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The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer

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"1. There is none more wicked than one who has committed suicide, as it is said: 'And surely your blood of your lives will I require,' Genesis, chapter 9, verse 5. Also for the sake of the individual was the world created, thus he who destroys one soul is as though he had destroyed the whole world, therefore one should neither rend the garment nor mourn for him who had destroyed himself, nor should a funeral oration be pronounced on his behalf. He should, however, be cleansed, dressed in shrouds, and buried, and with regard to the saying of Kadish the ecclesiastical authorities should be consulted.

"2. When one who had been killed was discovered, as far as possible the act of killing should be regarded as the deed of another person and not as his own deed.

"3. If a child committed suicide, it is considered that he had done the deed unwittingly. Likewise if an adult killed himself and it is evident that the act was prompted by madness or through fear of terrible torture, he should be treated as an ordinary deceased person."—

We have spoken. We sincerely hope that our modest treatise will be of a little help to someone called upon to minister to these unfortunate people.

May the epitaph on our tombstone some day read:

"Hic iacet Christianus,
Requiescat in pace!"

E. A. DUEMLING

The Lord's Prayer, the Pastor's Prayer

The Fifth Petition

The expositor may feel free to depart from the old and practical division of the petitions, which proposes that the first three petitions embrace spiritual blessings, the fourth, temporal gifts, and the last three, entreaties for deliverance from evil. The pastor may disregard entirely the classification of a petition if he has persuaded himself that his course of thought is more practical than the old grouping.

The Fifth Petition is the only one in plurals, and it is the longest. It must be prayed always true to the forms; for the sinful, loveless flesh insists on modifying the form to destroy the sense.

In the Sermon on the Mount, having concluded the Lord's Prayer, Jesus immediately returns to the Fifth Petition and appends remarks pertinent to it to emphasize the importance of this prayer and to warn against thoughtless repetition of it.

In Matt. 6:12 this Petition reads as follows: And forgive us

our debts as also we have forgiven our debtors. Καὶ ἄφεσις ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν.

In Luke 11:4 the same Petition is in the following form: And forgive us our sins, for also we forgive everyone who is our debtor (who owes us). Καὶ ἄφεσις ἡμῖν τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἀφίμεν παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν.

Christ's exposition of this Petition is recorded in Matt. 6:14, 15: For if ye forgive men their trespasses (παραπτώματα), your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Under the caption of the Fifth Petition we properly place Peter's question (Matt. 18): "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times?" Jesus answered: "Till seventy times seven." Peter's inquiry gave occasion for the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant.

The English version which substitutes trespasses for debts is based on Matt. 6:14, 15, where Jesus uses the word παραπτώματα. In employing different terms to denote the things which are to be forgiven, Jesus teaches us to see them in their various aspects and to acknowledge the multitude as well as the weight of our sins, that we may be more ready to ask forgiveness and to receive it with appreciation and gratitude.

Jesus calls that which is to be forgiven debts, ὀφειλήματα (Matt. 6:12). A debt is an unpaid obligation, financial, moral, or otherwise. Whatever we still owe is our debt. We are obligated to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. If we do not render that perfect love, our failure appears as a debt that is marked against us every time we fail. Therefore that which is to be forgiven appears as an omission. This debt, each and every sin of omission, excludes us from the fellowship with God and from heaven (Matt. 25:45, 46).

Jesus defines our sins by the word παραπτώματα, which is derived from παραπίπτειν, to stray, wander, to deviate from the given path, to trespass, transgress. Sin is every departure from the divine Law. Vincent, in his *Word Studies*, claims that παράβασις (transgression) contemplates merely the objective violation of the Law, while παράπτωμα often has the sense of intentional falling into willful and reckless sins, a conscious violation of right, involving guilt inexcusable. All sins of commission must be classified as such violations.

In Luke's Gospel the Lord uses a broad term for that which is to be forgiven: τὰς ἁμαρτίας, sins. This term includes not only debt and transgression, but the aggregate of sins, also the iniquitous state, in which we are by nature, our original sin.

Ps. 32 may be called the Fifth Petition of the Old Testament.

There we are taught to use the same terms when asking, and when thanking for, forgiveness: transgression, sin, iniquity, guile. Sin is a burden that must be removed; a tyrant that must be subdued, sickness that must be cured, leprosy, and filth.

