

A Very Necessary and Timely Lesson on Forgiveness

Given all the divisiveness and hard feelings and even outright slanderous hatred and murder—all the sinful *wickedness*—that is ruling in our culture, not just these past few days, but these past several months, these past four years and beyond; given all the wicked division and anger and slanderous hatred and murder that proceeds from our own sinful hearts and minds, it's only fitting that our Lord would have us this day to hear His Word on forgiveness. And don't go acting as if all of this unforgiving wickedness doesn't pertain to you. Don't go offering up excuses, as if your wicked and unforgiving ways are somehow warranted or justified. *"I don't have to forgive those people. They don't deserve it. They hurt my feelings. I can't forgive. It's in my DNA. It's not my fault that I'm such an insufferable hypocrite and jerk. The devil made me do it."* Nope. None of that is going to fly. Look in the mirror of God's Word through the lens of the cross. The sinful division and hard feelings and hatred and wickedness... that's your corpse of sin staring back at you from that mirror. **You** need to hear this lesson on mercy, grace, and forgiveness... and so do I.

But here's the thing: This is **NOT** a lesson primarily about you or what you need to do. I know this will sound strange, perhaps even wrong to some of you, because—let's face it—**EVERYTHING** is about you, isn't it? Nope. This lesson on mercy and grace and forgiveness is, *first and foremost*, all about the king. Forgiveness doesn't begin with you (or in your heart), as is so often regurgitated nowadays. Forgiveness begins and ends with the King. Forgiveness flows forth from the King and ultimately points to and flows back to the King. We love and forgive only because He has first loved us and forgiven us.

Look at this parable and ask yourself: Why did the king forgive the staggering debt of that lousy servant? *Answer: Because that's just who the king was.* The king's mercy had nothing to do with who the servant was or what he had to offer the king in exchange for his mercy. The steward had **nothing** to offer the king. All he could do was cry out to the king to be merciful. That's it. That's all he had to offer: pathetic cries for undeserved mercy. The thing is, however, the king had pity on the poor, undeserving and wretched schlep. That's just who the king was. This guy owed him an **impossible** debt; a debt that can't even begin to be comprehended, let alone repaid. And yet... the king forgave it all, *instantly and without hesitation.* There was no IOU drafted up. There were no caveats or conditions or *quid pro quos* drawn up in some long-term repayment plan. The king would recoup none of his losses. He would gain nothing, and would only lose (and lose heavily). And yet... in his incomprehensible and incalculable mercy and grace, he forgave the guy, totally and completely. He spoke the word, and that was it—*completely forgiven.*

I don't think you realize just how truly profound this kingly forgiveness truly is. I know we think we understand all that this lesson is teaching us, but the practical, real life application often evades us. Understanding is one thing. Actually putting into practice is an entirely different animal. Look at this way: What if your Lord and King forgave you the same way you forgive others? What if God forgave you in incremental measures; i.e., a little now and let's wait and see how things go? What if God's merciful love and forgiveness had a limit/capacity? What if some of your sins were just too much for even God to forgive? What if there were just too many sins to forgive; i.e., you over-drafted and broke the bank? "*Sorry, but you've used up your allotted minutes. Hit me up next billing cycle.*" What if God kept remembering and stewing over and bringing up your past sins/debts, constantly demanding more from you? What if "it is finished" didn't mean it was really finished, but just finished for right now? Such behavior—the same behaviors we exhibit towards others—would make God a liar! Such behavior would ensure our **condemnation and damnation**. Who could ever repay the impossible debt that is an eternity's worth of sin? Remember: the wage of sin—just one single sin—is eternal death. How could you possibly repay to God the sinful debt you owe Him? You can't... which is why God, out of His great mercy and grace, forgives you.

Now, this brings up an important point. **God is a just God**. This means that He doesn't simply wink at sin or let simply sin slide. God is a great accountant. When God forgives us our **impossible and incalculable debt of sin**, it's not that the debt is simply erased from the books. All that sinful, deadly debt is accounted for. It doesn't simply go away. That debt is still paid, and paid in full. It is paid for—in full—with the bitter suffering and death of His own beloved Son. Jesus' blood and perfect righteousness was the currency that paid our deadly debt. In fact, His innocent blood and holy righteousness is the **ONLY** currency that could make satisfaction for the debt of sin—your sin, my sin, and the sin of the entire world.

You need to think on this and let this sink in. This [*the crucifix*] is what God paid for your forgiveness, **upfront**. "*While we were yet sinners (dead in our sin) Christ died for us.*" This is why Jesus is often referred to as our "ransom payment." God died for your sins. God died so that you could have eternal life. Make no mistakes though: **This is all about forgiveness**. God has **never** demanded anything of you **before** He forgives you. He has never established a repayment plan or merit system that enables you to earn your forgiveness in increments. No! He forgives you. He has forgiven you, in Christ and because of Christ.

Okay... but then why do we pray to God for forgiveness, especially as it stands in relation to forgiving others? "*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" Folks: You already know the answer to that! Do you still sin, in spite of the Good News of your forgiveness? **A more troubling**

question, especially in light of where we find ourselves today: Does your forgiveness of others need forgiving? Do you forgive others perfectly... like God forgives you? I don't. I try, but the good I want to do, I don't do, and the evil I don't want to do I keep on doing. Lord, have mercy! Forgive me my debts as I am trying to forgive others!

This is why we pray to our Father. We don't forgive perfectly. We pray for His strength to help us forgive others; to release the sinful debts incurred against us. *We pray for His forgiveness for our weak, corrupted, and imperfect forgiveness of others.* He gave His life for them. He paid their sin in full, just as He did for each and every one of our sins. We cry out to Him to be merciful and patient with us in our own selfish sinfulness... and He is, each and every time. If He's merciful with us each and every time we cry out, should we not show that same mercy to others who are indebted to us for **FAR LESS?**

Now... should we take our Lord's forgiveness for granted, it will not end well. "*Mercy for me, but not for thee*" will not end well. Such wickedness is an affront to our Lord and King. And this has real world application, right here and right now. Coming to this rail into His holy presence to receive the undeserved grace of the King in His body and blood, and then leaving the rail only to slander and murder and shake down our neighbor for far less is absolutely reprehensible in the eyes of our Lord. As the parable shows, such willful wickedness does not end well. That's not opinion. That's not a threat. **That's just fact.** But, again, that's not what this parable is all about. Our Lord is teaching here on the unconditional and incomprehensible mercy and grace of God, our Lord and King. **The focus is on the King.** To take this Gospel lesson and "law it up" with demands and threats regarding what you need to do in order to be forgiven completely *corrupts and destroys* what our Lord is teaching us, His disciples and servants and children. The focus must be on our Lord and King; on His mercy, grace, and loving compassion. The focus must be on the forgiveness that is ours in Christ and because of Christ; the assurance and peace of total forgiveness that our Lord and King Himself baptizes us into and nourishes us with in His own Body and Blood. Folks: Here is the reason Christians forgive others! Here is WHY we are forgiven, and here is why we forgive, not occasionally or a certain amount of times, but all the time. We forgive because we are forgiven. We love because He first loved us. That's all the reason faith needs.

May this cruciform Good News of your total, complete, and eternal forgiveness grant you peace, and may it bear good and God-pleasing fruit in all that you say and do, from this time forth and into life everlasting. May you forgive all others by never forgetting what your Lord and King has so mercifully and graciously done for you, in spite of you. That's just who He is. **AMEN**