

The Mind of Christ - Lesson 85

December 18, 2020

Section 54 The Sermon on the Mount

A. T. Robertson's Harmony of the Gospels

Thank you for joining us for another edition of the Mind of Christ. We are in the Sermon on the Mount. We have been in the Sermon on the Mount for a while now, and we are working our way through the prayer that Jesus gave us that we commonly call "The Lord's Prayer".

We're glad that you're here with us. If you'd like to go back and find the recordings that we've done on the Mind of Christ over the past several months, you can go to our website at <https://www.centalsarasota.org/> and you'll find a link to all the places where we have recordings on this subject. If you are joining us for the first time, this is the result of a study that I did back in 2010 through 2017 on the Mind of Christ where I produced many journals. I am grateful to be able to share those journals with you now so let's jump into the subject today. We're going to be talking about forgiveness, and about the phrase that is used in the Sermon on the Mount is in **Matthew 6:12**.

Forgiveness is at the heart of heart of the Christian message and the mind of Christ, so we will consider this part of the prayer. ¹² *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* Of course, I'm using the New American Standard Bible as the basis for our study. You may also want to ... in listening to this message, you may want to pause it because this is an in-depth Bible study and you may need to take some time to think about it or look up scriptures. That's one of the great things about recording it; you can pause it and listen to it a little bit at a time.

Let's talk about the idea of forgiveness. The word forgive in this passage is *aphiemi* (ἀφίημι) in the Greek. It means to send forth. It has various applications. It really depends on the context as to how to apply this word. It can mean 'cry', it can mean 'forgive', it can mean 'forsake', it can mean 'lay aside', it can mean 'leave', 'let' as in let alone, or let be or let go or let have, it can mean to 'omit' or to 'put' or send away, or to 'remit', or it can even be translated 'suffer, or 'yield up'. *It's the 'letting go of something'*.

For instance, Jesus "dismissed", (that's the word), the multitudes according to **Matthew 13:36**. It's also used in "*putting away*" a wife as in **1 Corinthians 7:11-13** so it would be equivalent to the word *divorce*. In **Matthew 27:50**, Jesus yielded up His spirit. "*Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and gave up His spirit.*" In other words, He "let go" of His Spirit so that He could "let go", if you will, of **our sins**.

To "*let go*" from one's *power* or *possession* means "to free", "to let escape", "to let something escape". We're letting it go. In **Matthew 24:40** two men are in the field. One is taken; and the other "*is left*". The one who 'is left', that word is 'our' word and it can mean 'let escape'. So one is taken and the other is left to escape. In **Matthew 18:27** says, "*And the master of that slave felt compassion, and he released him and forgave him the debt.*" The King released the servant from his debt and forgave the debt. This idea is the focus of Jesus.

There are debts that we cannot pay. We *owe more* than we are *worth* in terms of resources or abilities to earn. Let's say I owe a debt of a trillion dollars. We might as well make it as big as possible. How much would I have to earn in 40 years in work to pay this debt? Well, I would have to earn \$25,000,000,000 (billion) dollars per year, and of course, not spend any of it to maintain my life because I have to use all of it to pay back the debt just to break even. But what happens if what I owe has interest ... let's say it has an interest of 5% - 10%. How can I ever keep up my 'sin debt' with interest? It's impossible to pay; not just because it is so large, but because of the *nature* of sin itself. **Sin debt is not like money**. It is impossible to *undo* a sin. If I borrow ten dollars I can pay it back, but I cannot undo an offense once it is done. It cannot be "*undone*". Sin is a different kind of debt, but the money metaphor helps to illustrate the idea.

The word for debts is *opheilema* (οφειλημα) meaning 'something owed' or 'something due,' or simply 'an obligation'. I am "compelled" to do certain things ... like the continuing debt to love other people according to **Romans 13:8**, "[Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law.](#)" I wonder ... is God under this obligation because of His nature; since *God is love* then He have the continuing debt to love us as well?

