

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #62, Lord's Day 51*

## A Readiness to Forgive



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

## **John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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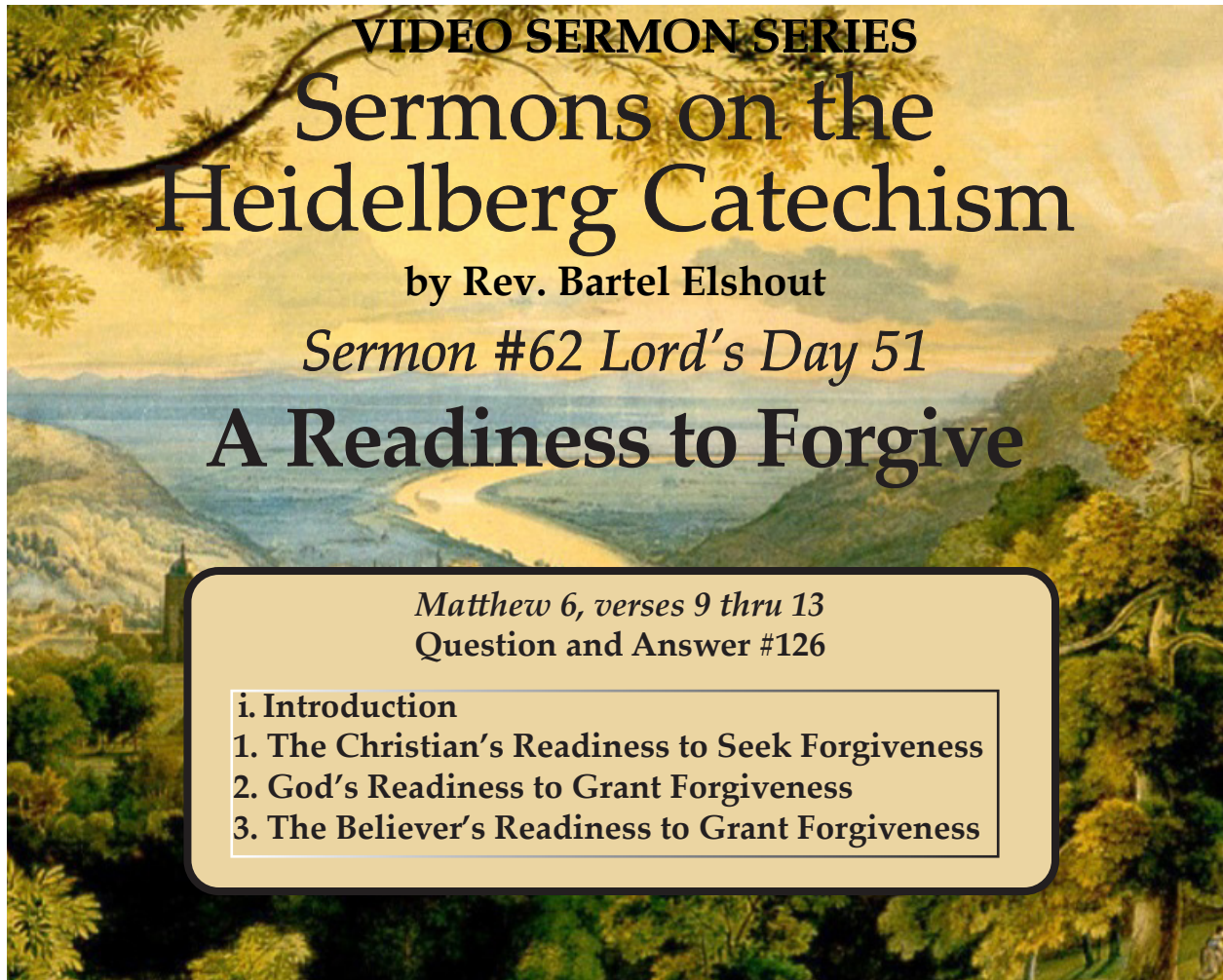
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*Sermon #62 Lord's Day 51*

