

Title: Forgive Us Our Debts
Date: August 29, 2021
Subject: Christians should pray for God to forgive
Scripture: Matthew 6:12; Luke 11:4

The desire for purity in our spiritual lives is revealed in the request for pardon in The Disciples' Prayer. The screen has the wording from Matthew and Luke according to the NIV. There are differences: the words describing that for which we want God to pardon us – debts, sins. Another is the last phrase: *as* we also have forgiven and *for* we also forgive. These serve to link God's forgiveness of us with our forgiveness of people. Jesus provides commentary on this immediately after giving us this example prayer.

READ Matthew 6:14, 15.

The petition for forgiveness has been termed the most terrible (Augustine) and frightening (Barclay) because of the connection between the forgiveness we give others and the forgiveness we receive from God. William Barclay gives his reason, “In verses 14 and 15 Jesus says in the plainest possible language that if we forgive others, God will forgive us; but if we refuse to forgive others, God will refuse to forgive us. It is, therefore, quite clear that, if we pray this petition with an unhealed breach, an unsettled quarrel in our lives, we are asking God *not* to forgive us. If we say, “I will never forgive so-and-so for what he or she has done to me,” if we say, “I will never forget what so-and-so did to me,” and then go and take this petition on our lips, we are quite deliberately asking God not to forgive us” (William Barclay. *The Gospel of Matthew*. p. 222.)

Our forgiveness of people doesn't determine whether we make it to heaven or not. That's covered by the initial forgiveness when we repented and came to Jesus Christ as our Savior. It does however impact the spiritual well-being of our lives. The horizontal determines what happens in the vertical with the Lord.

Having said that, we begin with the vertical. We need to keep in mind what God communicated through the aged apostle John who lovingly addressed believers as he wrote about sin 27 times in his first letter: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the righteous one” (1 John 2:1).

I. God's forgiveness of us

A. Conviction. We need to be convicted of our personal sin, to be convinced the horror of sin is so bad it drove Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us because he could provide the only sufficient payment.

What is sin? The vast majority of translations of Matthew 6:11, the top wording on the screen, use the words debts and debtors. A very few use trespasses, wrongs, wrong-doings or offenses. One uses “shortcomings” and “those who have failed in their duty towards us” (Weymouth New Testament). Another simply reads, “Forgive us as we forgive others” (GOD'S WORD® Translation).

In Luke 11, the bottom version, the translations all speak of our sins against God, but are split in expressing what people have done to us as either sins or being indebted to us.

Debts is a term from the financial world. A person legally owes something to somebody. If unpaid, punishment will be exacted. In spiritual terms, we have moral debts and obligations to God. We were created in God's image. Not only have we mismanaged his investment, we're unholy robbers and embezzlers who've stolen it and spent it on ourselves. To put it another way - we haven't fulfilled the greatest command of loving God and others. Based on all of this, we're indebted to God. We owe him a debt of complete righteousness which we're unable to fulfill. We could only try to pay by being punished, but would miserably fail.

The word sin means to miss the mark, not hit the target. God's target is the principles, guidelines, standards of the kingdom as delivered to us in his Word. When we miss, we sin.

Richard Burr, not my brother, writes: "The patterns of the world are permeating the hearts of God's people. And I am convinced that these grievous conditions can be traced to four specific areas: 1) the erosion of the fear and wonder of God, 2) the failure to see sin as God sees it - the "downsizing" of his Word, 3) superficial communion with the living God and 4) the absence of authentic confession with repentance. What then is the corrective action? Since the core issue is sin, we must search it out, examine its consequences and then allow the great physician to remove it. If left unattended, sin will grow easily and become more frequent and even habitual. In the process, the guilty one becomes unteachable, obstinate, unrepentant and finally a hindrance to the extension of Christ's kingdom on earth" (Developing Your Secret Closet of Prayer. p. 123).

We can be like the religious leaders Jesus decried as "white-washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:27, 28). We need to do more than clean the outside, make it nice and pretty so we have an appearance of being righteous. We need to focus on the heart issues and deal seriously with sins.

B. Confession. This is the act of admitting, saying the same thing God does about what we've done. We admit we've committed crimes against his moral decrees. We're in debt to him. We've missed the mark. We've violated his standards, principles and commands.

