

“Forgive Us as We Forgive Others”  
(Matthew 6:12, 14-15)

Introduction: If I was to ask you how many churches there were in the world today, what would you answer? Well, if you thought of this question in terms of individual churches, you might answer that there are hundreds of thousands of churches. If you were to think in terms of denominations, you might answer hundreds, if not thousands. But if you were to consider this question in terms of the body of Christ, how would you answer? How many bodies does He have? He has only one. Therefore, there is only one church. But if there is only one church, then why are there so many different denominations? It’s because there are many things which cause divisions in the body of Christ. Certainly there are differences in how each understands the Bible, and this affects what they do and how they live. These differences sometimes force us to work separately, because we can’t agree on what to do or how to do it. But why is it that often times those who substantially believe the same things don’t seem to be able to get along? Why are there divisions in our denomination? Why are there divisions among us? Why are there some who have even left our church? Well, the problem again could be in the way the Bible is understood. But I believe that more often than not the problem is one of forgiveness. There is an unwillingness to forgive. But should this be the case? Should we as members of the body of Christ, ever hold grudges and refuse to forgive? Not if we ever expect God to forgive us. Jesus tells us very plainly this morning, that

***We cannot expect God to forgive us, if we are unwilling to forgive others.***

This teaching is so crucial to the well-being of the church that I want us to take a good look at it this morning, so that we will not fall into the snare of unforgiveness, and possibly end up losing our own souls.

**I. First, Jesus teaches us here that when we pray, we should ask for the forgiveness of our own sins. He says when you pray, say, “Forgive us our debts.”**

- A. This tells us first that we are sinners and in need of forgiveness.
  - 1. Believe it or not, there are people today who don’t believe that they are sinners.
    - a. Some people deny this by denying that God exists. If there is no God, then it is also impossible to commit sin, for sin, by definition, is doing what God tells us not to do, or failing to do what He tells to do in His Law.
    - b. But there are still others who believe that God exists, and even some who claim to be Christians, who have so watered down the meaning of God’s Law that they believe that they no longer sin, at least in their own eyes.
  - 2. But this is not what God tells us in His Word.
    - a. God tells us that we have all sinned in Adam. His sin is our sin, because he represented us in the garden.
    - b. God also tells us that the corruption which is in us from that sin, which is still in us even if we are Christians here this morning, is also sin. It makes us hate God. It causes us to sin in everything we do.

- c. But besides this, we would all admit that we do often do things which are sinful, things which God tells us not to, and we often fail to do those things which God tells us in His Word that He wants us to do.
  - d. We are all sinners in need of forgiveness. John says that if a man doesn't believe this, then he is living a lie. He writes, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8, 10).
- B. And so since we are sinners, and we sin everyday, Jesus tells us that when we pray, we should confess our sins and ask for God's pardon.
- 1. John writes in that same chapter I just quoted, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (v. 9).
  - 2. God is a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth to all who sincerely call upon Him.
    - a. He bids us to come, and to freely drink of the water of life (Rev. 22:17). The only qualification is that we be thirsty. God has prepared a meal for those who hunger and thirst, a meal of forgiveness, a meal of righteousness.
    - b. What is this spiritual bread and spiritual drink? It is Christ Jesus. Jesus said that if a man eats His flesh and drink His blood, he will live forever. He did not mean by this that you must literally eat His body or drink His blood, but that you must receive Him and all that He has done for your salvation by faith, and take Jesus as your Lord and as your Savior.
    - c. The Lord tells us that we are helpless. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. The best of our works only earn more judgment and wrath from His justice. It is only through Christ that you can be saved. And so, if you are outside of Christ this morning, if you have not tasted of this heavenly bread or drunk of this spiritual drink, if you are hungry and thirsty for Christ, then come and receive Him now. He stands ready to receive all who will turn from their sins and come to Him by faith.
    - d. But if you are already in Christ here this morning, don't forget that you must still confess your sins and ask for Christ's pardon when you pray. John says that if we confess our sins as the practice of our lives, then God is continually cleansing us by the blood of His Son.
- C. But there is one other thing Jesus tells us in these first words, and it is this: "When we pray, we should not only have a concern about the forgiveness of our own sins, but also that of others.
- 1. I would remind you that Jesus here teaches us to pray, "Forgive *us* our debts."
  - 2. In Christ's body we are not separate, but united together. What affects one of us affects all of us. Therefore, we should be concerned that everyone of Christ's children walks in the ways of Christ and turns from their sins. We should never rest easy when even one of our brethren is living in sin.

