

The Forgiveness of Jesus

On one occasion during Jesus' ministry, the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. Divine inspiration must have prompted the question, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given by which they could know the God to whom Jesus prayed. Jesus answered: "Therefore, you are to pray after this manner: '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 forgive our debtors.** And lead us not into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen' " (Matt. 6:9-13).

Verse 12 is of particular importance. The record in Luke 11:4 is even more emphatic. It reads, "And forgive us our sins, **as we ourselves also forgive everyone** who is indebted to us." Afterward, Jesus explained to the disciples: "For **if you forgive** men their trespasses, **your heavenly Father will also forgive you.** But **if you do not forgive** men their trespasses, **neither will your Father forgive your trespasses**" (Matt. 6:14-15).

These are strong words. Jesus said that salvation is dependent upon *forgiving* those who have transgressed against us because God will not forgive us if we refuse to grant others the same. Without God's forgiveness, there is no eternal life. Jesus spoke at great length about forgiving others during His Sermon on the Mount; yet what He requires is undoubtedly most difficult to achieve: "But I say to you who hear, **love your enemies, and do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other *cheek* also; and if anyone takes your cloak, do not forbid your coat also. Give to everyone who asks you; and if anyone takes what *is* yours, do not ask *for it* back.** And exactly as you would have men do to you, you do the same to them also. But if you love *only* those who love you, what praise is it to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good *only* to those who are doing good to you, what praise is it to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive, what praise is it to you? For even sinners lend to sinners, that they may receive as much again. **But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be *the* children of the Highest; for He is good to the unthankful and *the* wicked.** Therefore, you also be compassionate, *even* as your Father is compassionate. And do not judge *others*, so that you yourself will not be judged in any way. Do not condemn *others*, so that you will not be condemned in any way. **Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.** Give, and it shall be given to you. Good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom. **For with the same measure that you mete out, it shall be measured again to you**" (Luke 6:27-38).

The two words *forgive* and *forgiven* in verse 37 come from the Greek word *apoluo*, which means "to free fully, release, dismiss, or (figuratively) let die, pardon." God's forgiveness is not partial; it is complete and without reservation. It means letting the offense "die." We, too, must learn to forgive fully. To understand what this means, notice the example of Christ: "And when they came to the place called *Place of a Skull*, there they crucified Him and the malefactors, one on *the* right and one on *the* left. Then Jesus said, '**Father, forgive them,** for they do not know what they are doing.' And as they divided His garments, they cast lots" (Luke 23:34).

Perhaps the most incredible act that Jesus did on earth is recorded here. He was betrayed and condemned following an illegal trial; then, though innocent, He was humiliated and beaten

so cruelly and mercilessly that He was unrecognizable (Isa. 52:14). Thereafter He was murdered by crucifixion. As He was hanging upon the cross enduring torment that few have ever experienced (and none who were completely innocent, as was Jesus), He said, “Father, forgive them.” To advocate such mercy through misery and suffering is astounding. Appealing for the lives of His tormentors at that moment truly defines the grace of God.

The word *forgive* in Luke 23:34 is the Greek *aphiemi* (the same word is used in Matthew 6:12). It means *to send forth* in the sense of separating. Jesus asked His Father to *separate* the offenses from those who crucified Him. In forgiving, Jesus was fulfilling a commandment and giving us an example. He was asking God to *remove* this sin so it was no longer attributed to them. “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He **removed** our transgressions from us” (Psa. 103:12).

Forgiveness is always a petition to God, asking Him to lay aside sin, whether it is our own sin or the sin of others—because all sin is against God (Psa. 51:4; I Cor. 8:12). Moreover, God requires that we ask Him to forgive *others* before He forgives us. And it doesn’t matter whether the one who caused the offense is aware of our appeal to God or not. Above all, our plea to God to forgive someone must be sincere, as the kind of forgiveness God requires is from the heart: “And in anger, his lord delivered him up to the tormentors, until he should pay all that he owed to him. Likewise shall My heavenly Father also do to you, **if each of you does not forgive his brother’s offenses from the heart**” (Matt. 18:34-35).

In forgiving those who crucified Him, Jesus knew that they didn’t understand who He was and what His death meant for them. How easy it is for anger to be our response to an offense, even if it was unintended. Not so with Jesus, because He came to this earth to *be* the sacrifice for sin. Truly, forgiveness is the measure of love in one’s heart.

The love of God is evident in this verse: “And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the book of life of the **Lamb slain from the foundation of the world**” (Rev. 13:8). The phrase “from the foundation of the world” literally means “from the founding of the cosmos (universe).” Even before man was created, God established a way to forgive the sins of mankind. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God’s love is so complete that Jesus was predestined to die for us so that forgiveness might be available to us—and this was determined even before man was given the breath of life.

Everything God has done proves His love and forgiveness. Even the name of Passover (meaning *pretermisison* or *to disregard intentionally*) reflects forgiveness. Jesus is called the Lamb of God (John 1:29, Rev. 5:6) because He was the Passover sacrifice. Love that produces such forgiveness is manifested in the willing sacrifice of His life. This is especially understood by those who reside in heaven: “And I saw and I heard *the* voices of many angels around the throne, and *the* voices of the living creatures and the elders, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing.’ And every creature that is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and those that are on the sea, and all the things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing, and honor, and glory, and sovereignty into the ages of eternity.’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen.’ And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped *Him Who* lives into the ages of eternity” (Rev. 5:11-14).

Ever notice in the book of Revelation that everyone—men and angels alike—uses only

Lamb when referring to Christ? They do not use the name of Jesus Christ or the Son of God. Why? The God who created all living things proved His love by His sacrifice. The angels who wander the earth are firsthand witnesses of all the terrible sins of mankind that Jesus is willing to forgive. Above all created beings, they comprehend the *love* that can forgive such horrors.

Partaking of the blood and body of Jesus Christ and renewing our covenant with God at Passover means preparing our hearts by *forgiving others* because forgiveness is the *measure* by which God forgives us. It is the outpouring of God's love and the gauge of the love that resides in our hearts.