

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

### **Forgive Us Our Sins, Part 3**

Scripture: Luke 11:4

Code: 42-154

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 11 and return again to this wonderful, wonderful passage which we have entitled, "Lord, teach us to pray," borrowing the words of a disciple who spoke to Jesus. And it's good for us to set the prayer in our minds, so let me read verses 1 through 4.

"And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.' And He said to them, 'When you pray say: Father, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us and lead us not into temptation.'"

As we have been pointing out in this particular study, these were followers of Jesus Christ who were prompted to ask this question because the praying of Jesus was so very different than what they were used to hearing from the religious leaders of their day. John the Baptist, the last of the true prophets and the forerunner of the Messiah, had to teach his disciples how to pray the right way because they too had been exposed only to the vain and empty repetitions that had developed in Judaism. And here the followers of Jesus who didn't yet know how to pray, even though Jesus had taught these same things before many months earlier in Galilee as recorded in Matthew 6:9 to 13, there were some who didn't get that lesson and on this occasion months later in Judea the question arises about how are we supposed to pray in response to listening to Jesus' own praying. And so the Lord again for the second time teaches us how to pray. This is not a prayer to be prayed, although it can be prayed and has been prayed many, many times since it was given, it is more than a prayer to be prayed, it is a way to pray every prayer. It is a structure, a skeleton, a framework around which you build all your prayers. You're to always come in your prayers to a loving, gracious, caring, supplying, resourceful Father. You are always first to be concerned that His name be holy and sacred and that whatever you ask be consistent with His holiness. You are always to be first of all consumed with the advancement of His Kingdom and not yours. And as Jesus taught in the Matthew passage, you are to be concerned that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The priority then is God's holiness, God's Kingdom, God's will. That's the priority in all your praying at all times and then after having set God in the place of priority, you turn to the needs of your own life and ask Him to supply your daily bread which means to sustain your physical life in all its needs. And then even more importantly than that, you ask Him to take care of your spiritual needs by forgiving your sin and

not leading you into temptation. These are components that should be a part of every prayer that one prays when he goes before, or she goes before the Lord.

Now we have worked our way down in to verse 4 and we're looking at the petition here, "And forgive us our sins." In fact, we've already spent two weeks looking at it, so we're going to move on to the next statement. But it connects to that petition. "And forgive us our sins for, or because, we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us."

This seems at first a strange addendum, a strange addition. None of the other petitions have any caveats or any requirements, this one does. We are asking for forgiveness and expecting it because we give it to those who sin against us. This is the only caveat in this entire list of petitions. There is here a prerequisite to having your sins forgiven. This is the only one of these petitions that has a prerequisite tied to it.

Now we've already talked about the problem, which is sin. And then last week we talked about the provision which is available forgiveness, and now we come to this prerequisite. And what our Lord is saying here is, "Don't expect to be forgiven by God, your Father, if you haven't forgiven others." This introduces then to this whole subject of being a forgiving person, being a forgiving Christian. Now remember, the main emphasis of the petition, forgive us our sins, is directed at believers. This is teaching us how to pray, those of us who are disciples who've already been saved. We've already been regenerated. We've already been born again. We've already been justified. We've already received eternal life. We already have all of our sins judicially forgiven, forensically we have been declared righteous by God because Jesus paid in full the penalty of our sins and we have had the righteousness of God therefore imputed to us.

What we're talking about here is not a prayer for salvation. We've done that. We're now among God's children. We're talking about not that judicial forgiveness but that relational forgiveness we talked about last time. We are completely, totally, fully and forever forgiven for all our sins. We'll never pay the ultimate penalty for our sins, it's been paid by Jesus Christ. But as we live in the world, we still sin. We don't lose our salvation, we just interrupt our joy. We just lose our assurance, our peace, our usefulness, our testimony. We put ourselves in a position to be disciplined by the Lord. And so day to day we need to go to the Lord and ask forgiveness. And He will give it if we forgive those who are indebted to us, those who have incurred a debt to us by some violation or sin against us. Don't expect God to forgive your sins if you haven't forgiven others their sins against you.

