

Grace for forgiveness

Victor Hall

Notes prepared for the communion ministry, 31 May 2020

Resolution for the abused

Jesus was unambiguous on the subject of forgiveness. He said that unless we forgive those who sin against us, we will not receive forgiveness from the Father for our sins. In other words, we will not obtain salvation as sons of God. Mat 6:14-15.

This truth can be particularly challenging for those who have experienced significant abuse, betrayal or treachery at the hands of others. The pain of these injuries can be very deep and enduring. As a consequence, the victim's will, and capacity, to forgive the person who has sinned against them remains elusive. Indeed, it *is* elusive, because forgiveness is not a capacity that is native to us. It is a *grace* that we receive from Christ when we look on Him whom we have pierced, and join His travail.

Before we consider the mercy and grace of God that we obtain when we come to Christ, it is important that we distinguish *this* provision for healing and resolution from the *fallen* approach that is promoted in the world.

The spirit of the world teaches that victims of abuse can find healing and closure by publicly exposing the deeds of the one who has defrauded them. This form of vengeance is presented as a means by which victims can overcome their sense of humiliation, and receive some form of identity verification through the approval, support and subsequent actions of others.

Obtaining closure through vengeance is often dramatised in film and television through the narrative of 'good triumphing over evil'. This pursuit, as a means of resolution, is exemplified in current affairs programs that provide a media platform for victims to publicly humiliate and chastise their abusers. It is a form of retribution for the one who has suffered loss.

Providing victims of abuse with a relational setting to voice their grievances is a common, yet unfruitful, approach to pastoral care in the church. In these situations, the counsellor provides a sympathetic ear to a victim of abuse who is seeking justification and verification through the disclosure of their mistreatment. The carer then endeavours to fortify the identity of the victim by affirming their good, over and against the evil of the one who has sinned against them. This form of counsel is based in the knowledge of good and evil, and is unable to minister life and healing to the one who is in pain.

Those who pursue this form of resolution believe that, as they speak out against evil, their courage and goodness will be made known and affirmed by others. They believe that through this exercise they will find peace. Sadly, this does not bring healing to a person or closure to matters; it may even exacerbate their distress.

The apostle Paul addressed this issue in his letter to the Romans. He wrote, 'Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty,

give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' Rom 12:19-21.

We are only able to do this when we are joined to the offering and sufferings of Christ. In this fellowship, the love of God is poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit. We receive the capacity of God Himself to love our enemies and to overcome evil through our obedience to the Father. Let us now consider how this happens.

Father forgive them

The first statement that Christ made from the cross was, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' Luk 23:34. This was Christ's prayer to the Father as the soldiers nailed His hands and feet to the cross. In relation to this event, King David, who was speaking prophetically for Christ, said, 'In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer.' Psa 109:4.

The abuse of crucifixion was the final and most painful humiliation that Jesus suffered on His offering journey. In the preceding five wounds, He had been brought back from the dead by the resurrection life of God that was in His blood. Paul coined the Greek word '*exanastasis*' to describe this effect of resurrection life in a mortal body. Php 3:11. Christ's death on the cross was the dying phase of His offering. This was when He laid down His life in obedience to the command of the Father, so that He might take it again in *anastasis*. Joh 10:18. Php 2:8. *Anastasis* is the resurrection of the dead to immortality.

Christ's death on the cross demonstrated the Father's love for us. Because God the Father loved the world, He gave His only Son, who died for us even though we were all ungodly and without strength. Rom 5:6-11. Joh 3:16. The offering of Christ was not only the expression of the Father's love toward us; it was also the means by which the love that He alone possesses was commended to us so that we could be born as His sons. The Father's love is the definition of His life. Through the offering of Christ, He gave His life to us as a gift. Giving His life to us was the expression of His fatherhood toward us.

