

Forgive us our Debts

Forgiveness Part 1 Matthew 6:12 10-31-10

When you ask God to forgive you, what exactly are you asking for? What action takes place when He answers that prayer? What is forgiveness? And how do you know when it has happened?

Most people think asking forgiveness means asking not to be punished. But there is far more to forgiveness than that. When we sin, we incur four massive problems, and asking forgiveness means requesting that God reverse all four of those problems. This message will elevate your ability to appreciate how staggering is the gift God has given you in offering forgiveness.

Excerpt:

What we deserved was transferred to Him and what He deserves is now transferable to us. The Biblical word for that is justification. And justification is an exceedingly wonderful thing, but it is only one part of forgiveness. I think many Christians, if you asked them the definition of forgiveness, their definition would make forgiveness exactly the same as justification – nothing more. But it is more. Justification is legal, forgiveness is relational. There is much more to your relationship with God than your legal standing. You are not just a name in a book to God. When God forgives you He goes from being angry and displeased with you to being favorable toward you.

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Matthew 6:5-15 And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' 14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Introduction

When you ask God to forgive you, what exactly are you asking for? What action takes place when He answers that prayer? What is forgiveness? And how do you know when it has happened?

We have been studying verse-by-verse through the Sermon on the Mount and ever since we hit this section in Matthew 6 where Jesus teaches us how to pray we have slowed to a crawl. Instead of flying through at our normal break-neck speed we are taking it one phrase at a time because the Lord's

Prayer is not a rote prayer to be recited but rather an outline for all prayer. Each phrase shows us an entire category of prayer. And so we come this morning to verse 12 – **Forgive us our debts.**

Two levels of forgiveness

Forgiveness has to be one of the most precious words in any language. We use that word constantly – and yet it amazed me these past couple weeks as I studied this how little I understood about what forgiveness even is. In Matthew 12:32 Jesus spoke of two levels of forgiveness - forgiveness **in this age** and forgiveness **in the age to come**. Temporal forgiveness here and now and eternal forgiveness in the age to come.

That is one important distinction we need to understand. Another one is the difference between the forgiveness God offers to unbelievers and the forgiveness He offers to His own children. What is the difference between that initial forgiveness we receive when we first become Christians and the day-to-day forgiveness we receive after we are adopted into God's family? It is going to take me two sermons to answer that question. This morning our focus will be on the initial forgiveness we receive the moment we come to Christ, and that will give us the foundation to understand the kind of forgiveness that Jesus is teaching us to pray for on a regular basis after we come to Christ. So I am not really going to preach on Matthew 6:12 today. Today will just be the introduction, and then next week we will have the foundation for really understanding the forgiveness of Matthew 6:12.

I have two goals I would like to accomplish with this sermon this morning (beyond just laying the foundation for next Sunday). There are two kinds of people sitting in this room right now. There are those who have received eternal forgiveness and those who have not. My first goal is for those of us who have to increase our joy and gratitude by gaining a greater understanding of the preciousness of what we have received, resulting in a greater love for God. The other goal is for those who have not received it to see how precious it is and open your heart to receiving it.

The Need for Forgiveness

To understand what forgiveness is we must first understand why it is necessary. Why do we need it? We need forgiveness because of our sin. "OK, so what is sin?" Probably the most common misunderstanding about sin is to think of it as mainly a moral issue. Sin is not mainly moral – it is mainly relational. Sin is not mainly breaking a rule or violating a standard; it is offending a Person. God is not a list of rules – He is a person. When you walk up to a person and slap him in the face, you now have a relational problem with that person. If you steal from him, insult him, lie to him, betray him – any sin against him results in the fact that now you have a problem between you and him. It is the same with God. The *only thing* that makes sin bad is the fact that it is an offence against God.

