

Fourth Sermon on the Lord's Prayer, by Rev. Theodore Pitcairn, January, 1947.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." (Matthew 6:12)

Or as in Luke :

"And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us." (Luke 11:4.)

All things which a man has are from the Lord, whether they are celestial, spiritual, natural, or material things. They are given to man to use as if of himself. Man either uses these things according to Divine order, and then ascribes them with their use to the Lord, or he misuses them and abuses them, and ascribes them with their use to himself. All the gifts from the Lord which he ascribes to himself are debts, and when, from ascribing them to himself he abuses them, they become sins.

But what is the nature of these debts?

First as to the more interior debts for which man must be forgiven:

A man is given a perception of certain true things of the internal sense of the Word. These true things are impressed on his internal memory and become cognitions there. In a following state a man fails to ascribe these cognitions to the Lord, but instead, by means of these cognitions he strives to acquire further true things from the internal sense of the Word, but from himself. Due to the cognitions he knows he can in appearance do this, but they are stolen things, for which he is in debt to the Lord. They are things gotten by climbing up some other way, like a thief or a robber, instead of entering by means of the Lord, who is the door.

Everyman who is of the internal Church at times does this; wherefore he must come into a state of repentance, and pray, "Forgive us our debts, or our sins"

Again, a man applies the things of Doctrine to his life, but forgets that he cannot do this of himself, but solely from the Lord; wherefore he immediately falls into that which is meritorious, for which he must, after examining himself, repent, and ask forgiveness for this debt which he owes the Lord.

Observe how everywhere we can see stolen things, debts for which forgiveness is often not asked.

A young man or woman is granted an inspiration, which is a common thing in youth, on the basis of youthful innocence; but he soon becomes proud of his abilities; vanity takes hold of him, and he spoils his gifts.

An old man or woman who has experienced much during a long life becomes proud of his knowledge of life, with the result that he becomes more stupid than the young.

See how a man prides himself in his intelligence and how a woman prides herself in her womanly perception or intuition, with the immediate result that the man loses his intelligence and the woman her perception. As soon as a man thinks about his intelligence, and still more if he speaks about it, he becomes internally unintelligent; as soon as a woman from having had perceptions prides herself on her perceptions, and still more if she speaks about her perceptions, all perception leaves her. Wherefore if one does not continually ask forgiveness for one's debts, one is carried away.

Observe how the wealthy, both in the natural and spiritual sense of the word, glory in their wealth, and in the power and influence it brings, while the poor in the natural and spiritual sense pride themselves in the imagination that if they had the wealth of the rich they would make far better use of it.

Consider the various occupations: How a priest glories in his knowledge of the Word, and glories in the idea that he serves God and not man. How the government official glories in the idea that he serves the whole commonwealth, and does not serve private interests. How the teachers pride themselves in sacrificing themselves for the coming generation, and pride themselves in thinking that the future civilization is dependent on them. How the business man prides himself on being the brains of the whole economy upon which everyone depends. How the manual workman prides himself on how he is the one who actually does the work, and loves the power that numbers bring to the working class.

See how the judge prides himself in the ability his profession has trained him in, of weighing evidence free from the usual human emotions; and note the lawyer's pride at viewing things from the principles of the law.

Observe again how the medical profession prides itself in its selfsacrifice in guarding the health of the community.

See how those who are in the arts set themselves above others on account of their inspiration and intuition, even to the point that they think that they more than others can prove that there is a spiritual world, which is the source of their inspiration.

Note how the aristocrat prides himself in his family, the lower class in its red-bloodedness and vulgarity; while the middle class is often most proud of its mediocracy, which it regards as being more normal and healthy.

The learned man prides himself as if he were wise; while the stupid man imagines himself to be the simple good, and therefore to be free from the knavery of those who are bright.

Thus each in his vanity looks to himself and his own type or class, and few in humility look to the common good and to the Lord from whom the common good proceeds. Here again are debts from which none of us are free, and for which we must pray daily and as it were every moment to be forgiven.

We are told to pray for forgiveness; and this is well; yet forgiveness on the part of the Lord is not forgiveness, but Mercy; the Lord's forgiveness represents His Mercy. When Peter asked the Lord how many times he should forgive his brother, seven times? the Lord said, Not seven, but seventy times seven, - that is, without end. How much more is this true of the Lord! The Lord has infinite Mercy and Love for every man, even for the devils of hell. But it is a law of the Divine True that insofar as a man turns away from the Divine Mercy he cannot receive it; not because the Lord does not give it, but because man rejects it.

That forgiveness is only an appearance and a representation is clear from this: if a parent is wise, he tells the child he must ask forgiveness for the wrong thing which it has done; if the parent feels that the child is not really sorry, he may withhold forgiveness until he sees signs that the child really regrets having done what is wrong. Yet on the part of the parent there is nothing but love, and no question of not forgiving, and any appearance to the contrary is only from love for the sake of the child. How much more so is this true of the Lord's Divine Love? If a child at arriving at adult age turns away from the mercy of his parents, to a life of evil, a separation occurs, but this is due to

the one who is in evil, and is not due to the lack of love and mercy on the part of the parents, which immediately manifests itself if the child repents.

