

The “Give-for” Forgiveness of God

Description

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 3rd Quarter
Rest In Christ
Week 7
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This week’s lesson is entitled, “Rest, Relationships, and Healing,” and discusses the importance of forgiveness.

One of Friday’s discussion questions reads,

“Someone once said, ‘Not forgiving is like drinking poison while hoping that the other person will die.’ What does this statement mean?” Sabbath School Quarterly Lesson, Friday, August 13, 2021

Forgiveness – what is it really all about? What is the purpose behind it? Is it about us feeling better ourselves?

Forgiveness, of course, is about pardoning a trespass. But if that was all it was, well, even heaven wouldn’t last very long. After all, God didn’t just pardon Satan for his rebellion. If He had done that, heaven would most likely not even exist anymore, at least not as a place of righteousness. And when God does forgive sins, it isn’t to avoid getting an ulcer or in order to “let go” for the sake of His own peace of mind.

Of course, forgiveness involves more than pardoning in the way most people think of “pardoning.” Ellen White tells us what that is. She said,

“...forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. When God gives the promise that He ‘will abundantly pardon,’ He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend: ‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’ Isaiah 55:7-9. God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.’ Psalm 51:10. And again he says, ‘As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.’ Psalm 103:12.” Ellen White, Prayer, p. 298

The purpose of forgiveness is to “reclaim from sin” by the outflow of selfless love for others. Basically, the purpose of forgiveness is ultimately to put an end to sin. This doesn’t come by just “forgiving and forgetting,” as the saying goes. We can see from Ellen White’s quote which we just read, that when David said, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:12), David wasn’t talking about “forgiving and forgetting,” but about God removing our sin by transforming the heart so we do not sin anymore.

This was why Satan had to be finally cast out of heaven. It wasn’t that God was not willing to pardon, but that Satan wasn’t willing to be reclaimed from sin. Ellen White said,

“He [Satan] was not immediately dethroned when he first ventured to indulge the spirit of discontent and insubordination, nor even when he began to present his false claim and lying representations before the loyal angels. *Long was he retained in heaven. Again and again was he offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission.* Such efforts as God alone could make, were made to convince him of his error, and restore him to the path of rectitude. God would preserve the order of the heavens, and had Lucifer been willing to return to his allegiance, humble and obedient, he would have been re-established in his office as covering cherub. But as he stubbornly justified his course, and maintained that he had no need of repentance, it became necessary for the Lord of heaven to vindicate His justice and the honor of His throne; and Satan and all who sympathized with him were cast out.” Ellen White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, pp. 319, 320.

Lucifer was offered pardon, but it was on condition of repentance. It had to be. If God were to pardon those who continue to sin, it would grant sin a free reign and that would destroy righteousness and joy and all that is good. But God’s forgiveness is more powerful than that. We often think that forgiveness is purely something that takes place within the person doing the forgiveness; it is a change in their attitude toward the guilty person. But God’s forgiveness is not about a change in him; it is about a change in us. For us to be forgiven is for us to receive a new heart, a new mind – a new way of thinking and acting. This new way isn’t something that we can conjure up ourselves. It is actually God’s way and he brings it to us and offers it to us. This is God offering us pardon and forgiveness and it is why, as Ellen White said, “Repentance, as well as forgiveness, is the gift of God through Christ.” (Faith and Works, p. 38). We can’t receive forgiveness without repentance, just like Lucifer couldn’t. By why would we want it any other way? Isn’t God’s type of forgiveness – the forgiveness that transforms the sinner into a Christ-follower – so much better than the world’s forgiveness?

So, how can we forgive others, not in the world’s way, but in God’s way? How can WE help transform another’s heart? Well, by giving them your love, your patience, your kindness, your knowledge of the principles of truth, by sacrificing yourself for their sake, etc., just like Jesus did for us in his life and on the cross. Jesus showed us how to overcome every temptation to sin, even while suffering in the worst of circumstances – crucifixion. He did not give in to hate while being nailed to the cross but continued to love us no matter what we did to Him. By His patient endurance and love, he gave us the opportunity to learn the lessons of the cross – that sin is never worth it, that sin leads to death, even the death of a loving, innocent man like Jesus. This end result of sin should repulse us so much that we turn from sin in our own lives. Jesus bore our sins – He endured our sins – so that by His love we could see the terrible results of sin and change our hearts – to put an end to sin in our lives. And we can do this same thing for others when they trespass against us as well.

We can remember this broader meaning for “forgive” by reversing the syllables and think: “give-for.” When I forgive someone, I need to do so in God’s way. It shouldn’t be about me giving myself peace by letting go of negative feelings. It should be about giving them the truth and love they need to be renewed. I need to give-for them my love, give-for them my patience, give-for them my help, give-for them my kindness, give-for them my knowledge of the truth. Offering this, hopefully, will inspire in them a change of heart and a change of actions. To summarize the main lesson, God’s forgiveness is not like the world’s forgiveness. The world tells us that we need to let go of grudges for our own sake and calls this forgiveness. God wasn’t holding grudges against us to begin with and we shouldn’t hold grudges against those who wrong us either. God’s forgiveness (as ours should be) is offered freely, but can only be received on condition of repentance. But when it is received, it transforms the repentant one by providing them with a new and better way.