

## Matthew 6D

- Let's return to our study of Matthew 6 and to Jesus' explanation of how to live-out our righteousness
  - Jesus focuses His teaching on four examples of religious life, so He can contrast hypocritical piety with genuine obedience to God
    - His four examples are giving, prayer, fasting, and wealth
    - When we practice these things from a hypocritical heart, we practice these things to be noticed by other people
    - We do so, hoping to receive their praises
    - In such cases, Jesus says these men have already received their reward
  - But when we practice these things with a true heart, we do so quietly, secretly seeking to impress our Father in Heaven
    - And our Father in Heaven will see our obedience
    - And He will assign us eternal, Heavenly reward in a day to come
    - As Paul says

**1 Cor. 4:5** Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

- In the end, our praise will come from God, and that praise is based on the motives of our hearts, not merely on our actions
- Last week, at the end of our teaching on prayer, we studied through the model Jesus gave us, which we call the "Our Father" prayer
  - As we learned last week, Jesus didn't want us to repeat this prayer in some mindless fashion
    - He wanted us to pray to the Father in our words, but structure our conversation with the components He gave us
    - So our prayers are addressed to the Father, they include adoration and praise of God, they are Kingdom-minded

- They lift up our needs before Him on a daily basis and seek relief from temptation
  - But near the end of Jesus' model, He says our prayers should include time seeking the Lord's forgiveness for our sins, as we forgive others
    - I didn't cover that part last week, because it's a complicated issue and Jesus spends additional time on it, following the prayer
    - So today, we take time to understand the need to seek forgiveness and what that means
    - Following that, we'll take a brief look at Jesus' third example of fasting
- Let's jump back into the middle of the prayer, starting at v.11

[Matt. 6:11](#) 'Give us this day our daily bread.

[Matt. 6:12](#) 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[Matt. 6:13](#) 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']

[Matt. 6:14](#) "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

[Matt. 6:15](#) "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

- In v.12, Jesus said we are to ask the Lord for forgiveness of our debts
  - Perhaps you've heard this part phrased as "forgive us our sins" or "our transgressions"
    - The actual Greek word in the text, is the word for "debt"; nevertheless, the other versions are also accurate
    - The Jewish people used the word "debt" as a euphemism for sin, because they recognized that sin was a debt before God
    - And sooner or later, someone must pay our sin debt
    - And you can either pay it yourself – which is eternal separation from God – or you can accept Christ's death on the cross as the payment acceptable to God
  - So Jesus says we should ask the Father for forgiveness for our sins in our prayer time

- And upon hearing this, many Christians become confused
- Because we know that the Bible teaches that as we came to faith in Jesus Christ, we were forgiven of our debts once and for all

**1 Pet. 3:18** For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

- Jesus' death on the cross was a payment, a perfect offering made for our sake to cover our sin debt before God
- And by His perfect life, we are credited with the perfection required to enter Heaven
- As the Bible says:

**Heb. 10:14** For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

**Heb. 10:15** And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,

**Heb. 10:16** "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM

AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD:  
I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART,  
AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,"

He then says,

**Heb. 10:17** "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS

I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."

**Heb. 10:18** Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

**2 Cor. 5:21** He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- So by that offering on the cross, Jesus perfected us forever, and therefore Jesus paid our debt in full...we have complete, eternal forgiveness from the Father
  - Yet Jesus tell us in Matthew 6:12, to continually seek the Father's forgiveness in our prayers
    - Which leads some to wonder if the forgiveness we received when we believed was temporary?

- Or perhaps God's forgiveness wasn't sufficient to cover all our sins
- This leads to bad theology, which steals the joy of the Gospel
- Well, for any who might share those concerns, let me put them to rest
  - The Bible is abundantly clear that by our faith in Jesus, we are set free forever from the penalty of sin

**John 8:34** Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

**John 8:35** "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.

**John 8:36** "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.

- When the Son of God sets us free from slavery to sin, truly we are free indeed, Jesus says
- His grace is sufficient and His forgiveness complete
- And if you fear you are no longer worthy of receiving His grace, please remember that God's mercy was always unmerited
  - You were just as unworthy to receive His mercy when you first came to faith as you are now
  - That fact won't change, no matter how much sinned yesterday or how much you sin today or tomorrow
  - You weren't saved because you did good things, and you won't be unsaved because you do bad things – it has nothing to do with what you do
  - You are saved by faith alone – it's not a works-based message
- It also doesn't matter if you aren't as godly as someone else in the Church
  - Because none of us were good enough to be saved, which is why we all needed God's grace and Christ's perfection
  - Two Christians arguing over who was more worthy of God's grace is like two passengers sitting in deck chairs on the Titanic arguing over who has the better view...

