Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Pardon of Prayer, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 6:12, 14-15
Code: 2242

We get a lot of mail at Grace Church from people who listen to tapes, radio programs, read books, visit the church and so forth; hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of letters a week. Once in awhile one letter just draws everyone's attention. We've had one like that that came just a few weeks ago, and I want to share it with you this morning because it ties in so well. It's from a man who is a prisoner in upstate New York in a penitentiary. He is writing to thank us for the tape ministry which he has received. He's been studying the tapes quite diligently and is expressing his gratitude. This is what it says in part.

"Brother, I received your beautiful gift of a set of tapes by John MacArthur, your pastor. I'm still listening to them and sharing them with some of the brothers as the Lord leads. I am taking notes on each tape as I listen, praise the Lord. I may not only understand His word better, but I may be able to teach and lead those whom He has enabled me and placed in my care." I just would add a footnote; apparently this man has become the pastor of what he calls The Church of Green Haven Prison. He said, "I want to thank you for your fine gift and share a little of what the Lord is doing in my life as I promised in a previous letter. Brother, the Lord saved me seven years ago. At that time I was in a dirty and dark county jail cell waiting for the opportunity to finish off what I had begun a few days before in my worthless and wretched life."

"My family came to the United States from Puerto Rico when I was nine years old. My dad was killed in an auto accident when I was 12. We had moved to upstate New York by that time and I was spared growing up in the big city. Mom was pregnant when our father died and she was left with me, my brother Tony and then my sister was born. We were poor, from a minority group, and living in a small town where not too many people knew us. But none of these things hindered me, nor were they an excuse. I grew up in Rockland County in the town of Haverstraw, New York. I went to school there and played all the sports. I really enjoyed school and after graduation I married my childhood sweetheart, whom I had known since the sixth grade."

"We both had good jobs and a couple of years later I became a police officer at the age of 21. By that time, God had given us two children and we were prospering materially. I had been born and raised a Catholic, but I never heard that being born again was necessary. I hated the dry and dead church scene so I stopped going. I moved into a life of adultery and fornication. God's judgment did not come upon me suddenly, though I had plenty of warning. I thought I was something big. Nothing or no one could touch me and God was the furthest thing from my mind. I had plenty of money now that I was

working with the district attorney's office. I was the only Spanish-speaking police officer in the county and was in great demand for my interpreting abilities."

"My wife was making good money as a secretary. We had our own home and I was Mr. Respectable Citizen on my way to hell. With all of these material benefits and carnal pleasures as well as the satisfaction of being recognized among my friends in the community, I was empty and bored with life. I was always looking for a new adventure and nothing really satisfied me permanently. Finally, as a member of the Narcotics Bureau, I began to use drugs myself. I began with pot, then I used pills and acid. I never shot any drugs because I was afraid of needles, but I have eaten, snorted, drunk and smoked everything but hard stuff because I had seen what that did to others. Needless to say my family life, as well as my job, began to suffer and deteriorate as soon as I began fooling with drugs. And like I said it didn't happen right away, but the Word of God says that if nothing else, we can be sure of one thing and that is that our sins will find us out."

It took a period of about 10 years, but from the moment I began stepping out on my wife until the period when I did three things I never thought I could do, my sins were catching up with me and would eventually take their natural course: destruction. Even though I ran around on my wife, I always claimed to love her and I believe I did. Of course I didn't know the love of God, so it was mere human love, which is just not strong enough. When I did the first thing I never thought I would do I left my wife and children. I took off for California with a young girl and abandoned my family. The drugs, my wounded conscience and the sin made me paranoid, and I was always staying high in San Francisco and always looking over my shoulder. As a police officer before, I would sometimes go on duty with an empty revolver because I could never see myself hurting anyone physically. I was just not a violent person, even though I was wicked. I don't think I have ever been involved in more than two fights in my whole life, yet I wound up murdering another person."

