

“A Dangerous Prayer”

In the name of our crucified Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace.

One of the most common prayers we recite is The Lord's Prayer, I suspect we can all agree on that. In Matthew's account, Jesus encourages his disciples not to ramble on in long, wordy prayers. Instead, he offers them a simple prayer that addresses the most important needs in life. What we know as the Lord's Prayer.

In this prayer, God is praised, God's will is acknowledged, material sustenance and forgiveness of sin are requested and a plea is made for God's protection against harm. A peculiar twist, however, can be noted in a part of this simple but all encompassing prayer. God is requested to forgive us as we forgive others. In other words, we beseech God to be willing to forgive us in proportion to our willingness to forgive others. Jesus confirms this with a warning at the conclusion of the gospel passage: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

We might wonder, therefore, when we frequently and casually offer this prayer, how alert we are that we are calling down upon ourselves either a blessing or a curse. In terms of offering God the conditions for our forgiveness, this is a dangerous prayer. If we are free and open with our forgiveness of others, of course, we have little to fear when we give God this challenge. If, on the other hand, we are resentful, peevish, eager for revenge, and reluctant with our forgiveness of others, we stand on precious ground. Either we stop saying this prayer, or significantly change our attitudes on forgiveness.

So, my friends. Does forgiveness come to you easily? Do you bear grudges and resentments over years of time? Consider how much you may have harmed and hurt others over a lifetime. Wouldn't it be a great relief to know that all is forgiven and forgotten, and that God would never hold it against you? That relief is as close as your willingness to forgive others. Friends, let us say the Lord's Prayer with all sincerity of heart, but be alert to its implications. Let us commit ourselves to be as forgiving as we can and then we can trust God to return the favour. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.