

"FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS"

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Matthew 6:12.

As we have been studying the Model Prayer, we have been living in the atmosphere of praise and worship. The intimacy of our relationship with our Heavenly Father, based upon our receiving Jesus Christ as our Saviour, has led to the inevitable desire that His name should be hallowed, His Kingdom established and His will be done. We have rejoiced because of our union with Him, and we have expressed that joy by our concern for His glory.

In the petition immediately preceding this one is the prayer for daily bread. It is prayed in an attitude of confident and expectant hope. With upturned faces, in the assurance that He never fails those who put their trust in Him we have asked for bread suited to our needs and for daily supplies of His grace to meet our weakness. We are absolutely dependent upon God for our very existence; so, our Lord teaches us to ask God for the material bread that is to sustain our physical life from day to day.

However, "man shall not live by bread alone." In addition to the hunger of the body, there is hunger of the soul. What the soul hungers for is pardon, forgiveness and the peace which forgiveness always brings. So, when we have prayed for bread, we have not finished. We have another prayer to offer. We have a larger request to make. We have a greater boon to ask-- "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

A prayer for bread is a prayer for life--for mere existence. We go on to pray for a gift far greater than that of bread; we go on to pray for mercy, pardon, reconciliation and peace. To make life worth living, it must be made happy and peaceful, and before it can be made such the barrier of sin must be removed, and we must walk in the light of God's countenance. This prayer for forgiveness meets a demand that is just as universal as is that for daily bread. All of us need to pray it, because we have all sinned.

"Sin" is an ugly word, one that stands for the ugliest and most terrible fact in the universe. The world was fair and bright until sin entered. All its wretchedness is the result of sin. Man was pure and happy until sin entered. The Bible emphatically declares that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." There is not a truthful man who will deny that he is a sinner.

God's Word does not use a single word to describe the terrible fact of sin in all of its many aspects of horror. It employs various words for this one terrible thing as it views it from different standpoints.

I. Definitions Of Sin.

1. Sin is a rebellion against the will of God.
Sin is any thought, desire, word or deed contrary to the will of God. Man's personal opposition to the will of God is sin. Having the God-given power of choice, man is free to obey or to disobey God.
2. Sin is a transgression of the law of God.
"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Transgression means

to go across. God's law shows man what is right and what is wrong. When he goes across the line which marks the boundary between right and wrong, man has sinned.

3. Sin is a missing of the mark.
God's law requires perfection, and anything short of that is sin. Any failure to measure up to the divine standard is sin.
4. Sin is a failure to live up to the light one has.
"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). To leave undone what one knows he should do is to sin.
5. Sin is a debt.
A debt ariseth upon the non-payment of that which is due. We owe to God exact obedience, and, when we fail to pay in that coin, we thus come to be in debt. When we sin, there is something in our act for which we become responsible to God. Formerly, He had a claim upon us, but now He has a claim against us.

A debt is something we owe. In relation to God it is something we owed to Him and failed to pay. So, it stands here for the many things we ought to have done which we have left undone. There are certain things we owe to God. We owe Him reverence. Have we given it to Him? We owe Him obedience. Have we given it to Him? We owe Him service. Have we given it to Him? We owe Him our heart's best love. Have we given it to Him? We owe Him the first place in our thoughts and affections. Have we given it to Him? We owe Him complete self-surrender. Have we given it to Him? Probe your hearts with these questions. Face them frankly and earnestly. Have you given God perfect obedience, the first place in your lives and the best love of your hearts? Have you rendered every service for Him that was within your power to render? Such questions humble us, for we realize that we have not done our best. If you will ask yourself if you have done what God expects from you, your pride will disappear, and your self-satisfaction will be torn to shreds, and you will be humbled greatly. What pygmies we are in comparison with the men and women God has made it possible for us to be. All of us have failed to measure up to our highest possibilities.

Sin is a failure to pay God His due. The word itself implies an undischageable obligation--one that cannot be denied, ignored, transferred or evaded. We do things we ought not; we leave undone things we ought to do; and in both cases we fail in paying our duty debt to God.

II. The Cry For Forgiveness.

"And forgive us our debts." You will notice that this petition is linked with the one for daily bread by the word "and." The suggestion is that just as we need to go to Him for daily bread for daily need so we should ask Him for daily mercy for daily sin.

What do we mean by forgiveness? There are those who think of forgiveness as a rather trifling matter. Some think of it as no more than an escape from punishment, but forgiveness is something more than a way of escape from the consequences of our sin.

To forgive sin is to take away iniquity. In pardoning, God lifts off this burden from the conscience and lays it upon Christ. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). To forgive sin is to blot it out. "I am he that blotteth out thy transgression" (Isaiah 53:6). To forgive sin is to blot it out. "I am he that blotteth out thy transgression" (Isaiah 43:25). The Hebrew word which means to blot out alludes that a creditor, who when his debtor had paid him, blotted out the debt. So, God, when He forgives sin, blots out the debt. He draws the red lines of Christ's blood over our sins. It is God only who forgives sin. To pardon sin is one of the flowers of God's crown. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:7). It is certainly proper for God to pardon sin, for only the creditor can remit the debt.

III. The Condition Of Forgiveness.

Let us not forget that this prayer does not deal with the sins of the unsaved. It concerns the sins of the children of God which mar their fellowship with Him. A condition of restored fellowship with Christ within the family of God is a forgiving spirit.

The first impulse in the human heart is to retaliate when wrong is done. Probably no man of any grit or courage was ever struck without provocation, without wishing to return the blow with interest. That is a part of the natural instinct of self-preservation.

Perhaps the reason why we find it hard to forgive is because we have the wrong idea of what forgiveness is. We imagine that to forgive is for the other person to admit his guilt against us. We are ready to forgive if he will confess. If he does not recognize the wrong he has done, then we need the ability to forgive him and be a good and faithful Christian. This great duty of forgiving others is contrary to the flesh. Men forget kindnesses, but remember injuries. But it is an inescapable duty to forgive.

"How often," said Peter, "shall my brother sin and I forgive him? Seven times?" No doubt Peter thought he would be pretty generous in forgiving to that extent, but Christ looked him in the face and said, "Peter, unto seventy times seven." In other words, there is no limit to the number of times we are to forgive.

Any person who would seek forgiveness for sins committed will not find it unless he shows forgiveness to other people. In other words, the evidence that God has forgiven you is that you forgive other people. That you have tasted of God's redeeming love is borne out by the fact that gladly and lovingly you forgive all others. If you are to know God's forgiveness, you must fulfil the condition that is laid down here, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Until we forgive, God simply cannot forgive us. God will not forgive the unforgiving. "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" (Matthew 6:14-15). In order to receive forgiveness we must forgive. Would you really like for God to forgive you in exactly the same way as you forgive others?

How must we forgive? As God forgives us. How does God forgive? God forgives immediately, heartily, lovingly and fully. God also forgets as well as forgives. Concerning our sins which God forgives He says, "I will remember them no more for ever." How glorious!