

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Seeing and Delighting in Jesus through an Expository
Journey through the **Gospel of Matthew**

44- The Kingdom of Heaven and Its Citizens- Part 24
Secret Purity and Public Hypocrisy- Part 7

Church March 12, 2023

Matthew 6:1-24

1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

2 "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

3 "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

5 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

7 "And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

10 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

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

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

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.

16 "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face

18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Now you might want to know that I developed this Sermon from my *own* Effort to obey Jesus and pray, "*in this Way*". And so, as I spent time in Prayer and labored over the Issues or the Subjects that Jesus taught in this "*Prayer Guide*"- I began to write down my *own* thoughts- which I then developed into this Sermon.

Now as we examine what Jesus is teaching here in this Passage of what we call, the "*Sermon on the Mount*"- we see that Jesus is addressing four Topics:

1. Giving to the Poor (verses 2-4)
2. Praying (verses 5-15)
3. Fasting (verses 16-18)
4. Wealth (verses 19-24)

... and Jesus is teaching that the *new* people; of the New Covenant- who will inherit this *new* "Kingdom of Heaven"- will have the Attributes that He talks about here. And three weeks ago, we began looking at what Jesus taught about the wondrous Mystery of "Prayer"- and I want to *continue* this today.

Now two weeks ago, we found out several things that Jesus never taught. Such as:

1. There is no particular *Posture* in Prayer
2. There is no particular *Place* to pray
3. There is no particular *Time* to pray
4. There is no particular *Attitude* in Prayer

... but what Jesus DID teach is that there are certain things about Prayer that matter to God like:

1. We MUST pray (in Faith-believing)
2. We MUST be *genuine* in our Prayers (not Hypocritical)
3. We MUST pray about the Issues that matter to God (God's Will)
4. We MUST pray so that God alone is glorified

... and the Issues or the Subjects that are *paramount* to God are what Jesus taught here in verses 9-13, when He said:

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'

And based on what Jesus taught here- we can say that we are NOT to merely *memorize* these words and then *repeat* them in Church. Instead, what Jesus taught in verses 9-13 are the Subjects or the Issues that matter the most to God. And so, they should matter the most to us as well. So, ...

- We are to pray about God being the Believer's heavenly Father
- We are to pray that God's Name is to be Hallowed in all we think and do and want and pray about
- We are to pray about God's Kingdom coming to this earth in fullness
- We are to pray that God's Will is done on the earth to the same extent and with the same urgency that God's Will is done in Heaven
- We are to pray about God supplying that which we need for that day
- We are to pray about the Connection of God forgiving our Sins with the Ability that we have to forgive those who have sinned against us
- We are to pray that God will NOT lead us into Temptation

- We are to pray that God will deliver from the Evil one and what the Evil one has to offer us
- We are to pray that God will make us aware that we ask all of this precisely because we know and understand that the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory belongs ONLY to God alone

... and as I told you before- it is perfectly proper for us to pick one or more Parts of this “Guide” and pray about that Issue for a day or a week or a month or even a whole year! What does NOT bring God any Glory- is for us to merely *parrot* these words in Church- without actually crying out to God about the Issues themselves.

Now before I get into the main focus of my Sermon this morning- I want to *remind* you of what Prayer is all about. Over the Centuries- this wonderful Gift- this “*Means of Grace*” called, “*Prayer*” has been *co-opted* by the leaders of the visible Church- *especially* here in America- to become another “*Man-centered*” Enterprise of modern Christianity. And through Books and various Teachings- the sheep of God’s Pasture have been taught how human beings can *impose* our will on God; and how we can make *demands* on God- which, in effect, makes God to be nothing more than our own personal “*Cosmic Puppet*” or a “*Divine Tool*”- that we can *use* to get whatever our heart craves for.

And with all due respect to those who are very sincere, but who have been caught up in this perversion of Prayer- much of what is being taught about Prayer today and the way that Prayer is being exercised by far too many, who claim to be saved- is Blasphemy!

