



His Word Is Truth!

This article is written by Pastor Tom Eckstein of Concordia Lutheran Church in Jamestown. "His Word is Truth" will appear in this paper every 3rd Monday.



Today we continue my series on The Lord's Prayer by focusing on the 5th Petition: **"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."** In his Small Catechism Martin Luther gives the following explanation: **"What does this mean? We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and**

surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us."

Martin Luther correctly teaches that God's forgiveness of our sins is what moves us to forgive others who sin against us. In other words, when Jesus teaches us to pray *"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us"* He is NOT saying that we must first forgive others perfectly before God can or will forgive us. Not only would that mean that we can earn God's forgiveness by something we do, which is false teaching (see Romans 3:23-28 and Galatians 2:20-3:14). Worse yet, we would all be doomed to suffer God's wrath for all eternity because no person can ever forgive others perfectly. *We may try to forgive others perfectly, but we all fall short.*

Therefore, what Jesus is teaching us is that the full and complete undeserved forgiveness He showers upon

us is what moves us to forgive others. For example, Ephesians 4:32 reads: **"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."** Also, Colossians 3:13 reads: **"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."** We see a good example of God's forgiveness of our sins moving us to forgive others when Stephen prays for the salvation of the very people who are stoning him to death! Acts 7:59-60 reads: **"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he fell asleep."**

However, if all this is true, then how do we understand Jesus' words in Matthew 6:14-15? Jesus says: **"For if you forgive men when they sin against you,**

your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." This sounds like Jesus is saying that God won't forgive you unless you first forgive others perfectly. But that's NOT what Jesus is teaching us! Instead, Jesus is teaching that those who REFUSE to forgive others thereby show that they are unbelievers – they do not trust in Jesus! In other words, those who think they have a right to hold a grudge and not forgive others thereby show that they don't believe how much God has forgiven their many sins.

Jesus makes this same point in Matthew 18:21-35. Peter arrogantly says: **"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"** Peter thinks he is impressing Jesus, but the fact is that Peter has forgotten how much God has already forgiven him – *far more than seven times!* Therefore, Jesus tells the parable about the

"Unmerciful Servant" (Matthew 18:23-35) to humble Peter's self-righteousness pride and teach us that those who refuse to forgive others show that they don't appreciate the forgiveness that God has given them. Such unbelief places us outside of God's grace and under His wrath!

But the GOOD NEWS is that we can come to Jesus in humility and admit that we are having a hard time forgiving others, and we can know that God has already forgiven us for Jesus' sake and that He will help us to begin to forgive others as He has fully forgiven us. In other words, it's one thing to say: *"I don't care what God says! I refuse to forgive that person. I have a right to my hatred!"* **This is the attitude of unbelief.** However, it's quite another thing to say: *"God be merciful to me, a sinner! I know you want me to forgive others, but it's very hard sometimes. Please forgive me, and help me to forgive others as you have already forgiven me."* **This is how**

believers speak to the Lord.

We can know that God has forgiven our sins – including our sins of not being able to forgive others perfectly – because when Jesus was dying on the cross with our sins on His back He prayed the following: **"Father, forgive them!"** *When this Good News captures your heart you will be moved to forgive others!*



Please read the next "His Word is Truth" on Monday, August 18th! Pastor Eckstein will continue his series on the Lord's Prayer with the 6th and 7th Petitions: "Lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil."

For more resources about Christian teaching and issues, go to Concordia Lutheran's web page: www.concordiajrt.org

Paid for by Concordia Lutheran Church