

Commentary on the Lord's Prayer Martin Luther

from Martin Luther, Commentary on the Sermon On The Mount. Charles A. Hay, trans. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1892), pp. 240-269.

V. 5, 6. *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Along with almsgiving, or doing good to our neighbor, it is also our Christian duty to pray. For, just as the necessities of the present life demand that we do good to our neighbor and sympathize with him in his need (for that is why we live together upon earth, so that one may serve and help the other); so, because we are daily exposed in this life to all manner of danger and need, that we cannot avoid or turn aside, we must also ever call upon God and seek for help, both for ourselves and every one else.

But as proper almsgiving is a rare thing in the world, not only because of the common robbing and stealing that abound in the world, as no one does good to his neighbor, and everybody scratches on his own dung-pile, and does not ask how his neighbor gets along; but also because if they do a good deed, they seek only their own interests thereby; so that thus the world is nothing else than a set of robbers and thieves, both on the right and left, both bodily and spiritually, both in bad works and good; just so now is praying a rare thing, that no one does but Christians, and yet it was such a common thing in the world, especially among the Jews, as Christ here shows, in synagogues and at the corners of the streets, and now in so many churches, monasteries, nunneries, etc., muttering and bawling day and night with singing and reading, so that the world is everywhere full of it, and there is no lack of this work, and yet taken altogether it is not worth a cent.

For since Christ here rebukes and rejects all their praying, who were nevertheless so diligently practicing it, only that they might be seen of men and get glory; how much more is the praying of our ecclesiastics to be condemned, who seek nothing else thereby than that they may fill their bellies, and not one of them would say a *pater noster* if he did not get pay for it. And when they have done their

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best, they have mumbled over a bagful of words, or intoned them, without heart, sense or faith, just like bells or organs; they have gotten thereby the honor and glory of being the only ones that pray; but that the others, as occupied with worldly affairs, cannot pray or serve God, and they must pray in our stead, so that we may make lords of them by our money and goods.

But how necessary prayer is, is not to be told here; we ought indeed ourselves to feel this, since we live in flesh and blood that are full of all sorts of evil tendencies; besides, we have the world around us and against us, that causes us much misery and affliction, and manifold trouble; and in addition the devil is everywhere around us, who originates innumerable sects, parties and heresies, and drives us to unbelief, despair, etc., so that there is no end to this, and we have no rest, because we are surrounded by these enemies who do not cease until they have stricken us down, for we as single poor men are much too weak for so many enemies. Therefore God says in the prophet Zechariah xii. 10, that he will give to his own “the spirit of grace and of supplication,” wherewith they may be sustained during their present exposure, and guard and defend themselves against the evil, harmful spirit. Therefore it is the special work of Christians, who have the Spirit of God, that they be not weary and idle, but pray without ceasing, as Christ elsewhere teaches.

But now comes the test, that it be a genuine prayer and not a hypocritical one, as theirs was, and ours has hitherto been. Therefore Christ begins by teaching them how to pray aright, and shows how they are to go about it, namely, that they should not stand and pray openly upon the streets, but should pray at home, alone, in their chamber, in secret, etc.: that is, that they should first of all lay aside the false desire to pray for the sake of the appearance and reputation, or anything of that kind. Not that we are forbidden to pray upon the street or openly; for a Christian is not bound to any place, and may pray anywhere, upon the street, in the field, or in church; but merely, that it must not be done with reference to the people, to get honor and profit from it, just as he forbids sounding a trumpet or bells at alms-giving — not for that reason, but he rebukes the addition and the false motive with these words: that they may be seen of men.

Thus it is also not commanded as necessary that we must go into a closet and shut the door; although it is suitable for one to be alone when he wishes to pray, as he can pour out his prayer to God free and unhindered, and use words and gestures that he could not in the presence of others. For although prayer can take place in the heart without any word or outward indication, yet this helps to stir up and enkindle the spirit; but the heart should, aside from this, be praying almost without intermission. For a Christian (as above said) has the spirit of supplication always present within him, so that his heart is perpetually engaged in supplication and prayer to God, whether he is eating, drinking, laboring, etc. For his whole life is devoted to the dissemination of the name, honor, and kingdom of God, so that whatever he does must contribute to this.

