

In Luke 7:36-47 we find an extremely touching lesson of a woman washing the feet of Jesus with her hair and tears. Such a work of humility seems to have been motivated by her understanding of her tremendous sinfulness and worthlessness compared to Christ. Christ draws a lesson for those around him who could not understand such humility, saying that he who is forgiven much, loves much, and he who is forgiven little, loves little. The heart of the lesson is the response that this woman has to the grace of Christ that late showed itself in the forgiving of her sins. I think that if we could improve our own understanding of grace, we will be capable of a more God-like love.

What is meant by receiving the forgiveness of God? Let us consider two creditors, each with a debtor whose debt is of such magnitude that it is simply impossible to pay it off. The first creditor receives his debtor and tells him that he realizes the situation, and will allow the man to pay off whatever he can, whenever he can. The debt will still exist, but will simply be put on the back burner and no legal action will be taken. The debtor feels that he has received great grace, but still feels the crushing weight of the debt on his shoulders. And the debtor lives constantly under the strain of trying to pay off what he cannot. The second creditor, however, tells his debtor that the debt is totally canceled! And what is more, any future debts will be taken care of! The debtor is now totally free, and his life from this point on shows it. He responds with love, because he has been loved so much!

The first creditor has a partial parallel with God and the old covenant, where, until Christ came, the sins of the Jews were simply rolled forward year after year. We saw how the Jews responded to that. But the second creditor is very much like the God of the new covenant, whose son Christ died once for all, nailing our sins to the cross.

What would we do if our banker told us that our present and future debts would be canceled? Would we buy that computer system that we've had our eye on for years? Paul answers the spiritual parallel to this in Romans 6:1-2, by telling us how terrible that response is. The response that God wants is that of an understanding of our debt and moral bankruptcy, and an understanding that it has been covered for those who are in Christ. That in our understanding and confession of our sinfulness we are continually cleansed, 1 John 1. How different we act when our motivation is love and gratitude rather than that of working off a debt. What is our response to God's inexpressible gift?