
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE LORD'S PRAYER

LECTURE 7: FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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Presented in 14 Lectures called
THE BEAUTY OF PRAYER

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Lecture 7

FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

Welcome to this lecture, lecture number seven, in the series of the Beauty of Prayer.

Every day we transgress God's Commandments. Every day we fall short, and therefore the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

To "forgive our debts," that obviously means that we would receive forgiveness for all our sins we commit against God because man needs forgiveness, remission of all his sins; Scripture is very clear about that. In Psalm 14:1, "There is none that doeth good." This is repeated in Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous, no, not one." And so many texts refer us to the fact that we are sinful people. Psalm 130:3, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand?"

And all the sacrificial laws in the Old Testament, they point us to the necessity that man must receive forgiveness of sins. And then, John the Baptist preached, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The Lord Jesus is the fulfillment of all the sacrifices of the Old Testament because a sacrifice must be brought because we have sinned against God. That's the main problem of man: sin. That's our biggest problem in life. Sin is always alive, but sin leads us to death and misery.

And so, daily new bitter fruits are brought forth from the tree of sin. And therefore, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our debts." Daily we are called to confess our sins before the Lord. And daily we are to acknowledge our corruption before Him. In ourselves, we are carnal, sold under sin. And therefore, it's a miracle that the Almighty, Holy God is still willing to hear us and to listen to us. And so, we are called to really humble ourselves and confess our sins.

And in doing that, we should be very concrete. We should mention certain sins we have committed. We must confess before the Lord our actual daily sins, the words we have spoken that we should not have spoken, attitudes that were sinful towards our wives or children or towards our husbands.

And so, we are also to confess our natural inclination to evil. We are to confess our natural corruption that we have sinned in Adam. That's where sin started also in our lives. And now we have natures that are inclined to hate God and our neighbor. Our understanding is darkened, [and] we are blind to God and to His honor. And really, the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man because they must be discerned spiritually.

It is necessary to confess the stubbornness of our will and that we do not obey the voice of God. Even the imaginations of the thoughts of our hearts are evil (Genesis 6:5) and it has been so from our youth. We should set our affections upon heavenly things, but so often we look at the things of this world and they fill our lives and we

so easily follow deceit and vanity. We have forsaken the Fountain of Living Water. And also, we, in our natural inclinations, prefer broken containers that can hold no water.

We can even have been raised in a Christian church, but [it can be] that our hearts are not right before God, that we are still unwilling to bow and to surrender unto the Lord, then we have been planted as trees in the garden of the Lord, but we have brought forth no fruit. We are barren and deserve to be cast into the fire. The Lord has looked for fruit, and we have brought forth bad fruit.

And so, this is our sinful nature. And this is what we must confess before God. And when we are very concrete in the confessing of our sins, then we will also realize how necessary and how blessed is the fact that God forgives sins. And when we experience forgiveness of sins and we confess our shortcomings before God, then at the same time we should also ask for grace to fight against sins that we would not commit such sins again.

And so, these are the great matters in life that can bother a person: his sins, his iniquity. Oh, if we dwell on this matter, how much is there in our lives that we should not just brush over, but let us focus on that for a moment. How impatient we can be. Oh, that we can break out in unjust anger. We can have hearts that are covetous. We desire the things of the world. There can be pride within us. We can be ungrateful for God's goodness. We can murmur under afflictions. We can distrust the living God. We can be harsh towards our neighbor. We can be indifferent to his needs. We can be judgmental to those around us. We can be, spiritually speaking, lazy. And backsliding, and lukewarmness can set in. Who can control his tongue? And of every idle word that men will speak, they must give an account. And so, by our attitude, by our deeds, and by our words, we are all condemned.

And you know, sin has never made a person happy. No one is ever glad at the results of sin in his life. The greatest joy is to honor God. But if we do not honor God, that's great misery. And so, sins are a reality in our lives, and we find that repeatedly in Scripture. The Lord accuses us of our sinful nature. The Lord even has to complain about his people, Israel, that He has raised them. He said, "I have raised children and they have rebelled against me" (Isaiah 1:2). And that is our sorrow in daily life. This is what caused the Apostle Paul to groan, "Wretched man that I am. That which I desire not to do, that's what I do" (Romans 7).

And so, we read in Scripture that so often God's people confess their sins. Yes, not only the unconverted ones who come before the Lord with repentance, but also God's people after they have fallen into sin. Look at David, a man according to God's heart. In 2 Samuel 24:10 he confesses, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done. And now I beseech you, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly."

And the godly priest, Ezra in 9:6 says, "Oh my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens."

We hear of Daniel in Daniel 9:5, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments." Daniel doesn't say "the people did that" or "our fathers did that," but "we have done that." He includes himself in it, and he is not exaggerating. He knows we have sinned.

And so the Apostle Paul says, "I am the least of the apostles because I have persecuted the Church of God," in 1 Corinthians 15:9. Although God has forgiven that sin, that awareness of that sin still remains upon him. That gives him cause for humility.