But yet (I say) in addition to this we must also pray outwardly; both individually, that each person use a benediction or a Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or a psalm, in the morning, in the evening, at table, and when he has time, and collectively, when they come together, handle the word of God, and thereupon thank him and call upon him in view of the common need.

This has to be done openly, and time and place are set apart for this purpose, when the people assemble; this is a precious method of prayer, and a strong defense against the devil and his wiles, for then the whole Christian community combines with one accord, and the more earnest the effort, the sooner the prayer is heard, and the more efficient it is: as it is even now doing much good, averting and

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hindering many artifices of the devil, that he would otherwise employ through his agents, so that surely what is now left secure, both in ecclesiastical and secular affairs, is preserved through prayer.

But what are the needful elements and characteristics for constituting a real prayer, I have often elsewhere said and treated of, namely, to repeat in a word, that we are urged to it, first, by the command of God, who has strictly enjoined it upon us to pray; then, his promise, in which he assures that he will hear us; thirdly, our contemplation of our need and misery, which so oppresses and burdens us that we greatly need to carry this straight to God, and pour it out before him, as he has commanded; fourthly, that we upon this word and promise of God pray with true faith, in full confidence that he will hear and help us; and all this in the name of Christ, through whom our prayer is acceptable to the Father, and for whose sake he gives us every grace and blessing.

This Christ shows also here with the word: Pray to thy Father in secret, etc., and afterwards more distinctly, where he says: Our Father who art in heaven, etc. For this amounts to saying that our prayer is to be addressed to God as to our gracious, kind Father, not as to a tyrant or angry judge, etc. Now no one can do that unless he has the word of God, that he wishes to have us call him Father, and that as a Father he has promised to hear and help us, and that he have this faith in his heart, so that he cheerfully dare call God his Father, and pray with hearty confidence, and rely upon this prayer, as assuredly heard, and await help.

But there were none of these elements in that Pharisaic prayer, for they thought no further than how the work was to be done, so that they might be looked upon as holy people, who like to pray; or like our monks and priests, so that they may fill their belly by it. Yes, they are so far from holding that they ought to pray with such faith, that they have regarded it as a folly and presumption that one should congratulate himself upon the certainty that his prayer is acceptable to God and heard by him; and thus, although they prayed, they counted everything as a pure venture, and thereby grievously angered God by unbelief and abuse of his name, against the first and second commandments.

Therefore learn here that no true prayer can be offered without this faith. Do you, however, feel weak and timid? for flesh and blood always hinder faith, as if you were not worthy or fit and in earnest to pray; or do you doubt whether God has heard you, because you are a sinner? then cling to the word and say: Though I am a sinner and unworthy, yet I have the command of God, that tells me to pray, and his promise that he will graciously hear me, not because of my worthiness, but for the sake of the Lord Christ. By this means you can drive away the thoughts and doubts, and cheerfully kneel down and pray, not regarding your worthiness or unworthiness, but your need and his word upon which he tells you to build; especially since he has placed before you and put into your mouth the words how and what you are to pray for (as follows), so that you joyously send up these prayers through him, and can lay them in his bosom, that he may lay them by his own worthiness before the Father.

V. 7-13. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

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He rebuked above their wrong intention in prayer, as they sought their own honor and profit among the people even in doing that which was directed to God alone, calling upon him and beseeching him for help in our need and temptation. Here he is rebuking this perversion of prayer, that they suppose it is praying if one uses many words and vain repetitions, and he calls it a heathenish method, a trifling useless prattle, as of those who suppose they will otherwise not be heard. For he saw very well that this would be the case, and that such an abuse would continue in Christendom, as it existed among them already at that time, so that prayer would be made a mere work, that would be valued in proportion to its size and length, as if thereby it were admirably done, and thus instead of a true prayer there was a mere prattle and babbling, of which the heart knew nothing.

