

Forgive As I Forgive
Heidelberg Catechism (2016-18)
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Our reading from the Scriptures this morning comes from the Gospel narrative of Mark 11. Mark 11. This chapter records the first part of Passion Week, the last week of Christ's life on earth, a week of suffering. In the first 11 verses, we have the record of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Triumphal? Riding on the colt of an ass, but triumphant it was. We begin to read in verse 12 which is the history of Monday.

12 And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: 13 And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. 14 And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it. 15 And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; 16 And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. 17 And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. 18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. 19 And when even was come, he went out of the city [now Tuesday]. 20 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. 22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. 23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. 25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. 27

And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, 28 And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? [still considering what Jesus had done the previous day in cleansing the temple] 29 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. 31 And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? 32 But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. 33 And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.

And he meant, "If you failed to see the truth with regard to John, you're going to fail to see the truth of what I say."

Our reading of this passage of Scripture is because of what we find stated very remarkably and powerfully in verses 25 and 26. Mark 11:25-26,

25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

We use the passage and we're going to look many other places in Scripture in the course of the sermon as the biblical basis for the instruction that God gives to us in Lord's Day 51. Lord's Day 51 covers the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer. Six petitions, the fifth one, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"; that is," the Catechism says, "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; even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbour."

This is the second time that the Heidelberg Catechism is treating the subject of forgiveness. The first time we find it in the Apostles' Creed. There we're stating objectively what faith believes. Faith believes in God the Father. Faith believes in Jesus Christ the Son. Faith believes in the Holy Spirit. Faith believes the church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins. And let's remind ourselves what does the Catechism say about forgiveness of sins in Lord's Day 21 Question and Answer 56. This, "That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction," and now this is very interesting, "will no more remember," it's a description of an attitude of God, an attitude that arises out of an action but he "will no more remember," and he's got a perfect memory, that he "will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long." That's what he won't do, he won't remember. Positively, "will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the

tribunal of God." He imputes to me Christ's righteousness so that when I stand before the tribunal of God, whenever I stand, I will never be condemned.

Now this petition, a part of the prayer. Not remember but impute to me Christ's righteousness, that's Lord's Day 21. Here the fifth petition, he pleased. Lord's Day 21 on the basis of the satisfaction of Christ. Here for the sake of Christ's blood. Then it immediately goes not to impute to us poor sinners. Now two things. Just as 21, 21 speaks of my transgressions and my nature, my corrupt nature against which I have to struggle all my life long. So sin and sinfulness. Here, too, not impute to me my transgressions nor that depravity which always cleaves to me.

Have you ever wondered why in teaching us how to pray Jesus, why didn't he just say, "And forgive us our debts"? Forgive my sins. That's the way we usually do it. Why did he have to add "as we forgive our debtors"? That's what we want to consider and have to consider this morning. First of all, we want to consider that forgiveness, forgive me as I forgive others. What am I asking for? To be forgiven. What does it mean to be forgiven? The second, that forgiveness is experienced in a certain way, namely in confession and in changing. Saying, "I'm sorry," and changing, converting, turning around. It's very interesting that the same word that's translated "repentance" is also translated "conversion." They go together. To say, "I'm sorry," and to say, "I am striving to change." Then thirdly, forgiveness that's expressed and we're going to see the three ways in which it's expressed highlighting the one way that's in this petition that we forgive.

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is that work of God. Stop. It's a work of God. Why a work of God? Because sin is sin, precisely because it's against God. We know when we're sinned against, we know when somebody else is sinned against. All sin and my nature, my corrupt nature that cleaves to me, that depravity that cleaves to me, is all a violent violation of the person of that holy holy holy Lord God Almighty. Sin touches God. Forgiveness of sin is that work of God. He is the one who forgives.

Forgiveness may be described as God not imputing my transgressions to me. I do them, they're on my account, they are mine, they belong to me. My sin in Adam, original sin, my actual sins, my nature, all of those trio are mine. They belong to me. God can't point the finger at somebody else if I did it. Forgiveness is God saying, "I take them away and I don't impute them to you." No, because God is so holy and so perfect, he can't just take them away and leave them hanging or he can't take them away and shove them under the rug, he can't just say, "Okay, we're going to avoid it," or, "We're going to forget about it, just go on. Done. No more." No, God has to do something with them. They've assaulted. They are assaults on his person and his holiness, his perfection will not let him do nothing to them. If he takes them away and doesn't put them and keep them on our account, he must give them to Jesus. He gave his own self because to forgive is costly. It is costly. It hurts.

