

# Forgive, Forgive, and Forgive Again! Part 2

Jack Hughes

November 1, 2009

If you have your Bibles, please turn to Luke 17, where we are going to continue to look at verses 1–4.

In John Bunyan's *[The] Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is traveling to the Celestial City when he meets with Apollyon, who is a gruesome, demonic creature who commands him to turn around to go back to the City of Destruction. Christian refuses and so Apollyon tries to reason with Christian to forsake the Lord and the straight and narrow way.

Christian said, "I have given him my faith, and sworn my allegiance to him; how then can I turn back from this way? I would be hanged as a traitor."

"You did the same by me," said Apollyon, "And yet I am willing to pass by all, if you will now turn around and go back."

"What I before promised you I did as an unbeliever," said Christian," and besides, I count that the Prince, under whose banner I now stand, is able to absolve me, yes, and to pardon me for what I did as your accomplice. Besides, O thou destroying Apollyon, to speak the truth, I like his service, his wages,

his servants, his government, his company, and country, better than yours; therefore stop trying to persuade me farther: I am his servant, and I will follow him.”

“Consider again,” warned Apollyon, “when you are traveling what you are likely to meet with as you travel along the way. You know, that for the most part, his servants come to an ill end, because they are transgressors against me and my ways. You know how many of them have been put to shameful deaths!”

“And besides,” he groaned, “You count his service better than mine; but he has never yet come from the place where he is to deliver any that served him from their enemies’ hands: but as for me, how many times, as all the world very well knows, have I delivered, either by power or fraud, those that have faithfully served me, from he and his servants! And so will I deliver thee.”

Christian smiled and said, “His patience at present to deliver them, is on purpose to try their love, to see whether they will cling to him to the end: and as for the ill end you say they come to, it is a most glorious end. For, for present deliverance, they do not much expect it; for they trust in the glory to come; and then they shall have it, when their Prince comes in glory with his angels.”

Apollyon then began to accuse, “You have already been unfaithful in your service to him; and how do you think to receive his reward?”

“When, O Apollyon, have I been unfaithful to him?” said Christian.

“You fainted when you first set out, you almost drowned in the Slough of Despond. You tried to remove your burden in unlawful ways, instead of waiting until your Prince took it off. You sinfully sleep and lost your scroll of promise. You almost

turned back in fear when you saw the lions. And when you speak to me and others of your journey, inwardly you desire vainglory in all that you say and do.”

“All this is true,” said Christian confidently, “And much more which you have left out; but the Prince whom I serve and honor is merciful, and ready to forgive. Besides, I committed those sinful acts in your country and since have groaned under them, been sorry for them, and have obtained pardon of my Prince.

Then Apollyon broke out into a grievous rage, saying, “I am an enemy to this Prince; I hate his person, his laws, and people: I am come out on purpose to oppose you!”<sup>1</sup>

Here, Bunyan pictures forgiveness as the great defense we have against [Satan], the accuser of the brethren. Yes, the believer used to march under Satan’s banner. Yes, he was a slave of Satan, held captive by Satan to do his will [see 2 Timothy 2:26]. Yes, all believers are great sinners and rebels against their Lord and Master. All this is true, but when a person repents, when [he] turn[s] from [his] sin, when [he] believe[s] in the Lord Jesus Christ and follow[s] Him, [he is] perfectly forgiven.

Picture in your mind a large sheet of perfectly white paper, maybe three-foot-by-three-foot [square]. Imagine that every sin you commit is a mark placed on that perfectly white paper with indelible ink. Consider how early you started to mark that paper: when you were in your mother’s womb and that umbilical cord got in the way and you kicked in anger, when you were young and you didn’t get fed right away and you screamed in selfishness, or you kicked when you had your diapers changed because you wanted your way. Just think of how, from even that very early age, you quickly blotted out that whole paper until it became completely black, and then after that,

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<sup>1</sup>John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress, in the Similitude of a Dream; The First Part*, available at: <http://www.bartleby.com/15/1/104.html>.

you increased the darkness of it and layered ink upon ink until no more white could be seen.

