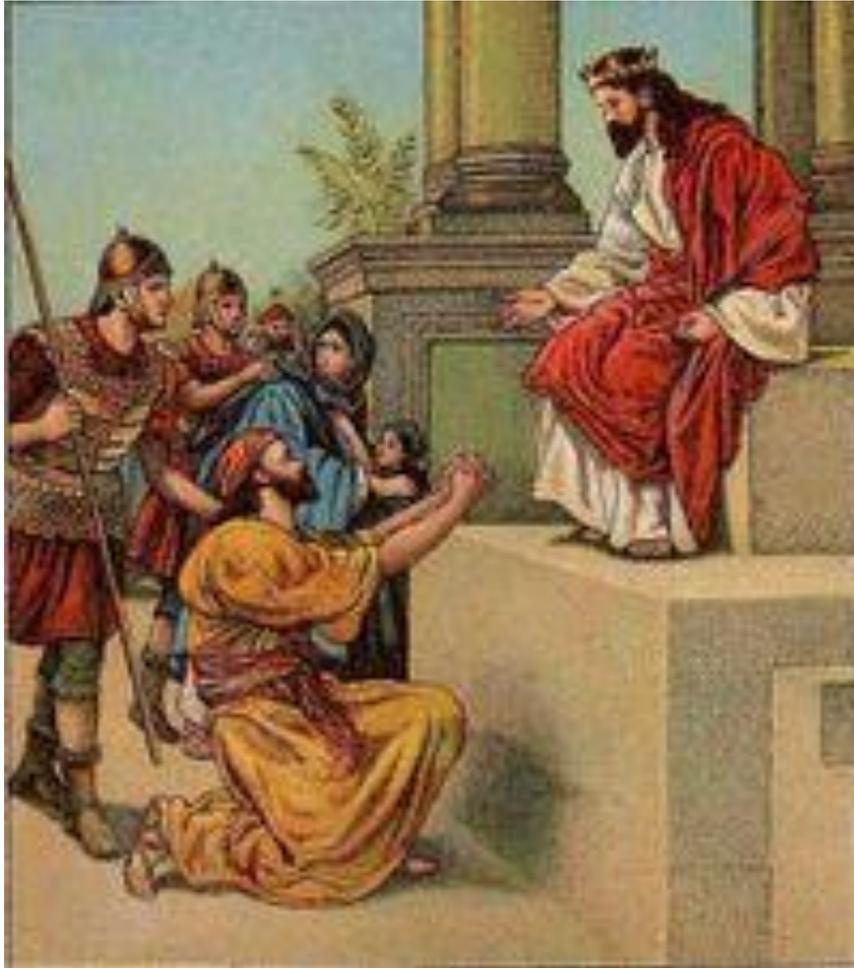


The Lord's Prayer – 4



And forgive us our debts,
as we also forgive our debtors.

Matthew 6:12

And forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone
who is a debtor to us. Luke 11:4

1. *What is the Forgiveness of Sins?*

Seek ye Jehovah while He may be found;
Call on Him while He is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the man of iniquity his thoughts;
And let him return to Jehovah,
And He will have compassion on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon. Isaiah 55:6-7

AC 9443. The Forgiveness of Sins shall now be spoken of.

AC 9444. The sins done by a man are rooted in his very life, and make it; and therefore no one is liberated from them unless he receives new life from the Lord, which is effected by means of regeneration.

AC 9445. That from himself, a man cannot do what is good or think what is true, but only from the Lord, is evident in John:

A man can do nothing unless it be given him from heaven (John 3:27).

He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5).

From this it is evident that no one can withdraw anyone from sins, thus forgive them, except the Lord alone.

AC 9446. The Lord continually flows into man with the good of love and the truths of faith, but these are variously received, being received in one way by one person, and in a different way by another. By those who have been regenerated, they are received well, but by those who do not suffer themselves to be regenerated, they are received badly.

AC 9447. Those who have been regenerated are continually kept by the Lord in the good of faith and of love, and are then withheld from evils and falsities. And those who do not suffer themselves to be regenerated by the Lord are also withheld from evil and kept in good, for good and truth continually flow in from the Lord with every man; but the infernal loves in which they are, namely, the loves of self and of the world, stand in the way, and turn the influx of good into evil, and that of truth into falsity.

