

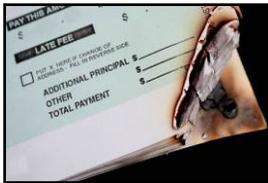
The Lord's Prayer

Forgive Us Our Debts

Part 8 - November 30, 2008

With His model of the perfect conversation with God, Jesus tells us to begin by focusing on: "THY name", "THY kingdom", and "THY will". It's only after we reestablish our priorities that we're prepared to pray: "give US ... forgive US ... lead US ... deliver US"

Today we're looking at the second "US" request: "forgive us our debts"



How many of you have paid off your house; it's debt free? Do you remember the day you got to tear up your mortgage? Did you celebrate the occasion? It's still fairly common for home-owners to commemorate the big event with a mortgage-burning party. And that's because a weight is lifted when debts are canceled.

But, what exactly are these debts that we owe to God? By re-centering us on "*Thy name*", "*Thy kingdom*", and "*Thy will*", Jesus is reminding us that we owe God total, tireless devotion.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." -
Luke 10:27 NIV



- Sin is the failure to meet our obligations.

We're not *self-made*, we're created. Therefore we *owe* our Creator perfect love for Him and all His creation, under all circumstances, at all times!

Be **perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is **perfect**. - *Matthew 5:48 NIV*

Starting with what we owe, how much of *your* debt is unpaid?! My books are in the red on a daily basis with God!

Now, the Lord's Prayer is *not* referring to the debt of sin that Jesus paid in order to reconcile us to God for salvation. That price was paid once for all on the cross.

By one sacrifice he **has made** perfect forever those who are **being made** holy. -
Hebrews 10:14 NIV

When we first come to Jesus and ask for that *initial* forgiveness for our sins, we do so in order to establish a relationship with God as "*Our Father ... who art in Heaven*".



My “daily debts” do *not* alter my relationship with God (as Father and child), but they *do* disrupt and upset our closeness, and my being led and blessed.

- Disobedience breaks fellowship, not relationship.

Even when I’m a *rotten* kid, He’s *still* my Father. I’m *still* His child.



He’s saddened, He’s grieved, but it’s because of the loss of intimacy between us. So, I ask for His *parental* forgiveness to restore our harmony.

- Daily forgiveness restores broken communion.

He’s not disappointed, or caught off guard, or surprised by my actions. He *can’t* be, He’s omniscient (all-knowing). But *I* sure am! Here’s the thing: if you’re a *genuine* child of God, you just can’t sin against Him *knowingly* without suffering some inner guilt and shame.



Guilt was designed to be painful in order to compel us to seek to resolve it. Sadly, many will try to repress it, rationalize it, run from it, or medicate it. Guilt is a warning light. Can you imagine a pilot flying a plane with the warning light flashing, and he’s just trying to ignore it and go on with business as usual?

Guilt is a warning light that something in my life needs to be corrected. It’s *not* supposed to stay on! You fix what’s wrong and move on.



The only antidote to guilt is forgiveness. Everything else is a temporary fix. But it only works if you mean it; if you’re genuinely sorry for your sin and ready to repent (reconnect and recommit to Thy will). That weight only lifts from our shoulders when we live “debt free” with our Father.

Otherwise, guilt is like garbage, it tends to pile up.



Don’t you hate it when you miss the garbage day?! You have to wait a whole week, and the cans are full of the *old* garbage, and it stinks, and now you have to find a place to put the *new* garbage. It’s so nice when garbage day rolls around again! It’s the same way with our sins. Only, *every day* is garbage day!

Forgiveness is as easy as “A, B, C”: Accept it; Believe it; and Commit yourself His will. However, there are times when we take our “daily debts” to God, yet we still struggle with feeling cleansed and forgiven. This can only happen to the degree that we’re unaware of the four distinct ways that God forgives our debts.



1. He forgives our debts: **Instantly**

Q: Do you know why we have a hard time understanding this?

A: Because it's the opposite way that we usually *offer* it!



When someone wrongs us, we like to hold it over their head for a while. We don't want to let 'em off *that* easy. We want 'em to grovel and beg ... at least, a *little* bit. We're trying to "balance out our universe" by seeing to it that the experience as much hurt as they made us feel. Sadly, that act of *self-worship* will sabotage our ability to believe what *we've* received. Reluctance to offer impairs ability to receive

How long should a believer feel guilty? About 15 seconds! That's about how long it takes to realize that you've sinned, confess it to God, and release it to His care.



Remember the Prodigal Son parable?

That's the one we filmed in a pig pen. The son does everything to reap his father's scorn, and yet when he returns home, forgiveness is instant.

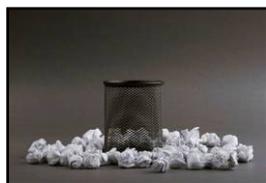
But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." - *Luke 15:20-21 NIV*

The father opened his arms *before* the son even opened his mouth! This is such a moving portrayal of the immediacy of gladly-bestowed forgiveness from our loving Father. And true repentance from a sincerely sorry son.



2. He forgives our debts: **Repeatedly**

Okay, quick survey:



How many of you have committed the same sin more than once? We all have areas of perpetual failure.

Nehemiah, referring to his Israelite ancestors who he says were "stubborn" in their sin (*Nehemiah 9:16*), said this about the Lord:

You are a God of forgiveness, always ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and full of love and mercy ... - *Nehemiah 9:17b TLB*

When is He "ready to pardon"? "Always"!



Not *just* the 1st time, 4th time, or 400th time I struggle with a stubborn sin, but "*always* ready to pardon". God is more eager to forgive than I am to ask.

Don't you sometimes think He must get tired of you coming back with the same sin – the same struggle?! Seems like He'd be thinking, "Hey, couldn't you at least get *creative* about your sin?! It's the same thing again and again!" But, He *never* tires of cleansing us! It's His nature to forgive; not because He's soft on sin, but because He's determined to have a family, and specifically to have you in it!



3. He forgives our debts: **Freely**

That just sounds too good to be true! There's no such thing as a "free lunch". Somebody *always* has to pay! And that's true. Somebody did:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified **freely** by his grace **through** the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – *Romans 3:23-24 NIV*

What does it mean to have "free" forgiveness? It means you can't buy it (with church attendance, tithing, Bible reading, or good deed doing). It means you can't bargain for it ("If You forgive me I'll *never* do it again ... I'll even serve in the Junior High!"). And it means you can't beg for it ("Please, please forgive me!") All of these attitudes are offensive to our Father.



It's like the little boy touring Washington D.C. He went up to a park ranger and asked if he could buy the statue of Abraham Lincoln." The ranger said, "First, it's not for sale. And second, you couldn't afford it if it was. And third, if you're an American, it already belongs to you!"



Those are the *same* facts as forgiveness: It's not for sale. You couldn't afford it if it was. And if you're a believer, it's already yours.

4. He forgives our debts: **Completely**

If you don't understand how comprehensive and absolute God's forgiveness is, you'll be tempted to think that the hardships you face are just kind of God getting even with you. In Jeremiah 31:34, the Lord declares:

I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. – *Jeremiah 31:34 NIV*



The Lord chooses to forget our sins once they've been cleansed. God permanently deletes our debt. When you get to Heaven, and you say to God, "About that sin ..." He's going to say, "What sin? I distinctly remember forgetting that!"

How long do you remember a debt that's been satisfied? Once your electric bill or water bill is paid, do you continue to worry about it the next day, the next week, or *ever*? No. Once a debt is cleared, you can put it out of mind.