Thus Jesus wants us to peer deeply into the unfathomable pit of our depravity, to see sin in its hideousness, to fear its influence and power, to determine its nature, and to hate evil (Ps. 97:10). All these designations applied to sin distress and humiliate us. Jesus is stern and severe, as He must be when He exposes to us our depravity and the iniquity of our sin. By teaching us this prayer He warns us against Davidic silence (Ps. 32:3; 1 John 1:8); and He kindly and graciously urges us to acknowledge our sin to the Father by this simple confession (Ps. 32:5; 1 John 1:9).

We are to refer to our sins and debts: ἡμῖν, ἡμῶν, ὑμῖν, ὑμῶν. These are marked against us, against each person as an individual, against each person also as a partaker of the sins of others (2 John 11). Our debt appears as unpaid and delinquent when we recall our innumerable violations of the Golden Rule by commission and omission, by deed, word, and desire. But our guilt assumes immeasurable proportions as it is checked against the demands of the supreme rule. We have served the devil, the world, and the flesh. We remember that we are God's children and that all our debts and trespasses grieve the Father, who is in heaven. We stand afar off, we kneel, we lie prostrate, in shame, in disgrace. We despise ourselves. Peter, teach me to weep! David, teach me to mourn! Publican, teach me to abase myself! No! Dear Jesus, teach me to pray to the Father, against whom I have sinned: "Forgive us our trespasses" And at Christ's invitation "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father, forgive!'" we go direct to the Father just as we are—not to a priest, with a long list of sins and in fear of the penance to be imposed. This confessional prayer, gently and tenderly taught, gently and confidently spoken, shatters to the right and to the left all devilish designs and human inventions of righteousness, and enters with boldness into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way, which He has consecrated for us.

Forgive! This beautiful word is placed against the black words *sin, trespasses, debts*. Some sinners think lightly of their sins and propose that God should overlook them. Others think nothing of their sins except to glory in their shame. God never overlooks sin. Sin must be punished, debt must be paid, transgression must be righted. Ἄφεσις! *Forgive!* How can God forgive our sin without offending His holiness and justice? We know, we preach, we believe the Gospel of the grace of God. The Prophet Jesus, who teaches us to pray for forgiveness, is the High Priest Jesus, who

made that forgiveness a reality by His substitutionary active obedience and by His substitutionary passive obedience rendered to the Father. God forgives us our sin by grace, for Christ's sake. This first part of the Fifth Petition embraces the entire doctrine of the justification of the sinner, the subjective justification in particular.

The meaning of "forgive" is determined by the object. "Forgive my sins" means heal all my diseases and deliver my life from destruction. "Forgive my debts" means cancel the debts, erase what I owe. "Forgive trespasses" means cover my crooked path and cause it to be straight in Thy sight. "Forgive" means relieve me of my burden of sin, save me from the power of canceled sin, bury my sin in the depth of the sea, cast my sins behind Thee, cause them to vanish like a cloud. "Forgive" means do not impute my transgressions unto me.

Does God forgive? "He forgiveth all thine iniquity." "There is forgiveness with Thee." "Thy sins be forgiven Thee." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." — And the body has as much part in this forgiveness as the soul. *Soli Deo gloria!*

We have no right to change the sense of the petition by confining God's act of forgiving to the objective justification. This course of thought assumes that God is no longer active in forgiving and justifying, since justification, finished for all at the moment of Christ's death, ratified for all at the moment of His resurrection, granted also to the individual in Holy Baptism, has eternal validity. The conclusion follows that the meaning of this prayer can refer only to God's renewed assurance to the penitent and to the penitent's reassured faith. Accordingly, the sense of the petition would be: Father, help me to believe that in Christ all my past, present, and future sins, one and all, are already forgiven. This view of the meaning of the Petition is only partly correct. We must indeed not weaken the Scriptural doctrine of God's act of forgiving, but neither must we weaken the meaning of this Petition. While God has forgiven all our sin and canceled all our debt, yet He forgives by as many repeated acts as the aggregate of the number of our sins. However, these repeated acts do not consist in giving Christ anew into suffering and death, but they consist in applying Christ's blood and righteousness to us again and again. The evidence is at hand in the tense of the word forgive. Ἄφεσις is the aorist and denotes complete, punctiliar action. Of course, it is in the very nature of the case that the Father forgives again and again as we sin again and again and ask for forgiveness again and again.

As we pray in the Fourth Petition with reference to the body, so we pray in the Fifth Petition with reference to soul and body.

