

TABERNACLE BAPTIST CHURCH
“FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS.”
Matthew 6:12

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Tonight we are going to center on Matthew 6 and Verse 12, from the Lord’s Prayer — “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

The words “our debts” can also be translated as “our sins” and “our debtors” as “those who have sinned against us.”

Even though the English rendering is a little different, the theology is the same — our sins are our debts, which are not forgiven until we forgive others that have wronged us! We are commanded to forgive our debtors, not bearing malice or ill-will to any, but true love to all!

For us, as believers, our sins have been forgiven and that our request for forgiveness is a plea for the restoration of our relationship with him.

Forgiveness and restoration are of paramount importance to God — even more important than our gifts and offerings to him.

Jesus made this very clear in Matthew 5:23-24 saying: "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

What Jesus is saying is simply this — “Don’t come to me with your spiritual acts of worship until you first settle your debts with others.”

Brothers and sisters, this passage not only deals with forgiveness, it also refers to our own guilt for the things we have done to ourselves and to others. Guilt is a feeling nobody likes. We do everything we can to avoid it but we all feel guilt at times because we are not perfect. Frankly, the only way to avoid guilt is to never do anything wrong. But we all do. And when we do, the Holy Spirit will eventually convict us and help us to realize that the only way to right the wrong is to forgive ourselves and to forgive others.

If you have never been convicted by the Holy Spirit, the odds are that the Holy Spirit is not living in you. I would encourage you to really search your heart for the black spots and deal with them before God does. Because if God has to deal with them, it ain’t gonna be fun!

How then, can we deal with our guilt? I think one answer lies in the third stanza of my favorite hymn, "It Is Well With My Soul", which says:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

In simple words, it means take your burdens and sins to the cross. Let Jesus deal with them so you don't have to! 1 John 1:9 says it all! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Amen?

Again, it is of utmost importance that we understand that as believers, all of our sins have already been forgiven from a salvation prospective.

But when we sin, we impact our relationship with God and our confession is the first step that is required to restore communion with him. And when we do, He is faithful to allow us back into his presence.

In today's world, it seems like everyone is blaming society or the economy or the environment for the troubles that fall upon us. We live in a no-fault society. We blame our boss, our wife, our kids, whatever, but often not ourselves.

To overcome these feelings of guilt, we must turn to the bible that says that the only way to free ourselves from this bitterness is forgiveness. And there is only one source of forgiveness and there is only one way to get it. Ask God for it! Matthew says "This is how you should pray, 'forgive us our debts'".

So then, how do you get rid of guilt? Simple; you ask God. You ask for His forgiveness.

Many say "I do that, but I still feel guilty." Many times we confess our sins, but still feel guilty about it? Why is that? I believe that the problem maybe that we don't understand how God forgives. The bible says that if we understand — we would not feel guilty.

The bible reveals four ways that God forgives!

First, God forgives instantly!

Nehemiah 9:17 says, "You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" notice the word, "ready". God is always ready, willing and able to forgive us. He forgives instantly, immediately — there is no delay.

God is more ready to forgive you right now than you are ready to ask Him for his forgiveness. He is always ready. And that's different from human forgiveness.

Often times when someone who has hurt us comes to us and asks to be forgiven, we, in our selfishness, often make them grovel while we rub salt into the wound. We may say things like, "I'll think about it" or "I'll forgive you when I'm ready to forgive you." I ask you, have you ever said that to someone?

But God never makes us wait for forgiveness. Never! It's instant, immediate; it comes the moment we ask — because he did not design us to carry guilt. He did not design us to have bitter feelings about ourselves or others. He created us to be transformed into the image of Christ Jesus, who died for us so we do not have to suffer for our sins.

Well, if that's true, then should a believer ever feel guilty? Yeah, for about thirty seconds. That's about how long it takes for us to admit our sin to ourselves, confess it to God, ask Him to forgive us, and choose to change. It shouldn't take any longer than that!

But you need to understand that admission and confession of sin is meaningless, unless you choose to repent.

Romans 12:2 defines the biblical definition of repentance: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--His good, pleasing and perfect will."

You see, our behavior is a response to our thoughts. If we think ungodly thoughts, we will do ungodly things! But if our thoughts are godly, we will do godly things. To change our pattern of behavior, we must first change the way we think and that, my friends, is true repentance!

