

“THE PRAYER OF JESUS #4: FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES”

(Matthew 6:7-13)

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[PROPS: (#1) Two persons to perform "*Lords Prayer Dramatic Reading/Dialogue*"
(#2) SermonSpice Video (#3) Phrase of the day PPT]

[LaGrange First U.M.C.; 3-11-18]

--I--

1. "*Lords Prayer Dramatic Reading/Dialogue*", based on Matthew 6:7-13 and Pray.
2. **[WATCH VIDEO "*Forgiveness*"** (by VisualReality on www.SermonSpice.com , Time: 3:09, modified from original time of 3:28)
3. We're continuing a series exploring the meaning and value of each phrase of "The Prayer of Jesus" we know as "*The Lord's Prayer*," which he first shared to be a *pattern/skeleton* around which we develop our *own* personal and corporate prayers.

A--And today, our attention turns to words in Verse 12 that (as we saw in the video) are both difficult to understand & often hard to put into practice -- say them with me:
[ON SCREEN]..."*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*"

B--Now, these are beautiful words, of course, but we all know that they're often extremely difficult to actually *do*.

C--So, as we've been doing throughout this series, let's help with that by exploring this verse in detail to see how it addresses the dual dimensions both of (#1) *God's* forgiveness of *us*, & (#2) *our* forgiveness of *others*.

--II--

4. Let's start by acknowledging that in our United Methodist Christian tradition, the wording we're most familiar with in the first phrase is "**FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES...**" -- that's the way I learned it (as did many of you), and it's still what we use in worship today.

A--The word "*trespasses*" comes from an early King James Version of our English Bible, but it's probably better translated as "*debts*" or "*sins*" (which is why most modern translations use one of those words instead). ¹

B--Either way, though, the original Hebrew word (*ma'al*) refers to an act or behavior that causes a break either in our faith or our relationship with God. ²

1--In other words, this is *not* a request for God to forgive our broken, sinful *nature* (which we can never really fully shed in *this life* anyway), but for God NOT to *hold against us* the harmful *acts* that we do as a *result* of that nature.

2--Even in today's corporate world, the term "forgiveness" is used to describe the waiving of a financial debt, meaning that spiritual "forgiveness" works in the same way: it's a release from an obligation that we would otherwise owe.

3--How has it sometimes been said? "*We owed a debt we could not pay, so Jesus paid a debt he did not owe*"³ -- as we often say, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross "paid" the "debt" of our own sinful actions/behaviors.

C--And yet, the sad thing is that many people (maybe some of us here today) are still trying to "pay" on the "debt" of sin because we won't forgive ourselves, and we've become a slave to our own guilt.

1--But in this phrase, the implication is that forgiveness is *already available* -- after all, why would Jesus have us pray for something that wasn't possible or available?

2--So, when we pray "*forgive us our trespasses/debts/sins*", we can pray it with the confident assurance that God has *already* forgiven us -- that (as I often say) He knows the worst we'll ever do and loves/forgives us anyway.

3--And that all we have to do is *accept* that in faith -- to know that even when we don't *feel* forgiven, we nevertheless *are* forgiven!

5. Now, I do need to acknowledge that (as we saw in the opening video) sometimes we seem to think that this phrase doesn't apply to us -- that we're basically "good" people who don't *need* the forgiveness of God in life (thank you, very much!).

A--But it occurred to me that perhaps Jesus shared this fifth petition where he did in his prayer precisely because he knew that *all people* need God's forgiveness (at the very least) for our failure to practice the *first four* petitions:

1--For example, too often in my life I say and do things that do *not* honor God (i.e., that don't "*hallow*" my heavenly "*Father's*" name); And so I need forgiveness. And if you've ever done anything that doesn't honor God, then you need it, too!

2--And at other times, I find myself doing things that *I* want (i.e., *my* will), instead of following *God's* will, & in so doing, I'm building *my* "kingdom" rather than God's. And for these, I need forgiveness (as we *all* do if we've ever done that).

