

Hallowed be your name

5— Forgive our sins

Jesus says to ask for forgiveness. This is not a prayer of someone just becoming a Christian. It's the prayer from within the Father's family. Of course, it is the same prayer that someone who knows they are lost and wants salvation may pray, but here, it is a family prayer.

Jesus adds, '...as we forgive those who sin against us'. Asking the Father to forgive our sins is possible because Jesus lays down his life. If you are asking for love like that, you will know that is the way to treat everyone else. Jesus continues to talk about this after he finishes the prayer. He also tells a parable about it later (Matthew 18:23-35). Asking God to forgive us doesn't just change our relationship with God, it changes us. Everything about our life is on a different footing—his grace, received and given.

The request for forgiveness begins with an 'and'—which is significant. We've asked our Father to provide for our physical needs, and in the same breath, ask him to release us from the guilt of offending. We don't just have physical needs. We have spiritual needs—the need to be forgiven.

If we do anything wrong—anything that breaks God's law—there are consequences. No-one can just 'move on' as though nothing happened. We are made in God's image to reflect who he is and copy what he does. Think about software on a computer that automatically reports abuses of copyright. Action is being taken at higher levels. God is grieved over our sinning (Psalm 78:40; Mark 3:5). And, in this case, 'lower levels' are also involved. Satan knows our deeds. He can remind us of them. He's not called 'the accuser' for nothing!

Guilt is a 'killer'—not just because of where it takes us, but because of the false trails along the way. Our dignity is compromised when we do wrong—we are creatures of a holy God. So, we have to make up for it, cover it up, blame others to show we are better by comparison. If no remedy is found, the waters continue to get muddied. Satan laughs while we think we are 'handling' our own crisis. Satan can manipulate guilty people. So can governments!

It is this crisis that only forgiveness from our Father can remedy.

But why do we need to go on asking for forgiveness? Isn't it true that Christians 'have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins' (Ephesians 1:8)? Doesn't Paul say, 'Blessed are those whose transgression are forgiven whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sins the Lord will never count against him' (Romans 4:5-7)?

There is something very remarkable about our relationship with God. It is actually a covenant in which God has bound himself to treat us in a certain way and has bound us to live in a certain way. Jesus establishes this new relationship by what he does on the cross. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28).

It's not a casual relationship—one where we may be in favour one day and out of favour the next. Jesus has fulfilled God's promise: 'I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more' (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:14).

So how come we need to ask for forgiveness of sins if this is where we stand? Here are some pointers—first, from John, and then, from Jesus himself.

Have a look at 1 John 1:5—2:4.

Walking in the light of God—revealed in Jesus—doesn't disable our capacity to sin. It exposes it. But then, the blood of Christ goes on cleansing us from these sins. So, if we acknowledge our sins, Christ

is 'faithful and just' to forgive them. There's no mention here of being thrown out of the family! But God reveals this to us so that we won't sin—not so we are free to!

Perhaps, the Father regards our sinning as a 'lovers' quarrel'. That is, people who love each other may become annoyed and begin to fight. Their love is on the line. What is going to win—ego or love?

So here, we've wanted our will rather than God's. While this is happening, we are being held in God's love. Will we relent? Will we stay in the light of what has been revealed to us? If we do, our sins are not being remembered. They are buried in an ocean of his loving.

Whoever doesn't relent, and rather, decides to walk in the darkness of their own 'light', shows they haven't seen the light at all, and it is certainly not 'in' them.

So, how good it is that Jesus tells us to pray, '...and forgive us our sins'! We don't pray because the matter is in doubt but because we need to have it affirmed. So, we don't need to be crushed by our failures. We are humbled—by our failure of course, but even more by the continued love of God for us. And we are kept alert by the fact that we are now walking in light. Everything is known!

There are further clues in John 13:1-17.

Here is our Lord, preparing his disciples, and all of us, for the life we will lead. He's telling us that we *are* cleansed, and that we need to *be* cleansed.

Peter is embarrassed that Jesus does the dirty job of washing feet and tries to be noble by refusing the service. Notice, he's justifying himself—avoiding the pain of being 'wrong footed'.

Jesus uses the occasion as a parable and says their relationship depends totally on Peter sitting down and having his feet washed. A relationship with Jesus depends on him serving us—by laying down his life for us. There's no other way. No place for ego.

With that matter settled, Peter wants his hands and head washed as well! And Jesus explains that this isn't necessary. 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean...' (verse 10)—they have been cleansed by the word Jesus has spoken (15:3).

Our cleanness is not the result of getting our life together. It is the result of hearing and believing the word of Jesus Christ. His work as our Saviour is so complete, that when he speaks it to us, we are clean. Really clean before God. Really clean in our conscience (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22). Really clean and wanting to keep it that way! And future failures cannot muddy that stream because it is a stream that is flowing from above, not from within us.

But we do need our feet washed—the part of us that gets soiled with the world. So, 'Forgive us our sins!' We are in a covenant where our sins will never determine the relationship. We are walking in the light. But we feel the offence of this or that deed, and the pain of 'wearing' it, and the risk of staying in it. We want to 'clear the air'.

Jesus gives Peter an opportunity to do this after his miserable collapse at the time of Jesus' trial (John 21:15). He asks if Peter really does love him more than the other disciples. The acknowledgement of his failure, and his complete misunderstanding of his strength is obvious, but he does confess what is important. 'You know that I love you'.

So, let's go on praying, 'Forgive us our sins'. Let's walk in the light and not slink in the shadows. Here is a need as pressing as any physical need we have. And Jesus tells us to ask.