

(Matt. 6:12) - *“AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS”* - This verse has been the source of much misunderstanding, confusion, and division among professing Christians. The issue is this - Is Christ teaching conditional forgiveness, that God will only forgive us our debts IF we forgive others? This question arises from what the Lord stated 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.”* Consider the following:

(1) Notice how the Lord uses two different words here - “debts” and “trespasses” which both are words for sin. Sin is many times described as a debt as it brings us under an obligation of debt to God’s law and justice - *“the wages of sin is death”* (Rom. 6:23a). Trespass describes how sin involves stepping over the line God has drawn in His law. The Bible states that we all fell in Adam into sin and death, and we are all naturally born spiritually *“dead in trespasses and sins”* (Eph. 2:1). We have all *“sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23). Can anything we do pay our debt to God’s justice? No. It takes the blood of Christ to pay our debt and to make us righteous before God.

(2) The Bible is clear that because of our sins, neither salvation nor any blessing of salvation (including the forgiveness of our debts and trespasses) can be earned or deserved by our attempts to keep the law (Rom. 3:10-20; 4:4-5). The law commands us to love others as we love ourselves, and this would certainly include forgiving others as we desire to be forgiven.

(3) Salvation (including the forgiveness of sins) is a matter of God’s grace, not our works, and based on the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:6-7; Col. 1:13; 1 John 1:7). The Bible shows us that we are so sinful by nature that if God’s forgiveness of our sins were conditioned on our forgiving others, then none of us would be forgiven, and we would all perish. But it also shows that all for whom Christ died and arose again are justified which includes the pardon of all their sins and righteousness imputed to them.

(4) We must keep in mind that the Lord is teaching of obedience that God requires of the true citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and this is a kingdom of grace that reigns not through any supposed righteous acts we do but solely upon the imputed righteousness of Christ - *“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord”* (Rom. 5:21). Whatever we read here, including issues of a believer’s attitude, character, and conduct, must be kept in the context of salvation totally by God’s grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. A true believer’s obedience is to be motivated by grace, gratitude, and love, not by law.

(5) This shows us that whatever act of obedience is described in this sermon as required by God and as identifying the true children of the kingdom (as in the beatitudes), the act of obedience is never a condition we must meet in order to attain or maintain salvation or any blessing of it. It is always the fruit and evidence of God’s free grace and mercy towards us in Christ (John 15:1-5). No act we do can earn forgiveness from or make us righteous before God.

(6) Just as faith is the gift of God to His chosen, justified, and redeemed children, the forgiveness of sins is the gift of God given to all His children based solely upon the blood of

the Lord Jesus Christ - *“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7); *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). The only ground upon which God can be *“faithful and just to forgive us our sins”* is the merits of Christ’s obedience unto death as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. Sin must be punished with death, and this means it cannot be forgiven based on our forgiving others.

(7) It is true, however, that when God the Holy Spirit in the new birth gives us life and knowledge of how God forgives us freely and unconditionally based on the blood of His Son, He brings us to faith in Christ and true repentance of our sins. He also implants the spirit of forgiveness within us to motivate and cause us to be forgiving towards others, especially our brethren in Christ (Matt. 18:21-35; Eph. 4:31-32; Col. 3:13). This does not mean that as justified, redeemed, and regenerated sinners, we do not struggle in this matter. While we live in this world and engaged in the warfare of the flesh and the Spirit, knowing how we have been forgiven fully and freely in Christ has not yet rendered us totally free of a remaining selfish, vengeful spirit. We must continually fight our desires to seek personal vengeance and to harbor hard feelings and resentment. Being assured of the forgiveness of our debts and trespasses that God has bestowed upon us by His grace in Christ is the strongest motivation for us to forgive one another. The Lord is describing those who have been forgiven by God’s grace in Christ, as evidenced by their willingness to forgive accordingly. Believers are to cultivate a spirit of forgiveness by being ever mindful of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ. Whenever our thoughts concerning those who have offended us are that we will forgive them only when they have met certain conditions, we must stop and think of God’s forgiveness of our sins. It was Christ who met the conditions, not us. It was Christ who satisfied law and justice, not us.

(Matt. 6:13) - *“AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL”* - As James wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God does not tempt anyone with evil (James 1:13), but while we are in this world and still plagued with the remaining influences and contaminations of our sinful flesh, there are numerous temptations that appeal to us and into which we would fall if not for God’s grace. God permits His children to undergo temptations, not to let us fall or abandon us, but to show us the way out by His grace in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:13). God continually delivers us “from evil” (literally, “the evil one”). Satan is always accusing and attacking God’s people, but He cannot win because we are saved, protected, and preserved by God’s grace in Christ (Rev. 12).

“FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER. AMEN” - All of this is to the praise of the glory of God’s grace in Christ. Our whole life as true children of God is a matter of God’s sovereign grace and power not only to save us initially but also to preserve us unto glory. There is no part of our salvation and no blessing of salvation for which we can take credit and glory in ourselves. All glory is to God in Christ!