When you repent of your sins, when you believe in Jesus, He washes all that indelible ink away so that you are perfectly clean. Your slate has been erased. The sin has been perfectly washed away so that you are now whiter than snow in the eyes of God [see Psalm 51:7]. Even after being saved, you still commit sins, yet you have forgiveness. Satan accuses you, but you have forgiveness. Satan tempts you to sin, and maybe even succeeds in leading you to sin, but you have forgiveness. He can remind you of the sins you have already committed, and oh, how you are so undeserving of God's grace, but you have forgiveness. We don't deny his accusations. They are true and more than he can [even] tell because he can't read our hearts. We are great sinners, but Jesus came to save sinners [see 1 Timothy 1:15]. We are unworthy and we deserve hell, but Jesus paid the penalty of our sins, He clothed us in His righteousness so that we could go free. In doing this, He disarmed the accuser of the brethren, and now Apollyon can come against us with all that he has, but we are forgiven.

This morning, we return to Luke's Gospel. Jesus is teaching the multitude, the Pharisees, [and] specifically His disciples. The scribes and Pharisees have been hunting Jesus down for years now, trying to catch Him in something wrong that He might say so that they might accuse Him and disqualify Him in the sight of the people. Surely this grieved Jesus' disciples. Imagine loving somebody [as] His disciples loved Jesus and see[ing] the religious leaders constantly attacking and attacking like a little pack of wild dogs nipping at His heels and barking at everything He did. I am sure that they were even provoked sometimes to the point of violence, [thinking], "Maybe we should just take those religious leaders and tar and feather them!" Jesus knows this is what they are feeling and thinking, so He takes this knowledge and uses it as another opportunity to instruct them in how to respond to people who sin against us. This is what He says in Luke 17:1-4. Follow along in your Bibles as I read:

He said to His disciples, "It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he would cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Last time, we started to look at [Luke 17:]1–4, and I said there were four necessary steps that we needed to take to avoid an ungodly response to those who sin against us. Some people came up after the service, and said, "Pastor Jack, I only got three [steps from the sermon]." That's because that's all I gave you. [First]: We learned that we should expect to be sinned against. Jesus says, "It is inevitable. Stumbling blocks will come." A stumbling block is the Greek word *skandalon*, [which is] the word [from which] we get [the word] "scandal." It really refers to a bait stick in a trap. The animal sees the bait and is lured to his destruction, a *skandalon*. In the same way, when somebody tempts you or entices you to sin, they are becoming a bait stick, they are luring you to your destruction. Even if they don't entice you specifically to sin, but are sinning themselves, their bad example is teaching you to sin. In that way, they are still a *skandalon*.

Second, we saw that Jesus gives a stern warning to those who would intentionally tempt others to sin. He pronounces woe on them, condemnation, [and] judgment. He says, "It would be better"—a good thing, a preferred thing, a thing you should do instead of tempting somebody to sin—"to put a millstone around your neck and jump into the sea." This last week we were in the Smoky Mountains [and] we went to this old, water-powered mill [called] Mingus Mill. There, outside the door, were three very large millstones about three feet across and two feet thick. I looked at them—I even took some pictures of them—and I thought, "[It] would be bad to go swimming with [one of those] around your neck." But Jesus says [that it]

would be a good thing, a better thing, a preferred thing, than if you ever think of leading someone else into sin.

Finally, we learned that [if] someone sins against [us], specifically by tempting us to sin, we need to not go tell someone else, not gossip, not grow bitter and angry, not give [him] the cold shoulder, not try to avoid [him], but go to [him] and rebuke [him]. Show [him his] fault. Expose [his] error. Reveal the sin for what it is. You don't need to do it in a mean or harsh way. In fact, you should do [it] in the fruit of the Spirit, but you need to tell the person plainly and forthrightly that [he is] in sin, [he has] violated the Scriptures, [and that] this is what the Bible says, and therefore [he] need[s] to repent of that. That is the loving thing to do, the good thing to do. That's what Jesus says we are to do.

