

Praying for Forgiveness

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matthew 6:12

Discussion Guide

We often think of forgiveness as something that takes place between two people. But how does an entire country put itself back together when the forgiveness has to take place between two tribes that have known nothing but enmity from birth?

Check out this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKXHK74qLdg>

The video above tells the story of how this verse led one woman to forgive an entire tribe of people. This same process has played out in churches and courtrooms throughout the country of Rwanda. Literally hundreds of thousands of murderers have confessed their crimes and received forgiveness from survivors.

There are not enough prisons in the entire country to “make people pay” for a genocide that claimed a million lives. The murderers and survivors have to find a way to live together in the same communities. Forgiveness is the only thing that can keep it from plunging back into civil war.

Most societies understand the price of sin as being paid in one of two ways: guilt and shame.

It’s always interesting that the Gospel addresses sin according to both measures, thereby giving people from all cultures a way of understanding that the forgiveness of God takes care of the penalty of sin for them.

Let’s look at the examples of traditional cultures vs. modern western societies.

In more traditional societies, honor and shame are usually more important than money as social currency. When you hear the horrific stories of people participating in honor killings of their own family members, you get a sense of understanding the weight that shame bears on their lives. A milder form of this sense of honor and shame is when people would ostracize a loved one because of their sin against society.

Many of our teenagers’ struggles with suicide are not because they feel guilt, but because peers have bullied them into feeling unbearable shame, which is multiplied by the effects of social media.

When Jesus hung naked on a cross, he was taking upon himself the shame of sin.

Most Americans live with a sense of shamelessness.

Parents are not kicked out of country clubs because their adult children engage in wild behavior. Americans would typically not disown a close friend or child because of the shame that they bring on us.

Instead, we tend to have a much greater understanding of guilt.

Sin is measured in terms of what it costs. If you don't believe me, go to a courtroom and look at the docket of lawsuits and criminal cases.

We sue and press charges against people because crime (sin) has taken away something that was valuable to us personally. Family members and friends will often sue one another, not because they can reasonably recover whatever has been lost by sin, but because they view the legal system as a means of making the sinner pay a price for the wrong he has done to them.

Families squabbling over an inheritance will spend more money on legal fees than there ever was in the estate. They view the case as a matter of justice. No price is too high to receive vindication that they are right and the other person is wrong.

In no way am I disparaging the legal system. The Bible says we need just courts and officers of the law to punish evil and reward good. When someone breaks the peace, they must pay the just penalty to society.

The problem is when we think that courts will provide something they cannot — the satisfaction of guilt before a just and holy God and relief for the pain that that has been caused to victims.

A prisoner can go to jail and pay his debt to society. A defendant can write a check and pay his debt to the plaintiff. But no one can pay a big enough price vindicate himself of his wrongdoing before God.

When Jesus tells us to forgive debts as we ask for God to forgive ours, I believe he is speaking the language of a modern American about the debts of sin (guilt).

Jesus bled on the cross to satisfy the price the God demands for sin: death. The only way that God is satisfied with a sinner is when that sinner has received the forgiveness of Christ. In the same way, the only way that I can truly be relieved of somebody else's sin against me is when I choose to forgive that person in the same way that Christ has forgiven me.

Discussion Questions

- How does the video about Rwanda make you think differently about forgiveness?
- What is the difference between guilt and shame?

Life Group Discussion Guide

- How has the Gospel delivered you from both guilt and shame?
- Is forgiveness cheap? Why or why not?
- Where do you find it easiest to forgive others?
- Where do you find it most difficult to forgive others?
- Does forgiveness automatically make you best friends?
- Does forgiveness negate the consequences of sin?
- Why does a God-centered life have to include forgiveness?