

## "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"

The Lord's Prayer is a model prayer given to us by the Lord and recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Although the Lord, introducing the prayer, said:

Matthew 6:9a

"In this manner, therefore, pray.."

And in Luke 11:2a

"When you pray, say:"

And although in Luke's Gospel it is clear that this prayer was given explicitly in response to a question from the disciples about how to pray:

Luke 11:1b

"Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples"

Many try to downplay this prayer and dismiss it as "just an example"! This is certainly not the only belittlement of what the Lord said. It is part of a systematic effort to weaken His words and His commands, so that their importance is downplayed and they become merely a kind of nice thoughts that we are not really obliged to follow faithfully. But brothers and sisters, let us not make this mistake: what the Lord said is of the UTMOST importance and significance and must always receive our undivided attention! When the king speaks, his subjects listen! As the Lord says in many instances: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 11:15 and in many other places). When the Lord speaks, we must LISTEN and DO! We must never belittle His words but treat them with the utmost respect and attention they deserve! So here, when He says,

"This is how you should pray" and "When you pray, say," let us pay close attention, and let what He asked us to pray for be part of our own prayer! It is not "repetition" to pray every day the prayer that the Lord gave us to pray! If we do so, meaning every word we say with our hearts, it is the best prayer we can pray! Why? Because the Lord gave it to us as an answer to how to pray and told us to "SAY IT"! If He said, "SAY this prayer," and I don't "say" it because I have belittled it and think I know better, then it is obvious that I am wrong! Who knows better? The Lord who told me to "say it," or me who refuses to "say" it? Let us trust the Lord in what He tells us and say it! But we must say it with our whole heart, weighing every word of His, and not just rush through it while our mind is wandering elsewhere! Such prayers are worthless. The Lord's prayer is the best prayer if we weigh what we say and mean it! And this and every other "prayer" has zero value when we don't mean what we say but just talk—when we just move our lips like a machine while our heart and mind are somewhere else. The only prayers that matter are those that come from the heart! And the Lord's prayer, when said from the heart, meaning what we say, is the best prayer!

Now, what I wanted to talk about in this short article is just a few words of the prayer, the following:

Matthew 6:12

“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”

And in Luke 11:4

“and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”

This part of the prayer is also highlighted in Mark in another context:

Mark 11:25

“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

In this part of the prayer, we ask God for His forgiveness. But as we can see, this has two parts, and God's part is the second! The first part is ours. First, we forgive those who sin against us, and then we go to God to forgive our own sins! It is not the other way around! "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us." Have we forgiven those who have sinned against us? If so, then God will forgive us too! Many people think that forgiveness flows in only one direction: God must forgive them, and whether they have forgiven others or hold a grudge against them is irrelevant! Their line of thinking, which is quite popular, goes like this: "God as Father, in this age of grace in which we live, will always forgive us, no matter what, without conditions, as long as we ask Him, even if we ourselves do not forgive." But this is wrong. There are conditions attached to God's forgiveness! His forgiveness is NOT unconditional. In fact, it is ABSOLUTELY dependent on whether we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. Do we forgive? We will be forgiven. Do we not forgive? We will not be forgiven either! It's that simple! The Lord made this very clear, beyond any doubt, when, at the end of the prayer He gave us, He said:

#### Matthew 6:14-15

“ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

We have the choice to belittle these words of our Lord—just as false Christianity does with this and many other things—or to accept them just as they are!

My dear brothers and sisters, the truth is that we have so many debts, and we add to them every day, both secretly and openly! There is no end to it. We are talking about a huge debt. What our fellow man owes us, what he has done to us, is absolutely nothing compared to what we owe to God! Do we really want the righteous judge to leave our enormous debt unforgiven? Of course not! Let us therefore forgive from our hearts the debts that others owe us, knowing that our debts to God are much, much greater! And if, after we forgive them, they sin again, let us forgive them again and again! Just as God forgives us again and again!

The Lord demonstrated this with a very beautiful parable. Parables, like images, make the message very vivid, and the Lord chose such a parable to show that we must forgive others in order to be forgiven ourselves. Let us read:

#### Matthew 18:23-35

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should

pay all his debt. **So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.**”

We are like that servant who owes the king an incredible, incalculable amount! 10,000 talents would be about 4 billion dollars today! Is there anyone on earth who is so deeply in debt? And yet, this was the debt that this servant, who represents each one of us, owed to the King. And what did the King do? He forgave him everything! Impossible, and yet the King, in His grace and mercy, did it! This is our God! This is His heart! Full of mercy for anyone who asks Him! This servant now had a fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii. How much was that? It was just a day's wages. Really nothing! But instead of treating his fellow man with compassion and mercy—a very small, tiny portion of mercy compared to the mercy the King had shown him—he did not forgive him, but threw him into prison for this tiny debt! So great was his insensitivity and ingratitude! He essentially did not value the King and His mercy at all! He treated the King's forgiveness as if the King owed it to him and was obliged to do so anyway! This is exactly what many of us do today. We take God's forgiveness for granted. "God's grace covers everything. God will forgive you anyway! No strings attached! Live however you want! No problem! Just rely on His goodness!" As if God is a machine that is obligated to forgive everything, while we ourselves do not show the slightest bit of forgiveness and hold a grudge against someone who owes us almost nothing! So, my brothers and sisters, let's get this straight in our minds! If we do not forgive others, GOD WILL NOT FORGIVE us either! As we have just read:

### Matthew 18:32-35

“Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the

jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.**"

There is therefore no choice: we must forgive from our hearts! If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven! It is not optional but mandatory! Only those who forgive are forgiven! As Paul said:

#### Ephesians 4:32

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

#### Colossians 3:13

"bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

In conclusion, then, when we stand in prayer, before asking God for His forgiveness, let us search our hearts to see if there is anyone who has wronged us and whom we have not forgiven, and let us forgive them! Then let us ask God to forgive us too, as our Lord told us. He will do so with great joy!

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