



Worship – Part 21
Acts of Worship – Part 9
Prayer: As We Forgive Our Debtors
GCSP – 09/29/2007

Let me open with some interesting statistics tonight.

The world in which we live has approximately 6.6 billion people living in it. That population grows by about 147 people per minute: 258 births and 110 deaths on average. Not included in the number of deaths I just mentioned is the 94 abortions that take place every minute of every day. And contrary to popular belief, 1 out of every 2 marriages does not end in divorce; at least worldwide anyway. There are 90 marriages that take place every minute and only 18 divorces.

Of the 6.6 billion people in the world today, only 303 million reside in the USA. So the United States contains approximately 4.5% of the world's population, yet we have about 75% of the practicing lawyers in the world. It is not my intent to bash lawyers tonight; they take enough abuse as it is; but it is my intent to point out the underlying cause behind the need for so many lawyers in our nation. And that cause is primarily the lack of forgiveness.

I have at times heard it said that America is a forgiving nation, as I am sure it is said of other nations as well. But in America, if you will just admit your guilt, as a nation, we seem to be quick to forgive. When an actor or a sports celebrity is caught in a scandal, the ones who fess up, admit their guilt, and apologize for what they have done, generally are forgiven by society at large. While this may be true as a general rule in the court of public opinion, this is the farthest thing from the truth in the county, district, state, and federal court systems when it is individual against individual, or individual against group.

The late night talk shows on TV have regular features making fun of the frivolous lawsuits that are recorded by the courts from week to week. It has become so ridiculous that we are now entertained by the outrageous nature of these suits.

Any time a person is offended in our culture, immediate retribution, vengeance, and justice is demanded. There is no room for forgiveness anymore. Psychologists will even promote that it is unhealthy to forgive. They say it is much better for your physical and emotional health to vent your anger, and America has listened to these so-called experts and the results are kids killing kids at an alarming rate; arguments being handled with a gun or a knife instead of talking it out; road rage; gang population growing by the second; law enforcement officers being shot at for routine traffic stops; terrorists slaughtering innocent people by the thousands; and on and on it goes.

America and other nations, it seems, is only forgiving if I am not the one who is directly offended or harmed.

Forgiveness is typically the farthest thing from people's minds when they are the injured party.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 6**.

In our continuing study of what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, we find ourselves in **verse 12** tonight; as we also did last week. But let's once again read the entire passage before we zero in on the end of **verse 12**.

Matthew 6:9-13

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen'" (NASB).

Let's pray.

We have already covered the proper attitude of humility that is needed in our prayers; we have gained an understanding of the fatherhood of God, and how He longs to have an intimate relationship with us our *Abba*, or daddy in the phrase, "**Our Father**"; we studied the holy and righteous God of the universe in the phrase, "**Hallowed be Thy name**"; we have seen the importance of longing for and looking forward to the coming of God's Kingdom in the phrase, "**Thy kingdom come**"; we discovered the immense aspect of desiring God's will to be accomplished and not our own in the phrase, "**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven**"; we looked at the aspects of God as the provider of all our needs in the phrase, "**Give us this day our daily bread**"; and last time we saw the tremendous truth of how God forgives us at the very moment we ask Him, in the phrase, "**forgive us our debts.**"

I mentioned last week, that sin dominates the hearts and minds of mankind. Every human being to ever walk this earth has been contaminated or infected with the fatal disease of sin. The power of sin is responsible for every disease, every illness, every disaster, and every form of evil and unhappiness the world has ever known. Misery, depression, pain, dissatisfaction, and guilt are caused by sin. Sin is the common denominator of every crime, every murder, every rape, every lie, every immoral act, every disgusting perverted thought, every ugly word, and every sorrow. It is the germ that grows into the moral and spiritual disease of which there is no cure. The ultimate effects of sin are death and damnation.

These sins, these offences against God, require divine retribution. Every sin has consequences. Every offence against the Holy God of the universe must be paid in full. And we went through the differences between the sins an unbeliever commits and the sins a believer commits last time.

I just touched on an important truth that we need to briefly look at before we move on to our passage for tonight. I mentioned that sin is an offence against God. It is vitally important for us to understand this principle if we are going to be able to apply the truths we will learn in a few moments.

Turn with me to the Book of **2 Samuel**.

2 Samuel 11:1-17; 26-27

An amazing account of how king David commits the sin of lust, the sin of adultery, the sin of deceit, the sin of trying to hide his sin, and ultimately the sin of murder; and I am sure we could identify many other sins committed in this brief account.

So who did David sin against? He obviously sinned against Bathsheba, he sinned against Uriah, he sinned against his other wives, he sinned against his children in the example he sets, and he sinned against the nation he ruled. Yet this is not what David records in **Psalms 51**.

Turn with me to **Psalms 51**.

Psalms 51:1-4

The rest of this Psalm is David pleading for forgiveness from the Lord for his sin. But it is important to note that David says in **verse 4**, "**Against You, You only, have I sinned.**"

Nowhere does David mention all of the other people he has offended and sinned against; instead David recognizes that first and foremost, all sin is an offence against God. And as we saw last week, unconfessed sin is at the heart of every problem mankind faces today.

Turn back a few pages to **Psalm 32**.

Psalm 32:1-7

"How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!" For the genuine Christian, as I said last week, confession = forgiveness; and what a joy and a blessing that is in our lives.

Now let's go back to **Matthew 6**.

v. 12b

"...as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Last week when we looked at the first half of this verse, **"And forgive us our debts,"** I briefly took you through five different Greek words that are commonly translated sin in most Bibles. Some translations render this verse with the usage of the word sin, some use transgressions, and the NASB, which I primarily use obviously uses the word debt and debtors. While all three get the primary point across, the most accurate rendering of this particular Greek word is debt. And more so, the meaning implies it is a debt that absolutely has to be paid with no exceptions.