All sin is against God

Nothing is sinful unless it offends God. And everything that offends God is sin by definition. When David committed adultery and murder, in his prayer of confession he said this:

Psalm 51:4 Against you, you only, have I sinned

“ We understand the **against you**“ but why the **”you only** ?”What about his wife and Bathsheba and her husband? point is not to deny that he sinned against all those other people. The point is that even his sin against those people was sin only because it was ultimately an offence against God. Hurting people is only evil because it is a violation of what God desires. When we see other people suffer because of our sin that can be a helpful visual aid to assist us in understanding the seriousness of sin, but that is all it is – a visual aid. Our guilt is not limited to the damage we can see that we have done to people. Sin can only be defined in terms of that which is a perversion of what is good as defined by the character of God. God's desires are so good that any behavior that is contrary to His

desires is perverse. That is the definition of sin.

So all sin is against God, and it is all personal. There is no such thing as a sin that is simply breaking a rule but not offending God personally. If the speed limit is 55 and you drive 65 you have broken a rule. The police officer writing you a ticket may not be bothered or offended in the slightest by what you did. Sin is not like that. Sinning is more like committing adultery than breaking the speed limit. When you commit adultery against your spouse – that is personal. When your spouse is furiously angry or weeping with heaving sobs of grief, the issue there is not that you broke a rule. In a marriage shattered by adultery the last thing on anyone's mind is rule-breaking. It is deeply and intensely personal. That is what all sin is like with God. That is why Scripture so often refers to sin as adultery against God. Our relationship with Him is like a marriage. Our hearts and bodies belong to Him alone and we are to seek all our joy and satisfaction from Him and no other source, and when we seek it from the world that is adultery against God. James 4 speaks of those who covet earthly goods to spend on their pleasures:

James 4:4 You adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God

So when you sin, do not think of yourself as someone who parked illegally standing before a judge asking to be let off the hook. Think instead of coming to your spouse after having just committed adultery and asking him or her to forgive you. It is personal.

Anger

And that is why God is angry over sin. God is not an impersonal force. He is the ultimate Person and He responds emotionally to what we do. Psalm 7:11 says God is angry with the wicked every day.

Have you ever stopped to think what a horror it is to have the Creator angry at you? On Halloween our culture loves to dream up the scariest, most terrifying things they can think of. And it is usually demons or monsters or dead people coming to life. But none of those are even slightly scary compared to the most frightening thing possible – to have almighty God angry with you. Jonathan Edwards captured it well in his sermon “Sinners in the hands of an angry God.”

“The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.”

If your sins are not forgiven the only thing holding the arrow back is a God who is furious with you. Edwards went on: “The God that holds you over the pit of hell abhors you, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire; (he abhors you) and he is dreadfully provoked: ... he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; ... And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up. ... O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed ... You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have ... nothing to lay hold on to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.” All the horror movies put together have never begun to conceive of the terror that every unforgiven sinner faces every moment – and that terror is God. The thing that will make hell so unbearable will not be the

heat. It will be the anger of God. The Devil is not in charge of hell. He will be punished there along with everyone else. If everyone in hell could get together and vote one person “off the island” it would not be the devil. It would be God.

Guilt

And every time we sin we provoke more of that wrath. But that is not the only effect sin has. Sin also produces guilt. And guilt has two parts – the fact that you *are* guilty and the fact that you *feel* guilty.

First let’s think about the first one – actually being guilty. When you are guilty, justice demands punishment. God is a God of perfect justice, and so every sin that has ever been committed will be punished - no exceptions.

Exodus 34:7 he does not leave the guilty unpunished

Every sin ever committed will be punished.

Romans 6:23 the wages of sin is death

Wages speak of what you *deserve*. Every time a person sins he earns or deserves punishment.

No matter how sorry you feel, no matter how much you have worked to reform yourself, no matter how much you have tried to make up for what you have done – the guilt remains. And you can do nothing to reduce that guilt in any way. If I murder someone, and the next day I help an old lady across the street, that does not reduce my guilt. If ninety-nine days out of one hundred I refrain from murdering anyone, I am still a murderer. If I feel terrible afterward, I am still guilty and I still deserve to be punished. Once you earn a wage, you deserve that wage no matter what you do afterward.