AC 9448. From all this it is evident what the Forgiveness of Sins is. To be able to be kept by the Lord in the good of love and the truths of faith, and to be withheld from evils and falsities, is the Forgiveness of Sins. And to shun evil and falsity, and to turn away from them, is then Repentance. But these are possible only with those who, through regeneration, have received new life from the Lord, because these things belong to the new life.

AC 9449. The signs that sins have been forgiven are the following: Delight is felt in worshiping God for the sake of God; in being of service to the neighbor for the sake of the neighbor; thus, in doing good for the sake of good, and in believing truth for the sake of truth. There is an unwillingness to merit by anything that belongs to charity and faith. Evils, such as enmities, hatreds, revenges, unmercifulness, adulteries—in a word, all things that are against God and against the neighbor—are shunned and are held in aversion.

AC 9450. But the signs that sins have not been forgiven are the following. God is not worshiped for the sake of God; and the neighbor is not served for the sake of the neighbor; thus, good is not done and truth is not spoken for the sake of good and truth, but for the sake of self and the world. There is a desire to merit by our deeds; others are despised in comparison with ourselves; delight is felt in evils, such as enmities, hatred, revenge, cruelty, adulteries; and the holy things of the church are held in contempt, and are at heart denied.

Questions and Comments

1. Does it seem hard to “seek Jehovah while He is near” and “call upon Him” at times when we are aware of our sins? Isaiah 55 continues by comparing how abundantly He pardons to how high the heavens are above the earth.
2. The Latin word that is translated “Forgiveness” here is Remissio, from which we have “remission” and “remittance.” The root meaning is to send back or send away.
3. AC 9444 speaks of our being “liberated” from our sins, being brought out of house of servitude. The Lord came into the world to save us from our sins, to restore our freedom to stop doing them. This is forgiveness or remission of sins.
4. AC 9445 says that no one but the Lord can truly forgive someone by withdrawing them from their sins—certainly no priest or televangelist. Why then does the Lord call on us to forgive one another?
5. AC 9448 gives a definition of forgiveness of sins. Is this how you usually think of being forgiven?
6. Can we use the signs that sins have or have not been forgiven (AC 9449-9450) in self-examination?

2. *Whose sins are forgiven?*

Ezekiel 18:31-32. Cast from you all your transgressions, whereby you have transgressed, and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no delight in the death of him who dies, says the Lord Jehovih; wherefore turn back, and live.

[Continuation concerning the Forgiveness of Sins]

AC 9451. When sins have been forgiven, they are believed to be wiped off and washed away as dirt is with water. Nevertheless, they remain in the man; and their being said to be “wiped off” is from the appearance when the man is withheld from them.

AC 9452. The Lord regenerates a man from Divine Mercy. This is done from his infancy down to the last of his life in the world, and afterward to eternity. Thus, it is from Divine Mercy that the Lord withdraws a man from evils and falsities, and leads him to the truths of faith and goods of love, and afterward keeps him in these. And after this, in Divine Mercy He raises him to Himself in heaven, and makes him happy. All this is what is meant by the Forgiveness of Sins from Mercy.

They who believe that sins are forgiven in any other way are quite mistaken; for it would be the absence of mercy to see a multitude of men in the hells, and not save them, if it could be done in any other way. And yet the Lord is mercy itself, and does not will the death of anyone, but that he may live.

AC 9453. Consequently, those who do not suffer themselves to be regenerated, thus who do not suffer themselves to be withheld from evils and falsities, remove and cast away from themselves these mercies of the Lord. Therefore, it is the man who is in fault if he cannot be saved.

AC 9454. This is what is meant in John:

As many as received Him, to them He gave power to be sons of God, to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12, 13).

“Of bloods” means those who are opposed to the goods of faith and of charity. “Of the will of the flesh” means those who are in evils from the loves of self and of the world. “Of the will of man” means those who are in falsities derived from those loves. To be “born of God” is to be regenerated.

That no one can come into heaven unless he is regenerated is taught in the same:

Amen, amen, I say to thee, Unless a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Amen, amen, I say to thee, Unless a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).

“To be born of water” means through the truth of faith, and “to be born of the spirit” means through the good of love.

From all this it can now be seen who they are whose sins have been forgiven, and who they are whose sins have not been forgiven.

