

Pardon Versus Forgiveness

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Introduction

Before the Fall, Adam was a perfect man in a perfect environment. There was no corruption and, therefore, no death in Eden. Because he was innocent -- untouched by even the appearance of evil -- Adam was able to comprehend God's thoughts with perfect intelligence. The first man was designed to live forever, if only he would eat from the Tree of Life. God spoke personally to Adam and gave him gifts: dominion over the earth, a beautiful wife, and a free volition. With all Adam was given, he gave Satan a place, and Adam fell. That is the beginning of the story of forgiveness. This booklet explains the fullness that comes from God's forgiveness, surpassing even the perfection of Eden. So many Christians have never fully understood it. If we are offended, we may pardon the offenders; yet too often, we do not allow them to partake of our joy, which was Christ's purpose for coming (John 17:13-26). When we have sinned, unless we grasp the meaning of the Finished Work and forgiveness versus pardon, we will always live beneath our privilege and miss the treasures that are waiting for us right now.

The Importance of Perspective: Having God's Viewpoint

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). In Isaiah 1:18, God says, “Come, let us reason together.” The word “come” is in the imperative mood. God tells us to come. He doesn't ask us. He doesn't request us. He commands us to come. Furthermore, “Let us reason together” does not mean that God is asking for our opinions. He is saying, “Come, be quiet, and sit down -- don't say a word -- and I will instruct you. Come and reason from My viewpoint.” God has called us to that. And when we respond to the specific call of God to participate in a local assembly under a pastor-teacher, we will be given God's viewpoint. Anyone who participates in a ministry where the whole counsel of God is taught knows what a privilege that is. Yet, when a ministry gives us God's viewpoint, the Cross is always included. The pastor doesn't preach to argue a point. And God doesn't want us to sit there and debate the subject. The pastor is responsible to preach what the Word of God says. After that, it is our responsibility to receive God's viewpoint.

James 1:21 tells us to “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” That verse is not talking about saving our souls from hell but from the world, the flesh, and the devil. That happens when we receive the engrafted Word with meekness.

Jesus Came for Spiritual Beggars

There are two words in the Greek language for “poor”: *ptochos* and *penes*. *Penes* means that I am poor compared to a rich man, though I do have limited ability. In other words, I can work, but I'm making a dollar a day while the rich man is making one hundred dollars a day. So, I am poor, but I have some ability. In Luke 4:18, however, Jesus said that He came “to preach the gospel to the poor.”

The word there is *ptochos*, and it means “I've come to preach the gospel to beggars -- those who have no ability in themselves.” Barclay, in his book on New Testament Words, defines this word by describing someone who is lying on the ground, having no strength and no ability. If you were to put food next to him, he could not even reach out and get it himself.

He could be starving, but he does not have the ability to go and get it. This is the kind for whom Jesus Christ came to preach the Gospel. He came to give the Good News to people who realize they have no ability -- not even a limited ability that takes the natural, brings it into the spiritual, and tries to call it Christianity.

Christianity is realizing that nothing in man is able to comprehend God. As a preacher, I have come to this conclusion. I have no ability to explain the Scriptures. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. But I do have ability to proclaim what God has already spoken through our reasoning together when I have gone to Him, listened, and submitted.

The Value of Godly Persuasion

Submission to the Word of God and to the authority God puts before us is the greatest life saver on the face of the earth. I remember learning that lesson as a young Christian. During my first year at Bible college, I was living in the dormitory and listening to Christian rock music. One day, the pastor preached a very strong message against that music. I couldn't understand why he was so angry over this little issue! After all, the lyrics conveyed the truth. I didn't understand that another spirit was involved. I went back to the garage where I worked as a painter, and I complained about the pastor.

Reacting in my flesh, I said, "Who does he think he is to tell me what I can listen to? Two weeks ago he was talking about the doctrine of privacy. Now he's telling me that I can't listen to this in my private time." And do you know what happened? My coworker, who was also in Bible College, saved my life. He pulled me aside and said, "You know, the problem is not music." "Sure it is," I said. "That's what the whole deal is about." He said, "No. The problem is submission to authority." I became quiet. He looked at me and said, "Were you called to this Bible college?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Were you called to serve under this pastor-teacher?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Then either submit to this Bible College and submit to this pastor-teacher, or go somewhere else." I wept like a baby all afternoon, because he exposed something to me I didn't even know existed.