We need to understand that Prayer was God’s idea. And the main *function* of Prayer; the *end Result* of Prayer- like everything else God has given us- is about God and NOT primarily about us. So, Prayer is about God being Glorified; and about us being so transformed (by what God alone does for us) that we actually desire God’s Will MORE than we desire our own will. And that means that Prayer is NOT *ultimately* about us simply asking God for things. And that also means that Prayer is certainly NOT about us trying to change God’s Mind or twist God’s Arm behind His back- so He will give us what we *want*.

Prayer is FIRST about you and I *discovering* God’s Will. And the *primary* Way we find out what God’s Will is- is to read and study the Scriptures. But Prayer is also, *secondly*, about us being transformed- as we seek God’s Will- to the point where we begin to desire God’s Will MORE than we want our *own* will. And that takes time- because, many times, we either don’t *understand* God’s Will or we really don’t *want* it. Sadly, there are times, before we ever begin to pray- that we have *already* figured out what it is that we want from God. And so, we see Prayer as merely the “*Way*” or the “*Means*” by which we can convince God to do for us what we already want.

Now I have told you many times, that God didn't *have* to set Prayer up like this- but the Bible teaches that He did. And this Way with Prayer is *irrevocable*. In other words, God will NOT move any other Way- until Jesus comes back. So, what is Prayer about? Prayer is about these five things:

1. God desires to do certain things in the earth
2. God has chosen to do those things- ONLY in *response* to answering the Prayers of His people
3. So, we are to pray that God will do- that which He has already said He wants to do
4. If God's people do NOT pray- God will NOT move- even though it is His Will to do those things
5. But because it IS God's Will to do those things- God will *assure* that His people pray to that End

... which is what I call, the "*Pattern of Prayer*". And THAT is *why* Jesus gave us this Model that we call, the "*Lord's Prayer*".

Now I realize that, if you have never heard anyone say these things before- what I'm teaching about Prayer may sound strange to you. And so, last time- we went over a very important Passage in **Daniel 9**- that *proves* that what I am teaching here about the "*Pattern of Prayer*" is true. So, if you weren't here last time- you might want to get a copy of that Sermon.

I have already gone into great detail about the various Issues or Subjects that Jesus told us to pray about- so, today I want to focus on what Jesus taught in verses 14&15 when He said,

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 this Portion of what we call the "*Lord's Prayer*" has to do with the twins Issues of:

1. Forgiveness
2. Unforgiveness

... which are very important to God. And so, they should become very important to us as well.

And Jesus Himself tied in God's Forgiveness of *our* Sins against Him with *our* Forgiveness of those who sin against us when He taught this in **Matthew 6:12:**

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

... which is a part of the "*Pattern of Prayer*" we are to develop in our own Lives.

And the key phrase in verse 12 is: "**as we also have**"- which means: "*to the same extent*"; or "*in the same way*". So, we are to pay to God that He will forgive the Sins we have committed against Him- TO THE SAME EXTENT; or "IN THE SAME WAY that we forgive the Sins that others have committed against us. In other words, we are asking God to NOT forgive *us*- UNLESS we forgive *others*!

And then, Jesus elaborated on this Issue by what He taught in verses 14&15:

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

So, *how* are we to understand this? Well, to begin with- I would suppose that the spirit of "*Unforgiveness*"; our *unwillingness* to forgive those who sin against us- is probably one of the most *common* Sins that plague God's people. So, *most* people, who sit on the pews of the modern American Church are familiar with the Struggle to forgive other people. But as I previously told you- we are never more like God- than when we forgive those who have genuinely sinned against us. And we are never more like satan when we don't.

Now, in Context, Jesus was exposing yet another glaring absence of genuine Salvation and Holiness in the normal daily Life of the Scribes and Pharisees and other religious Leaders in Israel during the 1st Century. These men, who held themselves out as being THE most godly men on earth, were the very WORST kind of Sinner- because, according to Jesus- these men were "*religious Hypocrites*". And one of the most grievous Sins that were committed by the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots was their almost complete *Inability* and *Unwillingness* to forgive *anyone* who they had sensed crossed them- in any way. And the crowd that sat and listened to Jesus' Sermon that day- knew full well that Jesus was *specifically* referring to these unsaved Jewish Leaders.

