

TEACH US TO PRAY THROUGH FORGIVENESS

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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 6:12, 14-15

PASTOR STAN WEESE

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INTRO.

-- North Center's vision is to glorify God by being and making disciples. To help us understand what that means we like to use a diagram called "The Disciple's Cross."

-- Each year we emphasize one of the disciplines in the arms of the cross. Throughout 2015 we will be emphasizing the discipline of prayer and emphasizing its role in the life of the disciple. To get us started on that emphasis, we are doing a series on the Lord's Prayer given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:9-15

-- The first and foremost aspect of this model for our praying is its God-centeredness. The prayer teaches us that all true prayer begins with a desire for God to be the central desire of our lives. The prayer begins with a desire for God's name to be exalted, for His kingdom to be established, and for His will to be done. Only when that is our great desire as disciples are we ready to pray for ourselves properly. Last week we looked at the first request for ourselves: the petition for daily bread, which is the only request in the Lord's Prayer for anything that is material.

-- Today, we come to the second request for ourselves, which is in verse 12.

v. 12

-- This is the only part of the Lord's Prayer to which Jesus later adds an explanatory comment.

vv. 14-15

These verses are like underlining the request for forgiveness and putting it in bold print.

-- Jesus is stressing the importance of this part of the prayer, and I believe that He wants us to see two important ideas in the request - one idea that is implied and one that is stated explicitly.

I. The Implied Lesson: The Seriousness of Sin

A. The Bible Emphasizes the Seriousness of Sin.

1. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that sin is a deadly serious matter.

-- **Romans 6: 23** The wages of sin is death

-- **Ephesians 2:1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

2. The Story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)

-- The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 illustrates how God considers sin to be quite literally a deadly serious matter. Remember that this husband and wife, who were members of the early church in Jerusalem, sold a piece of property. They kept part of the money and gave part of it to the church to help other believers who were in need. There wasn't anything wrong with that. They could have done anything that they wanted with the money. The problem was that they lied and claimed that they were giving everything to the church. When the lie was exposed, first Ananias and then his wife Sapphira were struck dead by God. It was a powerful lesson to the early church in its critical formative stage about how seriously God takes the issue of sin.

-- This past week I attended the Bethlehem Pastor's Conference, which was on the theme of the seriousness of our sin. In his opening address at the conference, John Piper commented on Romans 8:20.

Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it

In commenting on this verse, Dr. Piper asked the question why did God curse creation after Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden? Dr. Piper's answer was that at least part of the reason was so that creation's curse would serve as a parable or illustration of the seriousness of sin. If you want to see the

awfulness of sin, look at the destructive power of a tornado that can reduce an entire city like Joplin, Missouri, to rubble in a few minutes.

3. Sin is the reason that the eternal Son of God, who was in the beginning with the Father, left the glories of Heaven and took upon Himself our flesh, in order to suffer and to die for us. As Isaac Watts wrote in his great hymn:

Alas! And did my Saviour bleed
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?
Was it for crimes that I had done,
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!

B. The Effect of Sin on the Church.

-- Sadly, we live in a time when the church in America is increasingly desensitized to sin's deadly seriousness. When we fail to take sin seriously, we find that we start to take salvation lightly. The more we tolerate sin, the less we treasure Christ. Just as kryptonite robbed Superman of his powers, so sin robs believers and the Church of spiritual strength.

II. The Explicit Lesson: The Absolute Necessity of Forgiveness

-- In addition to the implicit lesson about the seriousness of sin, this part of the Lord's Prayer has, of course, the explicit lesson about the absolute necessity of forgiveness. What Jesus shows us here is that it is absolutely essential for us to both receive and to give forgiveness.

A. We Must Receive Forgiveness.

-- Jesus instructs us to pray that we might receive forgiveness. There are two kinds of forgiveness that we need to receive from God.

1. Forgiveness that Overcomes Our Alienation from God

-- Sin has separated us from God and caused an unbridgeable chasm between God and us. That separation means that we are spiritually dead. The only way for that separation to be eliminated is for our sin to be forgiven, and that can happen only through Christ.

Ephesians 1:5-7 In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ... ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

-- This forgiveness that removes the separation between us and God is the forgiveness of justification, and it is an "once-for-all" forgiveness. When we received this forgiveness, we are made to be a son of God, a status that we will never lose.

