

To Err is Human, To Love Divine

The Message....

The phrase "To err is human; to forgive divine" can be comprehensively understood by examining human sinfulness and God's merciful nature through the lens of Joseph's story, Paul's letters, and Jesus' teachings.

I. Introduction

- * Human choices are real and have consequences.
- * The natural tendency to choose what is wrong instead of what is right has been a principal attribute of what it means to be human ever since Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
- * One of the noblest statements in God's Word is Joseph's address to his brothers.
 - * Not only did he forgive them for what they had done, but he went so far as to say that God was actually using them in His plan when they sold him as a slave.
- * We do not have nearly as much of a problem with God's will as we do with His timetable.
 - * We want Him to act on our schedule, not His.....
- * How much better off we would be if we simply trusted God to open doors for us.
 - * He will cause things to happen in, for, and to, us and at the time He knows is best.
- * The heart of the gospel is the merciful love of our heavenly Father.
 - * In Jesus, He sets us free from both the guilt and the power of sin (see Rom 5:7-8).

II. To Err Is Human: The Reality of Human Sinfulness

- * General Human Nature and Our Tendency to Sin
 - * Adam and Eve's rebellion against God distorted God's original plans for creation, breaking humanity's fellowship with God (we call it "the Fall").
 - * All human beings are born with a natural inclination toward what is wrong, often called "original sin."
 - * Everyone sins and falls short of God's glory (Rom 3:23).
 - * Human desires and plans are in constant flux and change over time, unlike God's unchanging nature.
- * Effects and Nature of Sin:
 - * Sin is breaking God's commandments, rebelling against His will, all causing a separation from God ("hell").
 - * Human sin affects every area of human nature; people continue to make choices, but every choice is tainted by sin's effects.
 - * This is "total inability" or "total depravity," meaning humans cannot come to God on their own without His prior intervention and forgiveness.
 - * Sin breaks communion with God and destroys relationships with others, initiating cycles of anger, distrust, and resentment.
 - * The desert fathers identified eight core sins that separate humanity from God: gluttony, anger, lust, restless boredom, greed, love of praise, depression, and pride.
- * Illustrations from the Bible:
 - * Joseph's brothers, in their distress, recalled their past sin against him, highlighting their recognition of their past wrongdoing (Gen 42:21).
 - * Joseph's statement to his brothers, You intended to harm me, clearly acknowledges their sinful intent (Gen 50:19).
 - * Even faithful figures like Moses and King David fell into sin and were disciplined by God, yet God continued to redeem and restore them.
 - * Jacob, growing up and as a young man, often resorted to trickery and deceit, motivated by greed and a survival-of-the-fittest mentality.
 - * His life showed a continuous struggle to triumph through his own intelligence and strength.
 - * Abraham, despite the promises of God, fled to Egypt during a famine and endangered Sarah by presenting her as his sister.
 - * King David was marked by deep flaws and sins, including adultery with Bathsheba and plotting her husband Uriah's death.
 - * Peter exhibited spiritual unevenness, moving from profound insight to spiritual insensitivity.
 - * The Prodigal Sons

- * The younger son initially rejected his father's love, dishonored his family, rebelled against his father, and lived an immoral life.
- * The older son exhibited a hardened heart, losing his compassion and treating his brother as less with disdain.

- * Spiritual Warfare

- * A real conflict within one's self — a battle between good and evil.
- * Conflict between following God or following the world.

- * The Sermon on the Mount illustrates not only outward actions but also innermost thoughts and motivations.

- * Manifestations of Human Error in Scripture:

- * Direct Violations, including:

- * murder,
- * disobeying commandments,
- * lying, stealing, false oaths, dishonoring parents, sexual immorality, and more.....

- * Intentional Wrongdoing:

- * Joseph's brothers, for example, acted with evil intent. Their sin was reckless, willful, and deliberate.

- * Attitudes and Internal States:

- * Remember, sins are not only external actions but also internal thoughts and attitudes.
- * If we feel hatred, anger, pride, and hypocrisy, etc. in our hearts, these inside feelings are as significant to God as vitriolic words and actions.

- * Neglect and Omission:

- * Hiding the truth, neglecting duty, gossiping, or standing idly by when a person is in need.

