

## The Lord's Prayer Part 7 As We Forgive Others

We return again today to these precious words given to us in Luke chapter 11, where the disciples, after observing the Lord Jesus during one of His many occasions of praying to God His Father, asked Him to teach them how they should pray.

And as He taught them . . . here, in verse 4, we encounter what I have found to be perhaps the most difficult of all the instructions that the Lord Jesus gave as He instructed His disciples, and you and me, that of our needing to forgive other people for the sins and the offenses that they commit against us.

Listen again to these words given to us in Luke chapter 11, beginning in verse 1.

<sup>1</sup>And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.

<sup>2</sup>And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. <sup>3</sup>Give us day by day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup>And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. (Luke 11:1-4)

And again, for clarity, may I read for us the more familiar words of the Lord's Prayer given in Matthew chapter 6, using the King James Version of the bible,

<sup>9</sup> Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. <sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13)

These are truly some of the most blessed words given to us in these scriptures, giving us a special insight into the heart of God, special insight into how He wants you and me to think and to live out the moments of our daily lives, loving Him and loving the people around us.

And now here, in verse 4 of this prayer, we find how God carefully interweaves each instruction into all the other instructions. Here, we see that the first part of

this instruction about forgiveness, that of our crying out, for God to “forgive us our sins, our debts, our trespasses” is closely intertwined with, and conditionally tied to the second part of the request, “As we forgive those who sin against us.”

Strangely, although we may quote the words of this prayer many, many times over our lifetime, the “conditional” nature of the second part of this particular instruction is often “missed” or “over-looked” by us.

With most all of the other words of this prayer being “Godward”, our requests being made to Him and our dependence being placed solely upon Him, our minds want to continue along that vein, of expecting Him to do all of the giving and providing.

But the second part of this verse is clearly not “Godward”, it is “usward”, telling you and me that, just like as Christ forgives, you and I also have a responsibility to forgive.

And it is within these words that God begins to reveal more of His heart, His mind and His will as He invites you and me to begin to enter into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Him.

Here, we see that God has a deep desire that you and I take a step forward and to rise above the common nature that resides within us, that nature that does not easily forgive others of their offenses and mistreatment of us, that nature that instead wants to judge, condemn, hold grudges and return evil for evil.

But knowing our sinful nature as He does, God knows that it will take more than just asking us. He knows that before we will be willing to begin to change, He must first place a penalty as a condition.

And consequently, we read these words,

<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

Here, very simply and plainly put, God has inextricably tied His agreement to forgive us of our sins against Him, to that of our own willingness to forgive others of their sins against us. And the two parts of the request are ever and always inseparable.

And because the two are inseparable, God is clearly telling us that we must not have any expectation that He will be gracious to us on the first part of the request, “to forgive us of our sins”, if we are not likewise willing to be gracious enough “to forgive others as they sin against us”.

Yes, God's foremost desire and purpose is to remove sin from men and women's souls and to reconcile them to Himself. And that is the purpose of the first part of the request, “asking Him to forgive us of our sins”. But here also, we can see that God is, at the same time, very intent in not only reconciling men to Himself, but also is intent upon reconciling men to men.

That is made especially clear to us also in the “first and greatest commandment” that Jesus spoke about in Matthew chapter 22. There He said to

<sup>37</sup> . . . “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Our first obligation of love will always be towards God, to love Him with all that is within us. But our second obligation is as Jesus said here, “like unto it” and that is to love people, all people, and we must be willing to love them enough to forgive them when they offend us and mistreat us.

Our love for other people and especially our willingness to forgive them must be able to reach beyond our usual personal and often “petty” feelings, and to reach into the realms where God enables His special graces to flow through us. That’s what Jesus is speaking about here in His instruction about forgiveness, where He tells us to pray,

<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

And then note here also, immediately following the prayer as it's given to us in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus instructs us in verse 14,

<sup>14</sup>For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: <sup>15</sup>But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Folks, stop and ask yourself, "Can these words be any more plain", first in the prayer, verse 12,

<sup>12</sup>And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

And then, immediately following these words, in verses 14 and 15 we read,

<sup>14</sup>For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: <sup>15</sup>But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Unfortunately, the people of this world who do not have Christ as their Savior and do not have the Spirit of God abiding within their heart and mind to guide them through this process have a reason, not an excuse, but at least a reason, for not understanding these words, because these words truly are Spiritual in nature and they are not comprehensible to the natural mind.

The natural world seems only to counsel "Anger Management", and not "forgiveness". And that is why secular therapy that counsels between angry and bitter people is seldom ever really successful.

But these words were not intended for unbelieving hearts and minds. These words were intended for earnest believers, first for the disciples of Jesus, and now for you and me. And we have the Holy Spirit in us to guide us in our comprehension of their meaning. So, we are truly without excuse for our not understanding these words.

These words have serious weight, importance and consequences. And we must take them exactly as they are given and move on forward with them. Again, verse 14,

<sup>14</sup>For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: <sup>15</sup>But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

May we take a moment and go back and remind ourselves of why forgiveness is so important to Jesus, both the forgiveness from Himself to us and the forgiveness between us and other people.

First of all, God's forgiveness of our debts, our sins, our trespasses, is absolutely necessary because our sin, in any form, and for any reason, is a violation of the

very person and nature of God. He is holy! And His holiness cannot abide in the presence of sin, neither in this life, nor in the life to come.

