

Monday, July 13, 2020

We are forgiven; we forgive

- Pastor Hank French

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 6:12).

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:8-9).

The fifth petition in our Lord's Prayer is about a subject dear to the heart of Jesus—forgiveness. Jesus both declared divine forgiveness and called his followers to be people who forgive. He saw forgiveness as a two-way street: God freely forgives us and, within the ethos of divine forgiveness, we freely forgive others. That's just how things are under the rule of God.

Although Matthew's Greek is often translated "Forgive us our trespasses..." the word literally means "debts." In this prayer we ask God to forgive our debts as we forgive those who are indebted to us. In Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to "forgive our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone *indebted* to us." So what is all this talk about debts?

It doesn't take a great stretch of the imagination to realize that we are deeply indebted to God. God has created this planet in such a way that it bountifully provides all that is needed for a meaningful and happy life for all people. We are in debt to God in that we have a moral obligation to recognize God's beneficence with the gratitude it deserves. We rarely do. We "owe" God trust and love and a life lived in keeping with God's gracious will—it is a debt that keeps growing as we turn our trust and love towards the things of this world rather than toward the creator of this world.

God deals equitably with us and expects us to deal equitably with each other—our lack of justice is rolled into the debt that we owe God. God has compassion on us and treats us with mercy—our indifference to others adds to the debt that we owe to God.

Our debt to God is so great that we cannot repay it and so we have no recourse but to ask for forgiveness—a forgiveness that God is quick to grant. In granting forgiveness, God grants the gift of relationship, the gift of a future not chained to or determined by the debts and sins of the past.

If we are in debt to God and in need of God's forgiveness, then it stands to reason that we are in debt to each other and in need of each other's forgiveness. Our failure to love each other as God loves us runs up our debt to God while at the same time running up our debt to each other.

As St. Paul wrote: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another... (Romans 13:8). When we do not love, we are in debt to those who we owe love. When we are not loved, those who have failed to love us are in debt to us. We cannot pay the accumulated debt, and neither can they. The only answer to this spiral of debt is forgiveness, a clean slate, a fresh start, a renewed relationship.

Prayer: Forgiving God, as far as it depends upon me, may there be forgiveness in all my relationships. Amen.