

#22 – Which Came First - Forgiveness, or Repentance

Introduction/Purpose: Concerning the forgiveness of God, let us compare the Biblical truth to popular natural assumption. The following questions are essential to comprehending the truth of God's character: A. What comes first our repentance, or God's forgiveness? B. Who initiates the negative consequences of our sin? God, or us? The answers to these questions are vital to our capacity to receive and respond to God's love.

1. Romans 2:4 Does the inspiration to repent originate from us, or from God? Which comes first, God's mercy, or our repentance? What is the normal human opinion? When someone transgresses against us, do we forgive them? What if they do not repent? Are you and I prepared to forgive? Do we desire reconciliation while we are being abused? What happens to us when we cling to refusing to forgive? Vengeance and anger are emotional poisons with tangible negative physical consequences. If I let you use my bicycle and you get in an accident and destroy it, how would you likely feel? How would I feel? The natural feelings of the violator are shame, guilt, fear, self-condemnation, depression, and embarrassment. The natural feelings of the one who is violated are anger and vengeance; wounded pride. As the violator, can we choose to hang on to our downcast feelings, even if the violated is ready to forgive us? How can the violator overcome strong natural feelings to embrace the willing heart of forgiveness? As the one violated, can we force our forgiveness on the violator? How can we, the one violated, hope to reach the heart of the violator if they reject our overtures? Sin does not change God's feelings for us to negative. Sin changes our feelings and thoughts about ourselves and God to negative. Sin puts us into darkness and deception about God's love, and, subsequently, about our worth. Sin damages our perceptions of truth. Damaged perception has the potential to defile and thus destroy our soul. What is our motive for avoiding sin? Is it what we fear God will do to us if we sin? Or is it what sin will do to us? Contrary to our natural beliefs and feelings, sin hurts us. Sin equals pain and death. God is not the enemy, sin is. Shame, fear, etc.; these are incentive enough for deliverance.

2. 1John 1:9 Who is the only one who initiates action in this verse? What blinds the eyes and stops the ears? "if"? Does repentance ease God's wrath toward us? Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: 59:2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. 2Cor 5:18-19 God... hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ,... reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. In the following, is God's wrath directed to Jesus the sin bearer, to the sin that He bore, or both? "Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. ...now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The Savior could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God. The sun refused to look upon the awful scene. Its full, bright rays were illuminating the earth at midday, when suddenly it seemed to be blotted out. Complete darkness, like a funeral pall, enveloped the cross. "There was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." There was no eclipse or other natural cause for this darkness, which was as deep as midnight without moon or stars. In that thick darkness God's presence was hidden. God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him. The silence of the grave seemed to have fallen upon Calvary. Then "Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" ...all that He endured--the blood drops that flowed from His head, His hands, His feet, the agony that racked His frame, and the unutterable anguish that filled His soul at the hiding of His Father's face--speaks to each child of humanity, declaring, It is for thee that the Son of God consents to bear this burden of guilt; for thee He spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise. He who stilled the angry waves and walked the foam-capped billows, who made devils tremble and disease flee, who opened blind eyes and called forth the dead to life,--offers Himself upon the cross as a sacrifice, and this from love to thee. He, the Sin Bearer, endures the wrath of divine justice, and for thy sake becomes sin itself". DA 753

3. 2Corinthians 5:21 What single word sums up what Jesus embraced as His identity? What was God's cost? Is the price withdrawn for those who abuse or spurn the gift and Giver? (Father forgive them...) Where was God at the cross? - According to Jesus' experience, where did Jesus feel that His father was? (not there) "Christ was treated as we deserve that we may be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. 'By His stripes we are healed.'" EGW; DoA When we feel like God is not with us due to our sin, it is then best to pray since doubt and discouragement are the devil's playground. The price God paid to redeem us is a measure of the desire with which God yearns to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Our guilt and shame, fanned as a flame by the devil's accusations, influence us to believe that God is surprised by our performance; that He feels angry with us, and is Divinely disappointed; Righteously offended. God knows the future before it happens. Nothing we do can or will surprise Him. God already knows every sin we ever will commit. As the prodigal father illustrates, God's love to us wayward children does not change or falter when we fall; He is eagerly prepared for our repentance. He will meet us 'a great way off' (Luke 15:20), embrace us and rejoice over us.