Just to help us understand that, take the picture, take a picture of this thought. A businessman has a client, he does the work, the cost of it is rounded off to \$1,000. He sends the bill. The work's done. He put in all of the cost of the material and all the cost of

the labor. He's out \$1,000. He sends a bill. No payment. He sends a reminder. No payment. He makes a phone call. "It's in the mail." No payment. When that businessman turns to that client and says, "I forgive you," what he's really saying is this, "I will pay the bill for you out of my own pocket. It'll be my expense. You go free. You don't owe me anymore." It costs. It's not shoved under the rug. It's not ignored nor avoided. It's paid, paid in full by that businessman.

God in his perfection must punish every violent violation of his holy person and he does. He voluntarily provides the payment himself. It costs him. I don't know if we really ever get it or really ever will what it cost God to pay for one of my sins. What he had to do to his own Son, to himself in order in his justice to satisfy. If he doesn't impute it to me, then he imputes it to himself in his only beloved Son. He loved him. Nobody loved a Son more than God loves the Son, Jesus Christ, and nobody, in a certain sense we may say, hurt more than the Father when he laid on him the iniquity of us all, and he so imputed them to him, so laid them on his own Son's account, and his Son so paid, so satisfied that we may hear God say to us what's really impossible for God but he's communicating to us, he wants us to know, he's teaching us, he's communicating to us on our level. He doesn't forget. He'll show us in the judgment day exactly how much was paid. He opens the books, he records the forgiveness that he gave for every sin, but he wants us to experience and know that in such a way that he says to us over and over in Isaiah, Jeremiah, "I will remember your sins no more," and so much so that the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 21 words it just that way, "for the sake of Christ's satisfaction will no more remember my sins, nor my corrupt nature."

Covered. But forgiveness is more than that amazingly. He takes the accounting away from us and he gives it to Jesus and Jesus pays, but then we're at zero. Our debt is paid but we don't have anything extra. We don't even have a widow's mite, an eighth of a cent. We don't have anything and the next thing is that God takes the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, all of his obedience, everything that he did, and God takes it and he imputes it to our account and he says, "This is yours. You're rich. You are the object of my love. You're my child. With tender love, I will take care of you in every detail of your life. When you're asleep, when you're awake. When you forget me, I will be taking care of you. I will make everything good because you're so righteous, so holy. I've imputed his righteousness and holiness to you. You have that. You are holy. You are a saint. You're my child and I am obliged to take you to glory forever. You're going to live with me in my house. We're going to be family forever." When a child of God realizes what he is an heir to, now jump with me to tonight, then Abram can say, "I don't care if I lose everything here. I'm rich. This will all burn up. I've got heaven. Can't compare."

The grace that brought me safe thus far, that grace will lead me home. The Lord has promised good to me, his word, my hope secures. He will, my shield and portion be, as long as life endures. And when this flesh and heart shall fail and mortal life shall cease, I'm going to possess within the veil a life of joy and peace. The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, and the sun will forbear to shine. But God who calls me here below, will be forever mine and I will be forever his. And when we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise, then when we first begun.

Forgiven. Righteous. God's forgiveness is tremendously great in quantity and in quality. The quantity of that forgiveness is such that "if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin." All sin. And that forgiveness is great in quality. "Come now, let us reason together saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

That forgiveness is full and complete, as far as the east is from the west. That's how far our transgressions are removed from us. When you remember them, yours of your youth or yesterday, you close the gap and you're not listening to him say, "How far is the east from the west? That's how far I have removed your transgressions from you. They're gone. They are no more." That's why he remembers them no more. All the times I failed yesterday, no more. Gone.

And the nature of that forgiveness is that it is free. Free. Absolutely free. From that viewpoint, you do nothing to get it. You don't have to pay a penny. You don't even have to pay a widow's mite.

Why does he forgive? The reason is not to be found in us, it is not to be found in that we have done something to pay for our debt. It's not because I did something right most of the time and I failed a couple. I can't look at what I did right in my mind and say, "Well, look at here." That's how we do with each other. "I messed up but look at all the other times I did good." That doesn't work with God. It's not because I have church membership or because I've been baptized or because I make confession of faith. It is not because I pay my budget. It is not because I prayed. It's not because I did good deeds. It's not even because I was sorry. Oh, that's the one we use a lot in our unconsciousness, "I was sorry. I said I was sorry," as if that merits forgiveness. "I changed. I'm different." It's free in the sense that it is unconditional. The only ground for forgiveness is for Jesus' sake, on the basis of Jesus' satisfaction. Ephesians 4:32 because "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

It's his work. His righteousness. It's his person so that Colossians 1:14 and Acts 13:38 attributes it to the person of Jesus. It's only because of Jesus. Now we all know that. We know that so well, now let's focus on that. It's that person, in him there is forgiveness. When he was offered once, it's sufficient to save us to the uttermost.

