

The Fundamentals of Forgiveness #15

Matthew 6: 14-15

In our last study we considered the Lord's model for prayer. The verses we've read tonight are tied to the example that He has given for us to follow. This was clearly no accident. Our Lord mentioned forgiveness in the model prayer, [V.12](#), and He knew that a forgiving spirit was imperative for effective prayer. The importance of forgiveness is revealed by the fact that it is the only aspect of prayer that our Lord expounded further upon.

As we begin to consider these verses I want to try and clarify their setting. They do not present the possibility of losing one's salvation due to an unforgiving spirit. They do not portray that God would cast aside those genuinely saved because they held a grudge or were unforgiving. There would be application for a lost man who refused to forgive and seek forgiveness from the Lord being denied His abundant forgiveness, but that is not the focus of the passage. This is a fellowship passage and it is dealing with the spiritual lives of believers. These verses reveal how we are to forgive in order to receive forgiveness for the sins that we all commit while living in a body of flesh.

Let's take a few moments to consider the [admonitions](#) our Lord reveals as we think on: [The Fundamentals of Forgiveness](#).

I. The Emphasis on Forgiveness (14-15) – As I mentioned in the introduction, this is the only aspect of prayer that Jesus expounded upon. He is clearly emphasizing the need for a forgiving spirit associated with prayer. Consider:

A. The Definition – As we begin to define forgiveness, we first need to consider that which needs to be forgiven. In [V.12](#) the text refers to the forgiveness of [debts](#). In these verses we find the word [trespasses](#). [Debts](#) refer to *“that which is owed; justly or legally due; an offence or sin.”* [Trespasses](#) speak of *“stumbling, falling, or slipping; to blunder or deviate from the truth.”*

- We have all experienced debts and trespasses in our Christian lives. In fact, I am certain that we have all committed both of these as well. Here our Lord commands that we are to [forgive](#) our debtors and those who trespass against us. The word [forgive](#) has the idea of *“sending away or letting go; to disregard, omit, or neglect.”*
- We have all heard the old adage, I am willing to forgive, but not forget. That doesn't sound like biblical forgiveness. This speaks of removing it from our lives all together. Genuine forgiveness must be willing to forget the past wrongs and move forward.

B. The Participation (14) – For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: This requires action on our part. Forgiveness isn't something we simply contemplate; it is something that we are willing to follow through with. If we are to experience victory in our Christian lives and be effective when we pray, we must be willing to forgive those who have trespassed against us.

- Some of the commentaries that I have read state that there is no obligation to forgive if repentance is not present. I disagree with that. They use [Luke 17:3-4](#) as their text verses. *Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. [4] And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.* Clearly the Lord mentions our rebuke and their repentance, but when we consider the whole of Scripture, I cannot agree with that line of thinking. Was there any repentance on the part of those who crucified Jesus? Was there any repentance by those who stoned Stephen? No, and yet both Jesus and Stephen revealed a forgiving spirit as they prayed for the forgiveness of those who abused them.
- That line of thought is dangerous. It will lead to bitterness and resentment, which always results in spiritual decay on the part of the one who is bitter. [Heb.12:15](#) – *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;* (*Illustrate*) We don't have to embrace or condone their sin or hurtful acts, but we must be willing to forgive even if they are undeserving.

C. The Complication (14-15) – When we consider these verses together we discover the possibility of withholding forgiveness. Our Lord was aware of that and we have experienced it as well. We live in a body of flesh that desires to live and behave contrary to the ways of God. Our flesh doesn't want to forgive. It wants to get even. It wants to see the aggressor suffer the same pain that we have.

- Possessing and maintaining a forgiving spirit is difficult at best, but we can learn to overcome the flesh and offer forgiveness through the help and guidance of the Lord. If we are to be what God would have us be, we must be willing to crucify the flesh along with the lustful and hurtful desires it presents!

I. The Emphasis on Forgiveness (14-15)

II. The Expectation in Forgiveness (14-15) – Now let's take a moment to consider what we can expect in regard to forgiveness. Notice:

A. The Reality – As we consider these verses together, we discover that they are reciprocal, that is they are given by each toward the other. Forgiveness is a two-way street. If we offer forgiveness to those who have trespassed against us, we can expect God to offer forgiveness for our trespasses. If we withhold forgiveness from others, then we need not expect the Lord to offer forgiveness for our transgressions.

- Keep in mind that this passage is directly linked to the model prayer. We are still dealing with the prayer life of believers. I heard a preacher say, “You can do a lot of things with sin in your life, but prayer is not one of them.” That great truth is revealed here. We cannot expect to receive the forgiveness we need on a daily basis if we are unwilling to forgive.

B. The Reward (14) – *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:* Isn't that a wonderful promise? We are assured that God will reward our forgiveness with His forgiveness. I have said many times that the greatest battle I face is with my flesh. Many of you may be closer to the Lord than I am, but I sin and come short every day. I need forgiveness.

- Unconfessed and unforgiven sin hinders our walk with God. When we allow sin to remain in our lives, we lose fellowship and guidance from the Lord. We grow weak because we lack His power. An unforgiving spirit will hinder the Lord from extending forgiveness for my sin. How can I honestly seek the Lord in forgiveness if I am unwilling to forgive?

C. The Retribution (15) – *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* Here our Lord reveals the consequences for an unforgiving spirit. If we are unwilling to forgive, we will not be forgiven. Jesus illustrates this great truth wonderfully in [Matthew 18: 23-35](#) in the parable of the unforgiving servant. Let's turn there and look at a few of those verses. Notice first of all:

1. His Debt (24) – *And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.* Can we not all relate to this servant? He owed 10,000 talents, an amount that he would never have been able to repay, even in a lifetime. We were just like this servant; we owed a debt that we had no chance of ever paying. We were hopelessly indebted to the Lord with no way of getting out of our debt.

2. His Deliverance (26-27) – The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. [27] Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. Isn't that amazing? The lord of this man forgave all of his debt. He walked away without owing one thing. His entire debt had been marked "paid in full." That too is a beautiful picture of all who have been redeemed in Christ. We owed a sin debt that we could never repay and our Lord forgave all our debt. He marked our account paid in full.

3. His Disobedience (28) – But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. The servant who had been forgiven of the enormous debt he owed was owed a fraction of that amount by a fellow servant. Rather than extending the forgiveness he had received, he demanded payment of the lesser amount.

- What a picture of a Christian who is unwilling to forgive. What could someone possibly owe us that would compare to what we owed our Lord? There is no way that we would ever be asked to forgive such a debt as Christ forgave on our behalf, and yet we are many times unwilling to forgive the small, insignificant things in life.

4. His Discipline (34) – And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. The disobedient servant stood before his lord once again and was required to pay all that he owed. We could never repay the sin debt that we owed our Lord. As I said, this does not imply that we would lose our salvation if we were unwilling to forgive. The unforgiving spirit was demonstrated after he sought forgiveness for his debt. However, it does illustrate the discipline that is brought upon those who refuse to forgive others. Our Lord has so much to offer, and He would willingly give it to us, but we must be willing to forgive if we expect to receive.

- Many today are living in the bondage of bitterness, apart from the blessing of God, simply because they were unwilling to forgive. I don't want to miss out on any of God's blessings. But, if I am to receive, I must be in a right relationship with Him.

How are things in your life today? Have you sought the Lord for forgiveness and salvation through faith? Christian are you willing to forgive as God forgave you? I am sure that we can all relate to this passage. No doubt we all could be more forgiving. If there is a need in your life, come to the Lord and receive what He has to offer.