

“The Terrible Petition: Forgive Us as We Forgive Our Debtors”

Matt 6:9, 12-15, Luke 11:4, Sermon Notes

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Saving Grace Bible Church

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Morning Worship Service

Text:

⁹ "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.¹⁰ 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ 'Give us this day our daily bread.¹² 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.¹³ 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. *For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*'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." (Matthew 6:5-15 NAU)

"And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." (Luke 11:4 NAS)

Title: The Terrible Petition: Forgive Us as We Forgive Our Debtors

Focal Point: vs 12 "Forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors."

Homiletical Keyword: pray

Interrogative: What? (What are we to pray for?)

Teaching Aim: to understand how to pray for God's help

Introduction

*This sermon sets our thoughts for prayer and the taking of the Lord's Supper

St. Augustine called this text a "Terrible Petition"

- Not that asking for forgiveness is unnecessary or wrong
- Though it has been argued here that Christians should not be asking for forgiveness because they have already been forgiven
- This is not Watson's concern in this great text before us

In this text is a connection between our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of us

- This is the terrible dilemma for the Christian
 - It would be easier for us if Christ did not make this connection between our forgiveness and God's forgiveness
- "The reason why this text is a "Terrible Petition" is because: "if we pray "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" with an unforgiving heart, we are actually asking God NOT to forgive us." Hughes pg. 424

Imagine it like this, "If someone sins against you and you harbor that sin and don't release it, then you are praying God harbor my sins like I harbor the sins of others."

- None of us want that to happen, do we?
- "The scriptures are so conclusive on this matter that the Puritan Thomas Watson said, 'A man can as well go to hell for not forgiving as for not believing.' And the nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "Unless you have forgiven others, you read your own death-warrant when you repeat the Lord's Prayer." Hughes pg 425

As you see this text is important for us to understand and critical we get right, lest we condemn ourselves by the very prayers we are commanded to pray

Introduction to Forgiveness:

The idea of forgiveness is very difficult for us to grasp and apply. To some degree it is not natural for us to forgive or want to forgive

Megan Feldman Bettencourt, a secular writer, who wrote the book *Triumph of the Heart: Forgiveness in an Unforgiving World* writes about her journey to discover forgiveness

- She admittedly struggled with the idea of forgiveness because she did not want to let go of the anger she had. She says:

"The truth is I happen to like anger. I think it's one of the most productive emotions at our disposal." Pg 25

- How many of you can honestly agree with that sentiment?
 - At times we feel like we have to be angry to let people know we are serious
 - We think if we are not angry with someone over their sin then a second injustice has taken place.
- She continues

"... I often savored the emotion. I enjoyed the memory of the newspaper reviewer calling my ex a "caveman." It gave me a sweet, sickly joy."

- Forgiveness is hard because at times we want to be angry at those who hurt us and if we are as honest as Megan is in her book, we even enjoy the offender being hurt in some way
- We subtly live a life of secret revenge seeking the harm of the offender or taking delight in any expression of harm they may encounter
- It makes us feel better about being a victim

But this secret world of anger and revenge, even if it lives in the heart and mind and never is allowed to express itself in external displays, is destructive and potentially spiritually damaging

- Not only should we forgive for the personal and physical benefits
- More importantly we should forgive because it is a reflection of the character of God

No matter how hard it is for you to forgive, no matter the hurts and suffering you are facing as the result of the selfish acts of another person, you can and you must forgive

Introduction to the text:

This is Jesus teaching on prayer

The five aspects of prayer in this section are:

1. Prayer is Intimate Communion with a Holy God
2. Prayer is Aligning Our Will to God's vs 10
 - a. Two parts same purpose
 - i. One Bring your Kingdom
 - ii. Do your will
3. Prayer is Casting Our Burdens Upon God vs 11
4. **Prayer is for Reconciliation vs 12**
5. Prayer is for Protection 13

This is a wonderful prayer:

- Prayer, even for the most seasoned saint, can be challenging
- There may be times in your spiritual walk where you are regularly praying and it seems like your prayers are just bouncing off the ceiling and getting no where
- Clearly God hears, and clearly this is not the case, but we often lose heart in prayer

