

Prayer-Part Four-Forgiveness

We know that to deal with sin and transgression, that which keeps us from communion and fellowship with God, we must repent and ask for the Lord's forgiveness. Psalm 51 is the psalm David wrote when he was seeking God's forgiveness for the many sins he committed as a result of his adulterous act with Bathsheba. (We should all memorize this psalm). Also, as a ever present sentiment in our prayer time should be that expressed in Psalm 139:23,24: Search me, O God, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

But also, as we seek God's forgiveness so that the way is made clear for fellowship with him, God enjoins us to forgive others. Unforgiveness, then, is also an obstacle to our communion with God. We must forgive!

Forgiving is, thus, tied to an effective, fruitful prayer life. In Matthew 6:12, in the middle of what we call the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs us to say "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Then in 6:14,15 he says: For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The Believers Bible Commentary, McDonald, says of this passage: "this refers to the parental forgiveness that is necessary if fellowship with our Father is to be maintained. If believers are unwilling to forgive those who wrong them, how can they expect to be in fellowship with their Father who has freely forgiven them for their wrongdoings?"

Mark 11:25: And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses (Jesus said). This is a flip on what Christ said in the mountain sermon: Matt. 5:23, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee: Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. So, it indicates that the overriding motive for both admonitions is reconciliation, especially with those who are our brothers in the Lord. We want communion with God, but there is layover stuff in our hearts between us and our brothers. We need to take care of it.

Luke 17:4 tells us to keep on forgiving no matter how many times. Jesus, our example, while hanging on the cross cries out to forgive the perpetrators in Luke 23:34 (only in this gospel) "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." In Acts 7:60, Stephen, while he stoned to death utters a similar plea for forgiveness to those stoning him: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

In Matthew 18, it is no accident that after telling disciples two or three being in agreement asking of God and it shall be done (v.18-20) that from verses 21-35 is a discourse on forgiveness. Needing forgiveness and forgiving is tethered to prayer. For unhindered communion with the Lord, we must not retain unforgiveness in our hearts. Forgive!