

# Forgiveness • Matthew 6:12, 14-15

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. *Cod Liver Oil*

1. Growing up in the Midwest, the winters were often brutal.
2. Being a child, I thought the snow was great. We built forts, had snowball fights, went skating and sledding.
3. My parents hated the winters because of the snow.
  - a. for them snow was a nuisance; it made the roads dangerous ,
  - b. it damaged the house and yard,
  - c. the cold tore up the streets and there was all that shoveling they had to do; this was a few years before snow-throwers.
4. Of course, snow-shoveling was another reason why as a kid I dug the winters; I got 50 cents for every driveway I cleared!
5. Winters were usually a time of colds and flu; and one year they hit our family especially hard.
6. So my mother decided to apply one of the remedies from her days as youngster – cod liver oil!
7. Every night before going to bed, I had to take a tablespoon – YUCK!!!!

### B. *Medicine*

1. Children's medicine has come a long way in the last 40 years; some of it now tastes like candy, but not all – some still tastes pretty nasty.
2. Several years ago I saw a bottle of cherry flavored cod-liver oil at the health food store and bought it.
  - a. it tasted just like, you guessed it – cherry flavored cod liver oil;
  - b. there was the unmistakable taste of cherry, and the inescapable flavor of fish-guts!
3. Some medicine will never be masked by a sweet coating.
4. It's a bitter pill, but it's necessary to take it if we're going to recover.
5. And so it is with Jesus's teaching about forgiveness.

### C. *First Sunday*

1. The first Sunday of each month, besides sharing Communion, is also dedicated to the subject of prayer as we focus on prayer this year as a church.
2. One aspect of prayer we're going to zoom in on today is Jesus's teaching on the role and place of forgiveness in prayer.

## II. TEXT

### A. *Forgive Me • Matthew 6:12a*

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

1. This verse comes in the context of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is

correcting so many of the religious errors that have been in place in among the people of God at that time.

2. There were a lot of goofy ideas about how to pray and Jesus was showing them the right way.
3. In v. 9 he began by saying – “Pray like this . . . “ then went on to show the kind of prayer God wants.
4. Nestled in the very center of how we’re to pray, is this petition, this request –

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

5. Jesus refers to sin here, not by its usual word, which means to miss the mark, but a word used more often in the realm of accounting & finance – something owed, a debt.
6. And forgiveness means to discharge or send away the debt, to account it as paid.
7. Our sin, our moral failure, whatever it’s been and however it’s been manifest, has incurred a debt before God.
  - a. when a criminal commits a crime, we say he’s incurred a debt to society.
  - b. what we mean is society, civilization only works when the people in it abide by the rules, the laws that govern them.
  - c. when someone breaks the law, it creates disorder that will lead sooner or later to someone’s hurt and pain.
  - d. laws are needed to ensure all may live safely.
  - e. so when someone breaks the law, they inevitably endanger others; there is no such thing as victimless crime.
  - f. so the law not only establishes the rules by which we live, it pronounces the consequences for when it’s broken.
  - g. these consequences are necessary to hinder those who think about breaking the law.
  - h. when the law is broken, those consequences MUST follow so others will see and take warning about the seriousness of breaking the law.
  - i. so the criminal owes a debt to society – a debt placed on him by the law.
8. Just as there are laws that govern human society, there are even higher laws that govern creation.
  - a. physical laws like gravity and electromagnetism govern the physical universe.
    - 1) we know what happens if someone tries to break the physical laws, they usually suffer an immediate consequence.
    - 2) there have been many who tried to defy the law of gravity to their own hurt.
  - b. alongside the physical laws God established to govern Creation, He also established moral and spiritual laws based on His own character and nature.
  - c. breaking these laws incurs a debt just like breaking any other law.
9. God’s law comes from His perfection as a Holy, Righteous, and Loving Father.
  - a. as Creator, He is the Author and so Authority Who possess the right to set the rules.
  - b. because He is perfect in righteousness, the rules are totally right & just!
  - c. because He is perfect in love, the rules provide the guide for experiencing