And the Apostle Matthew, who wrote this Gospel Record *initially* to his Jewish brethren was *especially* keen on exposing these Frauds- so that his kinsmen would NOT be deceived by them. So, Matthew quoted Jesus, *more than any other biblical writer*, in calling these men, "**Hypocrites**" (**Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 15:17; 22:18; 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, & 29**).

But holding on to “*Unforgiveness*” sounds so ugly and dirty- so, Man developed words and phrases that try to “*dull the edge of the sword*” as it pertains to the Issue of Unforgiveness to make this horrible Sin to be less horrible and more acceptable, like: “*Holding a Grudge*”; or “*Not being able to let go*”. But the real Culprit here- is the ugly and dirty Sin of “Unforgiveness”. And we would do well to call it that.

Now it is evident, from reading the New Testament- that God thinks that Unforgiveness is not only a terrible Sin- but one which *causes* or *allows* several *other* Sins to exist and to flourish. And we need to get into this- if we are to understand why Jesus *elevated* this Sin like He did. And, of course, here, Jesus said that our Ability to be forgiven by God hinges on whether we are willing to forgive those who have genuinely sinned against us. So, we really need to examine this Issue.

It is also evident, from reading the New Testament, that God *expects* us to forgive. He *demand*s that we forgive. God *command*s His people to forgive. And our gracious God has one of the most frightening Punishments in mind for those who will not forgive others, that Jesus said in verse 15:

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

There is probably not a greater Punishment than for God to refuse to forgive us. Because without the merciful and gracious Forgiveness of God- we have NO Hope. But that is *exactly* the Punishment we shall receive if we hold on to Unforgiveness.

Now it should be obvious- but in case you haven't seen this yet- what Jesus is saying here- is that those who *refuse* to forgive will NOT go to Heaven- because Heaven is filled with ONLY *forgiven* people. We need to constantly remind ourselves that “Good” people do NOT go to Heaven- “forgiven” people do. So, if God *refuses* to forgive our Sins against Him (which are many)- we are doomed. So, this is a real big deal.

Now in case you have been deceived by the Heresy of “*Antinomianism*” (Lawlessness); or you know somebody who has- let me say to you- you *cannot* say, “*But I'm saved- so, it doesn't matter if I forgive or not.*” NO! You CANNOT separate the Reality of your Salvation from the Way you live your normal, daily Life. Saved people have *experienced* the Miracle of the New Birth; and they will live their lives as though that is true. The *dominating* Power of satan over their Lives has been destroyed (**1John 3:8**) and so, they are no longer cruelly “*driven*” to fulfill the Lusts of their Flesh. They now live their Lives to God's Glory- by being lovingly “led” by the Spirit of God (**Romans 8:14**).

So, the Way to understand this- is to say, “*If you were saved- you would have a new, divine Nature- which would empower you to forgive.*” In other words, Jesus is teaching here what real Salvation looks like in the Lives of every-day, normal Believers.

Now keep in mind that the religious Hypocrites of Jesus’ Day (*the Scribes, Pharisees; Sadducees; Essenes; and Zealots*) WERE deceived about themselves. And they thought; and they said; they believed; and they taught that, because of “*who they were*” (supposedly Abraham’s Children)- that it didn’t matter how they lived their Lives. So, they honestly thought they were free to live utterly grotesque Lives- filled with blatant Sin and Corruption- and still be in “*Right Standing*” with God.

But from Chapter 5 all the Way to Chapter 7- in what we call, the “*Sermon on the Mount*”- Jesus teaches that these people were deceived about their Relationship with God- because all of the Issues that Jesus raises in this “Sermon”; all of the Attributes and Characteristics and Actions- have to do with the every-day normal Behavior of these religious Frauds.