Notice the word Jesus uses here for sin (**Forgive us our debts**). He calls the guilt of our sin **debts**. Anytime you wrong someone you owe it to that person to make it up to them. You owe it to them to make things right. Last week I borrowed a laser bore sighter for sighting in a rifle. You stick it in the end of the barrel and look through the scope to see if the dot from the laser matches up with the cross hairs in the scope. Then you remove it from the barrel and fire the gun at a target. When I did that with Josiah’s rifle last week I skipped a step. I forgot the part about removing the laser sighter from the barrel. So it was still in there when I fired a live 30-30 round from the gun. It was the only bulls-eye I have ever had – I hit that \$150 laser sighter dead center and blew it to smithereens. The moment I pulled that trigger I incurred a debt. Actually I incurred two debts - I destroyed that guy’s laser and I destroyed Josiah’s new rifle because the barrel exploded. So now I have to make it right – and replace the laser and the barrel.

That is an example of a payable debt. Hopefully if I just replace the laser and the barrel there will be no hard feelings. But not every wrong is that easy to make up for. What if there had been someone next to me when I fired and the shrapnel from the exploding barrel made him blind for life? Or what if someone’s daughter was standing there and she was killed? How would I ever make that up to him? Impossible. I could never do anything to make up for that. Either he would have to forgive me, or I would have to spend the rest of my life indebted to him. All sin against God is in that unpayable category.

Matthew 18:23 the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought .to him

A talent is six thousand denarii, and a denarius was one day’s wage. So ten thousand talents was

sixty million days wages.¹ If you work six days a week, and you never spent one dime of your income it would take almost 200,000 years to earn that much money. Jesus is making up a story here. When you make up a story you can make up any detail you want. Why does Jesus pick out a number this ridiculously large? There was not even that much money in circulation at that time in the entire Roman Empire. Jesus is saying this guy owes the king more than all the money in the whole world.

Every sin we have ever committed against God is an unpayable debt. There is nothing you could ever do to make up for one single sin against God. If you told a little “white lie” when you were 5, and the rest of your life you were perfect and never did anything but good deeds until the day you died it still would not make up for that sin. The standard for us every day is holiness. And so it is impossible to ever do more than what is required to make up for a sin. Sin is not like ruining a laser sighter that we can replace. It is like putting someone’s eyes out or taking the life of their child. Every sin adds another unpayable debt. And so far you and I have racked up about 200,000 years’ wages worth and counting. We are the servant in Matthew 18.

And the amazing thing about that servant was he said, “Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.” He had no concept of how much he owed. That is really offensive. If my carelessness with that gun killed someone’s child and I said.., “Oh here – let me make it up to you” and handed him a \$5 bill, what an insult that would be!

And the really sickening thing is that not only do we do that with God, but we sometimes go even further and imagine that God is indebted to us! People think *God* owes *them* something! They ask God for something they really, really want, He does not give it to them and so now they are mad at Him. Or they endure some horrible suffering for His name and so now He owes them. Or they go to church every week and read their Bible every day and give ten percent in the offering, so now they feel they have earned the right for a little enjoyment of this world – a little laziness or some other sin. They owe 200,000 years’ wages and they are standing before the king with their hand out saying, “Pay up, king.” God have mercy on our souls for how much we have underestimated the magnitude of our guilt before Him.

Guilt feelings

Every time we sin we offend God and provoke a negative emotional response from Him, and every time we sin we become guilty and deserve punishment and we add to our unpayable debt. And a third effect is that to one degree or another we begin to feel the weight of that guilt. One of the byproducts of actually being guilty is *feeling* guilty. Nobody feels as guilty as they really are, but all of us have some experience with guilt feelings. David talks about what it was like before he confessed his sin.

Psalm 32:3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

The whole world is filled with man’s efforts to escape the pressure of the weight of guilt feelings. Religions are invented for that purpose - mitigating guilt feelings. Others run to alcohol or drugs. Others turn to philosophy and try to reason their way out of feeling guilty. Others try to distract themselves with activity. Others just plunge further and further into sin until their conscience is destroyed altogether and they can’t feel anything. Others are driven off the edge of sanity by their guilt. The head of a large British mental institution once said, "I could dismiss half my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness."

Estrangement from God

¹ Ten thousand was the largest number that there is a Greek word for, and a talent is the largest denomination in existence at the time. So Jesus is speaking of the largest possible figure.

