

²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

²² "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³ "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Without the forgiveness of our sins we cannot have a relationship with God. God's nature is that of absolute, perfect holiness. When perfect righteousness comes in contact with unrighteousness, no matter how relatively small, it is rendered no longer perfect righteousness. To be in relationship with sinful human beings without adequately dealing with their sin would be to destroy God's nature. God tainted by our sin would no longer be the God revealed in Scripture or the One we worship. It follows that the biggest obstacle to our relationship with God is our sin.

The importance of our need for forgiveness is signaled by Jesus' message, "*The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*" (Mark 1:15). We must repent of our sinful ways (which includes turning to God's way) and believe that Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension provide the only way for our forgiveness.

Above all else, we should be constantly praying for our forgiveness. Although it appears impossible, both from practical and theoretical perspectives, we can obtain forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. But that faith must be more than intellectual ascent. It is a faith that must be exercised in our daily living. It is a belief that is acted out in the discipline of forgiving others. If you say I am forgiven and yet refuse to forgive others, then don't expect abundant fruit from your prayers.

Lord, make confession a part of all my prayers. Help me to confess my sins and confess that you have provided for the forgiveness of my sins on the cross. Convict and empower me to live my life in faithful forgiveness of my neighbors for whom you also died and rose again. Amen.