**A Readiness to Forgive**

*Matthew 6, verses 9 thru 13*  
Question and Answer #126

**i. Introduction**

- 1. The Christian's Readiness to Seek Forgiveness**
- 2. God's Readiness to Grant Forgiveness**
- 3. The Believer's Readiness to Grant Forgiveness**

**Introduction**

Boys and girls, what must it have been for that father to embrace his son, who had gone to a far country, and who spent his living, who spent his inheritance in riotous living, when that young man in that far country came to himself and realized how grievously he had offended his father, and whose heart was kindled with an intense desire to return to his father, though he was not certain how his father would receive him. But he so longed for the restoration of that relationship that he was willing to spend the rest of his days as one of his father's hired servants. And we know how that all went. Because what that young man did not realize was that his father had been waiting for his return; he had been longing for his return, a father who was more than ready to pardon his son, should he return. As you know, when the father saw him coming, he did not wait for the son to come to him; he did not stop his son in his tracks and tell him that he should first clean himself up and make himself acceptable; but the father, dispensing with all the social protocol of his day, the father ran to his son, wrapped his arms around him and smothered him with his kisses, so that the young man never had an opportunity to confess what he wanted to confess (Luke 15:11–32). And as you know, Christ told that story, also for the Pharisees, to give them a proper view of the character of God. Because even though that young man was in a far country, he was still the son of his father. Their relationship still existed, even though it was not functioning. There was, of course, no fellowship, no communion between the father and that son. But the moment he comes back, the

moment he repents, the moment he returns, the father goes out of his way to let that young man know that in spite of all that he has done, that he has fully and freely forgiven him.

And congregation, that's the focus also of the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, because the focus on that petition is the Fatherly forgiveness of his children. We need to realize the context also in which the Heidelberg Catechism deals with the Lord's Prayer, in the realm of sanctification. And so, let's turn to our Heidelberg Catechism, and let's read together Lord's Day 51, Question and Answer #126: *Which is the fifth petition?*

The Answer: "*And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*"; that is, *be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners our transgressions, nor that depravity which always cleaves to us; even as we feel this evidence of Thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.*

So this petition focuses on, *A Readiness to Forgive*. First of all, we will focus on *The Christian's Readiness to Seek Forgiveness*, because that's what Christ wants to encourage us to do by means of that petition. And secondly, *God's Readiness to Grant Forgiveness*; we will see that's implied, as those two are inseparably connected. And thirdly, *The Believer's Readiness to Grant Forgiveness*: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

*A Readiness to Forgive; The Christian's Readiness to Seek Forgiveness; God's Readiness to Grant Forgiveness; and, The Believer's Readiness to Grant Forgiveness*, to those that have offended him or her.

### **1. The Christian's Readiness to Seek Forgiveness**

The language is remarkable, is it not? It says, "Forgive us our debts." Because, you see, if we belong to the household of God, if we belong to the family of God, we have a debt of love towards our heavenly Father. We are indebted to him for all things. We are indebted to him for our daily bread, as we saw in the fourth petition. But as I pointed out to you already, that fourth petition is uniquely positioned in the Lord's Prayer, because the reason we ask for daily bread, the reason we ask for God to provide for all of our temporal needs, is so that we can live out God's agenda stipulated in the first three petitions. And so, what is the agenda again? What is the agenda of the Christian life? What are the three goals of the Christian life? First of all, to hallow God's name, to live lives to God's honor, and lives in which we honor his Word. Secondly, that we do whatever we can to promote the coming of his kingdom, to be engaged as the people of God to advance the cause of God in this fallen world. That is, after all, the Great Commission that God has given to his church. And thirdly, our obligation to live our lives according to his revealed will; that in every aspect of our lives, individually, as spouses in our marriage, as parents, as children, as employers, as employees, whatever our station of life may be, to honor God, to honor his Word, by living lives that are consistent with his Word.

And then, when we consider how we often fall short, and that we have but a small beginning of that obedience which God requires, and if we then consider how faithful God is in caring for us, how faithfully he gives us our daily bread, how faithfully he meets our daily needs; and then we view that over against how we are doing in our sacred obligation to hallow his name, to promote the coming of his kingdom, and to be doers of his will; then there's only one petition that remains for us, and that is, "Lord, forgive us our debts."