We pray that "our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins," but upon Christ, to whom our sins were imputed and who has rendered satisfaction for them. We ask that the objective justification may be made effective upon and in us because we need its power daily, since "we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment." Jesus teaches us to pray not only for reassurance, but that God may ever repeat in our behalf His act of forgiving made real through Christ's merit. The very concept of the word *ἄφεσις* refers to God and not to our faith. If this is not true, then we have no longer any need of the *Παράκλητος*; (1 John 2:1).

In what do the acts of God indicated by *ἄφεσις* consist? The Father's forgiveness is offered to us by the means of grace. Jesus absolved the palsied man and the disciples. In His name Nathan absolved David. Philip baptized the Ethiopian. Scripture presents instances of general and of private absolution. The Father forgives sin ordinarily through His children, to whom He has given the Office of the Keys (John 20:21-23). My pastor absolves me, your pastor absolves you. In consideration of the persons absolving, the persons absolved, the place, the time, and other circumstances, no one will deny that God actually forgives sin at various times and places, reiterating to penitent sinners the efficacious proclamation of forgiveness. The Christian's repeated act of absolving is God's repeated act of forgiving. Does God, then, forgive each sin separately? Yes, single sins, particular sins, collective sin, no sin remaining unforgiven.

The second part of the Fifth Petition enters most practically into the doctrine of sanctification in the narrower sense, a result of the subjective justification.

In the first part of the Petition the Father appears as the Creditor and we as the debtors; in the second, we appear as the creditors, and fellow men as our debtors. However, this second part teaches what we owe our fellow men, namely forgiveness. Therefore we, the creditors, are at the same time debtors, and our debtors are our creditors. Owe no man anything, but to love one another (Rom. 13:8).

That which we are to forgive is debts (Matt. 6:12), trespasses (Matt. 6:14), a sinning against us (Matt. 18:21). The standard by which we are to measure the fellow man's debt, or sin, is the insignificant ratio of one hundred pence to ten thousand talents. His debt is an item chiefly so far as it concerns his relation to God. It is of importance to us, the creditors, only in view of our debt to him, namely, that we owe him forgiving love. For Jesus does not want us to demand of our debtor: "Pay me that thou owest." He teaches: "Thou shalt also have compassion on thy fellow

servant, even as I have pity on Thee." We are to forgive men (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) their guilt. This term is general and includes unbelievers, enemies. Because they sin against God, they offend also us, who are His children.

In Luke we say, ἀφίωμεν; we are now forgiving. In Matthew we say, ἀφήκαμεν; our forgiving has been extended; it has taken place. We forgive before we pray the Fifth Petition, and we forgive while we pray it. This act must have the same significance which we attach to the word in the act of the Father. It means to cancel the debt, to erase the account, to relieve the brother of his burden, to acquit him. As the Father restores the relation between Himself and us, so we are to restore the relation between ourselves and our offender. All this is possible except the erasure of men's trespasses against us from our human memory. God's grace, however, can forget and does forget the awful sin of Adam, though its consequences strike billions of souls and bodies and the entire creation. His grace does forget our sins, though they crucified Jesus. "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). But I cannot forget, though by God's grace I can forgive. We cannot forget as long as we are inconvenienced by, or suffer under, the consequences of our neighbor's offense. The wound may heal; the scar remains: a grave, a limp, a puckered purse. God does not exact from us forgetfulness, and it is heartless to demand what God does not enjoin. But memory is not to be the nursery of pet past griefs. Whenever we are reminded of a sin committed against us, let it rise in our memory only as already forgiven. Though recollections of canceled debts may vex us, we note that the effort and the struggle toward forgetting is in ourselves between the heart and the head, the heart rejoicing in the final victory of sanctification. Our forgiving is not controlled by, or its validity dependent on, our ability or inability to forget. We remember the forgiveness which we extended rather than the sin now forgiven. We are not to forgive whatever is not a sin against us in the sight of God. Our forgiveness should be granted without measure, seventy times seven times, "from your hearts" (Matt. 18). Whatever proceeds not from the heart is not a good work.

Irreconcilability is a mortal sin (Matt. 6:15). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31; Matt. 5:21-26). And we have the right to expect forgiveness of our brother when we have sinned against him and ask his pardon. It is his duty to forgive us our sin. Indeed, if we have God's forgiveness, and the brother remains heartless, it is his sin against God and against us. He will have to bear his guilt, while we are absolved by the Father.