It is amazing in some sense to me that of all the things that God could have identified as a specific way to short-circuit blessing, He picked this. There are all kinds of sins we could commit and any and all those sins...any and all those sins will cut us off from blessing until they're confessed. It's when we

ask for forgiveness that we receive it on that day-to-day basis. You remember the illustration of Peter, the Lord said to Peter, "You don't need a bath, you had a bath, you just need your feet washed." Your bath occurred when you were saved, but as you go through the world you accumulate mud and dirt on your feet and regularly and routinely you need to ask Me to keep you clean and to wash you so that you can know the joy of salvation, so that you can have a clean heart. And as David said, a renewed spirit, and get the song back in your life and then will you show transgressors your way is God's ways and sinners will be converted. Then you'll have an impact evangelistically.

If you live with the dirt on your feet and the mud on your feet, if you truck your way through the world accumulating sin that's not forgiven, you keep yourself outside the place of blessing, you keep yourself under the discipline of the Lord, you forfeit joy, peace, assurance, usefulness and effective testimony. And of all of the sins that cause that, it's so interesting to me that He picked this one, I'm not going to forgive you when you ask if you don't forgive others. Why does He pick that? Because bitterness can reign supreme in the human heart so easily...so easily. We cultivate and nurse and hold grudges, some people, for a lifetime. And in the end, every relationship is ultimately destroyed because somebody or both people can't forgive. Whatever goes wrong in a relationship, we're human, we sin and in the end everything comes apart if you can't forgive, marriages come apart, families come apart, friendships come apart, churches come apart. In the end there's going to be problems because there's sinners everywhere and even in the church and in the marriage and in the family and in the relationships and if you can't forgive, then in the end everything is destroyed. So that puts a premium on forgiveness...a premium on it. If we don't forgive, we won't be forgiven.

We live in a world that is bitter. We live in a world that is angry. We live in a world that is full of vengeance. The world is just built on an attitude of revenge, particularly in our country where lawsuits are probably the dominating indicator of how people want retaliation and revenge. Vengeance has been elevated to a virtue in our society. It's like noble to seek vengeance. People make heroes out of the vindictive, heroes out of the vengeful, heroes out of the cruel. They are heroes of movies, they're heroes of television programs, they're heroes of video games, they're heroes of novels, comic books. This country is just drowning in a sea of vengeance and unforgiveness. Shattered marriages, shattered relationships, gang warfare, crimes of all kinds, lawsuits, it goes on and on and on and it's all exalted in the media. And there are psychologists, believe me, who say it's unhealthy to forgive, I've read them. It's very unhealthy to forgive because you're going to have that bitterness down there until you lash out to someone and give them back what you think they deserve. "You've hurt me and I'm going to get you back," has been defined as a virtue.

But frankly, the price of vengeance in this world is very, very high. The price of unforgiveness is extremely high. You see, unforgiveness imprisons people in their past and it makes the person that offended you the jail keeper. Why do you want to live like that? As long as you fail to forgive

someone who has offended you, as long as you have failed to forgive that offense and forgive that person, you shackle yourself to the past. You are a prisoner to hate and anger. You are literally picking at an open wound and never letting it heal. You are sentencing yourself, frankly, to always feel as bad as you do and more likely than that, to feel worse all the time because you keep rehearsing, rehearsing, and rehearsing, and rehearsing what was done to you and exaggerating and exacerbating the wound itself. You choose to love hate and now you are a tortured prisoner of the offense and the offender.

Who wants to live like that? This produces bitterness, becoming an infectious cancer of the heart, it begins to chew up and eat up your whole life. Unforgiveness is malignant. It is the producer of harassing memories, memories that are distorted, memories that are exaggerated. Anger gets out of control, emotions are unchecked, desperate ideas of revenge develop in the heart even though they're never carried out. Every conversation becomes a forum to slander that person. Why do you want to live like that? It's nonsense. It's unwise, it lacks common sense, it's self-destructive. It destroys your well-being. It takes control of your life. It removes your happiness and your joy. It's a ridiculous way to live. I refuse to live that way. By the grace of God I refuse to live that way. I'm going to live my life here endeavoring to know the maximum joy, peace, assurance, usefulness and testimony that I can. I want to live like Jude said, "Keeping myself in the love of God." I want to be where the love shower comes down the hardest, don't you? I want to get into there and I want to get rained on.

