

10. A Heart of Forgiveness

By John Thiel, *Seeking to Please God Series*, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

We want to open our hearts to this *grace that will pardon and cleanse within*, this *grace that is greater than all our sins*. For without this grace of God,

*Sin and despair, like the seawaves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss.*

But

*Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold
Points to the Refuge, the Mighty Cross.*

As we examine our hearts again, there are moments where each one of us comes face to face with anxiety at the discovery of so many sins in our lives, so many character defects that are just not in harmony with what the call of salvation is meant to achieve; and it is imperative that we fill our hearts with this grace that we believe in:

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?*

The call is to receive the grace when we are overwhelmed with the deep senses of our discoveries in this solemn and serious time of the judgment. We now want to spend time to search our hearts regarding forgiveness, to see whether or not we have a spirit, a heart, of forgiveness.

We have been shown throughout this series that upon true repentance, true contrition, we are forgiven, pardoned; that in the heavenly books there is written pardon beside our names.

To Forgive As We Are Forgiven

Jesus gave a parable to describe a person who had pleaded for mercy because he could not repay his large debt to his master. In this parable the master then

grants that man mercy and forgives him all his debt. But then, this same person, after having been forgiven all his debt, goes to someone who owes him a small amount, much smaller than he himself owed his master, and goes to him and tells him, Pay your debt, or else I will put you into prison. He takes him by the throat and tells him that he must return his debt to him. Of course that person also pleads for mercy; he says, I will repay all in due time. But no, his creditor doesn't pay any attention to this and puts him into prison. Jesus uses this illustration and says that this person who would not forgive the smaller debt is now loaded with all his former debt again, even though it had been forgiven him in the past.

Matthew 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Jesus actually gave this parable because of what Peter had asked:

Matthew 18:21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Then Jesus gave this parable: to forgive as we are forgiven. That was the same language which Jesus used in the Lord's prayer.

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And when He had finished giving them this prayer, He brings the point home:

Matthew 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

In this time of the hour of God's judgment, we are called upon to give God the glory. This is the message of the first angel.

Give Him the Glory

Revelation 14:7 ...Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come:

"Show to the world His character, His glory. Give Him the glory." What are we to do in showing the world God's character? We have been shown that God is mercy; He just wants us to repent. And if we will repent, what will we do?

The hymn tells us: *Grace is greater than all our sins; grace will pardon and cleanse within.* Examine your past. See where you have come from. And even after we have been brought under this beautiful message, have we failed the Lord here and there? Have we sinned? Have we been faulty in personality and character? We have to answer with a contrite mental exercise, Oh yes, I am a sinner. Apostle Paul himself said he was the *chief* of sinners. As King David also said, *My sin is ever before me.* But as my sin is always before me, God's grace is always before me too.

As we let this mercy and character of God who pardons all our sins enter into our experience, just extend that the following passage. This is the character of God; here this hope that is embedded in our hearts because of grace is expressed:

Romans 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. 10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Here is a mental exercise that should overwhelm us with God's infinite character of love. What is this forgiveness of God? *While we were yet sinners, when we were enemies,* God revealed a forgiving grace and let Jesus die for us. Let this picture warm our hearts. Reflect upon this beautiful character of God; so that as we meet with our fellow men, whatever they are, whether friends, relatives, fathers, mothers, even if they have not revealed any ounce of repentance, and they are enemies, what is to reflect from our hearts, after we who were enemies have been met with such love? Give God the glory in this hour of God's judgment. What does it mean? Show the world that God loves the person even while he is an enemy, and has a forgiving heart toward such people. This is God's heart.

As we meet with people who are yet sinners, who will curse God, who will misuse His name, who will speak evil, who will reveal all sorts of horrible characteristics, can we be like God and love them? This is what we are called to be. By beholding His character, His glory, we should be changed into the same image. Can we see this illustrated in Jesus and His disciples?

Father, Forgive Them

When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He was being mistreated, reviled, slaughtered by evil men. When you get treated nastily by someone, what is in your heart? Examine yourselves. Let us do deep heart searching. How do we react to people who absolutely turn us off because of their unChristlike behaviour? What did Jesus say?

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

There is depth in this expression that is to sink into our hearts. To recognise that these poor souls are so much under Satan's delusion that they don't know what they are doing.

In another illustration of this, we see Stephen who had just been expressing scathing condemnation of the Jews around him; he had been telling them, You are no different than the fathers who have done all these horrible things. So it sounds like Stephen is really giving them the works. In our interpretation of it, in our human way of seeing it, we don't realise that Stephen was actually speaking with tears in his voice, just like Jesus did when rebuking. Stephen hadn't lost his love for these people; he was just appealing to them, while they were yet sinners, with love. And as he was finally rejected by them and they got wild at him for the things he was saying, as the stones were striking him and he was dying,

Acts 7:60 ...he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

While we were sinners. While they were yet sinners, so cruelly dealing with Jesus, with Stephen, and with all the martyrs of the past, the forgiving spirit and disposition in the heart of these people who were so mercilessly dealt with was, *Father, forgive them.* And this disposition gives us something to contemplate about in reference to our own hearts.