Having been born of God's life, which is the divine nature, we are to abide in the Son's love. This is the love that He received from the Father. Joh 15:9-10. Our desire to abide in Christ's love is our response to the compulsion of His 'giving' love. 2Co 5:14. We abide in love when we live by offering, as sons of God, in the fellowship of the body of Christ. We do this through our obedience to the commands of the Son, which is the word of God. Our obedience is demonstrated as we freely lay our lives down to reveal others. This right was given to us when we were born again as sons of God. Joh 1:12-13. We will say more on this later in these notes.

Beholding the Lord Jesus Christ

To receive salvation, a person must look on Christ and acknowledge that He was crucified *for* them, and *by* them. Rom 5:6. Rev 1:7. This happens when a messenger of the gospel declares that we, by *lawless hands*, crucified Jesus, putting Him to death. Act 2:23. The messenger also tells us that God has raised Christ from the dead and has seated Him at His right hand on King David's throne as the Head of the nations. Act 2:24,30,33. He was made 'the Lord Jesus Christ'.

As a title, the name 'Lord Jesus' designates that He is Yahweh the Son of Man, Immanuel, God in the flesh, made supreme in authority as Ruler of heaven and earth. He is also 'the

Christ'. Act 2:36. This means that Jesus was the anointed, or ordained, Lord, which made Him the King of Israel and the Saviour of the world. Joh 4:42.

On the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter declared, 'Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' Act 2:36. Those who heard him say this were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Act 2:37. The beginning of their salvation was to repent of their sin, be joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings through baptism, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Act 2:38.

As a person receives the word of the cross through which Christ is portrayed to them as crucified, grace and supplication are poured out upon them. Zec 12:10. This is the overflow of the anointing that Jesus received when He was ordained as 'Lord and Christ'. This anointing falls upon us. As this anointing falls upon us, we are enabled to see His offering for us and the effect of our sin upon Him. We recognise that our thoughts and actions, motivated by good and evil, are all the works of *lawless hands*. They are our sinful deeds for which Christ suffered, and died on the cross.

Christ took all of the abuse that we would suffer in life and made it His. He has forgiven those who trespassed against Him. This includes us as well as those who have sinned against us. When, by the anointing, we see our sin and begin to mourn with godly sorrow, we receive the forgiveness of our sin.

As the Spirit continues to pour the love of God into our hearts, we receive grace to join the prayer that Christ prayed as He was crucified on the cross. Joined to the fellowship of His travail, we are able to pray, by the anointing He received, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' Luk 23:34.

The capacity and motivation to forgive does not come from ourselves. It is not a charitable action that is sourced from our own motivation for good. Our capacity to forgive is from the *anointing*, by which the love of God is being poured into our heart by the Holy Spirit. Rom 5:5. We are enabled to love others in the same way that Christ loved us. Instead of seeking to justify ourselves and avenge our hurts, we are able to forgive those who have sinned against us. This is the only way in which we can truly love our enemies. Luk 6:27-30.

An evil conscience

Most sinners are people who have good ideals and are motivated by honourable intentions. Because their intentions are good, many will even view themselves as righteous, or fruitful. Yet, God has already assessed us and concluded that we are *all* sinners. He has said, 'There is none righteous, no, not one.' Rom 3:10. He has further declared that we have all turned aside and become unprofitable; we have not known the way of peace. Rom 3:12,17. He said that there is no fear of God *before our eyes*. Rom 3:18.

Unless we are delivered from the darkness of our own perspective, we will view ourselves as righteous, or acceptable to God. We will believe in our inherent 'good', even if we are familiar with the Scriptures that challenge this perception. The Scriptures describe this condition as 'great darkness'. Mat 6:23.

Those who live and walk in darkness use their conscience to support the self-righteous position that they have chosen for themselves. By their conscience, they assess and pass judgement on their own attitudes and actions, believing that their conscience gives them

the necessary objectivity to make these judgements. Because they believe in their inherent goodness, they allow their conscience to provoke their thoughts so that their thoughts accuse or else excuse them. Rom 2:15.

