

Forgive us our trespasses

Introduction:

After the words: “**Give us this day our daily bread**” the Lord’s prayer continues with “**And forgive us.**”

Prerequisites for forgiveness

We pray, “Our Father, forgive us.” But are there prerequisites for being forgiven? There are. In 1 John 1:9 we read, “**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**”

And in Proverbs 28:13, “**He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.**”

Therefore, the first step in being forgiven is not to hide our sins, but to confess them and forsake them. If we do, we have God’s assurance that he will cleanse us and forgive us. This is exactly what took place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Peter preached. The crowd understood their need to be forgiven and asked, “What shall we do?” And Peter said, “Repent (Acts 2: 37–38). Repent includes a turning away from previous wrong-doings. Those that followed Peter’s admonition were then baptized and about 3000 were added to the church that day. If we have done according to 1 John 1:9, we can be assured that God has forgiven us and made us part of his family. How can we be sure? See 2 Timothy 2:13, Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13).

... in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began (Titus 1:2).

It is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18).

Secondly, Jesus says:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14-15).

So, our willingness to forgive others, plays a role as to whether or not God will forgive us. Therefore, confess your sin, do not deny it, forsake wrong and be willing to forgive others.

What are the means of forgiveness?

In 1 John 1:7 we read that “**the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**” The reason we can be freely forgiven is because Jesus died for us on Calvary.

And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. (Hebrews 9:22)

Because there is no remission of sins without blood, that is why Jesus paid the ultimate price for us and gave his own blood on the cross of Calvary, so that **whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).**

Ephesians 1:7 verifies this:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7).

Also consider the following scripture:

Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:10).

Who can forgive?

Only the person who has been offended or sinned against can offer forgiveness. Yet, every sin is an offense against God. If we sin, we have done a wrong against God. Thus, we need to seek God's forgiveness. The scribes were right when they said that no one could forgive sins except God (Mark 2:7). Yet in Matthew 9:6 Jesus proved that He too had the power to forgive sins. We understand why, but for the scribes this was a stumbling block.

Today people try to avoid the word sin. Even in the media¹, there is much discussion of wrong, evil and wickedness, but the word sin is carefully avoided. We hear of crimes and offences, but not of sin. This is because sin implies that "we are morally culpable in the sight of God."² Even if a person agrees to being wicked, to say that one is sinful would imply that one is accountable to God. By denying God this authority, humans set themselves up to be the judges, in effect putting themselves in the position of God. This is idolatry. Idolatry is evil and is in itself sin.

What word is used in Greek?

Matthew 6:14 reads: **"forgive us our debts"**. The Greek word is *ὀφειλήματα*. The understanding here is that we have such a great debt before God, that we cannot pay it. The only hope we have of clearing the debt is for **being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24).**

Our only hope is for God to annul it, to forgive it, to cancel it. We can never pay it. That is exactly why Jesus paid it all, so that we can be free from this debt. The parable beginning in Matthew 18:24 make this teaching of Jesus clear. In Luke 11:4 we have

¹ Josef Piper, *The Concept of Sin*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2001), 1.

² Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (London, Great Britain: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), 458.

another version of the Lord's prayer. Here it reads: Forgive us our sins. The Greek word used here is ἁμαρτίας. It is plural and therefore includes multiple sins. *Hamartia* (ἁμαρτία) is often defined as missing the mark. In Romans 3:23 we read that all have sinned or missed the mark.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24).

God has a standard for us, a law, a mark, and ignoring or disobeying that law is sin. In 1 John 3:4 the Apostle John defines sin. He says sin is lawlessness or ἁμαρτία ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνομία. Now *nomia* (νομία) is law. And *anomia* (ἀνομία) is without law. So if God gives us a law and says "Thou shalt not lie, but we say we are without that law and lie, then we have sinned. Another example would be if God says "Thou shalt not commit murder," and we act without obeying this law, and we murder then we have sinned. So, if instead of heeding God's law, we ignore it or say we do not need it, then we practice "anomia", without law, or lawlessness.

After teaching the disciples to pray: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12), Jesus explains further in Matthew 6:14. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." Here he talks about trespasses. If we disobey God, we trespass. So, whether we miss the mark, or the intention of God's law, or whether we ignore it and act contrary to God's law, or if whether we are trespassing, the end result is the same. We have committed an offense against God and we have incurred a debt which only God can forgive or release us from.

