine some of the Scriptures where this verb is used.

Examine (“peirazo”) yourselves, whether you be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know you not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobates? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you cannot bear them which are evil: and **you have tried** (“peirazo”) them which say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars: (Revelation 2:2)

And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, **he assayed** (“peirazo”) to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. (Acts 9:26)

And this He said **to prove** (“peirazo”) him: for He Himself knew what He would do. (John 6:6)

This last verse shows Jesus Christ **testing** Philip’s faith and understanding. But Jesus Christ was assuredly not “tempting” Philip in any way. The above verses should suffice to show that this verb “peirazo” has a far broader range of meanings and applications than merely referring to the restricted meaning of “to tempt”.

“**To tempt**” is a negative meaning, because it implies **trying to get someone to sin**. “To prove” and “to test” and “to examine”, on the other hand, have no such negative connotations. They are ethically and morally neutral in their meaning. And so some biblical Greek dictionaries will rightly point out that this verb is frequently used in a good sense, and that it is also frequently used in a bad sense. The context is always the key.

The biblical Greek noun “peirasmos” likewise can be used in a good sense, and it can also be used in a bad sense. A potential difficulty here is that **translators** of the New Testament **may make the wrong choice**. That is, they may imply a bad sense (e.g. “temptation”) when the original writer of that NT book may have had a good or neutral sense (e.g. “trial”) in mind.

The noun “peirasmos” means: to put to proof by experiment, to test (that is the good sense), to solicit to do evil (that is the bad sense). In the bad sense “to solicit to do evil” refers to “a temptation”. In the good sense this word refers to “a test”.

In other words, this noun “peirasmos” means: experiment, attempt, trial, proving, test, temptation.

A key to understanding Matthew 6:13 correctly is to recognize that in the context of this prayer outline

Jesus Christ used this Greek noun with its good meaning, and not with its bad meaning. The meaning in this verse is “test” or “trial”. Here it does not refer to “a solicitation to do evil”.

So the first part of verse 13 should read: “**and bring us not into trials** ...”.

But there is another point we should note regarding this first statement in verse 13. And that is this: the Greek verb “eisenegkes” (a form of “eisphero”), correctly translated as “bring”, is in **the subjunctive mood**.

Now in biblical Greek the subjunctive mood expresses **possibility and potentiality**. What this means is that any action described by the subjunctive mood may or may not occur. This mood implies that whether or not something occurs **depends on certain circumstances**. Something could happen, but it also might not happen at all. **It all depends on certain other things**. This type of potential is expressed very succinctly by the subjunctive mood.

Do you grasp the enormous significance of the subjunctive mood in this specific statement here?

All true Christians are ordained to having to deal with tests and trials. Trials are a fixed part of the Christian life. As David tells us in Psalm 34:

Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Psalms 34:19)

However ...

Exactly how many trials we may have to face in our lives is not fixed. It is not a done deal. Jesus Christ’s instruction for us to use this approach in our prayers to God (i.e. “bring us not into trials”) means that, when we in our prayers ask God to not bring us into trials, **we will then be likely to be exposed to less trials**, than we would be exposed to if we do not express this thought in our prayers.

That’s profound!

And it all goes back to the very simple principle of “ask and it shall be given to you”. All of us would surely prefer to face less trials rather than more trials. And Jesus Christ has just revealed one way in which we can make less trials a reality.

To be quite clear regarding the use of the subjunctive mood in this expression:

We are the ones who use the subjunctive mood in our prayers to God. So we are **appealing to the possibility** that God may expose us to less trials. In effect we are saying the same thing that Jesus Christ said in His own prayer to the Father. Jesus Christ prayed:

"... **if it be possible**, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless ..." (Matthew 26:39)

That statement is exactly what the use of the subjunctive mood in our prayer request says. We are instructed to pray: "... **if it be possible, bring us not into trials**, nevertheless ...".

Now the fact that Jesus Christ has instructed us to express this specific thought in our prayers to God means that **it is indeed possible** in our lives. For Jesus Christ Himself there was no way around going through His particular trials, because those trials formed a key part of God's revised plan of salvation for mankind.

But for us **all of the trials we may have to experience are far more flexible**. There is plenty of room for us having to face some trials and for us to not have to face other trials. The power to decide in this matter lies in God's hands. Therefore we are instructed to pray in this manner.

