

Unmasking the Supernatural 08

“And (Jesus) said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven!” Luke 10:18

If Ye Forgive

When we need real answers to prayer for our own needs or those of others, we want to be sure that the way is open between us and our Saviour so that nothing will get in the way of His being able to answer us. There are a few things that can completely block our prayers and also leave us vulnerable to Satan’s attacks; One is if we have known sins in our lives, unconfessed and unforsaken. God says: “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” Isaiah 59:2.

Then if we lack faith to believe that God means what He says in His promises; “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. . . For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. James 1:6, 7.

Now here is another area that many have problems with, an unforgiving attitude can get in the way of heavens blessings! “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.” Matthew 6:14, 15.

These verses follow where Jesus was talking about Prayer and had given the Lord’s Prayer; “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” They are the very next verses.

I wonder how many of us, as we read this, realize the seriousness of it? If we fail to forgive others, God will *not* forgive us!

How willing is the Father to forgive? He was willing enough that He gave the greatest gift Heaven could possibly bestow to make forgiveness possible!

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Isaiah 1:18

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Ezekiel 33:11.

Did Jesus say that God was ready to forgive? “For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.” John 16:27.

But here we see that there is something that can get in the way so that the great plan of salvation is made unavailable to us. In order to be forgiven, we have to forgive!

Did Jesus practice what He taught? Notice the amazing scene here in Luke 23: Here is Jesus, tired, hungry, in severe pain, and they place Him on that cross and drive nails through His hands and feet; Incredible, heartless cruelty! Yet hear His voice cry out, not with pain or cursing, but loving forgiveness.

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34.

An old spiritual says, “They crucified my Lord, and He never said a mumbling word!”

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who, when he was

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reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously:" 1 Peter 2:21.

Actually, that word, '*himself*' in the text is a supplied word, it is not in the original. It is the *situation* Christ was committing to His Father; and we can do this also with confidence, knowing that God judges righteously and will take care of us. Jesus is our example of what God wants each human to be; He is our pattern man. God's design for us is to be forgiving.

Jesus said to His disciples; "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Luke 17:3, 4.

It seems the disciples may have listened to this in stunned silence for a moment, but then they responded: "And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." Luke 17:5.

Increase our Faith! They felt the need of something they realized they did not have enough of; faith. It came through to them that no amount of rules and regulations could save them if this was an example of the standards of God's kingdom; they needed faith.

The words of Jesus must have stayed in Peter's mind; because we see on another day Peter came to Jesus and asked a question about forgiveness; perhaps he thought Jesus had made a mistake before and so would give Him a chance to set the record straight, back to three times, as Peter had been taught.

Now Peter was a Jew, and Jesus was a Jew. Here was one Jew asking another, "How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?" Now the Jews had a custom, and their limit was three times. They would forgive one time, two times, and three but after that never; no more.

"The rabbis limited the exercise of forgiveness to three offenses. Peter, carrying out, as he supposed, the teaching of Christ, thought to extend it to seven, the number signifying perfection." Christ's Object Lessons 243.

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Matthew 18:21, 22.

This equals 490, just like in the prophecy where there was 490 years, the time allotted to the Jews after the decree went out in 457 BC, and it led to AD 34, when the leadership stoned Stephen. 70 weeks was determined on them and 70 times 7 equals 490 years.

So what about forgiveness then? Are we supposed to count the times up and keep careful track? "400 times, 450 times, 490 times---sorry, OK, I can't do it anymore! I stop here and won't forgive you any more now." Why if we were numbering up all these incidents, our minds would be occupied all the time with it!

No; the lesson Jesus is trying to convey here is that we should never become weary of forgiving. No matter what the circumstances are, Jesus is saying we must never become weary of forgiving each other.

"But Christ taught that we are never to become weary of forgiving. Not "Until seven times," He said, "but, Until seventy times seven." COL 243.

Peter thought seven was too much; what did he think now? Seventy times Seven! That is four hundred and ninety! Perhaps he appeared shocked, for right away Jesus started to tell a story, a parable, in Matthew 18:23-35, teaching the same lesson as we find in Matthew 6:14, 15.

For greater understanding let's explore chapter 19 in Christ Object Lessons, pgs 243-247: "The Measure of Forgiveness."

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“Then He (Jesus) showed the true ground upon which forgiveness is to be granted and the danger of cherishing an unforgiving spirit.”

It is dangerous to cherish an unforgiving spirit; not only does it give Satan greater access to harass and tempt us, but it even has a negative physical effect on our health and wellbeing. Continuing:

“In a parable He told of a king's dealing with the officers who administered the affairs of his government. Some of these officers were in receipt of vast sums of money belonging to the state.”

