

Forgive us our debts

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[0 : 00] So this evening we're going to be looking at verse 12 in this chapter.! Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

! I just wanted to point a few things out about this verse. So the first thing I noticed when I was reading this and preparing was that having our debts forgiven is very easy, but for us to actually forgive other people is very difficult.

The first half we would say, yes, we want that. We want to have our sins forgiven, our debts forgiven. Nobody would say that they didn't want that, but for us to do that for others is difficult. Also, it could be a little bit misleading if you read this verse in isolation. It says that we ask God to forgive us our debts because we are forgiving our debtors.

So I just wanted to point out in this that God has forgiven us first and God forgave us when we first put our trust in him.

[1 : 18] And because of that, we should extend the same grace and love and kindness to others. And this is really the whole point of this verse, is the extending of God's grace to others.

And as we go on in our faith, we continue to come back to God and ask for forgiveness for our sins that we commit every day. In different things, we go back to God for cleansing and for forgiveness. And so as we go on each day, we can offer the same grace and the same forgiveness to the people around us. And forgiveness doesn't mean that we don't feel pain anymore.

So if you're in a situation where you need to forgive someone or you feel a need to forgive someone or feel like you shouldn't forgive somebody because of something they've done, it's very important to remember that we shouldn't expect or we shouldn't wait to have any feelings of hurt or pain completely removed before we do this.

I think if we start thinking like that, then we end up in a very complicated situation on how this all fits together.

[2 : 37] But I don't see that that is an expectation of someone who forgives. If we are waiting to be free of the hurt and the loss of something that somebody's done to us, then forgiveness would be very easy.

There would be nothing very special about it. It would just be a matter of politeness that once you've got over something, you just merely say, I forgive you in more of a polite way or maybe part of etiquette that it's just something that we say, but has no real weight on our hearts.

But forgiveness is hard. It's very personal, but it's also wonderful and it's essential. Forgiveness comes from the power of the Spirit. And so it's a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit in us, of the Spirit working in us and changing us, making us more like him.

And forgiveness is an outworking of that. So I wanted to look at how sin can be paid for.

So in the Old Testament, they had the Day of Atonement. Part of the law that God had given to Moses, they had the Day of Atonement where they would sacrifice a lamb for the sin of the people.

[4 : 09] And to atone means to correct a wrong. So this lamb was sacrificed by the high priest to cover the sins of the people in a pictorial way.

And if someone takes something from you and they don't give it to you back, then who pays for it? You have to pay for it. And if you borrow money from a friend and you don't give it back to them, then your friend has paid for it. So wherever there is a debt that somebody has to pay for it.

I have a student loan, which is very large. I would probably never pay it back. And the student loan company, after the 25-year allotted time, will forgive me of the loan.

That's the word they use. It will be forgiven. And they will pay the rest of it. Because there is a cost there. And if I don't give them the money, then they have to pay for it themselves.

[5 : 11] So there's always, wherever there is a debt, it has to be paid for by somebody. And it will be paid for. And Romans 6.23 says, The wages of sin is death.

The gift of God is eternal life. So where there is sin in our lives, the wages of that is death. And Hebrews 9.22 says, The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood. And without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. So if we want to have forgiveness, we want to have the atonement, we want our debts paid, there has to be blood. And we see this throughout the New Testament.

It's very clear that there has to be a sacrifice. And this was the point of all the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, was trying to cover the debt of sin from Israel.

So the Day of Atonement was a day when an animal would be sacrificed for the sins of the people. And it was a picture of the necessity to have something to pay for our sins. The alternative to this is that we pay for our sins ourselves.

[6 : 15] But as we've just said in Romans 6.23, the wages of sin is death. So it's not something that we want to pay for ourselves. But there is a choice there.

We can pay for our own sin with our lives. But Christ has offered to pay this for us. And so what a wonderful gift that is. And I wanted to look at the parable of the servant in Matthew 18.

So I think this demonstrates this very well. So it's Matthew 18, verse 21. That's on page 985.

