

Forgive and Be Forgiven

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into the importance of forgiveness and confession of sins in the context of the Lord's Prayer. It emphasizes the need for genuine forgiveness towards others as a reflection of God's forgiveness towards us. The speaker highlights the impact of holding grudges on relationships with others and with God, stressing the need to continually seek forgiveness and extend forgiveness to maintain a healthy spiritual life.

Scripture: Luke 11:1, 1 John 1:8, Matthew 6:14, Matthew 18:21, Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:32, Proverbs 19:11, James 5:16

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Confession of Sins"

Description

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Transcript

All right, let's turn to the Word, and we've been studying the Gospel according to Luke, and we're in chapter 11, Luke chapter 11, and we, it happens to be the Lord's Prayer, what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, or the Lord's, or the Model Prayer. So let's read Luke 11, verses 1 through 4, and we're in verse 4 this morning. Luke 11, verse 1, Now it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, that one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

And so he said to them, When you pray, say, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

So we're in verse 4, and this is a very difficult verse to understand and to interpret, and so please stay alert, because there are details that we need to figure out as we go through the verse. As I've been studying these verses again, I've been amazed at how glibly people pray these words without having a clue as to what they are saying, without understanding even the most basic implications of those words. And so I do pray that the Lord would help us this morning, that we might be able to understand what it is that the Lord Jesus is trying to convey in these words.

And so there are two parts of the, and obviously I'm just going to deal with the first half of the verse. The first part, forgive us our sins, and then I'm going to deal with the second part, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. So the first part deals with asking for forgiveness of sins, or what we commonly call the confession of sins.

And obviously we, our confession is to God, it's not to a man, He alone is the one who is able to forgive. And so the problem here is, what do we mean by this? And again, we can so easily just pray and say, Lord, forgive me for my sins. Now, remember, sorry, I needed to start at the beginning.

This is not a prayer for those who are not born again. Remember that the prayer begins, Our Father. So if God is your Father, then this applies to you.

If God is not your Father, then this verse does not apply, or none of those verses apply to you. If God is not your Father, then you need to be born again. Your sins, your past sins, need to be washed away by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse is not dealing with my past life. That needs to be dealt with in the born-again experience, needs to be dealt with in the cross. And this is dealing with ongoing sins of those who are already born again.

The ongoing sins of those already born again. Now, we'll see in 1 John, he says that if we say we don't sin, well, then we lie. The fact is that we all continue to sin, even though we are born again.

And in fact, the article, there's an article which you should have received or will receive this morning, which deals with that process of being born again, and God dealing with our past sins. But as we continue to live our life, we continue to sin. Hopefully we're sinning less and less as we continue, as we grow in grace, as we grow in what we call sanctification.

But the fact is that we do sin, and we will continue to sin until the day we are transformed into the image of Christ. The problem is now, how do I deal with those sins? What do I do with them? The one option is just to ignore them. And that's what many Christians do.

They say, well, I'm saved. I'm born again. I'm going to heaven.

And so it doesn't matter. So they live blindly. They continue to sin.

They don't repent. They don't confess those sins. They don't change anything.

And that's a very, very dangerous place to be in. I think many Christians are in the sort of middle group who pray this prayer. They come to the end of the day or the end of the week or whenever it is, and they say, well, Father, forgive me for my sins.

Except that it doesn't quite work that way. You know, it's fascinating to watch how people apologize to other people. I'm sorry if you misunderstood me.

That's not an apology. It's putting the guilt on you for my bad communication. It's not taking responsibility.

You see, here's the heart of this issue of confession and of asking for forgiveness, is accepting responsibility. So when I say, I'm sorry you misunderstood me, I'm not accepting responsibility. I'm putting the guilt on you.

Or the other thing is, forgive me if I did something wrong. But you know you did something wrong. You did something particular, specific wrong, whether this is to God or whether this is with your brother or sister.

And so there's a need to take responsibility again. And this is the problem with this verse, is that we come to the end of the day, we say, well, Lord, just forgive me for my sins today, without accepting responsibility for my actions during that day. And the problem with that, and I accept that God can and does forgive when we ask for general forgiveness, but the problem with that is that we don't learn.

Part of the process of confessing our sin is learning from our mistakes. If we don't take responsibility and we don't go through our day, and in fact it doesn't need to be, it really should be more than once a day. And for some Christians it's only once a month as we come to the Lord's table, unfortunately.

It needs to be all the time during the day. There needs to be a constant awareness. No, I did the wrong thing.

I didn't do the right thing. I thought the wrong thought. And there needs to be an instant call upon the Lord for forgiveness.