They were checking out the king's accounts; balancing the books. Going on:

“As the king investigated their administration of this trust, there was brought before him one man whose account showed a debt to his lord for the immense sum of ten thousand talents. He had nothing to pay, and according to the custom, the king ordered him to be sold, with all that he had, that payment might be made.”

According to the custom he, his wife and his children were to be sold; everything that he had. Continuing:

“But the terrified man fell at his feet and besought him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.”

"But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence; and he laid hands 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 with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou 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.”

“This parable presents details which are needed for the filling out of the picture but which have no counterpart in its spiritual significance. The attention should not be diverted to them. Certain great truths are illustrated, and to these our thought should be given.

“The pardon granted by this king represents a divine forgiveness of all sin. Christ is represented by the king, who, moved with compassion, forgave the debt of his servant. Man was under the condemnation of the broken law. He could not save himself, and for this reason Christ came to this world, clothed His divinity with humanity, and gave His life, the just for the unjust. He gave Himself for our sins, and to every soul He freely offers the blood-bought pardon. "With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption." Psalm 130:7.

It does not mean money or possessions; it means freely as you have received forgiveness, give it brethren—for God is always ready to forgive us. With the Lord there is mercy!

“Here is the ground upon which we should exercise compassion toward our fellow sinners. "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." 1 John 4:11. "Freely ye have received," Christ says, "freely give." Matthew 10:8. {COL 245.1}

“In the parable, when the debtor pleaded for delay, with the promise, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all," the sentence was revoked. The whole debt was canceled. And he was soon given an opportunity to follow the example of the master who had forgiven him. Going out, he met a fellow servant who owed him a small sum. He had been forgiven ten thousand talents; the debtor owed him a hundred pence. But he who had been so mercifully treated, dealt with his fellow laborer in an altogether different manner. His debtor made an appeal similar to that which

he himself had made to the king, but without a similar result. He who had so recently been forgiven was not tenderhearted and pitiful. The mercy shown him he did not exercise in dealing with his fellow servant. He heeded not the request to be patient. The small sum owed to him was all that the ungrateful servant would keep in mind. He demanded all that he thought his due, and carried into effect a sentence similar to that which had been so graciously revoked for him.

"How many are today manifesting the same spirit. When the debtor pleaded with his lord for mercy, he had no true sense of the greatness of his debt. He did not realize his helplessness. He hoped to deliver himself. "Have patience with me," he said, "and I will pay thee all." So there are many who hope by their own works to merit God's favor. They do not realize their helplessness. They do not accept the grace of God as a free gift, but are trying to build themselves up in self-righteousness. Their own hearts are not broken and humbled on account of sin, and they are exacting and unforgiving toward others. Their own sins against God, compared with their brother's sins against them, are as ten thousand talents to one hundred pence--nearly one million to one; yet they dare to be unforgiving.

"In the parable the lord summoned the unmerciful debtor, and "said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldst not thou 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," said Jesus, "shall My Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." He who refuses to forgive is thereby casting away his own hope of pardon."

There is a reason Jesus said we must forgive and that reason is more for us than for the other person. Forgiveness gets rid of the negative connections in our brain that will do us harm. Statistics show that just having an unforgiving, grudge-bearing disposition can shorten our life expectancy by 18 years! Amazing!

A mission story was told many years ago about a little boy, about six years old, somewhere in Africa. One night while the family was sleeping his home was broken into by a bandit, who proceeded to kill each member of his family.

Being just six years old this little boy managed to hide under his bed and from there he saw this bandit killing his mom and dad, his two brothers and sister; they were all in the same room. As he kept staring at what was happening he was horrified; he was shaking; but soon after the bandit left the house taking with him whatever he had found to steal. It was a horrible, sad day in his life. While he was under that bed he managed to see the face of the bandit that came into the house.

Many years later, that little boy grew up into a man. There was an evangelistic meeting in the village where he lived. He attended the meetings and he accepted the Seventh-day Adventist message. Then as a young man he wanted to preach Christ and Him crucified, so he went to one of the colleges and became a minister of the gospel. Once he was a minister, he began to hold evangelistic meetings like he himself had been baptized in.

Then one day when he was conducting one of his meetings, he made an altar call at the end of his sermon and a lot of people began to come up to the altar for prayer. Suddenly he saw a man coming up and when he looked at the man, it was the same man that had killed his family when he was there under the bed and the memories started to come back into his mind! He had never seen the man from that terrible day until now here he was before him asking for prayer.

