

Singⁱ beforehand: Psalm 86:3

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earthⁱⁱ. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christⁱⁱⁱ. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 103:2^{iv}

*To all the needy God is just and faithful.
He showed His deed to Moses and his people.
The LORD is gracious, rich in steadfast love.
He is compassionate and slow to anger.
He will not keep His wrath on us forever.
He does not treat us as our sins deserve.*

Prayer

- **Doxology:**
- **Worship:**
- **Confession:**
- **Supplication** (for pardon of sins):
- **Thanksgiving:**
- **Intercession** (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God):
- **General supplication:**
- **Illumination of the Holy Spirit** (necessary for the ministry of the Word):

Amen.

Psalm: 25:9

*Look up on my great affliction
And my troubles, LORD, behold;
Grant me full and free remission
Of my trespasses untold.
See my enemies, for great
Is the number that upbraid me;
Who, in their consuming hate,
With their cruel scorn have flayed me.*

Scripture reading : Mark 11^v

Scripture text : Mark 11:25; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 51^{vi}

²⁵And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

We must fully believe that which we in prayer in our hearts desire.

- Our childlike trust in the omnipotence of God must be such, that we must expect that which we ask, in such a way as if we have already received it.
- But then our prayers must be anchored in obedience to the Lord, and we must appropriate the reconciliation and forgiveness in Christ, for ourselves.

Many aspects impact our ability to forgive those who transgress against us. We pay attention to the following:

- 1. Forgiveness and hypocrisy**
- 2. Forgiveness and prayer**
- 3. Forgiveness and conversion**

1. Forgiveness and hypocrisy

What the Lord Jesus told to and showed His disciples was a warning of how not to handle one's life, faith and especially how not to handle prayer.

- First there was the fig tree, which even out of season had the pretence of being fruitful.
- That the tree dried up, was symbolic of what it in essence already was – a hypocritical pretence (of being something other than it was).

Thereafter it was the cleansing of the temple; when the believers and their leaders misused the temple and their religious practices to project an image of faith, where the entire set-up was in actual fact indicative of a lack of faith.

- They made a complete blunder of their principles of faith
- Therefore they transformed the temple into a trade centre, which the Lord had to change back into a house of prayer by force

This type of inner deadness must first be shaken off before those of true faith can stand before the Lord's throne in prayer.

- Or else He will punish such people with the accompanying death penalty – of which the fig tree was a symbol

In this passage one aspect of prayer is accentuated:

- The relationship which you have with your neighbour
- Before having communion with God, you need to clear certain aspects of your relationship with your neighbour out of the way.
- The matter is indeed so serious that in the Old Testament a person was not permitted to make any sacrifice unless and until he had set right all matters which were not in his relationships with other people

We read of this in Matthew 5:23, 24:

²³Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; ²⁴Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

It is not possible to use prayer to make the Lord subservient to yourself – which is the attempt of some prayers.

- First off we must heartily confess and acknowledge that the Lord is God
- Which means that in everything, we sincerely seek the Lord's honour first
- And that each one of the commandments must be obeyed in our lives

It goes without saying that we cannot pray unlimitedly and that the Lord will not give each thing we ask of Him – as if in faith we will receive anything and everything from the Lord.

- Oftentimes there are things which we in sin desire, and which is completely wrong
- Such prayers the Lord will not hear
- The only way to pray aright is to first off, get our relationship with God and our neighbour on the right track

2. Forgiveness and prayer

The commandment, which summarises all commandments, is the command to love

Before being able to pray, my entire life must exhibit my love for God as well as my complete dependence / reliance on Him.

- Dependence and reliance on the Lord means that when I pray, I experience the need to receive the Lord's forgiveness of my sins
- The relationship with the Lord of him who does not realise that he is lost unless his sins are forgiven him, needs serious development
- Viewed from the other side; it is pure conceit that allows you to rely so much on yourself, that you do not realise your own sinfulness
- It is conceit which causes someone to not realise that outside of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation there is no future for him with the Lord

The principle of forgiveness of sins stretches further than just the relationship between you and the Lord

- The Lord says that it also applies to the relationship you have with other people
- You must indeed lay down all the things which you hold against others before you pray:
²⁵ **“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25 NKJV)**

A number of matters are apparent:

- The first being that it does not matter whether the person is indeed guilty or not
- From your side, you must have the right attitude

In this instance the Lord is not concerned with what the other person may or may not have done to you

- That being an entirely different matter, which the Lord will deal with entirely differently
- Here it has to do with that feeling in my heart which I harbour towards other people
- And if that were a feeling of vengeance or of hatred or some such ill feeling, then the Lord demands that I repent of it.

Secondly the Lord demands that I smooth out every bit of tension I carry around within myself concerning other people, and that my inside will be completely right before I start my prayer.