"I had done the second thing I never thought I could do, and then I wanted to die. I couldn't live with myself. For three horror-filled days I tried various ways to end my life in a motel room, but God didn't allow it. I tried taking an overdose only to awaken 17 hours later after having vomited the poison, and by all rights I should have drowned in my own vomit as is usually the case with overdoses of alcohol and barbiturates. When I awoke I tried to electrocute myself in a bathtub, but as I was about to place the cables in the water the wires touched and I was left in darkness as all the lights in the room went out. But I was too far gone. I was a man possessed. I climbed into the tub and slashed myself up with a blade until I passed out from the loss of blood only to awake to a third day of madness and horror. God had been trying to reach me for a long time. My mom had become a Christian a few months before. Other people had tried to tell me about Jesus, but I wouldn't hear them. I finally turned myself in to the authorities and confessed to a crime they weren't even aware of. When I was taken to the jail I was kept under observation for a few days because they knew I was suicidal, and brother, I had all intentions of killing myself. I even took a spoon and was awaiting the right moment to sharpen it and stick it in my throat. And then a letter came. It told me about Jesus Christ."

"'Ray,' it said, 'Jesus is real. He loves you and He wants to be your friend. He can make a way where there is no way. Do it for your family, Ray. Come to Jesus.' Well, I believed that Jesus was real in her life and that He was her friend, but that He loved me – never. I didn't even like myself. How could Jesus love me? What way could he make? I had tried every possible way. What could I do for my family? I had abandoned and scattered them. The answer came. I took it to be my mind, but now I know who it was that put those words there. The best thing you and do is go and kill yourself and get out of everyone's life. But God used that letter to stay my self-destructive hand, and people came and told me more about the love of God toward sinners, and even murderers like me. They told me about the good news of Jesus Christ and not only did he demand a new life from me, but he was the only one who could give me the power to live it. I must be born again, they told me, and they said if any man be in Christ, all things are passed away. I needed to have that old life put away. I needed a new life. Finally, out of desperation, I went down on my knees in my cell. I was contemplating suicide and really being pressed by the devil. I had been granted a phone call home. I confided in my mom and told her the devil was there telling me to kill myself. She handed the phone to another new Christian who was there with her and instead of being gentle with me like I expected, he said, "Ray, you must repent before God. You must ask Him to give you a new life and forgive you."

"Well that kind of shook me because I expected him to baby me. I realized that even though I had been sorry for the things I had done I had not asked God to forgive me. I had the sorrow of the world of works death, but Godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation. So on my knees I cried to God and I asked Him to forgive me and to take away the burden of guilt which was driving me mad. I asked Him to give me new life. I told Him I didn't even know if he was out there or not, but if He heard me please, please forgive me and help me live a new life through Him. Well, for the first time in my life I knew God heard me and that I had been forgiven. I knew he had forgiven me because the burden I'd been carrying, the burden of guilt and shame was lifted off me. I felt a peace I had never experienced before. I sensed a freedom I had never known on the other side of those walls. I could live with myself because I knew that my conscience was clean. I had been forgiven and my conscience was purged. I knew what truth and reality were. I had taken a life and I had to face trial. I had done many things for which I had been ashamed and there were consequences. Men would not forgive nor forget, but I knew that my God had and that for once in my life I could be at peace with Him and with myself. From then on I would serve Him and all those who would be of like mind would understand that I had been forgiven, that I was a new man. The old Ray was dead. The Bible came alive to me. I became a fanatic. And the guys warned me not to read the Bible too much or I'd go crazy. Man, I was crazy before. The Bible is the only thing that helps me to know the truth. Now I can understand God's spiritual word and it's no longer the giant crossword puzzle that it once was to me. I had been born again and now I could see the kingdom of God. I have been sentenced to 15 years to life in prison. This means I must serve a minimum of 15 years before I am even considered for parole, and then they don't have to let me go."

“But Brother, I wouldn’t trade the freedom Jesus Christ has given me behind these prison walls for the prisons which were mine in what the world calls freedom. I surely would love to be home with my family someday, but Jesus has given me something in this prison which many on the outside neither know nor have. My family had been scattered through those years. For two years I cried out to the Lord and claimed the promise that my wife and children would come to Christ, for although I had not heard from my wife in all that time I continued trusting Him and serving Him. He gave me a ministry. For three years I read nothing but the Bible; no books, no commentaries, no newspapers, no magazines, just the Bible and His word became real to me. And finally God reached out and saved my wife and she came to see me. Later, she brought my daughter Debbie and I had the pleasure of leading my own daughter to the Lord, and my nine-year-old, Christine, received the Lord too. Brother, what can I say? Forgive my lengthiness, but there’s so much more that I could say. God has given me a ministry teaching and preaching His word. I want to serve Him to the fullest. I’ve seen many broken and desperate men come to know our Lord and be transformed. Praise God. Greet the saints. Your brother in Christ, Ray.”

