

### **The Pardon of Prayer, Part 3**

Matthew 6:12, 14-15

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Let's look together at Matthew chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6. We're in our eleventh message from the Disciple's Prayer, and I want to read the prayer to you, and then the two footnote verses, verses 14 and 15, and then we'll go into our study for the morning. Matthew 6, beginning in verse 9: "After this manner, therefore, pray ye. Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be 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." Verse 12 is the petition to which we draw your attention again this morning for the third time. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The word forgiveness strikes us immediately. Forgiveness may be the most wonderful word in any language. There is nothing more wonderful to know than that your sins are all forgiven by God. There's nothing in a human realm more wonderful to know than that you have been forgiven by someone you grossly wronged, or hurt, or injured. Forgiveness is a thrilling word.

There is an epitaph in a cemetery outside of New York City. It's a large headstone. It doesn't have on the headstone the name of the person who's there in the grave. It doesn't have when he or she was born, or when he or she died. It doesn't say beloved mother, father, husband, wife, brother, sister, son, daughter. Just one word stretches from one end of the headstone to the other and it's the word, "Forgiven." Somebody wanted it known that they could die in peace because they were forgiven. And that's all that really matters.

Henry Ward Beecher, said, "Let me go and saw off a branch from one of the trees that is now budding in my garden, and all summer long there will be an ugly scar where the gash has been made. But by next autumn, it will be perfectly covered over by the growing, and by the following autumn it will be hidden out of sight, and in four or five years there will be but a slight scar where it has been, and in ten or twenty years you will never suspect that there had ever been an amputation. Now, trees know how to overgrow their injuries and hide them, and love doesn't wait as long as trees do." I like that. Peter said love covers a multitude of, what? Sins. Love is in a much bigger hurry than trees are. Forgiveness is a vital commodity of love.

Now, God has said in the Scripture much about this area of forgiveness. Forgiveness, you see, is man's deepest spiritual need. Mark that down. It is man's deepest spiritual need. For, apart from forgiveness, man never enters a relationship with God. Apart from forgiveness, he pays his own penalty for his sin. Apart from forgiveness, he spends eternity in hell. Forgiveness, then, becomes man's deepest spiritual need. That is something he must have if he is to know God, if he is to enjoy heaven. It is man's deepest spiritual need, also, because it is the only way he's delivered from the anxiety and the pressure that guilt of sin brings to bear upon his life. And so, when you come in verse

12 to this, the first of two spiritual petitions in this prayer, you are touching man at the deepest point of his need. Coming to God for forgiveness is the most vital thing of all.

I guess we need to ask ourselves some questions this morning. Being that forgiveness is man's deepest spiritual need, have you experienced the forgiveness that comes in Christ? That's the first question. If you have, then even as a Christian, as you walk through the world are you bringing your sins to the Lord on a day to day basis for that cleansing that comes to you day by day, as He washes away the dust of the world from your feet as you get them dusty? Are you experiencing the usefulness, and the joyfulness, and the intimacy with God that comes from daily confession? How about forgiving others? Have you freed others from the bondage of an offense by openly and full-heartedly forgiving them? These are questions, I think, we need to ask ourselves. Forgiveness is a blessed virtue.

Now, we've talked about God's forgiving us for two weeks now. Today I want to talk about us forgiving others. Because, the end of verse 12 says, "As we forgive our debtors," and verses 14 and 15 say: if we forgive, we get forgiven; if we don't forgive, we don't get forgiven. And so, I want to go to the concept of us forgiving each other. Now, let me begin by saying this and I want you to mark this down: there are several reasons why we are to forgive one another. And I'm going to give you a list. Get them down because I think you need to know them.

Number one: we are to forgive one another because such is the character of saints. Such is the character of saints. Christians are characterized as those who forgive. Matthew chapter 5 verse 43. Backing up to the fifth chapter, we find that the traditional Jewish rabbis taught: thou shalt love thy neighbor, hate thine enemy. They taught that the principle was to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But, the Lord said: Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you. Pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you, that you may manifest that you are the sons of your Father. In other words, forgiving others, blessing those who curse, which is tantamount to forgiveness, loving your enemies, which is the same idea, is all a characteristic that manifests that you are a son of God. It is characteristic of saints to forgive. I mean, we are the forgiven, are we not? Have we so soon forgotten what has been forgiven us, and would we not forgive someone else? You know, as a Christian, when you fail to forgive someone else you set yourself up as a higher court than God, for God infinitely forgives. And that's idolatry, for you're worshipping yourself as if you were God; you've usurped His place.

