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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“FORGIVE US OUR SINS...”
Matthew 6:12, 14-15

□ **“Forgive us our sins”** (Matthew 6:12).

☞ I prefer the word *mistakes*, don't you? It sounds better than **“sins,”** and it lets me off the hook. If I phrase it just right I can transfer my blame to you, as in: *“I'm sorry if my mistake offended you.”*

But Jesus did not say, “Forgive us our *mistakes*.” He said **“sins,”** plain and simple. Sure, we make honest mistakes, but we also flat-out sin.

☹ The bad news is, everyone falls {Ro 3:23} **“short of the glory of”** God's perfect righteousness. Not just the other guy, not just the secularists and pagans out there, not just our enemies – me, you and all of us.

- Some here are being liberated from sin's tyranny. **“Thank God! Now you are free from sin, your old master, and you have become slaves to your new master, righteousness”** (Romans 6:17-18 {NLT}).

- Some are sinking deeper into brutal bondage to sin by the day. Please, take heed! **“The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sin hold them fast”** (Proverbs 5:22).

☼ But not even the most vibrant, knowledgeable, sincere disciple is sin-free this side of heaven. We pray **“Forgive us our sins”** because we sin.

☠ Worse, {Ro 6:23, CEV} **“Sin pays off with death.”**

Sometimes, sinners have more fun than saints – to a degree, for a time. But just as an embezzler sacrifices his

soul on the altar of greed, and an adulterer forfeits precious love for a tawdry affair, and a heroin addict risks survival for one more fix those who persist in sin cooperate in their own destruction.

- James hit the nail on the head ~ {Jas 1:14-15} **“Each of us is tempted when [we] are dragged away by [our] own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”**

- Today, even the good die young; but {Rev 11:15} **“the kingdom of the world [will become] the kingdom of our Lord.”** {1 Co 15:53, NLT} **“Our perishable earthly bodies [will] be transformed into heavenly bodies that will never die.”** For the citizens of God's kingdom, {Rev 21:4} **“There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain.”**

- In contrast, those who serve this present darkness {Mt 8:12} **“will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

☼ We pray **“Forgive us our sins”** because the way of sin is the way of eternal death.

☺ The good news is, {Mt 6:9} **“Our Father in heaven” is like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.**

- {Lk 15:11-32} A man has two sons. Each will receive a large inheritance upon his death, but the younger demands his share now. It's like telling his father to drop dead.

His father honors his request and the kid moves out. He blows all his money on wild parties and cheap

women. By squandering his inheritance he spits on his father's hard work and generosity.

Then his money runs out, his "friends" run out, and the economy tanks. Desperate to survive, he takes a job tending swine. Not only is it disgusting and degrading work, it violates O.T. law. On top of that, it doesn't pay much: he is so hungry, he longs {Lk 15:16} **"to fill his stomach with the [pig's slop], but no one [will give him] any."**

This young man decides to return home, confess his sins, admit that he is not worthy of being called "son", and beg to be hired on as a servant.

While he is still far off, his father sees him. {Lk 15:20, Msg / TNIV} **"Heart pounding, he [runs] to his son, [throws] his arms around him and [kisses] him."** {Lk 15:22} **"Quick!"** He calls to his servants, **"Bring the best robe and put it on him"** (he restores his son's dignity). **"Put a [signet] ring on his finger"** (he restores his status as heir), **"and sandals on his feet"** (servants go barefoot, so he restores son's place in the household). Then he throws a lavish feast.

✪ We pray **"Forgive us our sins"** because God is able and eager to pardon our worst offenses.

☐ **"Forgive us our sins."** But Jesus does not stop there, does He? He continues, **"As we forgive those who sin against us."**

☐ Just in case we don't get it, in verses 14-15 He clarifies his already clear teaching ~ **"If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."**

Is there no out? Are there no provisions to make this easier? Can't we claim a personal exemption?

◆ Some argue that **"as we forgive"** is a figure of speech, that Jesus is using a metaphor to make the point that forgiveness should, *generally*, be our goal.

🔗 Well, it is an axiom that Scripture interprets Scripture. Let's apply that principle here.

- Just before this, in Matthew 5:44-48 Jesus commands ~ **"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect... as your heavenly Father is perfect."**

- In Mark 11:25. Jesus instructs, **"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins."** This is not a repetition of the Lord's Prayer. It is a separate teaching.

- Matthew 18 {23-34} records the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. A king decides to settle accounts with his servants. One (we'll call him Attila) owes an unimaginable sum, enough to bankrupt Bill Gates. He can't pay up, so the king orders him sold into slavery.

Attila falls to his knees. **"Be patient with me,"** he begs, **"and I will pay back everything."** As if that's ever going to happen! Even so, the king takes pity and cancels Attila's entire debt.

This reminds Attila that another servant owes him a few thousand dollars. He immediately tracks the guy down, grabs him by the neck and begins to choke him. **“Pay back what you owe me!”** he screams.

The man falls to his knees. **“Be patient with me,”** he begs, **“and I will pay you back.”**

But Attila is merciless. He has the man thrown into prison until he can pay back every last cent.

When the king finds out about it, he is furious: **“You wicked servant. I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?”** And into prison Attila goes.

Then Jesus warns, **“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive a brother or sister from your heart”** (Matthew 18:35).

✳ In light of these verses it is evident that Jesus expects us to take Matthew 6 literally.

◇ Some argue that **“as we forgive”** is limited in scope, that it applies only when the sin is not habitual, or it is not especially terrible, or the offender is sufficiently remorseful.

- As for frequency, in Matthew 18:21-22 Peter asks, **“Lord, how many times shall I forgive some-one who sins against me? Up to seven times?”** He is being generous. The rabbis teach that a person should not forgive any more than 3 times. Yet Jesus replies, **“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.”**

That *is* figurative language. Christ’s disciples understand him to mean that when we keep count, it is not forgiveness at all; we are merely delaying revenge.

- As for severity and remorse, some of us have been the victims of stomach-turning sin. Nevertheless, no deceit, betrayal or abuse that we have faced can equal or exceed the treachery, injustice, and torture Jesus suffered. And those who had a direct hand in his crucifixion were not the least bit apologetic, with the exception of Judas and the Roman Centurion. But what did Jesus do on the cross? He prayed, **“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing”** (Luke 23:34).

✳ It is evident that Jesus expects us to apply Matthew 6 consistently, without exception.

● There is one caveat: Jesus is talking about forgiveness, not reconciliation.

📖 Forgiveness means pardoning an offense, cancelling a debt of guilt, giving up all claims to revenge.

📖 Reconciliation means restoring a broken relationship, creating harmony out of conflict, or causing enemies to become friends.

≠ Reconciliation demands participation by both sides. Forgiveness can be accomplished by one.

≠ Reconciliation demands that the offender change. Forgiveness needs only the effort of the forgiver.

≠ Reconciliation demands mutual trust. Forgiveness calls only for trust in God.

≠ Reconciliation is often impossible. With God’s help, forgiveness is always attainable.

Reconciliation is ideal, when the right conditions are met. However, our ironclad obligation to forgive does not require us to submit to betrayal or abuse.

We pray **“Forgive us”** because we sin.

We pray **“Forgive us”** because the way of sin is the way of eternal death.

We pray **“Forgive us”** because God is able and eager to pardon.

And because Jesus said, **“if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins,”** we pray **“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us,”**

This is the word of the Lord.