

Our Father Delights in Mercy

Matthew 6:12: Micah 7:18

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What is divine forgiveness? God's forgiveness is His promise to immediately remove and bury the guilt and punishment of sin that separates you as a sinner from Himself when you trust in Christ alone (Hebrews 8:12; Acts 13:38-39). God's forgiveness is not a feeling; it is a promise that is realized in the court of heaven. Thus, your assurance of God's forgiveness must be anchored in God's promise, not on how you feel from day to day. God's forgiveness is not a partial forgiveness, but a complete and total forgiveness of all sins—past, present, and future (“having forgiven you all trespasses” Colossians 2:13).

This amazing forgiveness is full and free—free to you who trust Him, and yet so costly to the sinless Son of God who suffered the just punishment of His Father for all His beloved elect. God's forgiveness is not your ticket to live in sin. It is rather your ticket to live in loving obedience to the One who set you free.

We considered God's judicial forgiveness (His justifying forgiveness) last Lord's Day, but today we return to our text in Matthew 6:12 to consider God's fatherly forgiveness (His sanctifying forgiveness). This is the second main point from last week's sermon.

II. God's Fatherly Forgiveness (“And forgive us our debts.”)

A. I believe we are given by the Lord Jesus a beautiful illustration of these two aspects of God's forgiveness in the Gospel of John (chapter 13). Please turn with me there.

1. John declares the unfathomable love of Jesus for His disciples who certainly continued to struggle with daily sin, as do each of us (John 13:1). He loved them to the end knowing the worst about them. After the Passover and then a common supper meal together, Jesus removed His outer garment, took a towel and a basin of water, and began washing the feet of His disciples as the lowliest of servants in a household would do at that time. He, who was the Lord of all, humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of a Servant in order to serve and save sinners who were under God's righteous condemnation. He would have been perfectly just in leaving us in our sin and in condemning us for our sin, but He loved us.

2. When Jesus came to Peter, Peter resisted, “Thou shalt never wash my feet” (John 13:8), to which Jesus responded, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (John 13:8). Such a thought that he would have no part with Jesus was so unthinkable to Peter that he goes far beyond the mere washing of feet, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head” (John 13:9). “Then give me a bath, Lord.”

3. Jesus now distinguishes a two-fold cleansing of forgiveness: one that is a full and complete washing/bathing of the body that does not need to be repeated; and another that is a washing of the feet alone which does need to be repeated (John 13:10).

4. Here Jesus distinguishes between judicial forgiveness (in justification) that is once administered by God to the believing sinner and fatherly forgiveness (in sanctification) that is administered daily to the child of God. Once you have been justified by God, the guilt of all your sin is pardoned and there is now no condemnation forever (“ye are clean”—justified—but not all, Judas, John 13:10). But there is the daily need to wash your feet from the dirt and pollution of the world, the flesh, and the devil by way of coming to God now as your reconciled Father who loves you and calls you into blessed communion with Him and obedience to Him and His commandments.

5. One of the evidences that you have been fully cleansed and forgiven by God as Judge is that you desire to come daily to God as your personal and loving Father for His daily forgiveness. One who is only interested in justifying forgiveness, but not in sanctifying forgiveness has reason to doubt whether they

have been delivered from God's just condemnation. Those who are justified hunger and thirst to be sanctified. In other words, coming daily to your loving Father for His forgiveness is an evidence that you are no longer under God's condemnation as Judge.

B. When we read the words of the Lord's Prayer, it is clear that it is addressed to God, as our "Father", not God as Judge—God as a loving Father, not God as a condemning Judge ("Our Father which art in heaven" Matthew 6:9). What has made the difference from God being our Judge to God being our Father?

1. When God as Judge declares you, the believing sinner, to be righteous in Christ through faith in Christ (to be accounted in the court of heaven as righteous as Christ Himself is), God does not leave you as simply a pardoned criminal that has been set free from death row. He (as it were) steps down from behind the Judge's bench, and throws His loving arms around you and adopts you into His family as His own dear child. God becomes your own Father who will supply all your needs, care for you, preserve you, and love you with an everlasting love. He will only give you what is good for you (Matthew 7:9-11). Jesus becomes your Elder Brother (that is an older Brother that will always be with you in whatever you face), and His inheritance (all that is in the heavens and on the earth) becomes yours (Romans 8:15-17; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

2. Only one that has been justified and adopted would truly pray the petitions we find in Matthew 6:9-10 (read them). It is clear that here the adopted child of God is coming to his/her loving Father, seeking forgiveness for sins that are committed daily, not coming to God as Judge, pleading with Him to remove all condemnation. Certainly as God's children we ought always to express to our Father our grateful hearts that we have been delivered from all condemnation, but here we pray for daily forgiveness from our Father whom we have offended by our sin.