**II. All of this is clear enough, but now Jesus says something which is one of the hardest sayings in all of the Bible. It is the way in which, or the reason for which,**

**we are asking God to forgive us. He tells us to pray that God would forgive us in the same way that, or because, we have forgiven others, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”**

- A. There is a little uncertainty here about how to understand the word “as.”
1. It can be translated “in the same way,” meaning that we are to ask God to forgive us in the same way we forgive others. Or it can be translated “because,” which would mean that we are to ask God to forgive us on the basis of our forgiving others. Jesus states it this way more clearly in the parallel passage in Luke 11:4, “And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”
  2. Either way makes little difference. The bottom line is that if we are to receive forgiveness from God, we must be willing to forgive.
- B. All of us rejoice in the prospect of God’s completely cleansing us from all of our guilt and giving us a record free from all sin and filled with all righteousness. But how many of us here want God to forgive us as we forgive others? This is the way Jesus tells us that God will deal with us, whether we choose to pray in this way or not.
1. The point here is that we must be willing to forgive others. Jesus doesn’t leave us with any other option. He makes it perfectly clear that God will treat us in the same way we treat others.
    - a. Notice that this is so important to Christ, that He takes the time to explain it more fully at the end of this prayer.
    - b. He says, “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (vv. 14-15).
    - c. I don’t think these words really register in the minds and hearts of many professing Christians today. If they did, we wouldn’t have all of the schism and divisions that we do. But these words are so sobering that we must pay careful attention to them. *Jesus says here that if we are unwilling to forgive those who sin against us, God will also be unwilling to forgive our sins. Furthermore, Jesus doesn’t say that these sins even need to be committed against us, but if we are unwilling to forgive anyone of anything they have done against anyone else, God will not forgive us!*
    - d. Now please understand how serious this is, Jesus is not talking about some kind of forgiveness for some kind of sin which only cuts off our fellowship with the Father for a time while on earth. *He is talking about the saving forgiveness of our sins, without which we will perish eternally in hell. What could be more serious than this?*
    - e. Now does Jesus mean here that we are saved by our works, at least the work of forgiving others? No. What He is saying is that if we have experienced the grace of God in our own hearts, our lives will be so changed that we will freely forgive others of their sins against us and others, if they repent, and we will stand ready to forgive them if they don’t.
    - f. So that you may see this more clearly, let me read to you the parable that Jesus told Peter, when Peter asked Him how forgiving he should be towards his brother. Was seven times enough? “Jesus \*said to him, ‘I do not say to

you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle *them*, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything." And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began to choke him*, saying, "Pay back what you owe." So his fellow slave fell down and *began to entreat him*, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord *said to him*, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Matt. 18:22-35).

- g. Now Jesus was speaking to Peter in this parable, and He was speaking to His disciples in our passage this morning. Was this only a danger to them then, and not to us now? No. This warning applies to all of us. *If we are not willing to forgive others their sins against us, God will not forgive us. He will hand us over to the torturers, which means He will throw us into hell, until we have paid the last cent, which we will never be able to do. Jesus says to us, "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (v. 35).*
- h. If you don't forgive others, then God has not forgiven you. You have not experienced the grace of God. If you had, if you understood how great your sins were against Him, and how much He has forgiven you, you wouldn't be able or willing to hold grudges against anyone else. If a man graciously forgives you for a \$10 million debt, how could you refuse to forgive someone who owed you \$5000? Even so, if God forgave you an infinite amount of sin, how can you refuse to forgive someone for committing something infinitely less against you?
- i. Now, I don't mean by saying this that the true Christian won't have any struggles in doing this. Sometimes the things people do against us are very cruel. Sometimes it's hard to forgive them. But if we have God's grace at all, if His Spirit is in our hearts at all, we will forgive them. We will not remain embittered. And even if they never ask for our forgiveness, we will still stand ready to forgive them, and we will truly desire to see them repent.
- j. And so I ask you, Are you holding a grudge against anyone here this morning? Are you harboring bitterness against anyone, against your husband or wife, your children, your father or mother; against your brother or sister, in

the Lord or without; against your neighbor, your employer, your fellow-worker? Are you holding a grudge against anyone in the world, whether he or she is a Christian or not? You had better see to it now. God does not give you the option to hold any bitterness against anyone. Forgive, or you will not be forgiven. Draw near to them in your heart. If you are not able to do this, then you have not forgiven them.

2. But how are we to forgive? Where does the strength to forgive come from?
  - a. It can only come from Christ. It can only come from His love. The greatest evidence that you are born again from above is love, God's love. It is a supernatural love which comes from the Spirit of God. Paul writes, "The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22), and he writes, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love" (v. 6).
  - b. If you have this love in your heart here this morning, then you are truly born again from above. If you have this love in your heart, then you can truly forgive as Christ calls you to do.
  - c. The only reason bitterness and unforgiveness exist in any heart is because there is no love, or because the love which is there has grown cold. Love covers over sins (1 Peter 4:8). Love "is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered . . . bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:5, 7).
  - d. When love fades, when the affections die out, then all of the flaws and failures of our brethren stand out. But when you love someone, it hides all their faults. When you are strongly in love with your spouse or with your children, you can't find anything wrong with them. But when that love dies, you can't find anything right. Love covers a multitude of sins, therefore, Peter says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).
  - e. Has your love grown cold this morning? Do you find yourself being critical of others? Are you unable or unwilling to forgive the sins of your brethren? Then you need Christ this morning. Jesus, by His blood, has bought the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is the only One who can apply Christ to you. He can give you a new heart so that you can love. He can also renew your cold heart, so that you may love again. Whichever is your need here this morning, Christ is the answer. Do not resist what He tells you. Do not continue to excuse any of your bitterness or hatred. Be filled with Christ's love, and love and forgive others. It is the only way that you may glorify God, and it is the best way for you to know that you are loved by the heavenly Father. Amen.