The issues of my own imagination, the issues of my own thinking, didn't matter. God wanted me to reason with Him, and it was beautiful. That confrontation saved my life. I would not be here today if my friend did not lovingly instruct me and tell me, humbly and graciously but firmly, what he needed to say. Today he is a missionary pastor and still a true friend, and I love him. He saved my life. If you ever have a chance to instruct someone with God's viewpoint in love and in meekness, do it. You will save his life (Galatians 6:1).

Receive with Meekness

So here we are, and God wants to instruct us. He wants to tell us things. But unless we learn to receive from Him with meekness, knowing that no man knows anything as he ought to know it (1 Corinthians 8:2), we could miss opportunities to be blessed and to be a blessing. We know nothing as we ought.

Every time I walk through the doors of a building where the Word of God is being preached, I make a mental note that I don't know anything. If I hear something over again, I recognize that the Bible is true and that repetition is for my sake, because I am constantly thinking naturally when I should be thinking spiritually. I often find myself evaluating circumstances and trying to figure out the plan of God. I need to let Him lead me and guide me through them. So much has been said from the opinions of men about the blood of Jesus Christ. Some so-called theologians tell us that the shedding of Christ's blood was not

necessary to pay for our sins. They tell you that His precious Blood is not literally on the Mercy Seat in heaven. They try to say that only the death of Christ, and not the Blood, is what counts. Some say they are one and the same. That is natural reasoning -- human opinion. But God says, "Come, let us reason together," and let us hear what He has to say about it. Once we have heard, let us submit to what He has to say about it. If we are truly spiritually poor, we know that we can't do anything. Of course, there will always be people who will remind us of our inability, because they look at us after the flesh instead of seeing what God has done. But naturally speaking, we have no ability to do what we do. Men have no ability to be great husbands or good fathers. Women have no ability to be godly wives and mothers.

Anything we do that counts, anything we do that will last, comes only from the ability that the Holy Spirit performs in us and through us. Everything we try to do with our natural ability is fruitless. We tend to hurt rather than encourage people. Our nature is to tear down and criticize instead of to edify. My favorite chapter in the Bible is Ezra chapter seven. Verse 10 says, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." In other words, Ezra studied the Word, and he practiced it. This is an inadequate translation, because "to do" or "to practice" something brings it into the realm of works. But in fact, the Hebrew word of "to do" actually means that Ezra became the Word. He studied the Word, he submitted to it in his studies, and the Holy Spirit engrafted the Word into him. Therefore, he became the Word. He didn't just teach about mercy; he was mercy. He didn't just teach about love, he was love in his actions toward the people of Israel. That is how God wants to perform in and through us.

The Lamb of God: An Offering and a Sacrifice

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor" (Ephesians 4:32 - 5:2). I used to think that I understood forgiveness. I thought that I had received God's forgiveness. But recently, I had a test on just how much I knew about God's forgiveness. Someone who left our church had spoken evil about me, spreading lies all around, and caused some of our young people to go against me. He called me, weeping. He had been gone almost a year, and now he said he wanted to see me. I told him to come over to the house. It is amazing, though, how natural opinion began to flare up in my mind: "I'm going to react first; then we'll talk." Then I said to myself, "That behavior isn't becoming of a pastor, so I'll just expect an apology. Then we can talk." You see, I went from considering an overt action that was wrong to a covert action that was just as wrong.

Then the Holy Spirit said to me, "When he comes to the door, you open that door, and you be like the father of the prodigal son. You run out to him; you hug him; and you welcome him into your home." "What Lord?" (Natural reasoning!) "But Lord, do you know what he's been saying?" Of course He knows. God also knows the problem in that man's heart, and He knew that the only solution was forgiveness. Forgiveness -- pure and simple.

Both His Death and His Blood

If you notice carefully, the Bible says that Christ was both an offering and sacrifice. The people who are off in their understanding about the eternal value of the Blood do not understand that Jesus Christ was both an offering and a sacrifice. They want to talk about His death, but they also want to eliminate the Blood as necessary for salvation. If Jesus Christ hung on the Cross and shed His blood, we are cleansed from our sins, correct?

