

Deliver us from Evil

I want to call attention to the expression “deliver us from evil,” a phrase found in what many people call “The Lord’s Prayer.”

*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 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**: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13)*

You may have noticed that the NIV, NKJ and NJB versions translate this phrase “deliver us from the evil one.” This raises the question, “which translation is correct?” Why do most translations just say “deliver us from evil” while the NIV, NKJ and NJB say “deliver us from the evil one.” Most of the versions do not include the word “one” because it is not in the Greek text. If the word “one” is not in the Greek text, you might be wondering why the NIV, NKJ and NJB translate this phrase “deliver us from the evil one.”

I believe it was improper for the NIV, NKJ and NJB to translate it “deliver us from the evil one.” But I know the reason they did it. The Greek phrase (ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ) is literally translated “deliver us from THE evil.” The Greek word πονηρου is an adjective that is “articular.” Put another way, it is an adjective preceded by the article (τοῦ). When preceded by the article, an adjective generally takes on the function of a noun.

The NIV, NKJ and NJB attempted to convey the force of the articular adjective τοῦ πονηρου. But by inserting the word “one,” they made the assumption that the expression “the evil” (τοῦ πονηρου) was referring to Satan. Thus, they interjected their own interpretation into the translation. Perhaps that is what Jesus meant. But nobody can prove from the Greek text itself that Jesus was referring to Satan by Matthew’s use of the articular adjective “the evil” (τοῦ πονηρου). At the very least, these translations should alert the reader about their interjection by using *italic font*¹ (deliver us from the evil **one**).

Someone might argue, “If Jesus was not referring to Satan, then what did He mean by “the evil?” Let me offer a possible alternative explanation using the literal translation as a springboard, “deliver us from THE evil.” The gospel includes the command to repent. Why does God require repentance? What does repentance facilitate? All people are born with rebellious hearts as expressed in Psalm 2:3. (“*Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.*”) By nature, people want nothing to do with God’s rule over them. The autonomous spirit permeates their lives. God is the rightful ruler, and His Kingdom is comprised only of those who surrender the rule of their lives over to Him and gladly live their lives submitted to His rule. But until the day they die, they will be engaged in a war against their own flesh that wars against the Spirit. The flesh is by nature autonomous, always wanting its own way.

I suggest the expression “the evil” may indeed be referring to this autonomous, rebellious nature rather than Satan. Let me point out that this idea is consistent with the meaning of the imperative verb “deliver.” It seems to me that if Jesus was referring to Satan in Matthew 6:13, Matthew would have used a word more like “guard” or “keep” us from the evil *one*, or “shield” us from the evil *one*. The word deliver implies that we are already being affected or influenced by “the evil.” It is the enemy that lives within us. We need to be shielded from the evil one who resides outside of us. But we need to be progressively and continually delivered out from the evil that permeates the flesh.

Whenever the flesh raises its ugly head, the temptation towards autonomous, rebellious living rises within us. We truly need to be delivered always because the flesh resides within us. We need always to be delivered from the grip of THE evil autonomous, rebellious nature. On the other hand, Satan resides outside of us. We need **protection from** him. We need to be **guarded from** him. But we need to be **delivered** continually from the grip of THE evil (autonomous, rebellious nature of the flesh).

I believe that the essence of what we need (to be delivered from THE evil), is expressed in greater detail by Paul by passages like Romans 8:13 “*if you are living according to the flesh you are about to die (perish); but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*” In ourselves, we do not possess the power to put to death the misdeeds of the body. It must be done by the Spirit. So, we pray, “Deliver us from THE evil.” I need to be delivered FROM it. I will need to be delivered from the EVIL within me until the day I die.

Paul expresses this also in Galatians: “*Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).* Since nobody who practices (on going present tense) these works of the flesh will inherit the kingdom of God, it is essential that these misdeeds of the body be put to death by the Spirit for the rest of my life in this body. So, I am highly motivated to cry out, “deliver me from THE evil.” I pray daily that God will

¹ Here is a note from the preface of the NKJ that explains the use of italic font in the NKJ Bible: “Words of phrases in *italics* indicate expressions in the original language which require clarification by additional English words.”

empower me to put to death the misdeeds of the body by His Spirit so that Jesus rules in my heart and manifests His nature through me to His glory.

Finally, let me point out that my understanding of the expression “deliver us from THE evil,” is in harmony with the rest of this prayer. For example, it also says, “*Your Kingdom come, **Your will be done.***”² By these words we acknowledge that He is the rightful ruler over us and that we fully desire Him to rule over every part of our life, including our attitudes and motivations. In keeping with this desire, we acknowledge the reality that *nothing good dwells within us, that is, within our flesh* (Romans 7:18). We need His power to overcome THE evil that resides with the flesh.

My understanding of this expression (deliver us from THE evil) also perfectly connects to the statement that immediately follows it, “*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.*” I have strong reason to pray with confidence, “*Deliver me from THE evil* (autonomous) tendencies because it is what God Himself desires. It is His Kingdom. No autonomous, self-ruling creature is permitted in His Kingdom. He only desires obedient subjects who love Him. It is only His power that can deliver me from the evil autonomous tendencies that by nature, rebel against His rule. So I pray, “Deliver me from THE evil.”

² This statement (*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.*) is indeed a part of Mathew’s original wording. Only 1% of the numerous Greek manuscripts do not include it, and the ones that don’t include it are demonstrably inferior manuscripts full of errors. It is unfortunate that some Bibles do not include these words.