

A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expositional Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**

Chapter 11- Luke 11:1-13

211- Lord, Teach Us to Pray- Part 4

July 21, 2013

Luke 11:1-13

1 It happened that while Jesus 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."

2 And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.

3 'Give us each day our daily bread.

4 'And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

5 Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves;

6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him';

7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you *anything*.'

8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him *anything* because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs.

9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

11 Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?

12 Or *if* he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?

13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

To the Glory of God

Now today and for the next several weeks I want to zero in on verse 4- so let's read that verse again together:

And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us...

So we are told to pray like this; or after this manner. Now there is an expanded version of this same prayer over in **Matthew 6-** and the part that deals with forgiveness says this:

Matthew 6:12,14&15

12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Now there are not now and there never have been and there never will be any unforgiving people in Heaven. Not a single one. Forgiveness is the hallmark of Christianity- it is the calling card of the New Birth- it is part and parcel to being saved. Forgiveness is what we do. Christians forgive. Christians let it go. The Power of the indwelling Holy Spirit enables genuine believers to not harbor grudges and so in the Power of the Holy Spirit and to the Glory of God- truly born again souls do not hold things against other people.

Genuine believers follow after Jesus and by God's Grace- they seek to resist the indoctrination and the imposition of beliefs and practices and mind- sets that this fallen and pagan world desires to influence us with. We stand boldly and openly against things like abortion and sexual sins and infidelity and the love of money with pretty good regularity. And we speak out against the wicked and

destructive influence that Darwinian Evolution and radical feminism have sought to have on us and our culture.

But many times- we stand silent about the sin of unforgiveness- and then we make cop- out statements that are designed to justify our sin like, *“Well, I’m just not there”*, or *“I really don’t have a problem forgiving somebody until they do me wrong”*. I hope that after today- we will never allow unforgiveness to have a hold on our lives again.

I would respond to those who seek more power to cast out devils and to perform miracles or to enact physical healings with simply their spoken word that we are never more like God than when we forgive. We are never exemplifying the true breathtaking Power of the risen Lord than when we let grievances go and when we allow men who have hurt us to live in peace with us.

Therefore - I do not believe that being spiritual is measured by some mystical account or by some personal experience that is supernatural or by how many people I have raised from the dead. I believe that being spiritual is nothing more nor less than me struggling against the lusts of my flesh by the Power of the Holy Spirit to be found humbly and joyfully submitted to the Authority of Scripture in my daily life- all to the Glory of God. I believe that being spiritual is when I truly delight myself in Jesus Christ and when His Commandments are not grievous to me but are, in fact, the very *source* of my joy. I believe that being spiritual is when the love of money no longer has hold on me and when material possessions do not dominate my thoughts and when I prove that my treasure is in heaven and when the praise of men is not the primary thing I seek and when I am able to escape loving self and can live my life in the beauty of self- denial.

So let me repeat- there are not now and there never have been and there never will be any unforgiving people in Heaven. Not a single one. And yet unforgiveness troubles us all. So then who can be saved? With men this *is* impossible, but not with God. So how does this work? Do we rub the two sticks of our own will power and human effort together to produce forgiveness? Does God simply make us perfect in this life so that we *never* fail to forgive? Does He bring us to the point immediately where our response to every personal insult or injury is *never*- not for even a moment- resentment, anger, vengeance or self-pity? How do we walk in forgiveness?

To answer this question requires that I ask another question:

Is forgiveness *unique* among all that Jesus demanded from His disciples?

... in other words- is *our* forgiveness of other people the *quality* on which the Father's Forgiveness of our sins depends? In other words- do we *qualify* to receive the Father's forgiveness for our sins when we exhibit forgiveness toward the sins of others? Is that what Jesus teaches? And if so- if God does require us to forgive in order that we might be forgiven- isn't that an attempt at *earning* God's Forgiveness by what we do?

First of all – we must understand that *all* of Jesus' Commands must be met or we will perish. It is not just an unforgiving spirit which cuts a person off from God; it is *sin- any sin*.

For example- **Matthew 5:29** says:

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

And **Matthew 5:22** says:

... everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool', shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.