So you’re the saints and you’ve been greeted. It’s great, isn’t it? Can I add a footnote? There used to be a prisoner in Green Haven prison. He wrote us for some tapes, and when he left he left them there and asked God to help them to fall into the right hands. They fell into the hands of Ray. He’s a second generation tape listener in Green Haven Prison, and through the study of the Word of God has become the pastor of the church in the prison. That’s what forgiveness is all about. I don’t know what the future has for him in this world, but I know what it has for him in eternity and for that we can be excited. Let’s turn in our Bibles again this morning to 6 Matthew as we continue in our series on the Disciples Prayer. Today we come to a continuation of what we began last time as we look at verse 12, but we must see it in its context, so again let’s read the prayer and the two verses following. 6 Matthew beginning in verse nine, “After this manner therefore pray, ‘Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed by 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 forever. Amen.’ 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.”

As you know, if you were with us last week, we began to look at verse 12, the second of the three petitions related to us. The first of which relates to physical sustenance; the second and the third are those of a spiritual nature. Going back to verse 12 we are reminded again of this petition, ‘forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.’ And that petition is footnoted in verses 14 and 15. Now we’re endeavoring, as we examine this tremendously important petition, to really understand this whole matter of dealing with sin in our Christian life. Even though we are believers, we still have a sin problem and we must face that problem. This petition in verse 12 is prayed by one who already belongs to God. The prayer begins, “Our Father,” the prayer that affirms there is a living and vital

relationship with God through faith so that as a believer we are to pray, “Forgive us our debts,” after we have affirmed that it is God’s name that is hallowed and it is God’s kingdom that is to come and it is God’s will that is to be done. And after we have again acknowledged that it is God who is the source of our physical sustenance, we come to our spiritual problem of sin and there we are to acknowledge again that we need God’s forgiveness.

We’re talking about Christians. I know there are some people who think that when you become a Christian you don’t bother with confessing sin any more or seeking God’s cleansing and forgiveness. But that’s not true because here we find those who can call God, “Our Father,” we must also say, “Forgive us our debts.” Now in understanding the fullness of meaning in verse 12, and 14 and 15 which footnote it, we have had to discover that there are four key words for us to study. We began that study last time. We won’t finish it today, but we will next time. And the composite of all three of these Lord’s Days examining this, I think will give us a new and far-reaching and broad study of this whole area of sin in the life of the Christian. First of all, the problem is sin. We saw that last time. Forgive us implies that we have done something for which we need forgiveness. Debt, in verse 12, implies a sin. Trespass, in verses 14 and 15, equally implies sin. The problem here is sin. Sin is a reality in the life of a Christian. When you become a Christian, you don’t all of a sudden stop sinning. You don’t all of a sudden lose your sensitivity to sin. In fact, the truth is that when you become a believer you become more sensitive to sin. And as you mature as a Christian, and in your maturing experience there is a decreasing frequency of sin along with a decreasing frequency of sin is an increasing sensitivity to it when it does occur.

We know our sin. That’s the problem. Principal number one is sin makes us guilty and brings judgment. Sin makes us guilty and brings judgment. Where there is sin in our life there is judgment. Whom the Lord loves he what? Chastens. And every son he scourges. And part of that is the chastening for our sinfulness. We talked last time about five words used in the New Testament for sin, *hamartia*, which means to miss the mark. We don’t hit the target, we fall short of God’s glory. *Parabasis* is to step across. God draws a line and says, “Stay here,” and we step across. *Anomia* means lawlessness. We break His laws. *Paraptma*, which is trespass in verses 14 and 15, means we slip or we fall. We can’t stay on the straight and narrow. We fall. We’re unable to keep erect in righteousness. The fifth word is *opheilma*. That’s the word debt. Because of all of these things we have violated God’s holiness and we are in debt to Him and we have to deal with that debt by seeking His forgiveness. So the problem is sin, and if you deny it that’s the biggest problem of all because if we say we have no sin then we make God a liar and the truth is not in us.