Confession of sin can be tough to do as a host of voices tell us to not make a big deal of it. The devil, our sinful nature and the world system say, "Not so fast. What you you've done isn't really that bad or wrong. Everybody cheats on their taxes. Everybody has sex outside of marriage. Everybody illegally downloads stuff. No need to get all high and mighty about it. Just get on with your life and act as if nothing happened. There's no real harm being done. Sin is the normal thing to do." We need to ignore those voices.

C. Conditions. Requires humility. It's the admission we're wrong and God is right. Unconfessed sin can hinder prayers. "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:18), "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; Your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2).

Repentance is called for. It means to turn from what we've done and turn towards God. Burr gives what he feels is the most complete definition of repentance: "to feel such regret (godly sorrow) over one's sin

as to bring about a revolutionary change of mind, leading to a radical change attitude and behavior.” He follows this up by saying, “Repentance is not *penitence*, and it is a masterstroke of Satan to confuse the two. *Penitence* comes from a Latin word meaning sorrow or grief, but *repentance* comes from the Greek word meaning “a change of mind.” There is a vast difference between these two words; a person could feel remorse over his or her actions with no change of behavior. But someone who is truly repentant has a change of heart that is demonstrated by a change of attitude and conduct” (ibid. pp. 136, 137).

The people in 2 Corinthians 7 are an example. They earnestly desired to please God and ferret out evil. They eagerly wanted to clear themselves and not rationalize sin. They were indignant and alarmed about what they’d done. They longed to be restored and rectify what had happened. They were ready to accept what God said and any possible consequences. They wanted to get right with God.

D. Conclusion of the matter. The purpose is for God to cleanse and restore to a right relationship, fellowship with him. Forgiving means to completely cancel the debt. There is remission of punishment and removal of the offence. As part of the new covenant initiated by Jesus Christ, God chooses not to remember our sins (Hebrews 8:12, 10:17; Isaiah 43:25). He casts our sins into the depths of the sea and he doesn't go back fishing for them (Micah 7:19). He removes our sins as far as the East is from the West (Psalm 103:12) which means he’s going one direction while sins are going the other and never the two shall meet.

All of God's forgiveness is traced back to the cross. Only Jesus’ perfect sacrifice could take away sins and the punishment sin deserved. It was one point in time but continues the effect. It becomes personally effective when a person places trust in Jesus as Savior. It continues to be effective throughout life. We accept and receive his forgiveness. It’s like people watching a parade. A person in a helicopter can see the entirety while a person on the curb can see a small part. The same thing is true of Christ forgiveness. It’s ongoing.

II. Our forgiveness of others

A. Conviction. Use the term differently. Of what are we to be convinced? The role is reversed. Now we’re on the side of being the forgiver. Haddon Robinson said, “We are never closer to God's grace than when we admit our sin and cry out for pardon. We are never more like God than when for Christ's sake, we extend forgiveness fully and freely to those who have sinned against us.”

What is the sin of others toward us? Certainly, we’re not God so it's not that people have to live up to our standards, principles or commands or they’ve missed the mark as to what we expect. Sin is that they’ve violated God’s commands in a way that impacts us. They’ve mistreated us, spoken in a way that’s harmed us, lied, gossiped, stolen, physically injured.

REREAD Matthew 6:14, 15. The teaching of forgiving as Christ has forgiven is expanded in Ephesians. We’re instructed to put off evil such as lying, anger that leads to sin, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, brawling, slander, but are to speak truthfully, not let anger fester, speak to build up. Then it states, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up

for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 4:32 - 5:2). Forgive as Christ forgave is followed by the call to imitate God. There’s a doubling down.

Colossians says much the same, “As God's chosen people, wholly and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And overall these virtues put on love” (Colossians 3:12 - 14). Forgiveness extends to grievances, complaints, differences. Forgive and love.

How is forgiveness granted? More conviction. We remember how Christ is active in our lives to forgive our sins. We understand he did it freely. He willingly gave himself to extend forgiveness to us. We remember we’re sinners and others aren’t perfect. We shouldn’t expect them to be. “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). We’re to grant grace since grace has been extended to us.

B. Confession. We confess, admit, state we are forgiving. This can be done as we talk with the person who is in debt to us or it can be done in the quiet recesses of our heart and mind. It all depends on the situation.