Lord, sorry, I did the wrong thing there. I reacted in the wrong way. And there needs to be acceptance of responsibility and confession before God.

And He forgives us. He is gracious, and He is kind, and He is loving, and He forgives. But in that process, we're also learning that we can't keep doing the same thing over and over and over.

When we don't look at ourselves objectively, and we don't look at the things that we have done wrong, whether that's in our relationship with someone else or in our relationship with God, and we just stumble along, and we repeat the same thing over and over and over, there's no growth. There's no learning. Any skill that you learn—and I'm not suggesting that our faith is a skill—but any skill that we learn, you have to learn by your mistakes.

And so you do something, and it doesn't work out. And you say, oh, I made a mistake there. I did it wrong.

And then let me try and not repeat that mistake the next time. So let me try again. I do the thing again.

And maybe I repeat the mistake again. Maybe I don't. Maybe I make another mistake.

But I learn. And as time goes on, we learn to get better at whatever it is that we're doing. And the same is true of our Christian faith.

If we constantly are looking at what we're doing, and we recognize our failure—and I'm going to speak about that word mistake in a moment— but if we recognize our failure, we recognize our sin, and we confess that to the Lord, well then we're not just dealing with the problem of what we just did, but we're dealing with a lifestyle. We're dealing with a habit which is formed, and we're facing the problem head on, and hopefully learning from that, and not repeating the same problem. The saddest thing is to watch Christians live their lives year after year after year, making the same mistakes, doing the same stupid stuff over and over and over and over, as the Scripture says, ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth.

That's a sad place to be. You know, even animals learn by their mistakes, and eventually—it doesn't matter how stupid the animal is—eventually figures out, no, this doesn't work. I need to stop doing this.

I need to do something else. And yet somehow we who are far superior to animals sometimes just don't learn. And so as we come to Him and we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and He forgives us.

So let's look at that verse in 1 John 1, verse 8, and I'm going to go through 8, 9, and 10 very quickly. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. This may not be a surprise to you, but it never ceases to surprise me, the number of Christians who feel that they don't sin a lot.

Every now and then I come across someone, they say, well, you know, I don't know what to confess because I don't sin. I mean, in what world are you living? Of course there is that famous saying is that I don't have to ask for forgiveness because I don't make many mistakes. Well, that's the height of arrogance.

And here's the problem. They're not mistakes. There's a difference between a mistake and a sin.

If you add two plus two and you get five, you've made a mistake. But if you think the wrong thought, it's not a mistake, it's sin. There's a difference between sin and mistakes.

And we all sin. And if we say we do not sin, we deceive ourselves. I've spoken about that so many times because this is the worst form of deception.

There's so much deception going on in the world today, in business and in politics and in all kinds of areas. People are cheating and deceiving and lying. But the worst form of deceit is when you deceive yourself.

When you try and put one over on yourself, when you do a con job, whatever language you want to use on yourself. It's one thing for somebody else to deceive you. And it's another thing for you to deceive someone else.

But to deceive yourself is the height of foolishness. And when we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. But here's the flip side of the coin.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The word confess there means to agree with God's testimony. When God says that all have sinned, I need to agree with that.

When God says that I sinned, I need to agree with that. And so there's a need for us to confess. When we confess, we're taking responsibility.

And in that process, we're obviously asking God to forgive us. And so it's absolutely vital that in our prayer life, on a regular basis, we ask for forgiveness. We confess our sins.

And the blood of Jesus cleanses us. That's the wonderful thing. He is just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

And then verse 10 says, if we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. Remember that John is not writing to unbelievers. He's writing to Christians.

He's saying, my little children. So he's writing to Christians and he's saying, if we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. So if we then go back to Luke chapter 11, and forgive us our sins.

I forgot to look it up, but in the 60s there was a movie, I think it was called Love Story. Now I know very few were around at that time. But a famous line in this movie was, love means never having to say you're sorry.

Love means never having to say you're sorry. Now that's absolute nonsense. That's, you know, it's amazing how people think these things up and, you know, it ends up in a movie or somewhere and it becomes part of popular culture, and it actually finds its way into the church.

So that there are Christians who believe that, you know, that I don't have to say I'm sorry. I don't have to say I'm sorry to those that I live with in my family. I don't have to say sorry to anyone else in the world.

I don't have to say sorry to God. No, if we, Father forgive us. Forgive us.

And He is gracious, and He is kind, and He forgives. And so I want us to examine how we keep our accounts with God. We speak about keeping a short account.

Some people keep long accounts. What I mean by that is that their debts add up, and add up, and add up, and add up. And then somewhere along the line they get overwhelmed by their debt, and I'm not meaning their financial debt, their debt to God, because you'll see that He uses the word debt and sin, exchanging, exchanges those two words.