Secondly, last time we saw that there is the provision. The problem is sin, the provision is forgiveness. It’s six times in the passage, twice in 12, twice in 14 and twice in 15. Six times the word forgiveness. Principal number two is, “Forgiveness is offered by God on the ground of Christ’s death.” Our problem can be dealt with because there is forgiveness. We must recognize the problem and then seek the forgiveness. A Christian who says he doesn’t sin is in a desperate situation because he

doesn’t seek the solution. There are some who teach that a Christian can reach a certain level in his life where he doesn’t sin any more. That isn’t true. He’ll continue to sin, he just won’t seek the forgiveness and he’ll lose the meaning of his relationship with God. Now how is it possible that God can forgive us, and how does that forgiveness work? Well it is possible because of the death of Christ, so on the basis of Christ’s death forgiveness is available because the price is paid. Now when we left off last time was at this point. I suggested to you that there are two aspects of forgiveness and that’s what I want you to see again this morning. There are two aspects of forgiveness. This is just thrilling to me. Number one was judicial forgiveness and we talked about that. Judicial forgiveness. This is the full, complete positional forgiveness granted by God as the moral judge of the universe, and by it our sins, past, present and future, are totally, completely forever forgiven. We are justified, declared righteous eternally. That happens when you’re saved. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, at that moment the righteousness of Christ is imputed to you and you who have sinned and come short of the Glory of God are instantly made righteous in Christ 3 Romans.

The righteousness of Christ is imputed to you. God drops the gavel of His sovereignty. He hits the table with it and says declared righteous in Christ. That is an absolute, that is a positional truth, that is as eternal as God is eternal. That is inviolable, unchangeable and forever. The moment I put my faith in Christ, God’s righteousness is imputed to me. It is granted to me. It is placed upon me. It is put into my account. It is eternal. God is satisfied. That is settled. And that’s why 8 Romans says, “No one will ever separate us from the love of Christ.” That’s why 8 Romans says, “No one can ever lay any charge to God’s elect.” That is settled. We saw, didn’t we, when we looked at judicial forgiveness, there are many words to describe it. We said it involves God taking away our sin, covering our sin, God blotting out our sin and God forgetting our sin. It is done with; judicially settled for good. Now if we have Christians, then, praying this prayer, “Our Father,” and all of their sins forever are forgiven, and God has dropped the gavel and declared us righteous, then why are we saying, “Forgive us our debts.”? Why are we asking God for forgiveness? If all of that is a settled matter, what is the point of praying that kind of prayer? The point is answered in a second kind of forgiveness. There is not only judicial forgiveness, there is parental forgiveness. And maybe you can come up with a better word than parental, but it’s one that kind of stuck in my mind based on the fact that “Our Father” begins the prayer. Parental forgiveness.

Now we are not dealing with God as a righteous judge, we are dealing here with God as a loving father. Now listen, even though we have been judicially forgiven and forever that is settled eternally and never changes, we still sin don’t we? And when we sin, something happens in our relationship to God. The relationship doesn’t end, but something is lost in the intimacy of it, right? If my children, my boys or girls, sin against me by disobeying me, the relationship doesn’t end. They’re still my children. I’m still their father. And there is a certain forgiveness in my heart that is automatic because they are in my family. But something is in the relationship that causes a loss of intimacy until they come and say, “Daddy, I’m sorry,” and then the intimacy is restored. I’m married to my wife happily. Wouldn’t have it any other way; getting better all the time. And if I should sin against my wife by a thoughtless

deed or word or something that was unkind, it doesn't change our relationship. And there is a sense in which I am forgiven just because I'm under the umbrella of her constant love. But there is something lost in the intimacy, until I ask her forgiveness, that is found again as soon as I do. That's what he talking about here. This is not some unbeliever praying for salvation. This is not some Christian pleading that God would please forgive his sins. Like the guy I heard on television and people were asking him questions and one person said, "If I sin and I die before I get it confessed, will I go to heaven?" And the man said, "No, you'll go to hell." What a terrible, terrible lie that is, to put someone under that kind of fear. We're not talking about that. We're talking here about the forgiveness that gives us the fullness of joy in intimacy with God. It is all that the relationship can be. That's what he's talking about.

