

"FORGIVE US OUR SINS: PRAYING FOR GOD'S PARDON"
LUKE 11:4

There are many truths that distinguish Christianity from the religions of the world:

- ✓ The tri-unity of God
- ✓ The union of God and man in the person of Christ — the eternal God-Man
- ✓ The humility of Christ in coming to earth and going to the cross
- ✓ The resurrection
- ✓ Salvation by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, in Christ *alone* (apart from works)
- ✓ That He indwells saved sinners by the Spirit and works in them to build the church, etc.
- ✓ That we can talk to Him in prayer and that we have fellowship with the Father who adopted us

This morning, as Jesus again teaches us to pray (Lk. 11), we come to another of the most remarkable truths about our faith — *we can come to Him for forgiveness. And — He will forgive.* There is freedom from sin.

This request that Jesus teaches us to pray follows the request for **bread** — for our daily and ongoing needs. When these two requests are combined, we remember that just as there is no physical life without food and covering, so there is no spiritual life without forgiveness. So it has been said, "A world of revenge and retaliation is a world of terror and dread; a world of forgiveness is a world where there is renewal of life, peace, and hope." [Edwards] Kent Hughes has rightly said, "Forgiveness should mean more to you than your daily bread." So if you are a sinner (and you are), this prayer is of vital significance to you; and if you are enslaved to some particular sin, this prayer is the lifeline of hope for you.

Even unbelievers realize the weight of guilt that comes from sin, so you will often hear it said that we should forgive ourselves. The problem with that sentiment (as "profound" as it sounds) is that our sin has incurred a debt, but the debt is against God and not against ourselves (so as both sinner and "forgiver" we aren't in a position to forgive — my sin isn't against primarily against myself). And because the sin is against God, the debt of the sin is infinite, so we are incapable of paying the debt incurred by the sin. What can we do? We do what Jesus teaches us to do: we pray, "Father, forgive us our sins..." —

YOU HAVE SIN AND GOD IS GRACIOUS. SO ASK GOD TO PARDON YOU.

Let's consider this petition by recognizing **four truths about seeking God's forgiveness...**

- 1. What Forgiveness Is**
- 2. Who is Forgiven**
- 3. Why Forgiveness is Needed**
- 4. What Forgiven Sinners Do**

Remember the structure of the prayer: (and remember it is a *pattern* for praying — expand the prayer...)

- **There is an address** — Even as these requests are being made, we are to be aware of the nature of God to whom we make these requests: He is ***Father*** and approachable and accessible, He is compassionate towards our needs, He is omnipotent to provide, He is sovereign to orchestrate the provision we need, and sovereign so that no need is too great or too small (Mt. 6:25-34; 10:28-31).
- **There are five petitions:**
 - ✓ **Two petitions** are concerned with God and His purposes (v. 2; they are made in the 2nd person).
 - ✓ **Three petitions** are concerned with the petitioner and his personal needs (vv. 3-4; they are 1st person requests). While pray for purpose of worship, but we also are seeking His help.

YOU HAVE SIN AND GOD IS GRACIOUS. SO ASK GOD TO PARDON YOU.

1. What Forgiveness Is

- ***Forgive us*** is a very common word and request. For example, when Jesus teaches us to pray for forgiveness, He is teaching us to do what He did on the cross (23:34).
 - ✓ Jesus was petitioning His Father for those who were sinning by crucifying Him.
 - ✓ He was asking that if those men would repent that the Father would be ready to forgive them.
- What then is this ***forgiveness*** that we ask of the Father?
 - ✓ This word means “dismissal” or “remission.” It is to remove the sin and all of its debt.
 - ✓ Think about a court case; perhaps you received a speeding ticket that you decide to contest. You *were* speeding, but you go and make an appeal — “I just moved to this part of town and I didn’t know the speed limit and my wife was in labor and I had to get to the hospital — I appeal to your mercy and leniency this time...” And the judge decides to “throw out” the charge; the citation is dismissed. That means that it is removed from your record and you are treated as if you hadn’t sped.
 - ✓ When we ask for forgiveness, that’s what we are asking — remove the debt of sin as if I hadn’t sinned. And that’s exactly what He does, He takes away the sin debt from us.
- The Bible uses a number of figures of speech to indicate how God removes that sin debt:
 - ✓ He puts them at the bottom of the sea so they will never be seen again and cannot be retrieved (Mic. 7:10)
 - ✓ They are blotted out from the record against us (Is. 43:25a), nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:14)
 - ✓ He has placed them behind His back where He will not look at them (Is. 38:17) and He has decided not to remember them again (Is. 43:125b) by holding them against us again.
 - ✓ He has thrown them infinitely far away — as far as east is from west (Ps. 103:12, also vv. 8-11).
 - ✓ It has been said that for the forgiven sinner, our sins are out of sight, out of reach, out of mind, and out of existence. They are dismissed, removed, and obliterated.

