

# Matthew 9:1-8

- "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." -

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## Introduction

- ❖ Forgiveness permeates the gospel of Matthew:
  - "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name **Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins**" (Mt 1:21).
  - The people went out to John the Baptist: "**Confessing their sins, they were baptized** by him in the Jordan River" (3:6).
  - At the Lord's Supper: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. **This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins**" (Mt 26:27, 28).
  - The Lord's Prayer: "**Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors**" (Mt 6:12). And: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Mt 6: 14, 15).
    - See also Matthew 18:15-20 and 21-35.
- ❖ In Matthew 9:1-8, forgiveness is based on the authority of the supreme judge, which he is given to the Son of Man (Dan 7:13, 14; Mt 9:6).
  - Forgiveness implies acquittal of sin or absolution. It is based on the grace, righteousness and mercy of God.
  - In effect, forgiveness aims at the purification of the heart and peace among God and men (Mt 5:8, 9). It aims at reconciliation, restoration, renewal, the release of guilt and shame.

- At the end of the narrative, the crowd "were filled with awe; and they praised God, **who had given such authority to men**" (Mt 9:8).
  - Matthew described what he has witnessed or heard from first-hand witnesses. He describes his calling just after this incident (Mt 9:9-12)!
  - Did the crowd fully understand the consequence of this authority? They sensed the presence of God (**filled with awe**) because only God can forgive sins and the one who received the authority to do so.
  - More important is the message to the church of Matthew's days (second half of the first century) and for the church today.
  - The authority to forgive sins has been given to men, and to the church (Mt 16:18; Mt 18:15-20), also in administering baptism and the Lord's Supper. This authority is part of the overall authority of the risen Christ (Mt 28:18).
- The forgiveness of sins has a deep impact on the lives of men on a personal, psychological and emotional, relational and social, religious level. The most important result is peace with God.
- ❖ The context, form, and structure as well as the theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap somewhat with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of Matthew. This makes it possible to use this outline as a "stand alone" or as part of a series.

## Context

Theme	Summary
<i>Teaching and Healing</i> (Mt 4:23)	Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.
<i>Healing and Following</i> (Mt 4:24, 25)	News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.  Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.
<i>Teaching</i> (Mt 5:1-7:29)	<i>Sermon on the Mount</i>
<i>Following and Healing</i>	When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed

(Mt 8:1-9:34)	him. <i>the demon-possessed, those having seizures, the paralyzed, and he healed them.</i>
<i>Teaching and Healing</i> (Mt 9:35)	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

- ❖ Matthew 8:1-9:34 is an elaboration of Matthew 4:24, 25.
  - Nolland Remarks: “The dramatic importance of the materials in chaps. 8–9 for Matthew is marked by an unusually high concentration of uses of ἰδοῦ (literally ‘behold’ - Mt. 8:24, 29, 32, 34; 9:3, 10, 18, 20, 32, compare the ESV -, but not translated above). The chapters have also concentrated into them most of the language of coming (προσεῖρθεσθαι) to Jesus to be found in the Gospel. In the healing accounts concentrated here those healed are often provided with no identity beyond the affliction (the leper, the demoniacs, the women with the hemorrhages, the blind). The afflicted are on occasion linked with anonymous friends or helpers (those healed one evening, the paralytic, the mute person). The sick lad is identified by his connection to a certain centurion; Peter’s mother-in-law is identified by that relationship; and the daughter of the ruler is also identified by her family relationship.”<sup>1</sup>

## Form and structure

<i>Transition</i> (verse 1)	Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his town.
<i>A. Jesus and the paralytic</i> (verse 2)	Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”
<i>B. Jesus and the teachers of the law</i> (verse 3-6)	At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!” Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....”

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<sup>1</sup> Nolland, J. (2005, p. 348, 349).

<i>A'. Jesus and the paralytic</i> (verse 7)	Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home.
<i>The crowd</i> (verse 8)	When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

- ❖ The central part shows ABA'-structure.
  - A. Jesus addresses the paralytic (verse 2);
    - B. Jesus addresses the Pharisees (verse 3-6);
    - This part contains the central message: the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.
  - A'. Jesus addresses the paralytic again (verse 7).
- ❖ Parallel narratives: Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:18-26.

