

## **Forgiveness Must Be Earned**

As you keep sheep to give you wool, and cows to give you milk, so you keep God to give you forgiveness. What is meant is grimly illustrated by the story of the German poet Heinrich Heine, writhing in his bed of agony, who when asked by a visitor if he had hope of the forgiveness of sins, replied with a glance upwards of mocking bitterness, "Why, yes, certainly: that's what God is for."

Is that what God is for? Forgiveness seems so easy to us, largely because we are so indifferent to sin. Isn't God a God of love? Why mention sin and its consequences? God's holiness and justice are rarely recognized. He is there to help us out of trouble and to forgive when we have failed.

Let us be honest with ourselves, We can show up quite nicely in the presence of others, but when we are alone with the holy and almighty God, we know that shame and hypocrisy do not avail. The problem of sin and guilt must be recognized and its solution must be found in the gospel. Through sin man has turned from God and this break in relationship cannot be restored by man on his own. God alone can restore and renew this relationship.

This is a part of the gospel proclamation. A person must become sensitive to the demands of God in His Word, and when through the working of the Holy Spirit this happens a healthy and wholesome conviction of sin is born. The conviction of sin that grows out of the knowledge that you have transgressed against the holy God will lead to repentance, confession and forgiveness.

We must know and confess the fact that we are sinners, and this confession will lead to deliverance. The grace of God is abundant to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Isn't the glory of the Gospel that there is forgiveness with God no matter how great our guilt? Didn't Jesus Christ consider the forgiving of sins his ministry? He looked for sinners. He went into their homes and sat down with them for a meal. He came to save sinners.

The price for this salvation?

Christ went to the cross. He gave His life so that we might be forgiven. He died so that all who believe in Him might be set free from their guilt and sin.

The price for forgiveness is high. It cost the life of the Son of God. He took the penalty of sin upon Himself. Now we understand that forgiveness involves a fundamental change of relation with God and nothing but Christ's death for us can make this possible. The gospel has always declared that. It is only in the almighty grace of God that a sinner can hope.

The peculiar characteristic of the Christian experience is the forgiveness of sins, the forgiveness that is received as an undeserved gift of God. It is bestowed upon man independently of his moral goodness or worth.

Forgiveness comes from God, but there is also a human side of the coin of grace. A Christian, one who has been forgiven, should forgive others. How can you claim to be a Christian and walk around with bitterness towards your neighbour, your friend or relative? How can you expect to be forgiven if you cannot forgive yourself?

Only the person who forgives his fellowman may hope in the forgiveness of God. Jesus taught us in His prayer that the spirit of forgiveness towards others is the basis for the forgiveness of our own sin. "Our Father who art in heaven forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

The spirit of forgiveness is the fragrance of the person who knows that He has been forgiven by the Holy God through what Christ has done on the cross.

The sandal tree perfumes, when riven,  
The ax that lays it low:  
Let man who hopes to be forgiven  
Forgive and bless his foe.

We don't have to continue through life with guilt feelings and without the forgiveness of the holy and almighty God. This is the good news!

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:6,7).

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