And we're talking here about the sins of believers. That's the context of the Lord's Prayer here. Because even though a believer is a pardoned sinner—that's what a believer is—in other words, if by grace, we have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ, we are indeed justified by faith, and that is a once-for-all justification. That justification will not be cancelled. And in that sense,

our relationship with God as our heavenly Father is secure in Christ. And yet, the reality of the Christian life is that God's children continue to sin until their dying day, and they continue to sin daily. That's why, when Christ taught us this prayer, he not only recognized our physical needs for daily bread, but our deep spiritual need. And by means of this prayer, he wanted to encourage his disciples and encourage us, that even though we sin daily, even though we stumble daily, that we must daily take refuge to our heavenly Father to secure his pardon.

And so, what believers need daily is what we call God's Fatherly or "paternal pardon." When we believe for the first time, and when we embrace Christ by faith, God then, he pardons us judicially. He grants us a judicial pardon, and he pardons us. And that pardon covers our entire life. But we also need his Fatherly pardon. I've explained this before. That's why I began with the illustration of the parable of the prodigal son or the gracious father. Because that relationship was ultimately not broken, but it was not functional until that young man returned to his father and who then embraced him and forgave him. And so it is in the life of God's children. Our relationship with God in Christ is secured, absolutely secured. But the functioning of that relationship, our daily fellowship with God, our walking with God, will be affected by our sins, especially if we do not confess our sins and daily take refuge to our heavenly Father. Because the obvious implication of this petition, as we will see, is that the reason Christ teaches us to pray daily for the forgiveness of our sins is because God is willing to daily grant us the pardon of our sins.

And the language of the Catechism is, again, so beautiful, so experiential. It says, *Be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners our transgressions, nor that depravity which always cleaves to us.* What an honest assessment this is of who we are and remain as believers. We will continue to be sinners until our dying day. That's why, for the believer, the day of his death is the best day of his life. Because then, at last, at last we shall be delivered from the body of this death. But until that happens, we need to experience, and we do experience, over and over again, that in ourselves, we never get beyond being poor sinners. We will be poor sinners until our last breath. What does that mean? That means that we are spiritually bankrupt. There's absolutely nothing in us that commends us to the favor of God. And the reason God is gracious to us, the reason he has pardoned us, the reason he embraces us in his Fatherly love is not because of anything in us, but because of who is Son is. That's the wonder of the believer, that God imputes to us poor sinners, poor bankrupt sinners, he imputes to us the flawless righteousness of his only begotten Son. It is that imputed righteousness that renders us acceptable in the sight of God. And the experiential reality of God's children is that until their dying day, they never get beyond being poor sinners. As a matter of fact, one of the marks of spiritual growth is that we become more and more aware of that spiritual bankruptcy in ourselves. And it's so very, very profitable for us spiritually, because you see, that's what compels us to look outside of ourselves. That's what teaches us not to expect anything from myself, but to expect it all from the Lord Jesus Christ, and from his unsearchable riches.

Do not *impute to us poor sinners our transgressions.* And so, of course, that's a reference to our actual sins. That's a reference to the fact that every day, as believers, we still transgress God's precepts. Some of it is known to us, some of it we, sadly, do ignorantly. That's why it's so comforting that God appointed sacrifices for the sins of ignorance. One of our forefathers said, the majority of sins we commit, we commit ignorantly. We're not even aware of it. And so, it's always worse than we think. It's worse than we think. But the wonderful thing is, the grace of God that is also communicated in this petition, it infinitely exceeds all that. And so, do not *impute to us poor sinners our transgressions.* Lord, do not hold me accountable. That's what prompted David to pray, in Psalm 51, when he realized how grievously he, as a believer, had sinned, how grievously

he had offended God. He said, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (verse 1).

