

Tempted and Delivered (Matthew 6:12-13)

Anne Graham-Lotz, Billy Graham's daughter was being interviewed on an Early Show not long after 9-11 happened and she was asked, "How could God let something like this happen?" Her reply was

"I believe that God is deeply saddened by this, just as we are, but for years we've been telling God to get out of our schools, to get out of our government and to get out of our lives. And being the gentleman that He is, I believe that He has calmly backed out. How can we expect God to give us His blessing and His protection if we demand that He leave us alone?" In light of recent events...terrorists attack, school shootings, etc.

"Let's see, I think it started when Madeline Murray O'Hare (she was murdered, her body was found recently) complained she didn't want any prayer in our schools, and we said OK. Then, someone said "you better not read the Bible in school...the Bible that says "You shall not murder, you shall not steal and love your neighbour as yourself."

And we said, "OK."

Then, Dr. Benjamin Spock said we shouldn't spank our children when they misbehave because their little personalities would be warped and we might damage their self-esteem (Dr. Spock's son committed suicide) and we said, an expert should know what he's talking about so we said "OK." Then, someone said "teachers and headteachers better not discipline our children when they misbehave." And the school administrators said "no faculty member in this school better touch a student when they misbehave because we don't want any bad publicity, and we surely don't want to be sued." (There's big difference between disciplining and touching, beating, smacking, humiliating, kicking, etc.) And we said, "OK."

Then someone said, "let's let our daughters have abortions if they want, and they won't even have to tell their parents." And we said, "OK." Then some of our top elected officials said it doesn't matter what we do in private as long as we do our jobs. And agreeing with them, we said it doesn't matter to me what anyone, including the President, does in private as long as I have a job and the economy is good. And then someone said let's print magazines with pictures of nude people and call it wholesome, down-to-earth appreciation for the beauty of the body. And we said, OK.

And then someone else took that appreciation a step further and published pictures of nude children and then stepped further still by making them available on the internet. And we said OK, they're entitled to their free speech. And then the entertainment industry said, "let's make TV shows and movies that promote profanity, violence, and illicit sex. And let's record music that encourages rape, drugs, murder, suicide, and satanic themes." And we said, "it's just entertainment, it has no adverse effect, and nobody takes it seriously anyway, so go right ahead." Now we're asking ourselves why our children have no conscience, why they don't know right from wrong, and why it doesn't bother them to kill strangers, their classmates, and themselves.

Probably, if we think about it long and hard enough, we can figure it out. I think it has a great deal to do with "WE REAP WHAT WE SOW." "Dear God, Why didn't you save the little girl killed in her classroom?" Sincerely, Concerned Student... AND THE REPLY "Dear Concerned Student, I am not allowed in schools." Sincerely, God.

Funny how simple it is for people to trash God and then wonder why the world's going to hell. Funny how we believe what the newspapers say, but question what the Bible says. Funny how everyone wants to go to heaven provided they do not have to believe, think, say, or do anything righteous. Funny how someone can say "I believe in God" but still follow Satan who, by the way, also "believes" in God. Funny how we are quick to judge but not to be judged. Funny how you can send a thousand 'jokes' through e-mail and they spread like wildfire, but when you start sending messages regarding the Lord, people think twice about sharing. Funny how the lewd, crude, vulgar and obscene pass freely through cyberspace, but the public discussion of God is suppressed in the school and workplace.

To me when I read those words, compelling words and although Anne Graham-Lotz is talking about America, she could be talking about Britain. We see the moral standards of our country going down and down and it is not because of the Muslims or Hindus or any race or creed or colour or faith group – it is because this country is going further and further away from what the Bible says is the right way to live from people who would tick the box which says Christian on the census – over 70% still do.

In the Lord's prayer we read

**“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”**
(Matthew 6:9-13 NIV)

We begin with God, something this country has forgotten about, by and large, unless something like 9-11 or July-7 happens. Then why did not God stop it? Why should he when we reject him? The first half of the prayer is God, do we give God enough of our prayer time? Do we give God enough of our time or do we just give him enough to 'keep him happy' - or at least the minister or deacons happy, or to keep our church membership?

