

The Lord's Prayer - Part 4

Luke 11:1-4

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I want to read all four verses of The Lord's Prayer, in Luke 11:1-4. By the end of this series, you'll have all these verses memorized. "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.' 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, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

We've come in our study of Luke's Gospel to find ourselves with Christ in the school of prayer. Verse 1 says, "He was praying." That is a reference to Jesus. And as He was praying, a disciple asked Jesus, "Would You teach us to pray, even as John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray?" So for five weeks, we're sitting at the feet of Jesus in His school of prayer.

We've seen that prayer involves God's Person—His name being hallowed, verse 2; His program—His kingdom coming, His will being done, verse 2; His provision—our daily bread, verse 3. Now we come to the fourth petition, God's pardon, verse 4. "And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

"We are creatures; we need bread for the body. We are sinful creatures; we need forgiveness for the soul." We need bread for the body, so "Give us day by day our daily bread." And we need forgiveness, so "Forgive us our sins."

This prayer, seriously prayed, would bring healing to our fractured, spiritual relationship with God and our broken relationships with people. In this petition, Jesus is teaching that true prayer does two things. Number one, it is a prayer request for personal forgiveness; and number two, it is a request for a forgiving spirit. It is a prayer for forgiveness of our own sins: "Forgive us our sins." And it is a prayer for a forgiving spirit: "For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." And we're going to look at those two parts of this petition.

Number one, this is a prayer for forgiveness. Verse 4 says, "Forgive us our sins." We have "forgive us...lead us...deliver us." This prayer for the forgiveness of sin, is out of step with modern culture. Whatever happened to the word "sin" in our culture? You can turn the TV on and listen to a lot of preachers, but rarely do they mention sin. Yet sin is an important doctrine in the Bible. We like to sidestep it, avoid it. We like to listen to preachers who are positive, happy and have pleasant thoughts. But we need to understand sin, if we're going to pray this petition of "Forgive us our sins." So we need to understand what sin is.

Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So sin is falling short of the standards that God has laid down in His Word. The simplest definition of sin that I can give is that sin is breaking God's law. We can sin by commission, which is committing an act of sin

that is contrary to God's laws, and we can also sin by omission, which is not doing what God tells us to do.

You might say, "Well, I haven't done anything!" That's the problem; you haven't done what God tells you to do. God tells us to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39), but we don't do that, so we sin. God tells us to "Forgive everyone who is indebted to us," but we don't do that, so we sin. Thus, there is the sin of commission and the sin of omission.

There is the sin of action and also the sin of attitude, like in the story of the prodigal son. The younger son committed sins of action, taking his inheritance and wasting it on riotous, reckless living. We understand that kind of sin. But the older brother, who stayed home and did everything the father told him to do, sinned in his attitude in that he was unforgiving of his younger brother when he repented and came back home. So there are action sins like sins of the flesh, and there are sins of the spirit.

We have the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments. These aren't "the Ten Suggestions"; they're the Ten Commandments. When Jesus quoted some of them on the sermon on the mount, He said, "You have heard that it was said... 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). "You have heard it said... 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22). So we've all broken God's Commandments.

The Bible pictures sin in different ways. It pictures it as a defilement in Psalm 51:2: "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." David had committed adultery. And David had murdered Bathsheba's husband to cover his sin. Then he realized he was defiled. The Bible describes sin as darkness in 1 John 1:6: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth." The Bible describes sin as sickness, in Luke 5:31: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Sin in the Bible is described as loss, in Luke 15, in the story of the prodigal son or the two lost sons, in the lost coin and in the lost sheep. And the Bible also pictures sin as a debt, in Luke 11:4: "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." This reads, in Matthew 6:12, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

So sin is a defilement, it's living in darkness, it's sickness, it's loss and it is a debt we owe to God. Thank God that Jesus paid our debt for us on the Cross so our sins could be forgiven!

The number-one qualification to pray this prayer is knowing that we are debtors or sinners before a holy God. The inference in this petition of "Forgive us our debts" is that we are sinners. To pray this petition, one must admit that "I am a sinner." So this is a clear example of why this is really not The Lord's Prayer, but The Disciples' Prayer. Jesus would never have prayed this, because He was sinless. This is a prayer for Christians when they sin that we would be forgiven by God.

So it implies that we do sin, but many people say this prayer without any consciousness or awareness or sense of their own sinfulness. Sin is a serious matter. The Bible says, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). And it says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Only God can forgive sin. He does that through the Cross of Christ. Without the Cross of Jesus Christ there could be no hope of our forgiveness. Jesus died on the Cross in our place. The death of Christ was a substitution; we should have died instead of Christ on the Cross. Jesus died in our place. Jesus "bore our sins" (1 Peter 2:24).