In the moral realm, "debt" is "fault". It's the *gap* between 'what I have' and 'do not have', thus, *fault-line* is an earthquake-prone area. So when there is a fault-line, then it is prone to an earthquake. The word here *opheletes* (οφελετες) is "an ower". It is someone who owes something; a person indebted, a delinquent, a transgressor, a debtor or a sinner. Paul was a debtor regarding the Gospel. **Romans 1:14** says, "[I am under obligation both to Greeks and to the uncultured, both to the wise and to the foolish.](#)" He was under obligation to everyone; barbarians and Greeks, wise and foolish, in order to preach the Gospel to them.

In **Romans 8:12** Paul says, "[We are under obligation, not to live according to the flesh, but to live according to the Spirit.](#)" In **Galatians 5:3** the man who receives circumcision as an obligation, in order to be saved, is under obligation to the whole law; *to receive and keep it too!* These become moral obligations because they are *a means of justification* or *being declared righteous*. Righteousness is by faith in the One who has the power to meet our total obligation; the One who both *paid our sin debt* and perfectly lived out the Law. The transgressor is one delinquent who fails in his performance of duty.

Opheilema (οφειλεμα) is something *owed*; something *due*; it's a *debt* as in **Romans 4:4** ... one who works is 'owed a wage'.

Opheilo (οφειλω) means "*to owe*". It's accruing; it is something that is accruing. It is an "ought" or a "must". There's an obligation. There's a "should" there. It's "to fail in duty", to "behoove", "to be bound by something", "to be in debt". In **Luke 7:41** Jesus posed the question of two debtors who were forgiven. "

[A moneylender had two debtors: the one owed five hundred denarii, and the other, fifty. 42 When they were unable to repay, he canceled the debts of both. So which of them will love him more?"](#) The answer came back *the one who is forgiven more*.

Now this is perception. Jesus then points out that the woman who wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair, kissed His feet and anointed His feet with perfume, as opposed to Simon who did none of these things; Jesus contrasts the two because it is the way **they perceived** the *forgiveness of their sins*. Simon perceived he had no sins or very few and didn't **need** forgiveness, but the woman knew she had many sins and therefore, she loved greatly.

But Jesus did not count these as "*payment*" for sin. In other words, what the woman did was not her "*payment*" for sin; her faith was what was under consideration here. It was her faith that saved her according to **Luke 7:50**. These were really demonstrations of *her love* and *her faith*.

By the way, and this is a little side point, but where were any of these things that she did to Jesus that day, or where were they either commanded or where was an example given to her, or even where this was implied that she should 'do' this? But *it was accepted nonetheless*, even though it did not carry the authority of a **command**, an **example**, or what we call a **necessary inference**. But she was accepted for what she did and was not even required of others in exactly the same way forever because it expressed her heart. My "take away" from that is that there are often things that we can do to express our heart to the Lord that are not 'commanded by God specifically'; that we are not given an 'example' of someone else doing it, and it's not even 'implied' in some Scripture that we do it exactly this way. So we have some liberty when it shows our heart and what we do doesn't contradict anything that God has otherwise commanded us.

Well, back to the Scriptures which talk about debt and forgiveness. The shrewd steward in **Luke 16:1-13** reduced the debt of others to make friends even though he had no authority to do so. He was praised for his shrewdness but he was still one who squandered his master's possessions. In **Philemon 18**, Philemon was the master of the slave Onesimus who ran away and came to Paul who taught him the Gospel and baptized him. He sent him back to his master Philemon and Paul recognized that Philemon was, the master, was out certain work that Onesimus could have done for him while he was away, so Paul offers to **pay** any debt owed to Philemon by Onesimus, which is an interesting idea here. That's because it *carries with it the idea of paying a debt that you don't owe*, that 'you' didn't make' but you're paying it on behalf of someone else. The idea here is to 'keep the slate clean', to live up to our obligations, to live, if you will, debt free.

So let's go back to Jesus on keeping our word. "Yes" or "no". Remember in the Sermon on the Mount He said to let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no". There is a huge sense of responsibility in *meeting your obligations*. The problem is man's **inability** to totally 'keep the slate clean' because of the nature of moral offenses. Unlike money that can be tracked, by an accountant, only God knows the extent of our sin-debt.

