

FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

On one occasion during His ministry, the disciples asked Jesus 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 Father to whom Jesus prayed.

MATTHEW 6:9-13 “In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father 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 forgive our debtors.** 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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 also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.** And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Afterward, Jesus explained to the disciples:

MATTHEW 6:14-15 “For **if you forgive** men their trespasses, **your heavenly Father will also forgive you.** 15 “But **if you do not forgive** men their trespasses, **neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

These are strong words. Jesus said that *salvation* is dependent upon forgiving those who have offended 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 and what He requires is undoubtedly most difficult to achieve:

LUKE 6:27-38 “But I say to you who hear: **Love [agapao] your enemies,** do good to those who hate you, 28 “bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 “To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. 30 “Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. 31 “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. 32 “But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 “And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 “And if you lend to *those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 “But **love [agapao] your enemies,** do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and **you will be sons of the Most High.** For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. 37 “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. **Forgive, and you will be forgiven.** 38 “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. **For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.**”

The two words forgive and forgiven in verse 37 come from the Greek word *apolo* which means to free fully, release, dismiss, pardon, or, figuratively, let die. God's forgiveness is not partial; it is complete and without reservations. It means letting the offense "die". We, too, must learn to forgive fully. To understand what this means, notice the example of Jesus Christ:

LUKE 23:33-34 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. 34 Then Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them**, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.

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 (Isaiah 52: 14). Thereafter He was murdered by crucifixion. As He was hanging upon the cross enduring an agony of torment that few have ever experienced (none were completely innocent like Jesus), He said, "Father, forgive them." To be capable of such mercy and grace through misery and suffering is astounding. Appealing for the lives of His tormentors at that moment truly defines God.

Interestingly, the word forgive in Luke 23: 34 is the Greek word *aphiemi* (also used in Matthew 6: 12). It means *to send forth* in the sense of separating. Jesus asked His Father to separate or send forth the offenses from those who crucified Him. In forgiving, Jesus was giving us an example. He was asking God to remove this sin so it was no longer attributed to them:

PSALMS 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, *so* far has He **removed** our transgressions from us.

Forgiveness is always a petition to God, asking Him to lay aside our sin because all sin is against God (Psalm 51: 4). As in the case when asking God to forgive our own sins, forgiveness of another person must be sincere and the kind of forgiveness God requires is from the heart:

MATTHEW 18:34-35 "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, **does not forgive his brother his trespasses.**"

By 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. This truly defines God because forgiveness is the measure of agape love in one's heart. The agape love of God the Father and Jesus Christ is plainly evident in this verse because the suffering and sacrifice was determined *before* the creation of mankind, not after.

REVELATION 13:8 “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.**”

The phrase “foundation of the world” literally means from the founding of the cosmos (universe). Before man was created, God established that Jesus Christ would endure terrible agony so that God could forgive the sins of mankind. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16). God’s agape love is so complete that Jesus Christ was predestined to die for us even before man was given the breath of life.

Everything God has done proves His love and forgiveness. Even the word *Passover* (meaning *pretermisison* or *disregard intentionally*) reflects forgiveness. Jesus Christ is called the Lamb of God (John 1:29, Revelation 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:

REVELATION 5:11-14 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 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!**” 13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: “**Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!**” 14 Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

Ever notice in the book of Revelation that everyone, men and angels alike, *only* use the name *Lamb* when referring to Jesus 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 through His sacrifice. The angels who wander the earth are firsthand witnesses of all the terrible sins of mankind that Jesus Christ is willing to forgive. Above all created beings, they comprehend the agape love of God that can forgive such horrors.

Partaking of the symbols of the blood and body of Jesus Christ in a worthy manner at memorial of the Passover includes forgiving others because forgiveness of others is the measure by which God forgives us. Forgiveness is the outpouring of God’s *mercy* and the gauge of the *agape* love that resides in our own hearts.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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