

Mark 2:1-12; Luke 11:4

Forgive Us, As We Forgive (Part 2 of 2)
LORD, Teach Us to Pray – Part 7

Forgive Us Our Sins, For We Ourselves Also Forgive Everyone Who Is Indebted To Us (11:4; Matt. 6:12; WSC 105 – Fifth Petition)

Last Sunday we began looking at (what is traditionally known as) the fifth petition of the model prayer Jesus is teaching us to pray. There we are taught to ask our *Abba* Father, “and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (**Luke 11:4; Matt. 6:12**). There were several points of emphases we made last week, the most important being that the forgiveness that God grants each of us, in and through the person and work of Jesus, is absolutely central to the gospel – the good news by which God has eternally saved us. Rather than being pushed into the background for something else to now become prominent in the gospel, the Scriptures place the forgiveness of our sins as one of the greatest, and therefore central, gifts Jesus accomplished for us at the cross.

Another point we made last Sunday was that **vv. 3 and 4** are tightly connected by the conjunction “and” so that it is reasonable to think that Jesus is teaching us to ask our Father to “daily” forgive us our sins even as we are taught to ask our *Abba* to “give us each day our daily bread” (**11:3-4**). Furthermore, it make sense that we need to ask that our sins be forgiven **daily** because we sin against God **daily**.

For We Ourselves Also Forgive (cont.)

The final point we made last Sunday, before the clock ran out, was concerning the conjunction “for,” which connects the main petition in **v. 4** to the secondary clause, which reads “for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” We noted that there are basically two ways of understanding the use of the conjunction here: (1) Jesus could be introducing an explanation given to strengthen or support the the main request – something like “forgive us our sins **as we too - or as it is expected of us – to forgive the sins of everyone**” OR (2) Jesus could be giving the reason or ground of the request – something like “forgive us our sins **because we are forgiving the sins of everyone**”.

With **the first understanding** Jesus would simply be saying that for the community of believers who are asking God to forgive them of their sins **it is natural to expect** that they too are forgiving the sins of others – in fact, we would think they were ungrateful hypocrites if they refused to forgive others. In other words, a community which has in common the forgiveness of God (they live in the sphere or realm of God's forgiveness) will also be a community that is characterized by forgiveness among one another. In fact it would be quite unnatural to expect to see a group that is receiving forgiveness from God while not practicing that same forgiveness towards one another. We might even be tempted to think that these unforgiving people have never truly experienced the forgiveness of God. **Can you**

envision being daily released of your burdens of sins while racking up a ledger of your neighbor's sins against you? Remember the story of the ungrateful servant who was forgiven of so much and yet he refused to forgive his neighbor of so little (**cf. Matt. 18:21-35**)? The hearer of this parable has to wonder if the unforgiving servant truly ever understood the incredible mercy that was shown to him by his king? When we look at our church, or better yet, when the world looks at our church, do they see a forgiving community which together is not only receiving the forgiveness of God but also gladly extending that forgiveness towards one another within the community? Does God's love and mercy so penetrate your heart so as to overflow from within your life into the lives of your neighbor in such a way that the world knows you belong to Jesus?

Well, this then brings us to the second interpretation of how to understand the conjunction "for" in v. 4. As we just said we can take the conjunction "for" in the first sense, (1) as an explanation providing support for the main request (see above) **OR** (2) we can take the conjunction "for" in a second sense, as the reason or ground out of which the request grows – something like "forgive us our sins **because** we are forgiving the sins of others." Perhaps Jesus is saying something like a *quid pro quo* if you don't forgive others then don't expect that God will ever forgive you and vice versa, if you do forgive others then God must forgive you of all your sins!

One thing we can say initially about this second understanding is that it appears to be a better fit for the latter words of expansion Jesus adds to His teaching on prayer recorded in **<READ Matthew 6:14-15>**:

¹⁴ "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ "But **if you do not forgive others, then** your Father will not forgive your transgressions (**Matt. 6:14-15**).