So what are the effects of sin? Sin makes a person guilty and deserving of punishment, sin offends a holy God and provokes His displeasure and anger, and sin presses down on your soul like a great, unrelenting weight or load. And the result of all that is estrangement from God.

Matthew 7:22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles in your name?' 23 Then I will 'tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers

“I never knew you” does not mean He was unaware of their existence. It means is there was no intimate, relational knowledge. They were sent to hell because they were at odds with God relationally when they died.

One of the wisest things you can do when you get married is to commit to never go to bed upset with each other. When someone dies while estranged from God – that is kind of like going to bed angry (except it is permanent). If you die while estranged from God – even if you have no hard feelings at all toward Him – if you die with Him angry at you then you will hear those words on Judgment Day, “Depart from Me.”

Those are not the only effects of sin. Sin also has a contaminating, dirtying effect on the soul, it distorts your ability to understand and accept truth, it harms people, it does all kinds of damage. But our concern here is restricted just to the effects of sin with regard to forgiveness. We are trying to understand exactly what we are asking for when we ask God to forgive us. And forgiveness has to do with the four things I just described – our guilt (what we deserve), our guilt feelings (how we feel), God’s wrath (how He feels) and the resulting estrangement from God.

The meaning of forgiveness

So what is forgiveness? It is the removal of those four things.

Removal of guilt

First, it is a removal of actual guilt. Think of what a miracle that is. That is something no judge or court in the world has the ability to do even with the slightest offense. If you steal a piece of gum the best a human court could ever do is say that you do not have to suffer the penalty or have it on your record, but they can never do anything about the actual guilt. If the Supreme Court of the United States declares that you are innocent, they are just wrong. You are guilty whether they see it or not.

Only God can remove actual guilt. When God forgives He makes it so you are not guilty of the sin. The guilt is removed. The Greek word for **forgive** is the same word translated “divorce” in 1 Corinthians 7:11-13 (three times). It points to a complete, final, permanent separation. In fact, that word is translated “to leave” more times than it is translated “forgive.”

.Matthew 4:20 they lefttheir nets and followed him

They “forgave” their nets – turned their back on them and walked away leaving them behind.

Psalm 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven

The Hebrew word translated **forgiven** in that verse literally means “to carry away.” God sends our guilt away.

Psalm 103:12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Jeremiah 50:20 search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none ... for I will forgive

.Micah 7:19 you will ... hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea

Remember that servant who owed 200,000 years' wages and begged for mercy? The king's response teaches us what God's forgiveness is like.

Matthew 18:27 The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

He did not set up a reasonable payment plan that fit what the servant could afford. One second after the king made that statement that servant owed him not one penny.

Removal of Anger

The reason God can eliminate your actual guilt is because He has the ability to credit Jesus' perfect righteousness to your account and to credit all your sin to Jesus' account. That is why Jesus died on the cross – He was suffering the punishment for all our sins. What we deserved was transferred to Him and what He deserves is now transferable to us. The Biblical word for that is *justification*. And justification is an exceedingly wonderful thing, but it is only one part of forgiveness. I think many Christians, if you asked them the definition of forgiveness, their definition would make forgiveness exactly the same as justification – nothing more. But it is more. Justification is legal, forgiveness is relational. There is much more to your relationship with God than your legal standing. You are not just a name in a book to God. When God forgives you He goes from being angry and displeased with you to being favorable toward you. “God forgive me” means “God, please do not deal with me according to my sin. Don't let Your emotions and feelings toward me be determined by this sin anymore.”

You know when you have sinned against someone and that person is cool toward you? You are at odds with them, and things are not quite right between you because of what you did. Your sin against them is a major factor in how they think about you and how they relate to you. But then, once all is forgiven, your sin no longer determines how they feel about you and you are not at odds with them in any way. That is what we are asking God for when we ask forgiveness for our sin. You look up at this furious, angry God who is holding this slender, smoldering thread that holds you from plunging into hell and you do not just say, “Please don't let go,” but rather “Please don't be angry with me anymore. Please don't regard me as a loathsome insect anymore.” The problem is not the thread – the problem is the fact that the one who holds it is angry.

