



21 DELIVERANCE

THE SIXTH PETITION

Save us from the time of trial.

What does this mean?

God tempts no one to sin, but we ask in this prayer that God would watch over us and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful self may not deceive us and draw us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins. And we pray that even though we are so tempted we may still win the final victory.

THE SEVENTH PETITION

And deliver us from evil.

What does this mean?

We ask in this inclusive prayer that our heavenly Father would save us from every evil to body and soul, and at our last hour would mercifully take us from the troubles of this world to himself in heaven.



The key to just about any good play in football, hockey, or basketball is the fake—making it seem as if you're going to do one thing when actually you're planning to do something else. When they work, fakes throw the defense off guard, opening up weaknesses that enable the offense to score or move closer to it.

There is nothing fake about temptations. They are terribly real. But they can be awfully deceptive, too. The less dangerous ones—temptations to curse, lust, steal, or lie—can look the most powerful. And the most dangerous temptations, like false belief and despair, can look weak and harmless. While you're setting up a defense against the temptations you see most clearly, the more dangerous ones come along from the other direction, hitting you blind side to rob you of the freedom and hope of the promise.

Luther sometimes called the smaller temptations "puppy sins." It's not that they aren't difficult or harmful. It's just that they are weak in comparison to the big ones, which always come silently or secretly to attack God's word for us.

Jesus has given us the Sixth and Seventh Petitions for both kinds of temptation. But he is especially concerned with the big ones. So in the Sixth Petition, "Save us from the time of trial," he teaches us to ask God for help with our temptations now, to keep us in faith while we await the new day. And in the Seventh, the concluding petition, he teaches us to pray also for the last day, when God will remove us from all temptations and every evil to take us to himself.

That leaves us with a couple of questions. First, what are these temptations that are so powerful? And second, how does God help us with them?

The hidden tempters

Something strange happens as God makes the new you. You might expect that this new you would get stronger and stronger until finally you wouldn't be tempted at all. That's partially true; the new you does get stronger in the promise.

But with temptation, it's just the opposite. The more you hear and want God's promise, the stronger the temptations



get. It's like learning to drive—the more you learn, the more aware you become of the dangers.

That's how the big temptations work; they are sneaky, silent, and deadly. Their target is the promise of the First Commandment, God's promise, given to us in Christ, to be our God. Two of these big temptations are listed in Luther's explanation: false belief and despair.

To start with, false belief might not seem like much of a temptation, not nearly as tempting as gossiping or coveting. What does it matter what people believe, after all? Isn't it a free country?

That's the fake—false belief looks harmless at first. But what is false belief? Since God's decision to be our God in Christ,



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forgiving us and adopting us, is the most important belief we have, false belief is something that denies this promise.

False beliefs works in just this way. All of them say, in one way or another, that God's decision isn't enough or good enough for us. So, either they say that we ourselves have to do what God has promised to do, or they say that God goes part way and we go the rest of the way in response. The God of the promise is treated like a liar, then, and you lose the freedom and hope of the promise.

Do you find that tempting? Probably not, when it's put that way. But the old Adam or Eve is the master of disguise. It puts much nicer clothing on it to make it more attractive.

"It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere," the old sinner in us will say, as if God had never spoken a word and we could make up anything we want about God. If that doesn't work, the old self will flip the coin so it comes down on the other side, making the promise into a law. "Now you have to believe this," it will say, "and believe it just as I tell it to you. Otherwise, there is no hope for you." The sinner makes God's Word out to be something so stupid that we have to be forced to accept it. Either way, the hope and joy of the promise is denied.

The second powerful temptation Luther lists in his explanation of the Sixth Petition is despair. Again, that doesn't sound like much of a temptation. But when things start to go wrong, when nothing seems to go the way you hope it will, it seems only natural to get discouraged, to lose heart.

It's not surprising that things go bad sometimes. Even though God controls those three opponents—the devil, the world, and our own flesh—they can still do enough damage to make us feel helpless and hopeless.

That's what makes despair such a sneaky temptation. It begins so quietly, in such a subtle way. And that's what makes it so difficult to fight, too. Like worries and guilt, hopelessness feeds on itself, pulling us down into despair until finally there seems to be no way out. And then, fight though we may, God's Word and promise don't seem true or helpful for us. The freedom and hope God promises to us in the Word are lost for us, covered by the old self's hopelessness.



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So we pray, "Save us from the time of trial," asking that God will watch over us so that we don't get lured into such things as false belief and despair. Praying this petition, we are asking God to protect us now from anything that would lead us away from the promise.

Power in weakness

The apostle Paul tells a story in 2 Corinthians 12 that shows how God helps us in temptation. Paul says that he had a "thorn in the flesh," something that bothered him deeply. "Three times I appealed to the Lord about this," he says, "that it would leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness'" (verses 8-9).

That's another puzzling answer, isn't it? God refused to take away whatever it was that bothered Paul. But still God gave Paul all that Paul could ask for and more: God's grace.



That's how God helps us. Now, while we wait for the new day, God doesn't take us out of temptation, somehow making us immune to it or exempt from it. God is going to keep us here, where there is temptation, because this is where our jobs are.

But if God doesn't take us out of temptation, God gives us what Paul also received: grace that never ends, gifts on top of gifts, enabling us to live in temptation with faith and our hopes up. "My grace is sufficient for you," God says, "for *you*." It is the grace of God's promise to be your God, God's decision to make the new you who will be what God created you to be—a believer. It is the grace of God's promise to take you as you are, putting the old self to death in you and promising to raise you from the dead. It is the grace that comes to you in the Word and sacraments, assuring you and reassuring you that whatever happens, Christ is yours and you are Christ's.



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That's how Jesus fought the tempter—with God's Word and promise of grace. When Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted, he didn't rely on his own strength or power, as he very well could have. Instead, each time the devil came Jesus met him with the Word. "It is written," Jesus said, "'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).



The Word is the power God gives us in our weakness. We shall be tempted right up to our last day and hour. If it weren't for God's promise of grace, we would be beaten by temptations right up to the last hour, too. But God has filled our ears with the Word, encouraging us, comforting us, upholding us, and uplifting us. God's Word is God's power, the power of the Spirit to uphold us in our weakness, to overcome all the temptations we face, to win the victory for us.

But that's not the end of the story. At our last hour, when the last day comes, God is going to deliver us from all evil—anything and everything that threatens us in any way. God is going to destroy all the old enemies—the sinful self, the rebellious world, and the devil—making us and the creation completely new.

Who is going to do that? Your creator, the one who in Christ, taught you this prayer. For this God is the God of the promise, the God who raised Jesus from the dead, the God who will raise you from the dead. "See, I am making all things new," God says (Revelation 21:5). "Amen," we say. That's the way it's going to be.