In this additional teaching of Jesus along with this second interpretation, it appears that Jesus is adding a condition before forgiveness will be granted by God, almost as if there is a divine bargaining going on here so that God will forgive you only if and when you forgive others. Now, I don't think that is what Jesus is teaching here at all, but let's say for a moment HE IS teaching that our forgiveness before Him IS in fact conditioned on whether or not we are willing to forgive others. Or, perhaps even scarier, what if God is willing to forgive you only to the degree that you first forgive others? What if God measured out His forgiveness of you in accordance the forgiveness you actually extend to others?

Let us consider for a moment this "conditional" interpretation further. It is no accident that Matthew records Jesus' words, which immediately precedes Jesus' teaching on prayer, that "you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (**Matt. 5:48**). Now if God's gracious nature is that of forgiveness (**cf. Ex. 34:7; Num. 14:18-20; Deut. 21:8; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 130:4; Isa. 6:7; 33:24; 40:2; Micah 7:18; Dan. 9:9**) then ONE of the ways that we should be PERFECT "as our heavenly Father is perfect" should be in our readiness to forgive others who sin against us, even as we have been forgiven by our heavenly Father. In fact, we can state this even more strongly, "We are to forgive all others who sin against us PERFECTLY as our heavenly Father PERFECTLY forgives us our sins!"

So, now listen to what Jesus would be saying if this interpretation were correct – if Jesus is putting a

condition on your receiving your Father's forgiveness; a condition which you must perform PERFECTLY as your heavenly Father is PERFECT – then that condition is like an impenetrable curtain with only one way to pass through it. You cannot get to the other side where God's forgiveness lay – where you can be forgiven of your sins -- unless you first pass through the one and only entrance, which is **your forgiving of all others who have sinned against you.**

The problem with this interpretation is not that we should expect God's people to be forgiving people. We already noted that interpretation earlier. We SHOULD expect God's people to forgive one another! The problem with the “conditional interpretation” is that it sees our work as the **ground or basis** for God's work. God's act of forgiveness is triggered only after we have perfectly forgiven others. But that would make God's work synergistic and therefore dependent upon the work of sinners to make His work a possibility.

In fact, if that were true then the whole question of why Jesus had to come and die for us is called into question. Think about it this way: **if** all we needed was for Jesus just to come and teach us how to forgive one another **then** why did He choose to go through that unnecessary, further step of going to the cross to die? Do you see it? Do you see what just happened? You can now see what happens when you choose this “conditional” interpretation of Jesus' words. If Jesus' work on the cross was not necessary to actually save us from our sins so that we could be forgiven by God, then how can we possibly salvage the meaning of the cross? We turn Jesus' work into a **mere example** of how we are to forgive others. We reduce the cross to a **mere illustration** of how we are to love and forgive others.

At this point, hopefully, you are seeing just how far removed we are from the main emphases of the Scriptures that God's work of forgiveness, rather than being based on our work, is itself the basis of our forgiveness of others. Therefore, the best interpretation of Jesus' words throughout His teaching on prayer is that our forgiveness of others is the necessary expectation we, and the world who is watching us, ought to have of the community that is forgiven by God. In other words, the necessary evidence that we have been forgiven by God is that we are forgiving all others who sin against us or as again the apostle Paul drives home:

¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity (**Col. 3:12-14**).

These are the qualities we ought to expect to see in the people who are chosen by God, the holy and beloved in Jesus.

Jesus' Forgiveness of Sins

Now, after we have taken this not-so-brief excursus on the conjunction “for,” it is time for us to return to the second point I mentioned last week that we needed to consider regarding the main petition in **v. 4**, “and forgive us our sins.” As we will see in a few moments, this second point will not only help us understand the main petition a little better but will have important implications for the dependent clause following it. Jesus teaches us not only that we should ask our *Abba* to forgive us our sins **DAILY BUT** we must always remember that we are able to ask Him only because Jesus has finished

the work that we need so that our sins are, can, and will be forgiven by God forevermore. In fact, this is the very heart of how the Old Testament looks forward to the true nature or essence of the New Covenant. Listen to how Jeremiah the prophet characterizes the New Covenant:

³¹ “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, . . . and I will be their God, and they shall be My people . . . for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “**for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more**” (Jer. 31:31-34).