- While God removes our sin from us, He can do that only for one reason — because Christ died for us.
 - ✓ He was our substitute (2 Cor. 5:21). He took our sin and imputed to us His righteousness.
 - ✓ So when we think about our sin being forgiven we recognize that God doesn't "wink" at sin or "ignore" sin — the One who has been sinned against has actually absorbed the full cost of the sin and paid for it Himself through the death of the second person of the Triunity (Rom. 3:24-26).
 - ✓ That's why it has been said that "In the entire Bible no sweeter word [than "forgiveness"] meets the sinner's eye." [Lenski] This is forgiveness — our only life and hope.

2. Who is Forgiven

- Jesus teaches us to ask forgiveness — *forgive us our sins...*
 - ✓ That is, each person is responsible to seek forgiveness from God for his own particular sins.
 - ✓ We don't seek forgiveness from God for the sins of others, and others do not seek forgiveness for us.
 - ✓ Each person is responsible to seek forgiveness for himself/herself. There is personal culpability...
 - ✓ Confession should be part of the regular rhythm of all our prayer lives. Ideally, the forgiveness is sought as soon as we commit the sin and recognize that we have committed sin.
- This also means that only those who repent and confess (themselves) are forgiven.
 - ✓ To ask for forgiveness is also to confess and repent of the sin that needs forgiveness. The penitent person is not merely asking for absolution, but he demonstrates that he knows he has sinned and that he hates his sin and seeks cleansing and transformation that is available through repentance.
 - ✓ "To ask for forgiveness is easy enough, and quickly done (as you may learn from your child); to confess one's fault in all its gravity is a very humiliating process, and if not with a view to forgiveness and the restoration of communion, it is a mockery of God. To confess, to judge oneself, is therefore far beyond asking forgiveness." [Kelly]
 - ✓ Those who want forgiveness must ask for it (*regularly*; pres. tense). God only forgives repentant sinners.
 - ✓ When we were training our children they might say, "I'm sorry, Daddy." Silence. "Are you asking for forgiveness?" "Yes." "Of course I forgive you!" I wanted to picture the necessity of repentance...
- It is also important to recognize the kind of forgiveness being sought by the one praying. There are two kinds of forgiveness that we seek from the Lord —
 - ✓ *Judicial forgiveness* — this is the forgiveness of salvation in which God in one moment imputes the righteousness of Christ to you for all time — He eternally declares you righteous (Rom. 4:4-5, 25). [If you are not a follower of Christ, and if you have not been forgiven of your sin, this is the time to acknowledge to God that you are a sinner and you are repenting of trying to live life your own way and you are repenting and asking Him to free you from the weight of your sin... Jn. 8:24]
 - ✓ *Familial forgiveness* — this is the forgiveness that restores a broken fellowship, though the two people involved already have a relationship (think parent/child or husband/wife). Cf. 1 Jn. 1:8-9.

- ✓ The forgiveness Jesus is teaching us to seek is familial forgiveness — God is already our **Father** (v. 2), we have relationship with Him, but our fleshly sin has impeded fellowship so we daily seek forgiveness from Him. **Only those who are in God's family seek this kind of forgiveness.**
- ✓ So this request for forgiveness is the regular rhythm of repentance of all of us who believe in Christ.
- ✓ We seek forgiveness daily because we sin daily — so just like we ask for daily food (v. 3), we ask for daily forgiveness to maintain our fellowship with Him. If we are His we are always His and can't lose relationship with Him; but our sin can and will impede our fellowship with Him (Ps. 66:18).
- ✓ Just like when I sin against RJ and seek her forgiveness because I want *her*, so we seek God's forgiveness because we want Him and *His fellowship*.

