

Forgive us our Debts...

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Date: 28 June 2020

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[0 : 00] Forgiveness plays a crucial role in our lives. We know how important forgiveness is, but how do you forgive? Perhaps there is someone you need to forgive or someone you need to ask for forgiveness.

What is it that stops us forgiving someone and what stops us seeking forgiveness? Asking for forgiveness can be one of the hardest things to do. And offering forgiveness can be even harder. Because asking for forgiveness or offering forgiveness can have a massive impact on our lives and our relationships. Forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian faith.

And so whether we call ourselves a Christian or not, we will never understand forgiveness without Christianity. Christianity, more than any other religion or philosophy, helps us make best sense of forgiveness.

Because it teaches us of our own need to be forgiven, but it also gives us the resources to forgive others. And Jesus teaches us this in the Lord's Prayer.

[1 : 04] It's what we've been studying in church over these past weeks. And today we're looking at the fifth petition, which is all about forgiveness. Jesus tells us to pray and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

There are two parts to it that concerns our relationship with God and our relationships with others. And so we're to ask forgiveness from God for ourselves, forgive us our debts.

And we're to offer forgiveness to others, as we also have forgiven our debtors. So when it comes to forgiveness, if we have never experienced forgiveness from God for ourselves, then we'll struggle to offer forgiveness to others.

So let's consider this phrase from the Lord's Prayer under two main headings. First, ask forgiveness from God. Second, offer forgiveness to others.

Ask forgiveness from God and offer forgiveness to others. First, ask forgiveness from God. Jesus makes it clear that we need forgiveness from God. And that's what it means to be a Christian.

[2 : 10] It means asking for our sins to be forgiven by God. God forgives us when we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus and his death on the cross.

So why does Jesus tell us we still need to ask for forgiveness? Well, first of all, let's think about full, once and for all forgiveness. And then about the frequent forgiveness Jesus tells us to ask for.

So full forgiveness first and then frequent forgiveness. First, full forgiveness. Jesus says, forgive us our debts. He's referring to our sins as our debts.

Now, a debt is what you owe someone. And so our sin is a huge debt we owe God. We have failed to give God what he is due because we haven't worshipped God as we should or given him our full obedience as we should.

And so we're guilty for what we fail to do. And we're guilty for all the wrong that we have done. This is our sin. And it all adds up as our debt to God.

[3 : 13] It's like we have a criminal record with all our offences. And so we are all guilty and our sin needs to be paid for. And unless the debt is forgiven, then we must pay the penalty for our sin in hell.

And so the Lord's Prayer reminds us that our sin is serious and our sin is a debt owed to God. And we need God's forgiveness because we can't pay the debt by ourselves.

We can't try to cancel it by doing lots of good things, even lots of religious things, believing God will accept them as our payment. And that's basically how all religions operate.

But it isn't true Christianity because we can never perform enough good works to earn enough credit to pay for our sin against God. Our sin can only be forgiven by God himself.

And that's why Jesus came into this world. Jesus lived and then died. He chose to experience hell in our place when he died on the cross.

[4 : 19] And so his death pays our debt in full because he took the punishment we deserve. And so when we put our trust in Jesus, we can be forgiven. God is able to satisfy his justice because Jesus was punished in our place.

In Colossians chapter 2 verse 13 to 14, we read this. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us. He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. So Jesus cancels the charge against us, which condemned us. He paid for our sin at the cross so that God can pardon and forgive sinful people like us.

And so when we know Jesus as our saviour, our debts have been cancelled. They've been removed from our account, paid in full by Jesus' death.

That means we're forgiven for all our sins, past, present and future. We've been justified. That is, just as if I'd never sinned or declared righteous by God.

[5 : 31] Now, this is how much God loves us and how much it cost God to forgive us. It cost the death of Jesus. And so when we go to God, confessing our sin, seeking his forgiveness, trusting in Jesus, the slate is wiped clean, as it were.

We are forgiven. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And so the question is, do you have forgiveness from God?

We all need it. So why then does Jesus tell us to pray for forgiveness if we've already been forgiven? Well, that's full forgiveness. Let's think about frequent forgiveness.

So if God has fully and finally forgiven us through the death of Jesus, why do we need to keep asking for forgiveness? Well, the answer is simple. It's because we continue to sin.

And so we constantly need forgiveness. Jesus tells us to pray, give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[6 : 39] So just as we need God to provide for us daily, so we need God to pardon us daily. And we're well aware of this if we profess to be a Christian.