For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. So our debts build up, and then eventually we're either overwhelmed by them or we eventually deal with them. No, we need to keep a short account.

So when we sin, when we know there's something between us and God, let's deal with it. Let's get it out of the way. And as we get it, get that out of the way, it clears the relationship.

You see, here's the problem. Sin always clouds relationships, whether they're human relationships or our relationships with God. And if there is, if there is sin, the prophet in the Old Testament says that the ear of the Lord is not heavy that he cannot hear, and his arm is not weak that he cannot save.

But your sins have made a separation between you and God. And so sin gets between us and God, sin gets between man and man, and blocks the relationship, kills the relationship. And the more that stuff builds up, the worse the relationship gets.

And so we need to keep a short account with God. When we sin, let's deal with it. Let's confess our sins.

Now the next part is the difficult part. For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. Notice the word for, because.

So the basis on which he says we ask for forgiveness is on the basis that we forgive others. Now I know that creates problems. I'm going to try and deal with that.

But if we go to Matthew, where the same prayer appears, it's just a little shorter and a little clearer. In Matthew it says, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. As we forgive our debtors.

Now just think about that. Do we forgive our debtors? Do we forgive, and of course again it's not dealing with money here, it's dealing with sin. People who we feel owe us, because they've done something wrong to us.

And he's saying, forgive us the same way as we forgive those who sinned against us. Wow. I think on that basis, many of us remain unforgiven.

All right, now let me deal with the theology, because I know this creates a problem. This does not mean that you lose your salvation. Our salvation is not based on our forgiving other people their sins against us.

Our salvation is not based on anything that we do. Our salvation is based on faith, and on the finished work of the cross of Calvary. That deals with our salvation, and that is not affected by whether we forgive others, or don't forgive others, or whether we, whatever else we do.

That is a fundamental of the faith. So now we have two things here. The one is that I'm saved, not by works, but by faith.

And yet at the same time, he's saying that if we don't forgive others, he's not going to forgive us. In fact, he literally says that. Let me go to Matthew 18.

No, let me jump forward to Matthew 6.14, where Jesus explains this line in the prayer in Matthew. For if you forgive men their trespasses, their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. What can be plainer than that? I think it's pretty plain.

Then he says, if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. It's pretty simple, isn't it? All right, so how do we deal with this? How do we explain that I'm saved by faith, and yet he says that we will not be forgiven if we don't forgive others. Now the first thing that I need to mention, and I'm not going to go down the road on this one too much.

I'm going to come back to this in two weeks time, once we've finished the end of verse four. And that is that there is a teaching that is becoming incredibly popular at the moment. And if you read the internet, you will find it all over.

And that is that Jesus' gospel is different to Paul's gospel. They're two different gospels. We don't live, and we're not saved by the gospel of the kingdom, or Jesus' gospel.

We're saved by Paul's gospel. And so the only books that matter are Paul's books from Romans through Titus. The rest of them are in a different dispensation.

This is hyper-dispensationalism. And it is heresy. Unfortunately, many good people teach this teaching.

But it is heresy because it denies the sufficiency of Scripture. In other words, it says that what Paul wrote is at a higher level than what Jesus said. So they've effectively created their own red letter edition.

I think we all understand what a red letter edition is. I don't think mine is, no. But the red letter edition obviously has the words of Jesus in red.

Now, let me just get too sidetracked, but let me tell you quickly that the words of Jesus in red are not more important than any other Scripture, because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. So whether they are the direct words of the Lord Jesus, or whether the words of God spoken through the prophet, or spoken through John, or spoken through Luke, it is still the Word of God, and they are at equal importance. But what these people have done is they've created their own red letter edition, so the words of Paul are in red letters effectively.

They haven't got a physical Bible like that, but that's what happens in their minds. And so all other Scripture doesn't matter. Only Paul's writings matter.

And as I said, that's a big problem. And so I'm going to deal with that in detail once we've finished at the end of verse 4, as I said, in two weeks' time. So we can't go there.

All Scripture is given by inspiration. All Scripture hangs together, whether it's Old Testament, or the Gospels, or Paul's letters, they all are the Word of God. And so if there are apparent differences, and I use the word apparent, if there are apparent differences, we need to resolve those differences.

So here's the thing. I'm not saved by works. I'm not saved because I forgive.

And yet at the same time, if I don't forgive, my sins will not be forgiven. All right, now let's think this through clearly. He's writing to Christians.

What has happened to the Christians' past sins? It has been washed away by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Old things are passed away. All things have become new.

