

## **The Lord's Prayer (8) - deliver us from evil**

The concluding petition of the Lord's Prayer reads, "but deliver us from evil".

"Our Father who art in the heavens, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth, Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Of all that is asked for in the Lord's Prayer these words would seem to be the most straight forward and least complicated petition of them all. And yet, though it is prayed for, our deliverance from evil and the manner in which it is accomplished, is not as clearly understood as we might imagine. The Lord wants nothing more than we should be delivered from evil. But from what evil? And if He is to successfully deliver us from evil, how much depends on our own effort? We are concerned here with the most vital process affecting our lives in this world. The essential purpose of our being here is that we may be delivered from evil and so prepared for life in heaven, and this particular petition of the Lord's Prayer is designed to direct our attention to it.

We all need to be delivered from evil. This is said not in terms of events and occurrences outside of us, but in terms of the evils of our own hearts and minds. The Lord taught us to pray "But deliver us from evil" intending that we should bring to mind the evil and selfishness in whose grip we are at first held and from which we can only be delivered by His strength in the course of our regeneration. We are all conscious of selfish tendencies and of 'thoughts which revolve around ourselves as the centre', and it is from these we pray to be rescued. "But deliver us from evil". More than just moments of anger and acts of selfishness, it is a whole way of looking at things; a fundamental disposition which manifests itself with everyone in adulthood, from which we ask to be delivered.

And yet the commonly shared disposition, to centre life around ourselves, to love and exalt ourselves above all else, only manifests itself in instances of evil. We must make ourselves aware of this if we are to be delivered from it. It is the love of self that arouses a person, when crossed by another, to be resentful of disagreement. It is the love of self which prompts a person to look for merit and to hide behind exaggeration and lies. From the love of self people talk a lot about themselves or try to dominate the lives of those around them. And these are the kinds of things we are to look out for in our own

particular thoughts and behaviour. It is not enough to pray "But deliver us from evil" associating with the request a vague idea of evil in general. We ask to be delivered from evil, conscious of particular instances of it and of specific occurrences where our unregenerate natures, as yet not overcome, have manifested themselves.

The process of our deliverance from evil commences when we first make ourselves aware of instances of evil in our lives. In other words, it commences with self examination, after which there must be frank acknowledgement, without resort to excuses of any kind, of the disorderly nature that has been either thought or done. The Lord cannot deliver us from our evils unless we make ourselves aware of them, and are conscious of them; and we must demonstrate, by our subsequently resisting them at all times, that in fact we want to be delivered from them. It is impossible for Him to deliver us from evil to which we still cling and hanker after.

And deliver us, only He can. For we cannot resist the pull of our lower natures and attraction of our selfish tendencies. They are altogether too strong. If we are to be delivered from any evil it will only be the Lord who can accomplish it. We may hide an evil, and shun it in company and when with others; but only the Lord can remove it from us. We can control impatience, but without the Lord's aid we shall not overcome it. We may learn to control bursts of temper, even though the feelings which give rise to them remain, unless we seek the Lord's help to remove them.

If we are honest with ourselves we must be aware of evil in our lives, from which we need to be delivered. Also there are times when the evil seems too much to overcome. We feel as if we shall never change and that it will always be with us. We see so much of self regard in what we think and do. Yet the fact is we can be delivered from our evils if we look to the Lord and draw upon His strength. In ourselves we are weak and would continually give in. The attraction is too much and the inclination too strong for us to resist. But the Lord can deliver us. And with His help the evils which we become aware of in our lives will be left behind. Often our trouble is we look only to ourselves and think only in terms of our own will power and determination to resist, which may of course not be strong. But there is more to it than that; more strength available to us if only we will care to call upon it. The Lord meant us to pray this prayer confident that it would be answered.

However, our deliverance from evil involves not only the strenuous resistance of it in our lives, but deliberately cultivating its opposite. If we want to overcome evil we must love and uphold good in its place. If, for example, we want to be delivered from unkind thoughts about other people, we must deliberately focus our thinking on good thoughts about them. If we are to be delivered from self centred thinking and constant thoughts about ourselves, we should plunge ourselves more deeply into the service of others and refocus our thinking on the needs of those around us. It was revealed to Swedenborg that the Lord "never expels evil by evil", but removes it by good. (*The Spiritual Diary* 1878). And this is what is meant.

It is due to the Lord's Providence that we are made aware of only a few of our evils at a time. And it is sufficient if we concentrate on just one, the one that stands out most of all, and seek the Lord's deliverance from it. Even though it may be gradual, this will in time, break the hold that evil has over us. As one set of evils are overcome so we shall become aware of others, from which in turn, we shall seek deliverance. It is with our evils, as it was with the conquest of the promised land, a slow process accomplished in stages only over a period of time. We might wish, as the children of Israel must have wished, for overnight victory and quick victory. But it doesn't happen that way.

Nothing so vitally affects our welfare or is of more importance to us in our day to day living than what we are asking for when we pray, "But deliver us from evil". If we would be a channel of blessing to others and find in life the rich fulfillment and lasting happiness which it is meant to hold for us, we must be delivered from our evils. These are what spoil it all and bring on misery and degradation in all its forms.

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