We know we're not perfect. We know we are still a sinner, but we are a forgiven sinner. Yet we still break God's commands every day in our thoughts and words and deeds.

But this doesn't make our sin insignificant or excusable. It merely highlights our continual need for forgiveness. So when we pray, forgive us our debts.

We're admitting our sin. We're seeking forgiveness and we're wanting to repent or to turn away from our sin. And so this daily prayer expresses our desire to be forgiven for one of sins, but also to break free from habitual sins.

Because we can't ask God for forgiveness and yet continue to practice a lifestyle that is opposed to his will for our lives. Praying for forgiveness must be accompanied by the desire to repent from our sin.

[7 : 49] And so as we grow in maturity as a Christian, the Holy Spirit works in us to make us more sensitive to our sin and increasingly enables us to turn away from it.

Because when we know that we have been forgiven, we're conscious that whatever sin we commit, it offends and it still grieves our Father in heaven.

And so it's our relationship with God that helps us best understand why Jesus tells us to pray for forgiveness. Because God is judge and Father.

He both justifies and adopts. God justifies us through accepting Jesus' death as payment for our debt of sin. But he also adopts us as his children by entering into relationship with us.

Now we might try and illustrate this by thinking of the law court and the family home. Just imagine a judge acquitting a guilty person by paying the debt himself.

[8 : 52] That would be amazing. But what if the judge also adopts this person and takes them home with him to live with him for the rest of their lives? That's astounding.

Now, illustrations are never perfect, but it helps us understand how God relates to people. Through Jesus, we are not only justified sinners, but we are adopted children.

God doesn't just forgive us and then leave us, but he enters into a relationship with us. And that's why Jesus tells us to address God as our Father.

Because if we're going to live the rest of our life with him, then we won't want to offend him or grieve him with our sin. We want to avoid sin because we realise what it cost our Father to forgive us.

And so when we do sin, we'll want to confess it quickly and know the joy of forgiveness. So by teaching us to pray, forgive us our debts, Jesus wants us to keep turning away from sin.

[9 : 57] Martin Luther, the German theologian, started the Reformation in 16th century Europe. And it's thought the spark that ignited the Reformation was Luther hammering his 95 theses to the doors of the castle church of Wittenberg.

And the first one said, when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, repent, he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.

So he's saying that the whole of the Christian life is repentance. It's how we come to faith, but it's also how we continue each day.

And so we're reminded in 1 John chapter 1, verse 8 and 9. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. And so we need the forgiveness that comes from turning from our sin and trusting in Jesus Christ.

[11 : 02] But when we experience this forgiveness, we need frequent forgiveness for all the times that we fail our loving Heavenly Father. So that's our first point, ask forgiveness from God.

Our second point is offer forgiveness to others. So we thought about forgiveness when it comes to our relationship with God. But what about forgiveness in our relationships with others?

Because Jesus tells us to pray, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. The prayer assumes we will forgive others.

It's so important that it's linked to our forgiveness from God. In fact, it's the only petition in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus expands on. So he says after the Lord's Prayer, Mark 6, 14 and 15.

Jesus doesn't mean that we are forgiven by God because we forgive others.

[12 : 13] But he is saying that we can't receive forgiveness without forgiving others. There's a connection between receiving forgiveness from God and offering forgiveness to others.

And so we won't have understood God's forgiveness if we can't forgive others. Because the only way we'll be able to forgive is when we have experienced God's forgiveness for ourselves.

It's so fundamental that Jesus illustrates this again in his parable of the unforgiving servant. It's in Matthew chapter 18. Jesus told this parable in response to a question about forgiveness.

So Peter asked, And then Jesus goes on to tell the story of a king who was owed a huge debt by his servant.

The servant couldn't pay. So the servant begged the king to be patient. So the king took pity on him and cancelled the debt. And then the servant went away and he found one of his servants who also owed him a debt.

[13 : 25] But it was a small debt. And he demanded it to be paid back. He couldn't. And so he had the man thrown in prison until he could. But when the king heard about it, he said to the unforgiving servant, You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.

Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you? Then the king handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay back everything he owed.

And Jesus concluded the parable by saying, This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.

And so the point is that we have been forgiven so much more by God than we will ever have to forgive anyone. And so the proof that we have been forgiven by God is that we will forgive others. Because we can't ask God to forgive us our debts if we are not prepared to forgive our debtors. Of course, this doesn't mean that we ignore or excuse sins committed against us.