But think of how often, when people sin against us, we do one of the other things. We grow bitter [or] angry. "Do you know what so-and-so did to me?" [we say to] other people. [We] avoid [the people who have sinned against us]. [We] stew on [the sin]. [Remember], we're not talking about personal preferences here, convictions, or gray areas, but sins. People aren't sinning against you when they fail to meet up to your expectations of them. They aren't sinning against you when you *assume* they have evil motives but you don't know [what their actual motives are]. They aren't sinning against you because you think they should obey God in a little different way, or with a little bit more fervor, or like you do in a certain area because that's how you like to do it. Someone is not a stumbling block if [he] exercise[s] a liberty you feel uncomfortable exercising—though [he] may be a stumbling block to the weak, that's not specifically a sin, necessarily. There must be a violation of Scripture, a violation of biblical principle or wisdom so that you can bring [him] to [that] point [in the Bible, and say], "The Bible says this and you've done that, therefore I want you to know it's wrong and you need to repent of that."

Rebuking somebody is the loving thing to do—for [that person], for the Church, and for the glory of God. It's how people grow in Christ. This is where we ended last time. We never got to the fourth step, which I'm afraid

we're not even going to finish this morning [because] forgiveness is such a vast topic and it is so interrelated with so many other things. As I sat in my study, I began to think of all the different things I need to mention so that somebody doesn't come up and wear me out with, "Well, what about this?" (I try and anticipate all those [possibilities] so you stay away.)

This morning, we're going to first consider that we need to keep forgiving. That is the fourth point: We need to keep on forgiving. We're just going to barely start looking at this. Look at [Luke 17:]3 again, where Jesus says: "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." The word translated "forgive" is a word that literally means "to send away." It is even used of divorce, [as in] a person sending away a wife. It means "to let go, to forgive or pardon a debt." That's what the literal word means.

You might be talking to [a friend], and somebody [else] might do something to you, and [your friend] might see it, and say, "You know what? You just need to let that go. You just need to forget about it. I mean, yeah, I saw what [he] did to you, but hey, just let it go. Just forget it. We're all sinners." What [your friend is] trying to do is basically tell you what this word [translated as "forgive"] means—to just let it go. Don't try and enact a judgment against [the person who wronged you]. Don't try to get justice. Don't try to get your pound of flesh out of [him].

We see a picture of this in Leviticus 16. [People went] out to get a big batch of goats that [were] unblemished, cast lots for them, and [they] pick[ed] one of those goats. A person was [then] appointed to lead that goat far out into the wilderness. It was called the "scapegoat." Once out there, [the goat] would start eating, and [the] person would sneak away from it and basically ditch it in the wilderness [see Leviticus 16]. [This act] was a picture of God's forgiveness of us, [because] our sins are to be sent away, never to be seen or heard from again. That is the concept of what it means to forgive—to forget it, if you can, to send it away from your thoughts, to not churn over it, to never see it again.

To help us organize our thoughts, I have constructed an artificial outline, [the] points [of which] remain to be discovered. I know the first point. You can think of all these as sub-points to the fourth point [of the previous sermon], which is: We need to forgive. How many [sub-points] there will be, only God will tell.

The first thing I want to look at is the pattern of your forgiveness. As pastors, we have people come to us at times who are very agitated, angry, bitter, frustrated, [or] discouraged, because some friend, some person, has sinned against them, and sometimes in really jaw-dropping ways. Sometimes [people have] relatives suing them, betraying them, robbing them, or cheating them. [They are] just [enduring] lots of really bad, grievous sins. [These people who come to us] have been hurt so deeply, wounded so much, that they have this anger, this bitterness in their soul[s] and they can't get over it. They want to be at peace. They want to be reconciled. They want to have restitution or something. They just want it to go away. Though in their minds they are thinking to themselves, "I know I need to forgive," they're also thinking, "I need to get a gun." They have these bad thoughts, they know they're bad, and they want to get rid of them, but they're just plagued because they're hurt deeply and they don't know how to resolve this pain that they have received from someone else sinning against them. If you were their counselor, what would you tell them?

