

Our Debts And Our Debtors

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[0 : 00] If you could turn with me then in Matthew's Gospel chapter 6.

And we'll read verse 12 and then verses 14 and 15.

And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And then verse 14, for if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. My main text really is at verse 12 there.

And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And what I would like to do is look at four things from this text.

[1 : 22] Firstly, the fundamental importance of forgiveness. And secondly, the full needs of our continuing forgiveness anticipated or announced if you like in the Lord's Prayer here.

And thirdly, the frightening bit of these verses that we have read. And fourthly and finally the challenge of forgiveness.

Now before I do that, I just want to make one or two comments about the Lord's Prayer. It almost reads a bit like a vision statement, a manifesto for the people of God, for the church of God.

Because clearly the agenda of priority in the prayer is God's agenda.

Your name be hallowed, your kingdom come, and your will be done. And of course the Lord's Prayer is part of the Sermon in the Mount, which has three chapters, chapters 5, 6 and 7.

[2 : 53] It's a magnificent section of Matthew's Gospel. And of course it is the most sustained block of teaching of Jesus anywhere in the Gospels.

People of course have asked what is it that Jesus is doing in the Sermon in the Mount? Well, you can give various answers to that question, but you're certainly answering the question, how then shall we live as disciples and followers of the law?

And in that T Sermon, Jesus says, doesn't he, that I have not come to destroy the law. Not one whit or tittle from that law will be removed until heaven and earth pass away.

And there's a sense in which the Lord's Prayer mirrors the law in that God is first, our Father, which art in heaven hallowed be your name.

And love your neighbor is second, give me my daily bread or our daily bread and so on.

[4 : 13] But the only petition that Jesus comments on following giving and offering the prayer there is on forgiveness.

And I think that shows in itself how important this matter of forgiveness is.

Who is it important for? Well, you know, Africa suffered, didn't it, under apartheid?

And when Nelson Mandela got out of jail, they set up a truth and reconciliation committee. And one of the things that Nelson Mandela said is, we need to have forgiveness on the table.

We seem, don't we, historically to have an intractable problem with the Palestinians and Israel?

[5 : 26] And perhaps one thing that has never been on the table is forgiveness. Forgiveness is important for each one of our personal well-being.

It is important in terms of our relationship with God and our relationship with one another. It's massively important in the church, the body of Christ.

It's the lack of it that has broken and split so many congregations and so many churches and within Christianity in its history.

The Gospels, of course, east and west. It is important, the apostle Paul mentions forgiveness of sins in both his letter to the Ephesians and the Colossians.

And he mentions it with the exact same phrase, here's the phrase, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[6 : 37] That is to say that redemption, in a sense, is defined by Paul, is emancipation from the grip and tyranny and chains of sin.

So it's something I hope you will agree that is hugely important.

Somebody has said of all the petitions in the Lord's Prayer, this one is the most frightening.

Isn't it very encouraging, I put it to you, this petition?

And forgives our debts. Now I want you to notice that word, and, give us this day, this day, our daily bread, and this day, forgives our debts.

[7 : 56] Isn't it wonderful, somebody mentioned about Jesus being the great healer, he certainly is. Isn't it wonderful that he has anticipated our need for forgiveness, even as the people of God.

I think it was Donnie that said last week, we will always sin right up until we die. I think I remember you using that phrase, Donnie.

And that wasn't good to be reminded of that. You see, we sin every single day, and we mount up a debt every single day to God.

We sin in thought and warped indeed. We sin because of doing things that we should never have done, and failing to do things that we should have done. We sin in terms of sins of ignorance.

We sin in terms of we don't understand the gravity of sin. It was my sin and your sin that nailed him to the cross, and that made him hang there.

[9 : 18] But isn't this immensely encouragement that Jesus is effectively saying, encouraging us to bring this petition and forgive us our debts.

And please notice the plural, forgive us our debts. There is no one within the body of Christ that doesn't need to pray that prayer.

There may well be times we need to pray it more intensely. There may well be times that we need to pray it more urgently.

But every single one of us forgive. This is what he said, and say this and say it every day, and forgive us, that is to say every single one of you, our debts.

Look at that parable that we read. Here was someone that owed a lot. And that debt, that's what the word means, owed.

[10 : 36] What kind of debt do we owe this saviour of ours? What kind of debt do we owe this one that said, we can call him father, Abba?

He that spared not his son and gave him up for us all. He that forgives all our sins, past, present, and future.

So I think there's some encouragement here, and I hope you sense that encouragement, that he knows that will never be perfect.

He knows, as Donny said, we'll keep sinning until we draw our last breath. And he's provided for that, and he's a God that is ready to pardon.

But notice how he phrases this petition, and forgives our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[11 : 52] He's talking here about the entire body of Christ, if you like. He's talking here about any body of Christians that meet locally.

And he's saying, you know something, I'm assuming, if I could put it this way, and I'm anticipating that every single one of you forgives those that are indebted to you.

And the language that he uses at this point in verse 12b, as we also have forgiven our debtors, he uses something called a hate-being technical, but the perfect tense.

And do you know what that means? Let me tell you, total forgiveness. What's he saying?

He's saying, I'm assuming that as forgiven ones, you will offer total forgiveness to those that love the OU debts that have offended you and that have hurt you.

[13 : 29] So there are encouraging things there, encouraging that God recognizes our forgiveness, encouraging that we, I was going to say, can almost expect to sin.

But I've got to watch the language I use. But the apostle Paul could say himself, couldn't he? I seem to be doing that which I hate and failing to do that which I love.

He knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. Now not for a second is he encouraging us or condoning us, but he's a better psychoanalyst than Freud or Newton or Skinner.