Thus, as we see, it was carried on in monasteries, nunneries and the whole ecclesiastical crowd, that seem to have had nothing else to do in their calling than to weary themselves daily so many hours, and at night besides, with singing and reading their Horas; and the more of this they could do, the holier and greater worship they called it. And yet among them all there was not one that uttered a real prayer from his heart: but they were all filled with the heathenish notion that one must tire God and one's self with crying and muttering, as if he neither could nor would otherwise hear; and they have thereby accomplished nothing else than to waste their time and punish themselves like asses, with their praying.

Therefore they have themselves said that there is no harder work than to pray; and that is in fact true, if you aim to make a work or labor out of your praying, imposing upon your body to read or sing so many hours continuously, so that any day laborer would rather choose to thresh for a whole (lay, than only to move his mouth for two or three hours one after another, or look straight into a book. In short their prayer was not a sighing or desire of the heart, but a mere force-work of the mouth or tongue: so that if a monk has been reading or muttering his Horas for forty years, he has not prayed from his heart for an hour during all that time. For they never think of presenting their wants before God in their prayers, but they think only that they must do it, and God must regard this trouble and toil.

But the Christian's prayer, which is offered in faith upon the promise of God, and presents before him from the heart its need, that is easy, and occasions no labor. For faith soon tells what it wants, yes, with a sigh that the heart utters and that cannot be reached or uttered in words, as Paul says. The Christian prays, and because he knows that God hears him, he does not need to prate everlastingly. Thus the saints in the Scriptures prayed, as Elijah, Elisha, David and others, with short, but strong and powerful words; as we see in the Psalms, in which there is hardly one that has a prayer of more than five or six verses. Therefore the old fathers have very properly said, there is no use in many long prayers, but they praise the short ejaculatory prayers, in which one lifts a sigh heavenward with a word or two; which one can do very often when he is reading, writing, or doing some other work.

But the others, who make only a huge labor out of it, can never pray with satisfaction or with devotion, but they are glad when they are through with their babbling; for it must be so, if one prays without faith and with no feeling of need, thus there can be no heart in it: but if the heart is not in it, and the body is to do the work, then it becomes difficult and vexatious; as we see also in secular labor: he who does anything unwillingly, how difficult and disagreeable it is; but on the contrary, if the heart is cheerful and willing, then it takes no notice of the work. So also it is here; if one is in earnest about it, and takes pleasure in prayers then he neither knows nor feels any labor or troubles but looks only at his needs and has finished singing or praying the words before he knows what he is about. In short, one

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should pray short, but often and strongly; for God does not ask how much and long one has prayed, but how good it is and how it comes from the heart.

Therefore Christ now says: Your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask for it; as if he would say: What are you about, that you think to overwhelm him with your long babbling, so that he may give you what you need? You do not need to convince him with words, or instruct him at length; for he knows beforehand better what you need than you do yourselves. Just as if you were to come before a prince or a judge who knew your case better than you could describe it to him, and you would undertake to make a long story to inform him about it, he would rightly laugh at you, or rather be offended at you. Yes, we do not know, says St. Paul, how we are to pray; so that, if he hears us and gives us something, he gives it above what we can understand or hope for. Therefore sometimes he lets us ask for something that he does not soon give, or indeed does not give at all, as knowing very well what we need or what would be useful to us or not; what we ourselves do not see, and at last must ourselves confess that it would not have been good for us if he had given to us in accordance with our prayer. Therefore we need not teach him or prescribe with our long babbling what and how he is to give to us: for he will give in such a way that his name may be hallowed and his kingdom and his will may be advanced and promoted, etc.