If somebody came to you, and said, "I'm just angry. I'm bitter. I'm frustrated. This person did this, and this, and this, and this [to me]," would you tell [him], "You know what you need to do? You need to get a rubber bat, visualize that person's face on the wall, and just beat it until you're in a sweat and you finally feel release"? No. You'd have to go see a psychiatrist to get that advice. Would you instruct [him] to get revenge in overt or covert ways? "Subtly ignore [him], subtly undermine [his] business. When you see [him] coming down the hall, take a turn. Turn your head when you walk by. Always shut [him] out. Never support [him]. [Say], 'Oh [that person] is going to be there? I'm not going. I'm not going to look at [him].'" That's a form of revenge.

Would you maybe counsel [him] that, “You know, that person is just a loser, and because [he’s] a loser, [he’s] not worth your fretting. So, just pretend it never happened”? Or, would you counsel [him], “You know what? You need to distract yourself. I’d get into drugs. I’d start drinking. Just drown your sorrows in substance abuse and entertainment”? How would you help [him] find release? How would you help [him] find peace, happiness, joy, and even love toward that person who has hurt [him]?

I just want you to know, you [could] go over to our preschoolers and they could tell you the answer because whenever you go over there, and you say, “So, what’s the answer to this?” they always raise their hands [and] say, “Jesus.” And that’s right. But when we get older, sometimes we forget the right answer. The answer is Jesus. We can forgive others because of Jesus. Are you bitter at somebody? Are you angry at somebody? Has somebody hurt you and maybe you haven’t done anything externally mean [to that person], but you’re kind of avoiding [him], you’re hiding from [him], you won’t talk to [him]? You know who [he is], and [he] know[s] who you are. [He] might not even be a believer. Maybe you just have a little silent war going on there because you refuse to act toward [him] in the fruit of the Spirit [see Galatians 5:22–23], to really love [him], because [he] didn’t meet up to your expectations. Maybe [he] even sinned against you. Maybe this has gone on for quite some time. You’ve really become hardened in your heart and grown cold toward [him]. If this is the case, it is almost a certainty that you don’t know or fully understand the forgiveness you have in Christ because that’s where the cure begins.

You may understand [that] you have forgiveness in Christ. You may understand that Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection are the foundation of that forgiveness, but if you are having difficulty forgiving those [who] sin against you, you need to better understand who you are. You need to better understand the magnitude of what Christ has done for you. This morning I want you to come with me on a little journey through the majestic land of forgiveness in Jesus. I want you to see if you can take in the whole canvas. This is the big picture. You need to step back instead of focusing on the

little black mark that someone has committed against you. Stand back and see the whole picture, and then ask yourself, “Is that what I know to be true?”

Adam and Eve were created perfect, they were put in a perfect place, and yet they fell into sin. They only had one rule: Don’t eat of that one tree [see Genesis 2:16]. That’s pretty easy, don’t you think? I wish we only had one rule. Yet, Adam, being the head, the leader, is held responsible for the Fall, and when Adam sinned, all who are in Adam sinned with him. He was cursed and in him all his descendants were cursed with him [ see 1 Corinthians 15:22]. In other words, because everybody came from Adam, therefore, everybody fell in Adam. So, when he sinned, he basically [dragged] the entire human race into sin with him, since he would only be able to father other sinners with Eve.