But it’s not just our transgressions, it’s not just our actual sins. And I want you to notice that Christ uses the plural. He did not say, “Forgive us our debt”—forgive us our *debts*. That’s why James writes in James 3, “For in many things we offend all” (verse 2), every single day. But then, there is also *that depravity which always cleaves to us*, that indwelling corruption that remains in the believer until our dying day. Oh, what grief that indwelling corruption causes to every believer. That’s that old nature, that old nature that dies but a slow death; that old nature that has to be crucified; that old nature that always tries to regain the territory it has lost. Luther<sup>1</sup> uses two powerful illustrations, very well known, and you may have heard them, to describe that reality of that indwelling corruption. That’s the groaning of the Apostle Paul in Romans 7. He groans! Oh, that causes him so much grief. He’s so tired of it. He’s so tired of himself. He’s so tired of sinning time and again, that he throws up his hands and he says, “Who shall deliver me from the body of death?” “O wretched man”—not what I was, but “O wretched man that I am” (Romans 7:24). So Luther, gave two very good examples. First of all he used the example of a man’s beard. And he says, no matter how often you shave that beard, the hair always comes back. When you’re done shaving, your skin is smooth, but the next day, the hair has returned. Luther said that’s how it is. We may have conquered one sin one day. By the grace of God, we may have overcome, but the next day, it will manifest itself again. Another example he uses is the example of a vegetable garden. And he said no matter how often you work in that garden, how diligently you work in that garden in removing the weeds, if you leave that garden alone for a few days, the weeds will reappear. That’s the reality of the Christian life. That’s the daily experiential reality for the Christian.

And that’s why, because that’s daily reality, it’s a daily struggle until our last breath; that’s why we need to pray daily, daily, “Father, forgive us this day our debts.” And what a blessing it is when we learn that lesson. What a blessing it is that we will not ever end the day without having freely confessed our sins to our heavenly Father. Because that’s the implication of course. When Christ teaches us this prayer, “Forgive us our debts,” that means, of course, the implication is that we have to confess our debts. We have to confess our sins freely to our heavenly Father. What does it mean to confess? Actually, it means “to say the same thing.” It actually means, when we confess our sins, we agree with God. We agree with how God views our sins. And so confession is actually self-indictment. When we confess our sins, we are indicting ourselves before God. And congregation, I hope that in your closet, when you are all alone, that you will be brutally honest before God, because he knows exactly who we are, he knows exactly how we behaved that day. We need to humble ourselves and realize, every day afresh, that we have to do with a God before whom all things are open and naked; who knows about every thought that darted across our mind; who knows about every sinful desire, every sinful inclination, every sinful word. He knows it better than we do. And so how foolish for us not to come before him and to confess freely how we have transgressed his commandments. But the wonderful truth of this petition is that God is so ready to forgive when we do this; so ready to grant us his paternal, his Fatherly pardon.

And the reason why, sometimes, believers become backsliders, and the reason why we do not prosper in our spiritual life, is because we do not endeavor to keep a clean account. And so, when we do not confess our sins, then there comes a separation. God rebuked the people of Israel, in Isaiah 59, verse 2, he says, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther (1483–1546), was a German priest, theologian, author, hymn writer, professor, and former Augustinian friar, who was the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Protestant Christian history.

your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” And you see, what God’s desire is, you see, he wants to make his people hypersensitive to sin. And he does that by hiding his face, by hiding his face, and to teach us that if we continue in sin without confessing it, that we cannot experience his favor. But his desire is to teach us thereby to keep a short account, and to come before him daily, and to freely confess our sins. Jeremiah 3, verses 13 and 25 are very helpful here. It says, “Only”—“Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God”—that covenant relationship, that special relationship; you have sinned against *your* God. And then, in verse 25, we see the result, “We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God.” And so, beloved, we need to be ready to seek that pardon daily. We need to be ready to come before God daily. We need to come and freely confess our sins—a God who is so ready to forgive.