Do not think of forgiveness as the elimination of punishment. A father might forgive his disrespectful son but still punish him. Or, he may not forgive his son, remain angry at him, but cancel the punishment. But the son who dearly loves his father desires more than anything *forgiveness*. Consequences or no consequences, he just wants everything between him and his dad to be OK.

Removal of Guilt Feelings

So when God forgives He eliminates our guilt, and His displeasure toward us gives way to Him being happy with us. And that enables us to be free from the load of our guilt feelings – which is one of the greatest joys of life.

What if you never felt guilty?

Now, that immediately brings up two questions. First, what if you never even felt guilty in the first place? Even then forgiveness is precious because what forgiveness does is enable you to be free from guilt feelings without that being another sin. If I steal \$20 from you, that is one sin. Then if I act like I do not owe you that \$20, and I act like everything is fine between us – that is a second sin. I not only owe you the \$20, but I also owe it to you to feel bad about stealing from you. But if you forgive

me, it is OK for me not to feel bad. Forgiveness grants permission not to feel bad about it and not to take a posture of indebtedness anymore.

When someone sins against you, you want them to be aware of what they did. And you want them to be contrite over it and to acknowledge their guilt. But after you forgive, you do not want them focused on that anymore. You no longer want them to be in a posture of guilt because you want restored intimacy with them. And you cannot have that while they are continuing to wallow in guilt. So you forgive because you want the whole issue to be in the past.

What if you still feel guilty?

But what about the opposite problem? What if even after God forgives you you are still weighed down with guilt feelings? The world of psychology says the solution is to forgive yourself. There are at least three problems with that. First, the Bible does not say it. Nowhere in the Bible does it tell us to forgive ourselves.

Secondly, the idea of forgiving yourself is nonsense. Forgiveness is the canceling of a debt and a willingness to absorb the loss yourself. Self-forgiveness is nonsense because to forgive yourself would mean to let yourself off the hook with yourself so that yourself no longer has to pay the debt to yourself because yourself absorbed the loss in place of yourself! That is nonsense! It is simply a misuse of language – it has no actual meaning. It will do nothing to help you with the problem of self-condemnation.

And third, telling a person that the solution is for him to forgive himself only perpetuates the error that is causing the problem in the first place. The error is his belief that he, rather than God, is the ultimate Judge. Urging him to forgive himself only reinforces that false belief.

The solution to self-condemnation is found in 1 John 3.

1 John 3:19 This then is ... how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 20 whenever our hearts condemn us: God is greater than our hearts

When our hearts condemn us the solution is to realize that God is greater than our hearts. God's assessment trumps yours. And God's assessment is that when you have repented the guilt is gone.

Another wrong approach goes in the opposite direction. Some people who embrace self-condemnation as their main strategy for overcoming sin. Beat myself up over my sin, feel really bad all the time, and maybe that will get me to finally change.

But 1 John 3 is clear that self-condemnation is a problem that needs to be solved. Guilt feelings that drive a person to repentance are good; but self-condemnation that causes you to be reluctant to draw near to God with boldness and confidence is bad.² If all your prayers are nothing but, "Oh God, I'm so sorry. I'm so, so sorry. I'm such a jerk..." – that does not lend itself to an intimate relationship. Remember – the reason a person forgives is because he wants that issue to be in the past and for the relationship to be back on a happy, joyful footing.

It is Satan who continues to accuse and condemn us after we have repented and have been forgiven. Satan's goal is to destroy the work of God in your life, limit your intimacy with Him and boldness in prayer, and paralyze you in your ministry. You will never overcome sin by joining Satan in his work of trying to condemn you.

² The New Testament is filled with passages that speak of the importance of having boldness and confidence in approaching God in prayer. Jesus devoted an entire parable to that point (Lk.11:1-13). See also...

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

2 Corinthians 3:4 We have such confidence through Christ before God.

Ephesians 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Hebrews 3:14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near

... ³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

Reconciliation

So if our guilt and God's anger and our guilt feelings all resulted in estrangement and distance from God, what is the result of those things all being removed? Reconciliation and intimacy and favor with God.