Yes, because without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin (Hebrews 9:22); but with the shedding of blood, there is remission of sin (Hebrews 10:18). So because Jesus Christ shed His blood, we have forgiveness, which means our sins are remitted, and we are released from the debt. But if He did not offer Himself and sacrifice Himself – if both actions were not executed on the Cross -- we would have been cleansed, innocent human beings, yet we would be like Adam before the fall. God did not want that. He didn't want us to be “innocent.” He didn't want the sins merely blotted out so we could go back to square one and try all over again. He offered Himself, and He sacrificed Himself. He gave His blood as an offering to wipe out my sins, and then He died willingly. You can't take the word “blood” and call it “death” as though they meant the same thing, because Jesus Christ did not bleed to death! Shedding His blood had nothing to do with His death. The shedding of His blood was an offering to God for the sins of the world. Once it was accepted, our sins were blotted out. When we received what He did for us, that left us, clean, spotless, and pure, but still human -- not innocent.

The Difference: We Are Seated Above

After His blood was shed, Jesus said, “Father, into thine hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). In John 19:30, He said, “It is finished,” then He bowed His head and gave up His life. In John 19:10-11, Jesus was saying to Pilate, “no man can take My life, except I give him the power to take it.” He died so that I could become a new creation. He died so that I would not be just a cleansed Adam. He died, and His death was so that I, an earthly, sinful man, could rise into heaven with Him. Jesus didn't want me to be only cleansed and innocent, like the first Adam again, before the Fall. He wanted me to be a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Not only did He want me to have my sins entirely blotted out, but also He wanted me to be complete in Him (Colossians 2:10). Yet, if He had just shed His blood, there would be no new creation. I love the shedding of the Blood. I love His blood. It is precious. It is the most valuable substance that has ever been on the earth.

Still, if Christ had only shed His blood as an offering and had not also given His life as a sacrifice, the work would not have been complete. That is why He said, “It is finished” and then gave up His spirit. You know what is amazing? If Christ had died without shedding His blood, we would have had no remission of sins at all. Furthermore, His death would have meant nothing to us. He had to do both. He came to earth, He saw us, and He saw how wicked we are, so filled with sin. Nothing is hidden from Him. But He wiped our slate clean -- Exaleiphon! In Colossians 2:13-15, that was the word the Holy Spirit used to show that every sin was blotted out, wiped away. He did not merely put an “X” over the record against us, so that we could still see it. He wiped it out. It is gone forever. Those sins are gone forever, cast into the deepest sea, and we rejoice.

Pardon Must Meet Forgiveness

The problem is that most people don't understand the difference between pardon and forgiveness. He pardoned my sins when He shed His blood, but He brought me into the fullness of forgiveness when He died, was buried, and rose again, so He could bring me into the heavenly places to be with Him (Ephesians 2:6). I'll tell you a little story. A young girl was working for a queen, and the girl was caught stealing. She was brought before the queen, who said, “What should we do with you?” The queen, thinking that her own heart was filled with mercy, and thinking that she knew what forgiveness meant, said, “Yes, I will forgive you. But you must leave my castle, and you must never be in my presence again.” The girl said, “But, Queen! You said you would forgive me. That is not forgiveness. That is pardon.

You are pardoning my offense so I don't have to pay the penalty, but you are not restoring me to my position in fullness.” Jesus Christ came to pardon us, to wipe out our sins, and to clean the slate. But He went beyond that to give us the total, absolute forgiveness of God. He took us from being poor and having no ability; and then He brought us into a place where we are just like Him. “As He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). Think of it. We are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. He took a poor, wretched sinner with no ability and brought that poor sinner with no ability and brought that poor sinner into a place of equality, in a sense, with Himself. That is forgiveness.

You see, if someone does me harm and I pardon him (expressed by the fact that I refrain from reacting), that is not forgiveness. If I pardon him, but I don't want to be around him any more; if I pardon him, but he is no longer welcome at my table -- that is not forgiveness. That is only pardon. Jesus said, “I'm coming to offer full forgiveness. I will shed My blood as an offering for sin. My blood will cleanse people of their sins, wiping them out completely. Then, I will give My own life as a sacrifice in order to bring anyone who will receive Me to a place where they are in Me.”

