

Total Forgiveness, Part 3

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

That is, of course, the well-known “Lord’s Prayer.” Many of us memorized verses 9–13 in childhood, but few of us memorized verses 14–15. We will get to that shortly.

Interestingly, the prayer is presented as not being optional. Verse 9 begins with a command, “Pray like this.” The idea is “When you pray,” not “If you pray.” Jesus expects us to pray.

“Forgive us our debts” in verse 12 is obviously a prayer for forgiveness from God. The word “debts” is often also translated as “sins” depending on the context. Our “debts” are what is owed, in this case, to God. It, of course, refers to our sins against Him—as all sins really are against Him. Then we have the conditional clause, “As we have forgiven our debtors,” which refers to those who have sinned against us in some way. This is a plea for God to forgive our sins against Him in the *same manner we have forgiven* the wrongs done to us by others. The wording of the prayer *assumes* we have forgiven those wrongs.

In Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, he states it a bit differently, “And forgive us our sins, *for* we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). In verse 4, Luke uses the term “*for* we ourselves forgive everyone...” and Matthew in verse 12 uses the term “*as* we also have forgiven...”. These are two different Greek words. “For” is the Greek word *gar* /gar/ and is translated as “for.” However, “as” in the Matthew version is *hos* /hoce and is usually translated as “as,” “when,” “how,” or “as it were.” It should be translated here more like “when” or “how” rather than “as”

because it is claiming that the one praying this prayer has indeed forgiven those who have wronged them. Because they have forgiven those who wronged them, they are asking for the same treatment for the wrongs they have done to the Lord.

This is a plea for forgiveness *and* a claim that we have already forgiven those who hurt us. Think about that for a moment. You are putting a condition on your forgiveness by the Lord based on how *you have already forgiven* those who have wronged you. “Lord, forgive me of my sins against You in the same way and to the same extent that I *have forgiven* others who wronged me.” That should be a sobering thought.

You are asking God to let you off the hook but only to the extent that you have let those who have wronged you “off the hook.” The word translated as “forgive” comes from the Greek word that means “to let be” or “to send away.” You are asking God to “let be” what you owe and not discipline you, “to send away” your sins so you would no longer be held liable for them.

And then the prayer concludes with verses 14 and 15: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Pretty straightforward, yes?

Some argue that this is a prayer for salvation, but it is not a prayer for salvation. If we plead for salvation on the basis that we have already forgiven others, then our salvation would be conditional on our works; we would deserve salvation if we have forgiven others and not deserve it if we have not forgiven others. But we know from numerous other passages that salvation is not a product of good works, the best and clearest example demonstrating that is Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been **saved through faith**. And this is **not your own doing**; it is the **gift** of God, ⁹ **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast.”

Works do not produce salvation; works are a *product of* salvation. You are called to be saved *first*, and *then* God has lots of work for you to do. Say it again: salvation is not a product of works, but works are a product of salvation.

If the Lord's Prayer were a prayer for a non-Christian to pray, it would be a prayer for conditional salvation based on good works. The prayer is one that only a believer—one who can truly call God "Father"—can pray. This is a prayer that a sinning believer can pray—and yes, even those who are saved can still commit sins—daily.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