Secondly, I believe we are to forgive one another not only because it characterizes saints, but it follows the example of Christ. First John 2:6 says, "If we say we abide in Him, we ought to walk as He walked." Right? How did He walk? He walked in forgiveness. And that's why in Ephesians 4:32 it says that we are to forgive one another even as God, for Christ's sake, hath what? Forgiven us. Christ has established a model, a pattern, that the death of Christ and the forgiveness of God, through Christ given to us, is not only for its own sake. It is for its own sake and beyond to give to us a pattern for forgiveness. On the cross to the very ones who had driven the nails through His hands, to the very ones who had spit upon Him, and mocked Him, and crushed a crown of thorns into His blessed head, He said, Father, what? Forgive them.

And therein is the model. The severity of any offense toward us cannot match that, as the writer of Hebrews says: you have not suffered unto blood. None of us have endured what Christ has endured, and He forgave us all, and He set the pattern, and the example, and the model. We are to forgive one another because it is the characteristic of saints to do so, and secondly, because it is the

following of the pattern of Christ.

Thirdly, we are to forgive one another because it expresses the highest virtue of man. The highest virtue of man. I believe man most manifests the majesty of his creation in the image of God when he expresses forgiveness. And I believe that's indicated in Proverbs chapter 19 and verse 11. It says: "The discretion of a man differeth his anger." And listen to this, "And it is his glory to pass over a transgression." The highest exhibiting of the virtue of a man is that he overlooks a transgression. We are to forgive one another because it is characteristic of saints, because of the example of Christ, and because it is the highest virtue of a man.

Fourthly, we are to forgive one another because it frees the conscience from guilt. It frees the conscience from guilt. When there is a need to be forgiven and to forgive, there is guilt. I think of David, who in the midst of an unforgiving situation, has all kinds of problems. His life juices dry up, the lymphatic system, the blood system, the flow in his nervous system, the saliva. Everything was wrong. He was sick. His bones were waxing old, as it were, and his roaring was going on all day long. There is connected with an unforgiving heart, an advantage for Satan, according to 2 Corinthians chapter 2, a root of bitterness that creates all kinds of binding of the conscience. And so, we are to forgive one another, in order to free the conscience.

You know, people who carry grudges and bitternesses, and who carry an angry attitude toward an individual that goes on and on and on and on unrelieved are literally wounding themselves. Dale Carnegie tells a story about visiting Yellowstone to feed the grizzly bears. Apparently, you feed them from a distance. But they made a clearing when he was there, and they piled a bunch of garbage in the clearing, and the guide was saying, now, the bear will come and eat the garbage. And sure enough, the bear came. And a grizzly bear is probably the most ferocious animal on the North American continent. The only animal that can maybe stand off a grizzly bear would be a Kodiak bear, or a wild bison that was really infuriated. But a grizzly doesn't have a lot of enemies. It pretty well dominates its own scene. And this grizzly came in and started to eat, and they don't like anybody intruding on their territory, the guide was saying. And all at once, this little black and white thing came cross the clearing: a skunk. And the skunk just stuck his nose right in there where the bear was, just started eating and enjoying, having a wonderful time taking the bear's food.

Now, Carnegie said that he noticed the skunk was very impudent but the bear didn't do anything. Together, they shared the food. Carnegie said: Why? The answer is simple: the high cost of getting even. The bear did not want to pay the price. Smart bear. Smarter than a lot of people I know, who get themselves messed up with toxic goiters, heart attacks, and colitis because they hold a grudge.

A father with his 14 year-old marched into the doctor's office one day and he said, to the doctor he said, "Doctor, I've come to get some more pills for my wife's colitis." His kid immediately replied, "Who is she colliding with now?" Doctor McMillan has written a book in which he has one chapter titled: "It's not what you eat, it's what eats you." That's the real issue. Why should we forgive one another? First of all because it characterizes saints. Secondly, it follows the example of Christ. Thirdly, it's the highest expression of the virtue of man. And fourthly, it frees the conscience from guilt, and guilt brings many diseases of the mind and the body.