So, in this Sermon, Jesus is teaching what the Attributes and Characteristics of the *new* “people of God”; who are part of the *New Covenant*; who will inherit this *new* “*Kingdom of Heaven*”- are. And those who do not measure up to the Standards that Jesus raises in this Sermon will NOT be a part of God’s Kingdom- precisely because they are proving, beyond a shadow of a doubt, by the “*bad Fruit*” of their Lives- that they are NOT “*Abraham’s Children*” (**John 8:38-59**). And that is *why* Jesus said this in **Matthew 5:20**:

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

... and so, *everything* in this Sermon (**Matthew 5-7**)- *including* what Jesus is teaching here about Prayer- is about what that “*surpassing Righteousness*” looks like.

So, while these religious Leaders were absolutely “*natural Jews*”- they were NOT “*spiritual Jews*” (**Romans 2:28&29**). And while they could trace their own personal lineage back to “*Father Abraham*”- they had NEVER been a part of “*God’s Family*”; and were wholly “*Gentiles*” (*Unbelievers*) as far as Jesus was concerned. So, the “*Divine Expectation*” for us to be a people, who are eager and able to forgive- is set against the Contrast of these men, who were *unforgiving* and *unmerciful* to their Core. And that is *why* the Command for us to forgive is NOT alleviated by us simply saying, “*Well, I’m just not there, yet*”.

My dear brothers and sisters, the single greatest Risk we face as a Church in these Days is NOT that we might lose a musician; or that we might lose money; or

that we might lose Members; or even that we might lose some or all of our Reputation. No, the greatest Risk is that we may lose Heaven. Because one sure Way to lose Heaven- is for us to hold fast to an unforgiving Spirit- and thereby prove that we have never been indwelt by the Spirit of Christ for a single day.

The Lord, Who gave us some of the most beautiful and precious Promises that have ever been uttered on this earth is the SAME Lord, Who said,

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 last time, we looked at several Aspects or Attributes or Characteristics of what it looks like when we truly forgive those who have wronged us or who have sinned against us.

So, today- I want to look at what Forgiveness is NOT. So, please notice what is NOT in this Definition of Forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness is NOT the Absence of Anger at Sin

Forgiveness is NOT us feeling Good about what was Evil. So, for example, when a Woman *refuses* to take Communion because she remembers that, 20 years ago- she was separated from her Husband because he *repeatedly* beat her and *sexually* abused her Children- we should go to that dear lady and tell her that it is correct and proper to think of his Actions as being evil Sin.

It is precisely because she IS a Believer that every time she prepares to take the Lord's Table- she remembers what he did to them; and she feels so angry at what it cost her children that she feels *unworthy* to take Communion.

But what should be spoken mercifully in a Situation like that- is that saved people are NEVER expected to feel Good about an Evil that happened. And so, Anger against Sin and its horrible Consequences is fitting- *but ONLY up to a point*. Because there is a Line that you must not cross. Because when you cross that Line- your Anger is now hurting you.

So, we must strive to NOT hold on to that Anger in a *vindictive* Way that would desire Harm to come to the guilty person. What will help- is to hand that person over to God- Who ALWAYS judges *justly* (1Peter 2:23)¹ and to pray for the *transformation* of the guilty one. And what will also help- is for her to take Communion- not stay away from it.

2. Forgiveness is NOT the Absence of Serious Consequences for

¹ ... and to hand that person over to the Authorities.

Sin

Having a person arrested or even sending a person to Jail does NOT mean you are “Unforgiving” to them. And Thomas Watson was helpful to me again on this Point. He asked,

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 ultimate 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 yet NOT have an “*Unforgiving Spirit*”. And the biblical Evidence for this is found in numerous places.

One 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 also teaches that our heavenly Father disciplines us, sometimes severely. In **Hebrews 8:12** it says, “**I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE.**” But then in **Hebrews 12:6,10** it also says,

FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.”... they [our earthly Fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

So, our Sins are forgiven and forgotten in the sense that they no longer bring down the Wrath of the great Judge. But they are still held against us in the sense that they may bring down the painful Spanking from a loving 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 had her husband (Uriah) killed. Nathan the Prophet came to David with stinging words in **2Samuel 12:9**, **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.**

... and David was broken by this “Divine Indictment” and said (in verse 13),

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

"I have sinned against the Lord."