Look also at Luke 15 where the lost son says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am not worthy to be called your son" (verse 21). And as we plead for forgiveness of sins, we may do that because of the finished work of the Lord Jesus. But Romans 3 says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24).

And also, the Apostle John says in 1 John 1 & 2, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. . . . If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation," the payment, "for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 1:8-10 and I John 2:1-2).

So, Scripture is very clear that we may receive forgiveness of our sins through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, in prayer we must confess our sins.

It can be that you are still living outside of Christ, that you are not a child of God, that you are not reconciled to Him. And every moment, God can take you out of this life, and you are still in your sins. You are hanging on

a thread above the pit of hell, and you will surely drop in hell if you die unreconciled to God. You need to repent. You need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You need God the Holy Spirit to convict you, to draw you, to save you. You must be united to Christ. You must become a partaker of Christ and of all His blessings. And so you will be saved and justified. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and your sins will be forgiven.

When you have been led to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then your sins are forgiven. Then you are incorporated in Christ. You have been declared righteous in the sight of God. You are an heir of heaven, and everlasting life is now already within you. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." And this is the wonderful exchange, the glorious blessing: that God gives lost sinners new life, hope which is true.

And so, the apostle rejoices in Ephesians 1:6-7, "He hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." That is a glorious reality for a child of God.

But why then does the Lord Jesus teach here also His children to pray daily, "Forgive us our debts"? People who believe in the Lord Jesus have hearts that are now led to seek God. They love God. They desire to walk in God's ways. The Holy Spirit is leading them in a life of devotion to God. The setting of their heart has been changed. There's a new nature within them. Their sins are forgiven. And yet, the Lord Jesus calls them to pray daily, "Forgive us our debts." Why must they still pray that? Because God's children still sin every day. Daily, they still violate God's laws. They cannot keep even one of God's commandments fully. And so, they need to acknowledge to God that they still sin.

They must confess them because they must confess who they are and what they do. And so, they must ask God to forgive them their daily fallings and stumblings. And at the same time, ask God for grace that they would fight against sin, against the devil and his whole dominion. They need to be brought in a life of dedication to the Lord.

And so, they need to pray daily, "Forgive us our debts." They need to be made right with God again after they have fallen into sin. And you know, along these terms the Lord Jesus becomes increasingly precious to us. For every day again we realize that it is because of Christ's sake that our sins can be forgiven. We need Him every day.

And so, this petition, "forgive," is the breath of a believing soul. It comes forth from a heart that is very much conscious of its own misery and sinfulness. And so, they become meek and lowly of heart. They become trusting in the Lord Jesus. And so, this prayer will continue in this life till our last breath. And then it will be changed into eternally praising God, for in heaven there will be no more sin.

And again, let us realize that all this forgiveness is only possible because of the Lord Jesus and His perfect sacrifice. The Lord Jesus paid for the sins of all His people. And what a precious reality it is to you, then, to know Him as your High Priest at the right hand of God Who is interceding for you. He is ready to pray for all those who come unto God through Him. He is a compassionate, precious High Priest, and He alone can be the Sacrifice and the Priest. And He is the full payment of our sins. And so, we see in Christ that the Lord delights in mercy, that He delights to give forgiveness.

And that's how He revealed Himself to Moses. In Exodus 34:6-7, "And the Lord passed by Moses and proclaimed, the LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." God forgives sin. And so, the prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 55:7, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and let him turn to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." And Nehemiah writes in 9:17, "Thou art a God ready to pardon." This is how God is. This is His character, His desire. But He is also a God of justice.

It can only be done, this forgiveness of sins, through the finished work of Christ, and He invites sinners to come to Him. Isaiah 1:18, "Come now, let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Let us never say that our sins are too enormous and our transgressions are too great. We may cast all our sins down before His throne.

And the Apostle John encourages us in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse from all unrighteousness." You see the order here in this text? First, we confess our sins, and then we receive forgiveness of sin. So, therefore if you see your sins, confess them. Regardless how great they

may be, confess them; and the Lord is still willing to cleanse you and to deliver you. And therefore Psalm 32 tells us, "I said I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (verse 5). The Lord forgives.

The Lord can also chastise because of sins. David did terrible sins in his life, and he received forgiveness of them, but he was still chastised because of them. God does that so that they would realize the enormity of their sin, that they would flee from their sin and never even think about committing this sin again. That's why the sword never left David's house, because of his sins that he had committed with Bathsheba and how he had let her husband, Uriah, be put to death. But his sins were forgiven.

And so, in all our daily failures, in all the carelessness in religious life, in the midst of all our lost opportunities when we have wasted our time, when we have neglected Scripture, when we have forsaken personal prayer, and when we even have our excuses for sinning, and when we have listened to the tempter, and when we have sought our own honor, and when we see shades of evil blending with all our daily activities, when we have been harsh to other people, when we have grieved the Holy Spirit, we must pray, "Pardon mine iniquities, Oh Lord, for they are many and great" (Psalm 25:11).

