

Forgiveness in light of the Father

Matthew 6:12

Pastor Tim Melton

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

In our world there are different kinds of pain and suffering. There is a car accident. There is disease. There are job layoffs that affect hundreds of people at a company. All of these are painful, but you could say they are impersonal “attacks”. Attacks is probably too strong of a word, but it is when a difficult situation comes against us but was not intended to be against us personally. There is something very different about the type of suffering that comes intentionally against us from another person. It wasn't accidental or mistaken identity, there was intentional, personal choice that caused the pain. Our natural response is to either avoid or retaliate. Both only increase the damage as we continue in bitterness, anger, resentment and judgment. The other option is forgiveness. It often feels weak and vulnerable, but we must believe God when he calls us to forgive. It is the choice that will set us free. Granting forgiveness to others brings forgiveness, blessing, mercy and nearness to God.

It is not letting the other person win or get away with it, it is just entrusting their justice to God instead of you. It is resting in the words of Romans 18:25: *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”*

As we look at Matthew 6:9-10, we see Jesus instructing us to set our minds aright as we begin our prayer. We are to present our prayers to God our Father. As our Father, He is our Provider and Protector. He draws us near and finds joy in the fact that we are His. We next are to remember that He is in heaven. He

sits on the throne of heaven where He sees and knows all things. He is all powerful and rules over our world. Thirdly, *“hallowed is Your name”*. Hallowed means holy, consecrated, sacred, unblemished, sanctified, pure and completely trustworthy. Hallowed is His name in scripture means hallowed is His character.

These verses give us the proper lens to look through as we pray. As we pray to our Father, Jesus instructs us to ask for forgiveness. In verse 12 we find these words, *“And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

The word “debt” in this context refers to sin. To pray these words first demands that we have a sense of our own sin. That we realize that we are the “poor in spirit” who are desperately in need of forgiveness. 1 John 1:8–10 is true of each of us: *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”* To be forgiven of sin, one must admit and take responsibility for one’s sin. All sins are first and foremost against God. Because of this, our first request for forgiveness must be directed towards God.

This verse in Matthew 6 tells us that we are to ask God to forgive us in the same way that we have forgiven others. Are we really ready to pray this type of prayer? Is this a prayer request that we really want God to answer? Christ is once again holding up the goal, His holy standard. His desire is that our forgiveness of others would be as complete as God’s forgiveness of us. He then proceeds to explain it in verse 14:

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

At first glance, these verses seem to say that if we first forgive others, then God will respond by forgiving us. That if we do what is required, then we will have “earned” God’s forgiveness. However, when we step back and look at the full counsel of scripture, we see another pattern. We never move first. God does. God draws us to himself, and we respond. God convicts us of sin, and we repent. God puts a burden in our hearts for an unbeliever, and we share our faith. God grants us a heart of compassion, and we give to those in need. God always works first to stir us up to faith and good deeds.

Scripture also reveals to us that none of us are good. None of us seek God on our own (Romans 3:11). We cannot even truly forgive others unless God has first forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). Then and only then are our hearts prepared to forgive others.

So, what is Jesus really saying? If we truly forgive others, then it is proof that we have been and will continue being forgiven by the grace that we have found in Jesus Christ. If we refuse to forgive others, especially on an ongoing basis, then it might be that we have never experienced God’s forgiveness in the first place. That our hearts have not yet been changed and our minds renewed by the amazing grace of God. That we have never really been born again. The other option is that we are in the faith but are not walking rightly with Christ. We have received the gospel, but for some reason it is not taking full effect in our lives.

Jesus gives an example of this in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, in Matthew 18:22-35:

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So, the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So, his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also, my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

This parable shows us how illogical our unforgiveness is when compared to the great forgiveness that God has granted to us. This should never be the case with those who have tasted the forgiveness of God.