Beloved, you are forgiven. You're righteous. You're a child of the King. You're securely saved forever. You're his and he is yours. That truth is taught clearly. In spite of the clarity with which it's taught, that truth is not experienced, it's not understood, it's not appreciated except in the way of confession, godly sorrow, a sorrow in confession which readily, freely admits, identifies the seriousness of a sin. So just to simply say, "I've done wrong," doesn't quite do it. It's a good start but understand the power of the confession of David when he said, "I have sinned against Jehovah." Understand the clarity with which the prodigal son made his confession, "I am not worthy to be called thy son. I have sinned against heaven and against thee." Identify the sin. Godly sorrow is an identification of my

nature and my sins as being against that holy Majesty. The one who gives me the ability to see, the one who gives me the ability to think, the one who gives me the ability to feel, the one who gives me the ability to do everything, it's him that I touched and to say I'm sorry is to say, "I am sorry. Against thee, thee only," David said, "have I sinned."

Right confession never forgets its nature. Sincere sorrow never forgets my natural face. That's the language of James 1. I can be a hearer of the word and a hearer of the word can know when he sits in church that he has sinned, but what he does because he's a hearer only, is goes out the door and he straightway forgets what manner of man he is. His mind is everywhere else but not remembering his natural face, the face of his birth literally. He's a hearer. Oh, he's a good hearer and he can say with the best of them, "I believe in total depravity." He might even say theologically, "Everything I do is spotted. Everything I do is wrong. Everything I do has got dirt on it." But now find fault with him and watch him. "You dare to charge me? Well, yeah I did it but it wasn't what I meant." Listen to the excuses.

"Lord of my life, God of amazing grace, against thee have I sinned." All the time. And if per chance there would be someone who would misunderstand me and bring an accusation against me, that would be wrong, it would be slander, it wouldn't be truth, it wouldn't be gossip, it would be slander, it would be a false charge. One who knows his natural face and he doesn't straightway forget it but he remembers it will always be thinking, "Boy, they got it wrong, but if they only knew the truth about me. They could throw more things at me because I know my natural face. I know that depravity against which I have to struggle all my life long. I know that nature that cleaves to me."

Confession freely admits without conditions, without excuses, without reasons, without blame-shifting, without minimizing. The enemy, let's be clear, the enemy of sincere confession, P-R-I-D-E in the biggest font that there ever could be, in boldface type covering the whole of me. Pride. No self-denial. The enemy of confession is the refusal to admit and that enemy is my nature. That's exactly what I'm confessing but that nature does not want me ever to admit it. We've become tremendously defensive. The fear of man and what man might think of us makes us reluctant to admit our sins and to admit them to others that we are wrong.

The prodigal son came to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and against you." That's why the wording of Scripture about that prodigal son and a real understanding of what it means to be locked into sin is this, in Luke 15, the parable of the prodigal son is described as the one who came to himself. He came to his senses. It's put this way, you've got to read it into it because he's talking to the servant of the Lord who must not strive but must be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth about themselves. Come to themselves. Come to their senses.

So there's not only sorrow, there's change. Now a change is worked by God so we come to our senses, our eyes are opened to the horribleness of what we've done. We are so busy horizontally that when we look vertically that's when we're humbled. That's when we see

the light and the closer we get to that light, then the darker the sin is in the shadow. So the change, the repentance, the turning about, is that we confess not only to God what we've done wrong, we've confessed to those whom we've wronged. But that experience of forgiveness is in the way of our forsaking. Rather powerfully stated in a proverb, Proverbs 28:13, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Flight, flee from fornication. Flee from every kind of sin. Turn me and I shall be turned inside and out.

Forgiveness so experienced is going to be expressed in a certain way. One who knows what it is to be so forgiven because of the love of God that gave his Son to take my guilt and to give me his righteousness is going to love God. Love God. Love Jesus. Grateful returns of ardent love, conscious that he's every second loving me first, not just in eternity but all the time he's still loving me. He's still loving me and I have to be renewed and the knowledge, he wins our love. He gives us commandments, he tells us what we must do but our Father wins us and he wants us to love him back. The heart of all the commandments is, "Love the Lord thy God with everything all the time."

The second way in which the experience of forgiveness is expressed is humility. Humility. Humility isn't just something that comes on us and it crushes us so we're small. Humility is that work of God's grace within his child so that his child bows. He puts himself down under and he acknowledges, "I am the chief." Paul said he was. He can't be, I am. Less than the least of all saints. What do I have to give considering how dirty I am and how washed I am? The Canons of Dort say that the knowledge of our sin and sinfulness is a constant matter for humility. The Canons of Dort say the knowledge that I am his and he is mine is an additional reason for humility.

Love, humility, the first two ways in which the knowledge of forgiveness is expressed but Jesus added a third way and it flows from 1 and 2, "I love him. I am unworthy. I feel. I feel this evidence of his grace in that I make a firm resolution to forgive." Those who are forgiven are of a forgiving spirit. One's readiness to forgive is proof that he knows forgiveness. Something from last week: one who knows the merciful heart of God, knows it, will be merciful and know that a sacrifice doesn't do it. Let's put it the other way. I stated it positively, let's state it negatively. A grudge-holding Christian is a scandal and Jesus makes him pray against herself, himself, every time they pray the Lord's prayer. Jesus makes me pray against myself when I don't forgive as forgiven. To know the reality of his taking everything that's mine and giving it to his Son and taking everything of his Son and giving it to even me is going to be expressed, "I forgive."