Now the Bible talks about forgiveness extensively. In fact, it gives 75 different word pictures of forgiveness...75 different word pictures of forgiveness, 75 different analogies. Let me just give you a few.

To forgive someone is to turn the key, open the cell and let the prisoner out. To forgive someone is to write across a debt "nothing owed, paid in full." To forgive someone is to pound the gavel in the court and declare "Not Guilty." Biblically, to forgive someone is to shoot an arrow so far, it can never be found. To forgive someone is to take out the garbage and dispose of it, leaving the house smelling fresh and clean. To forgive someone in the Bible is to loose the anchor and set the ship free to sail. To forgive is to grant a full pardon to a condemned and sentenced criminal. To forgive is to loosen a strangle-hold on the neck of a wrestling opponent, or an enemy in a war. To forgive is to sandblast a wall of graffiti leaving it clean. Also in the Bible, to forgive is to take a pot and smash it into a thousand pieces so it can never be put back together again. It is to once and for all destroy the memory of that offense.

This is a marvelous act. This is a virtuous act. This is a noble act. This is a liberating act. This is a loving act. This is a sensible act. Why do you want to become a prisoner to the pain and make the

person who inflicted it your jailor? One writer says this, "Only the brave know how to forgive." He's speaking of the nobility of forgiveness. He says, "It is the most refined and generous element of human virtue to forgive, and only the brave do it." He said, "Cowards have done good deeds and cowards have performed kind acts on occasion. Cowards have even fought and conquered when they had to. But a coward never forgives. It's not in his nature. It's not in his heart because the power to forgive flows only from strength and greatness of soul, conscious of its own humility unable to rise above all the little temptations of resenting every fruitless attempt to steal your happiness." I like that. I mean, that's prosaic stuff. I want to be thought of as a noble human being and brave. I want to rise above the hoi-polloi of the proud and self-protective who pick at everybody's accusations and everybody's offenses. I want to rise above that. I want to be among the brave, big enough to forgive, conscious of my own humility, never taking any offense against me too seriously because I'm nothing anyway. And that's good, I like that noble philosophy.

But I am frankly compelled to forgive for far more profound reasons than that. As noble as it is, as good as it is in terms of common sense, as much as it will produce well being and make me a happy person to forgive, there's something far beyond that, far beyond the sheer virtue of it and the nobility of it. There is a much more compelling why it is that I want to forgive and it is this...if I forgive, I will be forgiven. This is a monumental consideration to me.

That word "forgive" is really an important word. It appears in verse 4 twice, we ask the Father to forgive our sins and we expect to be forgiven because we also forgive. Forgive is *aphiemi* in the Greek. It's a very interesting word. It can mean to release, but my favorite sort of synonym for this word in the Greek is to hurl...to hurl, to throw something as far away as possible. Ask God to hurl your sins away, isn't that good? Ask God to hurl your sins away. And since God is a reconciling God of love, since He removes your sin as far as the east is from the west, remembers it no more, buries it in the depths of the sea. In effect, He hurls it out of His presence. It's really wonderful to know that.

When we came to the Lord the first time and asked for salvation, He hurled our sin into the blackness of the depths of what He Himself doesn't remember. And as we live our Christian lives and get our feet dirty, every time we go and confess our sins, He hurls them away again and we get a clean heart and restored joy and restored peace and restored assurance and restored usefulness and restored testimony. But we only get that if we give to others what we ask for from Him.

Whenever you pray then, Jesus says, ask for this routine, consistent, experiential, relational cleansing. No matter what the sin. There's no...there's no caveat here. He doesn't say, "Except if you do this, or unless you do this," whatever the sin is, ask for forgiveness. And the condition is not that it's a sort of a venial sin instead of a mortal sin, or sort of a significant sin instead of a very significant sin. Now, the caveat is if you forgive others, that's the only condition. Whatever the sin is, your Father will forgive it. Is that wonderful to hear? There is the pre-requisite, the one who prays for God's ongoing forgiveness, the believer, the disciple, that's who we're talking about here, who prays

for God's ongoing forgiveness must himself or herself be forgiving. See, unforgiveness is a serious sin, here it is of all the sins possible to be discussed, it is presented at that sin which blocks forgiveness.