If you have been born again, this is your record, as far as the truth is concerned: You died with Him, you were buried with Him, and you rose with Him. And you not only rose with Him by resurrection power, but you also ascended into heaven with Him (Ephesians 2:6), where you are seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. In many marriages, a husband will pardon his wife, but he does not forgive her. A wife will pardon her husband, but she won't forgive him.

Remember, forgiveness with God is more than just bringing someone back to the same state where he began. God didn't bring us back to the state of being a clean and innocent Adam. He brought us to a place where we will be higher in glory than the angels. We will judge angels. We will rule and reign with Christ over cities and nations. That is salvation. That is forgiveness. And that is reasoning together with Christ.

The Challenge: Accept Your Position in Christ

The problem with so many Christians today is that we are always looking back. We have learned to look back, and we thank Jesus for the grace we received yesterday. We rejoice in the grace of Calvary. We rejoice in what He has done. But we need grace for today and grace for tomorrow.

People are willing to believe what Jesus did for them, but they don't always understand what He did to them. It is what He did to us that enables us to receive all the grace we need for today and for tomorrow. I have faith in the grace of God that was poured out and demonstrated on Calvary. I have faith as being a child (1 John 3:1), as being a new creation, as being complete in Christ. I have faith that I can go boldly into the Throne Room and receive grace that I need right now. I believe it! I believe in what He did on Calvary for me, and I believe what He did on Calvary to me. That is the difference. And how do we explain to someone what it means to be seated in heavenly places? There is no explanation for it. Faith is the vehicle that makes it reality to me. I marvel at those who will sit down with me and say, “If you could explain it to me, maybe I would believe.” I can't explain it. But I can tell you this. If you will only believe, the Holy Spirit will explain it to you as only He can. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:5, 8), and we are also sanctified by grace. “... In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37). But these are only words in a book, only verses in the Bible, until I believe the truth they represent.

“See What He Did to Me!”

A dear friend of mine has read these verses in the Bible, but he does not live as a conqueror. People in churches everywhere have read these verses, and have heard the words preached. Still, so much of the time we don't live as conquerors. We are more than conquerors, yet we don't even know it, because we don't believe it. What we need to do is, by faith, grab hold of what He has done to us and what He has made us to be. We were crucified, buried, and resurrected in Christ, and we are seated above in heavenly places with Him. I am not concerned about your sins, because He already took care of them. I don't have to care about them. He cared about them. I'm not worried about your weaknesses in Adam. I don't care about inability. I don't care about any of those things at all, because they are none of my business. “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” As a preacher, my business is to proclaim your heavenly citizenship, to proclaim your heavenly citizenship, to proclaim your place in Christ. That's all that counts. Jesus said that if we would lift Him up, He would draw all men unto Himself. There are places on this planet where people have never heard of eternal security and the Finished Work gospel of grace.

Recently, I visited one of those places. What a mission field! In the United States, so many people speak of these things casually. But where people have never heard, they hunger and thirst after the truth. And very quickly, they learn about the power of forgiveness over pardon. You watch their faces beam with joy. You watch the tears flow as they understand the fact that they are already in Christ; therefore, no one has a right to know them after the flesh. They are already a new creation, already holy. It is not something they need to strive to become. I said to one lady, “You are already holy.” We had been talking about sainthood and how wonderful it would be to be a saint. By human standards, if everything were known, who could ever become a saint? But in the heavenly realm with Christ, He has already called us saints, “holy ones” (Romans 1:7).

Cheer up, You Saints of God

Somebody once told me I was arrogant, because I believe in this truth. “How dare you call yourself a holy one?” Do you know what I told them? “I'm confident. I have hope.” To have hope means to have a confident expectation that what God says and what God calls me is true. The world doesn't understand that this confidence is founded in the Word of God, so they call it arrogance. But, in fact, it is confidence in the Bible -- confidence in who I am in Christ. I have confidence that I am completely forgiven and accepted in the Beloved. In Numbers 1, the army of Israel was called to go to war “according to their pedigree.” Do you know what that means? They knew who they were. And when the trumpet blew, they knew where to go. Problems come when you don't know who you are, and you don't know where to go. That is why most people don't go to church to hear the Word the way they should; it is why they don't study the way they should. They don't enter into the intimacy of God's presence because they don't know who they are, and they are not sure if they are welcome.