- It's a pointless argument, because you both needed to be rescued
- God rescued us by His grace while we were still His enemy, and God determined to forgive us in Christ before we even understood the need for that forgiveness
  - God is way ahead of us, so we can't sin our way out of His love
  - And don't let the enemy deceive you by thinking that God has turned His back on you – he knows that he has lost you in the eternal, because you are saved
  - But he can deceive you into diminishing your witness and your reward – don't let him do it
  - As Paul says so powerfully in Romans

**Rom. 8:38** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

**Rom. 8:39** nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Therefore, knowing we have been utterly washed clean by the blood of Christ and eternally forgiven of our debt, why must we seek forgiveness from God?
  - First, you need to understand that the Bible speaks of two types of forgiveness from God
    - First, there is the forgiveness for sins that is Heavenly and eternal
    - That is the forgiveness we received when we placed our faith in Jesus Christ
    - At that moment, the Bible says we were born-again by the Spirit and made an adopted child of God
  - Our spirit was reborn in the image of Christ, so our spirit is like Christ's spirit, no longer under condemnation and no longer a slave to sin
    - Our new spirit remains with us forever, which is why Paul says nothing can separate us from the love of Christ
    - Once we shed this old, dying, sinful body, our perfect spirit will be received by Christ

- That's why Jesus can assure us that He loses none of those the Father gives Him

[John 6:38](#) "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

[John 6:39](#) "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

[John 6:40](#) "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

- This kind of forgiveness is how we receive the promise of eternal life; therefore, we call this type of forgiveness eternal, Heavenly forgiveness
  - It's eternal, because it cannot be taken away from us
  - And it's Heavenly, because it assures us that we will be received into God's presence in Heaven when we die
  - That's the forgiveness every believer has from the moment they place their trust in Jesus Christ
  - We can never be condemned by God ever again because He has already paid for our sins on the cross...our Heavenly debt has been paid
- But the Bible also talks about another kind of forgiveness, one that's temporal and earthly
  - Even though we have received a new, perfect spirit, that new spirit still inhabits a sinful body ravaged by sin
    - Our sinful flesh constantly pulls us back into disobedient thoughts and actions, even as our spirit wants to obey God
    - This is a war within ourselves, and in this war, we will experience great victories and suffer setbacks
    - Nevertheless, our goal as Christians is to mature in our walk so that we see our victories becoming sustained and more triumphant
    - And our losses becoming infrequent and less severe
  - So sin is inevitable in the life of a believer, and we know that even if we sin, our eternal destiny remains unchanged

- But that doesn't mean there aren't consequences for continuing in sin
- Sin damages our relationships with other people and with God
- In the case of our earthly relationships, sin produces hurt, anger, fear, jealousy, mistrust and resentment, driving a wedge between us and others
- And in our fellowship with God, sin pulls us away from an abiding walk with Christ
- And left unchecked, unrepentant sin may provoke the Lord to bring discipline against us
- We're talking about earthly and temporal consequences of sin
  - They are earthly, because their impact is limited to our life on earth...our eternal salvation is never at risk
  - And these consequences are temporal, because they can only last until we die and leave this body
  - Once we enter the Kingdom in our glorified sinless body, we will no longer suffer the consequences of our earthly mistakes
- But just because the consequences of our sin are limited to the here and now, don't assume they aren't worthy of your concern
  - When you sin, you are breaking fellowship with God, which means you set aside the counsel of the Holy Spirit, as you follow your flesh instead
    - It's a foolish tradeoff
    - It's like ignoring the counsel of your loving parents to heed the advice of your local drug dealer
  - Similarly, when we decide to sin, we're turning away from the Spirit's counsel to heed the counsel of the enemy or the world or our own flesh
    - That's a recipe for disaster, because it usually sets in motion a set of events that may bring us to ruin
    - Sooner or later, we're likely to find ourselves in difficult, painful circumstances of our own making
    - Circumstances we could have avoided, had we listened to wiser counsel that had our best interests at heart

- It's not hard to find believers in court, in prison, in bankruptcy, in emergency rooms, out of work, out of friends, out of options...
  - Suffering in a variety of ways, because they decided to persist in sin or because others in their life sinned against them
  - These are the natural consequences of sin
- And beyond all this, the Bible also says a believer engaged in unrepentant sin should expect to receive discipline from the Lord