Now just to show you how important this is in this prayer, go back to Matthew chapter 6 where Jesus there even made it a bigger issue. In Matthew 6 Jesus says in verse 12 in this initial instruction on these lines, Matthew 6:12, He went through the Our Father, hallowed be Your name, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done and give us our daily bread. And then He comes to this same petition, "When you pray, pray in this way, 'Our Father, forgive us our debts, *opheilema*, because every sin, every *hamartia*, every missing of the mark is incurring a debt against God. You owe Him love, you owe Him respect, you owe Him honor, you owe Him worship, you owe Him obedience. And every sin defrauds God of what He is owed and so you are accumulating a debt to God. And so, when you ask forgiveness for your sins, in effect you're asking to be forgiven your debt, only the creditor can forgive the debtor and God will do that. Verse 12, "As we also have forgiven our debtors." When people sin against us, it is true, they have violated us, they have defrauded us, they have taken something from us that is not theirs, maybe our good reputation, maybe our physical well-being, our health, maybe our money. They have a debt but as we forgive that debt, God forgives our debt.

Jesus even expands this, go down to the fourteenth and fifteenth verse as He explains this, very clear words, "If you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." Anybody find that hard to understand? I mean, it couldn't be more obvious than that. There is nothing obscure in what was said. The bottom line, you want forgiveness from God on an ongoing basis which produces joy, purity of life and all the best that God has to give, if that's what you desire, then ask for it having met the prerequisite that you have extended the same kind of forgiveness you're asking for in all conditions to those who have incurred a debt to you.

We're not talking about eternal forgiveness here, remember that? Eternal forgiveness we have in our justification. That settles the issue of heavenly joy. This is temporal forgiveness we need in our sanctification that settles the issue of earthly joy. And, you know, you look at many people who are Christian people and you look at their life and you wonder why they don't have any joy, why they don't seem to have any peace, why they don't have assurance. They're dry in their spirit, they lack joy, they lack power, they lack usefulness. They stumble and bumble their way around. It may well be that they just can't experience joy, they cannot experience peace, not because they don't believe it's available, not because the Holy Spirit doesn't dwell in them, but because they have in their hearts bitterness and an unforgiving attitude. And so withheld from them are all the blessings of forgiveness and in their place, all the hardness of disciplining by the hand of the Lord Himself.

Really, no one should be so merciful as the one who receives mercy. Is that not true? No one should be so merciful as the one who receives mercy. We have received mercy. We should be eager to give it. If you can't forgive others, my friend, you break the bridge over which you must walk.

An unforgiving Christian is a contradiction. That is a proud, selfish and I think weak-memory-ed Christian who has overestimated his own value and overestimated the importance of any offense against him, and underestimated the grace of God. If you can't forgive somebody, boy, do you have a short memory. Jesus was beginning the Sermon on the Mount, He gave what are called the Beatitudes and one of them in verse 7 is this, Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." It's the people who give mercy who get mercy.

Later on in that sermon, chapter 7 verse 2, Jesus said, "By whatever standard you measure it out, it will be measured to you." Isn't that amazing? You are enjoying essentially from God in your Christian life the measure of forgiveness that you are giving to others. Forgiveness is a magnificent virtue. I love it anywhere I see it. I love it sometimes when on the news somebody just out of the milk of human kindness or whatever forgives somebody who did something awful. It's rare, but when I see it, I like it, I love it. It's a noble virtue. It tells me that that person hasn't overestimated their importance. It tells me there's a little compassion and tender-heartedness and kindness in that heart. There's a little bit of the image of God leaking through even an unregenerate life.

It is a magnificent human virtue. It is a noble way to live. And it makes an awful lot of sense and it produces well-being. But that doesn't come close to the reason that we see here. We must forgive or we will not be forgiven. And if we are not forgiven, we sustain our position under the discipline of God and outside the circle of His outpouring love.