I think you will agree that some people seem to be always on a guilt trip. They are not happy unless they feel guilty about something. And then there are others who are not happy unless they make someone else feel guilty about something. The truth is that guilt can never make you happy. In fact, it makes you miserable!

But God says "No, forgiveness is yours just for the asking." He not only wants to forgive you, he wants you to feel forgiven. God wants you to walk, feeling forgiven all time. He doesn't want you carrying a load of guilt. Listen, it is yours for the asking and it is instant.

Isaiah 55:7, says, "God is merciful and quick to forgive." Yes, he is "quick to forgive", but you have to ask! If you haven't asked, start tonight, start now!

And secondly, not only does God forgive instantly, he forgives completely.

According to col 2:13-14 "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross."

When Jesus died for our sins, which ones did he include — all of them! That's right, all of them! God has forgiven us of every sin, mistake, failure, flop and error that we've committed in the past, that we are committing right now and will ever commit in the future. All of these sins have been nailed to the cross and covered by the blood of Jesus! Amen?

The true meaning of forgiveness lies in the way we act when we are hurt or sinned against. True forgiveness means that we act as if what happened never happened. We never bring it up again or use it against the other person. When the Lord forgives us, He will never use our sin against us. As far as He is concerned, what we did never ever happened.

Some of you might remember the movie "Love Story", where the theme was "Love means you never have to say I'm sorry". That might be the way this world looks at it, but God says that "Love means that you must always say I'm sorry".

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Cor 13:5 that "Love keeps no records of wrongs." And neither does God! Why, because God is love! And He forgives instantly, and He forgives completely.

Notice that the text says that He cancelled the penalty by nailing it to the cross." Jesus was nailed to a cross so you can stop nailing yourself to cross. He was hung for your hang ups. You don't have to beat yourself to death because the bill has already been paid and your pardon was purchased at a very high price. Jesus gave his life to pay the bill that you owe. Yes, He paid the bill for you! He died so we can live! Oh how I pray that you have let Jesus cover your spiritual debts and has set you free?

Jeremiah 31:34 says, "I, the Lord, will forgive and forget their sins." Notice the word "forget". God can forget! Isn't that amazing? God, the creator of the universe, can forget. He chooses to forget every mistake, every sin you ever do, once you ask Him to forgive you for it.

God says, "I want you to know I forgive you completely." The problem is that if you don't really believe God has completely forgiven you, you might think that God trying is trying to get even with you. Every time you have problem, you might say, "God is getting even with me!" If you have an accident, a financial crisis or the death of a friend or loved one, you're going to feel like God is paying you back for your sin.

Brothers and sisters let me tell you here and now, God does not act that way! He does not carry grudges once we come to Him, in honesty, and ask him to "Forgive us our debts."

When we confess that we blew it and that we were wrong and want to change, He forgives us instantly and He forgives us completely. He will not punish us for that sin.

And not only does God forgive instantly and completely, He forgives repeatedly

How many of you have ever committed the same sin more than once? We tend to get in certain ruts and do same things over and over. We are continually tempted; we get angry and often lose our temper. But if we confess our sins to Him, He can be depended on to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. And it is perfectly proper for God to do this for us because Christ died to wash away our sins.

I used to think that when i confessed the same sin over and over, God got tired of it and me! I could imagine God saying, "Can't you be original? You come back with the same old sin?" I'd think that God got tired of forgiving me. But he's not that way. I was remembering all my past sins! But the bible says that once i confessed them to God, He's forgotten them. It took me a while to understand that it is God's nature to be forgiving. Our God is a forgiving God. He loves to forgive. That's why He wants you to learn to forgive others so you can be like him.

And Jesus is our mediator. Hebrews 7:25 tells us that "Therefore he (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them." Yes, He's always there, waiting, ready to forgive, instantly, completely, repeatedly.

Have you ever procrastinated asking God to forgive you for something you know you've done wrong? All of us do. You know it was wrong but you don't want to admit it to yourself, to God, or to another person. Don't procrastinate — ask for forgiveness!

In a sense, guilt is like garbage. You have to take it out regularly and repeatedly. If you don't the whole house starts stinking. You can't just let it pile up.