But thanks be to God, in His great love for us, He has provided a remedy for our sins. John 3:16 is really real and is really effectual in saving us from our sins.

And thanks be to God, He did not stop at our salvation. But as 1 John 1:9 tells us, He has also made provision for the sins that we continue to commit even after we are saved, especially and including the sin of not wanting to forgive other people when they sin against us.

There He tells us that if we will simply confess our sins, repent of them and turn from them, then He will be faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But again, though it is left unspoken here, we need to be careful to remember that this promise of forgiveness has the same condition tied to it as does the promise in the Lord's Prayer.

We cannot simply select some of our sins, perhaps those most pressing on us at the time and ask God to selectively forgive those sins, while we have others still outstanding, especially the sin of anger, bitterness and resentment towards our neighbor, towards our family members or towards our friends. Again, simply put, God's forgiveness of our sins is conditional upon our willingness to forgive others.

And remember also that true repentance is not just simply feeling sorry for the sins we commit. Repentance also includes the requirement that we "turn from those sins" and never do them again. And if part of our sin is refusing to forgive another person, then repentance demands that we turn away from that and forgive that other person.

But if it is not our nature to quickly "forgive and forget" the offenses and the mistreatment that others put upon us, how do we then go about making it happen within our hearts?

As much as we might not like or want it to be this way, the only pathway that God allows in our forgiveness of others is "humble obedience". "Humble obedience!" Most often, we want to instead pray and ask God to give us the ability, the strength and the character to forgive. But God has chosen for it not

to work that way. Yes, He will help us, He will enable our forgiveness, but it is only after we have obeyed and have first taken our own steps forward.

He does not often take the first step! You and I must be willing to humble ourselves and take that first step. And then yes, as soon as we do take that first humble step, He then will begin to do His mighty and powerful work, enabling the next step, but not before.

And we must not let the many usual barriers interfere with our steps forward, especially the insidious and controlling nature of our “feelings”. It is so unfortunate, but our “feelings” most often define all the responses that take place within us. But here, Jesus is instructing us to rise above our “feelings” and to forgive as He forgives us.

And what that requires of us is that we be very diligent and very intentional as we go about the whole process.

And folks, God knows us well. He knows that our forgiveness can sometimes be a very difficult and painful thing to bring about within our hearts, especially if the offense was a particularly wicked one.

I recall some years ago when I preached a message on forgiveness addressing a story in the news media about the mass murderer, Ted Bundy, being executed for the killing of dozens of women. Before his execution, a man had witnessed to Ted Bundy and Bundy had reportedly repented and given his heart to Christ.

I said in the message that if Ted Bundy's conversion was real and he was truly saved, then, even though he committed all those heinous murders, He would still be allowed to enter into heaven just as assuredly as perhaps some of the women that he had killed.

That was a very difficult thing for one of the church members present that day to hear and to accept. A man came to me after the service and told me that his daughter had been murdered by some local man and that he could not accept the thought that his daughter's murderer might be able to be in heaven with her.

But folks, that is the way that forgiveness works. If we confess our sins to God and give our hearts to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to

cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And yes, to invite us to come into heaven with Him.

But the second part of the forgiveness that God wants to take place is within your and my heart, and in the heart of that dear man who had lost his precious daughter to a murderer.

Why does God want you and me to forgive others? It is for many reasons, but two in particular! First, for humility's sake! If in our salvation, you and I have been forgiven by God for our many sins, then we must not, we dare not, be as the "unmerciful servant" in the scriptures and refuse to forgive others. We have been forgiven much and we must also forgive much.

But also folks, anger, bitterness and resentment will slowly and surely eat a hole in our heart. Our staying angry at someone and refusing to forgive them for their offense and mistreatment of us does not punish them, it punishes us.

On one occasion, a visiting preacher who was speaking at French Camp on this matter of forgiveness used a far-fetched, but appropriate saying. He said, "It is like drinking a bottle of acid and expecting it to kill the other person". It simply does not work that way!

Forgiveness can be a very "healing" experience to the person who has been offended. It brings soothing comfort to a wounded heart.

Does forgiveness cause us to forget that the offense ever occurred? No, we will remember that the offense took place, but just like it is with God, we will not continue to hold the penalty against the offender.

Dear friends, we must forgive, hold short accounts. God forgives us and He expects us to be just as forgiving as He is.

One last question before we close . . . what will God do if we, as His beloved children, refuse to repent and forgive another person's sins against us. I confess that I have not found a clear answer to that question in my studies of these scriptures.

One thing that I do know for sure is that we will not lose our salvation. Our salvation is eternal.

But perhaps it is as simple as the words of Galatians 6:7 tell us, that we will surely reap what we sow, that if we sow seeds of discord by not forgiving those who sin against us, then we will reap the sufferings and the consequences that will come from our lack of forgiveness. We'll have unresolved anger, unresolved guilt, broken hearts, broken relationships, a lack of peace, and on and on, and deservedly so.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, please don't let this take place in your life. If you, right now, are holding an offense against someone else, no matter how big or how small, you must forgive that person.

One last thought, if you know that there is someone who is holding an offense against you, be a loving brother or sister in Christ and make their step of forgiveness easier. Go to them today and ask their forgiveness.

Again, these precious words of Christ,

<sup>14</sup>For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: <sup>15</sup>But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Let's pray.