Let me illustrate it to you from 51 Psalm. Go back to 51 Psalm. Here's David. Now David was redeemed. Mark it. David was saved. David had received Old Testament salvation. Righteousness was imputed to David's account. He believed God. He loved God. He trusted in God. His faith was in God. He had received redemption. The righteousness of Christ as yet, the future, had already been imputed to his account by his faith. He was a regenerated, redeemed man but he fell into sin. Terrible sin, sin not unlike our friend Ray that we read about this morning, for he committed adultery and then he committed murder and had he been anybody else but the king he probably would have lost his life. But he was something other than the law; something above the law and even though the sins were heinous, he was spared because of his position. I want you to notice the nature of his prayer in 51 Psalm because this is the prayer that comes out of his guilt-ridden, bloodstained heart as he reflects on his sin. And I want you to know this first of all, verse 14. "Deliver me from blood guiltiness," – now watch – "O God, thou God of my salvation." Listen. David affirms his salvation. David affirms that God is still the God of his salvation. He cries to a God whose presence is there, whose spirit is there, whose salvation is his yet. I believe that David was truly redeemed. He was redeemed and God was still there in His presence and in His spirit and he was still the God of my salvation. But even in affirming that the judicial forgiveness was there, David can't help but feel the loss of something intimate in the relationship and that's what he means when he cries out in verse two. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin, for I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is always before me. I can't forget it. Against thee only I have sinned and done this evil in thy sight." Verse seven, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

You see, there's a sense in which judicial forgiveness and parental, if you will, forgiveness are so different. David was saved but there was something between he and God that made him lose the meaning of that salvation. That's why he says in verse eight, "Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." He wanted the joy back, didn't he? That's what he wanted. "Create in me a clean heart, O God," verse 10. "Renew a right spirit within me." The capper is in verse 12, "Restore unto me the" – what? – the "joy of thy salvation." It doesn't say restore unto me thy salvation. He says restore unto me the what? The joy of it. Now here it is folks. Judicial

forgiveness takes care of the fact of salvation. Parental forgiveness takes care of the joy of it. You see? I can be forgiven but if I'm sinful and unconfessing and unrepentant in that sinfulness, I forfeit the joy of the fullness of that relationship. That's the issue. Look with me for a moment at 1 John 1. 1 John 1. John begins this wonderful epistle by saying that he preaches Christ, the word of life, from firsthand experience. That which was from the beginning which we've heard, which we've seen with our eyes, looked upon, and our hands have handled. He says, "We have had personal experience with Christ," in verse one. The word of life, and the word was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the father and manifested to us. In other words, we're preaching Christ. We're preaching the gospel. Why?

Verse three. That which we have seen and heard declare me unto you and order that. There's why. You also may have – watch it – fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father, with His son, Jesus Christ. John says we preach to bring you into the fellowship, see? We want to get you in the fellowship. We want to link you up with God and Christ and everybody else who believes in God and Christ. We want to bring you into the family. That's judicial forgiveness. We want to get you in the fellowship, participating in the common eternal life, to be one in the *koinonia*. That's why we preach Christ. Then he goes a step further in verse four, "And these things" – what things? The things we write unto you, that's the epistle that we write in order that your what – your joy may be full. Now on the one hand, we preach the gospel so that you'll come into the fellowship, and on the other hand we write the epistle so that in the fellowship you will know the fullness of joy. Being saved puts you in the fellowship. Being obedient to the standards and the principals we lay out makes you know the joy of that fellowship.

You see? On the one hand is judicial forgiveness putting you into fellowship, and there is the parental forgiveness that makes you know the fullness of the joy of being in the fellowship. And right off the bat he says if you're in the fellowship, verse nine, you'll be confessing your sin and He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to keep on cleansing us from all unrighteousness. Now look, he says I'm writing this unto you that your joy may be full. The first thing he says is if you want full joy, if you want full joy, then keep on confessing your what? Sins. That's the point. The gospel brings judicial righteousness, judicial forgiveness, obedience. And the obedience of confession to begin with brings you the fullness of joy that comes from parental forgiveness. Look at 13 John. I hope you're getting this. 13 John, one of my very favorite chapters. I've shared it with you many times, but I'm going to pull a thought out of it that perhaps we haven't covered. 13 John, our dear Lord is speaking of His love for His disciples here in this chapter in spite of their waywardness and sinfulness, in spite of the fact they were sitting around arguing of who would be the greatest in the kingdom. They were self-centered, selfish, possessive, indifferent to Christ, unconcerned about His pending death, arguing, proud, egotistical. They were very ugly at this time. In the midst of it all, the dear Lord takes His outer garment off and puts a towel about his waste and starts to wash their feet; humiliating to Him and to them, for they should have done it for Him. He should not have needed to do it for them.