And **Matthew 5:43-48** says:

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'

44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And **Matthew 18:6** says:

... whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Over every single Command of Jesus stands the very same Divine Principle:

If you do not do this- you will not enter the Kingdom

... which is the same as saying that the Father will not forgive you. And lest we take this too lightly or try to brush this off- listen to what Jesus Himself said in **Matthew 7:21-23**:

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.

22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; **DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.**'

Now this passage is not in the Bible to simply condemn Pentecostals- because there were no Pentecostals when Jesus said it. Here Jesus is condemning something that He called, "**lawlessness**" which He defined as:

Lawlessness: *not* doing the Will of the Father

... which is the same thing as saying those who live in ongoing unrepented sin as a normal function of their daily lives. And Jesus said that those who do so are not saved; they have not been born from above and they still possess the old fallen Adamic nature that *loves* to sin and that *loves* to rebel against God and that *normally* operates in hostile rebellion to God and so they cannot enter into Heaven.

So the Command, “Forgive that you might be forgiven,” is just another way for Jesus to discuss the impossibility of Salvation and our great need for God’s Grace because for anyone to be in Heaven with God requires that we be just as holy and just as Righteous as God Himself.

So forgiving is not the exception- it is the rule. As Jesus says in **John 8:34b&35a**

34 ... everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

35 The slave does not remain in the house forever...

... or as the Apostle John says in his first letter,

1John 3:6, 9, &10a

6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.

9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God...

...and the Apostle Paul taught the same thing in **Galatians 5:19-21**

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,

20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,

21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

So when Jesus says,

“If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive you,”

... He is saying nothing different from what the whole New Testament affirms. In order for anyone to *earn* a place in Heaven or for anyone to *deserve* Salvation- in order for anyone to be *entitled* to receive

Forgiveness or for anyone to be *worthy* of Salvation- they must be just as Righteous and just as sinless and just as perfect as God Himself is.

So the only person who can enter into Heaven based upon what he has done for himself- is the person who has lived his entire life in perfect and continuous Righteousness in every thought, word, and deed 24 hours every day and seven days every week. Anything other than that is sin and anything other than that utterly disqualifies you from *earning* a place in Heaven. And of course- the only Person Who can qualify for that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So is this statement by Jesus about forgiving those who sin against us a demand for sinless perfection without which we will not be saved? If it were- then what sense would the petition,

“Forgive us our debts,”

... have? Or what sense would the admonition to confess our sins in **1John 1:9** have? If a disciple were by definition one who never committed any sin- then why would Jesus instruct him to pray,

Luke 11:4

Forgive us our sins

What “debts” or “sins” did Jesus imply that we would keep on committing? Did He mean all kinds of sins *except* the failure to forgive? No, God does not classify sins like that. So then we are correct to think that one of the “debts” for which we should keep on asking forgiveness from God is our unforgiving spirit and our failure to forgive.

But notice what happens if we substitute “our failure to forgive” for “debts” in this model prayer. It would go something like this:

“Forgive us *our failure to forgive* as we forgive our debtors.”

But this seems to be a contradiction, doesn’t it? The phrase:

... as we forgive our debtors”

... implies that we *do* forgive. And this petition,

“Forgive us our failure to forgive”

... implies that we do *not* forgive. So what do we do with this apparent contradiction? The solution is for us to recognize that the clause,

“as we forgive our debtors,”

... does not mean that the disciple *never* has moments when an unforgiving spirit has the ascendancy in his life. We must understand that it is not that *some* people forgive while others do not. Unforgiveness is the natural and normal state of being in the fallen race of Mankind. *Everybody* struggles with this issue.

So if Jesus said that we should pray that our debts be forgiven, and if one of those debts is a failure to forgive- then the phrase

“as we forgive our debtors”

... cannot be absolutized to imply that only a *perfectly* forgiving spirit can receive forgiveness from God because that would mean that our work and our labor to forgive others has qualified us to *earn* or *deserve* or *to be entitled* to receive Forgiveness from God- and that will never be.

Dear friends- there is one primary thing to remember about things like God’s Forgiveness and God’s Grace and God’s Mercy. Those things are *always undeserved* and they are *always* completely determined by God and the absolute Freedom of His Own Will. *Nobody* deserves to receive Mercy from God- ever at any time in his earthly existence- *nobody*. There is no human being who is ever at any time *entitled* to receive Forgiveness from God because he or she did something or carried out a Command of God or did something that was so pleasing to God that it moved God to grant Forgiveness. That is patently a Man-made Roman teaching concerning “*The Rite of Penance*” and is utterly unbiblical and false.