Fifthly, we should forgive one another because it delivers us from chastening. It delivers us from chastening. Where there is an unforgiving spirit there is sin, and where there is sin there is chastening. And every son that the Lord loves, He scourges and chastens, Hebrews 12 says. And in

1 Corinthians, their animosity toward one another, and their bitterness, and their party spirit and their factions had turned the love feast into something horrible, something very vile. And because of that, many of them were weak, and sick, and some were even dead, and the Lord had chastened them to that point for a lack of a proper love relationship to one another. Now all those are important reasons why you should forgive one another. But there's one more that's more important than those five.

We are to forgive one another, because if we don't, we don't get forgiven either. And that's in our passage. Now, that's a shocking and startling set of verses, verses 14 and 15. And many people do not understand those verses. And I have to say this to you. For those of you who haven't been here, you need to get the last two messages to have the full meaning of what I have to say today, because I can't repeat all that background. But I'll try to give it to you just as briefly as I can. Now remember this, in this prayer, we are focusing on this, the first petition regarding man's spiritual need. The first three are regarding God: "Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done."

In other words, before you ever even get to yourself, God has to have the rightful place in your prayer. You will immediately sidestep all of your selfish desires by the time you've filtered through the depth of those first three petitions. Then you acknowledge that God is the sustenance of your daily bread. You wouldn't have a spiritual life with needs if you didn't have a life to start with, so He has to take care of that. And then you come to the spiritual, and here you are dealing immediately with sin. God is in the primary place, and then man's need, spiritual and physical. And as we come to this verse, we have shared with you there are four things that you need to know: the problem, that's sin, expressed by the word debt, and in verses 14 and 15 the word trespass. The provision forgiveness, twice in verse 12, twice in verse 14, twice in verse 15. The problem is we're sinners and sin brings guilt and condemnation. The provision is forgiveness based on the ground of Christ's death.

Now what did we say about forgiveness? We told you there were how many kinds of forgiveness? Two. Remember? The first was judicial forgiveness; the second, parental forgiveness. If you don't understand this you'll never be able to interpret these verses. Judicial forgiveness is that forgiveness God grants to an unregenerate, unredeemed, unsaved individual who comes, puts faith in Christ, God imputes to him the righteousness of Christ, declares him eternally righteous, drops the gavel, forgiven, declared righteous, justified forever. Judicial forgiveness embraces all of eternity and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ. It's a settled act forever. That's once and for all. All your trespasses totally forgiven. We went over that in detail two weeks ago. And the question comes up then: if I'm judicially forgiven and every sin is under the blood of Christ, past, present, and future, and everything is taken care of forever and ever and that can never be altered, what am I doing saying "Forgive us our debts?" You say, maybe this is a prayer of an unbeliever. No? What are the first two words in the prayer? What are they? "Our Father." You're not talking about an unbeliever here. You have to be in the family to even get into this prayer. This is how you are to pray as a believer.

Well, you say, if I'm a believer, and all is judicially cared for in the fact of salvation, why am I asking forgiveness? And this is what we call parental forgiveness. This has not to do with the fact of salvation it has to do with the joy of it. And we use that very magnificent and comprehensive illustration in John 13 where Jesus says to Peter: you took one bath. You don't need another bath. All you need is your feet cleaned, through the day. God has bathed us in the righteousness of Christ. All He wants to do is dust off the dirt on our feet that we collect as we walk through the world.

One is a positional forgiveness; the other is a practical one. One deals with our standing and our state before God; the other deals with our living in the world. And the Lord dusts off our feet. It's just

like John said in 1 John, isn't it? We have fellowship with the Father but I'm writing these things unto you not so you can have the fellowship, you're already in the fellowship by salvation, so that your joy may be, what? Full. It is joy, and usefulness, and productivity, and your spiritual welfare that is the issue here. And a believer, when he becomes saved, judicially redeemed and all is covered, doesn't then stop facing sin, become insensitive to sin, ignores sin but rather keeps on confessing sin. 1 John 1:9, right? As a way of life.