3. Why Forgiveness is Needed

- Forgiveness is not needed for mistakes, faulty memory, errors and bodily inability or other things we do that are the result of our humanity. Forgiveness is only needed for **sin**. And we are *too good* at sin!
- We need forgiveness because we are sinners who **sin** (even as redeemed people; 1 Jn. 1:5-10).
- It is the nature of sinners to dismiss the horridness and extent of sin. The Bible has much to say about sin, but from this verse, notice three characteristics of sin:
 - ✓ **Sin is failing to meet God's requirement.** The basic meaning of the word **sin** is "to miss the mark" much like one who shoots an arrow at a target. Because the target is perfection, we will never be able to attain all that God is and all that He requires (Mt. 5:48; Rom. 3:23).
 - ✓ **Sin is rebelling against God.** Sin is more than just failure — sin is rebellion against God's demands and against God's lordship; we don't want Him to be King, so we rebel (e.g., Lk. 15:18, 21).
 - ✓ **Sin is a debt to God.** Whether against other people or God, sin always comes with a cost. The one who is sinned against has paid a price for the sin committed against him. So Luke points out that when others sin against us, they are **indebted to us**. That is infinitely true of our sin against God. Jesus makes that point in Mt. 6:12 when He calls sin "debt." And our sin against God is incomprehensible debt, as Jesus points out in the parable of the man who owed 10,000 talents (Mt. 18:23ff).
- It has been said that "forgiveness is both mankind's greatest need [because of sin], and God's most important gift." We must repent, but when we repent, we have this great gift.

"Have you been forgiven? Does the guilt, misery, and shame of your sin haunt you? Do you feel hopeless? God will not simply overlook your sin, for he cannot. But in his great love, he has provided a substitute. He has provided One who took upon himself the wrath and penalty sin requires. Even now, Jesus is ready to forgive you. He summons you to come to him in repentance and faith. Look to the cross of Christ, where he freely and willingly shed his precious blood in death to forgive sin." [Dustin Benge, *The Precious Blood*.]

- Are you under the weight of guilt and self-condemnation? Are you exhausted from the sin of pride, anger, jealousy, bitterness, lust, greed, selfishness, covetousness, and more? He will liberate you from your sin and guilt. Just come to Him for forgiveness, and He will free you.
 - ✓ I said earlier that for the forgiven sinner, our sins are out of sight, out of reach, out of mind, and out of existence. They are dismissed, removed, and obliterated.
 - ✓ You can be freed from the guilt of your sin and freed from the need to sin. Just ask for forgiveness.

4. What Forgiven Sinners Do

- **Forgiven sinners forgive** those who sin against them. But that doesn't mean what you might think it means.
 - ✓ It's easy to misread v. 4 and think that God should forgive us *because (for) we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us* (because of their sin)...
 - ✓ But remember, Jesus is teaching His *disciples* how to pray; they already have judicial forgiveness with God — they *have* salvation from God. They are asking for fellowship as sons. And because they have relationship with God, He is changing them and they are practicing forgiveness of others.
 - ✓ So this request says, "Please restore us to fellowship with You because we are demonstrating that we are Your children by how we forgive others." It's a similar idea to **6:37**.
 - ✓ Do you wonder if you are a believer in Christ? This is a test — do you forgive others?
 - When someone asks you for forgiveness do you readily answer yes — and treat them as forgiven?
 - When you are sinned against, do you fight against bitterness and desire reconciliation?
 - ✓ *Forgiven people forgive*. When we have been forgiven many sins we will forgive little sins (and all sins we have received are little). "An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction in terms."
- As we forgive others we should remember there are two kinds of forgiveness (and we practice both):
 - ✓ When sinners are repentant, they grieve over their sin and they turn away from it and confess it and seek reconciliation from the one they sinned against. And when they repent, we forgive. Always. Immediately and fully (**Lk. 17:3**). We call this **transacted forgiveness** — I give you my sin and you give me the grace of forgiveness. And we forgive as often as we are asked for forgiveness.
 - ✓ But sometimes sinners don't seek forgiveness from us. And maybe they die unrepentant. What do we do with that? Cultivate bitterness? (May it never be.) Rather, **we forgive from the heart** (**Mk. 11:25**).
 - When we forgive from the heart, we trust that God will take care of the sin debt — either by placing the debt on Christ, or pouring out His wrath on them for eternity (**Rom. 12:19-21**). The debt of every sin will be paid. No sin will be overlooked — we can trust God with the sin.
 - And when we forgive from the heart, we treat them as if they hadn't sinned against us (talk with kindness and gentleness and as opportunity arises, serve them graciously).
 - ✓ This is not natural — Sigmund Freud is reputed to have said, "One must forgive one's enemies, but not before they have been hanged." Forgiveness (either kind) is hard. And possible for the believer.