God alone determines who will receive Mercy and who will be granted Grace and who will be given Forgiveness and to what extent that Mercy and Grace and Forgiveness will be given and granted and that Divine Decision is entirely based upon the Sovereign Pleasure of

God- without any regard to how much or how little obedience is being carried out by the individual.

If in any way we are owed Mercy or if in any way we are entitled to receive Mercy or if in any way we have earned Forgiveness due to something we have done or not done- or if in any way God *owes* us Forgiveness or is *obligated* to give us Mercy and Grace- then Grace ceases to be Grace and Mercy ceases to be Mercy and Forgiveness ceases to be Forgiveness and these wonderful and precious things become nothing more than a payment for what we have worked hard to earn and they are no longer based on God's absolute Freedom but are based solely on God being obligated to pay us what He owes us.

For Grace to be Grace and for Mercy to be Mercy and For Forgiveness to be Forgiveness- they must always remain entirely free; they must remain absolutely within the sole Prerogative of God alone and they must be determined by nothing other than the Sovereign Delight and Pleasure of God. Please read what the Apostle John wrote was the cause or the catalyst or the origination of our Forgiveness from **1John 2:12:**

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

Now this statement by John is absolutely glorious! God forgives us! Halleluiah! Praise God- we may be forgiven by God! That is good news indeed- especially since we are all wicked sinners. And the word, **“For”** in this verse tells us *why* we are forgiven or what *precipitates* our forgiveness or what is the *cause* or the *reason* for our forgiveness. And what does John says as to *why* God forgives us? Because we *asked* Him to? No- even though we are told to ask. But that isn't the reason John gives. So is it because we need God to forgive us? No- even though it is absolutely true that we do need God to forgive us and without God forgiving us- we are all in really serious trouble because we will have to pay for our sins ourselves in hell throughout all eternity.

Well then surely we are forgiven because we have *done* something to earn it or we have stopped doing something that would stop us from deserving it? No- even though all sin is evil and we are told to both do something and stop doing something else.

Well then it must be that we are forgiven because we have labored hard and worked hard and become spiritual enough to forgive other people who have wronged us, right? No- even though forgiving other people is a requirement.

But if none of those things are the reasons why God forgives us- then what did John teach the reason was why God forgive us? Look again at **1John 2:12**:

... your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.

So we are forgiven for the very same reason why we are saved in the first place- for no other reason other than it pleased God to forgive us; it brings God delight to forgive us; and it glorifies God's great Name and Reputation to forgive us.

So based on all that we have learned so far- let's go back to the beginning. When Jesus told his disciples to pray for forgiveness "in the same way" or "to the same degree" or "even as" they forgive others He means that we should pray something like this:

"Father, forgive me for my failure today to forgive this person. I was irritable and wrapped up in myself and when he said what he said I flew off the handle at him and held a grudge all day- savoring in my mind how I might show him up, and keeping count of all the times he wronged me. But my conscience smote me this afternoon when God the Holy Spirit reminded me of Your constant Mercy toward me. So I was convicted of my sin and You gave me both the Desire and the Power to go to him and apologize. Oh, God- I do not desire to hold the grudge any longer against him. You have rid me of my selfish indignation and so I pray You will now forgive my failure to forgive that person today for Your Own name's Sake and grant me that I will not fall into that temptation again."

In other words, "**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors**" does *not* mean that we are unsaved if the old unforgiving part of our flesh that loves vengeance and that loves retaliation and that hates humility raises its ugly head periodically.

But what "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" *does* mean is that no one who cherishes a grudge against someone may dare approach God in search of Mercy or Blessing. This prayer forces us to

confess this sin- or in other words- agree with God that we have sinned and turn from it *first*.

Another way to look at this is to say that once we are saved- God treats us in accordance with the belief of our heart. So, for example- if we believe it is good and beautiful to harbor resentments and to tabulate wrongs done against us- and we go about seeking to justify ourselves in this sin rather than humble ourselves- then God will recognize that our plea for forgiveness is sheer hypocrisy- for we will be asking God to do what we believe to be bad.