So, in the realm of money you hire an accountant and he can keep up with all the transactions of your comings and goings, what you spent and what you didn't spend, how much you owe and how much you don't owe ... all of that. But in the moral realm, only God is the One who can calculate the offenses and the amount of debt that we actually owe. But Jesus does connect our forgiveness by God to our forgiveness of others who sin against us.

So we look at **Matthew 6:12, 14-15** and we need to unpack this.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'

The 'as we' clause, 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors'... **as we** have forgiven others. The *as we clause is huge* in our understanding. Compare it with the measure that is talked about in **Matthew 7:2**. We'll get to that in a future recording. But it says, "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." It talks about "whatever measure you use; that will be the measure that God will use with you". *So, do we create our own standard of forgiveness by God?* The **Matthew 18** story indicates the same thing.

In **Matthew 6:14-15** says, "For if you forgive other people for their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father will not forgive your offenses." It is not just "how much" you forgive; it is whether or not you forgive *others*. It is a dangerous thing to say, "*I will never forgive so and so for this or that.*"

It is a dangerous thing to say that "*You could never forgive someone for this or that.*" But most of us understand this even if we do not say it. But this is also a way to keep our slate clean because *unforgiveness* is a burden we carry too. So, not only do we have our sins that need to be forgiven, but when we fail to forgive someone else, *that* is another sin that we add to our sin burden because we are obligated to forgive.

So which is heavier? Which is heavier; **forgiveness needed** or the **need to forgive**? In other words, I carry a big burden of needing my sins forgiven. My sins are a weight upon me that need to be lifted and can only be lifted by God. **But also**, I carry a burden in needing to forgive other people because that is an obligation as well. We have both because it is a corollary; **to love** and **to be loved**. Both of those are important. *To love is to forgive. To be loved is to accept forgiveness.*

Spiritual and emotional health depends on this, but how does this work? In the **12-Steps** there is a need to do a "moral inventory"...to go back and make things right with all the people you've hurt and to accept all the forgiveness extended to you. That's very important in the **12-step** program in order to move forward in your life. You must go back and 'clean the slate'. Carrying hurt can be equivalent to "unforgiveness", but is it always? Is it always? Is it always equivalent to unforgiveness? Can we still hurt if we forgive? In other words, I may be able to forgive someone who hurt me but do I continue to carry the hurt?

How is the burden actually lifted from our souls if we still hurt over past offenses? Now, I'm asking the question because it is one thing to say, "I forgive you"; but it's another thing to stop hurting because of the offense that was given. Forgiveness of debtors is more difficult depending on the *quality* and the *quantity* of the debt. Ten cents is one thing. \$10,000 is another.

The "**as**" clause also raises this question ... is it "as we forgive", as *in the same way* or forgiveness is applied to us as *we dispense forgiveness to others?* Let me read that again.

The “**as**” clause. We have to understand how we “take” that clause. Is it “as we forgive” as in the same way ... in other words, God is going to forgive me in the same way that I forgive others, or is forgiveness applied to us as we dispense forgiveness to others? In other words, I forgive somebody so God’s going to forgive me. There is a kind of Quid quo pro there ... I forgive, He forgives me. So there are two different ways to look at this.

Neither seems completely right since Jesus’ forgiveness is based on **His work** and not on **our work**. So it doesn’t seem right to me to really buy into either one of those choices. Is forgiveness of others a prerequisite to our being saved? Does one have to consciously forgive everyone specifically and intentionally before God will forgive them? Verses 14-15 seem to say this. This is a very serious matter here. Our forgiveness by God is tied to our forgiveness of others. If I forgive another person, I am demonstrating that I value forgiveness as something someone needs. God sees that I value it, and willingly gives it to me.

It seems to have to do with our sincerity, and God testing our sincerity by the opportunity to forgive others. How can I say forgiveness is important for me to have when I don’t deserve it any more than the next guy does? It is disingenuous to want God to pay **my** debt when I will not pay the debt of others. And God *paid my debt before* I was both *born* and *before I acknowledged my need* for it to be paid. Consider that and how we’re going to forgive others in that regard! Are we going to be **willing**, at least, to forgive the debt of others *before they even ask* for forgiveness?