But, of course, that includes confessing also our sins to each other. Because, when we sin, we either transgress the first table or the second table, we either offend God or our neighbor, and often we do both. And I’ve said this once before, and I’ll say it briefly. But that’s what Christians do. Christians do not apologize. Christians confess their faults to each other. Christians confess their sins to each other. And so, as a husband, if I have offended my wife, it’s not enough to just say, “I’m sorry.” I need to say to her, “I have sinned against you. Will you forgive me?” That’s the pattern of Scripture; and vice versa. So Christians confess their sins. That’s a lot harder, you see. That’s a lot harder than just saying, “I’m sorry,” to be able to say to the person against whom you have sinned, the person whom you have offended, to actually say, “I have sinned against you.” That goes against our grain. And so, we have to humble ourselves. And then, you see, by doing that, we are labeling what we have done as to what it really is—not just that I have offended, no, “I have sinned against you.” And so, we are to confess our sins committed against our heavenly Father, but also against each other.

## 2. God’s Readiness to Grant Forgiveness

But then we move to our second point, namely, that God is ready to grant forgiveness. That’s the wonderful implication of this petition, congregation. The implication of this petition is that the God directs us to pray for forgiveness is the one who delights to grant forgiveness. That’s why we sang Psalm 86, those beautiful words: “For thou, LORD,” one of my favorite verses in the Bible, Psalm 86 verse 5. I would encourage you to memorize it: “For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.” It cannot be any richer than that—“ready to forgive.” And the Dutch version is actually better yet. It says, “Thou art a God who delights to forgive.” He’s not just ready to forgive, he delights to pardon. That’s why Matthew Henry<sup>2</sup>—I’ve quoted it before—so wonderfully expounds this, when he says that God is more ready to forgive than we are to repent. Think about that. God is more ready to forgive than we are to repent—“Ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee.” That’s the wonder of the gospel, congregation, that God’s mercy infinitely exceeds my sin.

That’s why the Catechism points, here, to the blood of Christ. It’s because of that blood, of that precious blood of God’s only begotten Son, that God can be ready to forgive every single day of my life; that blood, which is of infinite value; that blood which cleanses from all transgression; that blood that the Father always sees. And you know I’ve talked about this—I will be brief here—the reason why blood had to be shed is because “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Blood had to be shed to teach us that, as sinners, we have forfeited the right to live. And therefore, the

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry (1662–1714, was a British nonconformist and Presbyterian minister and author, best known for his six-volume biblical commentary, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

substitute had to die in our place. Blood had to be shed, in order that, on the basis of that shed blood, our sins could be forgiven. That's why the Apostle, in Hebrews 9, quotes that from the Old Testament, that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22 and Leviticus 17:11). That's what happened on the cross, is that God imputed to his Son the transgressions, the sins, the depravity of his people. It all came down upon his head. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him;" so that by his stripes we could be healed (Isaiah 53:5).

Now we may know that in Christ, God has opened a fountain, a fountain to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin, and for our uncleanness (Zechariah 13:1). What a complete package that is! Sin, our transgression, but also the moral defilement that goes along with sin; that blood that is in that fountain, the blood of Emanuel, that blood cleanses from all sin. And to that blood, we may take refuge daily. To that fountain we may come daily, no matter how we have stumbled, no matter how we have failed. That fountain is always open. That's the whole point of this petition.

That's where Satan so tries to deceive us. Satan is always trying to keep us from our knees, to so discourage us because we have failed—and some days we sin more grievously than others. But Satan is there to deceive us that we cannot return to God. What a liar he is! Christ is teaching us that no matter how much we stumble, no matter how often we stumble, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sins.

And so, in Christ, dear believer, in Christ, there is a fountain in which we may daily cleanse our conscience. That's what the Apostle Paul did. In these wonderful words in Acts 24, verse 16, he says, "Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"—the two obligations we have: toward God and toward man. "Herein exercise myself." Do you know what that means, congregation?—that the Apostle Paul daily took refuge to that fountain, daily came before God, daily confessed his sins, daily experienced that God is ready, ready to forgive seventy time seven times.

