

Forgiveness

Part of the reality of being human is that once an act is done it can never be erased or undone. Although we may be able to hide the acts that we are not proud of, it can never be hidden from God and becomes imbedded in the fabric of our personal life history set in time and space forever, beyond the reach of any other human to erase or undo.

I may be able to recall an email that is sent to the wrong recipient if I act quick enough. I can even undo a horrible mistake that has corrupted a document on my computer by pressing the undo button to reverse the keystrokes back to a previous setting but as each second ticks past in my life and yours we leave an indelible record on the page of history that is interwoven with personal shortcomings, errors of judgement, deliberate and secret sins, small and even larger transgressions which are ultimately against God and we cannot change.

But God's plan of salvation for all mankind, through the person of Jesus Christ, is all about **FORGIVENESS** and the story that we had read to us from Luke 7:36-50 is one that highlights the amazing outcome that God's **forgiveness** can have on each of our lives when we are prepared to accept by faith Jesus Christ as our saviour.

Psychologists generally define **forgiveness** as a conscious, deliberate decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you, regardless of whether they actually deserve your forgiveness. When such forgiveness is practised it may in fact be all one sided and may not include reconciliation or even any interaction with the perpetrator. Sometimes though, the offense committed is considered far too serious for any chance of **forgiveness**. Other times **forgiveness** is given in word only and lacks sincerity and practical action by the person offering it or even receiving it. Then there are times when **forgiveness** is seen as being all too costly because it places a person in a vulnerable position where they risk being further hurt, disappointed, and even betrayed.

However, the **forgiveness** that God offers to all who acknowledge their sin and call upon God for his mercy is given as a gift irrespective of the gravity of the offense committed, is never insincere or lacking in action on God's part, always involves reconciliation between both parties and comes within the reach of all mankind at enormous personal cost to God.

There are **3 important things** that are connected with the subject of **forgiveness** as it is presented in the bible and I want to look at them in light of the story that is recorded in Luke's gospel 7:36-50.

Firstly, forgiveness implies that an **offense** has been committed at some point in the past. If there had been no offense or transgression committed, then it follows that **forgiveness** would be completely out of place and unnecessary. The woman in the story is said in verse 37 to be a known sinner in the city. She didn't dispute that verdict, she had a past that she couldn't erase and she knew that ultimately her life of sin was against God to whom she was accountable. In contrast to this was the self-righteous Pharisee that was the host to Jesus in his own home. In his eyes his personal offenses were only relatively minor and no cause for any concern but he was horribly wrong as he soon discovered when the story that Jesus told was paralleled with his life. This is the point that so many people miss. Whether our sins are many or relatively few, God says *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom 3:23) and therefore before God we are all equally guilty and in need of God's **forgiveness**.

Secondly, forgiveness implies that there is a personal **liability or debt** that rests upon the offender as a consequence of the offence having been committed until true **forgiveness** can be experienced. The personal sin of both the woman and the Pharisee are paralleled in the illustration Jesus gave regarding two people who owed a debt to a creditor. One person owed 10 times more than the other person but that wasn't the critical point. The critical point was that neither of these debtors had the financial resources to repay the debt (v42 *"they*

had nothing to pay"). They were both bankrupt and at the mercy of the money lender who had a legal right to demand payment. Similarly, all mankind face the just judgement of God because of our sin and equally need God's **forgiveness** to avoid God's judgement irrespective of how great or small their debt of sin may be. *"Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people"* Rom 5:18. Similarly, it would be totally irrational for me to say that a person that was drowning in 5m depth of water was in any better condition or state than a person that was drowning in 500m depth of water. The point is they both equally need to be rescued from their condition and so it was in the story that Jesus told - both people owed a debt and by implication all mankind finds themselves in the same position before God as sinners with no ability to pay. The difference in this story is that the woman knew that her transgressions were like a massive debt that she owed to a holy God that she could never pay for over any number of lifetimes. Reading between the lines and judging by the sense of gratitude that this woman showed to Jesus it would seem logical that this woman had a previous unrecorded personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Having been attracted to his message of love and mercy she poured out her heart in acknowledgment of her guilt and found that her debt of guilt was not too great that God could not forgive. The Pharisee on the other hand was lost in his own world of judging himself relative to everyone else (and sure there were plenty of people who had done far worse things than he had done) and was oblivious to the fact that God saw him in absolute terms – a sinner needing forgiveness before they can have a relationship with him.

Thirdly, on the positive side, **forgiveness** implies that there has been a **release** from ongoing personal liability or debt from the person who has committed the offense and a new relationship has now been established where the past offence that brought separation will never be brought up again. Psalm 103v4 *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."* That is why this woman willingly gave her most prized material possession, an **alabaster** jar filled with expensive perfume which represented a year's wages for her, and anointed Jesus with it as a mark of appreciation of what Jesus had done for her. She wasn't forgiven because of this act because what Jesus was effectively saying to her in verses 47 and 48 could be more correctly stated as saying **"your sins have been and remain forgiven"** which were spoken to reassure her that when she had previously come to Jesus, confessed her guilt and sought his mercy she was forgiven and now remains forgiven never to have her past recalled against her by God. The reaction of the Pharisee and his other companions was contemptuous *"Who is this who even forgives sins?"* which in one sense was correct to question because only God can forgive sins but they didn't realise that God was in their very presence in the person of Jesus Christ and they seemingly missed the greatest gift that could have been theirs if only they were humble enough to seek his forgiveness and gift of salvation through his sacrifice and death on the cross, and it is no different in our day today.

So the three things connected with forgiveness are:

- An **offense** committed
- A **debt** owed
- A **release** experienced

No wonder David could write many Psalms to celebrate the forgiving character of God because like David himself we have a past that cannot be undone but he experienced the forgiveness of God because he came not to argue with God's verdict but to repent of his sin and seek his forgiveness *"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him..."*
Psalms 32:1-2

Terms of Salvation – Forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50)

³⁶ When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ A 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. ³⁸ As 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.

³⁹ When 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."

⁴⁰ Jesus 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,[a] and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

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

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then 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. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been **forgiven**—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been **forgiven** little loves little."

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

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

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

Forgiveness from three perspectives:

1. An **offence** committed ("All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Rom 3:23)
2. A **debt** owed ("Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people" Rom 5:18)
3. A **release** experienced ("As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Psa 103:4)

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him..." Psalm 32:1-2