... to which Nathan responded on behalf of God,

The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

But even though God had forgiven David and **"taken away his Sin"**-
Nathan also said (in verse 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.

... and that would be Bad enough. But then Nathan said that the Consequences of David's Sin would be even *worse* than his child dying (Verses 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 told the people of Israel that they could go up and possess the Promised Land. The people were angry and wanted to stone their Leaders and go back to Egypt. God intervened and said 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 (acting as a Type of Christ) pleaded (interceded) with God (in v. 19) for their Forgiveness.

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.

... and the Lord responded (in v. 20),

I have pardoned them according to your word;

... yet that did NOT mean that there were no painful Consequences for their Disobedience. So, in verse 21–23 God *also* said,

**21 ... 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.

Now **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.

3. Forgiveness does NOT mean that what they did was “Okay” or that they “get away with it”

One of the biggest misconceptions about Forgiveness is that when we tell people to forgive- many think we are saying that what someone did to them was “*Okay*” or that it didn’t matter; and that we are saying that the Guilty person is NOT going to pay a Price for his Sin- but will “get away with it”. We are NOT saying that. There is NO Sin that is “okay”. All Sin MUST be paid for- even ours. The Issue is that by forgiving those who have wronged us- we are trusting the sovereign God to adjudicate the Issue- as ONLY He can. We need to remember that *nobody* ever gets away with *anything*- at least not in an *eternal* sense. All Sin will be either covered by Jesus’ Blood for the saved or the unrepentant Sinner will pay for his own Sin in Hell- forever.

So, *nobody* gets away with *anything*. But the Issue is the condition of our *own* heart. If we are to spend all of Eternity with God in Heaven- our heart MUST be clean. And holding on to Unforgiveness keeps our heart dirty.

To trust that God will handle all things perfectly is godly, biblical Faith. I mean we want God to hold our immortal souls in His Hands- can we not trust Him to handle these various Situations? But in order to do that- we must “*let go*” of the Desire to punish the Guilty; stand aside; and trust and believe and hope that God

sees all things; knows all things; and will bring about perfect Vengeance against those who harm God's people.

There is no more comforting Place in all the Universe for the Righteous than to be in God's Hands; and there is no Place in all the Universe that is more frightening to the unrepentant than to be in God's Hands.

4. What about the Forgiveness of an *Unrepentant* Person?

People ask me about this all the time. So, let me say this on the front end, "Forgiveness of an *unrepentant* Person does NOT 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 a single time to an *unrepentant* Person. Yet Jesus said this 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 what, at least, *appears* to be genuine Repentance. And I say, that because we have a problem with other people's Repentance. Because we never really know if their Repentance is genuine or not. For example, how do we know if a person has "turned away" (repented) from having wicked thoughts about another person? We can't see another person's heart- so, all we can do is to trust that if he asks us to forgive him- we should take that at face value- *until we have a reason not to*. And that is what Jesus meant in **Luke 17:4** when he said,

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

Now there is very good reason to say that this person's Repentance is NOT genuine- because he *continues* to sin against the same person. So, there is reason to say, "*If this man was truly repentant- he wouldn't keep committing the same Sins against the same person.*" And I would guess that many in this Sanctuary this morning have, at least, *thought* this about other people before. And yet, Jesus' Response here is crystal clear:

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

But doesn't Jesus know that some people just play games and the only "Sorry" they have- is because they got caught? Sure, He does. John 2:25 says that Jesus knows what is "IN all Men". Yet He commands in Luke 17 that if a person asks you to forgive them- then forgive them- even if he has already asked several times before; and even if he keeps on doing the same thing!

So, does Jesus want us to be a sap, who doesn't hold people accountable for their Actions? Let me answer that Question with another Question. "Have any of us committed the SAME Sin repeatedly? Have any of us asked God to forgive us and then turned around and committed the SAME sin again?" So, should God forgive us? But even more important, did God forgive us when we asked Him to?