All of this activity does not prove that we are righteous. Rather, it demonstrates that we are a law unto ourselves, and are therefore not subject to the Law of God. Rom 2:14-16. We are, in fact, the enemies of God. Rom 5:10.

Thankfully, we learn from the apostle Paul that, while we were the enemies of God, He reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son. However, reconciliation is not enough to save us from the wrath of God. We must be saved from our sins, through Christ. We cannot be saved from sin unless Christ gives His life to us. Rom 5:10.

The love of God

The life of God is *love*. Christ said that His obedience to the Father's commandment was the evidence that the love of God was in Him. Joh 10:17-18. Joh 14:31. God the Father loved the world and wanted to save it. Joh 3:16-17. He communicated His desire to the Son, and then imparted His love to Him. The Father then commanded the Son to love the world as He did. Joh 10:18.

The Son, having received the love of the Father, obeyed the Father's command. He laid His life down in offering so that He could multiply the life which He had received from the Father. He could then give this life to us to become our life. This manifested the love of God. In this regard, Christ testified, 'Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No-one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.' Joh 10:17-18.

Offering is the culture of faith that works by love. Christ's offering revealed two fundamental aspects of Yahweh's culture. The first aspect was His *obedience* to the command of God. The second aspect was His *offering* that revealed the expression of His name. The freedom of Yahweh was demonstrated by Their capacity to lay Their lives down to reveal One Another. This same freedom has been offered to us in Christ. Gal 5:1. A son of God exercises this freedom as an expression of their obedience to God's word.

By His obedience, Christ demonstrated that He was abiding in the Father's love. Joh 15:10. Christ now wants us to abide in His love. Joh 15:9. This love, as we have seen, is the love that He received from the Father. He wants us to love one another in the same way that He loved us. Joh 13:34. Joh 15:12.

Christ demonstrated His love toward us by being a friend to us. Christ defined 'friendship' as 'the culture of offering'. Jesus said that we are His friends if we do whatever He commands us. Joh 15:14. He also said that if we obey His commandments, we abide in His love, just as He obeyed the Father's commandments and remained in His love. Joh 15:10. The love of a friend is seen when they lay their life down in offering for their companion. Joh 15:13. This is the love of God that we are to have for one another.

As sons of God, we have received the divine nature, which is the love of God. We have a participation in the fellowship of Yahweh as members of the body of Christ. We must give heed to the Son's exhortation to *abide in His love*. We do this by continuing to receive and obey Christ's word, which is ministered to us from a presbytery in His hand. Rev 1:20.

By faith, we obey His word when we, in freedom, lay our lives down for one another according to our name as a son of God.

Jesus exhorted us to abide in His love so that His joy may remain in us, and become our joy. Christ's joy is the fruit of His life. He was saying that He wants *His* life to fully become *our* life. Joh 15:11. This was the very same desire of the apostle John, and of his fellow presbyters, who ministered to us the word of God so that our joy may be full. 1Jn 1:4.

Anointed to love

Yahweh the Son was begotten as the Son of God by the word of the Father. This was when the love that belongs to the Father was poured into His heart by the Holy Spirit. Rom 5:5. The Son was then anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Christ. By this anointing, the Son was enabled to embrace and express the love of God that He had received from the Father. The Scriptures teach us that Jesus was anointed with the oil of joy and gladness. Heb 1:9. This oil of joy was poured on His head, and made His face shine. Psa 133:2. Psa 104:15.

Because of the joy that was set before Him, He then despised the shame associated with our fallen condition, and endured the cross. Heb 12:2. 'The joy set before Him' was the joy of bringing many sons of God to birth, and then to full maturity and glory, through His offering. This happens as we are made members of His corporate body and join Him in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, we become workers together with Christ. That is, we become part of a kingdom of priests whose work is to minister to God the Father. Rev 1:6.

Most significantly, the joy of Christ was the fruit of embracing the love that the Father had poured into His heart by the Holy Spirit. The joy of Christ was an expression of His faith, which was working by love. It was a demonstration of the nature of His fellowship with the Father. Joh 15:9-10.