3--And whenever I ignore the needs of the poor and the cries of the oppressed because "*that's not my problem since God has provided my daily bread*" ... Well, I need forgiveness for that selfish attitude, as do we *all* when we act that way.

B--So my point, of course, is that there is absolutely *none* of us who is so good or perfect that we don't *need* the grace and forgiveness of God.

C--God yearns to give it to us. But for it to really *mean* anything, not only do we have to *understand* God's willingness to *grant* it, but *appreciate* our human need to *receive* it! ⁴

--III--

6. And yet, this verse ends with the words "...AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US" -- reminding us of perhaps the most difficult aspect of forgiveness: the *necessity* of *us* forgiving *others* if we truly want to experience forgiveness *ourselves*. ⁵

A--You know, most of us are more than willing to accept God's forgiveness of *us*, but we have a much more difficult time extending forgiveness to *others*.

1--We're like the angry, hurt little boy who's mother overheard him say during his bedtime prayers, "Lord, forgive him for what he did to me today... and then forgive me for what I'm going to do to him tomorrow."

2--Like that boy, we often want revenge -- or, we at least want to feel *justified* in our grudge-holding and/or coldness towards those who we feel have wronged us.

B--And yet, if "forgiveness" is the waiving of a debt, then it means being willing to *let go* of our desire to "get even" or "hold a grudge" -- I've said before that forgiveness means "Me giving up my right to hurt you when you have hurt me."

1--OR, in the words of a child who misunderstood this part of the prayer, "Forgive us our trash pressers as we forgive those who press trash against us."

2--You know, we've all had someone else's "trash" "pressed" against us from time to time. But when we hold grudges and withhold forgiveness, the only person we hurt... is *us*, because it blocks us from experiencing God's forgiveness in *our* lives ⁶

3--And since we'll *all* experience occasional hurt and wrongs from others (whether intentional or not), the question is *NOT* "How can I avoid being hurt?" but rather "How can I appropriately deal with the hurt that I do experience?"

4--Well, God's solution is "forgiveness," which is precisely why Jesus invites us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." ⁷

C--Now, does "forgiveness" mean that we're *condoning* the bad behavior of others, or are turning a blind eye to their unrepentant sin? Not at all!

1--I've said before that biblical Forgiveness is *not* the same thing as Reconciliation: *Reconciliation* requires outward repentance (and often restitution) on the part of the *other*; whereas *Forgiveness* can be shared by us *unilaterally* (i.e., even when the offending party is *unrepentant*).

2--So, as followers of Jesus, we have a responsibility to *forgive*. But that does *not* guarantee restoration of a relationship, and neither does it mean we're condoning their continued wrongful behavior.

3--Growing up, I remember one of my own Pastors used to say, "*We don't forgive others in order to change their behavior. We forgive others in order to show that we ourselves have been forgiven." ⁸*

--IV--

7. So, as we wrap up today, I simply want to ask: ***WHO do you need to forgive today?***

A--Is it ***YOU, yourself?*** Is there something you've done (or left undone) for which you need *God's* forgiveness? ...Maybe something you've allowed to get in the way of your relationship with God? a bad habit? a lack of *good* habits?

B--OR... is there ***someone ELSE*** you need to forgive *in your heart* for the hurt you feel they've caused (whether or not your relationship with them is ever restored)?

1--...Maybe it's a relative who offended you years ago?

2--Or a spouse who's been taking you for granted?

3--Or a boss who didn't give you the raise you felt you deserved?

4--Or a pastor or church member who hurt you by what they *did* or *didn't* do or say?