So Matthew 18, verse 21 says, Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?

Up to seven times? Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

[7 : 30] As he began the settlement, a man who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him.

Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I will pay back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. But then the servant went out.

When the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. Pay back what you owe me, he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, Be patient with me and I will pay you back.

But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown in prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said. I cancelled all the debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?

[8 : 42] In anger, his master turned him over to the jailer to be tortured until he paid back all he owed. This is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

So it's a really powerful message there from Jesus that he's extended so much generosity and kindness and forgiveness.

And it's cost so much. It wasn't just something that Jesus said, oh, I'll just be very forgiving to these people. He paid for this with his life and he's given this great gift to us.

And so it really is a very small thing to extend this to the people around us in comparison to what Christ has done, which is why I think he makes such a strong point there. It was a great thing that Christ did when he died.

He paid a debt that we could only have paid for with our lives. And it's amazing.

[9 : 50] It really is amazing. And we should be excited and enthusiastic about extending that towards other people when we really think about what Jesus has done for us.

But this debt that this servant owed, one talent was about 20 years wages for a laborer, and it was 10,000 of those.

So that's a lot of money, a huge amount of money that is inconceivable that he could really pay that back. So it was such an amazing amount he'd been forgiven.

And then he refused to forgive such a small amount. So I wanted to look at four questions or objections we might have about thinking about this.

The first is, if we don't forgive our brother and sister in Christ, can we be forgiven? If I don't forgive my brother, can I be forgiven? And the Bible is clear.

[10:53] It says, no, a good tree bears good fruit. If there is no good fruit, then it is not a good tree. Fruit is the evidence. When Jesus saw the fig tree with the leaves and there was no fruit, he cursed it because the tree should have had the first signs of fruit on there.

But there was nothing. The tree was barren, and he cursed the tree, and it died. And if there is no forgiveness towards other Christians or other people in our life, then it's clear, I think, that there is no salvation in us.

We don't have a true saving faith if we have no forgiveness. And verse 14 of this chapter, chapter 6, says, So he's very clear.

Very clear, very strong. Number two, shouldn't people pay for what they've done? And this, I think, personally, I think this is an amazing answer to this question.

That if we're talking about our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we're talking about them paying for their things that they've done, sins they've committed against us, then the only conclusion we come to is that Christ's atonement has paid for their sin.

[12:24] Whatever punishment we would want them to suffer has been suffered for by Christ. Whatever sin they committed against us has been paid for by Christ. And if another believer has the same forgiveness that we have, if we really believe that Christ's atonement for our sin is good enough, then it's good enough for all of us.

And it should change the whole way we see our brothers and sisters in relationship to dealing with tension and difficulties between us.

But I think it probably is the case sometimes that we have the unspoken feeling, we may not even realise that, we know that Christ has paid for their sin, but in some way we think that there should be some payment in this life as well for them.

And we want to try and administer that in some way. But this just takes away the completeness of Christ paying for all sin. And it steals the glory from God for his forgiveness and he's anti-gospel. And there are consequences for our actions, particularly criminal actions, there should be consequences for that.

[13:46] But I think there should never be unforgiveness. That unforgiveness should never be a consequence from our actions. In an ideal world, whatever we did, there would always be a place for forgiveness from others around us.

Number three, you might be thinking, I know that they're forgiven by Christ, but I still feel hurt and offended. And this is really where it gets very difficult to forgive people.

Because we know that Christ has paid for our sins. And we know that if it's our brothers and sisters in Christ, maybe they have apologized, but we still feel hurt or offended.

And I think really the answer to this is we need to look at the example that Christ has given us. And this is the example of covering the sin of others with forgiveness rather than exposing it in outrage. It's the example of being silent before his accusers. Jesus taught us to love our enemies. He taught us to be humble, taught us to be meek.

[15:01] The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, patience. So I think it all makes sense. It all fits together that everything is pointing in this direction, that we really should forgive each other for whatever we need to forgive each other of.