He comes to Peter in verse eight. Peter says you'll never wash my feet. This is not going to happen. I will not allow this. I believe Peter is convicted. I believe he wouldn't let the Lord stood to do that. I believe he's facing his won sin. The fact that he's been arguing about who's the greatest in the kingdom, that he's been selfish, self-centered, insensitive to Christ, and he just won't allow it. You're not gonna wash my feet. Jesus answered him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." And he takes that whole physical scene and turns it into a tremendous spiritual truth. He says Peter, if you want to really know what it is to fellowship with me, if you want to know what it is to be part and parcel of what I am, if you want the fullness of a relationship, you'd better let me wash you. Peter says, "Lord, don't wash me feet only. Wash my hands and my head." Do the whole deal. Again, a dumb statement. Jesus says to him, "He that is washed or bathed needs not accept to wash his feet. He's already entirely clean and you're clean. Peter, I only want to wash your feet." First he's telling him what not to do and then he's telling him what to do. Peter just be quiet, I'm only interested in your feet because there is a tremendous spiritual truth here. You're sitting around this table sinning. You are already clean, verse 10 says, except for Judas. Not all of you are clean; one of you is not. One of you is not redeemed. But the rest of you are already clean. You've already been redeemed. You've already been made righteous by faith. I am not talking about bathing you all over again. You only get made righteous how many times? One. You don't need that again.

What I'm interested in is keeping the dirt off your feet. Now in those days, of course, you took a bath in the morning as you got up and bathed your entire body and then you started out for the day and wearing sandals in that part of the world, the roads would either be muddy or dusty; muddy when it rained. You can imagine the muck. And when it was dry, dust everywhere and your feet would be dirty. And every time you would go into a home or a place of business or commune with people or eat a meal, it would be necessary for you to wash your feet just as a matter of very obvious propriety. And the Lord is giving him a very great spiritual truth. He is saying to him simply this. You've already had judicial forgiveness. You've had your spiritual bath when you believed. All that's necessary for me to do to keep the fullness of our relationship open is to wash your feet. That's parental forgiveness, you see. And daily as we walk through the world we collect the dust of the world. Those are the sins that we commit, and as we confess those things they are washed. And as we are confessing, 1 John 9, "He is faithful and still righteous to keep on forgiving and keep on cleansing." What a glorious truth. He's simply saying once you've been cleaned, bathed in the saving blood of Jesus Christ, you've received judicial forgiveness. That doesn't have to be done again, but parental forgiveness is something that goes on every day as we keep the fullness of the communion open. Positional purging needs no repetition, but practical purging has to be repeated every day. Listen, beloved, when you pray you'd better pray in accordance with 6 Matthew. Somewhere in your prayers, after you have acknowledged His name be hallowed and His kingdom come and His will be done, and after you have acknowledged that God is the source of your physical and daily sustenance, you need to face the fact that your feet are dirty and you need to acknowledge the fact that as long as they're dirty and you're unconfessing and unrepenting of that sin, there is a loss in the fullness of joy in the intimacy of

the communion you can have with God. Believers need to open their heart daily for that forgiveness that keeps the feet clean.