If you do, it starts overflowing and you say, "What am i going to do?" Now that sounds silly, doesn't it? But that's what a lot of people do with their lives. Listen; just take it out, dump your stuff to God on a regular basis rather than letting it all build up inside of you?

Don't let guilt pile up in your life over a long period of time. Keep short accounts with God. If you say something hurtful to someone, turn around and say, "Lord, i know that was wrong. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that." And tell them, too. Keep short accounts with God.

This is called spiritual breathing. Breathe out all the sins you commit and the guilt, mistakes, and errors of judgment, and breathe in God's power, God's love and God's spirit in your life.

Remember, God says, "I want you to come to me and ask me for forgiveness repeatedly, because I forgive repeatedly."

And lastly, God forgives freely

There is a saying that goes like this --- if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is! But let me tell you that God forgives freely and that is the truth!

Free forgiveness, wow! That doesn't even sound fair, does it? For we commit all these things, then he lets us go scott free. Free! Yes, totally free.

You know and I know that we deserve to pay for all the wrong things we do, that's only fair, isn't it! But for those who believe, the bill has already been paid in full. Amen?

About 2000 years ago on a hill called Golgotha. Jesus Christ, God, came to earth in the form of a man and said, "Even though I am sinless, I am perfect, I will take all the sin of world and pay for it, because I am the only one who has never done anything wrong!"

Those that do not know Him might ask "Why did He do it?" My friends, He did it out of love for his children! Romans 3:23-24 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus".

Notice the familiar word, "all". Yes, forgiveness is free to "all" who trust in Jesus. Also notice the word, "freely". While it is free to us, it cost God a lot. It cost Him, Himself. He suffered the humiliation of coming to earth and dying on cross. When Jesus died on cross, the last words he said was "It is finished."

With arms outstretched wide, he cried out, "It is finished." He didn't say, "I am finished" because he wasn't. It was His plan for salvation that was finished.

His payment for everybody's guilt was finished. The words, "It is finished" comes from the Greek word tetelestai, a legal term that means "paid in full." Yes, our debts were "paid in full" by the shedding of the blood of Jesus on the cross!

Let me tell you that if you're walking around carrying a load of guilt, you're carrying it needlessly because it has already been paid for by Christ! Amen?

God wants us to be able to live guilt free lives. All you need to do is accept that forgiveness.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9: for it is by grace [his free gift that we don't deserve] you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, [you can't work your way into heaven by trying to be good] so that no one can boast."

There is nothing to boast of since it is not the result of your own effort." It's a free gift. Remember, "grace" means giving us what we do not deserve and "mercy" means not giving us what we do deserve. We deserve God's "retribution", which means giving us what we do deserve. And what is that you ask? All of us deserve to be thrown into the fiery pit, eternally separated from God!

And if you are suffering from deep guilt — stop trying to hide it. Be honest with God and with yourself. Stop pretending that what you are doing is not sin when know it is! Call it what it is.

In his book "Lists", William Justice details some of the ways that we lie to ourselves to avoid guilt. Here are just a few!

We blame others — we blame everybody else except ourselves.

We rationalize —we try to convince our mind that something is right, when we know in our heart that it is wrong.

We compare ourselves with others — you think my sin's bad, you ought to see da, da, da is doing.

We suppress our guilt — I'm not going to admit my guilt. I'm going to push it down into my subconscious and I won't even think about it.

We escape — we look for any way to escape the guilty feeling. But when reality sets back in, we still have the same guilt because we have not dealt with the cause of the guilt.

None of these ways solve anything. They only make it worse.

To deal with this guilt, admit it to God and agree with him that what you are doing it's wrong! Call it for what it is — sin

Then believe that God wants to forgive you. That it is continuous and instant and free and complete because of what Jesus Christ has done for you. Accept that gift! It's there for you, but it's not yours until you accept it. Forgiveness of God does not become yours until you trust in Christ and take it.

Romans 8:1 reminds us that “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” No condemnation — I can't think of a better verse in the bible than that. Wouldn't you like to let go of your load of guilt? There's no reason why you can't walk out of here tonight with a clear conscious. That's what God wants to do for you in your life. That's maybe why He brought you here tonight.

As i close, i want to remind that God forgives you, how? Instantly, completely, repeatedly and freely!

Are you forgiving others the way God forgives you? If not, I pray that you will begin tonight!

Let's pray.