- the very best life possible.
- d. that means any deviation from the law, any breaking of the rules God has set is a movement away from the best..
  - e. indeed, we call breaking the law of God, sin; and in the end sin always produces pain, sorrow and death!
10. Now- here's the deal; all of us have sinned. All of us have defied and broken God's law.
  11. The entire human race fell in Adam and ratifies that original choice in our individual daily choices. We were there in Adam and Adam is present in us.
  12. We are all cosmic criminals who owe a debt, not to human society with its man-made laws, but to God and His holy law.
  13. So what is this debt? What is the payment or punishment worthy of our moral crimes?
  14. This is where many people make a colossal mistake.
    - a. they see sin as no big deal!
    - b. they've heard that God is loving and forgiving and that we're all sinners and so conclude that God has just sort of made forgiveness something easily obtained.
    - c. they're like the cynical critic of Christianity who said, "I love to sin. God loves to forgive – it's a wonderful combination!"
  15. Look at the words again – "Forgive us our debts." What is that debt we ask God to forgive, to discharge, to send away. And how does He?
  16. In our courts, we recognize the principle of justice demands that the punishment fit the crime.
    - a. shop-lifting ought to carry a lesser penalty than breaking & entering.
    - b. murder ought to lead to a more severe punishment than failing to live up to the terms of a contract. The punishment must fit the crime.
  17. One of the most heinous crimes in our legal system is that of being a traitor, of selling state secrets to a foreign power.
    - a. this is considered so heinous because such acts can imperil the lives of literally millions and tens of millions of people.
    - b. even among the most corrupt of societies, loyalty to ones own people is understood as a given.
    - c. to turn traitor is to violate one of the bedrock virtues of all societies.
  18. Because being a traitor is considered such a heinous crime, the unanimous penalty for selling out one's country is death. Even many of those who are against capital punishment per se allow it in the conviction of a traitor.
  19. It just makes sense that the worst crimes would receive the ultimate penalty. This is justice!
  20. So, what is the highest crime, not among nations, but in Creation?
  21. Does it not make sense that the highest crime would be the breaking of the highest, the greatest command?
    - a. and what is the greatest command of all?
    - b. we find it in Matthew 22

**37**Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." **38**This is the first and great commandment. **39**And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' **40**On these two

**commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”**

22. We've all broken this, haven't we? We're all guilty of the highest crime.
23. We are worse than traitors to the United States – we are cosmic traitors for we have defied the law of God.
24. We've violated both the greatest and second greatest commands; we've sold out the Kingdom of God and sided with the rebellious kingdom of satan.
25. Our debt friends – the penalty for our selling out is death!
26. But here's the amazing thing! God still loves us despite our treason!
  - a. and He doesn't want that we should die!
  - b. His righteousness demands our cosmic treason be punished,
  - c. but His love yearns for US!
  - d. what's to be done? If only there were some way our sin, our treason could be removed from us!
  - e. then it could be punished, and we could be restored to God's original plan for us, which was eternal union with Him!
27. This is what the Gospel is all about.
  - a. God became man in the person of Jesus Christ and went to the cross to pay our debt.
  - b. by believing in Him, the penalty of our sin was place on Him, and the righteousness which marked Him is placed on us!
  - c. as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21

**[The Father] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

28. As Jesus was teaching His followers how to pray, He included this petition – “And forgive us our debts.”
  - a. how often ought we pray this?
  - b. is this something we pray just once, when we first come to Christ.
  - c. well, the answer to that is easily found by looking at the previous verse – 11