3. Do your children come to you when they have sinned, pleading with you to receive them into your family because their sin has removed them from the family? Of course not! Their sin has hindered their fellowship, love, and obedience. The sin needs to be removed in order to enjoy that nearness and closeness once again. So likewise God, our loving Father, does not kick His adopted children out of the family for their daily sins (all condemnation is removed in justification). God's true children will not live in an unrepentant state. They will repent and seek His forgiveness. They cannot continue in sin and rebellion against their loving and holy Father; for God's life dwells within them (1 John 3:9).

4. If you want to know how much God your Father loves you—look at the cross. He did not give up an animal, a mere human, or even an angel. He gave up His only begotten Son to be your sacrifice. Don't dismiss this testimony of God's love so easily. "No big deal. I've heard that before." Would you sacrifice your child for the guilt of an enemy's sin who hated you? God did. If you want to know how much God your Father hates sin—look at the cross. Who did He send to suffer His holy judgment against sin? He did not send an animal, a mere human, or even an angel. None of those could remove sin. He sent His only begotten and beloved Son. That's how much He hates sin and how much He loves you, His beloved child. Only when we begin to understand these truths will we flee to our loving Father to daily seek His pardon and call upon Him to search our hearts with full transparency and with confidence. He knows the worst about us, and yet He loves us "to the end". We can hide nothing from Him, and yet His arms are always open to you.

C. Some application in seeking God's fatherly forgiveness.

1. Pray that your Father would search your heart and reveal your sin that you might confess it and seek His forgiveness. Acknowledge that you want nothing to hinder your fellowship with Him. When you confess what you know, He forgives what you don't know (even all unrighteousness, 1 John 1:9-10).

2. Seeking God's forgiveness without repentance (a change of mind about your sin), without sorrow, and without an earnest desire to obey Him will not obtain God's fatherly forgiveness. God is a loving Father, but He is looking for true repentance and not a pretended repentance (and He knows the

difference). No matter how far you have fallen away (like the Prodigal Son), He will be there to receive you, running to embrace you, and delighting in mercy and forgiveness (Psalm 103:13). Only when you truly realize the depth of your sin which God has forgiven will you love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Luke 7:47).

3. Don't rely on your feelings to assure you of God's fatherly forgiveness. It is great when there is that inward joy and gladness because the forgiveness of your beloved Father overwhelms you. However, rely always on His promise that you are forgiven. Let the assurance of God's forgiveness spring from the promise of Him who cannot lie. Begin to praise Him and thank Him, not necessarily because of the emotions welling up within you, but because you know He is faithful to forgive as He has promised.

4. Don't delay to repent and seek God's fatherly forgiveness. The longer you wait, the more trouble you will likely find, and the more hardened your heart will become to the conviction of the Spirit. The enemy loves it when you procrastinate to repent and seek God's fatherly forgiveness, for during that time he will bring all manner of temptation.

5. You will only come to God for His fatherly forgiveness as your sin bothers you rather than deadening your senses and making you more calloused. As you become more sensitive to the Spirit's conviction of sin, you will flee more to the throne of grace and mercy in Christ Jesus to seek the forgiveness of your Father. You may be inclined to think that you are not being sanctified because you daily see your sin and need of God's fatherly forgiveness. However, remember that the closer you come to the light of Christ's truth and righteousness found in His Word, the more you will see the spiritual dirt on your hands, feet, face, and even in your heart. To see your daily need of your father's forgiveness does not mean you are not growing. To the contrary, it means you are growing in your sanctification. Be encouraged, not discouraged.

6. Remember that God chastens in love every true child of God that He receives with fatherly discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11). He "chastens" (corrective) not punishes (retributive). Jesus paid all the retributive punishment for us. Because all of us as God's children are yet disobedient, leave our first love, seek after things that are not good for us, and are at times slow to repent, we will fall under the loving discipline and fatherly displeasure of God (David in Psalm 32:3-5 and the Corinthian believers). Just as God is a good and loving Father to discipline us, so He is a good and loving Father to forgive us as we repent.

7. Never forget that Jesus Christ is always praying for you as your Advocate that your faith not fail (as He did for Peter). He will always appear before the Father to plead His righteousness for you. He ever lives to make intercession for you every day, throughout the day. That is the only reason you can have confidence that the arms of your Father will always be open to you—He sees you in His beloved Son, and Jesus pleads His own righteousness as yours before the Father. The Father would have to turn away from Jesus before He could turn away from you. Your Father delights to hear your confession of sin (no matter how many times or how great or how small it may seem to you), and He delights to show His mercy and forgiveness (Micah 7:18-19). You don't have to pull His mercy out of a reluctant Father as if it was not what He wanted to do. He loves to show His mercy to you. If you struggle to believe God will forgive you (whatever you have done), let that truth be ever on your lips and in your heart: He delighteth in mercy. There is the promise. Rest in that promise every day as you seek God's fatherly forgiveness.

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