

FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Massachusetts
January 31, 1965

Scripture – Matthew 6:12

Introduction:

These are strange words to modern ears:

Matt.6:12 *“Forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

Luke 11:4 *“Forgive us our sins,
For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”*

These words are problematic to us people of the XX century. Since to modern man, God and his righteousness have become questionable, the question of asking forgiveness for our sins to a being who is beyond us is to a great extent meaningless. Why do we have to ask forgiveness to God anyway?

To put it in a clearer perspective: How many of us really think that asking forgiveness to God for our sins is part of our religious duty? I do not mean that we fail to say the Lord’s Prayer. Indeed, we say it every Sunday, and in saying it we ask for forgiveness. We may even say the Lord’s Prayer in our private devotions. We may even follow the pastoral prayer and tacitly accept that when the Pastor prays for forgiveness, somehow or other that prayer is efficacious in bringing us back into fellowship with God.

When we pray for forgiveness, I mean something more than the recitation of prescribed prayers. I mean this: How many of us parents are aware that we are at fault many times in the way we correct our children? Conversely, how many of our young people realize that many times they are negligent in their duties toward their parents? Do they confess their negligence and ask forgiveness to God?

Again, for how many of us is God the center of our lives and not an occasional visitor? How often have we confessed to Him that we have left Him out of consideration in our home life, in our business dealings, in our relationships to our neighbors, in our church responsibilities?

In brief, how many times have we missed the mark, or have rebelled against Him and his commandments, or have committed sins of ignorance and have not asked for forgiveness?

I. What do we owe to God?

A. We owe God recognition.

(1) Forgiveness of sins has no meaning apart from a belief in the existence of God. *“Without faith it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those that seek him.”*

(2) This is not a recognition of God as an idea or as principle. Rather, it is the confession of a God who has acted in history. (Ex. 20:2) - *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”* Redemption of Israel. (Eph. 1:3) *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ.”* Blessed by God who has blessed us in Christ. It is when recognition of God is a personal experience that we can really go to him to ask forgiveness. *“I have met the Lord of my life, my Lord and my Creator.”* Or *“Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one.”*

B. We owe God gratitude

(1) For his forgiveness. *“While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man – though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”*

(2) For his consolation. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in affliction, with the comfort...”*

C. We owe God obedience

(1) The ten commandments

- 1- You shall have no other gods before me.
- 2- You shall not make yourself a graven image.
- 3- You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.
- 4- Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.
- 5- Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land.
- 6- You shall not kill.
- 7- You shall not commit adultery.
- 8- You shall not steal.
- 9- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 10- You shall not covet.

(2) Jesus' summary (Matt.22:36)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. A second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”

In the context of a God who is our Creator and Lord, who redeems and blesses us, who

consoles and commands, the petition, “*Forgive us our debts*” has meaning. Who can say that he has been faithful at all points?

II. What we owe to man.

The petition is based on the fact that we have forgiven our debtors. Or as Luke puts it, “*As we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.*” Why forgiveness of our debts by God goes hand-in-hand with our forgiving the debts of the neighbor.

- A. To speak of God in the Biblical revelation is to speak of man. God created man in his own image. Human personality is sacred. When we meet a man or a woman, we are in the presence of God’s creation.

In human situations of sin, desperation and need, God is calling us to show his reconciling love. That is, we are to be God’s arm of forgiveness.

- B. Forgiveness is meaningless to an unforgiving soul. (Luke 7:40) “*Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little. And he said: ‘Your sins are forgiven.’*” The more conscious we are of our sin before God, the more understanding and forgiving we are. It is the man who has been forgiven, who knows how to forgive.

Conclusion:

What do we mean when we say, “Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors”? In the presence of a God who forgives and demands that we be forgiving, let us be big enough to recognize:

- (1) Our finitude – our partial knowledge.
We indeed know in part, not only the outward reality of the universe, but also our own selves. We are mysterious to ourselves. Can we plumb the depths of our beings? Can we explain our actions to ourselves?
- (2) Let us also be big enough to recognize our moral failure. Have we lived up to the best that we know? Have we not many times done wrong to our neighbors and brothers, even though unwittingly? Have we not many times knowingly pursued that which we knew was not pleasing to God?
- (3) Let us be big enough to forgive. Many blessing could come if people would get reconciled to each other.