This is the heart of the New Covenant. God will act so definitively on your behalf that all your sins will be forgiven forevermore. And how will God accomplish this “total” forgiveness for you? Jesus picks up on this language at the Last Supper and says:

²⁸ for this is My blood of the [New] covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20).

Jesus is the ONE in whom God has forever dealt literally the death-blow upon your sins. Isaiah the prophet said:

⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

Don't you think it is important that at least one of the two sacraments that Jesus gave us to remember Him by (and it could actually be argued for the other one as well), that at its very heart is the fact that He was going to the cross so that your sins would be forgiven as God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah? He is dying to effect the New Covenant in His blood! And the result of Him laying down His life for you is that your sins have been forgiven, pardoned by God forever!

Mark 2:1-12 – Your Sins Are Forgiven – The True Temple

Now, let's look at one more passage before we wrap up our study of the fifth petition this morning and that is the story we read earlier from Mark's Gospel concerning Jesus healing of the paralyzed man (cf. Mk. 2:1-12 // Matt 9:2-8 // Lk. 5:17-26). It was there that Jesus first declared that the man's sins were forgiven. We have already looked in detail at this story back in **chap. 5 of Luke's Gospel** but I want us to think about, for a brief moment this morning, why the Pharisees were so upset with Jesus when He granted forgiveness to this man.

We are told, in the story, that the Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy (Mk. 2:7). Why? Because Jesus was doing something only God could do; He forgave the man his sins (cf. Mk. 2:6-7; Lk. 7:36-50). [As an aside, you may wonder how the Pharisees could be so dense and not make the proper connection between what Jesus did in forgiving the man his sins AND what they were thinking that only God can forgive sins. The fact that Jesus went ahead and healed the man only confirmed that Jesus had the power to forgive the man his sins (v. 10 → v. 5).]

But what exactly was Jesus doing here that was so antithetical to ordinary Jewish life? To answer that question, you only have to ask the Old Testament Scriptures and the Gospels where the Jews

normally went to have their sins forgiven. What was the typical procedure of the Jews for centuries if they wanted their sins to be forgiven? They would go up to the temple and perform the necessary rituals Moses commanded them to perform to be forgiven by God, which always required some kind of shedding of blood (cf. **Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22**). What angered the Pharisees was that Jesus had positioned Himself in the place of the temple, which among many other things, threatened the centralized, religious power of the authorities in Jerusalem, of which the Pharisees were adamant about protecting against all rebellion, especially in the days of so many religious zealots.

To think how shocking it was for the Pharisees to see Jesus doing this, let's think of a somewhat modern example of what Jesus was doing here. We need something that will equally cover the political dimension of what Jesus was threatening. Let's try this. In the midst of our present-day political turmoil surrounding the immigration controversy, try and think of what would happen if someone simply met those illegally crossing our borders and started to hand out the equivalency of legal documents granting them full citizenship, including all the powers, rights, and privileges of a natural-born citizen. This individual simply bypassed the whole legal process that has been set in place, which many have to follow to become legal citizens by declaring that in himself, by his signature, those who came to him had all the rights and privileges of full citizenship. That's what Jesus was saying about Himself in contrast to the temple. Jesus was doing something so radically new that everything that the temple provided could now be found simply by trusting in Him. This is what Jesus meant when He declared things such as:

¹⁹ "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body (**John 2:19-21**).

Or how the preacher to the Hebrews announced:

¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us **through the veil**, that is, **His flesh** (**Heb. 10:19-20**).

Jesus has now become God's appointed "place" where the perfect sacrifice for sin has been performed and therefore He is the new temple of God. The only place where you can now have your sins forgiven is in Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah-King, but He is the King who has forgiven us our sins!

What does this mean for our interpretation above? To begin with, as we have already said, the only reason we can call upon our *Abba* to petition Him to have our sins forgiven – to be forever new and clean before Him – is because of and only because of what Jesus has done for you at the cross!