God does forgive the forgiver and gives to the giver. He wants us to be a conduit of His grace. It passes *through* us; it is not for **storing up** or keeping. As the old song says, “Love is something if you give it away”. Jesus says in **Luke 6:38**, “Give and it will be given unto you”. In **Acts 20:20**, in one of the few quotations of Jesus in the book of Acts, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

We forgive others, not merely for their sake, but for **our** sake. In this way, forgiveness is, in some ways, selfish. But instead of ‘giving to get’, I give because ‘I recognize my own need’ and since the other person is no different than I, then I know that they have the same need as I have for forgiveness. So this adds another dimension to grace. It is not cheap. It costs Jesus and us. He gave up His life and we give up our pride. He died, and so must we.

So why didn’t this phrase found in **Matthew 6:12, 14-15** make it into the **5-finger gospel**? Now some of you may not understand what I’m talking about but in the Churches of Christ when I grew up we were thinking that the gospel can be discussed in five fingers: hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized ... and this is how we become Christians. So why didn’t the phrases found in the text we are studying today ... why didn’t *that* end up in the five finger exercise ... or maybe the six finger exercise? Why just hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized? Why not “forgive anyone who sins against you?” Why is *that* not a prerequisite to being saved? Shouldn’t this be a prerequisite to baptism since forgiveness is not possible until I have forgiven others? Or perhaps this falls under repentance, the idea of repentance as a “sub-point” under repentance. If I truly am going to be repentant for my sins, then included in that is my desire or actual forgiveness of others. We seem to be very selective in what we stress to those who want to know what to do to be saved.

The “as” clause also raises the aspect of *forgiving* and *remembering*, or *forgetting*. In **Hebrews 8:12** quoting **Jeremiah 31** about the New Covenant, one of the features of the New Covenant relationship is to ‘*remember sins no more.*’ Paul, in **1 Cor. 13** speaks of *keeping no record of wrongs*. So if this is how God forgives, by including forgetfulness, then must we forgive as He does? Or *more* to the point, will He remember our sins if we continue to remember the sins of those we have forgiven? *How can God conform His practice to ours* if ours is flawed?

These are difficult questions and this is why we have to get into some depth in understanding what Jesus is saying. If we remember the sins of others we have forgiven, does this mean that God remembers *our* sins even though He has forgiven them? Does He *remind* us of these sins because He hasn’t forgotten them?

There has always been, in my mind, and now I ask, is it the mind of Christ? We’re trying to understand the mind of Christ here ... why He’s saying it the way He’s saying it? There seems to be two stages of forgiveness for an individual by God. The initial stage is at conversion when sins are washed away at baptism. So this seems to be one sense in which our sins are forgiven. I call this ‘wholesale forgiveness’ where all of my sins are washed away at the point of baptism. All sins up to this point are forgiven and the ability to continue to be forgiven is also put in place by my now being “*in Christ*” and the promises that are given to me, that “*if I confess my sin He is faithful and just and will continue to forgive my sins*” in **1 John 1:9**. Why can He do it and how can He do that is because of His sacrifice on the cross. But once we are Christians, and by nature ‘forgiven ones’, because that’s what it means to be a Christian, and as we continue to sin we are able and required to pray specifically for the forgiveness of these particular sins. This may be ‘retail forgiveness’ if you will.

In this picture, Jesus purchases all our debt, past, present and future and He forgives all past and present at the point of conversion, but dispenses forgiveness for ongoing sin *as we ask for forgiveness*. Is this how Jesus thinks about sin and forgiveness? Well, I’m trying to understand this. I suppose the other alternative is that Jesus forgives **all** sins, *past, present* and *future* on a ‘wholesale’ basis and our asking as we go forward is a ‘mere formality’ and is not really a factor in the maintenance of our relationship with Him. But *if this is true*, then what does the “as” clause really mean? Or could God decide that “if we do not ask and do not forgive others”, He’ll revoke the forgiveness of the debt? Read Matthew 18 again.

