

The Lord's Prayer

(Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13)

"And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us"

This may be called the crowning petition in this wonderful prayer. In the beginning of these comments we said that this prayer is only for those who have given themselves to Christ,—who can truly say "Our Father." This proves that still more plainly. We do not mean that it is for none but those who are perfect, but that it is for those who have surrendered themselves to the Lord that He may work in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. To be able always to pray understandingly and from the heart, "And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us," is something that can be done by but comparatively few who profess to be Christians. The one who can do it is in possession of the greatest of all Christian graces—love; for "love suffers long, and is kind," "is not provoked, thinks no evil," and this is the way we would be to have the Lord deal with us.

A great many people think that they are of a forgiving disposition when they are not. When they have done wrong, and someone takes revenge on them, they think that they are deserving of considerable credit if they can take it patiently; but they think that they are perfectly justifiable in harboring harsh thoughts, at least, if they are injured without cause. This is indicated by the common saying, "If I had done anything to deserve this treatment, I would not say anything; but I have not done anything, and I won't stand it." That is as far from the forgiveness that our Savior taught, as the east is from the west. "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God" (1 Peter 2:20).

It has been truly said that to forgive is divine. Certainly it is not human. Human nature knows nothing of forgiveness. Human nature stands upon its dignity, and says, "I'll have my rights; nobody shall trample on me with impunity." But the divine Son of God, who did no sin, and in whose mouth was found no guile, "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). You who say, "All I ask is simple justice; I demand only my rights," how would you fare if you should go immediately after such an assertion and repeat the Lord's prayer, and the Lord should take you at your word? Who could stand if the Lord should mark iniquity? Suppose the Lord should give you simple justice,—just what you deserve, and nothing more,—what would be the result? Not only would you be deprived of eternal life, but your present life would not be continued for another moment; for there is not one of us who deserves a single blessing from the hand of God; "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not" (Lam. 3:22). There is in us no good thing; we have all gone out of the way, and are unprofitable (Rom. 3:10-12); now when our rights have been invaded,

and we cherish resentment, we cannot utter the Lord's prayer without asking the Lord not to forgive us. What a terrible thing it is not to have a forgiving spirit.

Nor can we avoid the consequence above indicated, by refusing to use our Savior's prayer. Whether we ask or not, we shall be forgiven just as we forgive. Says the Savior: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14, 15).

We have said that forgiveness is not natural to the human heart. Only to the extent that one is partaker of the divine nature, can he exercise true forgiveness. God's forgiveness is the standard for us. Says Paul: "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). No one can know how to forgive, unless he knows how God forgives; and nobody can fully understand how God forgives, until he has felt in his own soul the fullness of divine pardon. It will be worth our while to note a few texts which show how God forgives, so that we may know what spirit we should have. Let us read a few texts:—

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18). "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:9, 10, 19).

We have heard it claimed that we are not required to forgive an offender unless he asks for forgiveness; that until he repents and begs for pardon, we are warranted in holding him off. But the above texts convey a different idea. We are to forgive as God forgives. Now suppose that God had made no movement towards the salvation of rebellious men until they humbled themselves before Him; there never would have been any salvation for men. It is only because of His love for us while we were rebels, that we are enabled to come to Him. He was under no obligation to mankind; the obligation was all on the other side; yet He took the initiative. God loved the world. He harbored no malice or enmity in His heart, because He had been insulted, and His laws trampled upon, but was filled with love and pity for poor, erring mortals. It grieved Him to think that man would pursue a course that would inevitably end in his ruin, and He made the way easy for him to return to his allegiance, and begged him to come and be forgiven. The same spirit should actuate us. No matter how much we may have been misused, we are not warranted in entertaining the slightest feeling of enmity toward the offender. On the contrary, we should have such love for him that our only feeling would be that of sorrow that he should pursue a course so detrimental to himself. The thought of the personal injury we have sustained should be lost sight of in the thought of the greater injury which

the offender's course will bring upon himself. It is not natural for us to do this; we can do it only when we are partakers of the divine nature.

It may be said that God does not actually forgive men until they repent. This is true; but He desires that they shall receive His pardon, and therefore, so far as He is concerned, He has pardoned them. All that is lacking is for them to accept the pardon which He gives them; if they will not, He is clear, and the responsibility of their ruin rests upon themselves. God could not actually pardon an unrepentant sinner, for the reason that when He pardons it means far more than when we forgive. If a man has maliciously injured us, and we forgive him, it makes no difference with his guilt; but when God forgives the sinner, his guilt is by that pardon taken away; and it is evident that God cannot take away the guilt of a man who has no desire or intention to abstain from his sins and is determined to retain his guilty practices.

This brings us to another feature of forgiveness. It is very common for people to say that they can forgive but they cannot forget. That is not true forgiveness. The man who does not forget the injury, will brood over it until the bitter feelings will come up again with more than their original force; the harsh feelings are not put away, but only smothered for a time. The man who does not forget an injury done to him, has never really forgiven the offender; he has not allowed love for the erring one to eclipse all thought of the injury done to himself, and without this there can be no forgiveness such as God exercises toward us. Divine pardon is justification; God pardons the believer in Christ, by imputing His righteousness "for the remission of sins that are past." The pardoned one is as though he had never sinned; where there was nothing but guilt before, God beholds nothing but righteousness,—righteousness put there through His own wonderful love. Then if we forgive as God forgives, we must regard the repentant offender as though he had done nothing against us. We must forget that he ever injured us. We must treat him and regard him as though he had done us nothing but good instead of nothing but evil.

The man who forgives in this manner is a true disciple of Christ, because no one can do this unless he has and is experiencing the blessing of divine forgiveness. It is not enough that we have once been forgiven; we must have a vivid sense of the love of God toward us now, if we would forgive as we ought. Under these circumstances the most difficult thing in the world to do, becomes the easiest. Because when we realize how sinful we are, and how much God has forgiven us, it seems a small matter in comparison to forgive the petty wrong done us by a fellow-man. When we contemplate the magnitude of our sin against God, all the wrongs that men may have done to us, sink into insignificance. We think that the servant who had received a free gift of ten thousand talents from his lord was mean and ungrateful because he would not give his fellow-servant one hundred pence. If he had any sense of what had been done for him, he would have told his fellow-servant to keep the paltry sum, and would have thought no more about it. So if we have any just sense of God's love to us, we cannot fail to exhibit corresponding love to our fellows.

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"AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY" - "WHEN YOU PRAY, SAY"