

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

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If the conclusions I will express in this thesis are accurate, then truly, there is even greater reason to suspect that Christian orthodoxy's claim to being the repository of doctrinal correctness is emptier than we have thus far suspected. Judge, if you will, the following summation, in very general terms, of whatever agreement there is among evangelicals regarding the meaning of forgiveness of sins and how, particularly, it affects our view of the nature of God:

Self-proclaimed orthodoxy's view begins with supposing that in order for forgiveness of sins to occur, a change within the heart of God had to occur first. Then, and only then, it is asserted, could absolution become a possibility. It is theorized that the shedding of the blood of Christ accomplished this necessary change of heart in God so that He could legally offer to mankind freedom from guilt before the divine tribunal. One might wonder, according to this convoluted theology, why Paul's statement regarding reconciliation does not read thus: "God was in Christ making it possible for Him to be reconciled to the world."

It becomes quite obvious when one pauses to really reflect on what the institutional church has to say about forgiveness, that its mentality, rather than offering a cure for the mindset that has resulted from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, actually reinforces that disease-infected and infecting consciousness. While declaring that Christ delivered us from the curse of the law, it presents God as responsible to give the law and its indictment of us a proper hearing in determining His relationship to us.

God is presented as a god of petulant perfection who---being offended by our failures to measure up to his expectations---confronts us with the standard of the law, as representative of His holiness, and goes to great lengths to shove our grievous shortcomings in respect to said law in our face. This god is seen as being between a rock and a hard place; on one hand desiring to remit mankind's sins, but on the other hand forced to acknowledge how offensive we are to him according to the law.

Thus legitimacy is granted to him casting us from his presence forever and, in the name of righteousness, consigning us to eternal agony.

The God who initially forbade us from eating (living by) good and evil knowledge (the law), has now become the god who, himself, is law-obsessed and law-driven; a god who refuses to consider changing his mind until he is given his pound of flesh via the sacrifice of his son. But it becomes really complicated at that point because it is He doing the reconciling work in his son, thus he becomes a masochistic deity who insists on reckoning our sins against us until he has sufficiently beat upon himself to answer the claims of the law against us. It seems to me that this god is a candidate for the psychiatrist's couch.

Be sure that, the real God did in fact, in union with His Son, incur great suffering even to death in order to bring us to a state of unashamedness in His presence, but it was not a suffering that solved a problem within God; it was not a reconciling of conflicting divine emotions each demanding to be heard----the law crying out for the right to inflict pain on the offenders in retaliation for their infamy, and grace weeping on our behalf, saying, "Don't do it, find a way to let them off the hook."

The conciliating work of God in Christ addresses conflicted humanity - not conflicted Deity. We are, in and of ourselves, angry, hostile, alienated, antagonistic and adversarial toward God and ourselves, and ashamed of being so.

Though we need, more than anything else, to be at peace with God, ourselves and others, we struggle with feelings and thoughts, rooted in the deepest depths of our subconscious, that God has done us wrong, and not being able to support such thoughts with a clear conscience, we turn our anger against ourselves and others to mask our anger toward God.

This is the form that sin takes in our hearts, becoming a cacophony of maddening internal voices that we deal with by constructing a hopefully soundproof wall of self-righteousness, but the wall only muffles the noisome pestilence, and/or by the self-preserving mechanism of suppression kicking in to keep us from going insane,

and/or giving into insanity rather than enduring the struggle any longer.

And, I'm sure that others, more knowledgeable than I in regard to the human psyche, could point out still other subconscious contortions with their various individual nuances that we suffer before we hear the voice of the Son of God saying, "Your sins are forgiven you."

To go back to the root meaning of the Greek words translated, "forgive" or "remit," etc, we find the idea of sending away or divorcing; to put (send) away. There is nothing in God that needs to be sent away, nothing from which He needs to be divorced. Forgiveness is a subjective change in man deriving from an eternally subjective steady state within God that refuses to disqualify us from His love and purpose which is communicated to us by the shed blood of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

We need the sprinkling of the blood of Christ on our hearts. God needs no such sprinkling. We need to have the satanic accusation sent away as we are confronted by love that will not retaliate against us even in the face of our crucifying hatred of God.

