

Article One

Thoughts on the Forgiveness of God and the Cross:

Forgiveness breaks the chain of causality because he who forgives you -- out of love -- takes upon himself the consequences of what you have done. Forgiveness, therefore, always entails a sacrifice.

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Why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't God just forgive us? This is what many ask, but now we can see that no one "just" Forgives, if the evil is serious. Forgiveness means bearing the cost instead of making the wrongdoer do it, so you can reach out in love to seek your enemy's renewal and change. Forgiveness means absorbing the debt of the sin yourself. Everyone who forgives great evil goes through a death into resurrection, and experience nails, blood, sweat, and tears.

Should it surprise us, then, that when God determined to forgive us rather than punish us for all the ways we have wronged him and one another that he went to the Cross in the person of Jesus Christ and died there? As Deitrich Bonhoeffer says, everyone who forgives someone bears the other's sins. [Note: if you don't know D. Bonhoeffer's story look it up, and see the power of forgiveness]. On the Cross we see God doing visibly and cosmically what every human being must do to forgive someone, though on an infinitely greater scale. I would argue, of course, that human forgiveness works this way because we unavoidably reflect the image of our Creator. This is why we should not be surprised that if we sense that the only way to triumph over evil is to go through the suffering of forgiveness, that this would be far more true of God, whose just passion to defeat evil and loving desire to forgive others are both infinitely greater than ours.

It is crucial at this point to remember that the Christian faith has always understood that Jesus Christ is God. God did not then, inflict pain on someone else, but rather on the Cross absorbed the pain, violence, and evil of the world into himself. Therefore the God of the Bible is not like the primitive deities who demanded our blood for their wrath to be appeased. Rather, this is a God who becomes human and offers his own lifeblood in order to honor moral justice and merciful love so that someday he can destroy all evil without destroying us.

Therefore the Cross is not simply a lovely example of sacrificial love. Throwing your life away needlessly is not admirable—it is wrong. Jesus' death was only a good example if it was more than an example, if it was something absolutely necessary to rescue us. And it was. Why did Jesus have to die in order to forgive us? There was a debt to be paid—God himself paid it. There was a penalty to be born—God himself bore it. Forgiveness is always a form of costly suffering.

We have seen how human forgiveness and its costliness sheds light on divine forgiveness. However, it is divine forgiveness that is the ultimate ground and resource for the human. Bonhoeffer repeatedly attested to this, claiming that it was Jesus' forgiveness of him on the Cross that gave him such a security in God's love that he could live a life of sacrificial service to others. Dr. Timothy Keller, *The Reason For God: The Forgiveness of God*

Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is again made clean.

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