

Acts of Devotion that Glorify God ***-Prayer- (part 2)***

Matthew 6:9 – 15 is commonly known as the Lord’s Prayer. The first half of the prayer reveals that the Christian’s primary concern should be for God’s glory, His coming Kingdom, and His will. The second half covers the needs in every area of our lives - material (bread), spiritual (forgiveness) and moral (deliverance from evil).

Give us this day our daily bread - - 6:11

“Daily” is a rare word in Greek. It seems to be an adjective meaning “of the day that is coming.” If we used it in the morning we would be referring to the day that is just beginning, if we used it at night we would be talking about the following day. Such thinking reflects a simple trust in God for daily provision.

In Jesus’ day, laborers were paid for their work at the end of each day. However, the pay was so low that it barely covered the day’s needs for food. Furthermore, the society was primarily agrarian, which meant that one crop failure would spell a major disaster. Praying “Give us this day our daily bread” in this type of society was no empty rhetoric. Jesus’ followers were to learn how to trust God for their daily subsistence. In essence, therefore, Jesus is teaching of the necessity of daily prayer for daily needs (Carson).

Our ability to trust God for daily needs translates into our ability to serve God wholly. In the latter half of chapter 6 Jesus says “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth . . . *For this reason* I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. . . . For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matt. 6:25, 26, 31-33).

In addition, such a prayer demonstrates that we understand that everything we have comes from God. James says, “Every good and perfect gift is from above” (Jam. 1:17) and Paul asked the Corinthians, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (I Cor. 4:7)

Everything we have is from God. Life in western society isn’t as precarious as in the first century. We have received much more. But sadly, our very wealth has contributed to our thanklessness. We have taken His gifts for granted; and then we complain and call into question the very existence of this beneficent God if they begin to dry up (Carson).

As every day demands bread, so every day demands prayer. No amount of prayer today will suffice for tomorrow’s prayer. Likewise, prayer tomorrow will not help today’s needs. God seeks to inspire a faith that leaves the future in His hands and depends on Him one day at a time. In God’s eyes, today’s bread is enough. (Also see Ex.16:4, 5, 13-31)

Forgive us our debts - - 6:12, 14, 15

Note that verse 12 begins with the word “and” which connects forgiveness to the need of daily bread; forgiveness is as indispensable for the life and health of the soul as bread is for the body.

In verse 12 sin is pictured as a debt owed to another person. We have a moral obligation that we owe God. When we fail to pay it we are in debt.

Throughout the Bible, “sin” is the direct object of the verb “forgive” whether it is explicitly stated or not (Lk. 3:33; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:22; Eph. 1:7; I Cor. 15:3; Matt 6:12), and the person is the indirect object.

This means that the sin is what is forgiven and the person is the benefactor of that forgiveness.

Therefore, forgiveness must also include the recognition of personal guilt. We realize that we have incurred a debt with God, are sorrowful for our actions, and are seeking to be released from that debt.

In today’s society “unconditional forgiveness” is regularly preached, yet it is questionable if forgiveness ever occurs without repentance. Jesus said, “If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and *if he repents, forgive him*” (Lk. 17:3). I John 1:9 says, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” To “confess” means to say the same thing as another, to agree with another, to admit the truth of an accusation. It means to agree with God that what He calls sin is sin. Jesus tells us to ask God to “forgive us our debts.” The proper Christian attitude is not to deny sin, but admit it and receive forgiveness for it.

The first thing to do if we are in debt is to figure out how much we owe. So how large is our debt to God? The answer is not encouraging. We are in debt because of what we have done and for what we have left undone. Our debt includes secret sins, public sins, deliberate sins, as well as sins committed in relative ignorance. We have also committed sins of the heart, mind, and of word and action. We have failed to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and failed to love our neighbor as ourselves. When all our sins are added together, they form an incalculable mountain of debt that demands payment. And yet amazingly, the Bible teaches us that God forgives our debts. This is why the gospel is such good news!

