

# THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (15).

December 23, 2007.

## Introduction.

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.... Beloved, now we are the children of God.” (*1Jn.3:1-2*). When God forgave us our sins in Christ, He also adopted us into His family. He is our Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus is our elder brother. *Heb.2:11* says He is not ashamed to call us “**brethren**”.

Forgiveness in Christ unto salvation is judicial. It is once-for-all. It is unrepeatable. It is irreversible. When God forgives us in Christ, He cleans our slate. The record of our sins is wiped clean. Our sins are imputed to Christ. And Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. We saw that divine adoption is also judicial, once-for-all, unrepeatable and irreversible. Divine adoption changes your relationship with God the Judge. He is now your Heavenly Father. From this point onwards God deals with us as His children. (cf. *Heb.12:7*). Now His work in us is to sanctify us and to conform us to the image of His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. (cf. *Rom.8:29-30*). This is also our final glorification.

The Bible makes it clear that as Christians we are not in a state of sinless perfection. *1Jn.1:8* says, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” *1Jn.2:1* says, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins....” According to *Rom.7:14-25* we have remaining sin in us. Sin continues to indwell us and it is waging war against us. The result is the reality we all know and experience : we sin. Sin defeats us again and again and again and we sin again and again and again.

As Christians, when we sin we need forgiveness. We do not need forgiveness from God the Judge. We need what one writer described as “**parental forgiveness**”. We need forgiveness from God our Heavenly Father. There is a once-for-all forgiveness we will never need again. That is divine judicial forgiveness in Christ unto salvation. But there is also a forgiveness we will need again and again and again. That is Divine Fatherly forgiveness that is part of our ongoing sanctification in Christ.

In our studies thus far, we examined the promise in *1Jn.1:9*. John wrote, “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This blessed promise of forgiveness stands firm. This blessed promise of forgiveness is an open door that never closes. But since God is dealing with us as a Father, this blessed promise of forgiveness may also include our Heavenly Father disciplining us and / or scourging us. (*Heb.12:6*).

### **Ongoing Fatherly Forgiveness.**

Today, with the Lord’s help, I want to open up for you what the Bible teaches about this ongoing Fatherly forgiveness. The primary fact I want us to note is that this forgiveness is conditional. The plain fact is that all granting of forgiveness is conditional. God’s judicial forgiveness of our sins in Christ is conditional. In *Lk.24:47* Jesus said, “repentance for forgiveness of sins [must] be proclaimed in His name.” The condition is repentance. In *Acts 2:38* Peter said to the Jews, “Repent ... for the forgiveness of your sins.” In *Acts 2:38-39* Peter used the words “**you**” and “**your**” when pointing sinners to repentance and salvation in Christ. In *Acts 3:19-20* Peter used “**you**” and “**your**” again because he was addressing sinners.

In *Acts 26:18* Paul said he was sent to preach the message of “forgiveness of sins” to the Gentiles. In *vs.20* Paul preached that “they should repent and turn to God.” In these two verses Paul used “**they**” and “**their**”. Turn to Paul’s classic statement in

**Rom.10:8-10.** And note how he used “**you**” and “**your**” and contrasted them with “**we**”. (read).

God’s Fatherly forgiveness of our sins in Christ is also conditional. The word of God shows us that this Fatherly forgiveness has two basic conditions attached to it. The first is found in **1Jn.1:9**. John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” John is writing to Christians and he has included himself with the words “**we**” and “**our**”. John also needed this Divine Fatherly forgiveness. We saw in a previous study that confession and repentance go hand in hand. In **Matt.3:3** John the Baptist came preaching a message of repentance. And we are told in **vs.6** that John baptized all those who confessed their sins. (cf. **Acts 19:18-20**). As the children of God, we need ongoing forgiveness for our sins from our Heavenly Father. In order to receive this forgiveness for our sins, we must confess our sins and repent of them. We must agree with our Heavenly Father and say what He says about our sin and turn away from them.

The **second** condition is our willingness and readiness to forgive those who sin against us. Paul wrote in **Gal.6:10**, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” Our primary focus will be on forgiving our brothers and sisters in Christ who sin against us. But the primary focus must not be allowed to minimize the secondary focus of forgiving those who are not Christians when they sin against us.