But now, here is a twist you may not have seen coming this morning. To help us better understand what Jesus is saying in this petition, remember that in union with Christ Jesus you have become the temple of God. Paul says:

You are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being

fitted together, is growing into a **holy temple** in the Lord,²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (**Eph. 2:19-22; cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 21:2, 9-10, 22**).

Now there are many ways in which we are functioning as the Temple of God in this world, but one of the ways that will hopefully bring together what Jesus is saying in the fifth petition of the prayer is that through us God is reconciling the world to Himself. Paul says in 2 Corinthians:

¹⁸ Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation (**2 Cor. 5:18-19**).

The Holy Spirit dwells within us and is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus through God's Spirit-led people. Before Jesus left our world to return to His heavenly Father, He said to His disciples:

⁴⁴ Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance for **forgiveness of sins** would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."⁴⁸ "You are witnesses of these things."⁴⁹ "And behold, I am sending forth **the promise of My Father** upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with **power from on high**" (**Luke 24:44-49; cf. Acts 2:38-39**).

Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit upon His blood-bought people, whom He is fashioning into the Temple of the LORD, to go forth to the nations to proclaim the gospel for the forgiveness of sins. It is not that we have within ourselves some special, sacerdotal grace to grant forgiveness of sins. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit through us, as we are telling the gospel – Jesus is the Messiah sent by God to suffer and die for sinners and be raised on the third day for our justification for all who believe in Him – God is reconciling – granting forgiveness – the world to Himself. Therefore as you go forth into your world, into the lives of your neighbor, your family, God is graciously granting the forgiveness of sins through His Holy Spirit empowered temple-people for His glory alone!

This then helps make perfect sense of what Jesus is telling us to daily ask our *Abba* in Heaven "and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us" (**Luke 11:4**). It is perfectly right and just to expect that Christians will be a forgiving people because not only have we been so graciously forgiven by our heavenly Father in Jesus but together they have poured out the Holy Spirit of God into our hearts so that we might love and forgive others just as we have been forgiven by our God for the glory of His name alone. And it is our prayer that as we lovingly, graciously, and mercifully forgive as we have been forgiven that we would:

¹⁶ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (**Matt. 5:16**).

Amen! -SDG-

Additional Notes

Before we end our discussion of the fifth petition, and there is certainly much more we could add to what has been said, but let me round it out with a quick word about something that unfortunately may happen when you attempt to repair a relationship that has gone awry for some reason. You may be trying to sit down with someone you have hurt and they refuse to even hear an apology or they may have hurt you and refuse to listen to you so that both of you can try and work it out together. I used to really spend a lot of time grieving over these broken relationships that just seemed impossible to heal until I came across a little verse in Paul that has helped tremendously remove the burden these broken relationships have caused me. In Rom. 12 Paul says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Since reading that verse I simply have concluded that I will do everything I can to try and make right everything I have done to hurt someone, both praying for them and loving them, but in the end realizing that there will just be some relationships that may not ever be repaired this side of glory . . .

We tend to separate what God intends to be kept together. How so? Theology and Ethics. We have been forgiven and we forgive others because . . . Jesus says we must forgive or we won't be forgiven. That is why Jesus had to come. He is the perfect forgiver. Father forgive them! He is the temple. We are called the temple. We are in Him. That is why we can follow Him to forgive others.

Many have tried to remove Jesus' punch in the gut here by trying to soften His challenge that God will not forgive you of your sins unless you forgive the sins of others. But let's not do that. Let's hear fully what Jesus is saying. That is why He is headed to the cross to provide us forgiveness and in doing so He gave us two things: first and foremost He gave us forgiveness without which we cannot approach God and He showed us the way to forgive. If all Jesus did was show us the way then Jesus could have simply left after this teaching and returned to Heaven. But instead . . .

In fact, Christianity is not simply a new set of doctrines followed by a new set of ethics. Christianity is foremost a person who is so powerful and overwhelming that He completely transforms everything about us so that we think differently, act differently because of His presence.

God's space is pushing in!! Heaven is God's space (realm). When we die we go to God's space which is taking over man's space until it takes over all.