

T H E

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F O R G I V E N E S S

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Lesson One

When we learn how completely we are forgiven by God, we have freedom and power to forgive that nothing else can give us.

However, the power of forgiveness does not come easily. It goes against our natural instincts.

God's Extravagant Forgiveness

It's really easy to know we are forgiven but miss just what that forgiveness cost God and Jesus.

To better understand how extravagant God's forgiveness is, we'll begin by taking a brief look at forgiveness in the Old Testament.

Old Testament Forgiveness

Before the Messiah Jesus came, the Children of Israel had to find forgiveness for their sins through a ritual established by Moses—a ritual that clearly pointed forward to what Jesus would do for them and for everyone when he pays the ultimate price for their forgiveness.

Passages from Leviticus 16:20 – 22, 29 – 30, 34:

"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.

²⁹ "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you— ³⁰ because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.

³⁴ "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites." And it was done, as the LORD commanded Moses.

From the beginning there had to be atonement for sin.

John 1:29:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Isaiah 53:6:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.



Psalm 32:1 – 2:

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

Psalm 51:2, 7:

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

David gives us this incredible truth that God does not hold our sin against us. In fact, he covers our sin—he hides them.

Psalm 103:8 – 12

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

God's forgiveness is infinite. You can't measure it and it has no limit.

Micah 7:18 – 19

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

God's forgiveness is profoundly freeing and utterly complete.

Every other religion is based on performance. You have to earn it; you have to prove you are worthy. Yet none of us ever could pay the price for our sins demanded by a Holy God.

Titus 3:5: *...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...*

Ephesians 2:8-9: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

How much did your forgiveness cost?

God has declared that sin cannot go unpunished.

Romans 6:23a: *For the wages of sin is death...*

If you choose to pay for your sins, it means you die for them. This is eternal death—a death that never ends.

Romans 3:10: *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one..."*

Romans 3:23: *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*

God knew from time eternal that none of us could ever pay for our sins, and in his mercy he prepared a way.

Revelation 13:8: *All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.*

God's plan from the creation of the world was that the Lamb of God would pay the price—Jesus took your place and mine so that you could be forgiven.

Ephesians 1:7: *In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

It was far more than the physical pain that Jesus endured for you and me.

Philippians 2:5 – 8:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Consider what Christ left behind. This passage from Colossians gives us a small insight into who Jesus was and is:

Colossians 1:16 – 17: *For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

This should cause us to be totally astonished—speechless.

Interestingly, Jesus didn't just become a man; he became an obedient man. From all of eternity the Son was equal to the Father in glory and majesty, but when he took on the human form, his relationship to the Father changed. In his incarnation, Jesus related to the Father in terms of authority and submission.

John 5:30: *By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.*

John 6:38: *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*

The Author of Life humbly submits to death. The One who is without sin becomes sin for us.

The One who had life within himself. . .

John 5:26: *For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.*

The One who was life. . .

John 14:6a: *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life.*

The One who gives life to whomever he wishes. . .

John 5:21: *For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.*

This One—Jesus—was the highest of the high gone to the lowest of the low.

Then consider what it meant for God the Son to endure the curse of God the Father on the cross. Try to fathom the sense of bewilderment the Son of God must have experienced, when for the first time in all of eternity, he felt his Father's displeasure.

Jesus endured the wrath that you and I deserve.

The "Forgiven-Much" Group

Jesus taught a Pharisee about forgiveness:

Luke 7:36 - 50:

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Which category are you in today: Forgiven Little or Forgiven Much?

- Have you have been forgiven for being selfish?
- Have you have been forgiven for pride and self-will?
- Have you have been forgiven for running your own life and running away from God?
- Have you have been forgiven for immorality or impurity of life?
- Have you have been forgiven for lying or cheating?
- Have you have been forgiven for being lazy?
- Have you have been forgiven for a tongue out of control - gossiping and talking too much and saying things you should not have said?
- Have you have been forgiven for being cruel and unkind to other people?
- Have you have been forgiven for lack of love and compassion?

What else could you add to the list?

Forgiven for Fellowship

"Forgiveness is essentially God's way of removing the great obstacle to our fellowship with him. By canceling our sin and paying for it with the death of his own Son, God opens the way for us to see him and know him and enjoy him forever. Seeing and savoring him is the goal of forgiveness. Soul-satisfying fellowship with our Father is the aim of the cross." — John Piper

So, if/since you've been forgiven, are you living in the joy of that forgiveness?

Colossians 2:13-14:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

According to this, how forgiven are you in God's sight? Does God hold any accusations against you? How many of your sins have been nailed to the cross?

Reasons that could be keeping you from accepting and enjoying God's forgiveness:

1. You don't feel forgiven.
2. You have a wrong idea of humility. It seems arrogant to really believe that you don't have to feel guilty about your past.
3. You live under a performance driven mentality instead of under grace.
4. You don't know how to defeat your enemy who constantly accuses you.

Galatians 5:1:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Are you living in the freedom and joy of your forgiveness?