He vividly recalled all that he saw back then. Now here he was standing as a minister of the gospel in the pulpit, having an opportunity to take revenge on this man who was now older and himself a young, strong

man. The devil was playing with his mind what to do. He had always wanted to take revenge on this man. Then the man came forward with the group for prayer and the minister prayed for them all.

The meetings went on until it was time for the baptism. The young minister went into the baptismal pool and many were coming to be baptized and he was baptizing one person after another. Then suddenly in front of him came this man. In his mind at that moment came the thought, "Here it is again; I have another opportunity to take my revenge." But the Spirit of the Lord said, "No," and he whispered a prayer of forgiveness; he asked God to forgive him and also to forgive that man.

He baptized that man and he hugged him; from that time forward, he and that man became the best of friends. He never told the man that he was the little boy under the bed and what he did to his family—he never told him. Many of us go through grievous things in our lives; but as Jesus said, we have to forgive! Being a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable; because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you and me.

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Colossians 3:13.

Be gentle and ready to forgive, never hold grudges or malice against each other. The Lord has forgiven us and so we must forgive one another. But our chapter in Christ's Object Lessons has more counsel for us; there is another side to this story we need to consider; it is just as much of a command of Jesus to honestly rebuke those who trespass against us as it is to forgive them.

"But the teaching of this parable should not be misapplied. God's forgiveness toward us lessens in no wise our duty to obey Him. So the spirit of forgiveness toward our fellow men does not lessen the claim of just obligation. In the prayer which Christ taught His disciples He said, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Matthew 6:12. By this He did not mean that in order to be forgiven our sins we must not require our just dues from our debtors. If they cannot pay, even though this may be the result of unwise management, they are not to be cast into prison, oppressed, or even treated harshly; but the parable does not teach us to encourage indolence. The word of God declares that if a man will not work, neither shall he eat. (2 Thessalonians 3:10.) The Lord does not require the hard-working man to support others in idleness. With many there is a waste of time, a lack of effort, which brings to poverty and want. If these faults are not corrected by those who indulge them, all that might be done in their behalf would be like putting treasure into a bag with holes. Yet there is an unavoidable poverty, and we are to manifest tenderness and compassion toward those who are unfortunate. We should treat others just as we ourselves, in like circumstances, would wish to be treated.

"The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul charges us: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:1-5.

"But sin is not to be lightly regarded. The Lord has commanded us not to suffer wrong upon our brother. He says, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him." Luke 17:3. Sin is to be called by its right name, and is to be plainly laid out before the wrongdoer.

"In his charge to Timothy, Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit, says, "Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." 2 Timothy 4:2. And to Titus he writes, "There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers. . . . Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." Titus 1:10-13.

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So this goes against the idea that we are just to 'grin and bear it'; never to say anything negative to the other person. We are to make things known to the person who has wronged us, but we are to do it in a kindly and respectful way, making every effort to be reconciled to them and to act in the best interest of their eternal well being.

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee," Christ said, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Matthew 18:15-17.

"Our Lord teaches that matters of difficulty between Christians are to be settled within the church. They should not be opened before those who do not fear God. If a Christian is wronged by his brother, let him not appeal to unbelievers in a court of justice. Let him follow out the instruction Christ has given. Instead of trying to avenge himself, let him seek to save his brother. God will guard the interests of those who love and fear Him, and with confidence we may commit our case to Him who judges righteously.

There are certainly situations that we can encounter that call forth special patience on our part in dealing with them; but never are we to lose sight of the value of the soul of he who is doing the wrong.

"Too often when wrongs are committed again and again, and the wrongdoer confesses his fault, the injured one becomes weary, and thinks he has forgiven quite enough. But the Saviour has plainly told us how to deal with the erring: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." Luke 17:3. Do not hold him off as unworthy of your confidence. Consider "thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Galatians 6:1.

"If your brethren err, you are to forgive them. When they come to you with confession, you should not say, I do not think they are humble enough. I do not think they feel their confession. What right have you to judge them, as if you could read the heart? The word of God says, "If he repent, forgive him. And if he trespasses against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." Luke 17:3, 4. And not only seven times, but seventy times seven--just as often as God forgives you.

"We ourselves owe everything to God's free grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the Saviour effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our exaltation to heirship with Christ. Let this grace be revealed to others.