But then the prayer moves on, and so should we. It then moves on to us and deals first with our physical needs

“Give us today our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11 NIV)

Because without our physical needs met, we cannot do anything. It is no good being spiritual to a person who is dying from starvation. But then we read

**“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”**
(Matthew 6:12-13 NIV)

This is the spiritual and moral aspect of our lives. Let us look at the moral aspects. This is what Anne Graham-Lotz is talking about. The moral decline in the West is so visible, why? Because instead of praying

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”
(Matthew 6:13 NIV)

People are being tempted and are going with the temptation. “It is not doing anyone any harm,” they say. “If it feels good, do it” is another mantra. Is this why we are getting more gun crime on our streets, we have more knife crime on our streets? We have police who have to wear knife-proof vests at minimum and often bullet-proof vests very often. There is an increase in the amount of violent crimes on our streets over the years when people have been giving in to temptation instead of praying

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”
(Matthew 6:13 NIV)

But surely it is not wrong to be tempted. That is true and it is not God who tempts us. James tells us

“When tempted, no-one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”
(James 1:13-15 NIV)

When we are tempted we are tempted by

- Satan – he is the evil one or at the end of the phrase

deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13 NIV)

this can be evil one or evil, full stop. Satan is the father of evil and knows so many ways to tempt us. But we can also be tempted

- By ourselves – our own inbuilt evil system leads us to temptation. And also
- By the world which is under the control of the prince of this world, that is Satan. Yes, God is in overall control, but at this time he allows Satan a fairly free range, although he does put the brakes on him sometimes.

Yes we are tempted; this makes us stronger and more mature. Again James says

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials (same word as temptations) of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4 NIV)

We need to keep asking God to not let us give in to our temptations, but to live moral lives because that is the way we are designed and society works best when that happens. Also it is part of our witness to live moral lives, different lives with different values, God’s values from those around us.

So we have seen the moral clause of the Lord’s prayer, the physical clause of the Lord’s prayer, so let us come to what some call the spiritual clause of the Lord’s prayer.

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12 NIV)

We are so much in debt to God because of our sin. We can so easily know forgiveness when we come to God – he is so ready to forgive, but are we? This phrase though makes it sound as if we are only forgiven when we forgive, but it is more that if we truly know the forgiveness of God, then we cannot help but forgive. With an unforgiving, cold heart it has been said that

God cannot enter the frozen heart of one who hates

And one who hates will never forgive because they will not have known forgiveness themselves. Remember that we are likened in Psalm 23 to a cup that overflows. As we know forgiveness that is to overflow from us and forgive others.

I would like to end with a positive picture of what this is rather than a picture of what it is not.

LET RIGHT PREVAIL

Imagine this scene from a courtroom trial in South Africa just before the Millennium: A frail black woman stands slowly to her feet. She is something over 70 years of age.

Facing her from across the room are several white security police officers, one of whom, Mr Van der Broek, has just been tried and found implicated in the murders of both the woman's son and her husband some years before. It was indeed Mr Van der Broek, it has now been established, who had come to the woman's home a number of years back, taken her son, shot him at point-blank range and then burned the young man's body on a fire while he and his officer partied nearby.

Several years later, Mr Van der Broek and his cohorts had returned to take away her husband as well. For many months she heard nothing of his whereabouts.

Then, almost two years after her husband's disappearance, Mr Van der Broek came back to fetch the woman herself. How vividly she remembers that evening, going down to a place beside a river where she was shown her husband, bound and beaten, but still strong in spirit, lying on a pile of wood. The last words she heard from his lips as the officers poured gasoline over his body and set him aflame were, "Father, forgive them."

And now the woman stands in the courtroom and listens to the confessions offered by Mr Van der Broek. A member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission turns to her and asks: "So, what do you want? How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?"

"I want three things," begins the old woman calmly, but confidently. "I want first to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial."

She pauses, then continues. "My husband and son were my only family. I want, secondly, therefore, for Mr Van der Broek to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining within me.

"And finally," she says, "I want a third thing. I would like Mr Van der Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive. This was also the wish of my husband. And so, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across this courtroom so that I can take Mr Van der Broek in my arms, embrace him and let him know that he is truly forgiven."

As the court assistants come to lead the elderly woman across the room, Mr Van der Broek, overwhelmed by what he has just heard, faints. And as he does, those in the courtroom, friends, family, neighbours - all victims of decades of oppression and injustice - begin to sing, softly, but assuredly, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."