

I. *Elements: The Fourth Element—Processing Debt* Gee Sprague, Lead Pastor Feb. 17, 2008

II. *Matthew 6:9-13* "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. 10 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 'Give us this day our daily bread. 12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. <For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.>'

III. Debts or Trespasses

- A. Depending on your tradition you have probably prayed one of these two, either debts or trespasses
 - 1. A lot of confusion is caused, especially when we pray this prayer out loud.
 - 2. United Methodists have used the liturgical version of forgive us our trespasses.
 - 3. Many of you have probably worshipped at another denomination that may pray debts and debtors and you feel pretty stupid as you are praying on autopilot and everyone else says debts and you are singing an unrehearsed solo as you blurt out trespasses!
- B. Not that I intend to settle this once and for all, or to try to change your way of praying the prayer, but as far as I can tell the most true to the Greek, and also all four versions of the Bible that I most commonly use for study and devotion, all say:
 - 1. *DEBTS and DEBTORS*
- C. *Opheilemata / Οφειληματα*--Translated: *A failure to pay that which is due, a failure in duty.*
- D. There are extreme theological and spiritual implications that can be drawn from your choice of words.
 - 1. This can be a splitting of hairs. I think it does help us develop a mindset and attitude that might be more consistent with the overall message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Trespasses may imply that one has actually done something deliberately that could possibly prove to be an offense.
 - 3. Debts can imply something completely different

IV. Gratitude is the Fruit of Forgiveness

- A. Let me tell you a little about my mother: She was a good one, at her best even a great one!
- B. I am particularly who I am because of both my parents.
- C. Mom's major interest was her family, so much so, that when we were gone the empty nest caused her great pain, but that's another sermon.
- D. She was the taxi driver for school and church activity, our home was one of the Koolaid hangouts during the summer and for after school activities.
- E. Sarah got piano and ballet, I got Gray Y football and guitar lessons.
- F. Fast food was barely in existence, so meals were still pretty much an eat-at-home thing.
- G. It was in the days that a family really could live on one income and survive nicely.
- H. My father was a college graduate, my mother was not; but they sacrificed in order to give my sister and me pretty much a free ride to a private college.
- I. I really was given a great set of values, a positive self-image, and an approach to life that is largely positive with a bit of a cynical edge, which I got from my mother. I got her sense of humor!
- J. All of these things make me feel very indebted to my parents.
- K. I live with a sense of gratitude for the debt I owe them and with very little guilt for the trespasses I did against them.

- L. Often Christianity is more about making us feel guilty for our sins and trespasses, rather than helping us establish a relationship that is based on the great debt that we owe God.

V. A Kingdom of Debtors

- A. Last week we talked about learning to rely on God for *Our Daily Bread*
1. We discussed that God prefers to deal with our needs on a daily basis.
 2. And that the greatest provision He has made is His only Son, *JESUS*
 3. We are therefore in His debt!
- B. This week the emphasis shifts to *Forgiveness of Debts*
- C. Americans know a lot about debt.
1. The average American has more than his her share.
 2. In 1981 the National Debt was 1 trillion dollars, today it is over 9 trillion
 - a. One year contains over 31,536,000 seconds in a year
 - b. If you divided one trillion $1,000,000,000,000 \div 31,536,000$
 - c. it would rounding up be 31,710
 - d. If you were to count 1 trillion dollar bills, one second at a time, it would take almost 31,710 years to count it all.
 - e. That's what our indebtedness to God is like
 3. Actually, I am going to take a risk here
 4. I am not so sure that the emphasis has been placed in the correct place.
 5. Too often, the Christian faith is overly repetitious for the need for forgiveness of our sin.
 6. Sin is a serious problem, no doubt.
 7. But God is seen to be a Cosmic Judge, who is only words away from sentencing us to the death penalty, if we don't confess, make right, or feel sorry for every thought, word, and deed that we have done or even witnessed.
 8. Most people when they think of God they tend to think Guilt. The average person in relating to God usually feels guilt, I don't think any one of us needs to be made any more guilty.
 9. Guilt is such a common part of our society.
 10. Keep in mind that this prayer is for the Disciples benefit; therefore the emphasis is less on forgiveness, and more on recognizing the debt that is due.
- D. We can try to ignore our debt, but it will eventually come back to us.
1. Several years ago a group of Season Ticket Holders for Jaguars, didn't receive their payment booklets before the season started.
 2. Human nature says if they don't bill us, then we don't actually owe anything.
 3. I remember an interview with a lady whining about how unjust it was for them to ask her to pay for her tickets, and to demand the money right now.
 4. In our relationship with god we are often like those whining Jaguar Season Ticket Holders.
 5. A couple of years ago we moved into a new home. In all the address changes and paperwork that goes into managing a household, I realized around the first of December that I hadn't gotten any

notice for taxes for the new house. I had gotten the bill for our old house and kept it in the back of my mind to check.