They do know what they did last night, so they do not dare pick up the Bible and try to get intimate with God. When I know who I am, even when I saint, even when I fail, I know where to go for help in time of need. I go to my Father. I enter boldly into the Throne Room in heaven, knowing I have access because of Jesus Christ's blood offering and sacrifice. I don't fear being punished. He has pardoned my sins. But more than that, through His forgiveness He has brought me into a place of equality with Himself. How can I understand it? I cannot.

The Rest of the Story

Thank God, He didn't just pardon our sins and make us clean, restoring us to Adam's innocence. But He has wiped our sins away, and He has restored us higher than we could have ever imagined – higher than most of us are willing to believe. We are hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). So, in the story, the girl understood what the word “forgiveness” meant. An the queen responded, “You are right. You are right! I said I would forgive you. So now, go back to work, and I will never bring it up again.” Can you imagine how everyone else around the court responded? “That's unfair! It's just not right!” The truth is, it was not fair. It was mercy. Thank God for mercy. But that is not the end of the story.

As the queen considered the fullness of forgiveness, she called that little girl to come live in her castle as royalty. The poor one who had been the queen's subject was no the object of grace. The girl received a free gift of a brand-new life. Jesus made us a promise in John 14:16 when He was getting ready to go to the Cross. He said, “I will pray to the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter.” Even when you understand the English language, words sometimes get distorted. Some people actually believe that when Jesus said, “The Father will send you a Comforter,” what He really meant was this: When you miserable, down in your flesh, living in negativity and unbelief, Jesus will come, put His arm around you, and say, “It's okay. I want to comfort you.” Friends, He doesn't do that. Jesus Christ does not comfort the flesh. He doesn't comfort unbelief. He doesn't comfort those things. Do you know what the word “Comforter” means? It comes from the Latin word fortis which means strength and power. He is saying to us, “The father has sent the Holy Spirit to live in you. I have made you to be something that you could never be by yourself. I brought you into this beautiful relationship with Me. I elevated you into heavenly places, even though you can't see that right now.

So I have given you the Holy Spirit, who will give you all the strength you need. You can't do a thing, but He can do all things.” Therefore, because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us.

Take What is Yours

It is the Holy Spirit who gives the ability and strength, because we can't do it. Do you see it now? Jesus Christ didn't just clean us up and leave us on the earth, empty (though innocent), saying, “Well, good luck!” No, He said, “I'm going to make you a winner before I put you into the battle. I am going to call you 'more than a conqueror'” (Romans 8:37). The conqueror goes in, defeats the enemy, and takes the spoil. But Jesus Christ went in, defeated the enemy, and He left the spoil for us to take. We just go around, picking up our inheritance, picking up everything that belongs to us. I love this! There is not an enemy in sight. And we are just believing God, picking up the treasures He's left for us, and rejoicing in who He has made us to be. If this is true -- and it is -- then the word “can't” does not belong in my vocabulary. “But Pastor, I can't forgive my husband. You don't know what he is like.” Another person's response has nothing to do with our obedience. It doesn't matter how he responds; that has nothing to do with what we are to do. Jesus didn't wait for us to respond before He died. He died and made it so. Therefore, we can forgive anyone, including ourselves, by mentally elevating that individual into a greater position than we have before -- seeing him as Christ does. Until we live in what God has made us to be by His death and the shedding of the blood, we only live in half of what was done on Calvary. We need to live in the fullness of what was done at the Cross.

CONCLUSION

Dear Father, how can we thank You with words? They seem so hollow at times. Lord, we ask You to continue the work You're doing in us. Keep drawing us to Yourself. We thank You for Your absolute, total forgiveness. You have taken us beyond what we ever could have been in ourselves, even beyond what Adam could have been in himself -- though he was clean and innocent before the Fall. You have elevated us to such a place that no one on earth deserves, but by grace we receive it. Thank You Lord Jesus. Teach us to believe and then teach us to yield to Your Spirit and to obey as He shows us truth in the Scripture. Thank You. We thank you, Lord God, that You will not comfort us in some subjective way, but that You come in and become the strength that we need, giving us divine ability to meet the need. Thank You, Jesus, for always being so kind, for always being so gentle, even when we fail, even when we fall. We never deserve it, and we could never earn it. Thank You for Your love. Thank You for grace. Thank You for Your precious blood and death on Calvary.

Thank You, Jesus, in Christ's name. Amen.