## Technical and hermeneutical notes

### Forgiveness of sins

- ❖ "Forgiveness" in the Gospels represents "a dynamic, social-psychological experience of being released from the deleterious effects of guilt and sinful behaviour and restoring broken relations between human beings and God and among themselves." Forgiveness, and related words such as liberation, salvation, reconciliation and restoration, create God's new community. "Because of humankind's deeply flawed nature, forgiveness ultimately depends on the gracious love of God mediated through Jesus Christ." A believer responds "to God's reconciling mercy in various ways, especially repentance, baptism, confession, prayer and forgiveness of others."<sup>2</sup> "It is forgiveness as part of a dynamic, holistic project of rescuing people from the ravages of sin and enabling them to flourish."<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Forgiveness of sins in the Gospel of Matthew, an overview:
  - Matthew 1:21: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (See also: Lk 24:47; Acts 2:38; 10:43.)
  - Matthew 3:1-12 (John the Baptist): "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Mt 3:11).

<sup>2</sup> Spencer, F. S. (2013, p. 284). *Forgiveness of Sins*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

<sup>3</sup> Spencer, F. S. (2013, p. 285). *Forgiveness of Sins*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

- = Luke 3:3: “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a **baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**” (See also: Acts 2:38.)
  - Matthew 5:21-26 (Reconciliation): “**First go and be reconciled to your brother;** then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:24).
  - Matthew 6:9-15 (The Lord’s Prayer): “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12).
  - Matthew 9:1-8 (Jesus heals a paralytic): “But so that you may know that **the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...**” Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” And the man got up and went home. When **the crowd** saw this, they were filled with awe; and they **praised God, who had given such authority to men.**”
  - Matthew 18:15-20 (A brother who sins against you).<sup>4</sup>
  - Matthew 18:21-35 (The parable of the unmerciful servant): “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (Mt 18:21, 22). This parable is an apt illustration of Matthew 6:14, 15).
  - Matthew 26:28 (The Lord’s Supper): “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
- ❖ Forgiveness of sins in the New Testament, a thematic overview:
- **Work of the Spirit** (John 20:22, 23): “And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”
  - **Preaching** (Lk 24:47; Acts 13:38; 2 Cor 5:19): “And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
  - **Testimony of the Prophets** (Acts 10:43).
  - **Baptism** (Acts 2:38): “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
  - **Lord’s supper** (Mt 26:28; Eph 1:7): “This is **my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.**”
  - **Ministry** (Jn 20:23): “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”
  - **Prayer** (Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4): “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”
  - **Forgive each other** (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/Matthew%2018.15-20.pdf>

❖ Forgiveness of Sins in the Psalms, a short overview:

- **Psalm 32: 1, 2:** “**Blessed** is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. **Blessed** is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”
  - See also **Romans 4:7, 8** and Psalm 103.
  - For “**Blessed**”, see also Matthew 5:3-10.
- A personal prayer for forgiveness (Ps 51).
- A communal prayer for forgiveness (Ps 130; also Ps 79:9; 85:1-3).

❖ Forgiveness of Sins in the Prophets, a summary:

- It is made clear by the Prophets that:<sup>5</sup>
  - God is gracious and forgiving: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isa 55:6, 7).
  - Cultic activity, such as offerings, does not guarantee forgiveness (Ho 6:6 = Mt 12:7).
  - **Forgiveness Is the Divine Prerogative.**

Son of Man

- ❖ The Son of Man is the Human One, “**the man he has appointed**” (Acts 17:31). “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, **the man Christ Jesus**” (1 Tim 2:5). He is also the “**Holy and Righteous One**” (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14).
- “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 Jn 2:1).

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❖ The Son of Man in Matthew, an overview:

- Jesus identifies himself with the Son of Man for the first time in Matthew 8:20 (also Mt 10:23; 11:19; 16:13).
- He has received the authority to forgive sins (Mt 9:6).
- He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mt 12:8).

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<sup>5</sup> McKeown, J. (2012, p. 253-257). Forgiveness. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

- The Son of Man will be betrayed, crucified (Mt 12:40; 17:12, 22; 20:18; 26:2, 24, 45) and raised from the dead (Mt 17:9).
- He will give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28).
- He will return in his glory with his reward and to judge (Mt 10:23; 16:27, 28; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:24). He will give entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 7:21-23).
- In Matthew 26:24, Jesus identifies the Son of Man with the one coming on the clouds (Dan 7: 13, 14):
- "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."
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- Compare Matthew 28:18-20:
- "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"
- The Son of Man is the beloved Son of God: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; 17:5; see also Mt 12:18).
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## Exposition

### Verse 1

#### ❖ "Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town"

- In the previous episode, Jesus stayed in the country of the Gadarenes where he healed two demon-possessed men (Mt 8:28-34). He was urged to leave. This is a transition verse introducing a new episode.
- "His own town" is Capernaum (Mt 4:13).