We entered by faith did we stop faith at that point and abandon it? No. We walk by what? Faith. We enter by confessing sin. We don't stop, we continue. It is a way of life. First John 2 says that if we love God and we're in the Lord, we will continue to love our brother. We will continue to be obedient to God's laws. You back up into 1 John 1, it's saying the same thing: if you're truly a believer, you'll continue confessing your sin, because the sensitivity to sin will be far greater than ever it was before you were saved, for before you were saved you walked in darkness. Right? And nothing was revealed. When you became a Christian you walk in the light and everything is made manifest, even your sin. So what he's talking about here is that foot washing that the Lord does as He cleanses us day by day, purging and purifying, not to bring us salvation but to make the intimacy of that fellowship all it can be.

I used the illustration of my family. If a child of my family sins against me and against the standards that I establish, they're not thrown out of the family. They don't have to do something to get back in the family, but they need to come and make some things right so the intimacy of a family fellowship can be maintained and restored, you see. That's what we're talking about.

And so, we saw the problem with sin: the provision was forgiveness; and thirdly, the plea was confession. The very plea and the petition is that we confess our sins, that we acknowledge it to God. And I'm saying to you, beloved, if you're not doing this, you are short circuiting your spiritual effectiveness. It's just that simple. You say, well, when you say confess, what do you mean? Well, I don't want to spend all the time this morning on that but let me just say this. To confess sin, the word confess means to say the same thing. It's *homologeō*, to say the same. It is to agree with God about your sin. It is to acknowledge your sin. It is to repent of your sin. It is to forsake your sin. And it is to thank God for forgiving it, and anything less than that is not true confession.

I agree with You, God, about my sin. You're right. And as soon as you do that you free God to chasten you without any impunity. You realize that? Because you just admitted that you deserved it. And God has the right for you to admit that, because when people don't admit their sin and God chastens they often blame God. That's why Joshua said to Achan in Joshua 7:19, "Give glory to God and confess your sin." In other words, God's going to judge you. You might as well admit that you deserve it first so God will still be glorified. So, when you acknowledge your sin you glorify God when He chastens, as One who had the right to do that. And then you are to repent of it, turn from it. And you are to forsake it, and then to thank God for forgiving it. That's the thing God wants you to do as a daily part of life.

First John 1:9: "We are the ones continually confessing our sin and we are the ones being forgiven." Present tense. It's a way of life. And yet I find that many Christians never confess their sins as they should. Now and then when you get desperate you do, and the frequency varies, and the intensity varies, and sometimes we kind of throw it to God in a big general ball. But we are to be dealing with our sin. I believe this is part and parcel of knowing the fullness of blessing in our lives. And every time you articulate your sin to the Lord, and you give it to Him in a very specific manner, there is

something very difficult about picking it back up again and doing it. On the converse, I think most people don't confess their sins specifically because they want to hold it back in the backwater a little bit in case they want to use it again. Bad enough to be a sinner without being a liar about it so they just don't confess it. Now, what are we going to learn then as we examine the fourth point? We've seen the problem is sin and the provision is forgiveness, and that's only the beginning. Because, the plea is for confession. But there's a prerequisite too, and the prerequisite is forgiving others. Forgiving others. An utterly significant prerequisite. Verses 14 and 15 elucidate the statement at the end of verse 12: as we forgive our debtors.

Now think with me. The prerequisite is to forgive others. I've given you five reasons at the beginning why you should forgive one another. Five reasons to be forgiving. The character of saints, the example of Christ, the glory of man, freedom of conscience, deliverance from chastening, and finally and right here: in order to receive forgiveness ourselves we must forgive others.

Look at verse 12, and let me start right there. You could translate it, "Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven." The idea is before we ever seek forgiveness for our own *opheilēma*, for our own sin against God for which we are indebted. Before we ever do that, we already have forgiven those who have sinned against us. That's pretty potent stuff, folks. First, we forgive, then we are forgiven. That's the order it is right here. Now that's another reason it can't be talking about an unbeliever, because an unbeliever has no capacity, no spiritual virtue to do an act of forgiveness by which he would earn forgiveness. It's talking about a believer. Before we come to get our feet washed each day, before we bring our sins to the Lord and say, Lord, cleanse me again and use me. We've got to be sure that we've forgiven others. That's the prerequisite.

Trace your steps back for a minute, would you do that? You look at your life and you say, John, I come to church all the time. I read the Bible. I listen to tapes. I go to seminars or whatever. But I don't have the joy that I ought to have. I miss out on being used by God. I feel my life isn't all it could be. I get tired of the routine of the trying to get up to a certain spiritual standard. And somebody says you need to pray more, and so I try that. Or, you need to take a class on spiritual growth. Or, you need to read your Bible; you're not reading the Word enough. Or, here's a book you've got to read. Or, go through all this data. Go through all of this material and all of these searches to find where the spiritual reality is missing.