But do you say: Why then does he let us pray and present our need, and does not give it to us unasked, since he knows and sees all our need better than we do? He gives surely to the whole world daily so much good freely, as sun, rain, corn, money, body, life, etc., which no one asks or is grateful for; as he knows that they cannot get along for a single day without light, eating and drinking; why does he then tell us to pray for these things? Answer: He does not require it, indeed, for the reason that we are to teach him this with our praying, viz., what he is to give us, but in order that we may acknowledge and confess what kind of blessings he is bestowing upon us, and yet much more he can and will give; so that we by our praying are rather instructing ourselves than him. For thereby I am turned about, that I do not go along like the ungodly that never acknowledge this or offer thanks for it; and my heart is thus turned to him and aroused, so that I praise and thank him, and have recourse to him in time of need and look for help from him; and the effect of all this is that I learn more and more to acknowledge what kind of a God he is; and because I address my supplications to him, he is the more disposed to answer me abundantly. See, this is now a genuine supplicant, not like those other useless talkers, who babble indeed a great deal, but never acknowledge this. But he knows that what he has is the gift of God, and he says from his heart: Lord, I know that I cannot of myself produce or get a piece of my daily bread, or shield myself against any kind of need or misfortune; therefore I will await it and beseech it from thee, as thou dost teach me, and dost promise to give me, as he who is ready with favors regardless of my thoughts, and who anticipates my need.

See, such acknowledgment in prayer is pleasing to God, and is the true, highest and most precious worship which we can render to him; for thereby the honor and gratitude that are due are given to him. This the others do not do, but they seize and devour all the gifts of God, just as hogs; they appropriate one country, city, house, after another; never think of paying any regard to God; want meanwhile to be holy with their great intonations and babbling in the churches. But a Christian heart, that learns out of the word of God, that we have everything from God and nothing from ourselves, such a heart accepts this in faith and familiarizes itself with it, so that it can look to him for everything and expect it from him. Thus praying teaches us, so that we recognize both ourselves and God, and learn what we

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need and whence we are to seek for it and get it. Thus there is developed an excellent, sensible man, who can readily adapt himself to all circumstances.

Christ, having thus rebuked and rejected these false and useless prayers, proceeds himself to give an excellent brief form, how and what we are to pray, that embraces all kinds of wants that are to drive us to prayer, so that we can daily remind ourselves of them in such short words, and no one may be excused, as though he did not know how or what he is to pray; and it is a very good practice especially for ordinary people, children and house servants, to pray the whole of the Lord's prayer daily, morning and evening and at table, and also at other times, so that one may present to God in it all our needs in general. Since, however, the Lord's Prayer is sufficiently expounded in the Catechism and elsewhere, I will add no further comments at present.

It is, however, as has often been said, surely the very best prayer that was ever uttered upon earth, or that any one could conceive, since God the Father gave it through his Son, and laid it upon his lips; so that we dare not doubt that it is extremely pleasing to him. He admonishes us at the very beginning, both concerning his command and his promise, in the word: "Our Father," etc., as the one who demands from us this honor, that we are to ask from him, as a child from its father, and he wants us to have the confidence that he will gladly give us what we need; and this is further also a part of it, that we glory in being his children through Christ; and thus we come in accordance with his command and promise, and in the name of the Lord Christ, and appear before him with all confidence.

Now, the first, second and third petitions refer to the highest benefits that we receive from him: namely, first, because he is our Father, that he may have his honor from us, and his name be held in high honor in all the world. Herewith I gather into one heap all sorts of false belief and worship, the whole of hell, all sin and blasphemy, and pray that he may put a stop to the abominable belief of the pope, the Turks, the factious spirits and heretics, all of whom desecrate and abuse his name, or under his name seek their own honor. There are indeed but few words, but their meaning is as wide as the world, against all false doctrine and life. Secondly, after we have his word and true doctrine and worship, that also his kingdom may be and remain in us, that is, that he may control us in this doctrine and life, and thereby protect and preserve us against all the power of the devil and of his kingdom, and that all the kingdoms that rage against it may go to destruction, so that this kingdom may stand. And, thirdly, that not our will, nor that of any man, but alone his will may be done, and that what he thinks and advises may succeed, in opposition to all designs and undertakings of the world and whatever may strive against this will and counsel, even if the whole world masses itself and struggles to maintain its antagonistic cause. These are the three most important topics.