You and I, with our sins heavily on our conscience, experience God's mercy. As we had read previously, the person who is in such a state abhors himself, condemns himself that he was so long in rebellion against God; he sees it all. And as we see this, can we have compassion on those who can't see it yet? Some of them will never see it; they will see it only when it is too late, and they will be destroyed. But they will see it one day. Our sins are now opened, going beforehand to judgment; theirs will *follow after*. But the experience will be exactly the same. For them there will be contrition too late; but for us there is to be contrition before it is too late. Everyone will acknowledge that God is right—

we now, and they then. Can we have compassion on these poor souls, when God has such compassion upon us? God's mercy and God's compassion is something which was expressed in the beatitudes for God's people to reflect.

As We Forgive

Matthew 5:7 Blessed [are] the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Father, *forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* This is interesting language. "As we forgive our debtors." I will be forgiven according to the mercy I have to people who are nasty and horrible to me. I will therefore be forgiven according to the way I forgive. This is what is written there.

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:15. Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. {COL 251.1}

Do you notice? It is not just unforgiveness, but *an unforgiving spirit*. What is my spirit? How does my spirit work within me when I see people with their wrong actions? Nothing will *justify an unforgiving spirit*.

He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God's pardoning grace. {Ibid.}

In other words, I don't even believe that I am forgiven. This is what I have heard many times from different people. "I can't accept the fact that God would forgive this horrible sin in me." And as I discover more and more details of my horrible nature, it is so hard for me to believe that God could forgive that. This is because I haven't got a forgiving spirit myself. This is what is suggested here: *He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God's pardoning grace.* Because if we are partakers of God's pardoning grace, it will reflect on others.

In God's forgiveness the heart of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. {Ibid.}

As I behold His mercy for me, my heart is drawn to His heart of infinite love.

The tide of divine compassion flows into the sinner's soul, and from him to the souls of others. {Ibid.}

We will give God the glory; as His glorious character of grace and love touches me and I permit it to take it root in my life, it will reflect on others.

Putting Away an Unforgiving Spirit

So do I really believe that I am being pardoned? And if I really believe this, my heart will be filled with compassion for others, because look what God has done for me.

The tenderness and mercy that Christ has revealed in His own precious life will be seen in those who become sharers of His grace. But "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Romans 8:9. He is alienated from God, fitted only for eternal separation from Him. {Ibid.}

This is real deep heart-searching material. You can see why in this antitypical day of atonement we are to afflict our souls; I need to let the truth afflict me and cause me to repent. So as we now look at this heart of forgiveness and we can see there are certain areas in my life that I still hold, I will therefore examine myself and break on the rock Christ Jesus. This is what I am called to do—to repent for my unforgiving spirit.

It is true that he may once have received forgiveness; but his unmerciful spirit shows that he now rejects God's pardoning love. {COL 251.2}

If I cherish an unforgiving note in my heart, I am separated from God by doing that.

He has separated himself from God, and is in the same condition as before he was forgiven. He has denied his repentance, and his sins are upon him as if he had not repented. {Ibid.}

This is serious. We are afflicting our souls. Let us do it. Let us afflict our souls in the thought of this.

The Source of Our Forgiveness

But the great lesson of the parable lies in the contrast between God's compassion and man's hardheartedness; in the fact that God's forgiving mercy is to be the measure of our own. "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" {COL 251.3}

We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude toward others we show whether we have made that love our own. Wherefore Christ says, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew 7:2. {COL 251.4}

We are really doing some heart searching now as we permit God to shine upon us His truth. And we are not reading this to condemn us. We are not reading and meditating and I am not sharing this with you to make you feel horrible. Like Stephen's voice, there is a note of love that is behind all this. Let us come before God with contrition. Let us open our hearts to this amazing grace for me, because I need to believe that His pardon is mine. I have confessed my sin, and I believe, and now I will have compassion on whomver is yet an enemy, on whomever I may have unleashed anger and towards whomever I may have cherished an attitude of unforgiveness.

We have, then, this interesting parallel of God's mercy for us that gives us comfort, and which leads us to ask ourselves the question, Do I have compassion on others?

But there is something especially important here that we want to take home. If I will cherish a forgiving, merciful spirit; if I will let the forgiving spirit of God in my heart and for my sins, and then reflect it back upon all around me, what will this do to me?