Now regarding asking God to not bring us into trials:

This is not intended as a carte blanche way of avoiding all trials. Rather, it means that **we are examining our lives** and looking ahead to identify potential difficulties that may come our way. We are in our prayers applying the principle of Proverbs 22:3.

A prudent *man* foresees the evil, and hides himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. (Proverbs 22:3)

And as we identify **potential difficulties ahead** with family members or with our jobs or perhaps personal health issues or financial issues, so we should ask God to help us to avoid problems in those areas. And the way to avoid such potential problem areas is to **ask God for wisdom** in preparing for and in handling such situations, as well as asking for favor with all the people who might be involved in these specific issues.

The point is that when we ask God to not bring us into tests and trials, **we ourselves have specific areas of our lives in mind**. Our requests involve areas we ourselves are thinking about. And we present those areas in our prayers before God.

It is never a case of: I'm supposed to ask God to not bring me into trials, but I myself don't have the faintest idea in what area of my life trials might possibly develop. When Jesus Christ prayed to the Father for help, Christ had a very specific area in mind, the trials He would have to endure during the next 24 hours. Likewise, when we ask God for help with trials, we should have some idea regarding where in our lives those trials might appear. Our prayerful requests for help and intervention need **a focus**.

Now let's consider **why God would expose us to less trials** simply because we ask God to not bring

us into trials. This requires us to understand **the purpose of God-imposed trials**.

I here refer to “God-imposed trials” because many of the trials I have to deal with are not God-imposed at all. Many of my trials are simply a consequence of my own personal foolish speech or actions. And I suspect that the same is true for you. We should recognize that many of the trials we have to endure, we have actually brought upon ourselves by what we have done, and what we have at times said to other people.

But as far as God-imposed trials are concerned, they are intended to achieve specific goals. For example, virtually all trials are aimed at teaching us faith and patience (see James 1:3). Some trials may have additional purposes. Now the more faith and the more patience we have already developed in our lives, the less God needs to test us in that specific area of godly character development.

When we have thought through our lives and what lies ahead of us, and in the process we have identified specific areas of potential difficulties and trials ahead, it means that **our minds are already looking at the things we need to deal with**, and the changes we may need to make in our lives and in our conduct, in order to avoid those potential trials.

One of the purposes of trials is to get us **to focus on the things we need to change in our lives**. So when we have already done that, when our minds are already looking at where we need to change, **then we don’t need a trial** to get us to focus our minds on those areas where we need to change. Our minds are already examining those specific areas. You follow?

People, who foresee potential evils in their own lives, and consequently take preemptive evasive action, always have to face less trials than other people who do not anticipate potential consequences for the things they say and do.

To be quite clear here: the vast majority of people never anticipate the negative consequences that result from the things they do and say. **Does that include you?** Maybe, but hopefully not.

Anyway, here is the point we need to understand about this instruction to pray: “and bring us not into trials”:

This request in our prayers demands that we examine ourselves before God!

We really do have to try to anticipate potential problems for us arising from the things we say and the things we do. And those things which we say and do need not necessarily be things that are wrong. Saying and doing things that are right also has consequences. **But we have to think ahead** and anticipate problems coming up in our lives. And then we have to try to think of **what we can do** in order to avoid those potential problems becoming real tangible problems for us.

When we seriously follow this approach, **then God will also bring less trials into our lives**, because we are on our own initiative already directing our minds into those areas that God wants us to examine.

This is simply another way of stating the principle Paul spelled out in 1 Corinthians 11:31.

For **if we would judge ourselves**, we should not be judged. (1 Corinthians 11:31)

To judge ourselves means to examine ourselves. And “we should not be judged” means that we would experience less trials.

The thing we need to understand is that **this request** “bring us not into trials” **places a responsibility on us ourselves**. God expects us to examine ourselves, and to identify potential problem areas in our lives. When we have done that in honesty and sincerity, then any potential problem areas that we are not really aware of, God will take care of. That’s based on us having placed our faith in God.

Now let’s look at the last request we are to present to God.

DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE

The next part of Matthew 6:13 reads: “... but **deliver us from evil** ...”. What does this mean?

The Greek text for this short expression is “alla rhusai hemas **apo tou ponerou**”. The words “apo tou ponerou” mean “**from the evil one**”, a clear reference to Satan.

To illustrate this meaning, let’s look at Matthew 13, verses 19 and 38.