This is quite apparent with his first son, Cain. You remember what Cain did. [He and his brother, Abel,] did the sacrifice thing, and because Abel’s sacrifice was right, because Abel did what was righteous, Cain hated him. Now, think about that. He hated him for his righteousness and then killed him in cold blood [see Genesis 4:3–8]. That is amazing. But, Cain was born a sinner because his father, Adam, was a sinner. We, too, are descendants of Adam, and therefore we, too, are sinners. David reminds us in Psalm 51:5 that we are all conceived in sin. From the moment of conception we’re sinners. In Psalm 58:3, he says we all go astray from the womb. Moses says, in Genesis 8:21, that we are evil from our youth.

Selfishness comes as naturally as breathing to us. Nobody needs to teach you how to deceive, lie, and trick your little brother or sister when you are a young person. You’re good at it. You’re an expert at birth. You’re born an expert at sinning because it is your nature. You were born a sinner. You sin because it is your nature to sin. Just as a dog knows how to bark because it is a dog, a cat knows how to purr [because it is a cat], so you know how to sin because you’re a sinner. You sin every day and you never stop sinning ever. You did nothing to please God before coming to Christ, if indeed you

have come to Christ. In fact, you were, or maybe still are, hostile to God [see Romans 8:7]. Your every breath is an offense to His infinite holiness.

Do you know how much infinite is? [Picture the distance from] here to the farthest reaches of the universe that the Hubble telescope can see. That compared to infinity is like a small line [next to] a line that goes [far, far] off beyond what you can see. That huge distance is nothing compared to infinity. That's what we're talking about here. You have offended an infinitely holy God. That is why Jonathan Edwards rightly said in his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" that, "It was only the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, that kept you one moment from being cast into hell."<sup>2</sup> You and I did not deserve to be spared from God's wrath, and yet He has extended mercy to us.

How do you think God feels? If you can, as far as it is possible for a sinner to put [himself] in the place of a holy God, [imagine] how an infinitely holy God feels when He extends grace and mercy to His creatures so that they won't sin and they continue to sin? Then He extends more mercy and grace, and they keep presuming upon His mercy, and sin, and sin, and sin against Him still.

As John reminds us in John 3:19 and following, "you loved darkness rather than Light for your deeds were evil, and you did not come to the Light lest your deeds should be exposed." As Paul says in Romans 3:11[-12], "there are none who seek after God...not even one." Like the multitudes in Jesus' time when He was being tried before [them] by Pilate, they said, "Away with Him! Away with Him!... We have no king but Caesar" [John 19:15], or Satan, or self, or whatever you're living for—put it in there. You didn't want Christ ruling over you. You didn't want Him telling you what to do. You didn't want to turn from your sins. You made yourself, or something, or someone else your own god and "worshiped and served

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<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," available at: <http://logosresourcepages.org/GreatSermons/angry.htm>.

the creature rather than [your] Creator” [Romans 1:25]. It is the problem with all of us.

All of this offended, angered, and incensed the Lord of Glory who the Scriptures say is angry at the wicked every day [see Psalm 7:11]. Being a just God, it would have been good and right for Him to execute us on the spot, to cast us into the lake of fire [see Revelation 19:20], where we would suffer day and night forever and ever [see Revelation 20:10]. That would be the right thing to do. Yet, what did He do? He extended mercy and grace. Mercy held back His wrath and grace gave us time to repent.

I am sure there are some here this morning who are still worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, who day and night presume upon God’s grace and [who have] never repented, [who] don’t love the Lord, [who] have never given [their lives] to Christ, [who] have never been born again. Right now, right this moment, God sustains you and holds you back from the judgment you deserve, giving you moments, more moments, to repent, and yet you will not do it. Until you repent and believe in Jesus as your Savior, you’re just provoking, antagonizing, [and] arousing His anger against you every moment. You never please God [see Romans 8:8]. You never honor God. Even when you do deeds [that] society says are good, it doesn’t please God. Even when you do the same deeds Christians do, that do give glory to God, you don’t please God because until you come to Christ, until you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, until you’re clothed with His righteousness, you can never please an infinitely holy God, and therefore everything that you do, no matter how great it is, how grand it is, and how wonderful you think it is, God doesn’t think it’s wonderful. It’s just filthy rags in His sight.