TCR 56e. ...how deluded those are who think, and still more those who believe, and still more those who teach, that God can damn anyone, curse anyone, send anyone to hell, predestine any soul to eternal death, avenge wrongs, be angry, or punish! He cannot even turn Himself away from man, nor look upon him with a stern countenance. These and like things are contrary to His essence; and what is contrary to His essence is contrary to His very Self.

Questions and Comments

1. AC 9451 teaches that even when our sins are forgiven, they are still all there. Perhaps this is the origin of the concept in AA that the best an alcoholic can ever do is to be “in recovery.”
2. Why is it important for us to know that the forgiveness of sins is from Divine Mercy? How does that affect how we think of other people’s sins?
3. Why can’t some people’s sins be forgiven? Why must there be hells? Why don’t we all go to the highest heaven?
4. Why do you think the Lord speaks of our preparation for heaven as being “born” anew? Why “born”?
5. How hard must it be for the Lord to see some of His children going to hell?

3. Repentance is the way to the remission of sins.

Mark 1:4. John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

TCR 459:12. "It is my opinion that charity is to forgive everyone his trespasses. I have drawn this opinion from the customary saying of those who approach the Holy Supper; for some then say to their friends, 'Forgive me what I have done amiss,' thinking that they have thus discharged all the duties of charity.

"But I have thought in my own mind that this is nothing but a painted picture of charity, not the real form of its essence; for this is said both by those who do not forgive, and by those who make no effort to follow charity; and such are not included in the Prayer which the Lord Himself taught, 'Father, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.'

"Trespasses are like ulcers, within which, if they are not opened and healed, diseased matter collects, which infects the neighboring parts, and creeping about like a serpent, turns the blood everywhere into such matter. It is the same with trespasses against the neighbor, which, unless removed by repentance and by a life according to the Lord's commandments, remain and devour.

"Those who, without repentance, merely pray to God to forgive their sins, are like the inhabitants of a city, who, being infected with a contagious disease, go to the chief magistrate and say, 'Sir, heal us.' And he would answer, 'How can I heal you? Go to a physician, find out what medicines you need, get them for yourselves from a pharmacist and take them, and your health will be restored.'

"So the Lord will say to those who pray for the forgiveness of their sins without actual repentance, 'Open the Word, and read what I have spoken in Isaiah:

'Ah, sinful nation, laden with iniquity. When you spread forth your hands, I hide My eyes from you; indeed, when you make many prayers, I do not hear. Wash you, put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well (Isa. 1:4, 15-18).

"And then your sins will be removed and forgiven."

4. What is the unforgivable sin?

Matthew 12:31-32. Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men; but the blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven men. And whoever says a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall say it against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that to come.

AE 778:3-4. "Sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" means to deny the Word, and to adulterate its essential goods and falsify its essential truths; while "a word against the Son of Man" means to interpret the natural sense of the Word, which is the sense of its letter, according to appearances.

To deny the Word is a sin that "cannot be remitted in this age nor in that which is to come," that is, to eternity, and he who does it "is subject to an eternal judgment," because those who deny the Word deny God, deny the Lord, deny heaven and hell, and deny the church and all things pertaining to it. And those who deny these are atheists, who, although with their lips they may attribute the creation of the universe to some Supreme Entity, or Deity, or God, yet in heart ascribe it to nature. Because such by denial have dissolved all bond of connection with the Lord, they cannot help but be separated from heaven and conjoined to hell.

Questions and Comments

1. You can read John the Baptist's teaching about repentance especially in Matthew 3 and Luke 3. The purpose of repentance is that our sins may be remitted and we may be free of them.
2. Should we require children to ask forgiveness after doing something wrong? Is it a good or bad idea to require them to say they are sorry?
3. Is it clear that trespasses or sins left in place without dealing with them will gradually devour your life? How can we go the Physician, find out what medicines we need and get them from the Pharmacist? What are the medicines? How do we take them?
4. What would be a present-day equivalent to going to the chief magistrate to seek healing of a contagious disease?
5. What might be an example of "a word against the Son of Man," a misinterpretation of the sense of the letter? What might be an example of a "blasphemy of the Spirit"? Can you see why the latter cannot be forgiven? What is the problem with being an atheist?

