

Unmerciful Servant

There is a common teaching among many who call themselves Christian that claims they are to offer unconditional forgiveness to all who do evil against them (and others), followed by reconciliation. Some teach that they are to allow this cycle of 'offense, forgiveness, reconciliation' to continue forever, '*unto seventy times seven*.'¹ Is this really what Christ commanded the Judæo-Christian to do?

Sadly, to forgive sin, however heinous, under all circumstances, unconditionally, and then to reconcile with the unrepentant offender communicates a false gospel. It is not biblical. This is not what God does, nor is it what the Judæo-Christian is commanded to do. However, to be unforgiving of sins against us by others also communicates a false gospel. So what is the true believer to do?

In what is commonly termed 'The Lord's Prayer',² there is a passage dealing with '*debts*' and '*debt-ors*,' sometimes translated '*trespasses*': '*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*.'³ Following, there is an important injunction, '*For if we forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*.'⁴ One interesting aspect lies in the Greek words translated '*debts*'⁵ and '*trespasses*.'⁶ '*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*' should read more correctly: '*Forgive us our indebtedness, as we forgive those who transgress against [are 'indebted to'] us,*' and where the Greek translated '*trespasses*'⁷ refers to '*side slips*,' '*lapses*,' and the like, unintentional infractions of the Law committed either through ignorance, weakness, forgetfulness, accident, inadvertence, error, oversight, or indulgence.⁸

In part,⁹ this can be taken as a reference to the Law dealing with the Sabbath-year release from debt. Our indebtedness to God is the sum of our sins committed before baptism, plus '*slips*' or '*lapses*' there-after.¹⁰ However, post-baptismal slips will not be forgiven us unless we also forgive others, not only in terms of the

¹ Mat 18:22b

² actually a type or example given by Our Lord, for the purposes of illustration and guidance, q.v., Mat 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4.

³ Mat 6:12

⁴ Mat 6:14,15

⁵ Greek: opheile, '*indebtedness*,' '*delinquency*,' or '*transgressions*.'

⁶ Greek: paraptoma, '*side slips*'; Barclay, William, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol.1, pp.220,221:

'It describes the slip which a man may make when he is off his guard, when he is not looking where he is going, when he takes his eye off the goal. Sin is the failure in concentration, the failure in self-control through which a man is swept or slips into sin.' These are not premeditated.

⁷ Greek: paraptoma.

⁸ q.v. sup.

⁹ de minimis in the grand scheme of things.

¹⁰ dealt with in much greater detail sup., as is the question of the '*unforgiveable sin*.'

provision of the Law in relation to money debts, but also in relation to the much wider purview of Judæo-Christian forgiveness.¹¹

The Greek word translated '*forgive*,'¹² in the Lord's Prayer and extensively throughout the gospels,¹³ means to remit sin, acquit, let go, or remove guilt or obligation of punishment, all deriving from the figure of a prisoner being released from prison or a debtor being released from a debt. This forgiveness may be complete, or it may constitute a suspension of punishment pending reform, as seen, for example, in the God-granted Jews' probationary period of forty years following upon the crucifixion.¹⁴

Unfortunately, the English word 'forgiveness,' as commonly used nowadays, offers the wrong meaning, in part, for it often imports the sense of ignoring sin, overlooking sin, or having good feelings about the person who sins. This is not forgiveness but compromising tolerance and it has made many 'professing Christians' cowards and turncoats to the cause of Christ's banner against evil, which Paul pictures unambiguously: '*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*'¹⁵ They think that when they ignore sin, or overlook it, they are being kind and loving, when in reality they are unloving. To tolerate or ignore sin is not forgiveness. Worse, it allows a professing brother or sister in Christ, if the party in default, to continue in sin, with all the destructive elements of that pursuit, including introducing leaven to the church, which begins to grow and weaken the resolve of all. That is not to say there isn't a sense of truth here, as Christian love does '*cover a multitude of sins*,' in the sense that many sins are simply minor issues of human weakness—side-slips, or lapses, in other words—and those can be '*covered*,' in the expression of Judæo-Christian love: '*Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth sins.*'¹⁶ '*He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth friends.*'¹⁷ There is also the question of prudence: '*A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.*'¹⁸ The covering, in love for mankind, is outgoing and ongoing: '*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth. And*

¹¹ q.v. sup.; also Prov 25:21; Mat 5:44-48; Rom 12:20; James 2:14-16; Rom 12:19b, '*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord*,' a reference to Isa 63:4.

¹² Greek: aphiemi.

¹³ used about fifty times in all, as opposed to Greek: charizomai, used only seven times by Paul in the epistles, which means '*to grant pardon as a favour*.'

¹⁴ q.v. sup. and Luke 23:44, '*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*'

¹⁵ Eph 5:11; Greek: elegcho, '*admonish*,' '*rebuke*,' '*confute*'; N.I.V. '*expose*.'

