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GRACE NOTES PROGRAM

SERIES: THE LORD'S PRAYER

TOPIC: Forgive us our debts - part 10

INTRO: Welcome to Grace Notes, brought to you by Sandbek Ministries. We trust you've been following all our broadcasts on the current series, 'The Lord's Prayer'. It's interesting to note that each phrase discussed so far, involves participation on both God's part AND ours. The phrase for today's program follows suite. For many people, this is a difficult issue. It was particularly hard for Jesus' disciples, too. The Jews in Jesus' day were a people very subject to revenge and were hardly brought to forgive any injuries done to them. Perhaps this is why Jesus made it a point to command that they forgive others AND tell them what the consequences would be if they didn't. In discussing this, we need to be careful not to conclude that our forgiving of others causes God to forgive us, or to compare our forgiving to God's. With this in mind, let's begin our study.

I've recited the Lord's prayer many times and I have to admit, that's just what I've done – recited it. When I spoke the phrase “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors”, written in Matthew 6:12, I rarely, if ever, stopped to think about its implications. Studying for this program has been enlightening and I'm delighted to share what I've learned with you.

This is the only phrase in the prayer that Jesus further clarified, probably because it is so important. Verses 14 and 15 read...

...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.

Notice, that debts spoken of in the first phrase are called sins in these verses. The Jewish writings often called sins, 'debts', which is a mild word for sin.

The question raised is this – are we seeking salvation here when we ask for forgiveness? If that were the case, it would appear as if WE have a part in whether God will save our souls. We know this is not true. Ephesians 2:8-9 says...

For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that NOT OF YOURSELVES, it is the GIFT of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Jesus gave this model prayer to His disciples. They were already His followers. The reference to forgiveness of sins in this context is for RESTORATION of FELLOWSHIP with God. We're reminded again of Psalm 66:18 of the need for that. It says...

If I regard iniquity(or sin) in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Let's look at an example in John chapter 13. Jesus was dining with His disciples. He got up from the meal, and began to wash and dry His disciple's feet. Simon Peter initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet, but Jesus said that unless He washed them, Peter would have no part with Him. There's the fellowship – notice Jesus didn't say he would have no part 'IN' Him, He said he'd have no part 'WITH' Him. Peter replied, "Not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean."

Just like Peter, when we accept Christ as Savior, our soul is cleansed, through the Blood of Jesus. We are adopted into God's family. He no longer sees us as a sinner because Jesus' righteousness is imparted to us. But, since we are still capable of sinning, we need to confess our sins to the Lord. To confess means to agree with God that what we have done is an offense against Him - something contrary to His will for us.

I John 1:8-9, also written to Believers, reiterates this. It states...

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we CONFESS our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and PURIFY us from all unrighteousness.

Isn't it a relief to be permitted to wash our feet, so to speak, after a day's contact with the earth? It's imperative that we take these verses to heart so that there is no breach in our communion with our Father.

But is confessing our sins enough to restore fellowship? No, we must also forgive others who have sinned against us. Forgiveness must be a completed act before we even begin to pray. Matthew 11:25 says...

When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in Heaven may forgive you your sins.

When we say, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors", we ask, in other words, that God would measure out to us what we measure to others, or that He would forgive us in proportion as we also have forgiven those who are in debt to us.

Jesus knew this was a real problem, so He related a poignant story in the form of a parable (which is an earthly message with a heavenly meaning). You can find it in Matthew 18:23-35. I'll paraphrase it.

A king wanted to settle accounts with his servants. One servant owed him 10,000 talents (which was at least \$7,500,000). Obviously, the servant couldn't pay so he begged for mercy. The king had pity on him, graciously canceled the debt, and let him go. But afterward, that servant grabbed a fellow servant who owed him only 16-18 dollars and demanded payment. The fellow servant, too, begged for mercy but instead was thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the king heard of this, he confronted the unforgiving servant and said, "Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on

you?" In anger he turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. The parable ends with Jesus' words in verse 35...

"This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Are we blind as to the amount of our debt to God to not forgive others? To ask God for what we ourselves refuse to men, is to insult Him.

When we do not forgive, we make a prisoner, not of the offender, but of ourselves.

This song says it so well. Listen carefully to the words as sung by the writer, Steve Chapman.

*** THE KEY ***

Releasing ourselves from the bondage spoken of in the Scriptures and in that song is certainly beneficial. But, there is another great benefit for extending forgiveness to an offender. Matthew 5:7 says...

Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.

The definition of 'blessed' is 'blissfully happy or contented'.

Don't you want that in your life? The Rev. Billy Graham once said he believed that 75% of patients in hospitals would be made whole if they would forgive." There's a lot of truth to that.

The good example of someone who, in mans' eyes, had every reason not to forgive is Job. God had allowed him to be afflicted. His friends didn't understand what God was doing in his life. They assumed he had sinned and was being punished for it, so they criticized and condemned him. Chapter 42 is the culmination of the story. God was angry with Job's friends because they did not speak reverently of Him so He made them offer a sacrifice for their sin. God then told Job to pray for forgiveness for his friends. Now, that had to be hard to do. I love verse 10. This is key...

AFTER Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.
What might he have missed out on if he hadn't forgiven?

The best example of someone with every reason not to forgive is our Lord Jesus Christ. As He was being executed undeservingly, and suffering in a way none of us will ever experience, He said of His executions. as recorded in Luke 23:34a...

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

John Wesley's explanatory notes say: While they are actually nailing Him to the cross, He seems to feel the injury they did to their own souls more than the wounds they gave Him; and as it were to forget His own anguish out of a concern for their own salvation.

Oh, that we might have the heart of Christ and seek to forgive as He forgave. What a difference we could make in the world.

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