Is our virtue of forgiving the cause of God's forgiveness? Is our sanctification ever the cause of our justification? The $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ in Matthew (6:12; 18:33) and the $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$ in Luke seem to be causal. Furthermore, Jesus says: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." Robertson (*Greek Grammar in the Light of Historical Research*, pp. 963 f.) remarks: "All other causal particles are insignificant beside $\delta\tau\iota$." In these "all other" are included $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$, $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$, $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ $\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho$. Of this $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ he says: "It may have almost the force of a causal particle as in Matt. 6:12." The average Christian regards the "as" ($\acute{\omega}\varsigma$) as a particle of comparison. But in this comparison the $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ does not refer to the degree of our forgiveness. Our forgiving is done in an imperfect manner and degree. The Savior, full of grace and truth, does not teach us to ask for imperfect forgiveness, but to attain to perfection in forgiving, after we have been pardoned. The pharisaical unbeliever is caught in confusion from every side when he is asked to interpret this petition which he attempts to pray.

Another word may be required on the second part of the Petition. Since according to the Holy Scriptures sanctification is not the cause of justification, this Petition belongs under the doctrine of justification. The negative presentation: A Christian accepts his justification by faith. His ability and willingness to forgive is a fruit of faith. The person who does not forgive has not that fruit, and therefore no faith. Because he has no faith, therefore his guilt is retained. The positive presentation: By faith the Christian bears the image of God. Forgiving reflects the image of God. The Christian who reflects God's image has faith. Because he has faith, he is forgiven.

This is again beautifully presented by the tenses of $\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\theta\mu\iota$ in Luke's text and the related passages in Matthew. Our act of forgiving appears in the present (Luke) and the past tense (Matt.), and the Father's act of forgiving in the aorist and the future (Matt. 6:14). The Apology states with reference to Matt. 6:14: that we are to recognize in our kind and forgiving spirit the fact of our personal, fruitful faith which justifies us in the sight of God. There we read (*Trigl.*, p. 199): "As, therefore, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs that continually admonish, cheer, and encourage the desponding minds to believe the more firmly that their sins are forgiven, so the same promise is written and portrayed in good works, in order that these good works may admonish us to believe the more firmly. And those who produce no good works do not excite themselves to believe, but despise these promises. The godly, on the other hand, embrace them, and rejoice that they have the signs and testimonies of so great a promise." F. Pieper writes (*Christl. Dogm.* III, 34): "Die Christen

sollen an ihrer Heiligung und an ihren guten Werken ein aeuusseres Zeichen (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti externum*) ihres Gnadenstandes und ihrer Seligkeit haben." He suggests to us the reading of Luther's exposition of Matt. 6:14, 15 (St. L. VII:512 f.).

There is much material in this petition for a searching and comforting confessional address. However, this meditation is not designed and intended to serve as such. The faithful pastor is always interested in the petitions he prays according to Christ's instruction. As pastor he encourages the timid as well as the bold to approach the throne of grace for full and free forgiveness. As pastor he sometimes has occasion to admonish contending parties to establish reconciliation. Was not one of Luther's last official acts the restoration of peace between brothers? Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God (Matt. 5:9). And was not the entire life of our chief Shepherd given for the reconciliation of God and man? Luther remarks (St. L. VII:512) that Jesus intends this petition to serve as a bond of peace to keep the children of God united. Our peace with one another rests in our peace with the Father through Christ.

The pastor's closet, where he communes with God, sometimes seems unusually darkened by his sins, his guilt, faults, and failings, the presence of which pain him. Above him rise and linger like heavy, black clouds his offenses against the Father, which threaten to obstruct his view of the throne of grace, and around about him lie his sins against friend and foe. Yonder crouch the sinful irregularities committed against the brethren by unfaithfulness and unethical conduct, and he cannot cover the products of selfishness that becloud his home life. The sins common to pastor and congregation bend him low. The pastor is sad and his heart is heavy. But here is He who is our Altar and Paraclete. His presence is the sun that disperses sin as a cloud. The radiance of His face, the forgiveness of sins, streams forth upon the pastor. Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart. The Father forgives. The word and promise is sure. It is God that justifies. It is Christ that makes intercession. The pastor, justified by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, now also "heartily forgives and readily does good to those who sin against him," and the fruits of his forgiving spirit become the thankofferings of his grateful heart.

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