

God disciplines, Satan tempts

What can we say of the trials and tests that come into our lives? Luther put it well in his explanation of the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Lead us not into temptation):

God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory.

God does not attempt to lead anyone into sin. He does, however, permit trials to come into our lives to keep us close to Him. Job is one notable example of this, and Joseph is another. God assures us that He will govern these trials so that they work out for our eternal welfare. Speaking through the Apostle Paul He says, "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose,*" (Rom. 8:28). He also assures us that they are signs of His love for us. ⁷ *It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?* ⁸ *If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.* ⁹ *Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?* ¹⁰ *For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness,*" (Hebrews 12:7-10). He promises us that He will sustain us as we go through them (1 Cor. 10:13; Is. 41:10; 43:1-2) and that He will deliver us from them (2 Tim. 4:18).

The devil, however, tempts us to sin. He tempted Eve to doubt God's Word or God's goodness. He tempted David to pride so that he counted the number of troops in his army (1 Chron. 21). He tried to tempt Jesus to sin, but failed (Matt. 4:lff.). He stalks us as a lion stalks its prey (1 Peter 5:8). He looks for the optimum time of weakness. He knows our weaknesses better than we do. He knows the best ways to exploit them. His purpose is to lead us away from God, into sin and everlasting damnation. He has allies. He attempts to lure us or deceive us through the ungodly world (1 John 2:15-17). He has an ally within us. It is our own sinful flesh (James 1:14).

By ourselves, we are no match for the devil. Yet our comfort is that God's Son, Jesus, became flesh and took the battlefield against Satan on our behalf Jesus conquered him, paid for our sins in full, broke the devil's power over us, and empowers us to say no to the devil and yes to God's will. When we think of the devil's temptations, then, we will soberly recognise our weakness and helplessness. We will also, however, have the confidence that Jesus' victory over Satan is our victory through faith.

HALLELUJAH! SING TO JESUS

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Hallelujah! Sing to Jesus,
His the sceptre, His the throne;
Hallelujah! His the triumph,

His the victory alone.
Hark, the songs of peaceful Zion
Thunder like a mighty flood:
“Jesus out of every nation
Has redeemed us by His blood.”

Hymn 771 v.1