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

- d. how often ought the follower of Christ pray this? Daily!
29. A short time ago we did a study on this entire prayer and realized that what's emphasized here, the main theme of the whole prayer is utter dependence on God, moment by moment living in His presence and leaning on Him.
30. That is no less true as it relates to forgiveness.
31. There's an unfortunate teaching going round some circles in the church known as “perfect redemption.”
  - a. it's a gross distortion of the reality of forgiveness.
  - b. it's the idea that once we come to faith in Christ, we need never ask to be forgiven again.
  - c. this teaching, advocated by teachers like Bob George, is that since Christ's redemption is perfect, the moment we are born again we enter into a state of forgiveness, and so to ask for it is really a denial of the sufficiency of Christ's perfect work.
  - d. this is a gross distortion of what the Bible teaches.
32. Yes, it's true, Christ redemption is perfect. What that means is that there is

- nothing we can do to add to it!
- a. we stand before God on the basis of what Jesus has done, not what we do.
  - b. but that in no way dispenses with the need to continually appropriate and lay hold of the forgiveness He makes available to us.
  - c. we see this amply illustrated at the last supper when Jesus washed the disciples feet.
    - 1) he came to Peter last of all and Peter refused to allow the Lord to wash his feet
    - 2) Jesus said, “Peter, if I do not wash your feet, then you can have nothing to do with me.”
    - 3) Peter then said, “Well, in that case, don’t stop at my feet; give me a bath!”
    - 4) Jesus replied with these enlightening words, “You don’t need a bath; you are already clean because I chose you – all you need is for your feet to be cleansed.”
  - d. the lesson was this – Peter was God’s man; Peter already stood in the place of acceptance with God because of His faith in Christ.
  - e. but Peter was God’s man in a fallen world and as he walked through this world, his feet got dirty.
  - f. in order to maintain his fellowship, his walk with God, all he needed was to have the muck and mire that had attached itself to his feet removed.
33. Listen – we are the Children of God! Our faith in Christ has made us his sons and daughters.
- a. that is our relationship with Him – and that relationship does not change!
  - b. what does change is our fellowship, the level and sense of our intimacy with Him.
  - c. and what affects that fellowship, what limits and hinders it is sin.
  - d. as we walk through this fallen world, it’s inevitable that some of the moral pollution that marks this age is going to splash on us and in some way influence us.
  - e. Jesus knows this, He experienced it first hand in His incarnation – though He never yielded to it.
  - f. and that’s why He instructed His followers here in Matthew 6:12 to make the request for forgiveness a regular part of their prayers.
34. Do you ask the Lord to forgive you for your debts, to send away your moral failure?
- a. notice carefully the words here –
  - b. “Forgive us our debts” not debt, but debts!
  - c. sin isn’t general – it’s specific sins!
    - 1) Lord forgive me for lying to Bill yesterday.
    - 2) Jesus, wow, my eyes were really wayward this morning!
    - 3) God, those juicy tidbits of gossip I doled out at lunch break yesterday – that was so wrong, forgive me.
    - 4) Father, my attitude toward my parents has been really rotten. Instead of honoring them as You command, I’ve been totally disrespecting them – forgive and change me.
  - d. this is what it means to ask God to forgive our sins and discharge our debts.

## **B. As I Forgive • v. 12b**

1. What Jesus taught on forgiveness doesn't end here though.
2. There is another aspect to forgiveness which follows that for makes the pill of forgiveness bitter medicine to swallow –

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

3. Everything I've just said about forgiveness is contingent on what Jesus says in the last half of v. 12.
4. Our being forgiven for our sins is intimately linked to our forgiving others of their offenses against us!
5. Jesus knew this was a radical idea and one that people would struggle with, so He immediately clarified it after closing out the prayer; look at verse 14 . . .