4. John 8:3-8 (first question), **9-11** How did this woman feel at this point? Was Jesus perfectly representing God's thoughts/feelings/actions in this scenario? What were the first words out of Jesus' mouth for this sinner? Was Jesus feeling violated? What was He feeling? Jesus responded with compassion, forgiveness, empathy, understanding, mercy, grace, and love. Is there any record of the woman repenting in this passage? Which came first, the woman's repentance, or Jesus' forgiveness? Who initiates the negative emotional consequences of our sin? – God, or us?

5. John 3:16-17, Romans 5:8 Which comes first – God's forgiveness, or our repentance? 2Cor 5:19 ...God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them...

6. Genesis 3:6-8 How did Adam and Eve feel after sinning? Who was doing the hiding; God, or Adam and Eve?

7. Psalms 86:5 Our repentance does not change God's willingness to reconcile with us. Our repentance merely allows God, a Genuine Gentleman, to take the permission He has so graciously requested; to apply His healing forgiveness to our thoughts and feelings; to our heart; to our life. God, in His astounding wisdom and love, has given us free will; the freedom to choose to love or not to love. We may choose to accept Love, or refuse Love. When we allow God to forgive us, we allow God's will; God's desire; God's Way. We grant Him the permission He deserves and has earned twofold as our Creator. This is a humbling, other-centered choice. It is a choice to let go of sin; to grant God permission to claim sin as His own and wash us in blood; releasing us from the threat of the second death. When we do not allow God to forgive us, we blockade His love, which is a proud, self centered choice. Love awakens love. God desires to cleanse us and free us from every evil. In this way alone are we capable of disentangling ourselves from imprisoning thoughts and feelings. As long as we are not free, but imprisoned, we cannot fulfill our purpose; our calling in life; our greatest desire. Only by accomplishing our purpose to be a channel of blessing to others can we be fulfilled. The choice is ours; let us allow Him to cleanse us. Isa 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. What if God cherished alienation, and our suffering until we repent? His 'love would be based on our actions; His forgiveness conditional. God does not require that we modify our behaviour so that He can then love us. Neh 9:17 ...but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. We can't change God. Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

8. Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 18:23-35 Why are we to forgive others? For Whose sake are we forgiven; why would God do this?

9. 1John 3:20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. When we feel violator feelings, let us take this as a sign, like when our stomach feels hungry. We have a need; spiritual; reconciliation with God. Pursuing God in penitence by prayer; this is the remedy God enjoins for Christ's sake. This is the truth, not the way we feel. Luk 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...

In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in the room. There were no distinguishing features save for one wall covered with small index card files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read "People I Have Liked." I opened it and began flipping cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one. And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn't match. A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching. A file named "Friends" was next to one marked "Friends I Have Betrayed." The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. "Books I Have Read," "Lies I Have Told," "Comfort I Have Given," "Jokes I Have Laughed At." Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: "Things I've Yelled at My Brothers." Others I couldn't laugh at: "Things I Have Done in My Anger," "Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents." I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped. I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my short life to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my own signature. When I came to a file marked "Lustful Thoughts," I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them! In an insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn't matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it. Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my

forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh. And then I saw it. The title bore “People I Have Shared the Gospel With.” The handle was brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than 3 inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand. And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that the hurt started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key. But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn’t bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one? Finally He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn’t anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn’t say a word. He just cried with me. Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card. “No!” I shouted rushing to Him. All I could find to say was “No, no,” as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn’t be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood. He gently took the card back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign the cards. I don’t think I’ll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, “It is finished.” I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written.

Review: Would you change your answers to these questions, and if so, how you would change them, and why?

A. What comes first God’s forgiveness, or our repentance? B. Who initiates the negative consequences of our sin; God, or us?