¹⁶ Prov 10:12; K.J.V.'s '*all*' does not appear in the Hebrew; v.12 doesn't tell how love does this. It doesn't explain the basis on which love covers sins or the conditions, but it does set forth the ministry of love, i.e., a desire to conceal sins, as far as one is righteously able to do so. Covering of sin goes back to the literal act of two of the sons of Noah who covered the nakedness of their drunken father, in contrast to the act of Ham, who repeated the sin in the sense that he shared with his brothers the physical condition of his father, cf. Gen 9:20f.

¹⁷ Prov 17:9

¹⁸ Prov 12:16

now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.¹⁹ All make mistakes and errors. All have lapses and slips. All need forgiveness in outgoing, brotherly love.²⁰ All must confess sins, be contrite, repent, and resolve not to repeat the infraction in order to gain God's forgive-ness, for *'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'*²¹

Confession precedes forgiveness.²² Without genuine confession by the guilty party / parties for serious sins, forgiveness is beyond the remit of the Judæo-Christian. Only God can forgive such sins,²³ because those types of infraction of God's Law are matters for the lawgivers, the Father and the Son, to decide and adjudicate upon, not the individual Judæo-Christian, and are crucially dependent upon confession, repentance, and divine forgiveness through the grace of God—where the ability to extend forgiveness is restricted to the persons of the Father and the Son,²⁴ a power which the Son specifically retained whilst incarnate on earth²⁵—for which there should always be evident much love of God and extreme gratitude on the part of the sinner, bringing forth much fruit in a new, Holy Spirit-filled life.²⁶ If the Judæo-Christian ever could forgive with absolute authority and in

¹⁹ I Cor 13:4-8a,13; K.J.V. 'charity,' from Greek: agape, means 'brotherly love.'

²⁰ Adams, Jay E., *From Forgiven to Forgiving: Learning to Forgive One Another God's Way*, p.82:

'[W]hen you forgive another, you declare that you are cancelling his debt, removing his guilt, and promising that you will never bring up his guilt, and promising that you will never again bring up his offenses to use against him.'

²¹ I John 1:9; Mark 11:25,26, *'And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. 'Forgive,' Greek: aphiemi, means 'remit'; 'trespasses,' Greek: paraptoma, means 'side-slips.'*

²² I John 1:19

²³ Dan 9:9, *'To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him.'*

²⁴ Mat 9:6a, *'But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins,'* also cf. Mark 2:10, and not just the Father, as the scribes had it, q.v. Mark 2:6,7

²⁵ Luke 5:21-26 (subscripted emphasis added), *'And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say: Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today.'*

²⁶ Luke 7:36-50 (sublinear emphasis added), *'And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.'*

‘splendid’ isolation, then, amongst other things, it would overturn the doctrine of binding and loosing,²⁷ which, sadly, is something many seek to do.

The Judæo-Christian cannot harbour resentment or grudges. There is no space for the common saying: ‘carrying a grudge to the grave.’²⁸ In his letter to the Colossians,²⁹ Paul states that the subjects of ‘quarrels’³⁰ are to be forgiven³¹ by pardon, granted as a favour to the erring party or parties. Writing to the church at Ephesus, he says, *‘Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.’*³²

There is no room in Judæo-Christianity for bitterness, malice, or holding grudges. If wronged, Judæo-Christians are not to take action or seek recourse through civil courts. God is the judge, and He will repay. The Judæo-Christian must ask for God’s judgement in the matter, for *‘it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.’*³³ Rather, Judæo-Christians have another Christ-commanded imperative to comply with concerning those who wrong them: *‘But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’*³⁴

The Judæo-Christian is not set up to be the judge of the sinner; for presumptive judgement can inhibit one’s forgiveness and salvation. Judgement is solely God’s prerogative: *‘Judge not, and ye shall not be judged:*

Acts 26:18, *‘To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.’*

²⁷ q.v. sup.

²⁸ neither is there place in Judæo-Christianity for what is sometimes termed ‘the doctrine of convenience,’ where help and assistance to one’s fellow man in need is held conditional upon it being ‘convenient’ for it to be done. Wherever is heard the rebuttal “Sorry, but it isn’t convenient,” there will not be found Jesus Christ, neither can He be.

²⁹ Judæo-Christian church at Colossus.

³⁰ Col 3:13, *‘Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye,’* where Greek: momphe, translated ‘quarrel’ in the K.J.V., means ‘blame’ or ‘fault.’

³¹ Greek; charizomai, ‘grant, as a favour,’ or ‘pardon.’