And you see, when we do that daily, what it does is it breaks the power of sin. In 1 John 2, verses 1 and 2, words we know well, "If any many sin"—that means *when we sin*—"we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous and he is the propitiation for our sins." That's what our Puritan forefathers meant, when they said—it originated with Richard Baxter<sup>3</sup>—that for every look we take at ourselves, we must take ten looks at Christ. The devil wants us to do the opposite, take ten looks at ourselves; because he knows, when we take ten looks at ourselves, we will fail to look to Christ. Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Romans 5:20). That's why the language of Scripture is so beautiful about this very essential aspect of God's being—a God who delights to pardon. Psalm 103, verse 12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." And boys and girls, you know that the east and the west, they never meet. So remarkable is God's pardon. And so, Micah, in holy amazement, utters these words—Micah 7, verses 18 and 19—"Who is God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity"—present tense—"and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?...And thou wilt cast all their sins into the depth of the sea."

And that's what God wanted to teach his people by way of the morning and evening sacrifice. You will often hear me refer to this, because that was such an essential component of the life of Israel. The morning and evening sacrifice, by which God communicated to his people every day that, on the basis of that shed blood of the lamb that pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ, he could be

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Baxter (1615–1691) was an English nonconformist church leader and theologian, who has been described as "the chief of English Protestant Schoolmen."

their God, and they could be his people; that there was forgiveness for them at the beginning of the day; there was forgiveness for them at the end of the day. This is the God, that Christ is talking about here in this prayer.

And so, do you know what that means?—that God—and dear believer, if I could only convince you of that myself—God so much desires fellowship with you. He so much longs to hear from you. He so much desires to commune with you. That’s why he gave the whole structure of the ceremonial law. Not only did he deliver them from Egypt, deliver them from bondage, but by means of that whole sacrificial system, it was God’s desire to dwell in the midst of his people, and to live in daily fellowship and communion with them.

And so, what this teaches us is that no matter how we stumble, no matter how we fail, that he is always ready to resume daily fellowship with his children. That’s why, in the gospel, God is, as it were, always reasoning with us. And he says, “Come now,” “Come now, and 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” (Isaiah 1:18). That’s why John writes, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleans us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

### **3. The Believer’s Readiness to Grant Forgiveness**

“Heavenly Father, forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). Does that mean that Christ puts our forgiveness of others on the same plane as his Father’s? Does he suggest that this is a condition that needs to be fulfilled? No, he’s simply saying that the two belong together. He’s saying that when our vertical relationship with God is restored, by confessing our sins, that should manifest itself horizontally as well with our interaction with our neighbor. And so, brilliantly, brilliantly, Christ constructed this petition, so that when I bow my knees, and when I seek forgiveness of the sins of that day, he compels me to ask myself whether I have been just as ready to forgive those that have offended me. And what is very clear, also from the passage that I read to you, is that if we’re not willing to forgive those that have offended us, we cannot experience God’s favor in our soul. The two belong inseparably together.

So that’s our third point, the believer should be ready to grant forgiveness. So, the sacred duty of the Christian is this: we should be as ready to forgive our neighbor—whoever that neighbor may be, whether it’s my wife, my husband, my children, my parents, my employer, my employee, whoever it may be—we should be as ready to forgive them as God is ready to forgive us. How ready? Well, that’s what Jesus taught Peter by means of that parable. Peter thought that it was quite impressive for him to say, he said, “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21–22). And in the Dutch Bible it says, “seventy times seven times.” What it actually means, Christ is saying, when it comes to this, we don’t deal with mathematical formulas. He’s saying we should always be ready to forgive those that have sinned against us.

What does that mean? If someone comes to us, and says, “I’m sorry, but I’ve sinned against you. Will you forgive me?” You must grant that forgiveness. It may be difficult. There may be real pain. There may be an offense that you will not be able to forget right away. It may be that you have really been hurt by that person. But if that person comes to you and says, “I am so sorry. I have sinned against you. I have offended you. Will you please forgive me?” Then we must be as ready to forgive as God is ready to forgive. But what does that mean? When you say to someone, “I forgive you,” you are thereby making the commitment that you will never bring up that transgression again. It’s done. It’s done. So we can’t just hide all those transgressions in the closet and then when

we feel like it, we bring them out in a moment that's convenient for us, no. That's not what God does. God forgets. Now, of course, God cannot forget anything. He's eternal, all-knowing. What that means is that God will never ever revisit that transgression. When it's forgiven, it's forgiven. And that's the whole point of that parable, that powerful parable.

