

## God's Forgiveness Delivers You from Death Row

Matthew 6:12; Isaiah 55:7

July 4, 2021

Greg L. Price

The torment of a guilty conscience is like a thorn in the foot that with every step pricks and drives the thorn deeper and deeper into the flesh. Billions of dollars are spent each year on drugs, books, and therapists to help relieve the pangs of a guilty conscience.

The beauty of the gospel of Christ is that God promises freedom from the bondage of guilt and condemnation through faith alone in Jesus alone. For the cause of guilt and condemnation before God is our sin (our corrupt nature inherited from Adam and our personal sins). Sin destroys lives, marriages, churches, and nations leaving billions of adults and children strewn along life's highway as the perpetrators and casualties of sin. Sin promises man wisdom, pleasure, and the realization of your dreams; but it delivers bondage, misery, and death.

If sin is our greatest problem in this life (and it is), then God's forgiveness of all our sin is our greatest need. Why will you live now and die eternally under the guilt and condemnation of your sin, when you can be pardoned by God as Judge now and for all eternity? We are all like condemned criminals before God on death row due to our sin, but Jesus has come to save all condemned criminals who will embrace by faith Jesus and His atoning sacrifice as their very own. There is nothing that makes this life worth living and gives hope for the life to come like knowing that you have been forgiven, washed, and cleansed of all your sins through atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Why will you wait?

Today, we will be focusing our attention on the Fifth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: "And forgive us our debts." There are two aspects of God's forgiveness that we will be considering: (1) God's Judicial Forgiveness (Justification-once); (2) God's Fatherly Forgiveness (Sanctification-daily).

### I. God's Judicial Forgiveness.

#### A. Review

1. We continue through the petitions Jesus gave us in order to guide us in our own prayers. Jesus teaches that we must first focus on the greatness and the glory of our God (Matthew 6:9-10). What good is our faith if it is not placed in a loving and almighty Father who is holy, who reigns over all, and who has revealed to us His will for us to obey out of love? Misplaced faith is no better than the absence of faith.

2. Next, Jesus instructs us to bring those petitions to our Father that concern our own needs: our physical/material needs—not our wants (Matthew 6:11); and our spiritual needs—forgiveness of sin (Matthew 6:12) and deliverance from sin/temptation (Matthew 6:13).

B. Note that the plea for God's forgiveness begins with "and". There is a connection between the Fourth Petition ("Give us this day our daily bread" Matthew 6:11) and the Fifth Petition ("AND forgive us our debts"). What's the connection?

1. Jesus makes clear that the only way that we will take comfort and joy in what God graciously supplies to us in our daily bread (physical/material needs) is when we know and are assured that He has pardoned all our sins so that we are no longer under His just sentence of condemnation. It is of little or no comfort to a convict on death row awaiting his execution the following day to eat a steak dinner the night before. A steak dinner will only be enjoyed when he knows he is pardoned (and so it is true for each of us).

2. That which gives you gladness in enjoying all God has given to you (family, food, clothing, home, job, etc.) is knowing that you are no longer under God's condemnation, but rather under His

present and eternal pardon/acquittal (John 3:18; John 5:24). Could that be why you find so little joy and contentment in all that God has given to you? Have you forgotten that you are no longer a condemned criminal eating your last meal? You who trust Christ have been pardoned in full for every sin.

C. Why do we need God's forgiveness? Because we are debtors to God due to our sin ("And forgive us our **DEBTS**").

1. You see, we owe God perfect obedience in keeping His law/commandments as the children of Adam, but we have failed and fail every single day (just as our father Adam failed, Matthew 5:48). None of us are sinless/perfect (Romans 3:10,19,23). As a result, we are all on death row; and that debt of our guilt and condemnation in disobeying Him in thought, word, and deed must be paid in full to Him (either by ourselves or by a Substitute). God must require full payment as a just and righteous Judge (He "will by no means clear the guilty" Exodus 34:7).

2. Our debt is so great that we cannot possibly pay it off to God. Rather than paying it off, every day that we live apart from Christ, we only enlarge our debt by adding to it. That is why hell is a place of eternal punishment—the debt of sin's guilt and just condemnation to God is never paid off. To sin against the infinite/eternal God and His righteous laws/commandments brings us all under everlasting condemnation (Romans 6:23; Revelation 14:11). No wonder there can be no joy in eating that steak dinner (i.e. a few blessings God gives here on earth) while God's just condemnation hangs over us. And the truth of this dark reality is that we all (as the fallen children of Adam) prefer our darkness in the prison cell of sin than the freedom of the light of the gospel. We hate the light of Jesus Christ because it exposes our sins, our shame, our guilt, and our condemnation. And we will not come to the light (John 3:19-20). We will not come to Christ until He comes to us and gives us new eyes to behold the beauty of the light of the gospel.