In the other four petitions we find ourselves confronted by the need that daily meets us on our own account, with reference to this poor, weak, temporal life. Therefore we pray, in the first place, that he may give us our daily bread, that is, everything that is needful for the preservation of this life: food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, child, good government, peace, and that he may preserve us from all manner of calamity, sickness, pestilence, dear times, war, insurrection, etc. Then, that he may forgive us our trespasses, and not regard the shameful misuse of and ingratitude for the blessings which he daily so richly bestows upon us, and that he may not for this reason refuse and deny us these or punish us with the disfavor that we deserve; but graciously forgive us, although we, who are called Christians and his children, do not live as we should. Thirdly, because we are living upon earth, in the midst of all manner of temptation and vexation, where we are assaulted on every side, so that we are hindered, and are tempted not alone outwardly by the world and the devil, but also inwardly by our

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own flesh, so that we cannot live as we should, nor be able to endure for a day amid so much danger and temptation; we pray therefore that amid this danger and need he may sustain us, so that we are not thereby overcome and ruined. And, finally, that he may at last wholly deliver us from all evil, and when the time comes, that we are to pass out of this life, may grant us a gracious, happy dying hour. Thus we have laid upon his bosom briefly all our bodily and spiritual need, and in a few words have gathered up a world of meaning.

But there is in the text a small appendage that closes the prayer, as with a common grateful confession; which is this: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. These are the proper titles and names that belong to God alone. For these three things he has reserved for himself, that is, to govern, to judge, and to glory. No one has a right to rule or have supremacy except God alone, or those to whom he has entrusted it, through whom as his servants he exercises the control. Likewise no man has a right to judge another, or to be angry and punish, except he who holds the office by divine appointment. For it is not a natural right of men, but one given by God.

These are the two, that he here calls the kingdom, or the sovereignty, so that all authority may be his; and then, the power, that is, the result of the deciding, *exsecutio*, so that he can punish, hold the wicked in subjection and protect the pious. For he who punishes, does it in God's stead, and it is all owing to his power that one handles justice, protects and sustains.

Therefore let no one avenge himself or punish, for it is not his office or sphere, and it does not avail; as he says: Vengeance is mine, I will repay; and elsewhere he threatens: He who takes the sword, shall perish by the sword.

So also the glory, or honor, is alone God's own, so that no one may boast of anything, of his wisdom, holiness or ability, except through him and from him. For, that I honor a king or prince and call him Gracious Lord, or bend the knee before him, this is not done on account of his person, but on God's account, as he is sitting in majesty in God's stead. So, when I show honor to father and mother, or to those who are in their stead, I do this not to man, but to the divine office, and I honor God in them; thus, where there is authority and power, to this is due honor and glory.

And thus his kingdom, power and glory prevail in the whole world, so that he alone rules, punishes and is glorified in the divine offices and estates, as father, mother, master, judge, prince, king, emperor, etc., although the devil, through his agents, opposes himself and aims to hold the authority and power, exercise vengeance and punishment and monopolize all the glory. Therefore we pray also especially for his name, his kingdom and his will, as those that alone should avail, and that all other names, kingdoms, power and will may go to destruction; and we thus confess that he is the highest in all these three respects, but the others are his instruments, by which he acts and accomplishes these things.