2. Forgiveness that Maintains Our Fellowship with God

-- There is a second kind of forgiveness that we also need to receive - the forgiveness that maintains our fellowship with God after He has become our heavenly Father. This is the forgiveness of sanctification - the ongoing forgiveness that we need whenever we disobey and dishonor our heavenly Father. When we become a child of God through believing in Christ, we become a new creation, but we are not made perfect - we will continue to commit sins. The sin that we commit after coming to Christ doesn't cause us to lose our salvation. When God adopts us as His sons, He never disowns us - we never cease to be His son. Sin doesn't cause the believer to lose his or her sonship, but it does disrupt our fellowship with our Father. In order for a close fellowship to be restored, the sin that has disrupted that fellowship must be confessed and forgiven.

-- The request for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer is being prayed by those who have already become a follower of Christ, which means that it is primarily a request for the forgiveness of sins that disrupt the closeness of our fellowship with the Father.

B. We Must also Give Forgiveness.

1. The Condition

-- It's critical for us to pay attention to the condition that Jesus attaches to this request to receive God's forgiveness. Look again at how Jesus instructs us to ask for forgiveness:

v. 12 "Forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors."

-- In other words, God requires that those who receive forgiveness must also give forgiveness; those who are forgiven must be forgiving.

2. St. Augustine called this "the terrible petition" because if we pray this with an unforgiving spirit we are actually asking God not to forgive us. The unforgiving person is praying, "Deal with me in the unforgiving way that I deal with others."

3. Jesus underscores the importance of this condition by commenting on this request in verses 14-15.

Cf., vv. 14-15

4. When John Wesley came as a missionary to the American colonies, he had a hard time getting along with James Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia, who had a reputation for being arrogant and unbending. On one occasion Oglethorpe declared to Wesley, "I never forgive." To which Wesley replied, "Then, sir, I hope you never sin."

5. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus reminds us of the unbreakable bond between receiving and giving forgiveness. The human heart has only one door of forgiveness - it is through this door that we both receive and give forgiveness. When we shut that door and refuse to give forgiveness to others, we are also shutting the door to receiving God's forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

Some of you are old enough to remember Corrie ten Boom, who would some times tell her testimony at Billy Graham crusades. Corrie was the author of a book called *The Hiding Place*, in which she told the story about her parents' decision to hide Jews in a secret room in their house to keep them safe from the Nazis during World War 2. Corrie's parents took this dangerous action because they were highly devoted Christians and believed this was what Jesus wanted them to do. Eventually, the ten Boom's "hiding place" was discovered, and the ten Booms, along with the Jews in their house, were sent to Nazi concentration camps. Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to the same camp, Ravensbruck, and Corrie had to watch as day after day Betsie grew weaker and weaker and eventually died. Corrie survived, and after the War she traveled throughout Germany telling her story and witnessing to her faith in Christ.

One evening she gave her testimony at a church in Munich, and after the service a man approached her. She immediately recognized him - he was the former S.S. prison guard who stood at the shower room at Ravensbruck. It was the first time that she had come face-to-face with one of her former jailers, and it brought back awful memories - the beatings and torture and shame-inducing humiliation she felt when she and the other women in the camp were forced to strip and shower in front of the mocking faces and leering eyes of the prison guards.

As they stood facing one another in the church that evening, the guard spoke to Corrie and said, "How grateful I am for your message, fraulein. To think that, as you said, God has washed my sins away!" Then he extended his hand towards Corrie.

Although Corrie had just spoken about God's love and the need to forgive, she couldn't find it within herself to shake hands with this man. All she could feel was a wave of anger, hatred and desire for revenge sweep over her. But then, just as quickly, the Holy Spirit reminded her of the sinfulness of those desires and reminded her that the former prison guard was a man that Jesus loved as much as He loved Corrie - and that Christ had died for him, to forgive his sins. Silently, Corrie prayed, "Lord Jesus, I can't forgive him. Give me your forgiveness."

And then Corrie's hand began to move, and she took hold of the hand off her former tormentor. And something happened that Corrie never expected - she felt as if a current passed through their hands, and in that moment God filled her with His love and gave her the power to forgive.

As Haddon Robinson, a great Bible teacher and preacher of the Gospel said, "We are never closer to God's grace than when we admit our sin and cry out for pardon. We are never more like God than when we, for Christ's sake, extend forgiveness fully and freely to those who have sinned against us."