1 Kings 8:46 for there is no one who does not sin

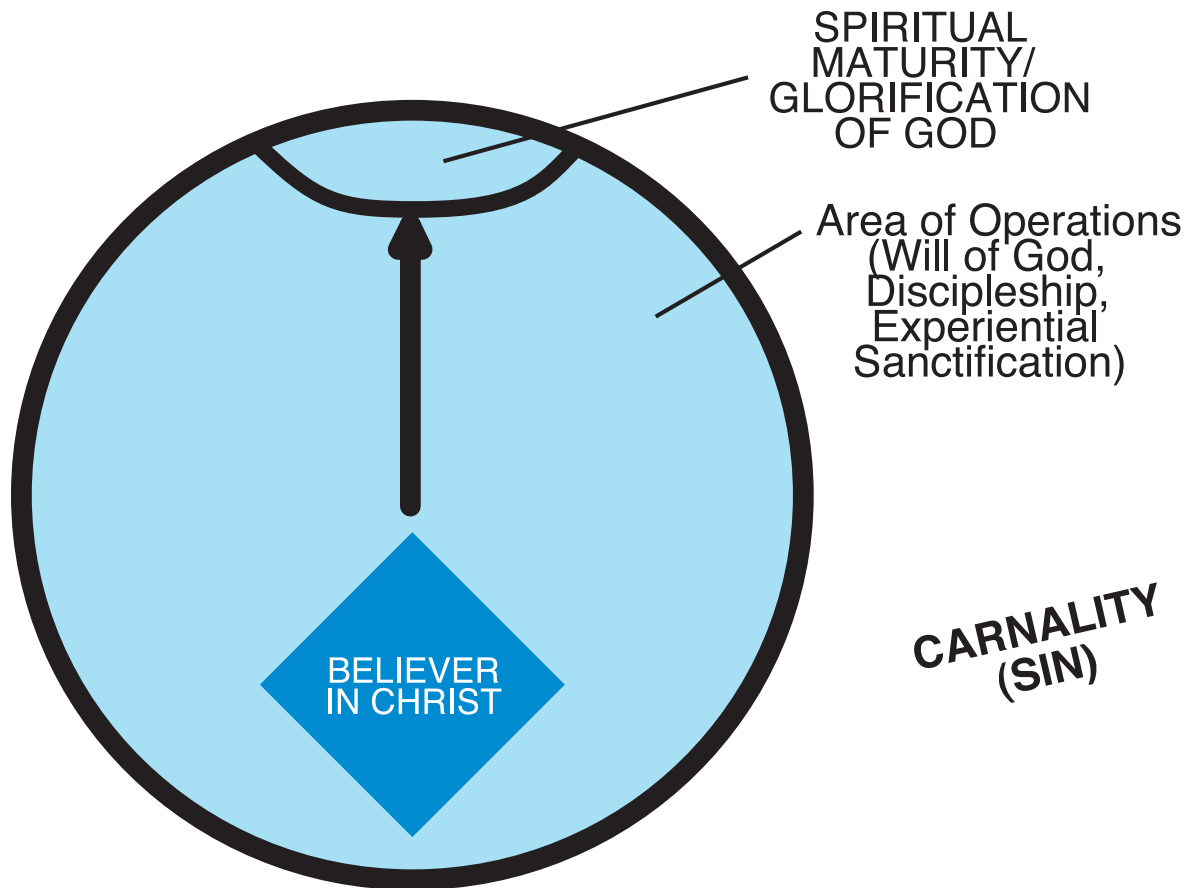
1 John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Then what is the purpose of the Lord's Prayer?

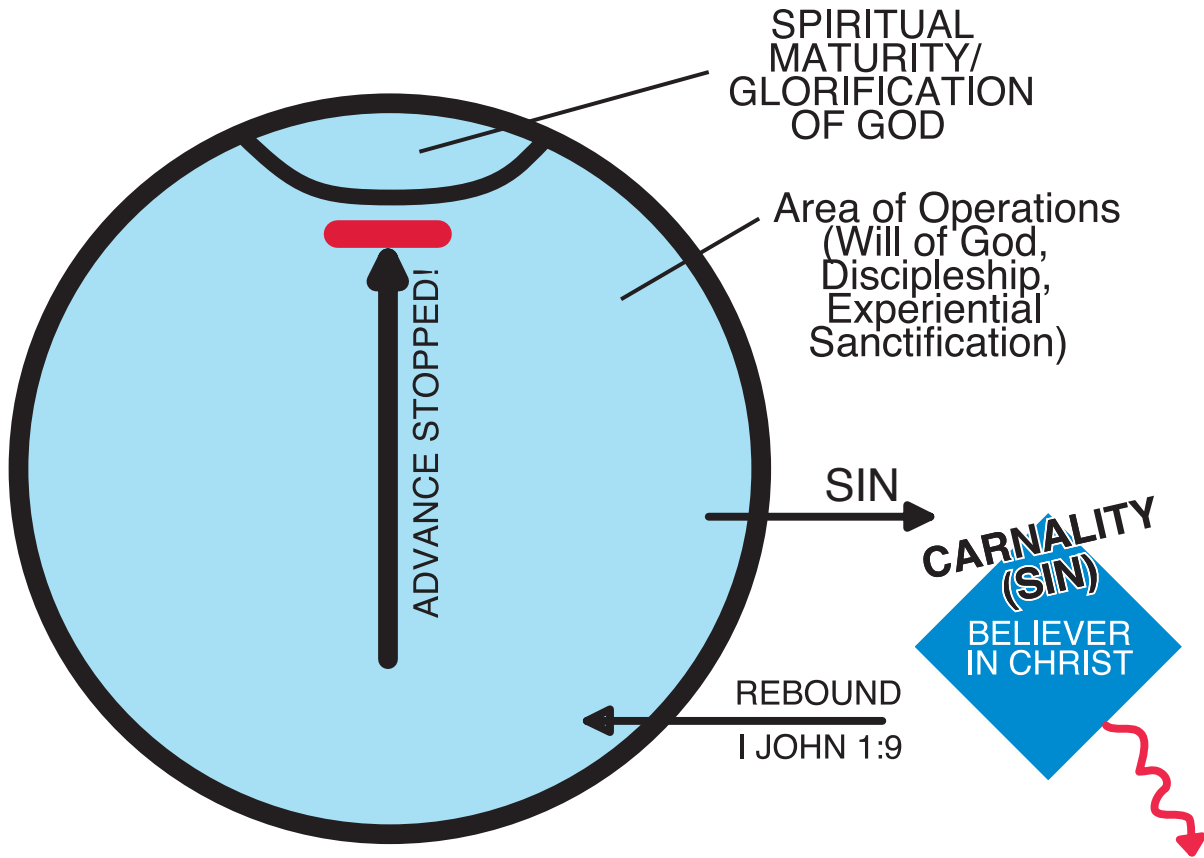
In order to have fellowship with God, all of our sins must be cleansed. The Lord's Prayer is to keep us from having a self-righteous attitude. We all have this problem. We sin daily. If you don't think so, I challenge you to examine yourselves and consider what sin really is. Okay, so you haven't killed anyone lately, knocked over a jewelry store, or had an affair with some famous person, but you have maybe fibbed, taken that pen from work, gossiped, judged someone and accused them of some wrong, dreamed of having that affair with a famous person, or you have unforgiveness in your heart ... I could go on and on, but you get the point. Many would consider some of these as merely minor sins—no biggie, but God doesn't. A sin is a sin. And a sin, even a small one, will damage the relationship you have with God through the indwelling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. That fellowship is broken until you own what you did and confess your sin(s), whether it is a "biggie" or just a "little minor one." Even that little sin puts you outside what I call your "area of operations," defined here as the place God wants you to be and doing what He is calling you to do. In other words, obedience to the will of God.

