

Forgiveness as a Legal Transaction

*"so you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"
Matthew 9:6*

I. The Problem

All of humankind was under a sentence of death, condemned and in prison, awaiting execution because we could not pay our debts. *Romans 3:23; Romans 5:18-19; Colossians 2:13-14*

II. The Solution

Jesus, through his sacrifice, paid our debts. This satisfied the legal requirements of the law. *Romans 8:1-4*

Therefore, as far as God is concerned, all debts are legally paid. *2 Corinthians 5:19 & 21*

Let's look at forgiveness from this legal standpoint. Jesus essentially took responsibility for our debts. He cosigned our loans and when we find ourselves unable to pay those loans, he pays them off for us. He does this for ALL humankind. *Matthew 9:6; Matthew 20:28; Luke 4:18; I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:14-15; Hebrews 9:24-28; Hebrews 10:11-12*

Thus, he is able to intercede for us since he made himself legally responsible for our debts. *Romans 8:33-34; I Timothy 2:5*

Because he assumed this responsibility, he earned tremendous authority over sin. *Matthew 9:6; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 1:3-4*

III. Our struggle to forgive

In the parable of the unmerciful servant, note that the servant's fellow servant did owe the first servant a debt. *Matthew 18:28*

When someone sins against us, that person does owe us. They have become our debtor, because they have taken something from us.

Because we are created in the image of God, we have within our DNA a need to see justice done. I call this our justice sense.

We feel deeply that it just isn't right for someone to get away with stealing from us. *Genesis 1:27*

According to scripture, blood must be shed for the remission of sin. Now, combine this God-ordained penalty for sin with our innate sense of justice. Is it any wonder we struggle to let go of other people's debts? After all, they do legally owe us. *Hebrews 9:22*

Unfortunately, people usually are unable or unwilling to pay their debts. For example, an abusive mother may regret what she did to her children, but there is no way to turn back time. The damage is done. She cannot pay her debt. Another abusive person may be in denial, unwilling to even admit he owes a debt.

No wonder forgiveness is "hard." It feels like this. If I forgive a person's debt, then justice is not satisfied AND I have permanently lost out. The debtor gets away with hurting me. I feel like God is punishing me by making me forgive, and I've lost all chance of having what was taken from me restored.

IV. Pay back

It is the character and nature of God to restore that which was lost. *Ruth 4:14; Psalm 23:3; Isaiah 40:31; Luke 15; Luke 19:10*

When someone sins against us, when someone steals from us, we do not have to try to wring payment from the person who hurt us.

We can go to Jesus, the legal owner of that person's debt, (remember he co-signed the loan) and ask HIM (the Lord) to restore to us what was stolen. He has both the legal right and the ability to make it up to us. See *the Book of Ruth (Boaz as a pattern of Lord Jesus, our kinsman redeemer); Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Peter 5:10*

Personally, I'd much rather the Lord paid any debts I believe are owed to me. Who is better equipped to make everything all right?

V. What keeps us in prison

In order for us to receive restoration from the Lord and move into our freedom, we must release the person who is indebted to us and accept our payment from the Lord instead. *Job 42:7-10; Matthew 7:1-2*

In Matthew 18:21-35, note that the unmerciful servant went to prison because he would not forgive the debt that his fellow servant owed him. The unmerciful servant had to stay in prison until he paid off all that he owed.

But...

Legally, his debt was already paid by his master.

Legally he didn't owe a dime.

Legally, he was a free man.

But his determination to extract justice and payment from his fellow servant blinded him to the fact that his master (the person he owed) had just absorbed his debt.

In the Lord's prayer, we are exhorted to accept Jesus as legal co-signer for the debts owed us. If we refuse, our heavenly Father will not pay off the debts we owe. Our refusal to release the debts and turn instead to the Lord for payment results in being stuck in debtor's prison.

When we insist on trying to force payment from those who hurt us, we are in essence refusing to recognize and honor that Jesus has made himself legally responsible for all human debts. We are also saying in our hearts that we don't believe He will restore what was stolen. Ouch. *Matthew 6:9-14*

Because of the goodness of our great Lord, we can freely release our debtors and turn confidently to him for restoration and justice.

Blessings and smiles from the Poolers,
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