Ephesians 4:32 commands us to, *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

Colossians 3:13 says, *“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

Spiritually speaking, God’s salvation and forgiveness changes us at the heart level. We came into salvation through conviction of sin, repentance, and forgiveness. We have now been made right with God, made alive in Christ, and have been given desires and affections that our heart never had access to before. Our hearts have been softened and awed by the grace that has been found in Christ. We have experienced the undeserved, lavish grace of God. A heart truly forgiven and walking rightly with God will have the needed resources to forgive others.

Responding to being sinned against with our Father by our side impacts how we will respond.

In Romans 12:17-21 the Apostle Paul writes, *“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”*

When one has been sinned against, the natural response is to seek revenge or to demand some sort of restitution from the other person. In the economy of God, it is different. Only He is fit to be the righteous judge who holds people responsible for their sinful actions. Because of this, God frees us from carrying out justice and commands us to leave it to Him. It is not that the one who has sinned goes free, it is just that we trust them to God's care and justice. This is important to understand as we seek to forgive others.

Many times, we refuse to forgive because we have been humiliated, threatened, or let down by someone, but when we dig down deep to find our reasons for refusing to forgive, we find needs that only the Father can meet. We refuse to forgive because we have been humiliated, but in the Father, we find our true identity and worth. We refuse to forgive because we want revenge, but in the Father, it is no longer necessary because He is the righteous judge who will bring justice. We refuse to forgive because it feels like the strong thing to do, but only in the Father do we find our security and the Almighty Fortress that we long for. We refuse to forgive because we feel we are right and have the right to play the role of judge, but in reality, we are gravely sinful as well. Honestly, we deserve worse. Only the Father is holy and can sit on the throne as Judge. We refuse to forgive because our hope is in ourselves to bring the desired outcome, but when our hope is in the Father, we can trust Him and His will and rest as He brings the sinful to justice.

The way for forgiveness is opened up when we walk near to the Father. Our needs are met in Him, so we are now free to forgive as He has called us.

The point can be seen in our home lives. Imagine a big brother and little sister. As long as they are alone, the big brother is a bully and the little sister has no recourse but to be bitter, afraid and hopeless. Then enters the father. With him by her side she is now free. He brings justice. He guards holiness. He protects her and punishes wrongdoing. The Father's love is so extravagant that it drowns out the mocking words of the brother. By the Father's side she is free to forgive her brother because her needs are met in her Father. That is the power of praying to our Father in regard to forgiveness.

As one walks with God the Father, he or she is freed to view suffering and being sinned against from a larger perspective. Yes, we are enabled to forgive, but we are also able to see it as a tool in God's hand. God is sovereign. He rules over all things. God uses sin and suffering in our lives to accomplish his purposes in us and in our world. ***"He works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose"*** (Romans 8:28). We have a choice to make. Do not harden your hearts. In the midst of being sinned against, do not miss the opportunity to exercise your spiritual "muscles" of forgiveness, faith, mercy and humility. Allow God to shape you as He makes you more and more like Christ.

Our responsibility is to walk near to the Father and allow him to protect our hearts. If we are filled up with Christ, we can now selflessly forgive others. Our needs are already met and secure in Christ. In this we are able to take a risk and extend a hand. It is the gospel in action. It is returning good for evil.

We have been forgiven much, so the only just response is to forgive others. With this in mind, let us draw near to the Father. As we grow to understand His holiness, we will more clearly see our sin. As we see our sin, we will confess and repent. As we receive His great forgiveness that covers our grave sin, we will be

awed by its extravagance. As our hearts are awakened by being forgiven, we will be empowered to give the same to others who sin against us.

Discussion questions:

- 1) What about this lesson did you find most interesting or meaningful?
- 2) Why do you think people choose not to forgive others?
- 3) What are the main lessons that we can learn from the parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:22-35?
- 4) Does God's forgiveness of our sin depend on if we have forgiven the sins of others? Can you support your ideas from different truths of scripture?
- 5) Why should a Christian not seek revenge towards one who has sinned against them?
- 6) How does praying to the Father help us gain proper perspective when thinking about forgiveness?
- 7) What do you need to remember from this lesson?
- 8) What actions do you need to take because of this?