³² Eph 4:31,32

³³ Rom 12:19; Lev 19 :18, *‘Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself : I am the Lord.’*

³⁴ Mat 5:44; Luke 6:27,30,31, *‘But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Give to every man that asketh of thee: and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as you would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise’*; Rom 12:19-21, *‘Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him: If he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.’* The results may not be edifying, however, since ‘No good deed goes unpunished.’ Wikipedia: ‘The phrase ‘No good deed goes unpunished’ is a sardonic commentary on the frequency with which acts of kindness backfire on those who offer them. In other words, because life is inherently unfair, those who help others are doomed to suffer as a result of their being helpful.’ God’s solution to such ingratitude is found more pointedly in Prov 25:21,22, *‘If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat ; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink : For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.’*

condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven,'³⁵ 'And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged,'³⁶ where Greek: krino, 'separate,' or 'discern' is translated 'judge' in the K.J.V.³⁷

Judæo-Christian conduct and interaction with sinners, in the mission of spreading the gospel, is given in Christ's commandment to the seventy: 'After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.'³⁸ This is not judgement, but a warning. Judæo-Christians are to deal with unbelievers in wisdom and with gentleness, always seeking their good.

Against that, some, seeking to set a numerical limit to forgiveness, cite Matthew chapter eighteen,³⁹ where Christ is questioned by Peter on the subject of the forgiveness of sin: 'Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shalt my brother sin against me, and I forgive him. Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but Until seventy times seven,'⁴⁰ where the phrase 'seventy times seven' is a colloquial device indicating very large numbers of forgiving and not merely restricted to four hundred and ninety. The Greek word translated 'forgive' again means 'remit.'⁴¹ These two verses are followed immediately by the parable of the servants in debt, which is summed, at the last, by Christ, comparing the forgiving King and the unforgiving servant: 'Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desirest me: Shouldst thou not also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him up to the tormentors, till he should pay all that

³⁵ Luke 6:37

³⁶ Luke 7:43b (sublinear emphasis added)

³⁷ John 7:24, K.J.V. translation: 'Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment,' has Greek: krino translated poorly as 'judge' (where it should read 'discern') but paradoxically contains the translation 'judgment,' from Greek: krisis, meaning 'discernment.'

³⁸ Luke 10:1-12

³⁹ Mat 18:21-35

⁴⁰ Mat 18:21,22

⁴¹ Greek: aphiemi.

*was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*⁴²

At first pass, this might seem to cover sins of all types⁴³ and thus bolster the concept of universal forgiveness of all sin that many Christians see as entirely in accord with Christ's commandments and parables. However, there are wantings in that view, firstly owing to the lack of the earlier words of Christ to which Peter was obviously responding, and, secondly, because the Greek words Peter used for 'sin' mean 'to miss the mark' and so not share the prize,⁴⁴ and Christ, in clarification, when referring to same, used the Greek word translated 'trespasses' in the concluding verse of the chapter, meaning 'side slips,' 'lapses,' or 'deviations.'⁴⁵ In other words, He was not referring to all types of sin, but to slips and lapses, namely, unintentional sins, more often of omission than commission, arising through weakness, forgetfulness, ignorance, error, oversight, accident, inadvertence, or indulgence.⁴⁶ These must be distinguished from the much more serious premeditated wilful sin, namely, sin coldly conceived and undertaken in the full knowledge of the penalty under God's Law.⁴⁷

Remember the sins the Judæo-Christian has been forgiven by God. The Judæo-Christian must forgive sins of weakness, etc., and must be merciful, in order to receive forgiveness from God of personal sins: *'But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father is also merciful....Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.'*⁴⁸ There is also the opportunity of a proactive element in the process of forgiveness where the offended party can initiate possible forgiveness of many sins, *'Take heed to yourselves; If thy brother trespass⁴⁹ against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.'*⁵⁰ This is not six repetitions of the same sin in one day, however, for that could not elicit forgiveness owing to the obvious lack of genuine repentance and conviction not to repeat the sin. The entire is predicated upon genuine confession and repentance on the part of the sinning party.

No Judæo-Christian has the authority or the right to forgive unconditionally all and every kind of sin in all and every possible circumstance. As has been seen, there are a number of prescriptions on forgiveness for several types of sin, and an effective proscription on others. The notion of Christian unconditional love covering

⁴² Mat 18:32-35

⁴³ save for the unpardonable / unforgivable sin, q.v.sup.

⁴⁴ Greek: hamartano, q.v. inf.

⁴⁵ Greek: paraptoma.

⁴⁶ e.g., the last being a sin of commission.

⁴⁷ q.v. sup.

⁴⁸ Luke 6:35-37a

⁴⁹ Greek: hamartano, 'to err,' 'miss the mark,' or 'be mistaken,' incorporating the Greek root word meros, importing the idea of untypical, outlier sin, thus not something of an habitual nature. Again, this is in relation to sideslips and errors, not premeditated sin.

⁵⁰ Luke 17:3,4, where 'seven' is taken as an indication of much sin in a day.

all and every taxonomy of sin, including unrepented sin, is nothing less than a pernicious misrepresentation and myth. If all sin were so treatable, then universalism, another pernicious myth, would become a reality, and there would be no need of a final judgement and the lake of fire, for, at the last, all would be forgiven everything and all would be saved and granted immortality in the kingdom of God.