

Jesus teaches us to always approach God in prayer as humbled sinners who are confident of our forgiveness and acceptance with God by grace.

1) We should be humbled by our continuing need of forgiveness.

- a) “Forgive us”—Christians who are not in name only, but are true followers of Christ, are to always pray in this way. Jesus begins, “When you pray, say . . .”
- b) “Forgive”—To release someone from an obligation.
- c) Sin as moral failure incurring a debt/penalty.
 - i) Many “word pictures” in the Bible to help us understand sin—transgression, trespass, rebellion, falling short, enmity with God, disobedience, filth, defilement, etc.
 - ii) “sins”—moral failure
 - (1) Original Sin—Because Adam was the representative of the human race, his one sin was done on behalf of all people, leaving all of us guilty, sinful, and condemned to eternal death (Romans 5:12-21).
 - (2) Actual Sin—Sins of omission and commission in thought, word, and deed, which arise from our corrupted nature (total depravity; Romans 3:9-18; 8:7-8).
 - iii) “indebted”—the consequence of sin is a debt we cannot pay
 - (1) **Romans 6:23** “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
 - (2) **Matthew 18:24** “ten thousand talents” (“a talent was a monetary unit worth about twenty years’ wages for a laborer” ESV text note)
- d) Christians need forgiveness because we continue to sin. *Simul justus et peccator* (Martin Luther)—Simultaneously righteous in the sight of God and sinners.
 - i) **Romans 7:18-25** “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.”
 - ii) **1 John 1:8-10** “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”
 - iii) **Romans 4:5** “And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.’” (cf. Psalm 32:1-2)
- e) Christians need forgiveness, not because our justification is in jeopardy, but because our sanctification and communion with God are not yet complete (whole argument of Romans 6).
 - i) Justification is grounded in Christ’s satisfaction of God’s righteous demands: **Romans 8:3-4a** “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own

Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us . . .”

- ii) This grace of justification flows forth in our lives as a fountain of grace for sanctification: **Romans 8:4b** “who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”
- iii) Progressive Sanctification brings us into fuller enjoyment of communion with God, which will only be complete when this time of suffering is past: **Romans 8:12-17** “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs with—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him.”
- iv) This communion is interrupted by our sins. The Father does not cast His children off, but we do experience His fatherly displeasure, leading us to repentance, confession of sin, and forgiveness. **1 John 2:1-6** “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says, ‘I know Him’ but does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps His word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in Him: whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.”
- f) The need for forgiveness is a necessary part of the message of the gospel.
 - i) RUF minister Sammy Rhode’s apology to the LGBTQ community was entirely misguided. The Church cannot apologize for naming sin and continue to be the Church. Politeness and political correctness cannot remove sin and bring peace with God; only the powerful grace of the good news of the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins can bring sinners to God. Without expressing the need for forgiveness this good news makes no sense.
 - ii) Jesus would have us all approach the Father as the penitent tax collector: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”; never as the self-righteous Pharisee, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men . . .” who need forgiveness (Luke 18:9-14).
 - iii) When Frank Luntz asked Donald Trump if he ever asked for God’s forgiveness for his wrongs, Trump responded, “I am not sure I have. I just go on and try to do a better job from there. I don’t think so,” he said. “I think if I do something wrong, I think, I just try and make it right. I don’t bring God into that picture. I don’t.” It’s no wonder that he says, “People are so shocked when they find out . . . I’m Protestant. I’m Presbyterian.”

2) We should be confident to ask God’s forgiveness knowing that He is infinitely more gracious than we are.

- a) “for we ourselves forgive”—The Greek construction sets this up as an argument from the lesser to the greater. ESV translates “we ourselves” which accurately conveys the emphatic first person plural subject of this clause. They do not translate one word that actually adds more force to the relation of the first clause (asking God’s forgiveness) and the second clause (acknowledging our acts of forgiveness). That word is *kai* which can be translated in a few ways, but is best translated here as “even”: “for even we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”
 - i) The implication is that if we “who are evil” forgive people who are indebted to us, how much more will God, who is good, forgive us our sins.

- ii) Our forgiveness of debtors is not the ground for God’s forgiveness of us. God’s grace is not contingent on human action.
- iii) Our forgiveness of others, especially when driven by our knowledge of the gospel, encourages us to confidently seek forgiveness from God.
- b) “everyone who is indebted to us”—releasing people from the guilt and consequences of their wrong against us
 - i) Distinction: offenses which can be overlooked vs. offences that create a breach in a relationship
 - ii) Forgiveness is a relational transaction that involves two parties, one to seek forgiveness, the other to forgive. The forgiver “pays for” the debt of the forgiven. He suffers the loss in order to release the offender from his duty.
 - iii) The offer of forgiveness or the willingness to forgive can be initiated by the offended party, but forgiveness cannot take place without the cooperation of the offender, admitting his offence and seeking forgiveness.
 - iv) The object of forgiveness is not the peace of mind of the person offended, but the peace of conscience of the person who caused the offense.
 - (1) God graciously and effectually calls us to repentance, confessing our sin and seeking forgiveness (Isaiah 55:6-7). The self-righteous Pharisee was not “justified” because he did not seek God’s forgiveness (Luke 18:14), rather, he thought he had no wrongs to confess, or that he could make up for them with his own religious performances. He was not forgiven because he would not relinquish his debt to the one who could forgive it.
 - (2) We are commanded to love our enemies, which means that we are to be eager and ready to forgive. But forgiveness cannot actually happen when an offender does not acknowledge his offence or refuses to seek forgiveness for an offense.
- c) God encourages us to seek forgiveness by showing us His abundant grace:
 - i) **Isaiah 55:7-7** “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”
 - ii) **Romans 5:6-11** “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”
- d) Do not go haltingly, but run to the Father for forgiveness.

Doxology:

I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that He has granted them according to His compassion, according to the abundance of His steadfast love.” Isaiah 63:7