

**Reading:** Matthew 18:21-35

**Theme:** Restoration and Forgiving.

What a tragic story the Lord Jesus told in the passage we read. It is a parable - an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Can we imagine anyone being so insensitive and foolish as to be forgiven so much and yet not be prepared to forgive someone the comparative little they owe them? Yet this is the reaction of so many people, sadly even Christians! Last time we considered what it meant to pray the 1<sup>st</sup> part of the 5<sup>th</sup> petition in the Lord's prayer, where we ask to have our debts forgiven, doing so under the heading **1. The Timeliness of This Petition.** The debts we focused on were our debts of sin against God and how we were in a bankrupt position with nothing to pay to reduce or remove such debts to God. We then saw in whom our hope is found and all that God did for us in sending heavens best to deal with our bankruptcy once and for all as the Lord Jesus paid our debts. When we trust in Him as our Saviour all our debts are counted as paid in Him and we are credited with, have imputed to us all the riches of Christ's holiness and purity forever more.

Yet that 5<sup>th</sup> petition does not stop there as we are to pray "*as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" We will move on and see the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> areas I want to look at.

## **2. The Timelessness of This Petition.**

We noted last time that as Christians we are justified - all our sins debt, guilt and condemnation has been **eternally** removed. We could ask "*Why continue to pray this petition?*" We are to remember the Lord's Prayer is for believers alone – only those who can truly say "*Our Father*" can really pray

it. It is the children's prayer and only for those with this relationship with God. We pray this petition because God is our Father and not Judge.

No Christian will ever be perfect or free from sin while here on earth. We have to work out our own salvation and justification on a day by day basis and we call this **sanctification** - as usually every day we seek God's help, as we read, pray, as we battle on using the armour provided, denying ourselves gratification of our sinful desires, indeed starving such to death. As believers we all have ongoing sin in our lives 1 John 1:8-10 tells us of this *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives."* What comfort v9 gives to us. To say that we do not have sin or do wrong, is to have a blind view of ourselves, a wrong view of our dark hearts, a wrong view of sin, a too low view of God and His holiness and in essence we call God a liar.

The confession John is talking about here is not one to justification to salvation, but **one of restoration to relationship** - we grieve and hurt our Father and sin against Him. This petition is in the context of a family and not a law court. To hurt and grieve a stranger is bad enough, but to do the same to someone we love and who loves and cares for us, is a different matter e.g. adultery - see Hosea. When we as believers sin, it is **a far more terrible thing** than ignorant unbelievers doing so. That is because we sin against God, His

known and experienced love, mercy and we rebel against Him in the light of His salvation that we know. Do we see our sin like that? Do we, dare we continue to sin lightly and glibly?

We need to examine our hearts and lives constantly and in so doing see ourselves as our Father sees us and then we will have a right view of our lives and our habits. We are so prone to sin and its tantalising and alluring influences, to its polluting, ensnaring and incapacitating effects, that we do not regard it as sin, but as a quirk, as a weakness, something part of us. We are to see sin as sin and as believers we are to fear its approach, tremble at its nearness. We have combustible hearts and should avoid sin's flames and sparks with all our might. We need to pray for forgiveness and also pray the next petition to be delivered from evil and the evil one.

In our private prayers we are able to confess our sin, our weaknesses - naming them, even day after day. It is practical for our Lord knows our sin, but as we confess them we will realise **our need of Him** and our need to watch and pray in these areas of our lives. We can then bring these areas specifically when we pray the 6<sup>th</sup> petition as we ask for protection. As believers we should keep short accounts with God. We are to realise that sin in us as believers affects and spoils our relationship with our Father in heaven. He is ever there, but as blinds shut out daylight from a room, so our sin removes our joy and awareness of our Father's love. We need to constantly to pray this petition and it is always timely to pray it. Finally, we also see:

### **3. The Time It Takes to Pray It.**

This petition, as with all prayer, is not always easy to pray and mean. Only this petition has a statement attached to it – “*as we also have forgiven our debtors*”. Let’s clear something up straightaway, praying and doing this is not a **cause** of our forgiveness, it does not say “*because*” or “*even as*” or “*just as*”, but it is the outworking, the resulting **condition** from the fact of our forgiveness from God. A literal translation is “*as we ourselves keep on forgiving others*” It is not a cause or merit for our forgiveness. The only cause for our forgiveness is the person and work of the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

Here we ask that because we have been forgiven our debts of sin by God, we should be able to find it in our hearts and lives to forgive others their debts, their wrongs against us. We can only forgive others the wrongs they **do against us** - we cannot remove their guilt and wrong against God, no man can, it is blasphemy to think or presume any man, whether ordained or not can forgive a person’s sin.