Now Brethren, I want to remind you that this is the part of the narrow road that brings relational **thlipsis** (pressure and stress) into our lives. This is where we will come face to face with the severe pain of relational spiritual gout. The questions are : how will you respond to the demands of God’s word? How will you respond when iron must sharpen iron and the sparks begin to fly? We can respond like Ahab and become sullen and angry, pout like a spoilt brat, and hate those who must tell you the truth and correct you. Or you can respond like David with godliness, humility, confession and repentance.

## **Matthew 6 : 9 – 15.**

The first passage I want us to look at is *Matt.6:9-15*. (**read**). This prayer has been popularly described as “**the Lord’s prayer.**” But the reality is that it is the disciples’ prayer. This is how the Lord taught His disciples to pray. What we have here is a pattern for prayer, not a prayer to be mechanically repeated. Even though it is tempting, I will not take the time to exposit this prayer. I want to focus on *vss.9, 12, 14, 15*.

*Vs.9* says, “Pray, then, in this way.” What Jesus actually said was, “You pray then in this way.” The “**you**” is emphatic. The verb is a command in the present tense. In other words, you must habitually bring yourself to prayer and when you do, you must pray in keeping with this basic pattern.

The first line, “Our Father who is in heaven” sets two powerful truths side by side. Firstly, God is our Father and we are privileged to have open door access to Him in prayer. In *Eph.2:18* Paul wrote, “for through Him (Jesus) we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.” In *Eph.3:12* Paul used the expression “confident access”. **Barclay** noted that in a world of so many gods and goddesses, to discover that there is but one God and He is to be called “**Father**” is a liberating discovery.

As our Father, He is concerned about every one of His children. *Psa.103:13-14* says, “Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.” He knows how fragile we are and in our fragility we will find that He is a compassionate Father. In *Jn.16:27* Jesus told His disciples, “the Father Himself loves you.” We have already seen in our studies that He loved you first. His love for you is unconditional. His love for you is eternal. His love for you is unchanging and unfailing. Why does your Heavenly Father love you? The answer in *Deut.7:8* is that He loves you because He loves you.

Secondly, our Father is no ordinary Father. He is “in heaven”. He is the King of heaven and earth. The expression “**in heaven**” points to our Father’s sovereignty, infinite greatness, majesty and power. *Psa.103:19* says, “The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all.” God is our Father with whom we are privileged to have open door access. But open door access or confident access is not careless familiarity. In *Mal.1:7* the Lord charged the priests with despising His name. And the Lord asked them, “If I am a father, where is My honor?”

This warning against careless familiarity is made clear in the next line of the prayer, “Hallowed be Your name.” To “**hallow**” is to treat as holy; to treat with due reverence. “**Name**” represents all that God is. The prayer, “Hallowed be Your name” expresses the desire to see God truly honored as God in the world. If this must be our prayer for the world at large, how much more must this be practically true of us who are the children of God! “Hallowed be Your name” must express your heart’s desire to see the children of God truly honor their Heavenly Father. We must be ever careful to honor our Heavenly Father, to treat Him as holy, to revere all that He is and stands for.

One of the ways in which we hallow our Heavenly Father is found in the request made in *vs.12*, “And forgives us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” The word “**debt**” is used for sin in general. “**Debtors**” are those who have sinned against us. “**We also**” is emphatic and underlines the significance of forgiving action on the part of those seeking forgiveness. “**Have forgiven**” expresses more than a resolution for future action. It means that action has been taken.

The point in the prayer is that we who are seeking forgiveness from our Heavenly Father must be prepared to forgive those who are seeking forgiveness from us. Just as our Heavenly Father is always ready, willing and prepared to forgive us when we sin, in the same manner we must be always ready, willing and prepared to forgive those who sin against us. Just as our Heavenly Father has an open door policy for us when we sin, in the same manner we must have an open door policy to those who sin against us. Just as we can go to our Heavenly Father with confidence, knowing that He will forgive us when

we confess our sins and repent of them, in the same manner those who sin against us must have the confidence that we will forgive them when they confess their sins and repent.

It takes grace to forgive. When God the Judge forgave us, He acted with grace. When God our Heavenly Father forgives us, He acts with grace. When we forgive others we manifest the reality that we have experienced Divine grace and that Divine grace is at work in us.