And so, here's the king who pardons his servant who owed him 10,000 talents. And parents, this would be a nice exercise for you to do with your children, to figure out how much that is. Because one talent was 6,000 pence. So, 10,000 talents is 60 million pence. One pence was the wage of a laborer, the day wage of a laborer. So let's assume that someone today works eight hours, and gets \$20 an hour, so one pence is the equivalent of \$160. You multiply that by 60 million, you end up with \$9.6 billion in today's value. So Christ purposely selected an amount that the people in his day would not have been able to wrap their minds around—\$9.6 billion. That was the debt he owed his master. And in one moment, he cancelled that debt, that entire debt. It was gone. It was gone. He forgave him. And then he had the audacity to grab his fellowservant by the throat and said, "Pay me what you owe me." And what did he own him?—100 pence. He owed the king 60 million pence, and his servant owed him 100 pence—\$12,000. And so, what that servant owed him was a pittance compared to what he owed the king. And so, the point Christ is making is how can you, a sinner, if God has pardoned you, has pardoned your transgressions, how can you not be willing to pardon those that have offended you? Because what people do to us is not worth mentioning, compared to the debt that we owe God.

And so, the point Jesus is making here is that a forgiven person must be a forgiving person. Let me say that again—a forgiven person must be a forgiving person. So turn in your Bibles with me to a remarkable passage that underscores this, from Luke 17, verses 3 and 4. There, we read, Christ is speaking here, he said, "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." So just imagine that someone does the same thing to you seven times a day, the same offense, the same transgression—Christ is saying, if seven times a day he comes to you, seven times he confesses, and seven times he says to you, "Forgive me," that you will forgive him seven times. And again, the number, of course, is, here, the number of perfection. Again, this is not a mathematical formula. And I think you understand the point that Christ is making. He is saying that a forgiven sinner, a forgiven believer, must be a forgiving person. That's the obligation that we have.

And so, a persistent and a stubborn unwillingness to forgive—we call that bitterness—is evidence, probable evidence of the absence of grace. In Matthew 6, verses 14 and 15, it says, "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." That's what bitterness is. That's why the Bible exhorts us not to allow a root of bitterness to flourish in our soul. It's like a noxious weed. And bitterness means a refusal to let go of an offense, that you hang on, you cling on to the offense. And it will poison you. It will make you bitter. That's why we're told not to allow that to happen. But you see, if we daily come before God, and we daily confess our sins to God, and we daily experience how gracious God is, how longsuffering he is, how he bears with me, then we should be willing to forgive others.

In my first congregation, I had an elderly couple, and they felt that they had been greatly wronged by their son. But their son had come around, and in many ways, he was signaling to his parents that he wanted to restore the relationship. But they refused. They stubbornly refused. I don't know how often I visited them. I pleaded with them to forgive their son, to forgive what he had done, and to embrace him again, and they just would not budge. And I finally said to them

in my last visit that I was there, I said, “If God is going to deal with you the way you are dealing with your son, you will be lost, and you will perish.” And to my knowledge, of no avail. And you see, then that means there’s no grace there. And all of God’s children may be guilty at times of not being willing to forgive at that moment, but Christ is teaching us by this petition, you cannot bow your knees and ask your Father to forgive you, if you have not yet forgiven, in your heart, those that have offended you.

And that’s the soul-searching question for us, “Have I readily forgiven my neighbor from the heart?” What does that mean? That means, there can be cases where the person who has offended you, who have sinned against you, that they will never come around and ask you to forgive them. I mean, that’s possible. And so actually, that means that you cannot actually verbally grant them that pardon. But in your heart, you must have pardoned them. And if you do that, you will be ready to forgive them, should that day ever come. But it may never come, but in your heart, you must have forgiven that person who has sinned against you. And so, again, in Mark 11, a very similar passage, verses 25 and 26, “And when you stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