And maybe the answer is very simple. You're not confessing your sins. You're not going to the Lord and saying: I am a sinner, I acknowledge it. I admit it. And here are the sins. Purify me. And you say, yeah, I'm doing that. John, I've done that. I go to the Lord and I say, Lord, I've got sin in my life and here it is. Some people I've met even have a list, you know? Write it down. And I still don't have the joy. And I still don't have the fulfillment. And I still don't see what I ought to see in my life.

You haven't backed up far enough. One more step. Maybe all that confession isn't cutting it because the Lord isn't giving you release from those sins, because you've still got something cooking with somebody else that you haven't forgiven, and you have short-circuited your own spiritual welfare. That's what Jesus is saying. It isn't my words; this is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we know that He knows.

Begin to examine your life, people, at that level. I know that I'm examining my life there. Oswald Saunders says, "Jesus is here stating a principle, and God's dealing with His children." He deals with us as we deal with others. He measures us by the yardstick we use on others. The prayer is not

forgive us because we forgive others, but forgive us even as we have already forgiven others. That's the idea. He's going to deal with us as we deal with Him.

Another illustration that's very clear. Jesus said this: give and it, what? Shall be given to you. In whatever measure you mete it out that's exactly how God will mete it out to you. Hmm. Luke 6, how about this one? Sow sparingly, reap what? Sparingly. Sow bountifully, what? Reap bountifully. God deals with us the way we deal with Him. Whatever we invest in His kingdom, we receive a return on. If we harbor sins and grudges and so forth, we cut ourselves off from the blessedness that can accrue to us because of those things. We have taught you so many times that as you give, you invest with God, you receive a return on it. The same thing is true on your confession of sin and seeking forgiveness. God deals with you the way you deal with others, and maybe the short circuit in your spiritual life is just that you have some people that you're holding bitter resentment or a grudge against, and it's constant.

Even the Jews knew this. In 200 BC, the Jews said: forgiveness of your neighbor's wrongdoing means that when you pray your sins will be forgiven too. They knew that. They could understand that spiritual principle. The Talmud, the rabbinical commentary on the Old Testament says, "He who is indulgent toward others' faults will be mercifully dealt with by the supreme judge Himself."

What about your life? Are you forgiving? Because if you're not God's not going to forgive you and you're going to be going through the world with muddy feet. Oh, judicially you are justified, and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to you, but the joy is gone, and the intimacy isn't there, and the usefulness disappears. Now you say, well, John, if I have a grudge like this with somebody, how do I take care of it?

Three steps. I think they're practical. Number one: take it to God as a sin. That's where it starts. Take it to God as a sin. "Lord, there is this person, and this is the way I feel, and it's a sin, and I admit it, and I'm sorry, and I acknowledge it, and I repent of it, and I forsake it." That's where you start.

Step two, go to the person. Tough, huh? Well, I'm only telling you this so you can know spiritual joy. You make the decision, what you want to forfeit to harbor your judgment and your grudge. Second, go to the person. You say, "I want to seek your forgiveness." You know, I've had people do that to me many times, and see the freedom that comes. I may have already forgiven them. I may not even have known I did anything by which they were offended. But go to the person.

Third thing, just practical: give the person something you value very highly. It's a very practical approach. Let me tell you why. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is," what? "That's where your heart will be also." You have a grudge against somebody or a bitterness, and maybe it's somebody in your family or out of your family, or somebody in the church. Whatever you hold against somebody else is to be dealt with by, number one, take it to God; number two, go to the person; and three, give them something of value. And I'll tell you this, you put something of value, something that is precious to you in their hand, and your heart will go with it, and it will change the way you feel about them.

I'll give you a true confession at this point. I'm not going to confess everything but just selected things. There have been times in my life when I felt something for someone that I shouldn't have felt: a bitterness, a bad feeling, you've wronged me. And there have been times when I have freed myself from the bondage of that through this process and the key was when I went to them. And maybe it

was a book that I bought. Maybe it was a check that I gave them. It varied. But when I gave them the gift was when I really began to express the liberty in my spirit. There's no joy like, the joy of giving. That's what the Lord is saying to us here. Confess to the Lord all you want, but you're not going to get the freedom of forgiveness until you've dealt with the human level first.