V. 14, 15. *“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

That is a remarkable addition, but a very precious one; and any one may well wonder how he happens to add such an appendix to this particular petition: Forgive us our trespasses, etc., whilst he might just as well have added also such a fragment to one of the others, and have said: Give us our daily bread, as we give to our children; or, Lead us not into temptation, as we tempt no one; Deliver us from evil, as we rescue and deliver our neighbor; and yet no petition has anything added to it except

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this one. And it looks besides as if the forgiveness of sins was gained and merited by our forgiving: what would then become of our doctrine that forgiveness comes alone through Christ and is received by faith? Answer to the first: He meant especially to state this petition in such a way, and to link the forgiveness of sin to our forgiving, so that hereby he would obligate the Christians to love each other, and to make this their main and foremost duty, next to faith and the reception of forgiveness, to be constantly forgiving their neighbor; so that, as we live in faith toward him, so also towards our neighbor in love, that we do not vex or injure others, but think that we always forgive although we are injured (as this must often happen in this life); or we are to know that we are also not forgiven. For if anger and ill-will be present, this spoils the whole prayer, so that one cannot pray or wish any of the former petitions. See, this means the making of a firm and strong bond, by which we are held together, so that we do not become disunited, and create divisions, parties and sects, instead of our coming before God, to pray and get what we need: but we are to forbear with one another through love, and remain of one accord. If this be the ease, the Christian man is perfect, as both believing and loving aright. What other faults he may have, these are consumed in the prayer, and all is forgiven and canceled.

But how does he attach in these words forgiveness to our doing when he says: If you forgive your neighbor, you shall be forgiven, and again, etc.? Does not that make forgiveness depend upon faith? Answer: The forgiveness of sin, as I have often said elsewhere, occurs in two ways; first, through the Gospel and the word of God, which is received internally in the heart before God, through faith; secondly, externally, by works, of which 2 Peter 1:10 says, when he is teaching about good works: Dear brethren, be diligent to make your calling and election sure, etc. Here he means, that we are to make this sure, that we have faith and the forgiveness of sin, that is, that we show the works, so that one may tell the tree by the fruits, and that it may be manifest that it is a good and not an evil tree. For where there is true faith, there assuredly good works will follow. In this way a man is both inwardly and outwardly pious and upright, both before God and man. For this is the result and the fruit, with which I make myself and others sure that I am a true believer; which I cannot otherwise know or see.

So also here the external forgiveness which I practically show is a sure sign that I have the divine forgiveness of my sins. Again, if this is not shown towards my neighbor, then I have a sure proof that I am not forgiven before God, but am still in unbelief. See, this is the twofold forgiveness; one internal in the heart, that clings alone to the word of God; and one external, that breaks forth, and assures us that we have the internal one.

Thus we distinguish works from faith, as an internal and external righteousness; but in such a way that the internal is there first, as the root and stem from which the good works as the fruit must grow; the external, however, their witness, and as Peter says, *certificatio*, an assurance that the other is certainly there. For he who has not the internal righteousness, he does none of the external works. Again, if the external signs and proofs be wanting, I cannot be sure of the former, but am deceiving both myself and others. But if I see and feel that I am gladly forgiving my neighbor, then I can conclude and say: I do not this work naturally, but I feel myself through the grace of God disposed otherwise than before.

This is a short answer to the twaddle of the sophists. But this is also true, that this work, as he here calls it, is not a mere work like others that we do of ourselves; for faith is not thereby overlooked. For he takes this work and plants a promise upon it, so that one might honestly call it a sacrament, thereby to strengthen faith. Just as baptism too is to be regarded as a work that I do, when I baptize or am baptized; but because God's word is associated with it, it is not a mere work, as that which itself

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avails or effects something: but a divine word and token upon which faith rests. Thus also, our prayer, as our work, would not avail or effect anything; but its efficacy comes from this, that it is done in accordance with his command and promise, so that it may well be regarded as a sacrament, and rather as a divine work than as one of our own.

I say this for this reason, because the sophists look at the works that we do, only by themselves, aside from God's word and promise. Therefore, when they hear and read these passages that refer to works, they must indeed say that man merits this by his doing. But the Scriptures teach thus: that we are not to look to ourselves, but to God's word and promise, and cling to this by faith, so that, if you do a work prompted by the word and promise, then you have a sure proof that God is gracious to you; in such a way that your own work, that God has now taken to himself, is to be to you a sure proof of forgiveness, etc.