6. I finally called the Property Tax Appraisers office and they confirmed that I hadn't paid it, and that I also hadn't applied for my homestead exemption.
 7. I explained that I hadn't received anything in the mail.
 8. They just nodded their head and told me how much the bill was and how to apply for my delinquent exemption.
 9. Ultimately, my debts are my responsibility.
- E. Every time we pray this prayer, the reminder is that we are a people who feel deeply indebted to the God we encounter in Jesus Christ.
1. What is missing in many of our relationships with God is the knowledge that we are debtors, that we are bankrupt in our ability to live in a right relationship with God,
 2. But that debt has been paid through Jesus Christ.
 3. The debt we owe to God is simple: It is for creation, for love, for fellowship, for daily bread, and for the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross for the payment of the debt of sin I owe.
 4. What God would want from us is not groveling over this debt, but the sincere acknowledgment of His love and provision.
 5. The debt we owe to God is similar to the debt of love some of us feel towards our parent's, that in turn makes us want to be good parents.
 6. One great gift that came to my sister and me was the gift of a college education—not that it is necessary for success or self-esteem, it was just a financial goal that they had and were able to provide for us.
 7. In turn, even before Hannah was born, we began earmarking money, sacrificing a bit of our lifestyle in order for our child to have that as an option
 8. The bad news is it is going to take 10 to 15 times what it cost to send her to a private college, and like one of my financial consultant friends says, if you have a girl, it will be even more expensive to pay for the wedding!!!
- F. One cannot give forgiveness until one has experienced forgiveness
1. There is very little room in the Kingdom of God for those who have a “*You Owe Me Attitude!*”
 2. The Christian's World View is that of, I am deeply indebted to the God who loves me through Jesus Christ, so much that it makes me forgive the debt of those close to me.
 3. Jesus goes on to explain this part of the prayer in the v14 & 15 14 *"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*
 - a. This is *not an if then statement*, if you forgive others then God will forgive you.
 - (1) That would *contradict God's nature* of Unconditional love, that forgiveness is a free gift of grace.
 - b. Jesus states a *spiritual law of cause and effect*: Only those who recognize their debts, or transgressions (which literally means slip-ups, not deliberate acts of sin) can offer forgiveness to others.
 - c. *Only those who truly experience God's grace and unconditional love can truly offer it to others*

- d. We do not have the capacity to forgive until we know we have been forgiven.
4. *Jesus offered a parable to this effect in Matthew 18:23-35* 23 *"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 "And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' 27 "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 "So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 "Then summoning him, his lord said^ to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. 33 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."*
- G. Have you ever wondered why some people are never able to forgive?
1. Have you met those who are eaten up with bitterness and unforgiveness?
 2. Have you ever had a hard time forgiving someone?
 3. Perhaps you have forgotten the debt you owe to God is like the national debt and that which is owed you is like the change from a Happy Meal!
 4. That it was that debt that sent his only Son to the Cross
 5. And that sacrifice is what has made you debt free.
 6. Now how are you going to respond to others?
- H. Only those who have knelt at the foot of the Cross and know the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on their behalf can ever have the capacity to live as forgiven, debt-free people.

VI. The Christian Should Live Debt Free

- A. Last week we celebrated the Lord's Supper and used the bread as a reminder of God's love for us and his desire to be our Daily Bread.
1. I hope it made a difference in your life
 2. I hope meal time is being transformed into a daily remembrance of God's love for you given through the broken body of Jesus.
- B. This week we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper again.
1. The emphasis is going to be on the forgiveness that God has given us through the blood of Jesus Christ.
 2. *Matthew 26: And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.*
 3. The Lord's Prayer is our guide to discipleship that keeps us in right relationship to God and to others.

4. The Lord's Supper offers us a symbol that is always available to remind us that we are a forgiven people, and that the natural outgrowth is to forgive us.

VII. Conclusion (Section Leaders Come Forward)

- A. Our first Concern was what makes water wetter? Soap!
- B. What makes forgiveness better?
- C. When we forgive our debtors.
- D. As you receive the bread and cup today, hold them and we will receive them together.
 1. Once again give thanks for your daily bread
 2. As you pass the Cup, say to the one to whom you are passing it
 - a. *Your debts are forgiven*
 3. As you receive the cup say in response
 - a. *I forgive my debtors.*
 4. This will be hard Section Leaders let me say it to you
 5. Your debts are forgiven, your response is—I forgive my debtors, now to each row that you pass the cup begin that response
- E. Take the Bread give thanks for Daily Bread
- F. Take the Cup
 1. Pastor: *Your debts are forgiven*

VIII. People: *I forgive my debtors!*