C--Whoever it is you need to forgive, God is inviting you (and me) today to pray (and practice) Jesus' challenging (yet healing) words "*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*"

D--He's inviting us to open our hearts to receive and offer **Forgiveness** -- to receive *God's* forgiveness and mercy of *us*, giving us (in turn) the strength & ability to forgive *others*.⁹

8. [PRAYER]

ENDNOTES:

¹ In modern versions of the KJV, "*trespasses*" is used in Verse 14, but not in Verse 12 (where "*debt*" is used instead). However, in the earliest versions of the KJV (during the time period when the "Lord's Prayer" was being codified in English, Verse 12 was translated to contain the word "*trespasses*". Only later when it was discovered that this was probably a mistranslation was the word changed in Verse 12 to "*debts*." But by then, church tradition/custom had already codified it in Lord's Prayer English worship rituals as "*trespasses*."

² The "*Guilt Offering*" described in Leviticus 5:14-6:7 is prescribed specifically to atone for such unintentional sins, and was often referred to as the "*Trespass Offering*." Read more about this in the article "*Sacrifices and Offerings / D.3.c. 'The Reparation Offering'*", in the New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.

³ In 1 Corinthians 6:20 Paul reminds us that we are "bought with a price," implying that there is "debt" to be paid. Yet, imperfect people like us can never fully pay a debt to a perfect God -- even our best efforts fall short to make us "worthy" of God's love. God knew this, and so he sent Jesus to do for us what we could not do for ourselves -- pay the "debt" we owe because of our sin.

⁴ *"This petition... urges us to recognize our indebtedness to God, to seek God's forgiveness for whatever wrong we may have committed, and to seek God's help to do the good that honors God"* ("*The Lord's Prayer*" article in New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible).

⁵ Jesus' words in Verse 12 actually present a bit of a dilemma: on the surface they appear to imply that God's forgiveness *of us* is *conditioned upon* whether or not we forgive *others*, which seems to contradict Jesus' other sayings throughout the gospels that God's grace is given first, *enabling* our forgiveness of others (Read Matthew 20:1-16). So which comes first? human forgiveness, or divine forgiveness? I think the latter is the biblical reality (i.e., God forgives us, and the human ability to forgive is a *response* to that divine forgiveness). If so, then the words of the Lord's Prayer here in Verse 12 are merely an acknowledgement that without human forgiveness *of others*, we will have a hard time experiencing divine forgiveness *from* God. In this instance, unforgiveness functions like a wall or jamming signal that blocks us from receiving God's forgiveness -- forgiveness is there "in the background," but (like clouds covering the sun on a stormy day) it cannot be seen and or felt because it is obscured, and until we "*forgive others who trespass against us,*" we will not be able to fully *experience* or "feel" God's forgiving of "*our trespasses.*"

⁶ When we hold on to bitterness, grudges, and unforgiveness, it has one of two effects: (#1) First of all, our smoldering hurt may ooze out its venom a little at a time, poisoning our emotional, mental, and spiritual life, making us cynical about everything and unable to truly trust others -- soon we wake up and wonder who and what we've become; or (#2) our hurt can build up pressure over time, and then when we least expect it, like a volcano, it erupts in fury against someone (boss, spouse, children, friend) with emotion that surprises even us. We sometimes think (mistakenly) that "time heals all hurts." *Not so!* A physical wound that's left untreated will not heal simply by the passage of time; In the same way, hurts that are not dealt with will NOT simply "go away" over time. Only attention through the *healthy* method of forgiveness can "properly dispose of" the toxic feelings of hurt and anger caused by perceived wrongs against us.

⁷ In fact, I've heard it said that "*The greater our hurt, the greater our need to forgive.*"

⁸ Rev. Gary Parish, a United Methodist Pastor in North Georgia (now retired), when I was a member of Fayetteville First UMC (Fayetteville, GA).

⁹ It might be that we say "*But I can never forgive that person for what they did!*" And we would be correct! We can never forgive others in our *own* strength. However, if we're a Christian, then question is simply "*Would we allow the Jesus who lives within us forgive them for us?*" In other words, are we willing to allow our *inability* to forgive to meet Christ's *ability* to forgive? You see, we *can* deal with unforgiven hurts from our past by actively participating in God's forgiveness of us given through Jesus Christ.