### Verse 2

#### ❖ "Some men brought to him a paralytic." Matthew doesn't specify how many men are present. They were more than five, including the paralytic. Mark 2:2-5 and Luke 5:18-20 provide more details.

- "Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them"(Mk 2:3).

❖ **“When Jesus saw their faith.”**

- The men didn’t say or ask anything. Their actions showed **their** faith.
- **“faith”**: of **belief and trust in the Lord’s** help in physical and spiritual distress;<sup>6</sup> See also Matthew 8:10; 9:22, 29; 15:28. In addition, Jesus addresses his disciples four times as men of little faith (Mt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8).

❖ **“Take heart, son;”** Compare Matthew 9:22: **“Take heart, daughter.”**

- **“Take heart”** = **“θαρσέω”**: **to be firm or resolute in the face of danger or adverse circumstances, be enheartened, be courageous.**<sup>7</sup>
- **“son”** = **“τέκνον”**: 3. **one who is dear to another but without genetic relationship and without distinction in age, child; a.** as a form of familiar address *my child, my son.*<sup>8</sup>
  - Jesus encourages the paralytic.
  - He saw their faith and he also knew that deep stress and anxiety were present. See for another situation: Matthew 14:22-33; "But Jesus immediately said to them (disciples): **“Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid”**” (Mt 14:27).
- These words show Jesus’ compassion.

❖ **“your sins are forgiven.”**

- **“are forgiven”** by God, a so-called divine passive.
- For the meaning and importance of forgiveness, see above. The paralytic will be restored in his position as a child of God. It must be emphasized that forgiveness is a legal action in the context of the Kingdom of God.
- Newman and Stine offer some possible alternative translations: (1) “I say to you, ‘God has forgiven your sins.’” (2) “I forgive your sins” or “In the name of God I forgive your sins.”<sup>9</sup> Option 2 reflect the authority of the Son of Man more accurately.
- **“sins”** = **“ἁμαρτία”**: ① **a departure from either human or divine standards of uprightness**<sup>10</sup>;

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<sup>6</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 819).

<sup>7</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 444).

<sup>8</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 994).

<sup>9</sup> Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 253).

<sup>10</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 50).



- These sins are specified and the paralyzed does not confess sins. His faith and that of his fellows is enough.
- This is the greatest need for human beings. Without forgiveness of sins, there won't be peace with God, other humans, and no inner peace. "The Christian readers who themselves have experienced the forgiveness of sins sense that **the decisive experience, salvation, has come to this man.**"<sup>11</sup>

#### Verse 3-6a

- ❖ **"some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, This fellow is blaspheming!"**
  - This is **the first major controversy** between the teachers of the law and Jesus.
  - In a sense, they are right. Nobody can forgive but God alone (Mk 2:7) and those who received the authority to do so.
- ❖ **"Knowing their thoughts,"**
  - Just like Jesus saw the faith of the men, he also knew their thoughts. He could read their minds, and he was familiar with their theology and the Old Testament.
- ❖ **"evil thoughts in your hearts?"**
  - What are these evil thoughts? In their minds, they were accusing Jesus of blasphemy.
    - Blasphemy was used accusing someone of an insult against God and especially ascribing to oneself prerogatives that belong to God alone, such as forgiveness. Jesus' words here, and alluding to Daniel 7:13, were perceived as a claim to do just that, thus threatening the unique otherness of God.<sup>12</sup>
    - As per consequence, they couldn't comfort the man and his companions. They were not able to offer him salvation. See for comparable confrontations: Matthew 12:9-14 and Luke 13:15-17.
- ❖ **"Which is easier: to say?"**
  - Nolland comments: "This is a riddling question. The answer is that it all depends on whether the words 'your sins are forgiven' are more than empty words. It is easier to say 'your sins are forgiven' if you are a charlatan because there is no immediate check."<sup>13</sup>
- ❖ **"But so that you may know"**. So that there will be no doubt about the authority of Jesus.
- ❖ **"that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...."**

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<sup>11</sup> Luz, U. (2001, p. 27).

<sup>12</sup> Dennis, J. (2013, p. 176). *Death of Jesus*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

<sup>13</sup> Nolland, J. (2005, p. 381).

- This “is the climax of the story”. Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man.”<sup>14</sup> See for **Son of Man** above.
- “**Authority**” = “ἐξουσία”: **potential or resource to command, control, or govern, capability, might, power.**<sup>15</sup> *Power, authority* to do a thing.<sup>16</sup> This authority has been given by God.
- “**on earth**”. In Matthew 28:18 this authority is extended: “Then Jesus came to them (disciples) and said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**”
- “**to forgive sins**”: see above.

