

And Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors

Why is it so hard to forgive?

Only a person committed to Jesus Christ dare pray this prayer. "And Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

These are the TEN most frightening words in Christianity.

This part of the Lord's Prayer wakes us up spiritually and make us think about what we are saying.

Do we have an unforgiving spirit? If things are not right with other people, how can they be right with a holy God?

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive our debts, as we also forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

"Our debts" is a common word for legal debts, **but here it is used of moral and spiritual debts to God.** We are sinners who have wronged God. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8, 10).

We are sinners who are constantly in the need of forgiveness. We have obligations to God. We owe God a debt. We need Him to cancel our debt because as sinners we can never repay it. We are spiritual **debtors in the need of God's saving grace.**

"Forgive our debts," means, "to send away, to dismiss, to wipe off, put away" (1 Jn. 1:7-9; Eph. 1:7; Matt. 26:28). From other Scriptures we learn that God provides forgiveness on the basis of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. Nothing can be added to that. Our forgiving disposition does not earn God's pardon. Our forgiveness is based entirely on God's unmerited favour and grace, and **not on any merits on our part. It is the divine grace of God in Jesus Christ that saves us** (Eph. 1:7; 2:8-10).

The act of forgiving others does not merit an eternal reward or gain for us salvation or eternal life. However, **when we forgive others it is evidence that the grace of God is at work in our hearts.** That which is impossible for us to accomplish in our own strength God enables us to do by the power of His indwelling in our hearts. **If we hold on to our bitterness and grudges and un-forgiveness, we need to examine**

ourselves. The apostle Paul admonishes us in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Put yourselves to the test to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize regarding yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you - unless, indeed, you fail the test!"

The grace of God in the believer's heart keeps bringing him back to the sanctifying truths of God's word. In 1 John 1:9 we read "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleaning us from all unrighteousness".

In the most hurtful experiences of life we forgive, and we choose to forgive again. It is a process whereby we confess our sins and choose to forgive the person who has offended us. It is a choice we make once and for all to let it go and trust God with the consequences. And every time the "old man" brings it back up we choose to forgive again. Our old sinful nature will remind us of the hurts of life.

When we choose to forgive we demonstrate that we are children of God and we experience His saving grace. By nature this is not something we do on our own. Human nature says take charge, get revenge, get even, do not let them do this to you. However, we have become new persons, a radical change has taken place in our hearts and we cannot live in the character of the person we were before we came to Jesus Christ. The power to forgive comes from the new life in Jesus Christ.

Salvation always begins with God's electing grace and never with us (1 Jn. 4:19; Jn. 13:15; Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 2:21). The evidence of that saving grace is how we respond to the circumstances of life.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Forgive our debt as we forgive our debtors." The idea can be paraphrased: "Forgive us our sins *in proportion as* we forgive those who have sinned against us." Jesus says with powerful words in verses 14 & 15 of Chapter 6 in St. Matthew's Gospel that if we forgive others, God will forgive us; but if we refuse to forgive others, God will refuse to forgive us.

No amount of trying to make excuses, or interpret the words in a way that caters to our sinful human nature will not work. *Human forgiveness and divine forgiveness are relational.* Jesus says our forgiveness of others and God's forgiveness of us cannot be separated. They are related to one another.

This prayer forces us to our knees in humble confession and repentance.

Do you remember St. Peter's question about forgiveness? **"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"** Jesus' response was unnerving, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22).

Then Jesus told a parable on forgiveness and concluded, " 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart".

Jesus keeps bringing us back to a spiritual birth, a radical change in us, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away, what is new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Forgiveness is evidence of that radical change in our hearts.

Has anyone in this earthly life arrived at this perfect state of forgiving? Let us face the reality that only Jesus Christ has been able to forgive perfectly (Luke 23:34). Our forgiveness is not total, thus it is imperfect.

All excuses laid aside, we are forced to come to God and deal with these issues of forgiveness and receiving forgiveness daily. **This prayer for forgiveness should be a daily priority in our lives.**

Jesus expected His people to forgive others, and **He gives assurance that the forgiveness of God is certain.** In order for us to enjoy God's forgiveness of our sins we must forgive our debtors. We get back what we give. Jesus said, **"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy."**

What we are humanly unable to accomplish, **God enables us to do by His power working within us.** It is His grace within us that gives us the desire and ability to forgive our neighbour. When we do take action to forgive we have a credible witness to our lost neighbour. He can see the grace of God at work in our lives. He will see the change and ask, **"What makes you different?"**

Vengeance belongs only to the Lord (Rom. 12:19). We are to hand every situation over to the Lord and trust it to Him. We can find no greater example of this action than in Jesus Himself while hanging on the cross. He prayed, **"Father forgive them, for they now not what they are doing"** (Luke 23:34; Jn. 13:12-15; Eph. 4:32; 5:1-2; Col. 3:13). The forgiveness of Jesus must have startled those who were hurling insults,

curses and abuses on Him in the hour of His death. One of the criminals saw the difference in Jesus Christ and responded to His love.

There is a tremendous sense of inner peace of mind and heart when we choose to forgive. **God's name is glorified (hallowed)** because we have been obedient to His command.

Only the power of Jesus Christ living in us can empower us to forgive.

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled *the* law” (Rom. 13:8).

Amen... God Bless you.