5. *Forgive men their trespasses.*

Matthew 6:14-15. For if you forgive¹ men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

AC 1594:3. Self-love... conceals within itself hatred of all who do not submit themselves to it as its slaves. And because it conceals hatred, it also conceals forms of revenge, cruelty, deceit, and further unspeakable things.

AC 1594:3-4. Mutual love, however, which alone is heavenly, consists in not only saying but also acknowledging and believing that one is utterly undeserving, and something worthless and filthy, which the Lord in His infinite mercy is constantly drawing away and holding back from the hell into which the person constantly tries, and indeed longs, to cast himself. He acknowledges and believes this because it is the truth. Not that the Lord or any angel wishes him to acknowledge and believe it just to gain his submission, but to prevent his boasting about himself when he is in fact such. This would be like excrement calling itself pure gold, or a dung-fly a bird of paradise.

To the extent therefore that a person acknowledges and believes that he really is what he in fact is, he departs from self-love and its desires, and loathes himself. To the extent that this happens he receives from the Lord heavenly love, that is, mutual love, which is willing to serve all. These are the people meant by the least who become the greatest in the Lord's kingdom, Matt. 20:26-28; Luke 9:46-48.

Matthew 20:26-28. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever wills to become great among you, let him be your minister; and whoever wills to be first among you, let him be your servant, as the Son of Man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give His soul a ransom for many.

AC 1079. ...People with whom faith is separated from charity... see nothing else but the errors and perversities with a man. But those who are in the faith of charity are different. They notice the goods, and if they do see evils and falsities they excuse them, and if possible endeavor with that person to correct them, as is said here of Shem and Japheth....

AC 1079:2e. But those who have charity hardly notice the evil in another person, but instead notice all the goods and truths that are his; and on his evils and falsities they place a good interpretation. Of such a nature are all angels, it being something they have from the Lord, who bends everything evil into good.

AC 10381. ...When [a certain spirit] found fault with me, I was allowed to say that what he found fault with did not belong to me but to the spirits around me, because what I was thinking

¹ Wherever the New Testament speaks of "forgiving" or "forgiveness," more literally it is speaking of "remission," that is, sending back or sending away.

did not begin in myself but in these spirits, who were influencing my thinking. He was astonished at this but nevertheless perceived that it was so. I was allowed to go on and say that to search out what is bad in a person is not an angelic thing to do unless at the same time one looked for what is good.

Matthew 5:23-24. If therefore thou offer thy gift on the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has anything against thee, leave there thy gift in front of the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come offer thy gift.

Questions and Comments

1. In Matthew 6:14-15, right after the Lord's Prayer, why is the teaching about forgiveness the only part of the Prayer that is repeated and emphasized?
2. Can we acknowledge and believe that we are utterly undeserving, worthless and filthy? Can we acknowledge this while still carrying on "our" daily responsibilities and uses?
3. How can we distinguish a healthy, true kind of self-loathing from an unhealthy, false kind?
4. Can we have contempt for others if we have genuine self-loathing from a clear understanding of our own nature? What happens if instead of self-loathing we get into boasting and self-promotion?
5. Can it be useful and charitable to search out what is bad in the neighbor as long as we also look for what is good?

6. *From your heart forgive your brother's trespasses.*

Matthew 18:21-35. Then Peter coming to Him said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times? Jesus says to him, I do not say to thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven.

Therefore, the kingdom of the heavens is likened to a man, a king, who willed to take account with his servants. And when he had begun to take it, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But he not having anything to pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and it be paid. Then the servant falling down worshiped him, saying, Lord, bear long with me, and I will pay thee all. And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt.

But that servant, going out, found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred denarii, and taking hold of him choked him, saying, Pay me what thou owest! Then his fellow-servant, falling at his feet, implored him, saying, Bear long with me, and I will pay thee all. And he was not willing, but going away, cast him into prison until he should pay what was owed.

But his fellow-servants, seeing what was done, sorrowed greatly; and coming, they gave their lord to understand all things that were done. Then his lord, calling him, says to him, Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou didst implore me. Oughtest thou not also to have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his lord, being angry, delivered him up to the tormentors until he should pay all that was owed to him. So also My heavenly Father will do to you, unless each of you from your hearts forgive his brother their trespasses.