In the illustration below, the large blue circle is that "place God wants you to be and doing what He is calling you to do." I call it your "Area of



Operations.” The believer is here pictured as a dark blue diamond, a precious stone in the eyes of God. Functioning inside your AO involves advancing to Spiritual Maturity—that semi-circle at the top of the AO. Advance toward that goal is through the on-going intake of Bible doctrine. This process is part of your “spiritual walk” (Galatians 5:16) and is advancing to spiritual maturity.

The alternative is for you to become involved in carnality, which is outside your AO, and that is what the second circle below looks like. You are still a born-again and saved believer, still that “diamond” precious to God, but your advance to spiritual maturity ceases because you are outside your AO and living (operating) in carnality. There you have lost the leading and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit—quenching the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). And there, you have two choices. The preferred choice is to confess your sins and return to operating in your AO. Some call this “rebounding.”



1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That puts you right back into fellowship with God, back in your “area of operations with your spiritual walk/advancement restored to functioning.

The other choice is to remain in carnality where you will likely spin out of control (that red squiggly line) deeper into sin. All the while you are out there you are outside the will of God for your life. You have “quenched” the power of the Spirit in your life (1 Thess 5:19). You are not advancing to spiritual maturity, and not accomplishing anything God has called you to do for Him. That word “quench” means to put the fire out, to stifle or suppress divine influence. The support of the Holy Spirit is extinguished as long as you are in this state of rebellion and carnality.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

That word “grieve” means to affect with sadness, cause grief, to throw into sorrow. Your sins, especially if you remain in carnality, sadden the Holy Spirit. While you are in this state of carnality, not only is the Holy Spirit had His “fire” (His power and leading) in your life suppressed, but that also grieves Him. Failing to totally forgive is remaining in carnality outside your AO with your spiritual life spinning out of control, and it is grieving the Spirit.

The Lord’s Prayer recognizes two things: that people hurt us and we sin ourselves and are in need of forgiveness. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. We have hurt God and want to be let off the hook, and people have hurt us, and we must let them off the hook. And that last point isn’t an option; it is a command.

As soon as Jesus finished teaching His disciples the Lord’s Prayer, He added:

Matthew 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:14–15 explain His statement about forgiveness in verse 12, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Look at it this way: a Christian’s forgiveness of others is based on realizing he has been forgiven.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

This command is not made to unbelievers; it is directed to *believers*. Nor is it concerning our salvation. It is our personal fellowship with God that is in view in these verses, being inside our area of operations. Christ has

forgiven and we cannot walk in fellowship with God if we refuse to forgive others.