Here Jesus gives us five categories we can pray for. Five areas we can pray in. Five categories we can fit our petitions in. If our petition does not fit into one of these categories we should then wonder if it should be brought to the Lord

- If we doubt our prayer's effectiveness we need simply to look at how well we are praying according to God's design

First we pray exalting God and extoling His virtues vs9

- Hallowed be your name
- We draw near to God as our Father
- He is close, near, personal, loving, gracious, supportive, caring, merciful, wise, insightful, and purposeful in His dealings with us
- His name is hallowed and set apart
 - We could spend a whole prayer just extoling the virtues and greatness of God
 - Marveling at His work, patience, His providence
- The key in this prayer is seeing God as set apart and extolled for who He is and what He does

Second, we pray for the will of God to be accomplished vs 10

- As Jesus prayed in the Garden, Father take this cup from me, but not my will but your will be done
- We bring our prayers and burdens to God but first we seek His will to be accomplished
- We seek to align ourselves with His purposes
- We bring ourselves out of our own pursuits and remind ourselves we are children of the most high God seeking to be servants of Christ
- Your Kingdom come Lord – says we want to get to the Eternal Kingdom to see your rule and reign upon this Earth
- Your will be done on Earth as it is in heaven – sees the realization of our acknowledgement that God's ways are to be practiced by all who call upon His name
- The Godly seek to walk like God through which they demonstrate this walk in following the will of God
- So we pray for the will of God to be known and practiced among the people of God

Thirdly we pray – give us this day our daily bread vs 11

- We take our needs and burdens to the Lord
- He cares for us and will provide for our needs
- He wants us to bring our burdens before Him
- And as we do we become aware of all the various ways God provides for His people

The scriptures say over and over again God is faithful to care for our needs

- Here the request is made
- In 6:33 Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be provided (food and clothing)
- Heb 13:5 - "*Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," (Hebrews 13:5 NAU)

But get this, God does not promise to keep and preserve you and allow you to remain comfortably where you are. There may be time He forces you to move. Leave behind family, friends, and a familiar life for something new and different

- He may dry up your opportunities in one area to open them in another
- This is what happened to Naomi in Ruth, when she heard God was blessing back in Bethlehem so she returned

The point is that God will always care for His people and if His people are not too stubborn to yield to Him they will find the gracious and loving provision He is pouring out. But if they resist and try to hold on to that which they cannot keep they will find their life filled with difficulty

Fourth, we pray forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors. Vs 12

One of the great lessons we have learned to this point is that God loves us and cares for us. As we are praying to God we know that we can take any care and concern to Him and He cares for us.

We now come to the section on Forgiveness.

¹²"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Look at verses 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."

One more passage is the corresponding passage in Luke 11:4

"And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation." (Luke 11:4 NAS)

From these two texts there are four principles which help us understand forgiveness

What is a Paradigm? A pattern or practice

4 principles

1. Forgiveness is to be regular and continually sought and given (Matt 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4).
It is not only for salvation
2. Sin is debt and needs to be released (Matt 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4)
3. Because we are forgiven by God we are regularly forgiving others and we boldly ask God for the forgiveness which is part of restoration (Matt 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4)
4. Forgiveness towards others is relational (Matt 6:12, 14-15; Luke 11:4)

Paradigm Principle #1

- Forgiveness is to be regular, continually sought from God and given regularly to others

Notice the context of our verse

- Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray
- First, He is teaching believers. Admittedly 1 unbeliever but at this point he was a professing believer
- Second, Matt 5:11 "Gives us this day our daily bread" This speaks of a daily prayer not a salvation prayer
- Luke 11:3 is equally as explicit "Give us each day our daily bread."
 - Luke adds that this instruction on prayer came as a result of the disciples asking to learn how to pray as John taught his disciples how to pray. Vs 1