I think about David. Nathan told David, he says, “David, the Lord has put away your sin.” Oh, what a relief. I mean David had committed this terrible sin of Bathsheba and Uriah, and the Lord had put him away. He said you’ve got judicial forgiveness. The umbrella’s over you, man. That’s done with. You might, today, find someone who would say in the same settling, I realize that but the Lord’s already taken care of that. I’m not going to worry about it. Not David. It wasn’t long after Nathan had said to him, “The Lord has put away your sin.” God’s taken care of that. That’s in redemption. That David wrote 32 Psalm and this is what he said, “I acknowledge my sin unto thee. My iniquity have I not hidden. I will confess my transgression unto the Lord.” Do you get that? Listen, when he already knew that the judicial element was cared for, he still cried out in confession to open the parental channel to keep the intimacy of the relationship. So what is the message in part one of this petition? Forgive us our debts? It is simply a plea that we experience the moment-by-moment cleansing that comes when we acknowledge our sin to the Lord. Very basic, very necessary, and you know what thrills me so much is that God is so eager to forgive. You know, you might think if you were in some pagan religion or something, and you believed the gods to be like men, that God would get so sick of hearing you that one day he’d just say, “You know, this is the last time I’m listing to you, fellow. From here on out, take the consequences. I’ve given you more forgiveness than any 10 people deserve.” But that’s not the way God is. I think it was Nehemiah who said, “Thou art a God ready to pardon.” Thou art a God ready to pardon. That’s right. Eager. I love Micah. He delights in mercy. You say, “But I go back every day and I keep saying Lord, I did this again and Lord, I have this problem again.” You go back every day and doesn’t God get sick of it? No, because He delights in mercy, because mercy is an act of His nature that gives him glory, for we glorify such a merciful God.

That’s why in 5 Romans it says, “Where sin abounds, grace does” – what – “much more abound. God loves to forgive and you know, you can take all the forgiveness he’s got and it won’t diminish his resource at all. And you can come back as many times as you want and it’ll never diminish His love. Never. He’ll forgive as often as you come. Somebody said to me last week, “Your sermon on judicial forgiveness I think ruined my son.” I said, “Why?” “Well, you said that he could just do – just sin and it was all covered for eternity so he just went out and did it and he said it’s all covered anyway.” Well, I question whether he knows Christ first of all, because if I know God has forgiven all my sin and if know no matter how many times I come back and ask his forgiveness he’s eager and anxious to do it, that kind of love retards me from sinning rather than compels me to sin because I can’t trade on that love. I can’t abuse that. Dr. Barnhouse told a great story to illustrate this. He was talking to a college professor and he told a story about a couple. This is what he said. The man had lived a life of great sin and immorality, but had been converted and eventually had come to marry a fine Christian woman. He had confided to her the nature of his past life in just a few words. As he had told her these things, the wife had taken his head in her hands and she drew him to her shoulder and kissed him gently and said, “John, I want you to understand something very plainly. I know my Bible well and

therefore I know the subtlety of sin and the vices of sin that work in the human heart. I know you are a thoroughly converted man, John, but I know that you still have a sin nature and that you are not yet as fully instructed in the ways of God as you will be. The devil will do all he can to wreck your Christian life. He will see to it that temptations of every kind are put in your way and the day might come, John – please, God, that it never does – but it might come when you succumb to temptation and fall into sin. And John, immediately the devil will tell you it's no use trying. You might as well continue on your way of sin. And above all, he'll tell you not to tell me because it'll hurt me. But John, I want you to know that there is a home for you in my arms. When I married you I married your old nature as well as your new nature and I want you to know there's full pardon and full forgiveness in advance1 for any evil that ever comes into your life."

Now that's something like God. When Barnhouse finished the story, the college professor lifted up his eyes reverently and said, "My God, if anything could ever keep a man straight, that kind of forgiving love in advance would sure do it." That is exactly and precisely the way God perceives his relationship to us. Listen, we've seen the problem of sin. We've seen the provision forgiveness. I want to close with a plea confession – the plea confession. The third principal is simply that we receive his forgiveness by confession of sin. We receive his forgiveness by confession of sin. The whole of this verse implies confession. You can know about sin and know about forgiveness, but if you didn't confess your sin you'd never receive it. As long as I harbor my sin and I never confess it and repent of it and turn from it and give it to God and agree with Him about it, I'm never free to know the joy that he wants me to know because the barrier is there and it shatters the intimacy of fellowship. And so I must confess. I must open my heart and admit my sin, and that is tough isn't it? It's tough. Just try to get it out of your little kids when they've done something wrong. Tough. I remember as a little boy I vandalized the school with another little boy where my father was holding a Bible meeting at a small town in Indiana. In the midst of the week, the little boy and I went down there and we did some bad things. They went from house to house in the town, it was so small, and they came to the house we were staying in and my father and the man who owned the house came to the door. The man said, "We've had vandalism in the school, would your children know anything about it?"