"Give the erring one no occasion for discouragement. Suffer not a Pharisaical hardness to come in and hurt your brother. Let no bitter sneer rise in mind or heart. Let no tinge of scorn be manifest in the voice. If you speak a word of your own, if you take an attitude of indifference, or show suspicion or distrust, it may prove the ruin of a soul. He needs a brother with the Elder Brother's heart of sympathy to touch his heart of humanity. Let him feel the strong clasp of a sympathizing hand, and hear the whisper, Let us pray. God will give a rich experience to you both. Prayer unites us with one another and with God. Prayer brings Jesus to our side, and gives to the fainting, perplexed soul new strength to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan.

We all need enabling strength above and beyond the human to meet these trials as our Lord wishes us to meet them.

"When one turns away from human imperfections to behold Jesus, a divine transformation takes place in the character. The Spirit of Christ working upon the heart conforms it to His image. Then let it be your effort to lift up Jesus. Let the mind's eye be directed to "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29. And as you engage in this work, remember that "he

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which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." James 5:20.

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Matthew 6:15. Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God's pardoning grace. In God's forgiveness the heart of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of divine compassion flows into the sinner's soul, and from him to the souls of others. The tenderness and mercy that Christ has revealed in His own precious life will be seen in those who become sharers of His grace. But "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Romans 8:9. He is alienated from God, fitted only for eternal separation from Him.

"It is true that he may once have received forgiveness; but his unmerciful spirit shows that he now rejects God's pardoning love. He has separated himself from God, and is in the same condition as before he was forgiven. He has denied his repentance, and his sins are upon him as if he had not repented.

"But the great lesson of the parable lies in the contrast between God's compassion and man's hardheartedness; in the fact that God's forgiving mercy is to be the measure of our own.

"Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" {COL 251.3}

"We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude toward others we show whether we have made that love our own. Wherefore Christ says, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew 7:2."

"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Psalm 130:4. Forgiveness with free and eternal salvation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, after the Lord outlines our duty to show love, longsuffering and compassion on others, then He instructs:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5:48.

We have all heard many ways of explaining this verse, but when we take it in the context it was written, we see it is all about having the character traits of God implanted into our lives. What is God's character like? Let the Bible tell us.

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin," Exodus 34:6.

It all fits together: let's explore other counsel both from the Old and the New Testaments:

"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mark 11:25.

That is serious! We don't want to be in a position where God can't forgive us!

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." Colossians 3:12

“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. 18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.” Leviticus 19:17

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: 9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.” 1 Peter 3:8.

THE WALL OF RESENTMENT

A story tells of a merchant in a small town who had identical twin sons. The boys worked for their father in the department store he owned, and, when he died, they took over the store.

Everything went well until the day a dollar bill disappeared. One of the brothers had left the bill on the cash register and walked outside with a customer. When he returned, the money was gone.

He asked his brother, “Did you see that dollar bill on the cash register?” His brother replied that he had not. But the young man kept probing and questioning. He would not let it alone. “Dollar bills just don’t get up and walk away! Surely you must have seen it!” There was subtle accusation in his voice. Tempers began to rise. Resentment set in. Before long, a deep and bitter chasm divided the young men. They refused to speak to each other. Then they finally decided they could no longer work together and a dividing wall was built down in the center of the store. For twenty years hostility and bitterness grew, spreading to their families and to the community.

Then one day a man in a car, licensed in another state, stopped in front of the store. He walked in and asked the clerk, “How long have you been here?”

The clerk replied that he’d been there all his life. The customer said, “I must share something with you. Twenty years ago I was ‘riding the rails’ and came into this town in a train boxcar. I hadn’t eaten for three days. I came into this store from the back door and saw a dollar bill on the cash register. I put it in my pocket and walked out. All these years I haven’t been able to forget that. I know it wasn’t much money, but I had to come back and ask your forgiveness.”

The stranger was amazed to see tears well up in the eyes of the middle-aged man. “Would you please go next door and tell that same story to the man in the store?” he said. Then the man was even more amazed to see two middle-aged men, who looked very much alike, embracing each other and weeping together in the front of the store. After twenty years, the brokenness was mended. The wall of resentment that divided them came down. It is so often the little things, like resentments, that finally divide people. The solution, of course, is to let them go. There is really nothing particularly profound about it. But for fulfilling and lasting relationships, letting them go is a must. Refuse to carry around bitterness and you may be surprised at how much energy you have left for building bonds with those you love.

Satan’s plan is to use unforgiveness to separate us from those we love. We must foil his plan by always forgiving quickly and from the heart. Even if the problem isn’t really our fault, we need not let it rob us of our family and friends.

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” 1 John 3:10

The Children of God; ‘Be ye therefore ‘perfect’ even as your Father in heaven’.