That forgiveness on the part of man is only an appearance is clear from this: if one has hurt us, he has either hurt us as to the things of the proprium, in which case there is no reason for forgiveness, or he has hurt us as to the things of the Lord which are with us, which the Lord alone can forgive.

Most asking for forgiveness, most forgiving, and not forgiving, or most refusal to forgive followed by forgiving, is merely from self and therefore evil.

And yet we are told to pray, "Forgive us our debts, or sins, as we also forgive our debtors." It is indeed useful to ask forgiveness not only of the Lord, but of others whom we have sinned against, but such asking of forgiveness should be a representative of an acknowledgment that we have sinned and that we desire to repent; while the forgiving should be a representative of our desire to believe in the other's repentance, free from all self merit or self justification on our own part, free from all the self satisfaction that usually accompanies forgiveness and asking forgiveness, and the merely proprial conjunction that follows such a forgiving and such an asking for forgiveness.

"as we also forgive our debtors." What are the common debts which we are to forgive as we wish the Lord to forgive us?

One speaks a true thing, and another, hearing it, speaks it as if it were his own, usually with a slight twist which makes it a falsity. Or only a part of what has been heard is repeated, with the result that a false emphasis is placed upon it, hence it becomes false. Again, one uses a true spoken by another, for an end or purpose that is quite contrary to the end or purpose of the one who first spoke it truly. Nothing is more common than for men to misuse the Word of the Lord, to use it contrary to the spirit of the Lord's Word; and the same applies to the words of a good and wise man, and particularly to the things of the Doctrine of the Church.

If one is in what is good and true, from self acknowledgment, he confesses that he has often abused the Word of the Lord in this manner; he is therefore merciful to those who have abused the true which he has spoken, even if the true that one has spoken is perversely used by another against himself.

A story goes that a wealthy man once said, "I do not understand why that man dislikes me. I never gave anything to him." This story illustrates the fact that in spiritual as well as natural things there is a resentment at owing any thing to another, by all who are not regenerate, and in the other world this resentment breaks forth as hatred against the Lord to whom we owe all things. This resentment has its origin in the proprium which desires to be interiorly self reliant and dependent on no one. And as everyone, to the extent that he is not regenerated has such a resentment against the Lord, a wise man who acknowledges this, is merciful towards others who have shown such resentment against himself, and shuns the sin of the servant concerning whom we read:

"And when he began to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and his children and all that he had. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the Lord of the servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him and forgave him his debt. But the same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and

besought him, saying, have patience, and I will pay thee all. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison... Then his lord said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldst thou not also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brothers trespasses." (Matthew 18: 24-35.)

We have said that man from himself is resentful, instead of grateful for the blessings, particularly the spiritual blessings, he receives from others. On the other hand it is to be observed that many desire gratitude and thankfulness on account of the things they have done for others, when yet no gratitude or thankfulness is due to them, as those who did good or gave to others did not do so from any genuine love, but from some selfish purpose, or for the sake of self gratification; to such no thanks or gratitude are owed. One who acts from charity does not wish thanks or gratitude, and if he receives them, he gives them to the Lord who is the only source of true blessings.

Note how often a parent indulges children, or how one who is in a position to do so indulges others until they are spoiled, and then is resentful at the lack of gratitude, while what they did was for their own self satisfaction in giving, and not from any true love for another; and what they receive in lack of gratefulness and in resentment was only the just reward for their spoiling another. How seldom do parents acknowledge this, and blame themselves rather than their children.

Again, there are parents who pride themselves in the strict discipline with which they bring up their children, but it is a discipline of command and not a genuine leading; it lacks a true example, which leads to the love of obedience; such parents also resent the lack of gratitude on the part of the children when they reap their just reward. With many there is an alternation between these two extremes.

When we think we have acted from love and spoken from wisdom, and find ourselves resentful and unforgiving on account of the abuse that has been made of what we have done and said, let us reflect on the misuse we have made of the good and true things the Lord has given us in the Word, and thus fulfill the words of the Prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors;" for the Lord's words following the prayer read: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14,15.)

We are told in the Word that influx is according to efflux, that is, that insofar as love and mercy proceed from man, to the same degree he receives love and mercy from the Lord. This is in a sense however, an appearance, for in truth the love and mercy that proceed from man to the neighbor is a sign that man has genuinely received the love and mercy of the Lord, for unless these have been received by man they cannot proceed from him.

Insofar as man has received the Love and Mercy of the Lord, they go forth from him without limit. They should however proceed according to wisdom. Wisdom is what protects love. To act from love but not according to wisdom, would in the end harm the love. Love in wisdom looks to the end, and therefore in order that the end may be obtained it often hides itself, as Joseph hid his love for his brethren and spoke harshly to them. But the end must always be an end of Love and Mercy.

Amen.

Lessons: I Kings 8:31-43 Matt. 18: 15-e Word Explained 6853-61.