So the full needs of our forgiveness are anticipated.

What about, thirdly, the frightening bit versus 14 and 15? It does read, doesn't it, like one of those if then statements.

[14 : 59] I'm going to put the word then in as I read it again. It's a conditional statement. There's no question about it. That's where it is grammatically. For if you forgive others, their trespasses, then your heavenly father will also forgive you.

And then the flip side of that, if we hadn't quite got the message. But if you do not forgive others, their trespasses, then neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

No wonder that person said, of all the petitions of the Lord's prayer, this is the most frightening. Now I do not believe, and I'm sure you don't, and I'm sure that we're together in this, that Jesus is teaching that our salvation is conditional upon our ability to forgive others who have hurt us and offended us.

I don't think that that's what Jesus is teaching here. What then is he teaching? Or how should we understand these words of Jesus versus 14 and 15?

Remember, he takes the trouble to add this. Of all the petitions, he wants to make a further comment on, it's this one.

[17 : 00] For if you forgive others, their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. C.S. Lewis once said this, when any of us come to prayer, let it be the real me that comes, and let us be coming to the real God.

Jesus had warned at the beginning of this chapter, beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them.

And he also had said, when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. What greater hypocrisy could there be in coming before God and seeking forgiveness for our sins while we withhold it from those that have offended us and hurt us?

And it might well be that what Jesus is saying is that it's going to impact your relationship. And I think we can understand that.

Because in relationships in general, forgiveness is important, isn't it? Because none of us are perfect, and some of us mess up.

[18 : 43] And sometimes we need forgiveness. Sometimes we need to forgive. And perhaps Jesus is saying, if you are plying me for forgiveness, but you're not forgiving others, you'll not get that sense of forgiveness at all in our relationship.

He began this prayer by these wonderful words of relationship, our Father. But there is another way to look at these wants of Jesus.

Because, and I'm just putting it out, and have a think about it yourselves, perhaps if someone is essentially an unforgiving person and they've never find the grace within their being to forgive anyone that has wronged them, perhaps it points to a question mark, whether they have a relationship with the Father to begin with.

That's not the same as saying that Jesus is setting this out as some sort of condition of our salvation.

He is our peace. He is our salvation. He is our righteousness. He is our redeemer. Alone, Sola Christos.

[20 : 45] Let me finish by looking at the challenge of forgiveness. And it is a challenge if you have been hot, really hot, if you have been disappointed, if you have been let down, if you have had to go through even a long period of what I might call spiritual pain, emotional pain, and that pain has been caused partly because someone else has inflicted that pain.

I certainly totally agree with you. Forgiveness is not easy. And that's why I've called this last part of what I'm saying this evening as the challenge of forgiveness.

What is forgiveness anyway? And what isn't forgiveness?

Forgiveness isn't a spirit or an outlook, or attitude of saying, I excuse what you've done, how you've hurt me.

That's not forgiveness. Neither is forgiveness something that necessarily removes the consequences of that hurt.

[23 : 06] And because we're human, there may not be a full healing.

I say that because we're this side of glory, and he knows our frame, and he remembers that we are dust, but he still puts the way of truth before us.

Forgiveness is letting go. Because let me put it this way to you.

Where forgiveness doesn't exist, and where it is absent, something else occupies that space.

And that something else is bitterness and anger.

[24 : 28] And you see the problem with that is it impacts your wellbeing, and it impacts your relationship with others, and supremely your relationship with God.

But letting go may not be simple. And letting go may not be a single act.

It could rather be a succession or a process. I'm intrigued that that conjunction and is there after givers each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins every day as we forgive every day others who have sinned.

Because you might find that you've come through, so to speak, in the matter of forgiveness on Thursday, that you're struggling a bit on Friday.

[25 : 54] Forgiveness, it's absolutely critical to the health and wellbeing of the Church of God.

It's absolutely critical for my wellbeing and your wellbeing. And it's absolutely critical for our harmony and our unity.

And I finish with a couple of ideas to try and think about.

As we perhaps struggle to forgive. And the first idea is this, keep thinking of your own sin.

My sin, my sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more.

[27 : 04] What's he done with your sin is cast it into the sea of his forgetfulness. What's he done with your sin is borne it all away.

How is he treating you as if you had no sin?

Keep thinking of your own sin. And also keep thinking, if I could put it this way, how understanding and tolerant you might be of your own sin and your own errors.

Who can understand his errors, said the Samist. Secondly, think of the golden rule.

Do unto others as he would have them do unto you. How would you like everybody to leave you in the room of the unforgiven?

[28 : 06] Falkley, remember this, especially of course, if it is a believer that has hurt you, your brother or sister in Christ, remember this that the same price tag is on their garments, that robe of righteousness is on yours.

Christ died for them. And remember this, finally.

This is exactly what the Gospel is about. I may be looking it up, I hope I've remembered it, but I think it's in Acts 13.

It's in several places, of course, verse 38. Yeah, there it is. Let it be known to you there for brothers that through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and to everyone.

This is what our Gospel is about, and if the people of God and the Church of God is not a forgiving community, who on earth will be?

[29 : 58] There it is, that great petition that is addressing our spiritual and our social and our psychological needs.

And forgives our sins every day as we forgive the sins of those that are indebted to us.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. And perhaps before we sing, we just have a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, how shall we offer thanks to you, Lord, for the fact that you have pardoned us from all our sin and all our guilt?

And, oh, Lord God, we pray that you would help us to be forgiving one another, as Christ also has forgiven us, and that you would give us that grace to let go and to know your healing and your peace raining in our hearts.

In Jesus' name, amen.