So if we desire for God to forgive us for the wrongs we have done toward Him- it should only be because we honestly believe that for anyone to harbor unforgiveness against somebody is wrong and sinful. But if we truly believe that- it will force us to relinquish our unforgiveness toward others.

It is a very wicked thing to try to make God your patsy by asking Him to act in a way that you, as your action shows, think very lowly of. If we value forgiveness as something very important for God to give- then we must also value it as being important enough to give ourselves.

We must always be reminded that the New Covenant is not simply a better set of rules that we must strive to obey like the Jews did under the Old Covenant. That would never qualify as being “Good News”: because we would not be any better at obeying them than they were and we would live our lives condemned by God every minute of every day.

The New Covenant is all about God’s Grace and God’s Mercy and God’s Forgiveness in Jesus Christ precisely because we are not perfectly and continually obedient to God’s Law- and cannot ever be.

So like everything else in Jesus Christ- Forgiveness is not a human work that we carry out in our own strength by exercising the will power of our own mind so that we may in turn earn God’s forgiveness when we need it. No, this precious Commodity freely flows from a heart that has become broken and satisfied with the Mercy of God and that rejoices in the cancellation of our own debt that is too large for us to pay.

And with Man this is utterly impossible- but not with *God*. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:19**:

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

But the tree that endures and that will not be burned up does so only because it is planted by *God*. No one- saved or lost- can ever boast in his own self-wrought merit or obedience before God- and all who do so- are deceived.

The glorious New Covenant that is based upon infinitely superior Promises made by an infinitely superior High Priest; brought about by an infinitely superior Sacrifice is not the rigorous following of rules- but rather the admission of a poor and broken and humbled spirit that grows in its total reliance on God's Mercy. That is the only person who attains any standing before God.

But the great mystery to all of this is that the person who has, through mercy, been truly and genuinely and completely born from above cannot ever be the same any more. He *cannot* go on sinning as before since "the seed of God" is in him (**1John 3:9**). He walks not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (**Romans 8:4**), for he is led by the Spirit (**Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18**). God alone is Sovereignly at work in that person both to will and to do of God's Good Pleasure (**Philippians 2:13**).

So the answer to this mystery lies in the fact that when we do "forgive from the heart,"- it is completely and it is always the fruit of the Spirit- and not the work of our own hands. **Galatians 2:20** says:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Galatians 6:15 says that we are a new creation- and the mark or the sign or the proof or the fruit of our newness is not sinless perfection- but a persistent inclination to forgive and a quick repentance of our failure to do so and a steady petition toward God for Divine help and to disregard the sin that we are abandoning.

Dear friends- the greatest risk that we face today as a Church is not that we might not have enough fun or that we may lose an organ, or that we may lose our money, or that we may lose some members, or that we may lose some of our own reputations and prestige. No, the single greatest risk is that we may lose Heaven. Because one way to lose heaven is to hold fast to an unforgiving spirit and thereby prove

beyond any doubt that we have never been indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.

Jesus said if we hold fast to an unforgiving spirit- then we will not be forgiven by God because we are proving that we have not been broken and humbled by the acknowledgment of our own sinfulness. And if we continue on in that way without repentance and transformation- we will not go to heaven- because heaven is the dwelling place of only forgiven and forgiving people.

So holding fast to an unforgiving spirit does not prove that the other person has genuinely wronged us and that we are justified in not forgiving them. No, it only proves that we really do not trust Christ. Because if we truly trust Jesus- then we will not spurn His Way of life- we will strive to embrace it by Grace through Faith. Turn quickly to **Ephesians 4** with me.

30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

So based on what the Apostle Paul is teaching here- grieving the Holy Spirit of God is not about asking serious and legitimate questions about the wayward and unbiblical practices that some people carry out in the “name” of being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is not about “testing the spirits” to see if they are of God. It is not about holding what people say and what they teach accountable to the Authority of Scripture.

No, quenching the Holy Spirit of God is all about us keeping bitterness and wrath and clamor and slander close to us. It is all about *not* being kind to one another; it is that we are *not* tender hearted and that we do *not* forgive.

In other words- the knowledge of and the humble appreciation of God's Forgiveness towards us is *always* underneath our forgiveness of others- and creates it and supports it. So that if we don't give it to others—if we persist in living in an unforgiving spirit—what we show is

that God is not present in our lives and we are not trusting Him. And not trusting God will keep us out of heaven.