Now, let's see this in several other passages and then I'll be done. Just briefly. Matthew 5:7. Just going to pinpoint the principle. We don't have time to go into them in detail. We've covered them in the past. Matthew 5:7, listen to it: "Blessed are the merciful." We have a whole chapter on this in the book. Tremendous statement. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall," what? "Obtain mercy." In other words, if you want to receive mercy from God, then you must be, what? Merciful. It's a principle of spiritual life. People in Christ's kingdom are merciful. They will bear the insults of evil men and their hearts will reach out in compassion. Now, in that context, that has a much broader meaning. And I don't want to get back into that again, but just the principle is the same. It can be compared. You want mercy, you give mercy. I'm going to show you another one: chapter 5 verse 21. "You have heard that it was said by them of old." That is a statement that gives a reference to rabbinic tradition. Your rabbinic tradition says: "You shall not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment." In other words, your teaching is that, and it certainly had truth in it, but it wasn't all the truth because that's as far as it went.

Your tradition says just don't murder and you're okay, murder and you'll be in trouble with the law. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment. Whoever shall say to his brother, *raka*, and by the way that is an untranslatable epithet. That's like saying, well I don't know what. It's not like saying anything. It's more a tone of voice than it is a word. To them, it might be like saying, "You brainless, stupid idiot. You rarara," whatever. Have you ever seen a cartoon where Charlie Brown gets mad and you just see stars and squiggles? That's what this is. Just whatever. Untranslatable.

When you say that to someone or you say, "You fool," you have stepped into a very dangerous category, very dangerous. Why? Verse 23: "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift, go your way, and be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift, and agree with your adversary quickly."

We'll stop right there. The point is the same. Again, the context is a little different as we saw in our study of it, but the point is the same. You cannot come offering to the Lord some sacrifice to deal with your own spiritual life until you've gotten it right with somebody else. Go away and get that right.

Now some of you came to worship the Lord this morning but you can't do it. You can receive instruction, but you can't offer God worship because He won't accept it. You have come to offer God worship. You've said, Lord, I want You to know I praise You. And Lord, I want You to clean me up today and, you're going to go away just like you came because you've got relationships that are unresolved and you're unforgiving in some situations. Therefore, you forfeit true worship. Leave the altar, go back, get that straight, then come back. And so you really can't worship today, and you can't have your sins dealt with, but you can be instructed to begin the process that will make that a reality.

Who am I not to forgive somebody else? Who do I think I am? Well, I certainly can't forgive you. God forgave them. Who do I think I am? Psalm 23 says this: "Mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Why? Because I have to have mercy all my life long because I sin. And if God is so merciful, without His mercy ever being diminished, who am I to be unmerciful to anyone. No wonder so much

of Christianity is short circuited in its power. So many unresolved conflicts with people. So, go away from the altar until you get your life right. If you regard iniquity in your heart, Psalm 66 says "The Lord will not," what? "Hear you." If you're harboring something, He won't hear you.

And James says it again; it just isn't in the gospels. James says it, 2:13: "For he shall have judgment without mercy that has shown no mercy." You put yourself in a chastening position. The Lord will really unload His chastening if you're not merciful to others. I mean, everybody manifests the same weakness in different ways. Let's be forgiving. Robert Louis Stevenson lived in the South Seas, and it was his habit with his children to gather them around him every day. At the close of their little discussion together, they would say the Lord's Prayer, as he calls it. He began to repeat the Lord's Prayer, and got half way through it, and he arose and walked away. At that time of his life his health was rather precarious, and so his wife assumed that he was feeling ill. And she went to him and she said, "Is there anything wrong?" "Only this," he said, "I am not fit to pray this prayer today." Well, I guess that's where it starts, doesn't it? With a recognition that you're not fit. Don't come asking for forgiveness that you're not willing to give. Matthew chapter 18 will provide us with a final look to illustrate this tremendous truth. Matthew chapter 18, verse 21. The whole text prior to this, by the way, down to verse 15, deals with the same issue but we don't have time to go into it. Where somebody has sinned, and you go and seek reconciliation, and then you take somebody with you, and then tell it to the church. And it's dealing all with sin, this whole thing, and forgiveness. And so Peter, in response to what the Lord has said about the sinning brother in the church and all, Peter says: well Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?