So when we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God saves us by His grace. "By grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8) in Christ. We've been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Jesus died to carry away our sin.

When we come to this petition of forgiveness, it's important to know that there are two types of forgiveness for the child of God. What kind of forgiveness is Jesus speaking of in this prayer? This is an important point, because it links to other important doctrines in the Scriptures.

The first type of forgiveness, which Jesus is not referring to in this prayer, is what I call "forever forgiveness," "final forgiveness" or "initial forgiveness." That happens when you were born again, when you first accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You come under conviction by the Holy Spirit. You may hear a message about Christ from the Word of God, and the Spirit takes the Word of God and convicts you. So you repent, which means to change your mind or "metanoia" and turn from your sin, and you trust Jesus as your Savior or put your faith in Him. So then you are eternally forever forgiven.

So if you are a Christian, you've been justified. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner to be righteous, based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. This is "initial forgiveness," and every Christian has this.

After you are born again, you need not be born again, again. You can only be born again or become a Christian once. And I'm convinced from Scripture that once you are born again, you can never be "un-born" again. Once you've been born into God's family, you are forever a child of God. That's why I call this "forever forgiveness." This is initial justification.

I want to give you some verses regarding this initial justification. Hebrews 10:14 says, "By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." So Jesus died on the Cross, and through that work of Him sanctifying the individual, He saved them, justified them, and they are sanctified forever. In the new covenant God says, in Jeremiah 31:34, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Isn't that a great verse? That's a "Praise-the-Lord!" verse. That's "final forgiveness." And in Romans 8:1, it says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

The moment you get saved God takes you out of Adam the first, with all of his sin, condemnation, death and judgment and places you in the last Adam, Jesus Christ. There are

two federal heads: Adam and Christ. All humanity is either in Adam or in Christ. So when you are born again, you are taken out of Adam and placed in Christ. That's why Paul uses the terms "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus."

Those who are in Christ Jesus have no condemnation. And Romans 8 ends by stating, in verse 39, "...nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." What I'm saying is that once saved, always saved. God saves you and gives you eternal life. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." That sounds pretty convincing to me! Jesus said, in John 10:28-29, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." So we have eternal life forever.

I've said all that to say that's not what our text is about. But this is important to understand. Keep these two kinds of forgiveness in their proper categories. All Christians have eternal, final forgiveness or justification or positional righteousness and it cannot change; it is forever.

Now the second category of forgiveness is "fellowship forgiveness." So there is "initial forgiveness" and "fellowship forgiveness."

"Fellowship forgiveness" takes place after you are born again or justified. As a Christian, you will sin, even after you get saved. Have you ever met a Christian who never sinned? No. They may think they've never sinned, but they still sin. If Christians never sinned, why would this petition—"Forgive us our sins"—be in The Lord's Prayer? This prayer is for the disciples, because we sin.

There are some who falsely teach that once you have been born again, you never again pray to be forgiven. I guess they've never read 1 John 1:9, which says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." This verse was written to Christians.

But Christians have a new nature. When you were born again and experienced initial forgiveness, you were given a new nature. "A new nature" means you were given a capacity or ability. Sometimes the New Testament calls our old nature "the flesh." Before conversion, we only had a sinful nature; after conversion, we have a new nature. But the old nature still exists. We should walk in the Spirit and yield to the new nature and not yield to the flesh or the old nature. So as believers, we must "Walk in the Spirit [so that we] shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). There is going to be a war going on between these two natures in the Christian.

1 John 1:9 is clear evidence that Christians do sin. So if we confess our sin, He will forgive our sin. Someone called this verse "the Christian's bar of soap." I like that. It's important that we wash ourselves in that "bar of soap." Allen Redpath said, "This is a family prayer we are

considering, and it does not deal with the sins of unbelievers. It does not deal with our standing before God, which can never be affected. It concerns the sins of the children of God.”

Remember when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet? When Jesus came to Peter’s feet, he said, “You shall never wash my feet!” Peter thought that was beneath Him. But Jesus said, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8) or “participation with Me.” You might use the word “fellowship,” as in, “You have no fellowship with Me.” That’s the Greek word “koinonia,” which means “joint participation.”

When Peter heard that he could have fellowship or joint participation with Jesus, he said, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” So He told Peter to calm down. Jesus said, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you” (John 13:9-10).

In those days, they would bathe in a public bath house. Then they would put on open sandals and walk on dirt paths, so their feet would get dirty again. Have you ever gone camping? You walk to the bath house and take a shower, put on flip-flops, walk back to the tent and your feet are dirty again. This is the picture Jesus was painting.