So that is why I say that the greatest risk we face as a Church in these days is the risk of losing heaven. Because whichever way we look right now at The Covenant of Peace Church- we are faced with the issue of forgiveness. Is there forgiveness for the Pastor and Elders? Is there forgiveness for those who are interested in being Deacons? Is there forgiveness for those who minister up here in song? Is there forgiveness for husbands and wives and for children and parents and for brothers and sisters? Forgiveness is a huge issue with which we have to deal.

And that is why I want to break the subject of Forgiveness down into three main issues:

1. What Is Biblical Forgiveness? How do you know when you are truly forgiving someone? What does Biblical Forgiveness include and what is excluded from it?
2. From Where Do We Obtain the Power to Forgive? What is it like to be forgiven by God through Christ? And how does that release forgiveness in us?
3. The Great Unshakable Vindication of our Forgiveness from God in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

So let's examine these together.

1. What Is Biblical Forgiveness?

Let me begin with a definition of forgiveness that we owe to each other. It comes from the Puritan- Thomas Watson who wrote a book about 300 years ago entitled, *"Body of Divinity"*. In that book- he is commenting on the Prayer that Jesus taught us to pray here in **Luke 11:4** that says we are to pray:

And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us...

And Watson responds to this by saying:

"Question: When do we forgive others?

Answer: When we strive against all thoughts of revenge; when we will not do our enemies mischief, but wish well to them, grieve at their calamities, pray for them, seek reconciliation with them, and show ourselves ready on all occasions to relieve them.”¹

I think this is a very Biblical definition of true forgiveness because each one of its parts comes from a passage of Scripture.

- ✓ Strive against thoughts of revenge: **Romans 12:19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord."**
- ✓ Don't seek to do them mischief: **1Thessalonians 5:15, "See that no one repays another with evil for evil."**
- ✓ Wish well to them: **Luke 6:28, "Bless those who curse you."**
- ✓ Grieve at their calamities: **Proverbs 24:17, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles."**
- ✓ Pray for them: **Matthew 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."**
- ✓ Seek reconciliation with them: **Romans 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."**
- ✓ Be always willing to come to their relief: **Exodus 23:4, "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him."**

So here is what forgiveness looks like:

When you feel that someone is your enemy or when you simply feel that you or someone you care about has been wronged- Biblical Forgiveness means:

- ✓ Resisting Revenge,
- ✓ Not Returning Evil for Evil,
- ✓ Wishing Them Well,
- ✓ Grieving at Their Calamities,
- ✓ Praying for Their Welfare,
- ✓ Seeking Reconciliation as Far as it Depends on You,
- ✓ Coming to Their Aid in Distress.

¹Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, p. 581

All these point to a forgiving heart. And the heart is all important because Jesus said in **Matthew 18:35**

... forgive your brother from your heart...

But now notice what is *not* there in this definition. Notice what forgiveness is not.

1. Not the Absence of Anger at Sin

Forgiveness is not the absence of anger at sin. It is not feeling good about what was bad.

I was on the phone yesterday with a pastor from out of state who told me about a woman in his church who, he noticed after he came to the church, never took Communion. He probed and found that 15 years earlier she had been separated from her husband because he repeatedly beat her and sexually abused their children. She said that every time she came to the Lord's Table she would remember what he had done and feel so angry at what it cost her children that she felt unworthy to take Communion. This was over a decade later. My pastor friend said to her, "You are not expected to feel good about what happened. Anger against sin and its horrible consequences is fitting up to a point. But you don't need to hold on to that in a vindictive way that desires harm for your husband. You can hand it over to him who judges justly (**1Peter 2:23**) again and again, and pray for the transformation of your husband."

So true Forgiveness is not feeling good about horrible things.

And he encouraged her to forgive him in this way, if she hadn't, and to take Communion as she handed her anger over to God and prayed for her husband.

2. Forgiveness is Not the Absence of Serious Consequences for Sin

Forgiveness is also not the absence of serious consequences for sin. In other words, sending a person to jail does not mean you are unforgiving to him. My pastor friend has also been part of putting two

of his members in prison for sexual misconduct. Can you imagine the stresses on that congregation as they come to terms with what forgiveness is!

