

Christ's Twofold Estate

Lesson 10: A Prayer for Forgiveness, Lk 23.24

- I. What exactly is forgiveness? It is God's gracious discharge of a believing penitent from the guilt of all his sins for Christ's sake.
 - A. It's God's discharge. God alone can forgive sin, Mk 2.7, because the principal wrong is done to Him, Ps 51.4; Js 2.10-11; cf. Mt 6.12.
 - B. It's God's gracious discharge, Isa 43.25; Ezk 36.31-32. God doesn't expect any satisfaction from us because He's provided a Surety, a Satisfier, in whom He's fully satisfied, Eph 1.7; Mk 1.11; Acts 2.24; Isa 53.12.
 - C. It's God's gracious discharge of a believing penitent sinner, Acts 13.39; Lk 24.46-47. Repentance can't earn forgiveness, but it is the determined method by which God dispenses forgiveness, Lk 13.3.
 - D. It's God's gracious discharge of a believing penitent for Christ's sake, Rom 4.25. Christ alone is the meritorious cause of pardon, 1Jn 1.7.

- II. From God's forgiveness of us, we learn that *to forgive those who wrong us is the true character of a Christian*, Eph 4.32; Col 3.12-13. This is what Christ requires of us all, Mt 5.44-45; 6.14-15.
 - A. The nature of this duty:
 1. Christian forgiveness *is not*:
 - a) a Stoic insensibility to wrongs and injuries. We are allowed to be sensible of wrong and of evil and of injury, but we are not allowed to avenge ourselves by moral evils.
 - b) a polite concealment of our anger because we think we have no choice in the matter.
 - c) a moral virtue. The world knows something of forgiveness as a virtue and enjoys a measure of peace because of it. But the forgiveness to which Christians are called is a Christlike grace and requires a changed nature.
 - d) a surrendering of our rights and properties to the lusts of everyone who has a mind to invade them. We may lawfully defend our lives and properties, but when legal assistance fails us we must not then seek to avenge them unchristianly.
 2. Christian forgiveness *is*: a gentleness of spirit that freely passes by injuries done to us in obedience to God's command.
 - a) It is a gentleness of spirit, Col 3.12-13; Gal 5.22.
 - b) It is a gentleness of spirit that inclines us to pass by injuries. We don't retain them bitterly in our minds, or avenge them when we have opportunity, but we pass them by.
 - c) It is a gentleness of spirit that freely passes by injuries in obedience to God's command, Eph 4.32; Col 3.13.
 - B. The excellence of this duty is that it points to the excellence and glory of the religion of Christ. Christianity teaches us to receive evil and return good (1Cor 4.12-13; Rom 12.17-21) as an evidence of a truly changed nature and as an evidence of our union with Christ and His holiness, 2Pet 1.3-4; 1Pet 1.14-16.

- III. Application
 - A. There is forgiveness with God for all who have been enemies to Christ, 1Tim 1.12-16. And if God is ready to pardon His enemies who repent, surely He will pardon His children who repent, Mk 3.28.
 - B. Since God pardons His enemies, it's inexcusable to continue in enmity to Christ. If you perish as an enemy to Christ, then your blood lies at your own door, Mt 11.28; Pr 1.22-33.

- C. Nothing is more opposed to the Christian spirit than strife, revenge, retaliation, and quarrels. The rule by which we walk is this: as far as it depends upon us, we're to be at peace with all men; and to those who wrong us, by God's grace we forgive them and leave room for God's wrath, Rom 12.18-19. One of the first effects of the gospel is to civilize people, cf. Js 4.1-2; Mt 5.38-45.
- D. It is a dangerous thing to abuse a Christian's forgiveness. Their patient and forgiving spirit invites some people to take advantage of them; but nothing should be more frightening than this reality: they may not seek revenge, but the Lord will avenge them, Js 5.7; 1Pet 2.23; Mt 23.34-36.