I believe I've stumbled across a marvelous way by which this truth has come down to us from the primitive roots of our English language. The word, "forgive" with its several variations, comes to us from the Old English word, "forgifan," a simple compound word that combines the intensive prefix, "for," with the body of the word, "gifan," to convey the thought of intensified giving; thus theologically, of the particular intensification of God's givingness in the face of our sin.

The prefix is not used in the sense of "fore," that is having occurred before hand (as one might properly conclude from the truth that the Lamb of God was slain before the foundation of the world), nor is it essentially used in the sense of being in support of something (as in, "I am for it"), though that thought is included, but the prefix, "for," in this case, as an intensive prefix, intensifies the "gifan" heart of the word, from which we get "give," "giving," etc., or as I coined above, "givingness."

Here in the roots of our language has been hidden the truth expressed by Paul, when he wrote that "where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." Here, we might say, God sends away from our hearts the notion that He distances Himself from us according to, and proportionate to our sinfulness.

The word conveys the truth that sin has the effect of intensifying the givingness of God toward us, so that, in the face of our sin, God, as it were, searches out and draws forth from Himself a greater, more energized determination to free us from all that separates us from Him.

Note, I said what separates us from Him, not what separates Him from us.

From us toward Him, we are separated by the blindness of our hearts in regard to His refusal to ever be disconnected from us. From Him toward us there is the unbreakable love-union that we should expect from our perfectly loving Father. The prophet is very precise when he

declares, "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear." (Isa.59:2. NAS) The separation is from our side, not His. He continues to hold us in His love, but we are numb to the embrace while we are blind to the undisturbed-by-sin look of love on the face of our God. He does not hear [He is unresponsive to] us because we are addressing a god that He is not.

This sending away of sin from man fully occurred in the conciliating death of Christ and each of us is made aware of freedom from guilt in our due time, in order that we, in union with Him, may put (send) away, divorce sins from others. Jesus declared this to be directly connected to the receiving of the Spirit. "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (Jn.20:23, NAS). I add Jonathan Mitchell's translation of the passage with its marvelous clarification:

"If you men should send away (dismiss; allow to depart; forgive; pardon;

divorce) the mistakes (sins; errors; failures) of certain ones, they have been sent away for them (have been and remain pardoned in them; have been dismissed or divorced by them). If you should continue holding fast (keep on seizing and grasping) those of certain ones, they have been and continue being held fast (seized; grasped)." Contrary to the commonly accepted interpretation, the remitting of sins and the retaining of sins, is not to be understood as standing in contrast, but as being complementary.

To retain sins does not mean to keep holding men's sins against them, but that we retain under God as a retaining wall retains. The idea is to seize and hold so as to bring under control. I believe that the saints shall become more and more aware of their commission to forgive and also to seize/hold fast sins by the authority that they share with Christ.

This, as in all things, must be done under the direction and supervision of the Spirit who will cause us to speak words of forgiveness to those whom He has prepared and, in certain situations, to stop sins in their track.

We do have the ground upon which to forgive sins and that ground or basis is not man's correct response to God, but the shed blood of Christ. Christ has died for all, thus forgiveness can be declared to be true to and for any and all men.

Accordingly, when a man believes, his faith, the faith of Christ in him, is a response to the already accomplished reconciliation that has occurred in Christ, rather than being the prerequisite for forgiveness. Reconciliation and its accompanying forgiveness produce faith, and by faith, we are made whole since the essential fragmentation of the human personality is traceable ultimately to unresolved guilt.

To concisely summarize: The reconciling action of God in Christ does not change God; it changes man. It does not deliver God from a conflicting dilemma in His relationship to us; it frees us from inner conflict as to our relationship to Him.

Forgiveness is a subjective human experience granted to us and communicated to us by God, not as a legal edict, but from His Father-heart. The indwelling Spirit of God throbs with this truth. In the

measure that we become intimate with the indwelling Spirit, we shall be forgiven and forgiving people.

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