[14 : 38] The injury, the insult, the abuse, it's all very real. We'll feel the hurt. We'll know the pain. We may even carry the scars. And so forgiveness is never going to be cheap or easy.

It is always going to be costly. And yet this is what Jesus calls his people to do. We are to forgive everyone for everything.

But this is where we need to be careful. Because forgiveness doesn't mean we're automatically reconciled to the person who has wronged us. They may refuse to seek forgiveness.

They may not admit what they did was wrong. They may have no desire to change. But that shouldn't stop our offer of forgiveness.

Because we have to treat others the way God treats us. And because he is the ultimate judge, we will have to leave it in his hands.

[15 : 38] After 12 years of pastoral ministry and counselling people to forgive, I've discovered from experience that Jesus' way is always better in the long run.

Because when a person can't forgive, they tend to seek revenge and want to get even. And because they harbour hatred and become bitter, they can suffer even more with the passing of time.

Anger inside any one of us can just start to eat us alive. You might say, but people need to pay for the wrong they've done. That's true.

All wrongdoers need confronting. And all wrongdoing needs addressed. But forgiveness does not ignore what's wrong. Forgiveness doesn't excuse sin.

But somebody is going to have to pay the price for the debt that is owed. That's why forgiveness is so costly. Because it's the victim who often has to absorb the debt themselves.

[16 : 44] Or else there's never any possibility of healing. And so the power to forgive others is evidence that we are really God's children.

People often say, my two boys look like me. Which is a shame for them. Hopefully they'll grow out of it. But when it comes to forgiveness, we should aim to be like our father.

Because forgiveness can change hearts. Last year, you probably saw the brother of a man shot dead forgive the Dallas police officer who did it.

And then he gave her a big hug in court. At the murder sentencing of Amber Geiger for killing Botham Jean. Botham's brother Brandt said this in his victim impact statement.

He said, if you truly are sorry, I know I can speak for myself. I forgive you. And I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you.

[17 : 46] And I don't think anyone can say it. Again, I'm speaking for myself and not on behalf of my family. But I love you just like anyone else. And I'm not going to say I hope you rot and die just like my brother did.

But I personally want the best for you. And then he said, and the best would be, give your life to Christ. And he finished his statement by saying, Again, I love you as a person.

And I don't wish anything bad on you. I don't know if this is possible. But can I give her a hug, please? Please. Then the judge gave permission for the hug and the killer sobbed in his arms asking forgiveness.

It was an extraordinary and emotional scene. But it simply shows the power of forgiveness. It is always going to be costly. But it's what Jesus calls us to do when we pray.

And forgive us our debts. As we also have forgiven our debtors. But how is it possible to forgive like this?

[18 : 58] Only through the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Because if Jesus took my sin, paying my debt through his costly suffering and death on the cross, then I must forgive others.

Knowing the cost I'll have to pay is nothing in comparison. And so if we can't or even won't forgive, it's because the gospel of Jesus Christ hasn't sunk deep enough into our own hearts.

Because if we have never seen our need for forgiveness from God, or sought forgiveness from God, or experienced forgiveness from God, or understood forgiveness from God, then we will never be able to forgive those who have wronged us.

So if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, you need to have your sins forgiven by God. Because we all do. As they were killing Jesus, do you know what he said?

He said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. So if Jesus wanted forgiveness for those who were killing him in that moment, then he wants forgiveness for you now.

[20 : 06] And the good news is he died to achieve it. So no matter who you are or what you have done, whether you feel you don't need to be forgiven, or even that you could never be forgiven, please turn away from your sin and trust in Jesus for forgiveness.

Don't delay. Or perhaps you have experienced God's forgiveness and would call yourself a Christian. You know that there is sin in your life that grieves your heavenly Father.

Then confess your sin. Seek forgiveness and repent. Don't delay. And if we need to forgive, we must. And we can, as we grasp that we deserve hell for our sin against God.

And so God has forgiven us far more than we'll ever have to forgive anyone else. The power to forgive comes from knowing we have been forgiven.

Let's pray together. Father, please forgive us our sins. We thank you for Jesus who was willing to die to pay the debt for our sins on the cross.

[21 : 22] May each one of us know and experience your forgiveness. And so help us to be people who can forgive others. For we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.mos