Also this accounts for the differences between these two passages. Matthew records the teaching on prayer in the context of a sermon Christ gave on the mount. While Luke records the instruction of Christ on prayer as a response to a question by the disciples to learn how to pray like John the Baptists disciples were taught

Here there are daily prayers given. This is important to catch. We are seeking a kind of forgiveness which is not a one-time act

- The prayer for forgiveness at salvation is for forgiveness which comes through justification. That is not the kind of forgiveness referred to here because this is a continual prayer for forgiveness
- This is the kind of relational forgiveness which is needed to keep relationships healthy and strong
 - This is why marriages fall apart. A failure to confess sins and seek reconciliation. Patterns of no forgiveness and unrepentance drives relationships apart

So it is important to see that the kind of forgiveness we are praying for is not salvific but relational

- Prayer for regular forgiveness should be part of our everyday practice. Lord forgive us as we forgive others
- Our model of forgiveness is measured by our everyday practice not by the historical event of Christ's death
- Indeed the seeking of forgiveness is part of the everyday pursuit of the Christian life
- 1 John 1:9 teaches us that by the present tense verb if we confess
- But here the emphasis is not on our regular asking

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT?

Look at the text, look at Jesus commentary on what he means in verses 14 and 15

"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. (Matthew 6:14-15 NAU)

- The whole emphasis is what we are to be as God's people
- We are to be forgiving
- This is the NT emphasis 5 to 1 in favor of freely forgiving with no respect to how you got to the point of forgiving. The emphasis in the NT is on the lavish and free gifting rather than the process

The key to understand is this, when the Bible speaks of forgiveness it is more concerned about the attitude and actions you demonstrate and not the steps you took to get there

- Attitude: Matt 18:35 "from your heart"
- Actions: release the debt

It does not matter the steps of how you got there, what matters is that you are forgiving others of their sin against you just as God has forgiven you of your sin against Him

- There may be times we go
- There may be times where the brother comes to us
- There may be times where we overlook and let love cover
- There may be times when we are forgiving people who think they are totally in the right but we are feeling the sting of loss
- There may be times we forgive people who do not think they need our forgiveness
- There may be times where we forgive those who are begging for our forgiveness
- There may be times we forgive people who do not want our forgiveness

The point of the NT teaching is that we are to be regularly forgiving others

- If we do not then God will not forgive us

Let us suppose for a moment then that we are only forgiven by God when we ask for it. Let us suppose that is what this verse implies

- Since we have forgiven others Lord you then forgive us

What happens to those sins we do not ask about? Those sins of omission?

- Should we be like the Catholics fearing that we have sinned a mortal sin condemning us to purgatory for an extended time?
- Do we assume that God only forgives us for the sins that we asked to be covered?

No matter what you must practice this, forgive us as we are forgiving others

- Now suppose this for a second
- Suppose for 1 min that you take the view of forgiveness which says “forgiveness only occurs when someone repents of their sin so we cannot forgive until there is repentance.”
- Suppose the person says I did not sin so I am not repenting so you hold on to the sin
- Let me ask you Christian, do you want God to treat you the same way?

You know I want God to forgive me even when I do not know I sinned

- I want God to forgive me even when I sinned in ignorance
- I want God to forgive me even when I am hard in heart
- I want God to forgive me even when I am not seeing the full picture of my sin
- I need forgiveness every day. Just as I know you do as well

Not only that, I want God to pursue me to repentance so that I will not want to seek this sin and cause further divide in our relationship

- Transactional forgiveness or conditional forgiveness really does not model their forgiveness after God because they do not want God to treat them in the way they are treating others

Paradigm Principle #2

Sin is debt and needs to be released

Forgive us our debt as we have forgiven our debtors

- Regularly
- Freely
- Fully
- Graciously
- Entirely

The Passage in Luke 11:4 is interesting here

“And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:4 NAS)

- Luke records Jesus equating sin as debt

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12 NAS)

We all naturally live under the realization that God forgives us of every debt. Past, present, future sins and sins of commission and omission