God is well within His legal rights if He decides to remit our debts, for the Scripture says that He took our sin away, “canceling the record of debt that stood against us” by “nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). The Greek word for “cancel” (*ἐξάλειψας*), which Paul uses in Colossians 2, means “to blot out” or “to wipe away.” When a debtor finally paid off all his debts, his creditor would write “tetelestai”, “paid in full,” on the certificate of debt. These are the very words that Jesus cried out on the cross; “tetelestai”, “it is finished”, “paid in full” (Jn. 19:31). Through the death of Christ, our debt of sin had been paid in full. God’s forgiveness is not simply God winking His eye at sin, He is taking the debt that is ours and placing it upon Christ. God drove a nail right through the infinite debt of our sin. There are no longer any outstanding charges against us.

When we pray the way Jesus taught us to pray, the debts we ask God to forgive are the very debts that were crucified with Christ at Calvary. When Christ died on the cross, all our debts were cancelled. It means that the mountain of debt we once owed to God has been completely erased.

However, there are still some things we owe to God— not out of debt, but out of gratitude — and one of those things is forgiveness. “Forgive us our debts,” Jesus taught us to pray, “as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). From this petition we learn that we are not the only ones in debt. We have debtors of our own, people who owe us something for what they have done to us. And we are called to forgive them.

Once we understand the huge debt that has been forgiven us it will translate into our own forgiveness of others. In fact, In Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus says, “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.” Some take this as meaning that our work of forgiveness is an act that secures the forgiveness of God, but it is our failure to forgive others that demonstrates that we have failed to see our own need of forgiveness. “Thus, we petition our heavenly Father to forgive our sins analogous to the manner we grant forgiveness to fellow humans. The analogy purposely pricks our consciences by rebuking, convicting, and humbling us if we have withheld forgiveness of sin from anyone who has petitioned us for forgiveness of sins done against us” (Caneday).

This relationship of our forgiveness of others to our reception of God’s forgiveness is so critical that in the parable of the unforgiving servant Jesus concludes with the words, “‘you wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” (Matt. 18:32-35). It is expected that those who have been forgiven should show forgiveness.

The Bible prevents us from thinking that God forgives us regardless of our attitude toward sin. It also calls us to forgive as we have been forgiven: “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). Likewise, in Colossians 3:12-13 Paul says, “ So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” And Mark 11:25 ““ And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”

Forgiving others demonstrates that we have truly experienced the forgiveness in Christ. That is, when we forgive others we show that our contrition is real and our repentance is genuine. Forgiveness is so basic to God's heart that it certainly should be basic to the heart of God's children.

This does not mean that we will never struggle with sin, nor does it imply that only a perfectly forgiving spirit can receive forgiveness from God. Rather, it is a conscious confession of our own sinfulness.

The more men desire God's will to be done, the more they see their own sinfulness. That sin is released by forgiveness. Consequently, we will not seek God's forgiveness and therefore, will fail to receive it. If we have an exaggerated view of the others offences, it proves that we have minimized our own. A proper perspective of our own sin will make the sins of others seem less severe.

So forgiveness is not a work by which we earn God's forgiveness. It flows from a heart satisfied with the mercy of God and rejoicing in the cancellation of our own enormous debt (Matthew 18:24).

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil - 6:13

The sinner whose past sins have been forgiven longs to be delivered from the tyranny of evil in the future.

The Bible clearly teaches us that God cannot be tempted by evil, nor can He tempt us (Jam. 1:13). Because of this, some have wondered why anyone would even need to ask God NOT to lead us into temptation. Although there are a number of explanations, the most satisfying and easiest to understand is that this is an example of a figure of speech known as litotes which expresses something by negating the contrary. For example we may say, "This flavor isn't bad at all!" What we mean is that the flavor is good. An example of litotes is in John 6:37 where Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." By saying that He will certainly not cast them out, Jesus was really saying, "I will certainly keep all who come to Me." In the same way, "lead us not into temptation" means "lead us in the way of righteousness" (Carson, Sermon, 70).

This is a strong reminder that not only do we need to depend on God for daily physical life, but we also need to depend on Him for daily spiritual victory. Failure to depend on God for spiritual victory is to have already fallen, for it is part of our ugly independence that fails to recognize that we are fallen creatures before God.



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