Think of the great number of your sins. Think of how many things you’ve done since you were conceived that do not meet up to loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength [see Mark 12:30]. It only takes one sin. It only takes one seemingly insignificant sin to damn a person to hell. Some people think, “That sounds a little extreme. I don’t know. You mean to tell me that somebody is going to suffer day and

night forever and ever because [he] told a little white lie or [he was] a little impatient, or [he] did this little thing? That just doesn't seem right. That seems like the punishment far outweighs the crime." That's because they don't know God or they don't know Him well enough. [They] don't understand that He is infinitely holy and righteous, [which means that] every sin against Him is an infinite offense to His holiness.

Do you remember what James says in James 2:10? He says: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." Have you ever seen safety glass break? It's kind of cool. It breaks in little pieces. The windows on your car, you could go out there and hit them with a hammer and see what happens. If you have a sliding glass door, you could see what happens. [To make safety glass], they take glass and then fire it and temper it. Once you do that, you can't cut it, alter it, [or] trim it anymore. If you were to have a big piece of tempered safety glass, and think, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm just going to break off the corner," you could get yourself a little pair of pliers and go down to the corner and grab it, and [try to break off a small piece], and when you did that, the whole thing would blow apart and you'd have a big pile of glass chips. That is like the Law of God. The Law of God is fixed. It is unalterable. Therefore, when you commit your insignificant sin, you break the whole.

Do you remember what Jesus said? He said, "The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength" [see Matthew 22:37]. Would you say that is a pretty significant commandment? Oh, it is the greatest commandment, isn't it? Therefore, to break that commandment is to break the greatest one. Now, the whole Law and the Prophets, every command in the Bible, rests on that one command because every act of disobedience is a violation of the greatest commandment. It is a failure to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Therefore, that one sin is the greatest law-breaking sin. No matter what you think, God says it is huge. We commit sins like that every day—almost every moment. So it is with the Law of God: you break

a little piece, you break the whole. You're guilty of all. You deserve hell. God, though all-powerful, is not able to overthrow His immutable nature. He must have justice. Every sin must be paid for in full. The Scriptures repeat over and over again: God will "by no means allow the guilty to go unpunished" [see Exodus 34:7; Nahum 1:3]. He has to do it. He has to punish that sin. He must have justice—perfect justice, complete justice—for every sin that is committed.

What do you suppose is the penalty of sinning against infinite holiness? What do you think His perfect justice demands? Eternal punishment. There you are, there I am, the chief of sinners [see 1 Timothy 1:15], the champions of rebellion who drink iniquity in like fish drink in water, who sin like the sparks fly upward [see Job 5:7], who are desperately sick and deceitful above all else [see Jeremiah 17:9], whose thoughts and intentions are only evil continuously [see Genesis 6:5]. You cannot but sin. You love sin. It is your nature to sin. In addition to all the sins you have willfully committed, which you committed in willful, rebellious acts against God, on top of all that are all the ones you didn't even know you were committing, and on top of that are all Adam's sins, which are dumped on you—you [are] born with that truckload of sins. So you have all Adam's sins, all the ones you willfully committed, and all the ones you committed in ignorance. They're all against you to condemn you, and rightly so.

How will you be delivered? How can you escape? How can you stand before a holy God? The deliverance comes from a very unexpected place. Just look there. Look there and see a young lady, and in her womb is a child, the Son of God and the Son of Man, "conceived. . . of the Holy Spirit" [see Matthew 1:20]. See that young baby boy growing up in a sin-cursed world, [a world] which He Himself created [see John 1:1–5], and He never kicks in anger. He never screams in frustration. As a young man, He always does what His parents tell Him to do, and they never ask Him twice. See Him there growing in wisdom, stature, and knowledge [see Luke 2:40, 47], working with His hands, building, crafting, studying, praying to His heavenly Father. God's justice is waiting for Him, though. It is calling out

to Him to come and make atonement for sins. He enters into the ministry, is tempted [see Matthew 4:1], is confirmed to be a prophet [see Matthew 21:11], the very Son of God from a voice from heaven [see Matthew 3:17], by His miracles [see John 2:1–11], by the Holy Spirit descending from above [see Matthew 3:16]. He does good, and only good, and always good. He teaches the multitudes great things. He models perfect obedience to the Law. And though tempted in all things as we are, yet He is without sin [see Hebrews 4:15], He never sins, even the demons, when He runs into them say, “We know who You are. You’re the holy One of God” [see Mark 1:24].