This must be the daily prayer in our lives, "Forgive us our debts." And if you neglect this prayer, you will become proud and presumptuous. You will become hardened and indifferent. And you would be in serious backsliding. God shall hide His face from you, and the Spirit will remove Himself from you. And the end result may be that it may turn out that you never knew the grace of Christ in your heart and that you are still in your sins.

So this petition, "Forgive us our debts," is only possible because of the finished work of Christ on Calvary. Oh, delight yourself in humbling [yourself] before Him. His love poured out in the heart will constrain you. And at the feet of Christ, you will experience sweetness. There you will see how precious the Savior is Who gave Himself for you. And you will melt in love and adoration because He forgives sin, because He bled and died on the cross for you, that He endured the hellish agonies so that you would never have to be there, and that He was forsaken of God so that you would never be forsaken of God. It's His glory, His goodness.

And that causes Micah 7:18 to break out in adoration, "Who is God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy." And this high priest causes new joy to flow in your life when you have confessed your sins and you again receive remission of your sin. Your conscience is set free, and the blessed peace of Christ flows into your heart, and you love your Savior more and more, and that's why you want to pray this petition every day again, "Forgive us our debts."

And so, this petition is, "Forgive us our debts." Again, we see the plural form. We must not be concerned only about our own sins, but also for the sins of others. We need to mourn and grieve for our own sins, but also for their sins. We must also confess the sins that others do and beg God if God would intervene in their lives and awaken them that they would see their sin and also confess them, and we may not be partakers of other men's sins.

We must not also think ourselves to be higher than other people. No, we must beg grace of God in our own heart that we would see how sinful we are. Then we become, in our own estimation, more sinful than other people because then we know our hearts. And so, we become humble, also when we pray for other people that they would be delivered from their sins.

Job, he offered up prayers because of the sins of his children. And did Moses not pray for forgiveness of sins for the children of Israel? Think of how Nehemiah and Daniel prayed for forgiveness of sins. And so, we pray, "Forgive us our debts." We pray for the sins of others that the Lord would forgive them.

But then there's something added to this and that is that we find, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." The Lord calls us to forgive those who transgress against us. You see, if we need forgiveness and we ask God to forgive us our transgressions against Him, then we must also be willing to forgive the sins of others against us. And we will all come into certain circumstances in life when we see how people have done evil against us. And then our nature is that we would want to take revenge, that we would become angry. But the spirit of Christ teaches otherwise. He teaches us to be humble and meek. That we would pray for those who mistreat us. That we would yet seek their well-being.

The Lord Jesus explains this necessity in Matthew 6:14-15, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." If we are unwilling to forgive the sins of other people, God will not forgive us our sins.

And realize in this whole matter that what we have done to God is far worse than what our fellow human beings have done to us. And here we see the real test: if we are sorry for our sins. And if we really need this forgiveness of God, if we are truly sorry for our sins, we will also be willing to remove the burden of guilt from other people who come to us and ask forgiveness. Then we are willing to forgive them.

If you know the grace of Christ in your own life and you live through His forgiving love, you will also forgive others. Sad to say, there are still many people who harbor grudges against one another. Even within the Christian church. Even among those who confess to know grace; then one says that he lives by grace, and one proclaims that he lives by the forgiving mercy of God, but yet he himself shows no mercy to those around him. And he himself does not show grace and is not gracious to them. That cannot be. That's absolutely wrong. When you know yourself as a sinner, and even as Paul said, as the chief of sinners, then you will be mild and meek towards others. Then you will say, "Lord, I have done so much evil against thee, I am ashamed of myself." And then you will be quick to forgive others what they have done against you.

You know, if God would enter into judgment with you, you could not stand before His throne. You need His grace and mercy. And as you realize this, you're also willing to forgive your neighbor. God forgives me my sins that I should also forgive the sins of others. And think also of how the Lord Jesus prayed, "Forgive us."

Now the Lord Jesus prayed that those who committed evil against Him, that they would receive forgiveness. He prayed, "Father, forgive them." He lifted up this prayer. If the Lord Jesus did that, how much more should we pray? And when God forgives immediately, let us also pray, let us also forgive immediately. Let us also be willing, from our heart, to forgive. There must be a sincere forgiveness of our heart.

We cannot worship God with a clean and true heart while there is an unforgiving attitude towards an offending brother. Therefore, ask grace of God to mortify grudges we may have and that the Lord would remove from us the desire of revenge. We don't have to avenge ourselves. If someone has done evil against you, God will see it. He will visit it. That's why Paul says in Romans 12:19, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'" Then you can even feel sorry for those who hurt you, and you can forgive them because if they have not found forgiveness for their sins before God, then they will be punished, and then you feel sorry for them.

If we resist and hold fast resentment, then God will not forgive us our sins. But maybe someone has hurt you. How can you get rid of that? By looking unto Jesus. Where you see what God has forgiven you and how He has forgiven those who trespassed against Him. Then He will also teach you that same spirit and teach you that attitude in life so that you learn to pray from your heart, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Thank you.