Praying for others

Interestingly enough, Jesus does not teach his disciples to pray "forgive me my sin," but forgive us our sins. How often have we prayed that God forgive the sins of others? We know that Job sacrificed for his children in case they offended God (Job 1:5). Also, Daniel, although he was righteous, placed himself under the sins of the people of Israel and made confession for them. Daniel says,

So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. (Daniel 9:3-5)

We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, LORD, because we have sinned against you. (Daniel 9:8)

Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name." (Daniel 9:19)

So, Daniel places himself in the position of the people and pleads on their behalf. What can we learn from this? Is there a place for intercessory prayer on behalf of others in a similar way? What did Jesus do? He placed himself in our place and

bore our sins. I know that we cannot bear the sins of others like Jesus did, but we can learn from Jesus, from Daniel, and from this prayer: Forgive us our sins.

Confess when you have done wrong.

David prays in Psalm 19:13, “Who can understand *his* errors? Cleanse me from secret *faults*.” And James says: “For we all stumble in many things” (James 3:2).

Now an error or a mistake may not be a sin. But we must bring our mistakes and faults to God as well. Lord, I blew it this time. Help me to do better the next time. I believe in Holy Living, and the Bible teaches Holy Living. For example we read in Titus 2:11-12: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”

But the Apostle John says: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). The normal condition is: “I write to you, so that you may sin.” However, John continues “if anyone sins, we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ.” So, it is possible to sin, and if we do, we had better not call it a mistake and ignore it. It must be forgiven by confessing as we read in 1 John 1:9. Let us not make the mistake of some of the churches mentioned in Revelations, where they thought they were rich and in need of nothing, but Jesus said Repent, for I have found you lacking. We can pray with David: “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23). If we are not sure we have sinned or not, we can be honest with God as well. We can say: “Lord, I don’t know if it is a mistake or a sin, but whatever it is, I feel badly about it, and I ask you to forgive me, and help me to do better next time.”

I have met believers, who do not believe in a victorious life. They are in great danger, because when they face temptation, they are more inclined to believe they may not be able to overcome it. Whereas from 1 Corinthians 10:13 we know that God will allow us to be victorious. As well Paul writes: “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1-2).

However, we who know that we have victory in Christ, also are in danger. If we do something that God impresses on our hearts we should not have done, we are inclined to call it a mistake, rather than a sin, and minimize it. In order to find forgiveness, and freedom from our wrongs, we cannot downplay them. We must take this seriously. “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.” I believe that and have experienced the freedom in Christ. However, should it happen, then we must take it seriously. There is help for us since if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (1 John 2:1)

Jesus teaches us to pray forgive me. Not excuse me, or pardon me, but forgive me. In Luke 14:18-19, we have a narrative of guests being invited to a wedding banquet, all excusing themselves. Excuse me may imply that I have done nothing wrong. Forgive me implies that I have done wrong. Jesus says: **If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin” (John 15:22).** We

see that excusing our sin will get us nowhere but genuinely praying: forgive is effective. Pardon me may imply a mishap or awkward situation, but not necessarily a willful sin. See Psalm 19:12–13. Let us ask for forgiveness and receive it.

The purpose of forgiving our sins.

When God forgives our sins, he does not just overlook what we have done, he also changes us. 1 John 1:9 says he cleanses us from all unrighteousness. When we come to God and genuinely ask for forgiveness, we are born again. Ephesians 2:4–6 says, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.”

When God forgives us, a transformation takes place. We are changed. After forgiving us Jesus says: “Neither do I condemn you” (John 8:11), but then he adds the words: “Go and sin no more.” May God give each one of us this victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questions

1. Are there prerequisites for being forgiven?
2. What must we do in order to be forgiven?
3. What is the means of forgiveness for sin?
4. Who can forgive sin?
5. How do we know that Jesus can forgive sin?
6. What is sin?
7. How does Matthew 6:14 describe sin?
8. Why did Jesus teach us to pray *forgive us our sins*, rather than *forgive me my sin*?
9. What is the difference between an error and a sin?
10. What takes place when God forgives us our sins?