- ✓ So Paul Tautges wrote, “Those with forgiving hearts have a long memory concerning their own sin, but a short memory concerning the sins of others. The long-lasting memory of their own sin is grievous, but the remembrance produces joy as their hearts reflect on the new-found freedom of forgiveness in Jesus.” [Tautges, *Teach Them to Pray*.]
- ✓ Seek the forgiveness of God for *your* sin and He will forgive you.
- ✓ As you live as a forgiven person, you will learn to be a gracious forgiver of others.

CONCLUSION: Prayer (including some phrases and adaptations from a prayer in *A Way to Pray*) —

Oh our Father — thank You that we can come to You as Father. And as the eternal, infinite, wise, gracious, and loving Father, You always welcome us as children to come into Your presence with the assurance that we belong to You and are loved by You. Thank You for welcoming us to Yourself. Thank You for not sending us away so that we are tempted to despair.

Yet even as we come to You as our Father, we also come to You acknowledging our sin. Thank You that when Christ died on the cross for us, He removed the penalty of our sin and made us alive spiritually. We no longer fear Your wrath against our sin; Christ received Your righteous anger against our sin for us (which astounds us). Yet because of our weakness and because of remaining fleshliness we still sin. We constantly fall far short of the great purpose of sanctification You have for us — and failed to use the great power of the Spirit to persist in sanctification. So we still sin. In many things we all offend every day. Who can tell how often he breaks Your law? So as those who have sinned this week and this day (perhaps even since we arrived for worship), we come to You and seek Your forgiveness to restore our fellowship with You. In the silence of the next few moments, would You search our hearts and reveal to us what we have not confessed, what we have held onto as a desired sin, what we have overlooked as sin... [silence]

You have rebuked Satan, removed the filthy rags of our sin, and clothed us in the festal garments of Christ's righteousness. You have told us that if anyone sins, we have an advocate who will plead with You on our behalf. This advocate is Jesus Christ the Righteous, who has provided an atoning sacrifice to remove Your wrath against us for our sins. You have told us that whenever we confess our sins, You will faithfully and righteously forgive those sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is what we seek — a cleansing so that we are restored in fellowship to You and a cleansing so that we live a renewed life.

Thank You for Christ, the One mediator between us and Yourself. Let us be fully reconciled to You through him. Let the record of chargeable offences that testifies against us be wiped clean. Let it be nailed to the cross of Christ. Forgive all our sins, that we may be brought to life together with him. O Father, show us the abundance of Your mercy, and never remember our sins and iniquities again.

Then would You also give peace to our restless hearts and guilty consciences? Give us the full assurance that our sins are forgiven. Speak peace to us. Bring joy and gladness to our hearts. Let the blood of Christ Your Son wash away all our sin.

And as a result of our being forgiven by You would You grant us the desire, the courage, and the boldness to obediently forgive those who sin against us. Empower us to love those who hate us, and to bless those who curse us. Let us fully recognize that if we do not forgive others of the wrongs they have done to us, You as our heavenly Father will not forgive our sins. Lord, help us to forgive others, and to do it with our whole heart. And help us to do that today. Even right now.

As Your children, we are aware of the provision of forgiveness. And we have been refreshed today to hear again of the extent and power of Your forgiveness. Might we live today and this week in the joy that comes from being forgiven by You — and might it excite our fellowship with You. In the name of Christ our Savior, we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION: Ephesians 3:20-21