Here we are shown that we are not to hold any anger, bitterness, malice, vengeful thoughts, hatred, grudges or animosity against anyone. We are to realise we have been forgiven an enormous, and infinite debt and therefore we should be prepared to forgive others any offence or hurt they have caused against us. In the parable in Matthew 18 the 1<sup>st</sup> servant is forgiven a huge debt of 10,000 talents which was equivalent to 12,000 tons of gold which was a vast fortune then and is now (12,000 ton = 430,080 oz of gold at £961.53 per oz = £413,534,822.40). The 2<sup>nd</sup> servant owed the 1<sup>st</sup> servant equivalent of a 3<sup>rd</sup> of year’s wages (about £9,000). While £9,000 is a considerable sum of money, it is nothing to

the 1<sup>st</sup> amount (*approx. 46k times smaller and insignificant compared to what 1<sup>st</sup> man owed.*) Even though he had received his master's forgiveness of his debts, he refused to show forgiveness to his fellow servant.

If we know God's forgiveness of our infinite debt, we are not to stubbornly hang onto hurt or slight done to us, but we will realise we and other believers are only sinners saved by grace and none of us are perfect yet, but we are all growing in wisdom, grace and maturity. We are also to realise unbelievers who hurt and offended us are not to be sought out and dealt with for revenge, for pride's satisfaction, but they are to be pitied and prayed for so that they would know God's forgiveness. As Christians we dare not harbour a grudge or demand an apology before we speak to or do for another, else our hearts and minds could become bitter and show pride. We are to be free of bitterness and hatred and so glorify our God and Saviour.

I suspect we all have problems forgiving others. In theory it is easy, but in practice it is far from easy. Perhaps it is because we have a wrong view of forgiveness. It is not the same as forgetfulness. Our God deliberately and sovereignly chooses never to remember our sin against us anymore. We can so easily bring up wrongs from years ago, store them in our hearts, will say things like *"I'll forgive, but I'll never forget"* and perhaps if that is the case, we have to question if we have forgiven these things!

To forgive someone is not to minimise pretend it did not hurt and grieve us. When Jesus forgave us on the cross and secured

our forgiveness it hurt Him and cost Him far more than we can imagine. Yes, we feel and bear the pain of the hurt, the insult etc. but we are not to hold the anger and resentment against that person or persons, but forgive them for Christ and God's sake.

We are not to minimise or enlarge the offence - we are to be biblical realists, but we are to exercise biblical forgiveness by God's grace, pointing out the seriousness of the offence in love, but also point out God's grace enabling us to forgive and to show that forgiveness to the one who caused the offence.

As we are faced with this petition, we are shown how unlike the Lord Jesus we are. He had no sin, He asked, cried out though in an agony "*Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*" This petition forces us to examine our lives, to seek out God's enabling grace to live holy lives, lives that are ready to forgive others their debts and trespasses against us.

Back to the title of this heading "*How long does it take to pray this petition?*" It takes every day of our lives to pray and live it out. To forgive others is a great thing, though God's forgiveness is a greater thing, but to accept God's forgiveness is a thing that many of us may find difficult, but it is our **duty and privilege** to do so.

To have a forgiving disposition is a proof of God's grace in our lives. True forgiveness from God breaks our pride and self-importance and must cause us to forgive others. All our claims of spirituality, our praying for God's forgiveness, will have no reality about it unless there is forgiveness for others

in our hearts. I pray God would have mercy on us all and show His mercy through us as we seek to be doers of His word and not hearers only.