Can those sins be revived? Can those sins be brought back again? No. He says their sins and iniquities, I will remember them no more. They are gone.

They cannot be brought back. We have been born again. So that work cannot be undone when I refuse to forgive.

So then what does he say? Well, the problem is, remember the context. If we go back to Luke 11-4, forgive us, and I'm paraphrasing, as we forgive. Forgive us our sins.

What sins is he talking about? Our ongoing sins. If we don't forgive others, then what sins is he not going to forgive? Our ongoing sins. Now that does not keep us out of heaven.

Remember, we can never attain perfection at a human level in order to get into heaven. But if those sins are not forgiven, what happens to them? We're not losing our salvation. We cannot, because otherwise we're denying the concept of justification by faith.

So what happens if those sins are not forgiven? Well, they stand. And what do they do? Well, they do a number of things. The first is that they ruin our relationship with God.

So I may still be a son. I may still be born again. But there are now issues between me and God.

And God doesn't listen to my prayers. Remember, Peter says, Husbands, treat your wives right, because if you don't, God's not going to listen to your prayers. So God's not going to listen to your prayers if there are sins that have not been dealt with in your life.

You're not going to grow spiritually if there are issues that you have not faced and not dealt with. And in fact, the more serious thing is that there is a potential to backslide. Because your relationship with God is clouded, you withdraw.

And the more you withdraw, the more He withdraws. Until eventually, there's, you walk away. That is the potential.

But more than that, there is a day of reckoning coming. There's a judgment coming. Remember, this again is not the judgment for whether you're saved or not saved.

This is a judgment for rewards. And remember, it says that when we appear before the beamer seat, the judgment seat of rewards, we are not just judged for the good, but we are judged for everything we have done, the good and the bad. And so those sins that we have not dealt with, that have not been forgiven, will stand on that day against us and may gain us, we may get into heaven.

Remember this concept, they say, so as by fire, we get into heaven, but we can lose our reward. And so all the good things I've done are accounted for nothing because there are sins that have not been dealt with. But worse, there is the potential of being rebuked by the Lord Jesus.

And so we need to deal with these things. And we need to deal with the sins of others against us. And so we need to forgive so that we may be forgiven.

You see, if we go back to Matthew chapter 18, and you know the story well, because I've quoted it so many times, because it's so important. But there's this man who owes his master a lot of money, and he can't pay. And he goes to the master, and he says, I can't pay, I don't have the money.

And the master forgives him. And as he goes from the master's presence, he finds his fellow servant who owes him a small amount. And he grabs hold of his fellow servant, and he says, pay up.

And his fellow servant says, I can't, I don't have the money. And he throws him in prison, in debtors jail. And Matthew 18, 32, so I've just given you the introduction.

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you. You see, the basis on which we forgive others, is not whether they deserve forgiveness or not.

But we forgive others because God has forgiven us. And when we hold others people's noses to the grindstone, when we force others to pay up, we're expressing a lack of gratitude for what God has done for us. Because at the end of the day, the sins that we have done against God, is a million times more than anybody else has ever done to you.

And I know some people say, well you don't know what people have done to me. I have a good idea what people do. And yet it doesn't compare to what we do to God.

And yet he forgives us. And he doesn't just write it off, he pays the price through his own son who dies in our place on the cross of Calvary. And on that basis, we are obligated to forgive others.

Now the problem here is that there are many Christians who will not forgive because they say, well this person did this thing. And if I forgive them, they're going to get away with murder. No, they are not going to get away with it.

We need to understand clearly, when somebody does something wrong to you, and they are wrong, they have sinned against two people. They've sinned against you, but they've also sinned against God. You remember the prodigal son, he comes back and he says, I've sinned against heaven, against God, and against you.

There are two issues here for the sinner. The fact that you forgive the sinner does not remove the issue between him and God. God will hold him accountable.

Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. And so to hold something against someone because you feel you're letting them off the hook, no, they're not off the hook.

God will deal with them in his time. But you know, when we don't forgive, not only does God not forgive us, but we literally drink poison. I've used the illustration before, but it's so real.

Holding a grudge, which is just another way of saying not forgiving. Holding a grudge against someone is like eating rat poison, and you hope that the rat's going to die. The rat's not going to die.

The rat didn't eat the poison, you ate the poison, and it will kill you. Folks, it will kill your relationship with other people. It will kill your relationship with God.

It will destroy your life. People are eaten up with bitterness, and with the desire for revenge, and with hatred. And folks, these are not things that belong in the Christian community.