TCR 409. ...The Lord taught in Matthew that good ought to be done from charity to the adversary and the enemy:

You have heard that it has been declared *to them of old time*, Thou shalt love thy neighbor², and shalt hate thine enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do well to them who hate you, and pray for those who injure you and persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in the heavens.... (Matt. 5:43-45).

And when Peter asked Him how often he should forgive one sinning against him, whether he should do so until seven times, He replied:

I do not say to thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21, 22).

And I have heard from heaven that the Lord forgives to everyone his sins, and never takes vengeance nor even imputes sin, because He is love itself and good itself; nevertheless, sins are

² Leviticus 19:18

not thereby washed away, for this can be done only by repentance. For when He told Peter to forgive until seventy times seven, what won't the Lord do?

Matthew 18:15-17. And if thy brother sin against thee, go thy way and reprove him between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. And if he will not hear, take with thee yet one or two, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every saying may be established. And if he neglects to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he also neglects to hear the church, let him be to thee just as a gentile and a publican.

Questions and Comments

1. In the Lord's parable about the king and the two servants, can we picture each of these voices within ourselves?
2. Can the Lord's teaching about loving our enemies, blessing them, doing well to them and praying for them be practiced literally in a marriage or a friendship where issues have arisen?
3. Does the Lord's teaching in Matthew 18 have practical application today? How would we "tell it to the church" in with the hope of gaining our brother? What does it mean, that if he neglects to hear the church, let him be to thee as a gentile and a publican?

7. Judgment and Forgiveness

John 8:1-11. And Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him, and sitting down He taught them.

And the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman seized in adultery, and standing her in the midst, they say to Him, Teacher, this woman was seized committing adultery, in the very deed. And Moses in the Law commanded us that such should be stoned; what then sayest Thou? But this they said, tempting Him, that they might have reason to accuse Him. But Jesus, stooping down, with His finger wrote in the earth.

And as they continued asking Him, He stood up and said to them, He who is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone at her. And again stooping down, He wrote in the earth. And they, having heard, and being reprov'd by conscience, went out one by one, beginning from the elders until the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

And Jesus, standing up and observing no one except the woman, said to her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Has no one condemned thee? And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.

CL 523. The Lord says, "Judge not, that you be not condemned" (Matthew 7:1). This cannot in the least mean judging as to someone's moral and civil life in the world, but judging someone's spiritual and heavenly life. Who does not see that if people were not allowed to judge of the moral life of those dwelling with them in the world, society would collapse? What would become of society if there were no public courts of law, and if no one was permitted to have his judgment concerning another? But to judge what the inner mind or soul is like within, thus what a person's spiritual state is and so his fate after death—of this one is not permitted to judge, because it is known to the Lord alone. Nor does the Lord reveal it until after death, in order that everyone may do what he does in freedom, and that good or evil may consequently be from him and so in him, and the person thus live his own life and be his own person to eternity.

CL 523:2. A general judgment is allowed, such as the following: "If you are in your inward qualities as you appear in your outward ones, you will be saved or condemned." But a specific judgment— as for example to say, "You are of this or that character in your inward qualities, therefore you will be saved or condemned"—is not allowed.

8. Condemn the sin but not the sinner?

AC 8343. ...Falsities in faith and evils in life cast themselves into hell. On account of this, when angels think and talk about the hells, they think and talk about falsities and evils, completely separate from the inhabitants there; for angels always banish ideas that focus on persons and confine themselves to those that focus on things, 5225, 5287, **5434**.

AC 5434e. Nevertheless, this abstracted idea involves persons, namely, those who are in the things in question.

9. *The Lord's Forgiveness*

Luke 23:33-34. And when they had come to a place called Skull, there they crucified Him and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Questions and Comments

1. By writing in the earth, Jesus may have been indicating the fulfillment of the words in Jeremiah 17:13: "O Jehovah, the hope of Israel, all who forsake Thee shall be ashamed, and they who turn aside away from Me shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken Jehovah, the spring of living waters."
2. Can we picture each of the characters in this story (John 8:1-11) speaking inside us?
3. The Lord said two things to the woman, both from mercy. We need to hear both of these too.
4. Is it clear what things we can and must judge, and what things we cannot? Can/must we judge another's intentions? How does necessary judgment fit with forgiveness?
5. In what situations is it good to distinguish the sin from the sinner, and in what situations must we not separate them?