**The Forgiveness of God - gratuitous liberation from guilt through grace alone**

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| Reading a book in Portugal – “Total Forgiveness”, started me off looking at this topic. I didn't think the book – or subject, particularly relevant to me, though its Foreword said countless hungry people avidly received the message. The blame culture has bitten deep in our society and we are encouraged to be angry and offended every day. However, the more I have thought about forgiveness the deeper and grander has its significance become to me. What I want to share this morning has been a process, reflecting before the Lord on different attitudes and needs we may all have, and what He has particularly underlined to me – and what is “the bottom line”  **The process**   1. Step One - a little self audit about me own heart to people  * I couldn't think of anyone I had not forgiven, or of whom I could not say sincerely that I loved them. Story over…… or was it? * But did I think of what they had done and hoped that they would be aware of their damage and repent? * Did I quietly hope that other people would get some discernment and stop worshipping them as ultimate saints? For their own good of course!! * Did I reckon that God would have to bless them in a tough love kind of way, to get them sorted out?! * Was I longing for the Lord to honour them, bless them, shower on them all His lavish goodness, so that past faults would be forgotten and dropped into the sea? Forget the salutary lessons I had hoped they would learn!   **What is full forgiveness?  To loose, to loose away, to let go, to send away, to be gracious, to remit – to hold no record**  2. Step Two – “ I can’t forgive myself”  This phrase - a topic heading in the book – is to my mind verging on offensive.  Be patient with me as I try to explain my reactions. To say I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself sounds like blasphemy to me. What, God can swallow sin, but my standards are higher? So I had to get quiet and asked the Lord to show me what people might be meaning to express by that phrase and “unpack it”, as they say!  (PS It does matter what words we use, - you shape your thinking by them, and the thinking of others.)  Perhaps some of the following are the thoughts of people’s hearts when they say they can’t forgive themselves:   * I know that the gospel says that God forgives sin, but what I am or have done just sticks in my throat * **Or…….** I expected better of myself, am disappointed in me, ashamed of myself * **Or**……maybeit is the cry of having my sin still with me, I haven't had anything loosed from me, or have not received forgiveness   **3. Step 3 - HOW DOES GOD FORGIVE US?**  Let’s look at the basis of forgiveness - from what God says of it. So first:   * Just think of all the things that you find it hard to forgive others for – just demeaning you in public? For pushing in front of you in a queue? For lying about you and getting you into trouble, abusing someone in your family, for murdering a child? * Now think about the things you have done, which you don’t feel quite free of, maybe a secret sin which disturbs you in your gut, a selfish act which you know damaged someone irrevocably. * Think of the brutal state murders, corruption, and injustice.   Now read Isaiah 53:6  “ALL OUR SIN ON HIM WAS LAID”  Isa 53:5,6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord **has laid on Him the iniquity of us all**  1 Pet 2:24 **He, Himself, bore our sins in His body** on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you have been healed  1 Pet 3:18 For Christ died for sins **once for all**, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God  Matt 26:28 This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins.  1 John 2:2 He is the atoning sacrifice/propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world  John 1:29 **Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world**  Lets look at this from a **legal** point of view. All the sin of man was judged at the cross, and God emptied the full wrath due against the sin onto His Son – **“It pleased the Lord to bruise Him**” Isa 53:10 There is **no wrath left**, no crime to answer for, He paid the whole price. Cf the law of Double Jeopardy. Can’t be tried for the same crime twice. Its done, the great transaction is done!   * + How can I put something on the slate against anyone – Jesus paid for him/her. Why am I trying to get a 2nd conviction, a 2nd prison sentence?   + How can I still hold my own sin, when Jesus has paid what I could never have paid for? How can I treat His sacrifice as if it was not enough, ineffective?     Maybe this legal statement of fact carries weight for some of us, and knowing this, you can now receive it as a done deal, and you can forgive others, knowing that it is illegal not to, and understanding that if Jesus died for you, you cannot before the law blame anyone else.  Maybe the legal fact can prevent us from continuing **to hold to our own sin** and trying to **expiate it**, doing some **penance** to get right. We can see the criminal stupidity of thinking that we can do anything to right ourselves, when thereby we are throwing the most **amazing sacrifice and the legal justice by proxy** back in the face of Almighty God, who punished the treasure of His heart instead of us.  Lets just read the story of a very wicked man. Matt 18:21-35  Don’t just think that the man not forgiving his own smaller debtor is the bad crime. I think the worse point is that he had **no thankfulness and understanding** of the amazing grace of his master. He only understood law not grace. He probably thought he had done well to get away with his debt. So then with grace rejected, he had to be dealt with by the law. And if you want to **live by the “old money”** – **the old calculation** you will be judged by that law. The master there put this man in prison until he should pay the lot – ie for ever – as it was **unpayable.