- Let me say it a little different, if God only forgives us when we ask then I doubt we spend as much time in prayer as we ought
- God’s concern is that we be like Him. When we are forgiving others, are lavishing grace and mercy on others, we are overlooking transgressions and walking in love we are like God in that moment

This is the NT emphasis. We are to be like God. One of the ways we do that is forgive as God forgives. That forgiveness may be manifested in many contexts but it must be evident in our attitude – the free and full releasing of others of personal debts to yourself

- When one sins they incur a debt. They owe someone. They are to make restitution

Paradigm Principle # 3

Because we are forgiven by God we are regularly forgiving others and we boldly as God for the forgiveness which is part of restoration

Look at Luke 11:4

“And forgive us our sins, *For* we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:4 NAS)

Notice the key word “for” there. What is it doing?

- It could mean that forgiveness is a prerequisite for our own forgiveness at salvation?
 - I doubt this interpretation as it would contradict other scriptures which teach us of our present salvation in Christ
 - Also makes salvation by works. Our works of forgiveness

- Or it could mean, what we ask God we should be doing ourselves. IE God we are forgiven so we forgive others
 - This is possible and a valid interpretation
 - We have been forgiven so we forgive others
- Or it could mean we can ask God for a relational forgiveness because we continually seek to show relational forgiveness towards others
 - I believe this is the best sense of the meaning here
 - It adds to the second view and says we can have boldness in approaching God for a forgiveness which restores our relationship because we are forgiving others who have hurt our relationship

JC Ryle said it like this:

“The justification of every believer no doubt is a finished and perfect work, and one admitting of no degrees, no increase and no diminution. The moment a man believes upon Christ, he is as much justified as St. Paul and St. John, and cannot be more justified if he lived to the age of Methuselah. But all this is no reason why he should not daily confess his sins, and daily seek fresh application of Christ’s blood to his conscience.” Pg 9 Luke Vol 2

Since God has forgiven us, and because we regularly forgive we can boldly approach God for forgiveness which is a part of restoration

- This is a prayer of relational restoration
- Just as we seek to restore relationships

Paradigm Principle #4

Forgiveness towards others is relational

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

Here is the grand truth, we must be forgiving others or we are condemning ourselves

- Like God we forgive our enemies
- Like God we forgive those who betray us
- Like God we forgive heinous sins
- Like God we forgive because it is in our nature to forgive as a child of God, not because the person deserves it

Now listen the question that comes up here is this, who is this warning too?

- If God will not forgive sins who is he speaking to?
- Is He speaking to all believers? JFM see gospel of Luke
- Is He speaking to professing believers who will not forgive? Kent Hughes see pg 425

I would say that both commentators are right and are not contradicting each other. In general Jesus is speaking to all of us who profess Christ and reminds us that our personal communion with God is hindered when we fail to forgive others. This is why struggling in your marriage to forgive has an impact on our spiritual life

- There is no such thing as an unforgiving marriage but a strong spiritual life
- Lack of forgiveness in the home follows you to the pews in the Church

On the other hand, this passage speaks specifically to the professing believer who can never find it within himself to forgive. This hardness of heart reveals an unacceptable ingratitude which is not part of the new nature in Christ

Now this view of forgiveness transforms our understanding of the justice and greatness of God

It is through God's nature as being forgiving, His willingness to forgive, and demonstrations of forgiveness, which make His justice both pure and meaningful

- Pure as it is free from a vengeful anger
- Meaningful because it is contrasted with unmeasured mercy

The wicked head to a terrible expectation of Judgement because on the day when His mercy was expressed they did not take of it and did not share it with others

- We on the other hand take freely of His mercy granted through forgiveness and freely give it to those fellow sinners who need God as much as we do
- This is what we do every time we forgive. We give mercy to undeserving sinners just as we have received and undeserved gift

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So as you pray, then pray in this way, God deliver me from the destructive intentions of the evil one who is seeking to harm me

- Deliver me from the one who would like to destroy my faith
- Deliver me from the one who would like to discredit your work in my life or in the message I proclaim
- Deliver me from the destructive purposes of the evil one who will glory in destroying my faith

Conclusion

4 principles

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