But He knows He needs to drink the bitter cup [see Matthew 20:22] and that justice must have its due. He is betrayed by Judas with a kiss [see Luke 22:48], the Shepherd is struck and the sheep are scattered [see Matthew 26:31], His disciples run away from Him [see Matthew 26:56]. He is falsely accused, unjustly tried [see Matthew 26:60], beaten [see Matthew 27:30], mocked [see Matthew 27:31], spit upon [see Matthew 27:30], scourged [see Matthew 27:26], rejected by His own countrymen [see John 19:15], despised and forsaken, smitten [by] God and afflicted. And, oh, look, how they have sinned against Him! Look at how they sin against Him over and over again. He has done nothing wrong. He is perfectly innocent, but they keep sinning against Him. After being forced to carry His own cross to the place of the skull [see John 19:17], He is nailed to it. That cross is dropped into a hole with a thud, tearing His flesh, causing excruciating pain. For what [does He endure all this]? [For] nothing He did.

There, look at Him. See the holy, perfect, righteous, innocent Son of God suffering on that Tree, rendering Himself a guilt offering [see Isaiah 53:10], suffering the punishment for those for whom the stroke was due [see Isaiah 53:8], the chastening of our well-being falling on Him [see Isaiah 53:5], Him being crushed for our iniquities [see Isaiah 53:5]. See Him there, stripped, beaten, bleeding, and badgered, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, bearing the sins of the world [see Hebrews 9:28]. In the pinnacle of His pain, suffering, and need, when innumerable sins are crushing the life out of Him who knew no sin [see 2 Corinthians 5:21], it gets worse,

for all of His disciples have abandoned Him. The leader said, “I will never deny you,” and yet he denied him three times [see Matthew 26:34, 75]. The rest said, “We will never deny you,” and they have all fled from Him in His greatest time of need.

But He has one comfort and that is [that] He has communion with His heavenly Father. He has always had that communion. It has existed from eternity past and it has never been broken. Then, in a moment, something worse still happens. In His greatest time of need and weakness, when the blackness of the sins of the world engulf Him, a terrifying moment [occurs in which] the communion which He has always had with His Father is instantly severed and is gone. In its place is a fury, a wrath, a fierceness of anger, which He has never known before, and it is coming from His Father. In addition to that, all the sins of the world are now bearing down upon Him. Tears seize Him, and He cries out in agony, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?” [see Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34]. He is alone.

At that very moment, when the colossal weight of every sin of the world combined with the fierceness and anger of His Father’s wrath is bearing down upon Him like the whole weight of the universe bearing down upon the tip of a needle, it is finished. “It is finished.” He commits His spirit into the Father’s hands, and He breathes His last and He dies [see John 19:30]. His body is buried in a rich man’s tomb. Three days later, He is raised from the dead [see John 20:11–18] to prove that He had committed no sin, to prove that death had no power over Him, and to assure all those who believe in Him that He is able [to] raise us from the dead, too.

Is this what you see when you think about who you are and what Jesus has done for you? Do you see that though He was sinless yet others, including yourself, have sinned against Him in incredible ways? Do you see how, as Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 3:18, that “Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit”? Jesus, celebrating the Lord’s Supper, looking ahead to what would be accomplished, took that cup in His hand in Matthew 26:28: “this is My blood of the covenant,

which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins”—your sins. Paul says in Ephesians 1:7: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” But there is more behind the scenes [that] must be understood because Jesus was a willing sacrifice. He paid the penalty. He “gave Himself as a ransom for all” [1 Timothy 2:6]. He satisfied the just penalty for the sins of the world, having volunteered for the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. Therefore, the Father’s perfect justice was satisfied. He could ask for nothing else in payment because He had the perfect blood of His only begotten Son to atone for our sins.