And to answer this objection about people who are hurting from the way that other people have treated them, we need to be open about this with other people. If your brother has sinned against you, it says that you should go and tell him and be open with him and be loving.

And don't expect all their feelings of pain and hurt to be gone before you forgive them because you'll be waiting a long time. And just going back to the idea of lending money, if somebody lends you money and doesn't pay you back, you will always have the loss of that money.

If you forgive somebody of 50 pounds, you'll always have the loss of that 50 pounds. There's no way for you to get that back because you've forgiven them of it.

And it's the same with anything else that we forgive, that if you've forgiven of it, if you forgive somebody, you accept the loss of whatever has been done to you.

[16:23] And we should remember that the atonement was from Christ and we shouldn't expect our brothers and sisters to pay for their sins.

And we should encourage them not to try. And I think that's very important, that if people come to you apologizing, feeling very bad about it, that we should be able to encourage them to remember that Christ has paid for their sins and not try and make it worse by making them feel bad. And lastly, number four, what about people who aren't saved? And do we still need to forgive them? Their sin hasn't been paid for by Christ.

There is no part of the atonement for them if they don't yet know Christ. So what about justice in that case? But forgiving someone doesn't absolve them from the consequences of what they've done.

So it's not up to us to say whether they should suffer some kind of punishment or not, but we can still forgive them.

[17 : 38] And I just think it's an amazing opportunity to display the gospel, to display the forgiveness that we have through Christ by extending that to other people.

And I wanted to read something. Earlier, at the end of January, January the 24th, a man called Larry Nassar was sentenced to life imprisonment for molesting at least 250 girls over a period of 20 years while he was working as the USA Gymnastic National Team doctor.

What a terrible life this man has lived. And Rachel Denhollander was the first woman to publicly accuse Larry of sexual abuse back in 2016.

And then on the 24th of January when he was sentenced, she was the last of more than 150 women and girls who had confronted him in court when he was sentenced for his crimes.

So she made the statement to Larry in front of the court. And I just wanted to read part of that because I think it demonstrates in a very vivid way forgiveness and just really shows us the gospel demonstrated to the world.

[18 : 59] So this is part of her statement and she read this out in court. You've become a man ruled by selfish and perverted desires, a man defied by his daily choices repeatedly to feed that selfishness and perversion.

You chose to pursue wickedness no matter what it cost others and the opposite of what you have done is for me to choose to love sacrificially. No matter what it cost me. In the early hours, in the early hearings, you brought a Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness.

And so it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God himself loving so sacrificially that he gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin he did not commit.

By his grace, I too choose to love this way. You spoke of praying for forgiveness, but Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things.

As if good deeds can erase what you have done, it comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen in this courtroom today.

[20 : 17] The Bible you carry speaks of final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing and that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found and it will be there for you.

I pray you experience the soul-crushing way of guilt so that you may someday experience true repentance, true forgiveness from God which you need far more than forgiveness from me though I extend that to you as well.

And I think that's such a such a demonstration of the gospel that she has shown all those people, all the other victims who don't know Christ have seen the power of forgiveness in her life and it reminded me of a verse in Colossians 1.24, Paul says, I rejoice in what I am suffering for you.

I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regards to Christ's affliction for the sake of his body which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present you, present to you the word of God in its fullness.

I think the only thing that was lacking for the Colossians was the in-person demonstration of the sufferings of Christ out of love for his people. There was no deficiency in Christ's suffering but it is made clearer when it's displayed in people, displayed in person through his people and so we should become walking parables to simply show people the love of God, the forgiveness of God that has worked out in our lives by extending that.

[22 : 16] Rachel Denhollander has done this by extending forgiveness to someone who does not deserve forgiveness and what an amazing example of salt and light that she is and I think we should pray that when we ask for God to forgive us our debts, forgive us our sin and we forgive others their debts that we do that for the glory of Christ that we remember that it cost it cost Jesus when he died on the cross.

It didn't come for nothing it cost him and it's something that we we can by the power of the spirit by his grace can and should extend to our brothers and sisters and to the rest of the world.
Amen.