- The Lord does not want to meet me in prayer until such time as I have cleared up my relationships
- My heart must be cleared towards other people, because the Lord wants me to have the ability to also apply forgiveness myself.

The Lord is serious about this matter

- We must not project the idea that we get along well with other people, but on the inside we are still irritated by ill feelings towards some of them
- Because then we are just like that fig tree

Which is why the Lord links forgiveness of sins to our prayers

- No person can live without prayer
- But we can (may?) also not pray unless we are willing to set things right – also in this case
- Which is why the *Our Father* teaches us to pray that our trespasses may be forgiven as we forgive those who trespass against us
- And the Lord clearly states that He does not forgive us our sins when we refuse to grant others forgiveness of sins (Matthew 6:12,14,15; Matthew 12:31, 32).

Another matter is that the Lord will also not forgive you those trespasses you trespass if you do not practice forgiveness of sins.

- The death of the Lord Jesus was unto a reconciliation of all the elect, and therefore the right of God demands that I not hold that against another, which the blood of Christ has already reconciled (Matthew 26:28).
- I must relinquish every form of conceit whereby I attempt to apply the right of God by deciding if I am or am not permitted to remain angry with someone.
- Could this not perhaps be why so many of our prayers remain unanswered? Because our attitude towards others is wanting!

3. **Forgiveness and repentance**

In order to understand this matter aright, we must go look at how the Lord applies forgiveness of sins.

- There is not a single person who has not bitterly transgressed against the Lord
- Yet, the Bible teaches that the Lord does not utterly exterminate and destroy all these people so that nothing remains of them.
- He teaches us that He is a God of love.
- His love is so great that He causes His Son to be born as a man and even that He be judged and nailed to a cross to carry God's wrath over these sins of ours.

This forgiveness of the Lord is perfect.

- He no longer blames, and He does not forgive only partially so that we must contribute the rest
- He forgives us completely (perfectly)

Therefore He asks of us to apply exactly that which He has done for us, in our lives.

- It is important to note that the Lord links many other things to forgiveness of sins
- Things such as repentance, re-birth, and even baptism
- Obviously baptism is mentioned because it is precisely that sacrament which reminds us of the renewal we underwent by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ
- There are also those Bible passages which link forgiveness of sins to our lives in the Hereafter.

Surely there is no man who is not done an injustice by another from time to time.

- And there is certainly no man whose life is such that he does not cause another irritation from time to time
- The Lord's admonishment applies here

Every moment of every day, we are to understand what it means that the Lord Jesus reconciled us to God

- This reconciliation brings us into a new relationship with the Lord and with our neighbour
- This is no longer the Old Testament dispensation where an eye for an eye etc. was still valid
- It is a state in which we must experience the reconciliation of the Lord Jesus, but also live it.

At the same time, it is a relationship in which God the Holy Spirit changes us so that we can *live* in this reconciliation wrought by Christ.

- Which is why the demand of the Lord is even stricter: we must get this matter of reconciliation and forgiveness of sins right before we pray
- It is the Lord's right to demand this of us, no less because we live in a time wherein His counsel has developed so much further than in for example Abraham's time
- We are in the spotlight of Jesus' grace – as a matter of fact, we already live in the early hours of His Second Coming

Let us pay serious attention to this matter, and let us ensure that our inside is free of every form of vengeful thought and irritation concerning our fellowman

- Obviously this requires repentance
- And obviously it means that we must deny ourselves
- Who is there amongst us who does not know exactly how tough it is to be humble and to be the least?

But yet it is the way. And from heaven we have all the help we need in this regard.

- The love of God the Father and the reconciliation brought by Christ and with that the guidance of God the Holy Spirit
- Let us bring our prayers into line on also this point, so that the Lord may grant us His abundant blessing.

Let us read what is written down of this matter in our confession in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 51:

Question 126. Which is the fifth petition? **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; (a)^{vii} even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbour. (b)^{viii}

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm: 32:1

*Blest is the man whose trespass is forgiven,
Whose sins are covered in the sight of heaven.
Blest is the man against whom, LORD, Thou wilt
Not count all his iniquity and guilt.
How happy he, contrite of heart and lowly,
Who has confessed his sins, O LORD most holy;
Who does not secretly Thy laws transgress,
Whose spirit harbors no deceitfulness.*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.^{ix}

Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.genevanpsalter.com>

ⁱⁱ Psalm 124:8

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 1:3

^{iv} http://www.genevanpsalter.com/attachments/GenPs103_Otte.HTM

^v <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+11&version=KJV>

^{vi} <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/heidelberg.html>

^{vii} **(a)** Ps.51:1 <<To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.>> Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Ps.51:2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Ps.51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Ps.51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Ps.51:5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Ps.51:6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Ps.51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Ps.143:2 And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. 1 John 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Rom.8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

^{viii} **(b)** Matt.6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: Matt.6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

^{ix} 2 Corinthians 13:14