And that’s why, when we, as God’s children, when we as believers, if we’re unwilling to forgive those that have sinned against us, that will bring darkness upon our soul, spiritual darkness. God will hide his face. Because you cannot pray this petition and be unwilling, be unwilling to forgive those that have sinned against you. There once was a church gathering where there was a serious conflict between two pastors. It was serious. And finally, they realized it was time for prayer, and the chairman asked the one brother who had an issue with the other, he said, “I want you to lead us in prayer, and I want you to pray the Lord’s Prayer.” And when he got to this petition, he could not continue, and he broke down, and he opened his eyes, and he said, “Brother, I forgive you. Will you forgive me?” Because that’s the intent; that’s the intent of that language, is that when we seek God’s forgiveness, we have to ask ourselves whether I am as ready to forgive those that have sinned against me.

And so, this petition demands that we are peacemakers. Peacemakers—“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9). God is merciful to those, even to those, to the unthankful, Jesus says at the end of Matthew 5—peacemakers. As I pointed out when I preached on this, not peace lovers, peacemakers. That means that as a Christian, as a believer, I am obligated to take the initiative. That’s what God has done. The initiative has been his from all of eternity, in giving his Son. And so, we are to be peacemakers. That’s why Paul writes, in Romans 12, verse 18, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” He’s saying there may be situations where it’s not possible, but then you have to have a clear conscience before God that it’s not because you did not do everything in your power to secure that reconciliation, that you have done as much as lies in you to live peaceably with all men.

And so, I hope you realize, again, the profound wisdom expressed in this petition, the profound instruction in this petition. And I hope and pray that we will carry this with us, and that we will order our prayers accordingly, and that, as the Apostle Paul, we will exercise ourselves to always have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men; by seeking his divine pardon, by seeking those whom we may have offended, and by forgiving those who have offended us. Because the blessed fruits of praying this petition, and living this petition, is that we will enjoy peace and fellowship with God, and peace and fellowship with our neighbor. Oh, we have to learn how to pray, do we not? Lord, teach us how to pray. Well, Christ has done that. And this has to be one of the components of our prayer life.

And if you have never taken refuge to this Christ, who shed his blood to save sinners, you are in awful danger. There's nothing worse than not to be forgiven. There's nothing worse than God's charging you with all of your transgressions, and then you will experience when you die that he will be no means clear the guilty, and you will perish. And what a wonder that that salvation is still offered to you, that God, who is ready to forgive, comes to you in the gospel, comes to you in his only begotten Son, and offers you that full and free pardon in his only begotten Son, promising to the vilest of sinners that, if we come to him, and if we take refuge to this Christ, if we come to him and embrace him by faith, that God will be ready to pardon even the vilest of sinners. That's why the story of Manasseh is in the Bible. What a vile sinner he was! And God pardoned him (2 Chronicles 33:13). Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted the church, and when he took refuge to Christ, God pardoned him (Acts 9:11–15). John Newton,<sup>4</sup> the slave trader, but he was a forgiven sinner. This is who God is, ready to forgive. Take refuge to him, while it is still the accepted time, the day of salvation.

And dear believer, we have homework, I have homework. May God bless this instruction, and may we learn that God has made full provision for us to dwell in daily fellowship with him—the God who is ready to forgive. Amen.

### **Let's pray.**

Oh, glorious and triune Jehovah, thou art good, and kind, and ready to forgive. What an astonishing truth! What glad tidings they are! We're so thankful that thou hast instructed us, oh, Lord Jesus, to pray that petition, to pray that daily, to pray it multiple times, to know that that petition pleases and honors the Father. Oh, that precious blood that cleanses from all sin, that blessed fountain that is filled with Emanuel's blood. And so, Lord, give us grace to repent, and give us grace to be as committed as the Apostle Paul was, that we would echo his words, that we would exercise ourselves to always have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men. Go with us now in this coming week. Give us grace to live our lives accordingly, that, as forgiven sinners, we will be forgiving sinners. Keep us from harm and danger, and gather with us again the next Lord's Day. We ask it alone in Christ's name. Amen

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<sup>4</sup> John Newton (1725–1807) was an English slave trader who was converted and repented, and became an evangelical Anglican cleric and abolitionist. He is best known for composing the hymn, "Amazing Grace."