3. "That is certainly a bleak picture, Pastor." True (and it is far worse than I have even described), but until you understand how bleak and dark is the condemnation you are under (even while eating your steak dinner), you will never look in faith to the glorious hope of complete and total pardon of all guilt and condemnation that is only found in God's sinless and perfect Substitute—His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He is perfect God and perfect Man, lived a sinless life, and willingly suffered the just punishment of God (as Judge) for all His elect who trust in Him alone for the forgiveness of all their sin (past, present, and future). There is here a double imputation that mere words cannot fully describe. All guilt and condemnation of God's elect was imputed to Christ's account as He hung on the cross—He paid the entire debt of sin in full (from the least to the greatest sin). Then all His perfect righteousness is imputed to the account of you who trust in Him as Savior and Lord of your life (2 Corinthians 5:21). In the court of heaven, God declares you righteous—as righteous as Jesus Himself—for it is His righteousness that is imputed to your account. That is **JUSTIFICATION**. Your account was filled with debt. You were spiritually bankrupt before God. But in the unfathomable love of God, He sent His only begotten Son to pay your debt in full (Psalm 103:12). I was the debtor who could not possibly make the payment that God required, but Jesus paid that debt in full, so that God is completely satisfied and pardons me. I paid nothing, Jesus paid it all. It is free to me only because He paid it all for me.

4. If any object that God could not pardon our future sins because they were not yet committed, I would respond, "Then God could not impute any of our sins to Christ as He hung upon the cross because they were all future at that time. God is not limited by time or space. All the sins of His elect were imputed to Christ when He paid for them on the cross, and all the sins of His elect (past, present, and future) are forgiven when they trust in Christ. That is God's judicial forgiveness.

5. Though God as Judge has forgiven all your sin, once and for all, imputed Christ's perfect righteousness to you through faith in Christ, are you yet living in misery as if you were still on death row? Why? Let me suggest some possible reasons, which you will have to search out before God in prayer and meditation.

a. Perhaps you are walking by your feelings rather than by faith in the promise and truth of God's Word. Your feelings are not reliable, but God's truth is unchangeable. Understand that it is not the size of your faith that secures the pardon, but the One in whom your faith is placed. Trust alone in Christ who secured that pardon for you.

b. Perhaps you have forgotten these most glorious and beautiful gospel truths. You've become so preoccupied with the busyness of this world. Your love for Christ has grown cold, and you are not living in light of these truths every day. You must as it were prominently wear the diamond ring of God's unfathomable love and forgiveness on your finger. It must be in a place where you can see it. It must be held up and beheld in all of its glory each day and throughout the day.

c. Perhaps you are living in the past (under the guilt and condemnation of past sins) rather than living in the present (under the full and complete pardon of those sins)? If God as Judge has pardoned us, we should not live in the darkness of the past, but in the present light of God's forgiveness. But at the same time, we should not forget the darkness of that past guilt, misery, and condemnation from which God has delivered you that we may glory in His love, mercy, and pardon.

d. Perhaps you have waited to repent of sin into which you have fallen rather than immediately coming to your merciful and gracious Father who delights to grant you His fatherly forgiveness daily on the same ground that He only and always can forgive sin: the righteous payment of Christ. We will consider the fatherly forgiveness of God next Lord's Day (God willing), which is an aspect of our sanctification. The longer that you delay in repenting of sin and seeking His forgiveness, the more the enemy will lie to you that your sin is too great (or too small and no big deal), that it's someone else's fault that you sinned, that you have not shed enough tears, that you are not sincere and your repentance is not real because you have fallen again into the same sin. Let your shame and unworthiness drive you to Christ, not away from Him. It is Christ who is worthy—not you or me.

D. We will only have confidence in approaching God daily for His forgiveness as a reconciled Father who loves us when we are assured that He who knows the worst about us, yet loves us with an everlasting love that cannot be quenched even by our sin; for where sin did abound, grace did much more abound (Romans 5:20).

1. Yet we cannot continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:1). Those who have been pardoned of all their sin hate their sin and are growing to hate it more each day, and at the same time love Christ's truth and righteousness and growing to love it more each day. Those who have been pardoned by God love what He loves and hate what He hates.

2. The forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ is your life, your peace, your joy, and your contentment. Jesus would have to cease from being righteous before you who are righteous in Christ would cease to be righteous before the Father. Jesus declared, "It is finished" (paid in full); and we know that the justice of God was completely satisfied with the payment of Christ, because Jesus was raised from the dead.

3. Dear Christian, why are you believing the lie of the devil that your sin is too great (or too small) to be forgiven, or that you have exhausted and drained dry the infinite fountain of His mercy and grace? Stop listening to the devil—there is no truth in him—he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Listen to God and receive the word of Him who cannot lie (Isaiah 55:7).

Copyright 2021 Greg L. Price.