Now, the rabbis taught three times. Three times you are to forgive. Peter thought he was being magnanimous. Seven times? Shall we double the rabbinic tradition plus one? Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee until seven times but seventy times seven. Indefinitely, infinitely, unendingly. Why? For we are to forgive as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. And how has He forgiven us? 490 times? Better hope not. 'Cause if you hit 491 before you die, you're in real trouble. He forgives us indefinitely. That's what our Lord is saying.

Then He says, let me illustrate it to you, verse 23: "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king who had to take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him who owed him ten thousand talents." Now, stop there for a second. This guy was a real rat, I want you to know: the scum, the worst. Ten thousand talents is so much money that it's very hard for us to conceive, and he owed 10,000 talents. You say, well, how could a servant ever owe that much? He probably stole the crown of jewels and hocked them, and lost it all on a bad investment. Somehow, he was pilfering from the king's treasury. To become indebted to that point is absolutely inconceivable at that time in the history of the world. That 10 million dollars would be beyond anybody's capacity to even understand. The guy has been robbing the king systematically.

So, verse 25: "He had nothing to which to pay." Huh, he's blown it all, the whole deal. If you think it's inconceivable how he got it, imagine how he got rid of it. What a foolish person. You say, the guy is not only crooked, he's stupid. It's one thing to steal it. That's being crooked, but it's awful stupid to lose it all. So, he had to liquidate the only assets he had and all he has was his wife and kids. So in verse 25, he said: well, sell them off as slaves and make a little money and, that would be about all he'd get. Look at verse 26: "the servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, 'Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all.'" Oh, that's really stupid. What do you mean? The guy, he's dumb every way you cut him. And you know your reaction normally would be, you'd be infuriated. You may have somebody that's holding out a couple of thousand on you, and you're a basket case.

And look, the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, loosed him and forgave him the debt. Now that is amazing. Guess who this king represents? God. Guess who the servant is? All of us. Did we owe a debt we couldn't pay? Huh? Better believe it. And he forgave. Why? He was compassionate. You say oh, how could anybody forgive anything as astronomical as that?

I want to show you more about this guy. The same servant, verse 28, went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. You know how much that was? Three months' work. Peanuts. Nothing. The servant went out, the one who had just been forgiven for the 10 million, went out and found a guy who owed him 3 months' work. And he grabs him by the neck, it says, takes him by the throat and says, "Pay me what you owe me." And the fellow servant fell down on his feet and besought him saying, have patience with me and I will pay thee all. And he could have. But he would not. Cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. Now, he couldn't pay the debt while he was in prison because he couldn't work while he was in prison, but that shows you the evil of the man's heart. So, when the fellow servants saw what was done, they were sorry and they came and told unto their lord all that was done. The rest of the servants went and reported back to the king what this guy had done.

Then his lord after he had called him said unto him, "O you wicked servant. I forgave you all that debt because you besought me. Should not you also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the inquisitors until he could pay all that was due unto him. So, likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your heart forgive not everyone his brother his trespasses."

That's the picture, people, that's the picture of somebody who wants to take all the forgiveness God can give but isn't willing to give it to somebody else. You see yourself there? You hold grudges? Oh, have you so soon forgotten? Are you so ill memoried that you can't remember the mercy that you have received? Thomas Manton said, "There is none so tender to others as they which have received mercy themselves, for they know how gently God hath dealt with them." Now listen to me, one of the reasons you need to acknowledge your sin as it exists and confess it by name on a constant basis is that you will be constantly reminded what a sinner you are, how constant His forgiveness is, and thereby in the midst of that reminder, you will be more prone to forgive others. But as you fail to acknowledge your own sin as you cover it up and not deal with it, you not only will lose your intimacy, and your joy, and the fullness of usefulness, but you will find yourself becoming unforgiving to others, because you're not being honest about what God is forgiving in your own life.

Lord Herbert, I think, put it very well, he said, "He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass." What have we learned? We have a problem. It's sin. God has a provision, it's forgiveness. Lord makes a plea, confession. There's a prerequisite, forgiving others. An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction: a proud, selfish, weak-memoried creature who has forgotten that his sins have been washed away. Learn to confess, beloved, and before you confess, learn to forgive.

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