[Heb. 12:7](#) It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

[Heb. 12:8](#) But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

[Heb. 12:9](#) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

[Heb. 12:10](#) For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

[Heb. 12:11](#) All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

- Our Father in Heaven may bring specific consequences against us to teach us not to sin in the future
  - These consequences are not punishment *per se*, but rather, they are a form of instruction
  - Notice the writer says the Lord's discipline will be unpleasant in the moment, but in time, it teaches us to live righteously
  - It's not a pleasant thing, so it may feel like punishment, but it's designed to get our attention and convince us to stop sinning
  - That's what a loving Father does for His children...He uses every tool at His disposal to encourage us to live a godly life
- So when believers sin, we place ourselves in jeopardy of both the natural consequences of sin, as well as God's discipline
  - But here's where God's grace and mercy comes back into the picture

- God's mercy and grace isn't limited to eternal, Heavenly forgiveness
- The Bible says that the Lord is also willing to grant us forgiveness from the earthly, temporal effects of our sin
  - John tells us this in his first letter

**1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

- John is referring to a believer confessing sin to the Lord to receive relief from the earthly, temporal consequences of that sin
- That's the type of forgiveness Jesus was describing in His model of prayer
  - That during prayer, we should confess our offenses, seeking the Father's forgiveness so that we might not suffer the consequences here and now
    - We know that by the blood of Christ, we will not suffer the eternal consequences of our sin
    - And now, we learn that because we are loved in Christ, the Father is also willing to forgive the earthly, temporal consequences of our sin...if only we would ask Him
  - As we seek His forgiveness, John says the Father is both faithful and just to forgive us
    - He is faithful in forgiving us, because the Lord is patient and kind with His children
    - As the parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates, the Father delights in welcoming back his wayward children
    - He waits patiently, watching for us to return and, spiritually-speaking, runs to greet us as we come back in repentance
    - We need not worry whether the Father will receive us...the Bible says He is faithful to do so because of Christ
  - And when the Father forgives us in this way, He is also being just, John says
    - By the blood of Christ, our sin debt has been paid, having been nailed to the cross

- Which means the Father is just in overlooking our sin and removing the consequences every time He does so
- Because those consequences ultimately fell on Christ instead
- So we can be sure that when we truly repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness, we will receive it
  - Which means the Father withholds His discipline, granting us mercy instead
  - And it may also result in God's limiting or removing altogether the natural consequences of our sin
  - The Bible never guarantees that He will remove all consequences, and life teaches us that God doesn't choose to do that in every case
  - But I believe He delights to surprise us with His kindness by lessening those consequences as we take steps of repentance
- But there is another side to this second type of forgiveness...one that we must understand, if we are to gain the benefit of what Jesus is offering
  - God's willingness to forgive our sin is connected to our willingness to forgive those who have acted against us
    - Notice in v.12, Jesus says we should pray that God forgive us *as* we forgive others
    - The connecting word "as" could be translated "to the degree"
  - So the Father's willingness to grant us mercy for our sin, is dependent on our willingness to grant mercy to others when they sin against us
    - Jesus re-emphasizes this connection in vs.14-15
    - He says if you are willing to forgive, you will be forgiven
    - If you are not willing to forgive, you will not be forgiven
  - Once again, the context here is earthly, temporal forgiveness, not eternal
    - We know this is true, because obviously, we do not possess power over someone's eternal destiny

- When I fail to forgive someone else, I'm not keeping them from Heaven
  - Furthermore, if salvation depended on a willingness to forgive others, Jesus would be teaching a works-based Gospel
  - That tells us that Jesus must be speaking about the earthly, temporal type of forgiveness, both in our forgiving of others and God forgiving us
- Essentially, Jesus is asking why should we expect God to grant us more mercy than we're willing to grant someone else?
    - Jesus explains it this way in Luke's Gospel

**Luke 6:37** "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.

**Luke 6:38** "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure – pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

- Jesus says that the measure we use in judging (or forgiving) others will be the Father's measure when He forgives us
  - If we are unkind and unmerciful, we demonstrate a hard heart, which is itself a sin
  - And therefore, if we condemn others to suffer the consequences of their mistakes against us, the Father will likewise allow us to suffer the consequences of our sin
  - On the other hand, if we are forgiving of others, we give opportunity for the Father to demonstrate mercy to us also
  - Once again, we're talking only about forgiveness in an earthly, temporary sense from the consequences of sin here and now
- So knowing this, let's make sure our prayer life includes time to confess sin
    - We can't benefit from pretending our sin doesn't exist, as the Pharisees did
    - We will experience even more of God's love and mercy as we confess, repent and humble ourselves, seeking His forgiveness

- And we will demonstrate even more of His love to others when we extend that same mercy to others who have hurt us
  - Jesus says it's in your own best interest to be forgiving in this way
- Now at this point, I need to state the obvious: it's better not to sin in the first place
  - As Samuel said:

