

The Lord's Prayer Session 4:

"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us"

Introduction

Why does revenge seem more appealing than forgiveness? What happens if we pursue revenge? (Anyone watched *The Godfather*?)

Now, what about forgiveness? "To forgive is...." What? *We will look at some possibilities.*

People sometimes accuse Christians of having a hang-up about guilt and creating guilty feelings. The general confession of the old Book of Common Prayer talks about us having "left undone those things we ought to have done and done those things we ought not to have done"; it's not just for things we've done that we can feel guilty.

- What's the difference between real guilt and imagined guilt? How long can guilt last without forgiveness?

There are variations in the wording of the Lord's prayer. The NIV, as most other modern translations, has **in Matthew 6:12** "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors", but **Luke 11:4** says "And forgive us our sins..." The Book of Common Prayer has "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us" (the 'traditional' version).

- What in your mind is the difference between a 'debt', a 'trespass' and a 'sin'? Does it matter? Is this just a shade of meaning? Do you think the difference affects how we pray?

God forgives us

Romans 3:23 declares that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".

Read **Psalm 51:1–2; Ephesians 2:1–3; Romans 7:14, 23; Colossians 1:21; 2:13–14**

- What images are being used of sin here? What *according to the image* would have to happen for sin to be neutralised? (Note that these passages link up with the studies we did before Easter on the cross.)

Read **Romans 6:23** and **Ephesians 2:1–3** (again)

- What is the result of sin? What do all these images say about the relationship between us and God?

Read **Mark 10:45**. Why does Jesus say he came? What image of sin does he use here? How does it help us understand what God's forgiveness means?

Read **2 Corinthians 5:21**. How does Paul say that God dealt with our sins?

There are many great passages on forgiveness in the New Testament. We'll read on in Ephesians 2: **Ephesians 2:1–10**. Note that "made us alive in Christ" in verse 5 is equivalent to being forgiven.

- What was our state when God forgave us?
- How do we receive God's forgiveness?

- Can we ever earn it?
- What does verse 10 say about the relationship of our salvation to what we do?

We forgive others

Jesus taught a lot about forgiveness (and forgave sins; the best-known occasion being when he forgave the paralysed man before healing him, see Mark 2:1–12). One occasion he taught on forgiveness was when he visited a Pharisee’s house and a “woman who lived a sinful life” came in and anointed him. Read **Luke 7:39–37**.

- What does Jesus say should be the result of forgiveness? How did the woman demonstrate that she had been forgiven?

Read **Matthew 18:21–35**

- Why does Jesus tell this story?
- How could the servant have paid the king back?
- On what basis was the servant let off his debt? How would you have felt in his place?
- What do the first servant’s subsequent actions show about his attitude to the forgiveness he had received?
- How does the king get to find out about this? What does this suggest about how others judge us for our forgiveness or lack of it?
- If you’d asked the king why he threw the first servant in prison, what do you think he would have said?
- So what are we to conclude about forgiveness from this parable?

So back to **Matthew 6:12** “And forgive us our debts/sins/trespasses, as we also have forgiven our debtors”. Is this phrase a request to God to be merciful to us on the same basis as we have been merciful to others? If not, what does it mean?

Read Jesus’ expansion of the phrase in **Matthew 6:14–15**. Why do you think Jesus felt the need to repeat this? What would we be saying about our own forgiveness if we failed to forgive others?

How should this work out in practice? Read **Ephesians 4:31–32**

In practice:

- Can I forgive someone for something they did to someone else? Why or why not?
- If someone commits a crime against me and I forgive them, does that mean that they shouldn’t be punished for what they have done?
- What happens if we forgive someone but they won’t accept it and refuse to be reconciled?
- Can we offer forgiveness to other people and if so, how?

To think about

- Do we truly believe God can forgive all our sins in Jesus?
- Do we regularly ask forgiveness and thank God for his forgiveness?
- Do we forgive others who have hurt us?
- Are we reconcilers?