Forgive Us Our Trespasses
Matthew 6:12-6:12          April 15, 2012
A Study of the Lord’s Prayer: Lesson # 7

"In this manner, therefore, 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 this day our daily bread. (12) And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us.”

The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther, The Fifth Petition:
Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

Today we examine the Lord’s second great instruction how we ought to pray concerning ourselves. This petition is an explicit prayer for three things:
1. Recognizing our sinfulness
2. Receiving Forgiveness, “forgive us our debts,” and
3. Reforming our heart with a forgiving spirit, “as we forgive our debtors.”

Of all the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer, the matter of forgiveness is of such importance that it is the only one of which our Lord later took the time to reemphasize and develop in depth. Just a few verses later in Matthew 6:14 –15 Jesus says, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (NKJV)

At least superficially men and women don’t seem to worry much about their sins. But deep down it is the deepest human need. It is because God has created us to be in relationship with Him, and that includes living in accordance to the moral compass that He, God, has written on the hearts of all people.

We are living at a time when the intellectual elite at our universities, in the media, and many in politics, are trying to make us believe that there is no god, and therefore, there is no sin, and therefore you are free to do whatever feels good to you. That is not so.

A cartoon in the newspaper once pictured a psychologist listening to a patient; “Mr. Smith,” he says, “I think I can explain your feelings of guilt. You’re guilty!”

If only modern psychology would do that, but most modern psychology seeks to help a person dismiss his feeling of guilt. They have tried to reeducate the last two generations of Americans that morality is all a matter of the situation. They call it situation ethics.

When we sin and live outside of God’s moral law, we build up a debt of moral guilt. We can deny it, we can try to re-educate ourselves and say there isn’t such a thing as guilt, and some may even try to be mean to themselves as a way of self-atonement for that guilt, but only Christianity helps man to be delivered from his guilt.

So the first thing we need to look at as we learn how to pray this model for prayer is that we:

I. **RECOGNIZE OUR SINFULNESS**

There are three basic words in the Bible that describe our need for forgiveness. These are words that describe wrongdoing.

1. **Hamartia = missing the mark.** This is the word used in Romans 3:23 where Paul says that all people have sinned.

   What is the mark we are trying to hit? The mark of perfection, 100%, the holiness of God Himself. Therefore, any action, attitude, or intention, that is not in conformity with the perfect holiness of God is sin. It misses the mark. Maybe you can see why sin is such a serious problem!

2. **Paraptoma = Trespass**

   This word carries with it the idea of stepping over a boundary on to someone else’s property, or other property that is marked “NO TRESPASSING.” For us today, we understand
that this is usually an intentional action, unless we didn’t see the sign. But in the Bible days this was generally considered an unintentional action.

3. Parabasis = Transgression
   This word carries the idea of being an intentional stepping over the boundaries that are clearly marked. You know it is not the right thing to do, but you do it anyway.

   What is the mark, what is the boundary? Again, we need to repeat, that sin, or trespass, or transgression, is **any violation of God’s moral imperative in attitude, action, or intent**.

   We call the **Ten Commandments** the moral law, because they lay down for us God’s expectations for us in living in harmony with each other and with God. But these 10 commandments are not the minimum, and they are not 10 suggestions! They lay out the basis of God’s Law. Jesus expanded on it, and gave the finer interpretations of it in His Sermon on the Mount. Also Paul writes more clearly defined explanations of it in his letters.

   Our intent today is not to go into detail about the law, but about forgiveness. So when we pray the Lord’s Prayer as a model prayer, we recognize it as:

II. A PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

   When we become aware of the gravity of our moral guilt and our need for forgiveness, then we can pray for forgiveness. We do not have to pray the Lord’s Prayer in order to receive forgiveness of our sins, but we must make some prayer asking for forgiveness. This is forgiveness:

1. At the Moment of Salvation.
   Whenever it was that you first realized your sinfulness, and prayed for forgiveness, you received remission of all your sins at that moment, and began to experience the freedom of salvation.

   Many people presume that because when we are saved we have no further need to ask for forgiveness or confession of sin. This of course, is not the case. 1 John 1:8-9 tell us, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (NKJV) Christian’s can and do still sin and thus stand in need of daily confession and forgiveness. It is because we still have our old sin nature that we still sin every day. Therefore, we need to ask for forgiveness from sins:

2. Every Day Thereafter
   When we acknowledge our sinfulness we echo the words of David, recorded in Psalm 51 (verses 2, 10, 17) “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin…. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me…. (17) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise.” (NKJV)

   It needs to be remembered that this is a “family prayer,” it does not deal with the sins of unbelievers.