Now, that might be all we need to say about this verse, but it's not because it opens up for us this whole subject of forgiveness and how important it is. The most important reason why you do it is right there. The Lord picked the most important reason. You do it because if you don't do it, you won't be forgiven. Boy, that ought to send you out of here running in every direction from the heart to forgive any grudge you're holding against anybody, an exwife, an exhusband, a parent who did this or that to you, a neighbor, a friend, a person at work, what ever. But there are more reasons and you know me, as I start to think about things like this, the list gets longer and longer and longer.

First and foremost, of course, because we want to be forgiven. But I thought of nine other reasons. You were thinking two...no, not a chance. I thought of nine other reasons. Now I'll give you three today and the other six next week. Number one, you should forgive not only because you want to be forgiven, but secondly, forgiveness is the most God-like act you can do. It is the most God-like act

you can do. You say you belong to God, do you? You say you're the child of God, right? You say God is your Father, do you? You say that God lives in you, is that so? You say that you possess, as it were, the very divine nature, you say that God has taken up residence in your life. Then maybe we ought to be able to look at you and see God. And if we did, what would we see? Well we would see forgiveness because forgiveness is the most God-like act you can ever do. Nothing is more divine than to forgive.

We've said this, haven't we, throughout this study of verse 4, the greatest need that we have is to be...what?...forgiven of our sins. And therefore the greatest thing that God does to display Himself is to forgive us. When God introduces Himself in Exodus 34, listen to what He says, "The Lord...verse 6...the Lord God...and this is God speaking....I am the Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness and faithfulness who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin." God says, "Let me introduce Myself. I am compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, faithful and as a result, I forgive iniquity, transgression and sin. That's who I am." And that sets God apart from every other God in the plethora and the panoply of deities. There's no such thing as a loving, compassionate, gracious, tender-hearted, merciful, faithful, forgiving deity. There wasn't any in the Old Testament, there hasn't been any in the human history. God says, "I'm not like the false gods, I'm compassionate." When God introduces Himself He says, "Let Me show you My loving-kindness, let Me show you My tender-mercy, let Me show you My grace, let Me show you My forgiveness." You are never more like God than when you forgive...never.

Now we would then expect that when God puts Himself on display in the Scripture, He would display Himself as a God of forgiveness. There is no greater picture than that then a story Jesus told in Luke 15 about the prodigal, remember that? In the story of the prodigal son, it's really...I wish I could retitile it throughout all of church history the title ought to be changed, the title of that story is the forgiving father...forget the son, he's barely worth remembering. It's the story of the forgiving father, that is the monumental aspect of the story. The son in the story of Luke 15 was not unlike many sons, in fact he was not unlike all of humanity. He represents all of lost humanity, all sinners...greedy. They want to get their hands on everything God has provided and use it wastefully, humanly foolish, giving Himself over to people who exploit Him and ending up in misery when the money runs out. He's the picture of every sinner, destitute, eating pig slop. Slowing comes to his senses dying of hunger in a pig sty, pig sty mirrors his life, no future, no hope. He's at the end of himself, spiritually bankrupt, brokenhearted. He says to himself, "My father's servants live better than I do. I'll go back...I'll go back. I don't expect to be forgiven. I don't expect to ever be a son again. I don't expect privilege, I'll just go back and be a slave. At least I'll have food better than this and shelter." All he wanted was a roof over his head and food better than pig slop and he started on the road back.



And at that point we see how God forgives. The father doesn't even wait for him to get there, right? He sees him coming, what's the next line? "Far away." And what does he do? Does he hide? Boy, I hope he doesn't find me because I don't want to deal with this kid. No. He runs to him. He runs after him and when he finally gets to him, he doesn't say, "Ahh, you've come to your senses, did you, buddy? And what do you think we're going to do about it?" Throws his arms around his neck, starts kissing him and embracing him. And all he wants is a shelter and some decent food and the father gets the best ring and the best robe and kills the fatted calf and calls for a celebration and a party, the likes of which nobody has ever experienced. And that's how God forgives. It is lavish. It is instant. It is complete. It is rich. As soon as God sees the sinner start back, and knows the attitude, the attitude is of a broken and a contrite heart, and the sinner wants to be back in the father's house...the father runs to him. This is the lavish forgiveness. Contrast the other son who had no forgiveness in his heart, who pouted and saw the father as a fool for forgiving his stupid brother. That's how...that's how false religion and Judaism saw God because God was that father.