** Do you remember Simon saying last week, how fair God is, and that He holds us all the same, not big sinners, or little sinners, just sinners – equal before the law. Our sin debt is unpayable. As Jesus says in the sermon on the mount, **if you will not live by grace with one another**, you will end in a prison and you will not get out until you have paid “**the uttermost farthing**”  This is the only real free gift in life, lets take it, and lets give it.  However the legal bit may not be the thing that sorts all this for you. Its an emotional issue, rather than a legal or accounting matter that is holding you away from giving and receiving forgiveness, so instead of “How does God forgive us?”, let us look at “Why does God forgive us??  **4 Step Four - WHY DOES GOD FORGIVE US?**  Simon said that the most famous verse in the Bible is  John 3:16 **God so loved the world** that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life  Lk 15:17-24 While he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion on him & ran to him and fell on his neck and kissed him…  The son came back because he was hungry for food, not for his father  Yet the Father loved him forgave him and lavished the blessings of  sonship on him.  Matt 25:34 Then the King said, Come you are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world  God has prepared a *kingdom* for me, for you, and particularly did this before the world was!  Lk 22:15 With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer  The night *before He died* Jesus *desired* with *desire* to be with them  Matt 13:44 The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his JOY, went and sold ALL THAT HE HAD and bought the field  This spoke to me of the Lord finding us His treasure and selling all for JOY, in order to get us.  John17:23 I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you have loved Me.  Can we begin to grasp the wonder that Jesus is telling us that the Father loves us – EVEN AS HE LOVES JESUS  The most important thing for me in this growing understanding and liberation about forgiveness is that the basis of everything in life is the LOVE OF GOD TO US – TO ME. Everything in our walk with God flows from His love to us, and our receiving that love. He draws us with His love. He opens our eyes and understanding through many experiences, relationships, teachings, **but freedom is when we receive His gift, His love, His forgiveness.** We are saved not because of what we believe, but because we have **received** something from Jesus, and people open themselves up to receive when they know they are loved.  So don’t lets start where I started about whether we have forgiven other people to the uttermost – to the last farthing, but whether I know that Jesus loves me and I have received His forgiveness for ALL my debt, all my sins  All the wrath of God was visited upon Jesus – none left for you, none left for those who have wronged you.  Acts 26:18 Paul said that God had sent him to people to “open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light… and to God, so that they may **receive forgiveness of sins.”**    This is the rock solid basis of my salvation, so that whatever we do or feel, we KNOW that God loves us, and that He has done All that is needed. It is the sovereign work of God: No man can do this. I am forgiven, and I MAY NOT try to pay for any of my sins myself. I am free; all the wrath was laid on Him, for my sins, and for any sin committed against me.  **Receive** remission of sins – and it will work in both directions  Have you received? Maybe if you feel you cant “forgive yourself, or forgive others”, you need to open your being up to the Lord to receive the remission, to drink His blood, to breathe in His Spirit, grabbing the loosing, the sending away of your sins. And be free!  A new understanding hit me when I was reading in John 20, when Jesus came to the upper room and revealed Himself to His disciples. He said  Jn 20:22,23 Receive the Holy Spirit, If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.  What deep deep mysteries the Lord speaks, and yet we receive crystal clear insights in tiny jewels of His truth and of His heart parts  Do you remember the Pharisees getting really upset with Jesus when he told the paralysed man that his sins were forgiven? They said  Mark 2:7 Who can forgive sins but God only?  They often got upset about this.  And in the deepest way, only God can. He is the One wronged, but He chose to make it right Himself, so that He could then come and give us His life. Here He is saying Receive the Holy Spirit, receive My life and if you forgive someone their sins are forgiven.  We can go back to where I started now, and ask ourselves whether we have forgiven to the uttermost farthing!  When I have received forgiveness and understood how great that forgiveness has been to me, I will be quick to forgive others.  Jesus has taken it all, what penalty could we require of one another?  When I have received the life of God in the Holy Spirit, I will know that all sin is sin, God is fair to us – we are all the same.  The distinction between various classes of sin disappears when we have caught a small glimpse of the holiness of God, and then we won't be disappointed in ourselves for not outstripping other fallen creatures, or not even measuring up to them. We will just be overwhelmed with the unspeakable grace of God that he bought, purchased at ultimate cost our forgiveness, by putting it all on Jesus.  We just have to live receiving, dependent , on our Father, as Simon said last week.  Living not under law, but under grace  Ps 116:12,13 How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.  "The forgiveness of God is gratuitous liberation from guilt” Brennan Manning |
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