

We must ask ourselves again and again the question: What does God want most from us? I believe that God wants us to respond to him, to the great things that he has done for us, the great love that he has shown us, and the wonderful grace that accounts us as righteous in spite of our sin. With all that he has done for us, especially the inexpressible gift of the sacrifice of his son, how can we not respond? And yet the mass of humanity which cares nothing for him, or for his son, or for goodness and righteousness.

Part of the problem is a lack of understanding of this grace. Let us consider a situation similar to that of Christ which will illustrate not so much the size of the debt, but how we feel about it and how the debt is handled by the creditor.

There are two ways that a creditor could handle an unpayable debt and the debtor not have to pay it all back. One is to say that the debt is still owed, and payment must be paid as much as possible whenever possible. The debt is still there, the creditor is gracious enough not to foreclose but the debt is still owed. Imagine how one might feel in this situation; some relief, sure, but still the overwhelming impossibility of the task ahead.

Another type of creditor might say, 'I will cancel the debt entirely: you owe me absolutely nothing!' Imagine the relief that we would be felt here: total freedom from a tremendous burden!

Christ asked in his parable, which of the two debtors loved their creditor most, the one who owed much or the one who owed little? But let us ask which debtor loved their creditor most, one who felt that he still had to pay the debt or one who felt totally free from it? The creditor most likely to earn love as a response is the one who simply forgave the debt. We can imagine a great contrast between one who has just had the burden lightened and one who has had his burden lifted forever! The response of the latter would be to do everything that he can for his creditor, not in any sense to pay the debt back, but simply out of gratitude. Both debtors may live in service afterwards but they will have totally different motivations.

Now let us think about the grace of God and what it really means in this light. The way that the Jews felt, that they still owed and kept trying to pay back God with works. Part of this feeling was due to operation of God's covenant prior to the coming of Christ. Sacrifices for atonement were offered every year. We read in Hebrews 10:12, 'But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.' In the new covenant, God has totally removed the debt. God goes a step further by promising to cancel our future debts as we walk 'in the light.' There is real power in that type of forgiveness.

God, as our father, has always wanted us to respond to his love rather than his discipline. From the beginning, he wanted the Israelites to respond to the great wonders that he performed in accomplishing their deliverance from slavery in the land of Egypt. He reminds them again and again of what he has done for them. Initially the response was good, but it didn't last.

We must remember that it was God who was responding to their cries during their hardship in Egypt, and He responds to our cries of suffering as well. God's response is Christ, and in turn we should respond to him. One of my favorite passages on the theme of God's response to man is Psalms 18:1-19, where we see God moving heaven and earth just to save man. Can't you just see the earthquakes, the thunders, the lightnings, as God delivers his loved one. And he has done the same for each one of us. God wants us to be motivated by this rather than the feeling that we still owe him. We do owe him, in a sense, but God has completely removed the debt. Being in Christ, cleansed by his blood, we are under the grace of God, and as such should respond to it.

What is God's motive in responding here? The only reason that God responds to is love His love for us. And to be like God we must make love that the root of our response, too. In 1 John 4:17-19 we see that our natural response should be to love God because he loved us in such a powerful way that he sent his son to die for us. Christ is the great motivator: I cannot conceive of a doctrine which could possibly motivate man any more that the gospel of Christ and his cross. We may have wondered at one time or another why God allowed all of this to happen. The answer to me is very simple. This was the very best way to accomplish his purpose of drawing men to him, of causing the proper response to him.

God has to deal with people who are very stubborn of will. So many times in the Bible we read of a 'hardness of heart', or of the mind, or even of the neck. God is confronted with the

problem of softening the heart, of changing it so that it is no longer stubborn and like stone, as we read in Ezekiel 36.26, 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' It reminds me of a problem that I have many times when working with a bolt that has rusted and cannot be loosened. A magic substance 'liquid wrench' can soften the hardened crust around the threads. And after a few minutes the problem is solved. But what can God use to soften our hearts? Well, it seems that the strongest substance capable of doing the job is the blood of Christ. The overpowering love and sacrifice which is represented by that blood causes us to respond, change, soften. Through it we submit our wills and rely on God for all things. This blood is powerful, but we must allow it to penetrate our heart so that it can be softened. For those hearts that remain hardened, God will ultimately crush them.

What is it that God wants from us? He wants us to respond to him, to the grace that he has shown us, and to the love that he has given us. He wants us to feel forgiven; to rejoice in it; to give our lives to him because of it.

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