The other brother thought he ought to send the kid back to the pig sty where he belongs. The forgiveness of God is just overwhelming and that's God. And that's how God forgives, and you're never more like God than when you forgive like that. Jesus illustrated it hanging on the cross. Looks down at the people killing Him, "Father...what?...forgive them...forgive them." This is God-like and because it is God-like, it's how we should react to those who have offended us. Listen to Ephesians 4:32, "Be ye kind to one another...writes Paul...be tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Mirror or reflect the forgiveness of God." By the way, when Paul wrote that he was in prison. He had been mistreated, misjudged, unjustly and hatefully persecuted and imprisoned. And it is from that vantage point that he says, verse 31, "Don't be bitter, don't have wrath, don't have anger, don't have slander, just be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving the way your Father forgives." In Colossians 3, also written from prison, verse 13 Paul says, "Forgive each other, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." And again, the standard is, you say you belong to God, then do what God does, forgive the way He forgives.

One other text on this point, Matthew 5, back to that Sermon on the Mount. In verses 44 and 45, this is specific. Matthew 5:44, "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This is Jesus saying love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. "In order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." You will display who it is that you belong to by your forgiveness...by your forgiveness. So you are a son of your Father in heaven? Then forgive the way He forgives.

So number one in my little list, strengthening the text here, is that you forgive because you're never more like God than when you forgive. Number two, you are forbidden not to forgive by the sixth

commandment...you are forbidden not to forgive...you are...yes, you are forbidden not...it's a double negative but it works...you are forbidden not to forgive by the sixth commandment. If you like it better, it is not murder only which is forbidden by the sixth commandment." You say, "What are you talking about?" The sixth commandment says, "Thou shalt not kill." Inherent in that forbidding is the idea that you must forgive. You say, "Well I don't see that in the text of Exodus 20." No you don't, but I'll show you where you do see it. You're in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, you were looking at verse 44 and 45, go back to verse 21. And what you have in the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus doing an interpretation and explanation and exposition, if you will, of this commandment. Verse 21, "You've heard that the ancients were told you shall not commit murder and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court and whoever shall say to his brother 'raca' shall be guilty before the supreme court. And whoever shall say 'you fool' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." Jesus is saying, you know, you guys really limited the Ten Commandments. It said you shall not commit murder. But there was much more behind that than just that statement. Just like down in verse 27, "You have heard it said you shall not commit adultery, but I'm telling you, if you look on a woman with lust in your heart, you've committed adultery in your heart already." Jesus is interpreting these commandments to say there's something deeper than just the act, there's the attitude underneath that. And the rabbis of old, of course, because at the time of Jesus, they were godless, they had a religion, a form of religion without the knowledge of God and so they couldn't restrain their evil flesh. They might not kill somebody but they were full of hate and animosity and bitterness and they had ways to express it, they were angry, they threw epithets at people like "Raca," they called people "fools." And this was supposed to be okay because they didn't kill. They took the most narrowing and limited interpretation of those commandments.

Jesus just blew that to ribbons. He was very, very aware of the prevailing attitudes that they had because they were being directed at Him. They hated Jesus. They were angry with Jesus. They cursed Jesus. And eventually, sort of wiping their own hands, they had the Romans murder Jesus. So He says, "You've heard one thing from the ancients, the old rabbis, you shall not commit murder, if you do you'll be liable to the court." You kill somebody and we'll have to take you to court. "But I say to you, there's a lot more there than just that, whoever is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court." First John 3:15 says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer." If you hate your brother, you're the same as a murderer. And with that, he swept away all self-righteousness. With that He unmasked the murderous vice of unforgiveness that wants somebody dead. If you say to your brother "Raca." What is that? I don't know. It was a four-letter word, that's the best we can say. I don't...every generation has its curses, doesn't it? Every generation has its epithets. Every generation has those words and they usually somewhere in them have a hard consonant, a consonant which allows you to put an emphasis on it. This was a common epithet in the ancient Hebrew environment. It has no modern equivalent, so it's just translated out of the Hebrew...*Rahaa*

...a term of abuse, a term of derision, a term of disdain, really the lowest of the low. When you say that to somebody, you are just giving hate to them.