Forgiving others is of such importance for our spiritual well-being that the Lord commented further on it after completing the pattern of prayer He gave to His disciples. This brings us to *vss.14-15*. The Lord said, “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” The first point to be noted here is that these verses warn us that our prayer in *vs.12* must not be insincere. If it is insincere, it is a lie. God knows the innermost secrets of your heart. What a frightening thought that we can be praying to God and telling lies. Secondly, we learn that forgiveness is not and cannot be a one-way process.

The conditions for receiving our Heavenly Father’s forgiveness are confession, repentance and forgiving those who have sinned against us. Refusal to forgive others does not mean that you will lose your salvation. Refusal to forgive others means that your Heavenly Father will not forgive you. Your refusal to forgive others will establish a serious breach in your relationship with your Heavenly Father that will remain unresolved until you forgive those who have sinned against you. It also means that your Heavenly Father may have to take action to discipline you and even scourge you to remind you that He will not tolerate your sin, that He will not tolerate your unforgiving spirit, and that He will not tolerate the ongoing breach in your relationship with Him. There is one other fact I want to point out : the unwillingness to forgive marks in you the desire for personal vengeance. We will return to this.

In closing this point, I want to speak directly to husbands and wives. Are you living with an established and entrenched breach with your Heavenly Father because you are unforgiving towards your spouse? When you are seeking for forgiveness from your Heavenly Father, does your spouse know that you have forgiven him or her for their sins against you? I didn't ask you : do you know in your heart that you have forgiven your spouse? I asked you : does your spouse know that you have forgiven him or her and that you have done so in keeping with the Biblical meaning and demands of forgiveness? You say : he should know that I have forgiven him. He knows that I have nothing in my heart against him. She should know I have forgiven her. She knows that I have nothing in my heart against her. The question is : did you tell him with compassion, graciousness, truthfulness and abounding lovingkindness, "*I forgive you*"? Did you tell her with compassion, graciousness, truthfulness and abounding lovingkindness, "*I forgive you*"? Ouch! That gout is really starting to hurt.

### **Matthew 18 : 15 – 35.**

We come now to the second major passage that deals with forgiveness. Please turn to *Matt.18:15-35*. (read). I have read to you *vss.15-20* to set the context of Peter's question. *Vss.15-20* deals with sin and the process we have to follow if the one who has sinned must be brought before the church. I will not deal with this. But I do want to deal with *vs.15*.

Jesus said, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." In *Lk.17:3* Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." In *Gal.6:1* Paul wrote, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."

Now turn to *Lev.19:17-18*. I want us to note what this passage says about the relationship God required the Israelites to have with one another. (read). "Fellow

countryman” is literally “**brother**”. Different Hebrew words are used for “**neighbor**”. However, all three words are used synonymously. Note the following. Firstly, the failure to reprove your “**brother**” who has sinned says you have hate in your heart for your brother. The Lord did not say that your failure to rebuke your brother who has sinned is a good thing because you are minding your own business. The Lord said your failure is a bad thing. The Lord said your failure reveals that you have hate in your heart for your brother. This gout is really becoming painful, right? You say, “*But I do not hate anyone. I just want to mind my own business.*” There are those times when minding your own business is a good thing. But there are those times when minding your own business is a bad thing. In this context the Lord calls minding your own business a bad thing because it is the manifestation of hate in the heart.

Moses’ second point is that you must not rebuke because you are seeking to take revenge or because you are harboring a grudge. Moses’ last point is that the same love you have for yourself you must have for your brother and your rebuke must be rooted in that quality of love you have for your brother.

One commentator wrote, “*Most instructive it is to find it suggested by this order, as the best evidence of the absence of hate, and the truest expression of love to our neighbor, that when we see him doing wrong we rebuke him.*” (Kellogg). I want to say it very clearly : if brother or sister in Christ sees you doing wrong and refuses to confront and rebuke you, that brother or sister has hate in their heart for you. There are “**ands**”, “**ifs**” or “**buts**” here. This is very serious because John says the one who does not love his brother is a child of the devil and does not have eternal life abiding in him. (1Jn.3:10, 15). If this gout is starting to get too painful and you need a painkiller, the painkiller is obedience to the Lord and loving your brother.