Now God has provided various ways, modes and manners, through which we obtain grace and the forgiveness of sins; as, first, baptism and the sacrament; also (as just said) prayer; also absolution; and here our forgiveness; so that we are richly provided for, and can find grace and mercy everywhere. For where would you seek it nearer than with your neighbor, with whom you are daily living, and have daily occasion to practice this forgiveness? For it cannot be that you are not much and often offended: so that we have not only in church or with the priest, but in the midst of our life, a daily sacrament or baptism, one brother with another, and every one at home in his house. For if you take hold of the promise through this work, you have the very thing that you get in baptism. How could God be more richly gracious to us than by hanging about our neck such a common baptism, and binding it to the Lord's prayer, which [baptism] every one realizes in himself when he prays and forgives his neighbor? So that no one has cause to complain or to excuse himself, that he cannot bring himself to it, and it is too high and far off for him, or too heavy and dear, since it is brought home to him and his neighbor, right before his door, yes, put into his bosom.

See, if you look at it, not with reference to the work itself, but with reference to the word which is associated with it, you find it an excellent, precious treasure, so that it is no longer your work but a divine sacrament; and it is a powerful consolation that you can attain to the grace of forgiving your neighbor, although you may not be able to come to other sacraments. This ought to induce you willingly to do this work from the heart, and to be thankful to God that you are worthy of this grace: you ought surely to run after this to the end of the world, and spend all your means for it; as we used to do for the fictitious indulgences. He who will not receive this must be a shameful, cursed man, especially if he hears of and recognizes this grace, and yet remains so crooked and stubborn that he will not forgive, whereby he at once loses both baptism and sacrament and everything else. For they are all linked together, so that he who has one should have them all, or retain none. For he who has been baptized ought also to receive the sacrament; and he who receives the sacrament must also pray; and he who prays must also forgive, etc. If you do not forgive, you have here a fearful sentence, that your sins also shall not be forgiven, although you are among Christians and are enjoying the sacrament and other blessings; but these will be all the more injurious and condemnatory for you.

And that Christ may the more incite us to do this, he has employed kind, friendly words, saying: If ye forgive men their trespasses, etc. He does not say: their wickedness and villainy, or perverseness and vice, etc. For by a trespass he means such a sin as is committed rather through weakness or ignorance than from malice. Why does he thus minimize and reduce the sin of our neighbor — for we often see that many a one sins deliberately, from sheer wickedness and an evil will? He does it for the reason

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that he wishes to allay your anger, and soften you, that you may willingly forgive, and he is more concerned to make your heart sweet and friendly than to make the sin as great as it is in itself.

For before God it is and must be so great, that it deserves eternal condemnation, and excludes from heaven, even though it be a small sin, and only a fault, if one does not acknowledge, and ask your pardon for it. But he does not mean that the sin should be thus regarded by you and me, whose prerogative it is not to punish sin, but to forgive it; so that you should think thus: Although your neighbor has done something against you through malice, yet he is still misled, taken captive and blinded by the devil. Therefore you ought to be so pious as to rather pity him, who is overcome by the devil, so that it may be called a great, unpardonable sin, on the part of the devil who has put him up to it, but on the part of your neighbor, a failure and fault; as Christ also himself has done toward us, when he prayed on the cross: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. That was making our sin small and of little account, which is yet in itself the very greatest that was ever committed on earth. For what greater sin can be committed than most shamefully to torture and kill the only-begotten Son of God?

Yet you must so interpret this error and fault that your neighbor who has sinned against you may acknowledge it, and request forgiveness and desire to reform. For I have elsewhere said that there are two kinds of sin; one that is confessed, which no one should leave unforgiven; the other which is defended — this one none can forgive, for it will not be regarded as sin or accepted as forgiveness. Therefore, also Christ, Matthew xviii. 18, where he is speaking of forgiveness or the keys, places both side by side, binding and loosing; to show that one cannot absolve the sin which one will not acknowledge to be sin or have forgiven, but must bind it in the depth of hell; but on the other hand, those which are confessed we are to absolve and raise to heaven, etc.