So, even when it comes to the Sincerity of a request to forgive- we should NOT hold somebody else's "*Human Hypocrisy*"³ against them unless we hold ours against ourself. Yet even when a person does NOT repent of the Sin they have committed against us- and *remains* our "Enemy"- we are *commanded* to do three things "for" and "to" them:

1. Love them
2. Pray for them
3. Do good to them

The Difference is that when a person who wronged us does not repent with "Contrition"; "Confession"; and "Conversion" (turning from Sin to Righteousness), he cuts off the *full* Work of Forgiveness from himself. But we can still lay down our ill Will; we can still hand over our Anger to God; and we can still seek to do him Good. But, because he has not repented- we cannot carry through with Reconciliation or personal Intimacy. Thomas Watson said something very jolting:

"We are not bound to trust an enemy; but we are bound to forgive him."⁴

... and that means you can actually look someone, who has sinned against you but who has *not* repented- in the face and say: "*I forgive you, but I don't trust you.*"

But O how crucial the heart is here! What would make this an *unforgiving* thing to say is if you were thinking something like 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*

³ "*Human Hypocrisy*" is the Reality that, because we are not sinlessly perfect- we are all, technically, "*Hypocrites*" in that we say and do contrary to the way we believe. That is different from "*Blatant Hypocrisy*" which doesn't care how we live our Lives.

⁴ Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, p. 581

if your life is totally ruined.” That is NOT a “forgiving Spirit”. And if that were your thoughts- *your* soul would be in grave Danger.

The way I would put it is like this: If the Forgiveness that we received at the Cost of the shed Blood of the Treasure of the Universe- Jesus Christ- is so *weak* and *ineffective* in our hearts that we are *incapable* of letting Grudges and Bitterness against someone go- then we are *proving* that we are not a “*Good Tree*”. In other words, we are proving, by *refusing* to forgive- that we have never really experienced the Miracle of the New Birth. Those with the new, divine Nature don’t *continually* hold Grudges. We can’t- because we cherish Forgiveness too much. So, if someone lays claim to be saved and yet they don’t *trust* in this Forgiveness; they don’t *embrace* and *treasure* this Forgiveness- then they are “*Blatant Hypocrites*” and are just like the Scribes and Pharisees.

And they are *proving* that they’re just *mouth*ing the words of Scripture. Their *unwillingness* to forgive testifies loudly that they do NOT value the Salvation that God graciously gave to them through the *crushing* of His Son on their behalf.

How in the world could *any* of us hold Unforgiveness in our hearts against anyone when WHATEVER they did against us *pales* in comparison to what we have done against God- and yet God has forgiven us?

So, this is why I teach that we are NOT to merely memorize the Words of this Prayer and then repeat them in Church. We are to really cry out to God about the various Issues of this prayer Guide; and then *agonize* over each Area where we are weak; or where our Flesh seems to have the upper hand for the moment.

And we are to remember that Jesus spoke these words right in front of the religious Hypocrites of His Day to draw a clear line in the sand between those *new* people; who are a part of the *new* Covenant; who will inherit this *new* Kingdom of Heaven and the religious Frauds of that day- who *hated* Jesus; and who *refused* to repent; and who, from this moment until the End of this Gospel Record become more and more Hostile toward the incarnate God, Who is the Glory of God- personified.

And that is our Challenge today. We must NOT merely know *about* Jesus. We must NOT merely be able to repeat Scripture. And we must NOT lay claim to all sorts of biblical Promises while the Way we live our Lives testifies that we are NOT born again.

We MUST be “in Union” with Jesus Christ through the Miracle of the New Birth. And we MUST know the Truth and believe the Truth and love the Truth. And we MUST prove beyond any doubt that we are the children of God by Adoption; that we are the sons and daughters of Abraham and heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant; and that we are citizens of this new Kingdom of Heaven- because of the way we give to the Poor; because of the way we fast; because of

having a correct Relationship with Wealth; and we must prove that we have been forgiven for our many Sins that we have committed against God- because by God's Grace; and to God's Glory; we have forgiven those who have sinned against us!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.