[1 Sam. 15:22](#) Samuel said,

**“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices  
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?  
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,  
And to heed than the fat of rams**

- It's better to obey than to sin and ask for God's forgiveness
  - And one of the ways we can discipline our sinful flesh, keeping it from leading us into harm's way, is to starve it a little
  - Both literally and metaphorically
- I'm talking about Jesus' third example of fasting, which we are going to cover briefly tonight

[Matt. 6:16](#) **“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.**

[Matt. 6:17](#) **“But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face**

[Matt. 6:18](#) **so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.**

- The basic outline of Jesus' third example follows closely with the first two examples, which means we can cover it fairly quickly
  - First, we see Jesus highlighting the hypocritical ways the Pharisees practiced fasting
    - Pharisees typically practiced fasting several times each week as a regular routine

- As we discussed in an early lesson on Jesus' fast in the wilderness, Jews fasted either by eating and drinking nothing or by only drinking water
- Obviously, such a fast tended to leave the person feeling faint and weak
  - The Pharisees wanted attention and approval for their fasting discipline
  - So they made a point of showing their discomfort on their faces
- Jesus says they put on a gloomy face, which means they showed their discomfort on their face
  - And they intentionally neglected their appearance, so that it was obvious they were engaged in a fast
  - This is a hypocritical way of fasting, because the point of the exercise became impressing men, not obeying God
  - And so Jesus says their reward would be limited to peoples' praises
- So how should we fast? Jesus says do it just as you pray and give
  - We should fast in secret and for the praises of God alone
  - Don't let it show, just go about your normal routine
  - But the Father in Heaven sees your devotion and He will reward you in the Kingdom
- In my experience, not many Christians practice religious fasting, and though the New Testament doesn't require it, it should be a part of our spiritual walk
  - Perhaps the reason it has fallen out of practice is because we lack an appreciation for what it accomplishes spiritually
    - The principle purpose in denying our body nourishment is to gain practical experience in disciplining the desires of the flesh
    - The Bible says sin dwells in your body, in your flesh, and your sinful flesh exerts an influence on your spirit, on your will
    - Your flesh has a mind of its own, and it's determined to get its way in opposition to the Spirit's desires

- Therefore, if we're going to walk according to the Spirit, we must learn to actively resist our flesh's desires
  - Resisting the flesh requires strength, spiritually-speaking, and like any "muscle", you must develop that strength by repetition
  - So we must practice disciplining our flesh, resisting its desires while attending to our spirit, so that we might become stronger in this battle
- Fasting creates the circumstances for your spirit to practice struggling against your flesh in a "safe" way
  - Your spirit must resist your flesh's desire to eat
  - This struggle creates opportunity for you to learn how strong your flesh's desires can be, and how hard it can be to deny it
  - Fasting is a safe way to practice denying the flesh, because even if you fail, you won't be sinning, since eating is not a sin
- Nevertheless, fasting regularly builds spiritual strength you can put to use in other circumstances
  - As you gain control over your body's desire for food, you'll become better at controlling its lustful desire for other, more dangerous desires
  - And that's just one benefit from fasting
  - Others include humbling us as we witness our flesh's strength, bringing our thoughts back to the Lord, reducing our attachment to this world, among others
  - To see all seven reasons, read the article on our website about fasting ([Why do believers fast?](#))
- So what have we learned today? First, as we pray, we are to seek forgiveness from the Father
  - If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, then by your faith, you have received eternal, Heavenly forgiveness for your sins
    - Christ has paid your debt once and for all and you have received the promise of eternal life
    - No amount of sin can change that outcome, because Christ's death paid the price for all of it

- Now if you have never experienced this kind of forgiveness, I urge you to humble yourself tonight and accept God's free gift of eternal life
- On the other hand, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then Jesus says we should continue to seek for God's earthly, temporal forgiveness
  - Your Father in Heaven is merciful and loving and wants to preserve you, to some degree, from the consequences of your sin
  - He calls us to repent and confess our sins to Him in prayer
  - And if we do, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from future unrighteousness
- Finally, if you're struggling to walk in the Spirit and to escape the power of sin in your life, Jesus reminds us to strengthen our spiritual resolve
  - Practice fasting regularly to learn how to gain control over your flesh's desires
  - As you learn to control your body's desire for food, watch and see how that spiritual strength transfers over to other battles
  - But as you practice these things, do it in secret as a service to God, seeking only for His approval
  - And as you do, you will receive not only His grace and mercy and forgiveness, but also rewards in the Kingdom
  - Alleluia and praise the Lord!