Notice the language of the Catechism, very very crucial. It's my firm resolution. It's not a feeling, "I will forgive you when I feel like forgiving you or when it comes over me and I'm amazed at my forgiveness, then I'm going to have that feeling control me so that I forgive." No, that feeling comes but that feeling is expressed in, "I decide. I decide to forgive." And by the way, that decision to forgive, that firm resolution is something that is repeated over and over and over and over and over until I forget, but I must resolve every time I remember to forgive as I've been forgiven. I decide, I make a firm resolution repeatedly. I'm not going to think about it. I'm not going to roll it around in my head. I'm

not going to go back to what they did and how I should have answered. I'm not going to think about it. I forgive and as I have been forgiven unconditionally, so forgiveness is given unconditionally. I still might have to go to that person for their sake, not so that I can forgive them. Forgiveness to me is what's been given from eternity. I am forgiven before I'm sorry. I'm not forgiven because I'm sorry. I might not experience forgiveness until I'm sorry, that's different. I have been forgiven and he remembers them no more. They're gone. That's what moves me to sorrow. That's what makes me ashamed.

So forgive. It has nothing to do with them but has to do with him and what he's done for me even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. It's going to cost. It costs. It hurts. It's denying self. To bear another's debt takes self-denial, humility and love but, again, it is a decision that must be repeated every time we remember the sin that was committed against us. The more that we dwell on others and their sins against us, the more we rob ourselves of joy and peace.

Verse 31 comes before verse 32 obviously. Ephesians 4:31, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." You find clamor, you find evil speaking, you find wrath and hatred, you find bitterness, the reason is because you haven't forgiven as you are forgiven. You didn't look up, you stared, you blinded them and yourself. You thought about "me, poor me."

Let's think about "me." Do you know what I'm worth? A hundred pence, 17 lousy dollars. That's all. Oh, it's there. It's not nothing, it's something but it's just \$17. Every one of mine to him is 10,000 talents, 15 million dollars each one, and he never ceases to say, "My child, it's gone. I remember them no more. It cost me, it cost me horribly. Look at the cross. I had to pour out my wrath, eternal wrath of hell on my own Son, but then I raised him from the dead." So start the week, Sabbath, the day of the resurrection in the knowledge, beloved, in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Go and sin no more. Amen.

Our Father, use thy word, not the words of a man, use thy word and speak. Admonish, comfort, encourage so that we can know now that we cannot ever praise thee enough but constantly in humble adoration proclaim how great forgiveness is, how great thou art. Thanks. Amen.

Matthew 18; Lord's Day 51

FORGIVE AS I FORGIVE

- I. Forgiveness.
 - A. Because every sin and all sinfulness is committed against God it is He Who forgives.
 - 1. Forgiveness is God not imputing our sins and sinfulness to our account, i.e., not holding us responsible to pay for them.
 - 2. The holy Judge declares that the sin and sinfulness is so covered that it is as if it has never been committed.
 - 3. More He declares us to be perfectly righteous, as if we did everything right and are worthy of eternal life.
 - B. Forgiveness is great in quantity: "all sin" (I John 1:7) and quality: though they be as scarlet (Isa. 1:18).
 - C. Why and how is it that God forgives.
 - 1. The ground of forgiveness is NOT found in us in any way, as if we paid our debt to God.
 - 2. The only ground for forgiveness is "for Christ's sake" (Eph. 4:32) - His work and righteousness (Col. 1:14; Acts 13:38).
- II. The way forgiveness is known and experienced is through godly sorrow and a forsaking of the sin.
 - A. Godly sorrow is sincere admission of guilt for offending God.
 - 1. Sincere confession freely admits the sins we know and also admits those which are unknown, hidden and secret.
 - B. And the way to experience forgiveness includes the forsaking (Proverbs 28:13) of the wrong.
- III. Three marks of experiencing forgiveness.
 - A. Forgiven souls love God and Jesus. They render grateful returns of ardent love to Him.
 - B. Forgiven souls are humble (Eph. 3:8; I Tim. 1:15).
 - C. And those who know they are forgiven are of a forgiving spirit (Matt. 18:23ff).
 - 1. Forgiving one another is a "firm resolution from the heart" - a decision, not a feeling.
 - 2. If we refuse to forgive, and instead dwell on the sins against us, and retain hatred, then we are sinning.
 - 3. Our focus is to be on how God for Christ's sake forgave us (10,000 talents), and then we strive to reflect God.