And these verses are a living illustration of what I’m trying to convey to you about the two types of forgiveness. So Jesus said that if you’ve been bathed, you only need your feet washed. The bathing here that Jesus related to Peter refers to regeneration; it happens when you are born again, the initial forgiveness. But once you’ve been born again, you don’t need another “bath,” because you’ve already been forgiven.

But now that you’ve walked through this world with God, your feet get dirty; you sin. So you need to repent and be forgiven. As you walk through life, you think a wrong thought, say a wrong word or have a wrong attitude; your feet get dirty. So at this point, we don’t lose sonship when we sin; we lose fellowship. So that’s what John 13:9-10 is all about.

And in The Lord’s Prayer where it says, “Forgive us our sins,” it’s talking about fellowship with God. It’s for believers who fall into sin, who need to repent and be forgiven. And God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

One of the most common sins of the saints is unforgiveness. That’s why there is the second half of verse 4 of The Lord’s Prayer. The verse says, “Forgive us our sins...” which is fellowship sin. It’s 1 John 1:9, which basically says, “Wash my feet, so I can have communion with You. I don’t want anything between my soul and the Savior.” Now the second half of this verse says, “...for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.” This is the second category of forgiveness. It is a prayer for a forgiving spirit. So the prayer is, “God, forgive me and help me to be forgiving toward others who sin against me.”

You expect God to forgive you, but you’re not going to forgive others?! You expect God to carry your sins away, but you won’t dismiss the sins of others, who have sinned against you?! This is the part of the prayer that lead St. Augustin to call it “a terrible petition.” Why? Because he

realized that if you pray this prayer with an unforgiving spirit and unforgiving heart, you would actually be asking God to not forgive you. If you pray and say, "God forgive my sins," but you are unwilling to forgive someone else's sins, you will not be forgiven.

This petition does not mean you merit forgiveness. All forgiveness in the Bible is by God's grace. But it does mean that my heart cannot receive forgiveness, if my heart is hardened and unforgiving toward others.

Matthew 6:12 says, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." It means that as You're forgiving me, I'm forgiving others. And Matthew 6:14-15 says, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive them their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." How much plainer can it be? If you don't forgive others, you won't be forgiven. So God's unforgiveness is an evident sign of an unforgiving spirit.

Jesus is saying that we cannot truly pray for forgiveness, unless our heart is right regarding other people. An unforgiving heart cannot receive forgiveness. God's not going to answer half the petition. We like the first part: "God, forgive my sins." But we don't like the second part: "I will forgive others." No, we don't want to do that. "I want to be forgiven, but I'm not going to forgive others." Then you stand with an unforgiving heart and really haven't been forgiven.

A forgiven heart is forgiving toward others. Charles Spurgeon said, "We come to the Cross to be forgiven." That's initial forgiveness. "We stay at the Cross to be forgiving." This is one of the reasons why it is so essential to be in church for communion. You can't take communion if you have animosity or hatred or unforgiveness toward someone else. How can you drink the cup and eat the bread if you haven't forgiven someone who has hurt you, offended you or wronged you?

You say, "Well, it's not right what they did!" That's not the issue; you still have to release that and let it go. God has forgiven you; you should be willing to forgive others. Ephesians 4:30-32 says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." So when we sin as Christians, we grieve the Holy Spirit. It doesn't mean that He leaves us; it means that we cause Him pain. The word "grief" indicates that the Holy Spirit is a person, and as such, He is subject to personal treatment. So He is grieved by our sin of unforgiveness.

And Paul lists other sins that grieve the Holy Spirit, in verse 31. "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

And when you forgive another person for their sin against you, you are being most like God.

That's why St. Augustin said that this was "a terrible petition." "I want God to forgive me, but I don't want to forgive that person. They hurt me!" How can we be so inconsistent?

In Matthew 18, Jesus told a parable of a servant who owed a great debt to the king. And the master of the king forgave him the debt. But the man found a fellow servant who owed him a little money and refused to forgive the debt. He grabbed him by the throat and said, "Pay me what you owe!" He could not, so the servant threw him in prison. The master found out what the man had done and said to him, "I forgave you all that debt....Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" It only stands to reason he should have done that.

So if we are forgiving toward others, it's the evident sign of a heart that has been forgiven.

When you don't forgive others, it's like mixing poison for your enemy and drinking it yourself. When you fail to forgive other people, you're burning the bridge that you yourself are going to have to pass over some day. If you want God to forgive you—if you haven't experienced God's forgiveness, you need to forgive others.

So pray to be forgiven and pray to be forgiving. How important that is.

Is there a husband who needs to be forgiven today? Do you need to forgive your wife? Are there parents who need to be forgiven? Do you have a mother or father you haven't forgiven? Is there a coworker, a friend, a family member you need to forgive?

How can you say, "Lord, forgive my sins" unless you also say, "as I forgive others who sinned against me"?