



## FIGHTING FORGIVENESS

**KEY SCRIPTURES:** Psalm 51:7, Matthew 7:7-11, 1 John 1:9

A guy that attended my high school had gotten baptized. Up to that point, he had been living a life that was contrary to God's desires for him, and he had finally come to the realization that he could have God's forgiveness.

Well, kind of.

Not too many months after his baptism, I was talking with him in the lobby of our church before Sunday morning services began. He was sharing with me how he had wronged many people in his old life, and how he wanted to make restitution, especially financially. He had accumulated tens of thousands of dollars of monetary debt, and he carried a heavy burden for it. But I noticed something else as we talked.

He was still carrying the heavy load of the spiritual debt that he had long since been forgiven for.

He had immersed himself in one class after another and had joined one group after another, and the stack of books he told me he was reading could have probably filled a milk crate. Still, it was obvious his shoulders were hunched under a substantial spiritual weight.

As I listened to him, I commended him for wanting to make things right with the people he had wronged. I told him that if he felt God was leading him to return any of the money he had gained in an ungodly way, he should do so. And I went on to remind him that God had forgiven him, that God had him safely in His arms and he could relax in that knowledge.

Then he surprised me with his response. He was so determined to remain in his guilt that he got angry with me. He was struggling with the notion that he still had to somehow pay, that a spiritual restitution similar to what he wanted to do with his wallet just had to be required. He then ended our conversation with, "I'm just not there yet, OK?" After that, he rarely met my eye or spoke to me at all.

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"...so we can know our value, live with purpose, and make a difference...**In that order.**"



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He was fighting forgiveness. He was fighting the idea that God could wipe his spiritual slate that clean.

Do you remember the chalkboard in your childhood school classroom? I do. (I remember the teacher who loved to quiet our class by running her fingernails down the board, but that's another story.) I also can recall how hard it was to get it completely clean. There was always dust everywhere, and even the cleanest eraser might leave a faint outline of the words that were once written on the board. That's the kind of clean I, too, have often envisioned for forgiveness. Feeling there is still a hint of something left over, I have struggled with the kind of clean God has provided, a newness and fresh start like a chalkboard that has been rinsed with clean water. So, like my friend, I have responded, "I'm just not there yet, OK?"

So, how do my friend and I stop fighting forgiveness? How do any of us completely accept the grace that was completely bought for us at the cross?

Gratitude.

My parents are very giving people. It gives them great joy to treat folks, especially their kids and grandkids. My dad has been known to just open up his wallet and give my daughter a \$5 bill, just because. If we eat lunch out with them, they always buy. And their generosity doesn't just involve dollars and cents. They are also free with their love and praise.

Years ago, I learned something about my folks, and I passed it on to my daughter. When they have decided to give, we just have to let them. When they have decided they want to buy lunch or give an unexpected and unearned ten-spot, we just have to say "Thank you." I learned long ago not to fight their generosity. I learned to express my gratitude and to just enjoy the gift because if I were to do anything less, I would rob them of their joy. I would especially hurt their feelings if I tried to pay for what they simply wanted to give.

Isn't God's gift of forgiveness the greatest gift we have been given? I wonder, then, how He feels when we either refuse His gift or try to earn it once we have received it. When we fight

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forgiveness in the mistaken notion that God couldn't possibly get our slate that clean, I wonder if we rob Him of His joy.

*"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?" (Matthew 7:7-11).*

There is no comparison between the gift of God and the gifts of man, but we do seem to be able to accept the lesser a little easier. God's grace is extravagant. God's forgiveness is complete. And we are a fallen people with a fallen sense of worth. But that isn't how He sees us.

He beholds us with delight. He redeems us with joy. He forgives us with rejoicing all around. God doesn't know how to do anything halfway. And that includes the cleansing He offers. His clean is all clean.

Can we stop fighting forgiveness and learn to just say "Thank you"? Oh, what a day that can be.

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