#### Verse 6b-7

##### ❖ “Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.”

- This healing is no evidence for a link between this man's iniquity and his disability, as a merited punishment. "Jesus does imply a broad connection between forgiveness and wholeness." The healing stresses his "authority on earth to forgive sins" as "the Son of Man," God's supreme agent of judgment and deliverance for his suffering people. This represents nothing less than Jesus' claim to divine authority since only God can forgive sins.<sup>17</sup> But see verse 8!
- The healing is evidence of his authority. “God would not support an impostor, so His aid in healing the paralytic proved that Jesus could forgive sins.”<sup>18</sup>
- The whole story implies that the man got up, took his mat and went home. The primary action involved faith.

#### Verse 8

##### ❖ “When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe;”

- By using crowd, Matthew excludes the teachers of the law.
- “**filled with awe**” = “φοβέομαι”: 1 **to be in an apprehensive state, be afraid**, often in the sense *become frightened*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Luz, U. (200, p. 281).

<sup>15</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 352).

<sup>16</sup> Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996, p. 599).

<sup>17</sup> Spencer, F. S. (2013, p. 284). *Forgiveness of Sins*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, R. K. (1979–1988, Vol. 2, p. 343). *Forgiveness*. In G. W. Bromiley (Ed.).

<sup>19</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1060).

- Why would they become frightened? Probably because Jesus referred to the Son of Man. In the visions of Daniel, the Son of Man was given authority.
- The crowd sensed the presence of God (filled with awe) because only God can forgive sins and the one who received the authority to do so.
- Compare Luke 7:49-50: “The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”
- ❖ **“and they praised God,”**
  - At first, they are in kind of awful shock, then suddenly they realized the impact of what happened. “The fear here refers to awe, to the kind of fear and respect felt in the presence of such a demonstration of power and authority.”<sup>20</sup>
  - Note the difference between the initial reaction of the teachers of the law and the crowds.
- ❖ **“who had given such authority to men.”**
  - Hagner comments: “This response is, of course, partially correct: Jesus has forgiven sin and performed a miracle; he is a human being, and therefore surely God has given this authority to human beings.”<sup>21</sup> But for the reader, the conclusion has more impact. This godly authority has indeed been given to men!
  - This highlights the fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”
  - A similar authority given to men is found in Matthew 16:19: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” See also Matthew 18:18.

## Application

### Remark

- ❖ “The present pericope suggests neither that the man’s sickness was caused by his sin nor that his sin had to be forgiven before he could be healed.”<sup>22</sup> This passage cannot be used to prove that when a person is not healed on prayer, this was due to a lack of faith. The main theme of this narrative is the authority to forgive sins.

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<sup>20</sup> Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 257).

<sup>21</sup> Hagner, D. A. (1993, p. 234).

<sup>22</sup> Hagner, D. A. (1993, p. 232).

- ❖ “The primary mission of Jesus is the overcoming of sin through the cross (Mt. 1:21; 20:28; 26:28); the healings are only a secondary indication of that fact.”<sup>23</sup>
  - “Praise the LORD, O my soul,
  - and forget not all his benefits—
  - who forgives all your sins
  - and heals all your diseases" (Ps 103: 2, 3; See also Ps 25:18; 32:1–2; 79:9).
  - “This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases (Mt 8:17; Isa 53:4).

### Praise

- ❖ Praise Christ because of his authority (Mt 9:6).
- ❖ Praise Christ because of His grace, mercy, his loving-kindness.
- ❖ Praise God who has given this authority to men (Mt 9:8).
- ❖ Praise Christ because his death on the cross made lasting forgiveness of sins possible.
- ❖ Glorify Christ as the “**Son of Man**” (see above). He has received the authority to judge mankind. After his resurrection, he has been exalted on high and received all power in heaven and on earth.

### Verse 2-7

- ❖ Pay attention to the “**faith**” of the men. Their actions spoke for themselves. They trusted Jesus.
- ❖ “**Sins.**” This is the greatest need of mankind. Jesus used sins in a general sense. There was no need to confess them publicly.
- ❖ Explain the centrality of the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel of Matthew.
- ❖ “**evil thoughts**”. Not only do the teachers of the law have their evil thoughts. When our minds are troubled, filled with anger, we can have our evil thoughts too when it comes to forgiveness.

### Verse 8

- ❖ Are we filled with awe, when we realize the character of the authority to forgive sins?
- ❖ The church and the individual Christian have received a delegated authority. This authority must be exercised according to Matthew 6:14, 15, and administered in baptism and Lord's supper.

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<sup>23</sup> Hagner, D. A. (1993, p. 232).

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