This Leviticus passage makes it very clear that every Israelite had the loving moral responsibility to rebuke a fellow Israelite who had sinned. Every Israelite was his brother’s keeper. We all know that both the rebuking a person and the receiving of such rebuke are not easy tasks. Both tasks call for a lot of humility. This is why David’s

prayer must be our daily prayer, “Let the righteous smite me in kindness (lovingly) and reprove me; It is oil upon the head; Do not let my head refuse it.” (*Psa.141:5*). David prayed that the righteous would reprove him and do so with kindness, with love and with humility. He prayed for such rebuke because he knew it was good for the spiritual welfare of his soul. But he also prayed that he would respond to rebuke from the righteous with humility and accept it. How we need to pray this prayer for ourselves every day!

*Prov.27:5-6* says, “Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” The word “open” also conveys the ideas of rebuke that is direct and even severe, but it is rebuke that remains caring and completely concerned for the best interests of the one being rebuked. An example of open rebuke is Paul’s dealings with Peter in Antioch. Peter was conducting himself in an inappropriate manner among the Christians and Paul said, “I withstood him to the face.” (*Gal.2:11*).

Depending on the context, open rebuke may be tactless, but it still remains a manifestation of loving care and concern. On the other hand concealed love is like a young man winking to the girl he loves but doing so in the dark. She does not see what he is doing and it does neither of them any good. The point is : he is winking in the dark because he is a coward. Concealed love is cowardly and of no help to anyone. *Prov.28:23* says, “He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.” You would notice that there is no difference between what is taught here and what Jesus and Paul taught.

Now, let us turn our attention to *Matt.18:15*. A literal translation of this verse is, “If your brother sins, go and reprove him between you and him alone.” Note very carefully the important call for sensitivity and privacy. Your first step in dealing with someone who has sinned must be between you and him alone. “If your brother sins” means that it is clear to you that this person has sinned. It is clear that this person has transgressed God’s word. (cf. *1Jn.3:4*). The point here is not that this person has

violated your personal scruples. Sin is never defined in terms of your personal scruples. Sin is defined in terms of God's word or Law and the glory of God. (cf. **Rom.3:23; 1Cor.10:31**).

The Lord command is that you go and reprove him, that is, set forth his sin before him and convict him. To set forth the brother's sin before him and convict him means there must be adequate evidence that this brother has sinned. You cannot deal with this matter on the basis of hearsay. Moses made it clear that when charges are being made, the charges must be investigated, searched out and inquired thoroughly. (**Deut.13:14; 19:18**). Your responsibility is to bring that evidence to light and convince the brother that sin has been committed.

There are two facts to note here. **Firstly**, Jesus is not saying that the responsibility to go and rebuke the brother necessitates that he has sinned against you personally. What Jesus is saying is that you have become aware that sin has been committed and you have evidence to prove to the brother that he has sinned. **Secondly**, like the Israelites, you are your brother's keeper. This truth will surface again and again. Your brother's sin is your business and responsibility once you have become aware of it and have the evidence to prove it. To abdicate your responsibility to deal with your brother is to reveal that you hate your brother.

Now, when you discover that your brother has sinned and you have before you the evidence to prove it, you are not commanded by Jesus to call the pastors and tell them. You are not commanded to call the deacons and tell them. Your first step, as commanded by Jesus, is to go to the brother in private and deal with his sin. If the first step you take is to call someone and tell them, you have violated **Matt.18:15** and become guilty of gossiping.

Brethren, I want to emphasize here : please break off the wrong habit of calling the pastors and telling them that they need to deal with so and so because they have sinned.

That is wrong. You are only allowed to call the pastors or another Christian for help when you have failed to bring the brother or sister who has sinned to repentance.

I want to further emphasize that the Lord Jesus clearly knows that He has commanded you to carry out a task that is usually fraught with difficulty. You may be going to an Ahab to rebuke him. You may be going to an Asa to rebuke him. You may be going to men like the sons of Eli. (*ISam.2:25*). But the difficulty of the task of rebuking another is no excuse for failing to carry it out. There is far too much at stake to fail in this matter. *Gal.6:1* presses home the responsibility to deal with one in the Christian family who has fallen into sin. We are commanded to restore the one who has sinned. The verb “**restore**” was used for resetting a broken bone. It was also used for fishermen mending their nets. The brother who has sinned has a spiritually broken leg. He needs help. You must provide that help and do so with gentleness and humility.