Just as it is with the office of the keys, so is it also with each Christian in regard to his neighbor; who, although he should be ready to forgive every one that injures him, yet, if any one will not acknowledge and refrain from sin, but besides will continue in it, you cannot forgive him; and this not on your account, but on his, because he will not have forgiveness. But so soon as he acknowledges his guilt and asks forgiveness, everything must be granted, and the absolution follow promptly. For since he rebukes himself and forsakes his sins, so that no sin any longer adheres to him, I should the rather pass them by; if he however himself clings to them, and will not forsake them, I cannot take them from him, but must let him lie in them, making for himself out of a pardonable sin an unpardonable one. In short, if he will not recognize himself, we must burden his conscience as heavily as possible and show no mercy, as he will perversely be the devil's own. On the other hand, if he confesses his sin, and seeks your pardon, and you refuse to forgive, then you have laden it upon yourself, so that it will condemn you too.

Thus Christ intends also that the sin be confessed, inasmuch as he still calls it a transgression; he does not mean to deny that it is wrong, or to impose it upon you to sanction it as properly done, or treat it as right or good; only if it have become pardonable, and of so small an account as to be called only a fault, that you then say to your neighbor: Although I cannot praise it, and it is wrong, yet, since you acknowledge your error and your heart is now changed, and you have no ill-will against me, I will also gladly overlook it as a fault and oversight, and will forget my anger.

If you now are thus disposed towards your neighbor, God will also show himself again towards you with a sweet friendly heart, and he will make your great, heavy sin that you have committed against him, and are still committing, of such small account that he calls it only a fault, if you acknow-

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ledge it and pray for forgiveness, as he is more inclined to forgive than we can expect him to be. Now you should offer your body and life to God for such a heart, and seek for it to the end of the world; as they used to seek for it in the papacy, and worried themselves for it with many kinds of works. Now there is here such a heart offered to you, presented and given altogether gratuitously, just as baptism, the gospel and all its blessings; and you get more than you with all your works and those of all men could acquire. For here you have the sure promise that cannot belie or deceive you, that all your sins, however many or great they may be, shall be before him as small as human daily weaknesses, which he will not count or remember so far as you have faith in Christ. For just as other sacraments originate in and operate through the Lord Christ; so also, that our prayer is heard and we have certain forgiveness; that we have not deserved it, but all is acquired through him and bestowed upon us; so that he always remains the sole Mediator, through whom we have everything, so that also the forgiveness based upon this work avails alone through him.

So you see now why Christ added this appendage to the prayer, so that he might thereby unite us the more closely together, and preserve his followers in unity of spirit, both in faith and love, so that we do not allow ourselves to be separated on account of any sin or fault, that we may not lose faith and everything else. For it cannot be otherwise than that many offenses will daily occur amongst us in all callings and kinds of business, when we are saying and doing towards one another what one does not like to hear or endure, and give occasion to wrath and contention. For we still have our flesh and blood, that acts after its own fashion, and easily lets slip an evil word, or an angry sign or deed, by which love is wounded, in such a way that there must be much forgiveness among Christians; as we also incessantly need forgiveness from God, and must always cling to the prayer: Forgive us, as we forgive; unless we are such ungodly people, that we always more readily see a mote in our neighbor's eye than the beam in our own, and throw our sins behind us. For, if we should look at ourselves daily from morning till evening, we should find so many cleaving to us that we should forget other people, and be glad that we could engage in prayer.

[This commentary continues with Luther's discussion of verses 16-18, and on to the conclusion of the Sermon On The Mount, concluding on page 506 with "God preserve us in his grace, revealed in Christ. AMEN.]