The Supernatural Life

The most natural tendency is to want to get even when we have been offended, but Jesus is telling us to do something that is unnatural; it is supernatural. He is calling for us to totally forgive people for the wrongs they did to us. When you totally forgive, you cross over into the supernatural, which is seen in my illustration as moving inside your AO into your supernaturally enabled spiritual life. It is supernatural because it is empowered and sustained by God through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

That is a promise that if you use that power of the indwelling Spirit (walk by the Spirit), you will not sin *while doing so*. The moment you shift from divine enablement (walking) you will be relying on your own personal moral strengths, and they will almost always be found lacking, and you will end up outside your AO. Total forgiveness involves using the supernatural power of the Spirit.

In the Matthew 6:14 passage, when Jesus says, “If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,” He is referring to receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit and participating in an intimate relationship with the Father (inside your AO). Unless you are walking in a state of forgiveness toward others, you cannot be in that intimate relationship with God. You are outside your area of operations in a condition of carnality.

1 John 1:6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

God is light. If you are walking “in darkness” (sin), you have no fellowship with Him. You are on your own in Satan’s world, a dangerous condition to be in.

If you are holding bitterness in your heart toward others, you are walking in the dark. You may think you are in fellowship with God, but I am here to tell you that you are wrong. Walking in darkness is a consequence of unforgiveness. You can spend hours in prayer, but if you hold bitterness in your heart, those prayers go no higher than the ceiling because you are out of fellowship with God—you are outside your area of operations.

Sometimes we are wounded by people we are close to, and it may be they did not intend to hurt us, but it was necessary. As a parent or a church leader, you may sometimes do this. You must make a decision but say, “I’m sorry, but this is the way it must be.” In this case, the offense is not an outright sin you must forgive, but you are hurt nonetheless.

However, there are people in this world whose actions are indeed sinful. Sometimes the sins are willful and intended to hurt in some way. At other times, the hurt is done without realizing they have hurt you. We all sin every day, therefore we should pray daily for those we have hurt without even knowing it. This calls for a spirit of sensitivity to those in pain around us.

Perhaps you have been so intentionally and maliciously wounded by another that you ask yourself, “Must I forgive even that?” Yes, you must. The plus side of that for you is the greater the wound the greater measure of the Spirit that will come to you in order for you to forgive. Welcome the opportunity to forgive, because the Holy Spirit is prepared to anoint you with as much strength as you need to forgive that hurt. There is no limit. Any limit to forgive is set by you.

We are called to forgive any sin committed against us. Allow God to judge the motives of others; judging isn’t our right. Leave their guilt to God to deal with, and you will be blessed for it.

Proverbs 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

There are many ways someone can receive glory, but none greater than to be glorified in God's eyes. Overlooking the offense requires crossing over into your supernatural area of operations.

Why would you *want* to forgive someone? Because you prize intimacy and fellowship with the Lord more than you want to see your enemy punished. Simply put, that is the only choice: Do you want to see them hurt, or would you rather be close to the Lord? You can't have both.

Matthew 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Failure to forgive means you will not be forgiven for your sin of failing to forgive. Forgiving is serious business and it is not optional. God's will is for you to forgive and leave the judging/punishment to Him. Failure for you to forgive leaves you outside the will of God and drifting along in Satan's world.

Salvation is unconditional, but fellowship with the Lord is conditional. When you are justified by God, you are declared righteous, and that comes by faith. "By grace are you saved through faith..." (Eph 2:8). You are credited with God's perfect righteousness.

Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Phillipians 3:9 ... not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Paul makes it clear that the righteousness of Christ is put (or credited) to our account at salvation, and we are then declared righteous in God's eyes. God looks at the believer in possession of the righteousness of Christ and that is what He sees. That crediting of the righteousness of Christ to our

account happens one time at the moment of salvation and is forever. The guiding and leading (anointing) of the Spirit, however, may come and go according to our sin status.

1 John 1:6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

“Walking in the light” is another way of saying “walk by means of the Spirit” of Galatians 5:16. You can choose to be in fellowship with the Lord inside your AO and doing the will of God or outside your AO and outside the will of God in carnality and “walking in darkness.” It is your choice to confess your sins or wallow in them.

Our status in the family of God is unconditional, but our intimacy with Christ is conditional.

We are sons and daughters of the Most High once we have been adopted into God’s family at salvation.

Ephesians 1:5 He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.

We are as secure in the family as Jesus Christ because we have been made joint heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...

We are indeed saved but our *intimacy* with our Lord is conditional.

