

SERMON

Matthew 6:13

Forgive us our Sins as we Forgive those who Sin against Us.

Nunawading and Waverley, 17-10-21

Dear friends in Christ,

Prayer is like entering a hospital because of some rare and unexplained malady. Tests have to be run, the pathology department set to work and people in white gowns must probe and ask you questions. Prayer is opening ourselves to the Lord, not just asking for things, but for the Lord to thoroughly examine each of us. Our great inner need is to seek the Father's **forgiveness** because of what is going wrong inside us. We live by his forgiveness and it makes us alive again. Sin deadens the spiritual life, it separates us from the Spirit, makes the heart hard and unyielding to God. When we keep falling back on our own strength alone, the Lord shrinks within us and the part he plays in our life declines. Our Lord Jesus gives us this prayer so that we can be renewed on the inside.

If we fail in some way, we are to examine our lives through prayer. What was going on inside that I did such a thing? Why do I nag or worry, or get upset, or forget people, not dwell in the word or be thankful? Making excuses is the enemy of spiritual growth. Our natural reaction is to say that we are in the right and have not done wrong, like Cain who killed his brother Abel and then asked, **am I my brother's keeper?** Self-examination is about asking questions of yourself: "What commandments did I break here?" It will always be the first but what about the others? Next, enumerate the actual wrong doing, confessing what you did. Then repent, renounce the behaviour and express contrition in prayer, revealing your sorrow and sadness. Finally, believe in the **forgiveness of your sins**, as we say in the creed. Yes, prayer is God's hospital.

Forgiveness comes from the word **to send away**. There are Bible verses that speak of this: **as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us** Ps 103:12, and many others. **You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.** (See also, Isa 43:25; 2Sam 12:13; Jer 31:34; 1Jn 1:7). Let them be your comfort. Our Father wipes the ledger clean. Would you ever go to your builder, mechanic or accountant and say, "Kindly strike out that debt on the invoice? I can't pay it." We would be too embarrassed to do that yet this is the prayer our Lord Jesus gives us. Once forgiven, the Father makes us pure, without spot or blemish, completely clean in his sight. Let's keep this in mind, that the Lord has given you this confessional box, where you can go into a cubicle dirty and come out new, like a beautiful chicken emerging from an egg.

The second part of the fifth petition is as hard as praying over our inner weakness; it is to forgive others. I am not talking about consequences but releasing the other person from your bondage. Prayer is for the other person; in compassion you want the person to be set free, therefore you pray, **as we forgive those who sin against us.**

Our default position is to punish others as Jonah wanted the Ninevites to be destroyed rather than saved. **I have a right to be angry**, he brazenly told the Lord. Most Christians fall for this. We want to take revenge but we disguise it under justice, legal rights, under self-righteousness and self-justification. **In your anger do not sin and let the devil get a foothold in your heart**, the apostle Paul warned us. Using this prayer means that we release a person from a grievous sin and in so doing release ourselves. As we pray, our Lord makes us to be Christ to the other person. It is like visiting a criminal in prison; the criminal who hurt you.

So serious is this that there is a connection between the two parts: **forgive us as we forgive**. The Lord forgives us freely; he releases us from a debt we cannot pay. The ledger is full of unpaid amounts and it goes over the page, the next page and the book is a thousand pages long with many companion volumes, filling the state library, shelf on top of shelf, reaching to the ceiling. The Father expects us to forgive that one sin against you. Thus, in prayer, Jesus is connecting us to the Father, teaming us up, so that together we remove guilt from the world.

Forgiveness begins in the heart. Prayer is the turning to your organ of volition within you. Forgiveness of others is a choice, a decision you make from the heart. Jesus said, **forgive your brother, forgive your sister from the heart**. There can be no conditions, there are no ifs and buts. Reconciliation may follow or it may not but forgiveness is an act you can achieve in prayer. Life in community is at the forefront here and forgiveness is essential to a healthy church. When you believe you are wronged, do not pick up weapons. Use prayer and the armour of God's word. Talking with the other person should follow examination of the heart rather than a rushing to judgement and punishment.

Confessing and forgiving are the hardest things to do because we are becoming martyrs. Therefore, confessing and forgiving must be subjects of earnest prayer.