Thomas Watson was helpful to me again on this point. He asks,

“Question: Is God angry with his pardoned ones?

Answer: Though a child of God, after pardon, may incur his fatherly displeasure, yet his judicial wrath is removed. Though he may lay on the rod, yet he has taken away the curse. Correction may befall the saints, but not destruction.”²

This gives us a pointer to how we may at times have to discipline a child in the home, or a leader in the church, or a criminal in society. We may prescribe painful consequences in each case, and not have an unforgiving spirit. And the Biblical evidence for this is found in numerous places:

- A. The Epistle to the Hebrews
- B. The Life of King David
- C. Numbers 14
- D. Psalm 99:8

The first example is in the book of **Hebrews**. On the one hand the book teaches that all Christians are forgiven for their sins; but on the other hand it teaches that our heavenly Father disciplines us, sometimes severely. For example- in **Hebrews 8:12** it says,

"I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

Then in **Hebrews 12:6, 10** it says,

Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives . . . [Our earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

² Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, p. 556

So our sins are forgiven and forgotten in the sense that they no longer bring down the wrath of a judge, but not in the sense that they no longer bring down the painful spanking of a Father.

Another example is found in the life of King David- the man after God's own heart (**1Samuel 13:14**). He committed adultery and killed Uriah. Nathan the prophet came with stinging words to him in **2Samuel 12:9** and said,

Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.

David is broken by this indictment and says (in verse 13), **"I have sinned against the Lord."** To which Nathan responds on behalf of God in verses 13& 14:

2Samuel 12:13&14

13 ... "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

14 "However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

... in fact Nathan says that the consequences of David's sin will be even greater- listen to **2Samuel 12:10-12**:

10 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

11 "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give *them* to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.

12 'Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'"

A third example is found in **Numbers 14** where Joshua and Caleb tell the people of Israel that they can indeed go up and possess the promised land. The people are angry and want to stone them and go back to Egypt. God intervenes and says to Moses that he is about to

wipe out the people and make him a nation greater and mightier than they (v. 12). But Moses pleads with God (in v. 19) for their forgiveness.

Numbers 14:19

Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

To which the Lord responds (in v. 20),

"I have pardoned them according to your word."

But this does not mean that there are no painful consequences for their disobedience. And in verse 21–23 God says,

Numbers 14:21-23

21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD.

22 "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice,

23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.

So they were forgiven but the consequence of their sin was that they would not see the promised land.

Psalm 99:8

Psalm 99:8 takes all these examples and sums them up like this:

**O LORD our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God to them,
And *yet* an avenger of their *evil* deeds.**

So forgiveness is not the absence of serious consequences for sin.

One last observation remains:

Forgiveness of an unrepentant person doesn't look the same as forgiveness of a repentant person.

In fact I am not sure that in the Bible the term forgiveness is ever applied to an unrepentant person. Jesus said in [Luke 17:3–4](#),

3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

So there's a sense in which full forgiveness is only possible in response to repentance.

But even when a person does not repent (cf. **Matthew 18:17**), we are commanded to love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us and do good to those who hate us (**Luke 6:27**).

The difference is that when a person who wronged us does not repent with contrition and confession and conversion (turning from sin to righteousness), he cuts off the full work of forgiveness. We can still lay down our ill will; we can hand over our anger to God; we can seek to do him good; but we cannot carry through reconciliation or intimacy. Thomas Watson said something very jolting:

“We are not bound to trust an enemy; but we are bound to forgive him.”³

So you can actually look someone in the face and say: *“I forgive you, but I don't trust you.”* That is what the woman whose husband abused her children had to say.

But O how crucial is the heart here. What would make that an unforgiving thing to say is if you were thinking this: What's more, I don't care about ever trusting you again; and I won't accept any of your efforts to try to establish trust again; in fact, I hope nobody ever trusts you again, and I don't care if your life is totally ruined. That is not a forgiving spirit. And our souls would be in danger.

The risk is high at Covenant of Peace right now. We all have people we need to forgive. We need very much to see Jesus and feel what it means to be forgiven our ten million dollar debt. I pray that the Lord will reveal that to us this week, and especially next Sunday.

Let's pray.

³ *Body of Divinity*, p. 581