This caused a chain of events in the mind and counsel of God [that] many sermons could not tell. I’m just going to summarize. For those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus, they receive perfect atonement. They receive propitiation [see Romans 3:24–25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10], a word that means “a sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God against them.” Not only that, they are “justified by His blood” [Romans 5:9]. You are declared to be righteous in Jesus. You are adopted by God into His family [see Titus 3:7]. You are baptized into the Church by the Holy Spirit [see Acts 2:38], who is then given to you as a pledge [see 2 Corinthians 1:22] to strengthen you, encourage you, comfort you, [and] help you. You are sanctified [see Acts 26:18]. You are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to “the kingdom of His beloved Son” [Colossians 1:13]. You are made into a new creature in Christ [see 2 Corinthians 5:17]. You are granted “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” [Ephesians 1:3]. You have waiting for you unimaginable glories that only eternity will tell. You are pardoned, forgiven of all your sins [see Mark 3:28]. The punishment you deserve fell on Christ [see Romans 15:3]. Not only were your sins taken away, not only were you washed whiter than snow [see Psalm 51:7], but Christ imputes to you, reckons to you, gives to your account, His perfect righteousness, His infinite holiness so that now it is yours forevermore.

This is why Peter happily preached at Pentecost in Acts 2:38: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” It is why Paul said in Colossians 2:13–14:

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

It’s why John reminds us in 1 John 2:12: “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake.”

So what does this all mean? It means you didn’t deserve it. It means you didn’t earn it. It means you were saved by grace [see Ephesians 2:5, 8]. You were a rebel, a sinner, an idolater. You sinned against God more than you could ever know. Yet God, though He had every right to enact His holy justice against you, execute you, and cast you into hell, did not exercise that right. Instead, He extended mercy and grace to you because you believed in His Son. He put all the thoughts of justice, anger, wrath, and fury toward you away from Him because of Christ. Now, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus [see Romans 8:1]. Believer, you are now, this very moment, perfectly, completely, continually, everlastingly forgiven in Christ—not because of anything you did or earned, but because of what Christ did. Being forgiven, you receive eternal life, the privilege and pleasure of knowing that forever and ever you will be in the presence of your Savior, who will love you with a love everlasting [see Jeremiah 31:3].

So, [if] you’re bitter at somebody, [or] you’re angry because they put a little mark on you, I think you need to rethink things. The cure, the solution, the way of finding peace, joy, and release from those who sin against you is to look at you and your own sin against God and to see what Christ has done for you.

The author of Hebrews instructs us in Hebrews 12:2–3, [saying,]

Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Just as the grace of God is enough to save you, it is enough to enable you to forgive that person.

I want you to know, we have a lot more [to cover]. That’s just the first point of the sub-points. Let me just close with some words from Charles Spurgeon in a sermon entitled “A Solemn Deprivation,” [in which], concerning forgiveness, he said this. Listen carefully.

[He] has put away your many, many sins. You were without Christ, and your sins stood like yonder mountain, whose black and rugged cliff threaten the very skies. There fell a drop of Jesus’ blood upon it, and it all vanished in a moment. The sins of all your days had gone in an instant by the application of the precious blood! Oh! bless Jehovah’s name that you can now say:

“Now freed from sin I walk at large,  
My Savior’s blood my full discharge,  
Content at his dear feet I lay,  
A sinner saved, and homage pay.”<sup>3</sup>

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible<sup>®</sup>, ©1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, by The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>3</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, “A Solemn Deprivation,” published on Thursday, August 19, 1915. Available at: <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/spurgeon/web/ss-0021.html>.