And then there were some who said, "You fool, you stupid and godless one." A fool has said in his heart there is no God. This is how you cursed someone. And Jesus said, "You say that to somebody or about somebody, you're guilty enough to go to hell." It is not murder alone that is forbidden in the sixth commandment. Not to forgive is forbidden by that commandment. You're going to violate that commandment if you don't forgive. You're going to be a murderer in your heart. If you've ever said, "Raca" or anything like that about someone or to someone, if you have to someone or about someone said, "You fool," and cursed them that way, or if you've just been angry, you bear guilt...guilt for the heart of a murderer. Pretty serious.

Why do you forgive? First of all, you forgive because you want to be forgiven and get in the place of blessing. And then adding to that, you forgive because there's nothing more God-like than forgiving. And secondly, because not to forgive is to violate the commandment and to render yourself guilty of that violation. And then one third reason why we forgive, because whoever has offended you has offended God more. Whoever has offended you has offended God more. You know, this is a place you can really rest. Somebody does something awful to you, somebody does says something terrible about you, somebody does destructive damage to your life physically, emotionally, financially, socially, whatever they did against you isn't close to what they did against God. And listen to this, whoever has offended you has offended God more and God who is the most holy and most offended forgives, shouldn't you? That's the point. Because you're the least holy. God who is the most important forgives and you who are the least important, should you not forgive? This is that argument from the greater to the lesser. Any wrong done against you is more a wrong done against God. Is that not true? Psalm 51, "Against Thee only have I sinned." Yes, David sinned against Uriah, yes David sinned against Bathsheba, yes he sinned against his own wife, yes he sinned against the people of Israel, yes, yes, yes to all of that, but his sin was far greater an offense to God than anybody else because God is the holy perfection. And it was David who said, "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven," Psalm 32. Any wrong done against you is more severely done against God and God forgives. If the most holy and the most offended can forgive, shouldn't the least holy and the least offended forgive? Don't overestimate how important you really are. You're really not that important. And you're not that holy. And if they said things against you that weren't true, they probably could have said some things that were true. So we're really incidental, in one sense. The sinful offense is truly directed at God and cannot we who are unholy forgive as the one who is absolutely holy forgives?

So, do we come into this Christian experience with a tremendous opportunity to live our whole lives washed clean, renewed, pure before God. When you do that, you put yourself in the place of ultimate

blessing, extreme blessing. And you can go as you accumulate the dirt of life day in and day out and you can ask for forgiveness and be forgiven, unless this sin is there. And it may be the last one you let go of. When you finally let go of all the rest, this may be the last one you let go of because you've cultivated the bitterness for so long because the wounds are so profound, because the pain was so great, because the implications were so far reaching. But if you don't forgive, if you don't hurl that sin away, then you're going to keep yourself in a place of discipline. Forgive because God who is more offended that you forgave. Forgive because it's the most God-like thing you can do. And forgive so you can be forgiven as well.

Well next Sunday we'll cover the six remaining reasons to forgive.

Lord, this is practical, this is easily to be understood, but we confess that our hearts are hard and rigid and we have created habits of vengeance, habits of anger, habits of animosity, habits of unforgiveness that have been fed and cultivated and nourished, they're like weeds that are so strong you can barely pull them out of the soil. So we need your help. Help us to contemplate the glory and greatness of Your forgiveness. Help us to long to be like You. And help us to fully desire the forgiveness that You give those who forgive so that we can have lives that are literally filled with blessing. And we commit ourselves to You for this work that the Spirit can work in us to Your glory, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).