

RESOLUTION: THE NECESSITY AND POWER OF FORGIVENESS

We come now to the fourth point of our study in the Model Prayer. Our Lord teaches us in Matthew 6:12 to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” This is perhaps the most determinative part of the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. It is at this point, sweet communion between us and our Lord (and people) will continue. It is at this point where the very answers to prayers are determined. This truth is stated in Psalm 66:18: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Also in Isaiah 59:2: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” It is the only part of the Model Prayer that has an addendum (Matthew 6:14, 15), which earmarks the importance of forgiveness.

In its rough state, a diamond is fairly unremarkable in appearance, but when cut in such a way to present brilliant reflective facets, the beauty that our Creator placed within the diamond is not only exposed, but placed on display as a jewel of rarest quality. To personalize this prayer, we need to consider three facets that, like a cut diamond, will allow the beauty of our Lord to shine through.

I. CONFESSION TO GOD

“And forgive us our debts...” (Matthew 6:12a). God does not get soft with us here. He declares us as sinners who need forgiveness. This is the time to incorporate the prayer of David in Psalm 139:23, 24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Leviticus 4:2 says, “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which ought not to be done....” The rest of Leviticus 4:2 through 4 points out that for these sins an innocent bullock must die. By the same token Christ died for our sins, even those subtle deceitful sins that flew under the proverbial radar of our remembrance or recognition. As we meditate on these words in our prayer, God will often reveal to us those things we need to deal with. Romans 8:26a, 27a says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought...And He that searcheth the hearts....” I Corinthians 2:10 tells us, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

When asked to interpret Pharaoh's dream, Joseph declared in Gen. 41:16b "...It is not in me...."

When God reveals something as sin we need to remember James 4:17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." When sin is revealed, our response should be to claim John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If we don't confess our sin, we attempt to excuse our sin as Romans 2:15b says, "...the mean while accusing or else excusing one another...." And at this point, if we don't deal with our sin, a very serious infraction takes place; we cover our sins as spoken of in Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." And it is important to add, that when confession is genuine, there is a willingness to forsake sin.

II. COMPASSION TO OTHERS

Not only are we required to receive forgiveness from our Lord, we are required to give this forgiveness to others: "...as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12b). To reemphasize this truth, it is the only part of the prayer that has an immediate commentary and clarification (Matthew 6:14, 15). Matthew 18:21-35 is a parable showing the seriousness of proffering forgiveness. If we are dealt wrongly, even then we should be willing to take the initiative in offering the forgiveness of God as Jesus prayed while dying for our sins. See Luke 23:34: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." No one was saying I'm sorry at the foot of the cross. In Acts 7:60 we observe Stephen echoing the cry from Calvary while being stoned to death, "And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." Ephesians 4:32: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Colossians 3:13: "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

Forgiving others means we bless those who do us harm (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:14-21). Forgiveness is given on the grounds of unconditional love. Forgiveness is not something we do that encourages God (in return for our kindness) to make the offenders suffer on our behalf. Forgiveness is not saying we forgive, yet not willing afterwards to have anything to do with the offenders. Remember, forgiving others is not an option; it is a requirement.

It is at this place in my prayer time that I ask God to reveal any animosity in my heart toward any person and if revealed, I confess it as sin and pray the blessing of God upon them.

III. CONTROLLED TEMPERAMENT

This is the perfect place to pray proactively. When we pray on a regular basis for forgiveness as well as the grace to forgive others, there will come a time when our conscience is clear and we can say with Paul in Acts 24:16, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Understand three principles that will help us keep our conscience clear of offense toward God and man.

A. Nothing righteous comes from my loss of temper.

James 1:19,20: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

B. God is willing to help us guard our speech.

Psalm 141:3: "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

James 3:5, 6, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell."

Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer." In Emerson Eggerich's new book, "Before You Hit Send," he suggests there are four questions to ask ourselves before we communicate with anyone. We should ask: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? Is it clear?

C. Determine to forgive before the offense comes.

Psalm 119:165: "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

Conclusion:

In the history of music, few families have had such a prolific display of musical compositions and performance as the Strauss family. Can you imagine what it was like to have Johann, Johann, Jr., Josef and Eduard all under the same roof? In the midst of the great creative personalities lay an equally great sense of humor. The traditional practical joke of the family occurred when the last Strauss would come in for the night while the others were still in bed. Just before retiring, the last Strauss up would go to the piano and play the ending portion of his own or his brother's composition and stop just one measure or note short of completion and walk upstairs and go to bed. Sometimes the response was immediate, but

usually there would be a long wait, maybe up to an hour or longer until inevitably one of the Strausses would get up, go to the piano and complete the piece. They all would laugh and then all could go to sleep, but not until resolution took place.

In the middle of the Model Prayer it is important to remember that we are not going to go further and deeper with God unless we have resolution in forgiveness.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.