So in asking the Lord to forgive us our debts, we are asking Him to forgive something that is actually unforgiveable; at least from a human standpoint. From a strictly human standpoint, the debt of sin that we accumulate is so vast it cannot be paid by us. And the vast majority of people will reach the end of their lives with the debt still unpaid. At that point the price that will be paid is an eternity in hell.

But praise God, Jesus paid the debt for us; and we accept that gift by repenting of our sins, believing in His life, death, and resurrection, and making Him the Lord of our lives.

That is one aspect of forgiveness, but the other aspect is the one Jesus speaks of in this verse. Jesus is speaking to believers, so this aspect of forgiveness is the forgiveness we receive for the sins we commit after salvation. And I went into that in much more detail last time.

For us then, asking for forgiveness for our un-payable debts, or sins, has to do with the quality of our Christian lives, both here and in heaven, as opposed to the place we will spend eternity. The debt of sin we accumulate after salvation is still infinitely beyond our ability to pay for. So we are to ask the Lord to forgive the debt.

But the second half of this verse seems to imply a qualifier doesn't it?

Let's read **Matthew 6:14-15**, and then I want to look at a passage in Luke's gospel to help us understand this qualifier and what it practically means to us.

Matthew 6:14-15

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (NASB).

So the qualifier is that in order for our debt of accumulated sin to be forgiven by the Lord, the only One who can pay the debt, we have to in turn forgive the debt of sin others have accumulated against us. And just as the Lord is the only One who can pay the debt of sin we

accumulate against Him, you are the only one who can forgive the debt of sin committed against you. I can't forgive someone's debt against another. You can't forgive someone's debt against another. To use a monetary example, if Clay owes John a bundle of money, I can't go to Clay and forgive that debt, only John can do that. We can only forgive debts that have been accumulated against us.

So last week, and this week, when I said, "confession = forgiveness", I left out a step in this equation didn't I? The complete equation should read, "Confession + forgiving those who have sinned against me = forgiveness."

But is there even more to it than this?

Turn with me to the Gospel of **Luke**.

Luke 17:3-4

"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Notice first of all, this passage deals with Christians sinning against other Christians. It says, "**If your brother sins...**" Secondly, your forgiveness is commanded only if he repents, as signified by, "**if he repents.**" And thirdly, there is no limit to how often you are to forgive when true repentance is present. I know the verse says "**seven times a day**" but in **Matthew 18**, Jesus tells Peter he is to forgive "**seventy times seven**" which is simply meaning for us to forgive as often as forgiveness is needed.

In both passages we have examples of conditional forgiveness. In **Matthew 6**, the condition of our forgiveness from God is first of all, asking for it, and secondly being willing to forgive others. In **Luke 17**, the forgiveness we give to others is based on the condition of the other person repenting and seeking forgiveness.

Now before any of you wander off too far in your minds, there is yet still one more aspect of forgiveness that we need to understand, and we can find that in the Gospel of **Mark**. I know some of you are thinking that we have to forgive everything at all times in all circumstances, period.

Mark 11:25

"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."

So what's the condition for forgiveness in this verse? The condition is if you have a problem with the sin committed against you.

We forgive others so that we can also experience forgiveness from the Lord, we forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ if they repent and seek forgiveness, and we forgive others if the offence is affecting us to the point of having anything against the person; whether or not they repent.

So, why is there distinctions concerning forgiveness in all of these passages?

There have been times in my life when a person has walked up to me and asked me to forgive them. My response is simply, "Of course, you are forgiven." I have no clue what they have done to me. If they had never asked for forgiveness I would never have known there was an offence

against me. Would the fact that I was in essence withholding forgiveness have affected my ability to obtain forgiveness from the Lord? – Of course not.

There have been other times when I have felt the brunt of the offence against me and the person never asks to be forgiven. According to the passage in **Luke**, I am not required to forgive, but if the offence is eating at me and I am becoming bitter or hold any ill will toward that person, the passage in **Mark** tells me I must forgive. And of course the passage in **Matthew** tells me I will not be forgiven if I do not forgive.

And quickly for the benefit of those who did not hear last week's sermon, when Jesus says we will not be forgiven if we do not forgive, He is not talking about our eternal forgiveness. Once you have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, all of your sins are forgiven in relation to whether or not you will be in heaven. That issue is settled once and for all. But, when we continue to sin while still on this earth, and we will all continue to sin while on this earth, our forgiveness has a different meaning and a different effect on our lives.

A Christian who is living apart from the Lord's forgiveness is a Christian who is living apart from the Lord's blessing, the Lord's provision, the Lord's protection, and the Lord's fellowship. Your soul is saved and you will spend eternity in heaven, but your life on earth will be miserable to one extent or another, and your reward in heaven will be diminished.

And the sad thing about all of this is you may not even know that the Lord has left you. One of the saddest verse in the Bible is **Judges 16:20**. After living in disobedience, Samson finally went too far in his sinful living and the Lord departed from him. At the end of **verse 20**, it says, "**But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.**" How deep in sin do you have to be to not recognize that the Lord has left you?

Beloved, if you do not know that the Lord has departed from you, if you do not recognize when His forgiveness, blessing, provision, protection, and fellowship are no longer with you, then you are in deeper trouble than just missing the point of this sermon tonight.

The bottom line is we are to forgive others just as Christ has forgiven us (**Ephesians 4:32**).

What is the goal of the Christian life? We are to be more and more like Jesus Christ every day. Beloved, you are never more like Jesus than when you forgive.

Proverbs 19:11, says, "**A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.**"

Let's pray.