What is at stake when a brother sins? Jesus said, “if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” **R.T.France** noted that the Christian must not ignore the sin he sees in a fellow Christian. He must confront with the prayerful hope that the brother will repent and be won, that is, rescued from possible spiritual ruin. When godly King Asa refused to listen to the rebuke of the prophet, what happened? Judgment fell upon him, a judgment that ended with sickness and death. As a Christian you must be concerned for the spiritual welfare, safety and reputation of your brother in Christ. The practice of this concern is the manifestation of love.

What does Jesus mean by the expression, “if he listens to you”? This is made clear in *Lk.17:3* Jesus said, “If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.” “**If he listens to you**” means he agrees with what you have said. He agrees that he has sinned. He acknowledges his sin and repents and asks you to forgive him. Asking you to forgive him presumes that he has also asked the Lord to forgive him. Jesus said your response must be to forgive him. You must say to this person, “*I forgive you.*” By your sincere words you must lift from this person the guilt of his sin and cast them away.

When a brother or sister is confessing their sin to you and repenting and seeking your forgiveness, do **NOT** stop them with glib responses. Do not say to them, "*Oh, forget that. I have already forgotten that. I forgave you a long time ago.*" That's wrong! You need to let them confess. You need to let them repent. You need to let them ask you to forgive them. You cannot unilaterally forgive someone. You can only forgive someone when they acknowledge their sin and ask for forgiveness. I will deal with this truth in more detail later on.

Jesus said in *Matt.6:8*, "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Does that mean that you must not ask Him? If it did, why is it that Jesus' next words were, "Pray, then, in this way"? You know your brother has sinned. You know he needs forgiveness. You must be prepared, willing and ready to forgive him. You must harbor in your heart a forgiving spirit towards him. But you must allow him to ask for that forgiveness before you give him that forgiveness.

Now Brethren, in closing, I ask the following : Have you been running from confronting and rebuking a brother or sister who has sinned? You need to confess your sin to your Heavenly Father. You need to repent of your sin. You need to ask your Heavenly Father to forgive you for abdicating your loving responsibility to your brother or sister in Christ. And you need to go and see this brother or sister and confront them and rebuke them and, if possible, bring them to repentance. Anything less is hate in your heart for your brother or sister in Christ.

Secondly, are you hallowing God's name by being prepared, willing and ready to forgive others? Or have you been harboring an unforgiving spirit in your heart? If you are harboring an unforgiving spirit in your heart, you need to confess this sin to your Heavenly Father and repent of it. And you need to hallow God's name by going to those whom you have refused to forgive and forgive them. You need to tell them, "*I forgive you.*" They need to hear you say, "*I forgive you.*" You need to lift the burden of sin they have been carrying because of your unwillingness to forgive them.

Your unwillingness to forgive has created a breach between you and your Heavenly Father and between you and those whom you are refusing to forgive. You need to close up and heal that breach. You need to become reconciled to your Heavenly Father and to your brother or sister in Christ. You need to restore loving fellowship with your Heavenly Father and with your brother or sister in Christ.

Lastly, have you sinned against a brother or sister in Christ? Get rid of your arrogance and humble yourself before your Heavenly Father and go to your brother or sister and ask for forgiveness. Your brother or sister cannot forgive you until you confess, repent and ask for forgiveness. Unconfessed sin creates a breach between you and your Heavenly Father and between you and the one you have sinned against. Do not make the mistake today by saying, *“well, that was so long ago, that’s water under the bridge. We need to let bygones be bygones and move on.”* Your Heavenly Father does not allow you to do that.

Now, it may be that over the years you have created quite a list of dealing with your brothers and sisters in Christ in an unbiblical manner in this matter of sin and forgiveness. It may be that you have quite a list of unresolved conflicts. You may know that relationships that were once warm, lively and mutually edifying have now cooled off to distant respectability. I would encourage you to bring this matter to your Heavenly Father in prayer and ask Him to bring before you those matters you need to deal with, resolve, bring about reconciliation and restore genuine fellowship. Then go deal with them. And do not accept glib responses in your dealing with them.

I am making this a two-way street. The Spirit of God may remind you that you have sinned against someone. The Spirit of God may remind you that someone has sinned against you. You are aware that love covers a multitude of sins. But these sins have thrown off the love covers and caused a breach in your relationships. You need to deal with them prayerfully and Biblically.

If your gout is getting pretty painful by this time, then you need spiritual healing. Hallow your Heavenly Father by taking the appropriate action and bring healing to your spiritual gout.