

"He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass."

—George Herbert

28-Sep-12

Sins in the Balance (Part Two)

As we saw previously, even though our sins are forgiven when we come under Christ's blood, a stipulation of that forgiveness is that we also forgive others. Our forgiveness of others is a hazy reflection of God's forgiveness of us, for the [sin](#) of one creature against another is almost nothing compared to the sin of a created being against his Creator. He nonetheless requires that we choose to forgive others, showing in the [Parable of the Unforgiving Servant](#) that He has every right to require our life-debt be paid in full if we are unwilling to forgive the relatively minuscule debts against us.

Regarding the requirement to forgive, [Luke 17:3-4](#) is often misunderstood: "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

Do these verses mean that we must forgive *only* if the one who sinned against us comes to us and repents? If so, we do not have to forgive anyone until he admits his sin and specifically asks for forgiveness. Yet, [Jesus](#) does not say *only if*. Rather, He says, "*If* someone comes to you and repents, it is

your obligation to forgive." In other words, if someone asks forgiveness, we dare not say, "I don't know if I will ever be able to forgive you"—because the payment for our own sins hangs in the balance! In these verses, He does not mention what to do if your brother does not say, "I repent." Yet the Bible is full of injunctions to forgive and examples of forgiveness, and *none* of them stipulates that we wait for the sinner to come to us and repent before we forgive.

In [Mark 11:25-26](#), Jesus says, "Whenever you stand praying, if you have *anything* against anyone, *forgive him*, that your Father in heaven may *also* forgive you your trespasses." There is no mention of stopping your prayer to see if an offender is ready to repent. He simply says to overlook those [offenses](#) when they come to mind, then He warns again that if we do not forgive, neither will the Father forgive what He has against us.

Paul writes in [Ephesians 4:32](#), "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*" [Colossians 3:13](#) contains similar instruction: ". . . bearing with one another, and *forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another*; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must* do." Our human nature, carnal as it is, might argue that, since we have to forgive *as* or *like* Christ did, and that before He forgave us we had to repent, then we need not forgive another until he repents.

However, that view entirely misunderstands our standing before God. When we first sinned, we instantly racked up a debt that only a life of equal or greater value could pay. Since we were not struck dead on the spot, it follows that God was *already* choosing to overlook the offense—though not in an eternal sense. God did a measure of overlooking just in choosing to call us, because our sins had *already* created an impassable gulf.

Yet, He did something to bridge that massive gap, even before we repented and formally came under the blood of Christ. He was *already* exercising a measure of forgiveness. If He was not, we would have been blotted out. Our debt was not paid in full at that time, but it was being overlooked nonetheless. Since that is how Jesus worked with us, we, too, can overlook the sins—debts—against us even *before* someone says, "I repent."

We see this same approach in Jesus' dealing with people in the gospels. Even without their asking for forgiveness, He tells them their sins are forgiven. There is also His personal example when, as His lifeblood was draining away, He prayed and said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." His torturers and those calling for His death certainly had no thoughts of [repentance](#). Even so, Jesus did not wait for them to come around before asking the Father to overlook the most awful offenses in history. If that is the example He set, then neither should we wait for someone to repent before we forgive.

In [Luke 17:5](#), notice the apostles' reaction to Christ's instruction to forgive: "Increase our [faith](#)!" They understood that faith was required for this, because forgiving an offense involves letting go of the desire for personal justice and trusting God to work it out. It is a matter of trusting that He is more perfectly aware of what happened than we are and that He has the perfect balance of justice and mercy, as well as the right timing. Forgiving the sins against us is a demonstration that we trust that God has the matter in hand and that He will settle it in the best way possible.

Even before His crucifixion, Jesus overlooked the sins committed against Him, but to grasp its significance, remember who He was: The Word became flesh. Our Creator emptied Himself of all power, glory, and authority, and stooped so low as to become a human being. After such incredible condescension, the Creator was reviled by His own creation! Yet, rather than reviling in return, He "committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" ([1 Peter 2:23](#)). Though having every right to demand satisfaction, He instead overlooked the arrogant transgressions of His creations and left it all in the Father's hands. He trusted that it would all be made right in the end because God is actively involved.

But our carnality *really* wants satisfaction. Even when merely slighted, all too often our carnality is ready to launch Armageddon. Even if we do nothing, we may remain in a state of undeclared war for years! Sometimes this continues even after the offender has died, and our carnality still digs him back up mentally to extract everything we feel he owes us. Our "old man"—the carnal man—wants to see others put in their places. He wants vengeance and the wrongs righted.

The old man, however, is not so keen on justice when *he* is the one incurring the death penalty. Then he is intensely keen on mercy and grace! This is why an identifier of carnality in us is keeping a mental tab of others' debts and a reluctance to let them go. The carnal man would rather dwell on the debts *owed to him* than the debts *he* owes. Yet the debt we owe is always bigger than the debts owed to us!

If we are truly concerned about our debts being paid, we will not let someone else's lack of repentance hinder us from forgiving them. This is not to say that we never do or say anything about another's sin. Forgiveness does not equate to passivity. In [Luke 17:3](#), Jesus says to rebuke a brother who sins against us. In [Matthew 18:15](#), He is not quite as forceful, instructing us to tell him his fault alone. But whether our brother hears us or not should not determine whether we forgive.

What is more, a Christian who is fully conscious of his own unpayable debt will approach his brother with a [meek](#) attitude. Recognizing his spiritual poverty, he will be motivated to have his sins forgiven, which is more important to him than the sins against him. The person who mourns over the violence that he has committed against his relationship with God will count it a small price to forgive the sins of others. And because he is [merciful](#), he will obtain mercy.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Reality of the Feast](#)

by Mark Schindler

Mark Schindler, cuing in on a theme in a previous sermonette titled Perception is Reality, suggests that the further away perception is from truth, the more dangerous become the consequences. The debacle of Enron and the disastrous Bernie Madoff ponzie scheme, followed by the latest financial meltdown, has illustrated the chasm-like gulf between the perceived version of reality and the truth. Because we live in a world whose leader's (Satan's)

mind is totally deceptive, we could be coasting on the verge of destruction. Unless we love the truth, anchoring ourselves in God's precepts, we are in danger of succumbing to deadly deception. As we learn about God's Holy Days, we need to learn to treat them as sanctified times and not just substitutes for the world's holidays. As we are offered the prospects to be made whole, we have a responsibility to bring forth fruits of repentance bringing glory to God, realizing that to whom much is given much will be required. We are evidence of Jesus' power and authority through our calling. The feasts of God enable us to present ourselves as living sacrifices, our reasonable service, humbly looking for opportunities to serve one another in the function God has given us within the body of Christ, transforming our minds from a false reality to conformity to Christ's image.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[God's Way of Give at the Feast of Tabernacles](#)

by Staff

God commands us to present ourselves at His Feast and give as we are able. This article describes many ways we can give at the Feast—and many of them will not cost us a cent!

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