We've seen enough of it in these last few months. People who claim to be Christians, but they're burning up with anger, with bitterness, with frustration, because of what other people are doing. It's got nothing to do with us what other people are doing.

And when people forgive us, we forgive them, because he first forgave us. Now that's very simple, but it's very, very hard to do. But here's the problem.

I don't know what percentage of us ask for forgiveness on a daily basis. I hope all of us. I certainly hope it's not something we reserve just for communion Sunday.

But how many of us, when we ask for forgiveness, at the same time say, well Lord, there is this person that I haven't forgiven. Now, I'm not going to get into the mechanics as to whether you need to go and speak to that person, or you don't speak to them. That's a whole other level of complexity, because sometimes it just makes the situation worse.

I remember very clearly a man who once did some terrible, terrible things to me and my family. And then one day he came to me, and I'll never forget these words. He said, brother, I forgive you.

Brother, I forgive you. I hadn't done the wrong. He had physically tried to destroy my family and destroy my ministry, because I called him out for sin.

I forgive you. Now, that may have been genuine in his heart. It didn't help the relationship, because it was the wrong thing to say.

So, I'm not going to get into how you deal with it practically. How you deal with it practically must flow, first of all, from a genuine forgiveness in your heart towards that person. Until that happens, there's no use speaking to them and saying, please forgive me, or I forgive you, because it's not real.

It's got to get real in your heart. And I know this is not easy. I've shared with you before.

It took me decades. I can't remember anymore, 30, 40 years to come to terms with what my father did to me, and to come to a place where I genuinely forgave him. I struggled with it.

I was rebuked by pastors, but I wasn't going to do something that wasn't real. And I thank God that in time, he helped me to come to a place where I genuinely forgave. And then I was able to face him.

And folk, we need God to help us. I know it's not easy. I've been there.

I still struggle today. And so, we need to say, Lord, please help me to forgive. Help me not to hold grudges.

Lord, help me to forget. I'm not even going to get into forgiving and not forgetting, or whatever the saying is. We need to do more than forgive.

We need to forget. It needs to get out of the way, so that our relationship with that person can be healed, so that our relationship with others can be healed. Because if we have these bitternesses, it affects our relationships with everybody else.

And it affects our relationship with God. Now, I told you this is not going to be easy. But Father, forgive me as I forgive others.

I think you can see that this is not a prayer that we can just pray and just say the words, because there's far more to it than what we imagine. How many times must I forgive? Well, they asked Jesus that question, you remember? And he said 70 times 7, 490 times a day. 490 times a day we need to forgive.

Oh, but if I don't, if I forgive them, then they're not going to learn anything. Look, let me share with you many years of being in the ministry. You don't get to teach people anything.

I have never been able to teach anyone anything, and neither will you, unless the Holy Spirit teaches them. Only the Holy Spirit can deal with them. All I can do is do what God asks me to do.

And he's asking us in this context to forgive, so that our relationships may be clean, and particularly our relationship with God may be clean. Now, we're about to come to the Lord's table, and every time we prepare, we remind you, spend time doing exactly what I've said this morning, making sure that your relationship with God is right, that there is nothing outstanding, that there is nothing you've not confessed. And I haven't even begun to speak about repentance.

I'll speak about that in two weeks' time. But saying you're sorry with no intent to change, obviously, doesn't count for anything. But saying sorry and not turning away from your start, not stop doing what you're doing, doesn't help.

And so, as we come to the Lord's table, there needs to be an examination of our relationship with Him, and there needs to be an examination of our relationship with our brother. And I trust that you've done that as we come to the table this morning. And if you haven't, then please take the time now to examine your heart.

Make sure that when we take the cup, and effectively we're drinking from one cup, and thereby we're signifying that we are one. We're drinking, eating the same bread, the same Christ. We're saying we are one, when in fact we may not be.

And so, there needs to be an examining as we come to take the bread and the cup. Lord, we pray that you'd help us. Lord, these are words that we all know off by heart.

Lord, many of us, particularly those who've grown up in some kind of traditional church, have said these words hundreds, maybe thousands of times. Without even beginning to understand what it is that we're saying. Help us, Lord, to understand.

Help, Lord, that we may begin to grasp the immense grace that you extended to us when you forgave us our sin. And Lord, help us to see in that perspective and that light that what others have done to us is nothing in comparison to what you've done, what we've done to you. Help us, Lord, to forgive.

But Lord, help us to take ownership of our sin and to confess our sins that you might be able to deal with them. And so, Lord, these are difficult things, Lord. They sound so simple, and yet they're difficult to speak on.

They're difficult to understand. And I pray, Lord, that by your Spirit you'd write these upon our hearts. I ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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