When any one hears the word of the kingdom, and understands *it* not, then comes **the wicked *one*** (Greek “**ho poneros**”), and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the way side. (Matthew 13:19)

The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of **the wicked *one*** (Greek “**tou ponerou**”); (Matthew 13:38)

The point is that evil does not exist in a vacuum. Evil is the expression of a free mind that has chosen to rebel against God. All of the expressions of such a rebellious mind are “evil”. We don’t need to be protected from “evil” per se; **we need to be protected from the minds that produce evil**, the minds that produce disobedience to the laws of God.

We need to be protected first of all from the individual whose mind produces evil, and that is Satan. And then we need protection from those minds that are receptive to the evil which has been broadcast by Satan, and which minds are then willing to put those evil thoughts into action, with intent to in some way harm other people.

We now have the first part of verse 13 corrected. It should read:

“And **bring us not into trials**, but **deliver us from the evil one**.”

So **how** does God deliver us from “the evil one”?

Satan is identified as “the prince (or ruler) of the power of the air” in Ephesians 2:2. In modern terms we might say that “**Satan controls the airwaves**”. Satan can send **thoughts** and **feelings** to the minds of people who are tuned into his many channels. Those thoughts and feelings can reach our minds, and they can also reach the minds of all other people.

So two ways in which Satan can potentially influence us are:

1) His evil thoughts can reach our minds directly.

2) He can influence other people, whose words or deeds can then have an adverse effect on our lives.

The first way is illustrated in Ephesians 6:16.

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench **all the fiery darts of the wicked** (**one**). (Ephesians 6:16)

“The fiery darts” are evil thoughts that Satan sends directly to our minds. Those darts do indeed reach their target, our minds. **It is our responsibility to then extinguish those evil thoughts**. We have to use faith to put out those evil thoughts. But faith is a fruit of God’s spirit (Galatians 5:22). So in order to neutralize those fiery darts, we must have access to God’s holy spirit.

Thus one way God delivers us from Satan, the evil one, is by giving us His holy spirit. That free gift from God is a spirit of power (2 Timothy 1:7). And that power is able to overcome whatever evil thoughts and impulses Satan may send directly to our minds.

But Satan can also influence **other people** to hate us and to seek to harm us. In this situation it is **God’s intervention** that will have to prevent the words and deeds of other people from harming us.

That is what we are asking God to do for us when we pray “deliver us from the evil one”!

Satan himself cannot physically confront us and threaten us, because he has no physical powers whatsoever. **The only way** Satan can threaten our physical well-being is by influencing **other human beings** to threaten our well-being. And that is where we need God’s divine protection.

Let's understand that when it comes to Satan's ability to send evil thoughts to our minds, then **we ourselves are expected by God to resist those evil thoughts**, and to drive them out of our minds. That is the type of testing to which all human beings are exposed. And in such circumstances God expects us to use His holy spirit to cast such evil thoughts out of our minds.

It is **when Satan uses other human beings** as agents, with the intent to actually harm us in some way, that we need God to stop those individuals from harming us. And Jesus Christ instructed us to pray for God's help in that type of situation.

So in plain terms:

"Deliver us from the evil one" means: please **protect us from any people, whom Satan has stirred up to intend to harm us**. Deliver us so that they have no power over us.

Now clearly, there will be times when we know quite well that someone is against us and wants to harm us. It may be neighbors who resent us, or it may be a boss or a coworker who hates us, etc. In such situations **we should be specific in our prayers**. We need to ask God to not let such individuals harm us in any way. We should also understand that Satan will be the one who will inspire such people to hate us. And asking God to protect us from receiving any harm from such individuals is one specific application of praying: "deliver us from the evil one".

THE LAST PART OF THE PRAYER

The very last thought in this prayer outline is a focus once again on God's plan and power and glory. It is a focus on the One who wields all power throughout the universe. We freely acknowledge that the Creator God is all-powerful. It is also an expression of reverence and respect for God.

For Yours is **the kingdom**, and **the power**, and **the glory**, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:13)

That concludes the outline Jesus Christ presented for us. Each of the statements in this outline can easily be expanded to include more details that apply to that particular statement. The amount of detail always depends on our personal and individual circumstances, and how we use our own minds. With all of these statements we need to be specific in regard to our own circumstances.

When we earnestly seek God in daily personal prayers, then God will surely help us and deliver us "from the evil one".

Frank W Nelte