I was holding my father's hand and applying my most angelic face, doing everything I could to show that I was as spiritual as my evangelist father. I would never be caught doing something like that. I hung on. "My son would never do that," and he patted me on my little head. "Not Johnny, why he's a wonderful boy." The other man was saying, "And our boy is a wonderful boy too, and I don't understand how this could happen." They gave him this long thing and my father was expressing such love for me and such confidence in my life. That night at the meeting I went forward when he gave the invitation. I prayed with him on the steps. I said I think I need Jesus in my heart. He never knew why. Ten years later before I told him about that. Ten years. I couldn't get the courage to do it. But I'm not alone. Adam and Eve sinned, and they were used to walking and talking with God in the cool of the day, but the minute they sinned, the next thing they did was what? Hide. It's tough to confess. As long as you don't, you forfeit the joy. 28 Proverbs 13 says cover your sin you don't

prosper. Cover your sin you don't prosper. Whoever confesses and forsakes shall have mercy. Our spiritual prosperity is at stake. That's why he says you'd better say, "Forgive us our debts." Confession of sin is vital. It's vital. David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord," 2 Samuel 12:13. David said to Nathan again in 2 Samuel 24:10, "I have sinned against the Lord greatly in what I have done. I have acted very foolishly." In 1 Chronicles 21:7 David said to God, "I am the one who has sinned and done very wickedly." Isaiah said, "I am a man of unclean lips and I live amidst a people of unclean lips." Daniel said in chapter nine, verse 20, "I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin." Peter said in 5 Luke 8, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Paul said, "It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners among whom I am" – what? – "chief."

Confessing sin isn't easy but it's necessary to appropriate the attended joy that comes with parental forgiveness. Don't conceal your sin, confess your sin. John Stott says, and it's true, one of the surest antidotes to the process of moral hardening is the disciplined practice of uncovering our sins of thought and outlook as well as word and deed, and the repentant forsaking of the same. If you don't do that it'll harden you. I've seen Christians, judicially forgiven and eternally secure, who are so hardened, so penitent, so unconfessing, so insensitive to sin and so totally joyless who didn't even know the meaning of a loving, intimate fellowship with God. They've blocked it out by the barricade of their unconfessed sin. Confession. This week I sat in my room back in Indiana and watched the snow fall out the window. I thought to myself the world looks so white. The city I was in has three streets and a stop sign. That was it. There were just fields of white everywhere. Little paths where people walked and trees were all covered with snow. I thought about our sins being white as snow. And then as I looked at my own life, I was reading a little book I have, *The Prayers of Puritans*, that sometimes I share with you. I came across one that set my life in start contrast to the purity I saw out the window. I thought it might be a fitting thought for us today. Confession is so necessary, people, or you lose that purity that gives you joy. This is what I read. "God of grace, thou hast imputed my sin to my substitute and hast imputed His righteousness to my soul. Hast clothed me with a bridegroom's robe, decking me with jewels of holiness. But in my Christian walk I am still in rags. My best prayers are staying with sin. My penitential tears are so much impurity. My confessions of wrong are so many aggravations of sin. My receiving the spirit is tinctured with selfishness. I need to repent of my repentance. I need my tears to be washed. I have no robe to bring to cover my sins, no loom to weave my own righteousness. I am always standing clothed in filthy garments and by grace am always receiving change of raiment for thou dost always justify the ungodly. I am always going into the far country and always returning home as a prodigal, and always saying Father forgive me, and thou art always bringing forth the best robe again. Every morning let me wear it, every evening return it in, go out to do the day's work in it, be married in it, be wound in death in it, stand before the great white throne in it, enter heaven in it shining as the sun. Grant me never to lose sight of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the exceeding righteousness of salvation, the exceeding glory of Christ, the exceeding beauty of holiness, and the exceeding wonder of grace. I am guilty but pardoned. I am lost but saved. I am wandering but found. I am sinning but cleansed. Give me perpetual broken

heartedness. Keep me always clinging to thy cross. Food me every moment with descending grace and open to me the springs of divine knowledge sparkling like crystal flowing clear and unsullied through my wilderness of life.

Confession; purging of the soul. That’s the plea of this petition. Is it part of your prayer?

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