**14“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

6. This wasn't the only time Jesus taught this; it was a recurring theme throughout His ministry.
7. Our being forgiven by God is directly related to our forgiving those who have hurt and offended us.
8. It's not that one precedes or is conditioned by the other; Jesus means His followers to understand that one of the evidences we're in genuine fellowship with God is that we are forgiving of others!
9. God's forgiveness of us WILL NECESSARILY overflow in a heart that forgives! (Again)
10. This truth is so crucial, Jesus told a story about it. We find it in Matthew 18.
  - a. He'd been teaching on the importance of unity among His people.
  - b. love is the premier sign that marks His own and the Community of the Redeemed,
  - c. so Jesus had just taught them what to do when offenses arose among them.
  - d. He went so far as to say when someone refused to forgive or to seek reconciliation, then that one was to be ousted from the Church!
  - e. Peter, thinking he was grasping the priority Jesus was placing on forgiveness ventured a question. V. 21 -

**21Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”**

- f. Peter really thought he was being gracious,
  - 1) you see, the Pharisees of the day taught that you were obligated to forgive someone twice.
  - 2) if you were especially magnanimous, you forgave 3 times – but that was it
  - 3) Peter new that 7 is the sacred number of perfection and so really stretched himself and threw this out to Jesus, thinking Jesus would smile and Say, “Atta' boy Pete!”
  - 4) but Jesus showed him and the rest of the disciples the forgiveness He was talking about was not at all the forgiveness they'd been taught.

**22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

- g. 7 is the number of completion and perfection; 70 times 7 means you’ve stopped counting!
- h. and that’s exactly the point Jesus has about forgiveness.
  - 1) the forgiveness we’re to have is something we walk in.
  - 2) it is not something we count up or figure out.
  - 3) it is not something we measure out according to specific offenses
  - 4) forgiveness is to be our posture, our disposition, our lifestyle.
  - 5) we do not calculate forgiveness, doling it out one packet at a time.
  - 6) we live forgiveness – graciousness and mercy are realities live by.
- i. in 1 Cor. 13, one of the marks of love is that it keeps no record of wrongs.
  - 1) this is another way of saying love forgives without measure.
  - 2) and Jesus says if we’ve received such love and forgiveness from God, the evidence will be love and forgiveness toward others.

**23** Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. **24** And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

- j. this was a vast fortune; billions of dollars in today’s currency!

**25** 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.

- k. a slave cost 30 shekels, so even in selling his entire family the debt would never be paid!

**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.

- l. Note that, it’s crucial to the story; the servant’s debt was discharged.
- l. the same terms are used here that Jesus used in teaching His followers how to pray.

**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!’

- m. a hundred denarii was a mere pittance, something the man would be easily able to payoff in a few weeks at most.

**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** So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. **32** Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. **33** 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.

- n. which of course he would never be able to pay.
- o. Jesus then ends the story with these solemn and ominous words -

**35“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”**

11. Don't miss the point of this story – the debt you and I owe to God makes the debt anyone owes us so small, so infinitesimal, that if there's any hint of unforgiveness in us, it's a sign we've not grasped, or have lost sight of just how terrible our sin is and how wonderful God's forgiveness is.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. *Perspective***

1. In the story Jesus told, the other servants who went to the master and reported the unforgiving servant's behavior were shocked by his lack of mercy.
2. They knew that one who'd been forgiven so great a debt ought to have been forgiving.
3. His master's mercy ought to have made him merciful.
4. Grace received must turn into graciousness.
5. If you find it difficult to forgive, if you're critical and given to fault-finding, heed Jesus's words here.
6. A critical, unforgiving spirit is distant from God.
7. The one who is intimate with the Lord shows mercy and grace.

#### **B. *Hurt & Forgiveness***

1. End with this: Most here this morning will see what Jesus says here this morning and agree that it is the right thing, but many will ask, “How? How do I forgive when I hurt so much?”
2. Some will say, “I thought I had forgiven, but I still hurt, so does that mean I haven't forgiven?”
3. 3. Don't confuse your feelings of hurt with forgiveness.
4. Forgiveness means to discharge the debt the person who offended or hurt you, owes you.
  - a. in other words, you let go the right to exact revenge or make them pay.
  - b. and you treat them in a manner that is not tied to that offense and hurt.
5. You may still feel hurt, but that hurt does not affect the way you speak to or act toward them.
6. What do you do with your hurt?
  - a. when I was a child and fell down, I went to my mom and she fixed my boo-boo's
  - b. when you're hurt today – Go to Papa.