Isaiah 57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says ... "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. 16 I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me ... 17 I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways. 18 I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, 19 creating praise on the lips of the mourners

The Prodigal Son abandoned the family and squandered all the money on prostitutes and then finally repents and comes back starving, ready to ask his father if he could return as a slave. But .half-way through his planned spiel the father interrupts him

Luke 15:21 The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive .again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate

When God forgives it is real, full, wholehearted, happy, joyful reconciliation of the relationship and welcoming you into His arms of love.

The Access to Forgiveness

So that is a summary of the meaning of forgiveness. And it leaves us with the obvious question – how do you get it? Most people never do.

Matthew 7:13 wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter .through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it

So how does this forgiveness come?

.Acts 10:43 everyone who believes in [Jesus Christ] receives forgiveness of sins through his name

God extends forgiveness only to those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father wants to glorify the Son and so on Judgment Day every last person gets swept away except for those who are leaning on Jesus Christ.

"I think I believe, but how can I be sure that what is in my heart is genuine faith?" There is one particular effect that true faith always has on the heart – repentance. God does not forgive unrepentant people.

:Luke 2447 repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations

Acts 2:38 Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the .forgiveness of your sins

Repentance is a turning from sin to God. ³Repentance is always connected with forgiveness ... When Jesus first commissioned Paul to preach to the Gentiles He said

Acts 26:17 ... I am sending you to them¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins
Jeremiah 36:3 Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their .sin

In Mark 4:12 Jesus said if the people understood His message they would **turn and be forgiven.**⁴ When you come to Christ you cannot just add Jesus on to your existing life. You have to make a choice – this world or forgiveness of sins; you cannot have both. You have to turn you back on one to have the other.

But it should be no contest. It almost sounds too good to be true. That huge weight on your back – you have carried it so long you cannot even imagine it being gone. It seems like part of you. It is part of you. But some days you awake from the stupor of this world and feel something of the weight of your guilt and it is literally unbearable. And it seems so irremediable – you are so far in debt – 200,000 years wages. And to think that whole debt – all your guilt – could be gone before you walk out of this room!

But that is not even the half of it. Far greater than getting rid of guilt, and far greater than offloading the guilt feelings, and far greater than avoiding hell – is promise of having God's favor. To go from being His enemy to being His son or daughter; to go from being the object of His wrath – that wretched, disgusting, loathsome insect on the end of the thread to being His beloved, dear child upon whom He smiles every day; to go from only knowing the back of His hand to knowing His tight, warm, daily embrace; is a treasure that is worth a million times more than any pleasure you might have to give up. Even if it cost you your life it would be worth it a billion times over. God is so unrelenting and terrifying as a Judge; and He is so delightful and satisfying as a Father, not all the pleasures on earth combined would be worth forfeiting His favor and receiving His disfavor. Jesus said having His favor is like drinking living water and never thirsting again.

Isaiah 55:1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. ... 6 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the .Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon

What does it feel like to receive that pardon? That is where we will pick it up next time.

Benediction: Ephesians 1:3-7 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure

³ Mark 1:4 John came ... preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:3 ... repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 5:31 God exalted Jesus to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

⁴ 2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will .. forgive their sin

**and will—6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.
7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins**

Summary

In the section on praying for needs far more is about the needs of the soul than of the body. As believers we ask for a different kind of forgiveness than at conversion (temporal, family forgiveness). When we sin God is displeased and our relationship with Him is disrupted. That continues until we confess in sorrow and repentance and He forgives and brings us back out into the light.

Q&A

These are the questions addressed at the end of the recording

- 1) In the sermon it was said that God loathes sinners. But what about John 3:16? Doesn't God hate the sin and love the sinner?
- 2) What is the basis for saying God is present in hell?
- 3) Won't a sermon like this drive unrepentant sinners away?
- 4) If forgiveness is given to all who believe, what about the demons who believe and tremble?
- 5) In the message it was said not to think of sin as breaking a rule. But John defines sin as lawlessness. Isn't lawbreaking the same as rule breaking?