Does the king revoke the forgiveness of the debt to the one he forgave when He doesn’t forgive his brother his debt? **Matthew 18:27** says “*the king released him and forgave him the debt*”. But in **18:34**, instead of being ‘moved by compassion’ the king was ‘moved by anger’ and “*handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.*” In other words, it seems like the king revoked the debt that he had previously forgiven for this unforgiving person. Then in verse 35 Jesus draws his conclusion, “*So shall My heavenly Father also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart.*” So it seems to be a very serious matter here, to forgive other people as we have been forgiven. This seems pretty clear. God **can** revoke forgiveness that He has already given to us based on how we treat our brothers and sisters.

Is God obligated to never reinstate debt over forgiveness? Is forgiveness really forgiveness if it can be revoked? But again, this seems to shift the burden of continued forgiveness to us; on our ability or unwillingness to forgive others! This is very difficult. *Is this a blow to the doctrine of eternal security?*

Whether we take a full Calvinistic view “of never losing our salvation” or take a view of “losing salvation only because we involve ourselves in a practice of which we are unwilling to repent”; those are two alternatives here! *This makes security tentative.* But how do we get around **Matthew Chapter 18**? Clearly the king held the servant accountable for *all that was owed him*. So how important is it to forgive from our hearts everyone who owes us a debt? According to Jesus it’s so important that God will use it as a measure of His dealing with us. The same idea is found in the judgment section of **Matthew 7**.

The very human side of forgiveness is freedom ... a sense of power. It would be like running miles with a large weight being pulled behind us and suddenly it is ‘cut away’ and we are free to run without restraint. Obligation to something that we are unable to fulfill is burdensome and it saps our strength. We are meant to fly, but a butterfly can’t fly with weights attached. Relief is another word. It’s like when someone has lived under the burden of an illness or an injury and it is finally healed. There’s relief.

I often use the illustration of *Sisyphus* who was in Roman mythology. Sisyphus was punished by being made to push a large boulder up a hill only to have it roll back over him before he could reach the top. The word “sisyphian” means ‘endless’ or ‘unavailing’, as labor for a task. *Sisyphus* was an egocentric king of Corinth. Many interpretations of this myth have been given. It reminds us of Solomon’s book of Ecclesiastes. Camus, a philosopher, calls him “the absurd hero”. I see in this story the *pointlessness of trying to work off a debt* that can never be worked off ... like paying off a large credit card debt by paying the minimal payment each month even as you charge that much more back on each month. *No progress is ever being made.*

In the New Testament Paul champions the cause of righteousness by faith and not by works. *Trying to find relief from sin by “works” or “keeping of the Law” is as pointless as Sisyphus’ rock!* The nature of sin is such that it can’t be “undone”. Restoration, even of stolen things does not fully restore all that has been lost. *Damage is done on a much more fundamental level than the mere property that was stolen.* Something is stolen inside the person who was robbed. Many sins rob one of innocence, security, hope and freedom. So *what is the answer other than* forgiveness of the debt, since it cannot really be repaid?

Human relations are to mirror our relationship with God. We need to be free even on the level of trust that we have inside. **Self-forgiveness** is important too. In **Matthew 6:14** Jesus uses the word ‘transgressions’ as a synonym for debts. The word is paraptoma (παρὰπτωμα), a side-slip, lapse, or deviation. It is unintentional error or it can be willful. It’s a transgression. It means a fall, a fault or offense, a sin or a trespass committed by ignorance or by carelessness. Jesus uses this word in **Mark 11:25**, “*And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you for your offenses (or transgressions).*” Paul says in **Galatians 6:1** that a man can get ‘caught’ in a *trespass*.

In **Romans 4:25** it says “Jesus, was delivered up because of our *transgressions*, and was raised because of our justification.” **Romans 5:15** tells us, “But the gracious gift is not like the *offense*. For if by the *offense* of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many.”

It was by *transgression* that the one, **Adam**, that all or the many died. Grace counters so that through the One Man, Jesus, all are *justified*. Transgression results in condemnation to all men. The law affects the increase of the transgression.