We forgive as Christ has forgiven us. We aren't in the position of paying the punishment for other people's sin as only Christ could do that. We do however pay the cost of the offense, the debt, being erased. We don't try to force people to pay, atone for the wrongs they've done (Proverbs 17:9, 19:11).

We aren’t to remember the sins, not hold them against a person. It's impossible to completely forget and it may come to our mind but we don't hold it over the person’s head until they repay us some way. Even as Christ throws our sins in the sea, we’re do the same with the sins of others -- throw them in the sea...and don't go fishing for them. Love means not keeping a record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5).

Not feel ill will toward. Not dwell on this incident and not bring it up or use it against the other. Not talk with others about it. Not allow it to be a barrier or hinder the relationship. Be kind, do good to the other as if nothing had ever happened.

There’s the element of repentance on the part of the person who’s committed the sin. Jesus taught about this in one of his parables (Matthew 18:15 - 35). The person who is sinned against should go privately to the other in the hopes of reconciliation. If that doesn't work, take another along one or two others. If the person won't listen, then it can go before the church leaders. Jesus gave the pattern of resolving conflict.

This prompted Peter to ask a question. Peter took the conventional wisdom of the day, doubled it and added one. He offered the huge number, in his mind, which just so happened to reflect the Jewish idea of perfection: “Shall I forgive my brother up to seven times?”

Jesus likely smiled. He performed some quick multiplication. He responded, “No. Seventy times seven.” In other words, forgive without counting. He told the parable about a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. One owed a debt which was impossible to repay. The king was going to throw him in prison, sell the wife and children to repay part of the debt. The servant begged for patience. The king took pity and canceled the debt. That servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed a measly amount. He grabbed and choked the debtor, demanding he pay back everything. There was a plea for patience, but the

previously forgiven servant refused and threw the debtor into prison. Other servants told the king. He brought in the wicked servant and told him that since his debt had been cancelled, he should have had mercy on his fellow servant. He angrily turned him over to the jailers. Jesus gave the punchline: “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart” (Matthew 18:35).

Jesus also taught: “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them” (Luke 17:3, 4). An unforgiving spirit is sin.

C. Conditions. For us not for the other person. Humility. Haddon Robinson, “Asking forgiveness of your sins is humbling. But first, also humbling, you must forgive others. You see how close to blasphemy it is to come to God and say, “You who are holiness, forgive me my sins. But this person has offended me, and I am so holy, and I am so righteous that it is unthinkable that I will extend forgiveness to that person.” People who do that are self-righteous” (sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/15588-the-disciples-prayer).

What can happen if we don't forgive? Won't be forgiven. Saw this right after the model prayer in v. 15. REREAD. Our sin creates moral and spiritual debt. What happens with that debt depends on how we treat others. If we forgive people, God forgives us. The opposite is also true. If we don't forgive, neither will God forgive us. Our sins will be forgiven in the proportion to which we forgive. Jesus repeats the warning days before his sacrificial death: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25).

The same verse leads to the idea that unforgiveness is a hindrance to our prayers and to our worship. In other words, don't waste our time and God's time worshipping. If we don't forgive, we can become bitter, angry, vengeful, depressed and retaliatory. Our spiritual life will suffer.

D. Conclusion of the matter. We're to seek reconciliation. It's not always possible. The other person may not be interested. They may not admit to doing something wrong. They may no longer be alive. Some examples of those who granted forgiveness without people asking for it are Jesus on the cross, Stephen when being martyred, Joseph of his brothers, and Paul of those who deserted him instead (2 Timothy 4:16).

Give Max Lucado the last word. He writes in his book When God Whispers Your Name about the experience of Joseph. He'd been sold by his brothers into slavery but God turned things around and he'd risen to second behind the Pharaoh. The opportunity to exact revenge arose but Joseph instead forgave. “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish now what is being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20). Lucado comments “Forgiveness comes easier with a wide-angle lens. Joseph uses one to get the whole picture. He refuses to focus on the betrayal of his brothers without also seeing the loyalty of his God...To forgive someone is to admit our limitations. We've been given only one piece of life's jigsaw puzzle. Only God has the cover of the box. To forgive someone is to display reverence. Forgiveness is not saying the one who hurt you was right. Forgiveness is stating God is fair and he will do what is right” (pp. 93 - 95).