   It does not deal with our standing before God, which was established at salvation, and which can never be affected; it concerns the sins of the children of God, which hamper our fellowship with the Father.

   No non-Christian ever receives forgiveness from God on the basis of claiming to forgive someone else. Although we receive forgiveness when we were saved we must be cleansed daily from sin. We will never be able to fully enjoy cleansing in our Christian walk unless we are ready to extend it freely to those who offend us.

III. PRAYER FOR AN ATTITUDE OF FORGIVENESS

   There are three basic attitudes associated with the extending of forgiveness

1. I Can’t
   He did not tell the disciples that they could pray, “Lord, forgive me my trespasses and I **will try** to forgive those who have wronged me.” He told them that when they had forgiven others they could then claim their own forgiveness.

   Sometimes we excuse our lack of forgiveness on the grounds that the one who has wronged us does not deserve our forgiveness. But the truth is; No one has ever wronged you as you have wronged God.

   In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus told the parable of Unforgiving Servant to illustrate this point.
“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. (24) But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. (26) The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ (27) Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.  (28) ‘But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’’ (29) So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ (30) And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. (31) Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. (32) Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ (34) And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. (35) “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (NKJV)

The point is that we are to marvel at how the first servant could be so unforgiving to his fellow servant’s debt. After being let off for so much how could he be so mean and cruel.

Ray Stedman tells the story of one man’s explanation for his lack of forgiveness. He said, “A man once said to me, ‘I know I’m a Christian, but someone once did an awful thing to me – something I just can’t forget or forgive.’ I replied, ‘Are you sure you can’t forgive him?’ He maintained that he had really tried to forgive this man, but was unable to do so. As we continued talking, I said, ‘I know, I have found that we often use the word can’t what we really mean is won’t. Is it possible that what you are saying is not, ‘I can’t forgive him,’ but ‘I won’t forgive him?’ If it is really true that you cannot forgive this man, then it indicates that you yourself have never been forgiven and you are only kidding yourself about being a Christian.’ This shook him a bit. He thought it through and then, with a rather sheepish grin, he said, ‘I guess you’re right. I guess I won’t.’ It wasn’t long before he came to me and reported with joy that he had finally forgiven the man who had injured him.” [Ray Stedman. Talking With My Father. ( Grand Rapids; Discovery House, 1997) p. 73

When God’s grace comes into our heart it makes us forgiving. We demonstrate whether we have been forgiven by whether or not we will forgive. The bottom line is, if you refuse to forgive, there can be only one reason, that is that I have never received the grace of Christ. I am unforgiven.

2. I won’t

When John Wesley served as a missionary to the American colonies, he had a difficult time with General James Oglethorpe. The general was known for his pride and harshness. One time Oglethorpe declared, “I never forgive.” Wesley replied, “Then, Sir, I hope you never sin.” [R. Kent Hughes. Abba Father: The Lord’s Pattern for Prayer. (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1991) p. 79]

William Barclay paraphrases the petition to read, “Forgive us our sins in proportion as we forgive those who have sinned against us.” Everett Fullam paraphrases makes it even more striking, “Father forgive my sins only to the extent I am willing to forgive those who have sinned against me.” [As quoted in J. Mark Copeland. After This Manner Pray. (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Pub., 1992.) p. 157]

When we refuse to forgive this part of the Lord’s prayer becomes a curse. As Kent Hughes spells out in his study on the Lord’s Prayer. “What we are really praying may actually sound something like this; ‘I beseech you, Lord, deal with me as I deal with my neighbor. He has been ungrateful to me (though not a one hundredth as ungrateful as I have been with you), yet I cannot overlook his ingratitude. Deal with me, Lord, as I do him.” (Hughes p. 80)

3. I am willing

Corrie Ten Boom shares about her experience in extending forgiveness in her book, “The Hiding Place.” She wrote, “It was a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there- the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, the pain on my sister’s face. He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing, “How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,’ he said, ‘To think that, as you say, He has was washed my sins away!” His
hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.”

Conclusion:
This short petition of the Lord’s Prayer that we can probably spit out in about 2.5 seconds is really a call for us to look over our day and pray a prayer of forgiveness to anyone and everyone that we hurt, and to the Lord.

I don’t know about you, but for me this usually takes a few minutes.