

Subject: *Forgive Us Our Debts*

Scripture: *Matthew 6:12*

We can identify seven voices in this model prayer:

- 1) the voice of a child – *our Father*
- 2) the voice of a worshiper – *hallowed be thy name*
- 3) the voice of a servant – *thy kingdom come, thy will be done*
- 4) the voice of a needy person – *give us this day our daily bread*
- 5) the voice of a sinner – *forgive us our debts*
- 6) the voice of a pilgrim – *lead us not into temptation*
- 7) the voice of a soldier – *thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.*

1. Forgiveness is a universal requirement

Everybody makes mistakes. Someone said that a dentist's mistake is pulled out, a lawyer's mistake is imprisoned, a teacher's mistake is failed, a printer's mistake is corrected, a postman's mistake is forwarded, an electrician's mistake could be shocking, and a pharmacist's mistake is buried. Nobody is perfect. Bottom line? We all need forgiveness.

When Jesus taught us to pray, He used the word "debts" (forgive us our debts). This has been the year of the bail-outs as companies have been bailed out by the government. By this He means our spiritual debts, not financial debts. In the parallel scripture in **Luke 11:4** *And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil*, Jesus uses the word "sins" (Greek, *hamartias*, means "missing the mark"). Sin is a debt to God that must be paid. Sinners are debtors. All are sinners, therefore all of us owe a sin debt that we cannot pay.

Man's greatest problem is sin. Because sin is man's greatest problem, forgiveness is man's greatest need, and that is what God provides. At first sin contaminates, then it dominates, and finally it separates. The immediate effects of sin are misery, guilt, and shame. The ultimate effects are death and judgment.

We need God's forgiveness in salvation. As believers we have received a full pardon for all our sin. But as Christians we still need daily forgiveness. We may think of salvation as God's judicial forgiveness, and our daily forgiveness as God's parental forgiveness.

Jesus gave a beautiful illustration of this kind of forgiveness when He washed the disciples' feet. The incident is recorded in John 13. When Jesus came to Peter, at first Peter refused and would not let Jesus wash His feet. **John 13:8-10** *Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.* Like Peter, we have been bathed in salvation, but we need daily cleansing. Dirt on the feet represents the sin that contaminates us as we walk through life. As our Judge, God is willing to forgive sinners, and as our Father, He is willing to keep on forgiving His children.

2. Forgiveness is a divine right

God is not obligated to forgive sin, but He promised to forgive if we would only ask. Jesus taught us to simply ask, "Forgive us our debts." The Bible makes it clear that only God can forgive sin. As great as our sin is, God's grace is always greater. **Romans 5:20** *But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:*

- Sin is a defilement only God can cleanse
- Sin is a disease only God can cure
- Sin is a debt only God can cancel

The One who formed us is the only One who can forgive us. Who can forgive sins, but God only? God promises to forgive our sins when we come in the right spirit. We must confess and forsake our sins. **Proverbs 28:13** *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.* **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* To confess means that we say the same thing God says, that we agree with God that it is wrong, and that we are willing to forsake it or stop it.

If we're really honest and sincere, we won't see God's promise of forgiveness as a license to keep on sinning. We will see it as a proof of God's love and faithfulness. We need to feel like the old Puritan who prayed, "Grant me never to lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the exceeding righteousness of salvation, the exceeding glory of Christ, the exceeding beauty of holiness, and the exceeding wonder of grace."

3. Forgiveness is a Christian responsibility

Jesus gave a simple, but powerful principle for receiving forgiveness. If we want forgiveness, we must be forgiving to others. The Bible says that one mark of God's children is that they are willing to forgive others. **Matthew 5:7** *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.* Forgiveness is the mark of a truly changed heart. When we forgive others we are acting like our Father in heaven. **Matthew 5:44-45** *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

We must be forgiving so that we don't grieve the Holy Spirit. **Ephesians 4:30-31** *And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:* We are motivated by Christ's example. **Ephesians 4:32** *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

Forgiving others is the mark of a wise man. **Proverbs 19:11** *The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.* But of all the reasons why we should forgive others, the most important reason is that it allows God to forgive us. Two men lived in the same nursing home. They had said ugly things and done mean things to each other through the years. Now, one of the men was on his deathbed, and called for the other man to come see him before he passed on. He told him, "I forgive you." And then he said, "But if I get better, this doesn't count." Are you thankful God doesn't act like that?

This part of the Lord's Prayer is so important that it is the only part that Jesus commented on. **Matthew 6:14-15** *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* Jesus even told a parable (story) about forgiveness. He described how much God has forgiven us and how we need to forgive others (see **Matthew 18:21-35**).

- **Forgiveness is a universal requirement**
- **Forgiveness is a divine right**
- **Forgiveness is a Christian responsibility**

Do you need forgiveness? **1 John 1:10** *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* Do you need to forgive someone else?