



"A gracious soul may look through the darkest cloud and see God smiling on him."

—Thomas Brooks

24-Jan-14

Forgiveness and Forgiving

Just before [Jesus](#) gives the [Parable of the Unforgiving Servant](#) in [Matthew 18: 21-35](#), Peter comes to Him and asks how often he should forgive a sinning brother. He ventures to suggest if he should forgive as many as seven times. It probably surprised him when Jesus answers that he is to forgive the brother seventy times seven times! To most people, 490 times might as well be infinity—a level of forgiveness that their [patience](#) and [kindness](#) would never reach.

Jesus then relates the story of two servants of one master, one of whom owed 10,000 talents to the master while the other owed 100 denarii to his fellow servant. When the first servant was unable to repay, the master fully forgave him. However, instead of extending similar mercy to the other servant who owed him far less, the forgiven servant demanded full restitution.

The subject of forgiveness affects every one of us, and without it, we would have absolutely no hope. We should be asking and thanking [God](#) for it every single day. To realize how much we need forgiveness, we need only to remember that all of God's commandments are righteousness ([Psalm 119:172](#) ; see also [Deuteronomy 6:25](#)). [1 John 3:4](#) shows that [sin](#) is a failure to attain

that standard, and the Greek word translated *sin* (*hamartia*) means "to miss the mark"—something we do far too frequently.

The history of sin goes way back in time. The first recorded sinner was the angelic being who became [Satan](#), whose sin was rebellion against God. In his pride, he grew dissatisfied with the job that God had given him to do, and in spite of the many gifts and authority that God had given him, he wanted more. How long it took the [Adversary](#) to seduce one-third of the angels to join him in his madness (see [Revelation 12:4](#)), we do not know, but it surely must have taken many years. By the time Adam and Eve came on the scene, Satan was well-prepared with arguments and stratagems to try to thwart God's Master Plan for humanity.

God had offered Adam and Eve a great variety of food, but He had exhorted them *not* to take the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Satan encouraged Eve to share his feelings of resentment, using cunning to persuade her that there was no good reason for God to deny her the pleasure of the one tree's forbidden fruit. Confused by what he said and persuaded by her senses, she chose the way that seemed best to her. Adam knew better ([1 Timothy 2:14](#)), but he still partook of the fruit. Through him, sin entered [the world](#) ([Romans 5:12](#)).

God, however, did not close the book on Adam, and when we sin, He does not close the book on us either. From before the foundation of the world, He knew the direction that Adam and his progeny would go, and He provided a means for our sins to be forgiven, through the sacrifice of the sinless Creator, His Son ([1 Peter 1:20](#); [Revelation 13:8](#)).

Many verses show God's great compassion and mercy toward us, for example, [Psalm 103:8-14](#):

The LORD is [merciful](#) and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those that fear Him. As far as east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD

pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.

[Isaiah 44:22](#) shows us that regardless of our sins, God has covered them as if with a cloud. They have stained us red, but through Him, we can be made white as snow ([Isaiah 1:18](#)).

God's great plan of salvation works through grace and [faith](#), not law-keeping. Paul extols the wonders of God's law in many places, and in [Galatians 3:21](#), he even says that if any law could have given life, it is what God gave through [Moses](#). Yet, the blood of slain animals will not pay for our sins ([Hebrews 10:4](#)). Those sacrifices illustrated the need for a Savior to pay for them, as [Hebrews 2:9](#) says: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." God the Father has bestowed grace on us by offering His Son to pay the penalty that we deserve so that we can have our transgressions completely paid for and *still* be a part of His plan! Because He has done this, our past sins are forgiven, and we have the opportunity to live as God lives, forever!

God wants us to ask Him for forgiveness so that we realize what we have done by our sins and how much we need Jesus' sacrifice to pay for them. God offered His Son to pay our penalties even before we realized the need for Him, and He wants us to acknowledge His Son's sacrifice, confess what we have done, ask for mercy and forgiveness, and [repent](#) of it.

Jesus' death justifies us, brings us into alignment with God. After we have been forgiven, we need to do our best to remain in alignment with Christ's standard of righteousness. God is holy, and we are also to be holy ([I Peter 1:13-21](#)). He has offered us forgiveness so that we may reap the benefits of bringing our thoughts and actions into alignment with the Creator of the universe!

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant helps us understand how much God has forgiven us and how impossible it is to repay Him. Commentators say that a talent equals about 6,000 denarii, so the unforgiving servant had been forgiven of 60 million denarii of debt. Since [Matthew 20:2](#) tells us that a denarius equaled a day's wages, if the servant worked 300 days/year, his

10,000-talent debt could be repaid only with about 200,000 *years* of work, a physical impossibility! [Luke 7:41-42](#) shows that sinners have *nothing* to repay their debts.

The parable deals with more than just how much we have been forgiven. It also encourages us to be like God in offering forgiveness to others to the extent that we can. When we forgive as our Father forgives us, our characters become more like His. But notice [Matthew 6:14-15](#): "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." If we act as the unforgiving servant did, selfishly taking our Master's forgiveness and then withholding the same from others, we, too, will find ourselves without forgiveness!

We have an opportunity and privilege now to act as God acts. We need to forgive, remembering the high price God paid for our forgiveness through His Son. None of us has ever been so offended, and none of us will *ever* pay such a steep price! As I heard a long time ago on WYLL, a Christian radio station in Chicago, "When God forgives a sin, He buries it in the depths of the sea and puts up a sign that says, 'No fishing.'" Since our great Creator has been so gracious to us, we should strive to be as gracious to our brethren. In other words, if the sin has been forgiven through the blood of Christ, why should we open up a can of worms?

- John Reiss

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[The Need for Forgiveness](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Because it is more blessed to give than to receive, the things we ardently desire for ourselves we should be willing to give to others, including forbearance and forgiveness. Following the Apostle Paul's example to the Corinthians, we ought to forgive and comfort one who has genuinely repented. Godly character includes the capacity to forgive and exercise

forbearance. Within the body of Christ, we consist of interdependent cells, dependent upon each other. By failing to forgive our brother, we jeopardize the health or well being of the entire body. Extending forgiveness to a repentant brother is a godly characteristic, strengthening the entire body, leading to unity. Jesus Christ's example should be our standard.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Forgiveness](#)

by John O. Reid

Following our too frequent mess-ups in life, forgiveness is so refreshing! John Reid examines forgiveness, highlighting how necessary it is for us to forgive others.

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