

Does Jesus' Forgiveness Really Depend on Me?

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Matt 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

**Matt 6:13 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.**

**Matt 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly
Father will also forgive you:**

**Matt 6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will
your Father forgive your trespasses.**

In examining the Lord's Prayer, we see that Jesus counsels us to ask for forgiveness for our faults, with that forgiveness predicated on the condition of our own willingness to forgive others who have sinned against us. This is not a reference to Justification. It is not saying that if we do not pledge to forgive others their trespasses, we cannot be born again and be accepted into the family of God. (It is true that one cannot come to the Cross to be Justified while holding onto things such as grudges that he is unwilling to give up. Even so, dying with Christ involves giving up on the whole world and life of the First Adam and not in itinerating specific sins of which we are repenting. When we come to the Cross to repent, give up, and die with Christ, everything in and from the old life is comprehended. If it is not, we have not repented in the orthodox sense. That is another matter.)

The message here is to the Church about Sanctification. In our daily lives and prayers to God, we will not get God's forgiveness if we ask for it out of a bitter and stubborn heart that is unwilling to forgive in others what we are asking God to forgive in us. Under the Old Covenant where Jesus taught to

the Jews, this distinction could not be made. But in the New Covenant, since the Resurrection and Pentecost, it can be made and it must be made if we want our prayers to have efficacy with God.

Many Christian, and professing Christian, people throughout the centuries of the Church, have repeated this prayer, or mouthed other similar prayers, all the while holding old hurts, old wounds, and old grudges that they get out and bring up whenever the time and situation seems to warrant it in their view. What they do not realize is that the bitterness and pettiness of soul and life in which they have lived all of those years is proof of the fact that God has not forgiven their trespasses in the context of Sanctification. They are not joyful, they are not strong in faith, and they are not charitable with their husbands, wives, families and others. They are narrow, pinched off little people who live in small worlds and nurse their almost-dead souls on the curdled milk of bitterness. They can never rise above the past and it takes almost nothing for them to fall back into it. That is because God has done exactly as they asked. He has forgiven them as they have forgiven others. They have been unwilling to forgive and forget, and so God has not forgiven them nor has He forgotten. In Sanctification, they are walking dead people, living far outside the boundaries of the Kingdom of God and industriously raking up a straw pile to make a bigger fire in the Day of Judgment. They think they have people fooled. "I am a forgiving person," they say, as they repeat their prayers by rote. The problem is that the one person with whom it matters is not fooled. Now let us get this straight, because it is important. If you do not, from the heart and with Christian charity, forgive your brother and your neighbor their trespasses, God will not forgive you yours. That is what Jesus is saying here, and you can go the bank, or the barn, or the wood shed, or the out house, or wherever you stash your treasures, with it. You will live out your life in bitterness, discouragement, frustration, anger, and falseness, because God will not let it be otherwise. That is the kind of person you are and that is the reward you will get.

Make no mistake about it, this is Jesus talking, not me. **“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.”** (Matt 6:14-15)

Our Heavenly Father will not forgive our trespasses if we do not forgive those who have (or who we think have) trespassed against us.

In the Lord’s Prayer and the explanations that follow in verses 14 and 15, Jesus is not talking about money and material things primarily. St. Matthew 5:44 makes it clear that money cannot be left out of this discussion, but the instruction here goes far beyond. It is talking about the wrongs that have been done to us and the old bitter memories, the grudges, the cases we have logged against our family, friends and brethren, and the pettiness that festers in our breasts. If we do not forgive those things and forget them, God will not forgive us or forget our past failings.

What Does it Mean that God Will Not Forgive Us?

In what sense will God not forgive us and what does that mean to us? All right, let us think about that for a minute or two. A meaningful and useful discussion of this matter starts with remembering that we are dealing with the issue of Sanctification and Christian living, and not with Justification. There was and is nothing that we could do to bring about our Justification. Jesus did all the work that was necessary to make Justification available to us. We either accept it or reject it. But once a person is born again and has the new nature; once he is indwelt by the Spirit of God, he is then in a position to do what the Jews could not do under the old covenant. Let us be clear about it, my friends, we Christians can forgive those who sin against us. We have the ability in Christ to do that. This is not an issue of either going to heaven or not going to heaven, and if you do not get past that hang up, you will never get hold of these teachings and benefit from them. But in order to walk with God, to be in fellowship with God, to go with Him down to the harvest field and to lay up treasures in heaven, we must obey His instructions. It is in the context of Sanctification — life in the family of God and rewards for faithful service both

now and in the Day of Judgment — that this teaching of Jesus applies to us under the New Covenant and in the Church.

What Jesus is telling us, quite simply, is that in our lives as Christians we will reap what we sow. If we sow to the flesh, we will reap the corrupt and perishable things of the flesh. We can only secure for ourselves eternal things if we walk in the Spirit, live in the Spirit, and sow in the Spirit. This Law of the Harvest, this sowing and reaping has meaning, impact and consequences, both now during our lives in this world and in the future when we give an account in the Day of Judgment.

Many Christian people refuse to turn loose of the past. They have their attics, their barns, and the storage sheds of their lives full of old and bitter memories, grudges and excuses. What does this do to their lives? It effectively destroys them as useful vessels for God to work through. Oh, they have their moments perhaps, but their lives are characterized for anger, resentment, discouragement and depression as they wallow in the hopelessness of the dead past. Their marriages, their families, and their churches are negatively influenced by them. By twisting the facts, they think they are winning something. They think they are clever, no one to be messed with, and they think they are hurting someone. Well, indeed they are hurting someone. In fact they are hurting many people, but the one they are hurting the most is themselves.

My sister, who was a missionary in West Africa for forty years, told me how exotic animal poachers used to catch little monkeys. They would bore a hole in a hollow log and put peanuts inside. The monkey would reach in his hand and grab the peanuts. Then his fist was bigger than the hole so he could not get it out. When the poacher came back, there was the little monkey, trapped and taken by the poacher because he refused to turn loose of the thing that was holding it captive. People who refuse to forgive and forget are like that. They will never get free until they give up and turn loose. Sadly, their families, their churches, and friends are victimized by their carnal behavior and example.

The Loss Now and Then

But if there is a great loss now (and there is) it pales in comparison to the loss that will be suffered when they are called up to the Throne, the books are opened, no imagined scenarios, lies, twisting of facts, and emotional outbursts are permitted, and the whole church of all ages is made aware of what they have done with their lives and done to others.

That is the sense in which God does not forgive us our trespasses. “All right,” God says, “if you want to refuse to forgive and forget and hang onto the past where others are concerned, then I will refuse to forgive and forget and I will hang onto the past where you are concerned and bring it up against you.” The Cross can take away the negative effects of our misdeeds and God is gracious. But in Sanctification, He simply will not take away those effects if we are stubborn and hard-headed and refuse to forgive and forget.