

12 You want me to forgive but why should we just let people off the hook when they deserve it?

You want me to forgive but why should we just let people off the hook when they deserve it? We live in an angry society. This is expressed both in crime and the response to crime. Sometimes the unforgiveness expressed after a crime can sound as bad as the evil perpetrated.

Why should we just let people off the hook when they deserve it? Counsellors say forgiving and letting go of the wrongs done to us is key to our own healing. Forgiveness is good for us.

Christianity reinforces this. By forgiving we cease to hold the responsibility for judgement and allow God to exercise it on our behalf. If there's justice to be meted out we trust God to do it.

Forgiveness is good for the soul. Through it we become more like our Father in heaven! It expresses our godliness. If you worship a God who treats you better than you deserve you grow into his forgiving attitude.

Forgiveness liberates us from the hurts of the past. The shallow comfort in clinging to unforgiveness and hatred can destroy us and our communities. Unforgiveness is a prison we put ourselves in that Christ has authority to unlock.

There's a powerful story from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. A woman was at the hearing about her son's murder. The police officer who'd ordered his brutal killing was there, shamefacedly hearing read out the details of what he and his colleagues had done.

At the end the room was quiet. The chair of the commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, asked the woman if she had anything to say to the man who had killed her son.

"I am very full of sorrow. So I am asking you now – come with me to the place where he died, pick up in your hands some of the dust of the place where his body lay, and feel in your soul what it is to have lost so much.

And then I will ask you one thing more. When you have felt my sadness, I want you to do this. I have so much love, and without my son that love has nowhere to go. So I am asking you – from now on you be my son, and I will love you in his place."

She went on to say – *"I can say this – I can only do this, because Jesus loved me and gave himself for me."*

Why should we just let people off the hook when they deserve it? Like this lady we can only point to Jesus!

As Archbishop John Sentamu says, Jesus alone is able to change this 'eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth' world into a 'lion lying down with the lamb' world.

What about righting wrongs done? Surely forgiveness doesn't remove that responsibility? That's true. When Christians repent of their sins they always do penance which means right the wrongs they've done, to the best of their ability. If you've stolen you may be forgiven but you still need to make restitution. Christian forgiveness doesn't imply people shouldn't right the wrongs they've done where that's possible

It's no coincidence that Christ's forgiveness was announced at Easter (John 20:23). The overcoming of death puts *the* perspective on overcoming wrongs. In the light of the eternity that beckons you, what significance will the hurts you endure bear? They will be overshadowed by glory as Christ's wounds were on Easter Day when he said *whosever's sins you forgive they are forgiven!*

When you know death is overcome, as Christians do, you can more easily relent about forgiving the hurts you've had in life.

A young lad called Jimmy Mizen was murdered in a bakery in south London. Jimmy was an altar boy. He'd only gone with his brother to buy some sausage rolls. He was threatened for no reason. He refused to fight. He was killed by a broken bottle. His mother caught popular imagination for her Christian forgiveness. She said she felt sorry for the parents and the family of the young man who had killed Jimmy. "*They've got to live with what's gone wrong in him*", she said "*whereas we can cherish the memory of a wonderful son*".

In a world so full of 'tit for tat' retribution, words like these are a surprise of the Holy Spirit.

Why should we just let people off the hook when they deserve it? Only because the Spirit bids us do so!

Total 777 words - just over 4.5 minutes to read

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