



## **Matthew 6:14–15**

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

### **Reflection**

Here we are again. Only two days ago, separated by one verse of Scripture, we

spoke at length about the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, in particular the second half,

'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.'

And now that the Lord's Prayer has finished, the very next two verses that we are confronted with are saying the same thing again. What are we to make of the fact that this is the only petition in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus saw fit to repeat and expand upon as soon as he'd finished offering us the prayer?

Jesus can only be repeating and expanding upon this point in order to impress upon us the importance – even more, the necessity – of forgiving others. If we feel

like we've just been taught this lesson, like we've already considered and weighed it, well Jesus would have us again think even more deeply about it, and that, only a moment after he's commended it to us as something we should pray over and think through and be reminded of every day when we pray.

So setting aside any reluctance, at our Lord's direction, let's look at this a second time. In these verses in front of us, Jesus seems to be saying not once, but twice, that if we don't forgive people who've sinned against us then God will not forgive us our sins. This seems to be the inescapable conclusion of the verses, I'll read them again:

14 For if you forgive other people when

they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Not once (v. 14), but twice (v. 15), and now along with the fifth petition (v. 12), three times in four verses he's intimated as much. Again however, we must be clear that for this teaching to be consistent with the rest of Scripture, it must harmonise with the core of the Christian faith, which is that we are saved through faith alone by grace alone and not ever by works. No passage says this more clearly than Ephesians 2:8–10 which says:

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works,

so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

There are no conditions to salvation, it is a free gift that can never be earned, it can only be accessed by faith. So what can Jesus possibly mean in saying that if we don't forgive other people when they sin against us then God will not forgive us for our sins against him?

A couple of days ago when we last spoke about this I read a parable of Jesus from Matthew 18. Today I'm going to read one from Matthew 22 that may help us shed some light on what Jesus means in our passage today.

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.

So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

A Christian who cannot find it in their heart to forgive may well be like the wedding guest, called in from the street corner to

be honoured at the king's banquet, yet who could not find it within himself to dress up properly for the occasion. He was cast back out for not responding appropriately to the king's call.

Genuine conversion to Christianity necessitates a response in the life of those who are converted. Many people may claim to be Christians and even perhaps believe in their hearts for a time that they are Christians but the proof of Christianity is evidenced by a changed life. A person who has truly experienced the mercy and grace of God will be transformed by the Holy Spirit into Jesus' disciple. In the most fundamental way, this means experiencing a transformed heart — a heart that produces a changed life that displays the same mercy and grace towards oth-



ers that has been received from God. Jesus is saying that at the heart of who he is and at the heart of what he came to do is forgiveness, so if there is no evidence of forgiveness in your life then you can't genuinely be a follower of his.

Jesus came to earth to make peace between us and God but also between us and each other. It's not either-or, it's both or none. At the end of times Jesus' work will find its fulfilment in people from every tribe and nation gathered as one around the throne of grace, and all things in heaven and on earth and under the earth reconciled, brought into perfect unity, through him and by him and for him. And so holding a grudge, refusing to forgive, refusing to repair a relationship, represents the antithesis of what Jesus has come to do and

there is no place for it in his church.

## **Think & Pray**

This is heavy teaching and might leave you reeling but I'm not sure Jesus' words leave us much room in which to hide. What do you think? Please think about this passage, and again, for the second time in three days, think deeply over your feelings towards people in your life who have wronged you. Jesus isn't saying click your fingers and forgive. But he is saying that forgiveness is very important to him and so at the very least pray and ask for his help to get you and me headed in the right direction. God works miracles by his Holy Spirit, miracles that can change your heart and mine to genuinely love our enemies, even if we've been unspeakably

wronged. Pray to him now for the grace to do just that.