God uses the transgression of the Jews to bring salvation to the Gentiles! This is found over in Romans chapters 10 and 11. There, is a whole treatment of this. This in turn, makes them jealous. If God can use transgressions to bring riches for the world, *how much more* can He use fulfillment to do so?

Compare Jesus’ teaching in the sermon about fulfillment. It is fulfillment which blesses all of the world. **Genesis 12: 3**. “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” So this whole idea of transgressions can lead to something good, a fulfillment in the life of other people. If I come to understand, for instance, how I have transgressed and I receive God’s mercy and grace, then it leads to fulfillment. God is the God who brings about something wonderful out of something that is horrible and terrible.

2 Corinthians 5:19 says, “God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself”. How? “... By not counting their trespasses against them.” Then in **Ephesians 1:7** it equates forgiveness of trespasses with redemption. The state of the loss is described in **Ephesians 2:1** as “being dead in trespasses and sins” but, His love reaches us in our trespasses or transgressions and makes us alive together with Him - **Ephesians 2:5**. In **Colossians 2:13** Paul connects transgressions with the uncircumcision of the flesh. New life depends on our transgressions being forgiven. Whether intentional or unintentional, sins, or transgressions or trespasses must be forgiven so as to clear the path for life.

The idea of transgressions, or rather reality in our lives, demonstrates several traits of man. One is our stubborn pride of *going our own way*. Water is an illustration of this. It goes its own way or follows a course of ‘least resistance’. It flows and presses against boundaries. The strong boundaries of a levee or a dam usually hold the water in place, but if water is strong, fierce or rapid, then it cuts or erodes the boundaries. It creates other paths, estuaries, streams etcetera; different environments where a new ecosystem is formed. Canyons are cut out of rock. Dangerous rapids are created. We speak of taming rivers so that they will remain useful to us.

The will of man and his free will is like this water. It will go its own way. There is creativity in the will and there needs to be ways to allow for this; but *creativity is driven by desire*, and *desire is focused either on us or Him ... God*. **Psalm 27:4** says, “One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple.” When there is **one thing**, the flow of water is focused, and can be deliberately channeled, so that it produces something good. **But the ★ key is the will and its desire.**

Transgressions also demonstrate our inability to control our will. It is a paradox. There is ***something in us that is so strong that we cannot control it***, so it is really a part of us. It is really “me” or as Paul says in **Romans 7:20** “*sin which lives in me*”.

This idea of the controlling nature of sin keeps psychologists and sociologists and theologians busy trying to affix responsibility for sin. It is difficult to divide us, our being, up to dissect us so as to see what is really controlling us. Paul calls it “*flesh*”. The contra force is the *spirit*. Flesh is in us but affected by outside forces. Even with the presence and influence of the Spirit, there is still a weakness in man so that sin is either not easily conquered or never brought consistently under submission. All of these are important in our understanding of transgressions and sin, and how we are to forgive others as we have been forgiven.

This section is extremely sobering because it causes us to have to ‘grapple’ with the idea of ***not only accepting the forgiveness for my sins, but how do I, in turn, allow God’s forgiveness to flow through me into the lives of other people?***

How can I learn to be as gracious to others as He is gracious to me? But it’s an important part of, not only our prayer life, because remember, this is ***found in the middle*** of a prayer, but it’s an important part of just our victorious living because the person who cannot receive forgiveness from God is going to be damaged, going to be hurt, is not going to be at peace in this world, ***but also the person who cannot forgive others*** will not be at peace in this world as well. Beginning to understand how all these things fit together is so important to our Christian walk and our having the mind of Christ.

Well, next week we will be talking a little about the next part of the prayer, **Matthew 6:13**, “***And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil***” so we’ll continue to work our way through this prayer.

Thank you for joining us.

Again, please feel free to go to our website <https://www.centralsarasota.org/>. It’s a place where you can have links to not only the other recordings of “The Mind of Christ”, but other recordings that we have done in the last few months.

Again, thank you and God bless you.