Our eternal destiny in Heaven is fixed, but receiving additional rewards is conditional.

Once we are saved we are assured we will go to Heaven, but receiving our inheritance, our eternal rewards, is conditional. Some go to Heaven with no rewards but others are richly rewarded.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

The word for “seat” in the Greek is *bema* and should more accurately be translated as “evaluation seat.” All Church Age believers will stand before Christ our Judge and explain what we did with all the assets He gave us for our part in the advance of His Kingdom. Did we effectively use them or not?

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Christ laid the foundation through His life, the Cross, His death, and His resurrection. The question at the Bema is did we build upon what He did? Our works, whether good done in the leading and power of the Spirit for His Glory or “evil” done in the leading and power of the flesh outside our AO for our own glory will be evaluated. They will be tested by fire, and only those works done in the leading and power of the Spirit will survive the fire test and be rewarded. But whatever the results of the fire test, good or bad, the one evaluated will be saved. Your salvation is NOT an issue at the Bema, only your works are for the purpose of rewards or not. “If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, **though he himself will be saved**” (v.15).

Why God Hates an Unforgiving Spirit...

It shows indifference to the greatest thing God did. And that was sending His Son to die for us on the Cross. He did for us what we did not deserve and expects us to “play it forward” to those who don’t deserve it.

It interrupts God’s purpose in the world: reconciliation. Having reconciled us to Him, He has given us the ministry of reconciliation and

wants us to pass it on. He forgives us and expects us to also give total forgiveness.

God hates ingratitude. God knows what sins He has forgiven us, and He loves a grateful response. In Matthew 18 we have the story of the ungrateful servant. He was forgiven the debt he owed to his master but refused to forgive the debt owed him by another servant and had the man thrown into prison. Eventually, his master who had forgiven him heard about his unforgiveness to another.

Matthew 18:32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

How Unforgiveness Manifests Itself

Having an unforgiving spirit usually begins with resentment and inward bitterness. The one hurt cannot deal with the possibility that their enemy might never be discovered and get their “just rewards.”

This resentment/bitterness manifests itself by mentally reliving what the enemy did to them over and over in their mind—dwelling on the hurt—and considering ways how the hurt might be revenged. Payback! But the “payback” will be for those who do not forgive. They are the ones suffering. They are the ones who must face “but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:15).

Summarize: What are the consequences of an unforgiving heart?

The Holy Spirit is grieved – Your relationship with the indwelling Holy Spirit should be one of the most important relationships in your life. With

the power and leading of the Holy Spirit quenched in our life and grieving over the loss, our thinking is distorted. Under the anointing of the Spirit, we are enabled to cope with whatever this world throws at us.

You are left to yourself – Refusing to forgive means that God stands back and lets you cope with your problems on your own strength. You have lost the protection from Satanic influence that was afforded you by the Spirit being active in your spiritual life, and he will exploit your weaknesses. You will not be able to think clearly, and you will begin to compromise on all manner of things you would not have before. We live in Satan’s World, a very dangerous place to be without the Spirit’s leading and power to deal with it.

You force God to become your enemy – The reason God treats you like an enemy is because, by not forgiving others, you are effectively trying to do His job. You are taking His place. But He alone is the Righteous Judge. Only He can deal fairly with the one who wronged you. But if you try to do His work, He becomes your enemy.

You lose the potential of your anointing – Fail to totally forgive, and you lose the anointing of the Spirit. It may not be obvious immediately, but you become an empty shell. The question is what is more important to you? Holding bitterness in your heart and getting revenge or the anointing – the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit in your life? Seek revenge, and you will be the loser for it.

No authentic fellowship with the Father – Jesus said, “If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” As harsh as that sounds consider that God is still your Father either way and no matter how many times the believer sins.

There are two levels of forgiveness of sins. One is forensic and refers to what is legal. It is the essence of our justification and salvation. At that moment of salvation, God sees the believer declared as legally having never sinned. He imputes Christ’s own righteousness to us.

Philippians 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, **the righteousness from God** that depends on faith

As part of our salvation, forensic forgiveness is forever.

The second form of forgiveness is at a spiritual level where we are seen as not only being declared righteous because we possess the righteousness of God, but we also enjoy a spiritual experience that comes from being forgiven. This is what we call our spiritual life or “walking by means of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). It is this second form of forgiveness at the very core of our spiritual life that we lose when we fail to totally forgive and walk in darkness instead of in the light.

The bottom line, as they say, is that failure to totally forgive hurts the one who was harmed *far worse* than the one who did the harm.