The Merciful Shall Obtain Mercy

Let those who desire to perfect a Christlike character ever keep in view the cross on which Christ died a cruel death in order to redeem mankind. Let them ever cherish the same merciful spirit that led the Saviour to make an infinite sacrifice for our redemption. . . . {HP 238.4}

The merciful "shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Proverbs 11:25). {HP 238.5}

I am watering others with forgiving love; and as I water them with this love, I myself will be watered also.

There is sweet peace for the compassionate spirit, a blessed satisfaction in the life of self-forgetful service for the good of others. {Ibid.}

He who has given his life to God in ministry to His children is linked with Him who has all the resources of the universe at His command. By the golden chain of the immutable promises his life is bound up with the life of God. The Lord will not fail him in the hour of suffering and need. "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). And in the hour of final need the merciful shall find refuge in the mercy of the compassionate Saviour and by Him shall be received into everlasting habitations. {HP 238.6}

If I want peace within, if I want the perfect healing balm of Gilead upon my soul, then, as I have received the mercy and grace and compassion of God in His pardon given, let me impart this pardon to others, and I will have sweet peace. For *there is sweet peace for the compassionate spirit, a blessed satisfaction in the life of self-forgetful service for the good of others.* This is contrary to our natural self. Just put yourself in Stephen's shoes. For him to be able to say, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;* He learned this lesson from Jesus. He had the same compassionate love for those who were his persecutors.

When people come to mistreat you and kill you, what will be your attitude towards them? There was a certain Christian by the name of Polycarp, in the period of the Caesars. He was an old man, and he knew that when the soldiers would finally come to get him, they would be taking him to his death. But do you know what he said to them as they arrived? "Oh, you men must be so very hungry and thirsty; come in, and let me refresh you." They couldn't believe how they were being treated by this man. They knew they were going to take him to be condemned to death; but he was so kind. Then he said, If you don't mind, I would like to go into the other room and pray to God. They let him, because he was so kind. Then he prayed for them, and prayed that the Lord would give him strength to meet whatever came. Then when he was brought before the Consul, he was showing continual mercy and forgiveness to all around him. We need to learn that lesson if we are going to stand as the true witnesses in the loud cry.

An Ever-growing Fragrance of Love

There needs to come from us a fragrance, a beautiful atmosphere of love that is expressed by forgiveness towards others. This is indeed the source of just such acceptable fragrance. We are called to have this fragrant spirit of forgiveness to all around us. This is true missionary work:

If we would be true lights in the world, we must manifest the loving, compassionate spirit of Christ. To love as Christ loved means that we must practice self-control. It means that we must show unselfishness at all times and in all places. It means that we must scatter round us kind words and pleasant looks. {ML 80.2}

What sort of looks? *Pleasant looks* to those who persecute us; not this hard condemnatory eye contact that we make to those who don't like us. *Kind words and pleasant looks.*

These cost the giver nothing, but they leave behind a precious fragrance. Their influence for good cannot be estimated. {Ibid.}

This is how the martyrs of the past, under pagan and papal Rome, were instruments to win others to God.

Not only to the receiver, but to the giver, they are a blessing; for they react upon him. {Ibid.}

There it is. If I will cherish a forgiving, merciful spirit, I will receive a blessing in my own heart, a peace, a wonderful sense.

Genuine love is a precious attribute of heavenly origin, which increases in fragrance in proportion as it is dispensed to others. {Ibid.}

The fragrance will grow sweeter and sweeter as we dispense the compassion, the fragrance of God's love, giving God the glory in this hour of the judgment we live in.

God desires His children to remember that in order to glorify Him, they must bestow their affection on those who need it most. None with whom we come in contact are to be neglected. No selfishness in look, word, or deed is to be manifested to our fellow beings, whatever their position, whether they be high or low, rich or poor. The love that gives kind words to only a few, while others are treated with coldness and indifference, is not love, but selfishness. It will not in any way work for the good of souls or the glory of God. We are not to confine our love to one or two objects. {OFC 45.1}

Those who gather the sunshine of Christ's righteousness, and refuse to let it shine into the lives of others, will soon lose the sweet, bright rays of heavenly grace, selfishly reserved to be lavished upon a few. . . . Self should not be allowed to gather to itself a select few, giving nothing to those who need help the most. Our love is not to be sealed up for special ones. Break the bottle, and the fragrance will fill the house. {OFC 45.2}

This reminds us of that beautiful song:

*Broken and spilled out
Just for love of You, Jesus.*

Jesus was that; and as a consequence, many of those who crucified Him finally repented, because He was spilled out for them and they saw it.

May we embrace and cherish this spirit, so that we will give God the glory.

"Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come."

He who loves God because his own sins have been forgiven, will manifest a forgiving spirit toward others, and will show an earnest love for their souls. {RH, May 14, 1895 par. 6}

Let us do just that; let us give God the glory.

Amen.