- * Rationalization and Impacting Others

- * Individuals may make excuses or justify bad decisions that go against God's will.
- * Believers are warned not to cause someone to 'stumble,' which, in turn, causes all involved to disobey God.

III. To Forgive Is Divine: God's Character and Provision of Mercy

- * It's about God's character (including His mercy, grace, and love), which makes forgiveness possible.

- * Grace:

- * God freely bestows salvation on undeserving sinners, like us.
- * God's grace can overcome any sin
- * God's grace is transforming, leading believers away from sin to become like Jesus.
- * Forgiveness is a product of God's grace.

- * Love:

- * God's love is infinite and eternally self-giving, and is showered on us while we were still sinners....
- * Jesus willingly and passionately sacrificed His life for us,
- * God's love is eternal, divine, and passionate, not based on human worthiness.

- * Goodness:

- * God's goodness is inherent to His character — He is good to us because of who He is, not because of what we can do for Him ('I promise to go to church every week, if you will.....').
- * God is good, bountifully providing for all His creation.
- * His goodness extends to unbelievers (called 'common grace') and to believers.
- * Because of God's goodness, He meets our needs, offers protection and forgiveness, and more.
- * All good things ultimately come from God's bounty.
- * God is infinitely compassionate, tender, and good, and His love surpasses that of any human parent.

- * Holiness and Justice met by Mercy:

- * God's holiness means He cannot tolerate sin, and His justice demands punishment.
- * God's mercy requires His justice to be satisfied.
- * His justice is achieved through Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice, where He bears God's wrath, allowing God to pour out grace, mercy, and love upon us instead.

- * Immutability:

- * God never changes His character, word, or plans.
- * His plan of salvation and His promises of grace are steadfast and reliable.

- * Omniscience:

- * God knows all things, including the depths of our sin and depravity.
- * Despite God's perfect knowledge, He does not withhold His love and forgiveness from us.
- * God's Nature and Initiative in Forgiveness:
 - * God is loving, merciful, gracious, patient, and faithful.
 - * Despite human rebellion and sin, God, out of His love, extends grace and forgiveness to us sinners.
 - * His grace for humanity is first seen throughout the Old Testament.
 - * Atonement, "at-one-ment," is God's way to bring reconciliation and restoration from human sin and its effects.
 - * It involves the covering of sin and the reconciliation between God and humanity.
 - * Jesus made forgiveness possible: His sinless life and voluntary death atoned for the world's sins, bearing the ultimate judgment.
 - * "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).
 - * God's divine initiative and the depth of His love provides forgiveness when as we are so undeserving of it.
- * Divine Providence Over Human Sin:
 - * God demonstrates His sovereign control over human destiny and can re-direct human movements to a good end.
 - * Joseph's story is a prime example:
 - * His brothers' evil intent was overruled by God for a greater good – the preservation of many lives.
 - * Joseph's own act of forgiveness was rooted in this understanding of God's providence.
 - * Then God assures Jacob's family that He will continue to provide for them and their children.
 - * God's design for Israel, even through their disobedience, leads to His mercy.
- * God's Plan for Restoration and Forgiveness in Action:
 - * God desired from the beginning of creation to have a relationship with humans.
 - * The Fall caused separation, but God launched a "redemptive program" to restore humanity to Himself.
 - * God can forgive sins and strengthen the faith of those who love Him.
 - * The Bible states that God forgets sins when He forgives them, removing offenses "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps 103:12).
 - * The storyline of the Bible is summarized as the redemption of God's creation, especially humanity, with Jesus as the main "star."
 - * God's correction and justice are always accompanied by grace; judgment is never God's final word, as He also offers compassion, forgiveness, and love.
 - * Biblical examples of divine forgiveness and its reflection in humanity:
 - * Gen 45:1-13: Joseph forgives his brothers — a powerful example of human forgiveness mirroring divine purpose.
 - * Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and reassures them: it was not you who sent me here, but God.
 - * Gen 50:19: Joseph says, Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God?
 - * Judgment and all real authority belong to God.
 - * Joseph is simply an instrument of God's plan, allowing him to extend forgiveness rather than revenge.
 - * God can transform bad decisions into a source of blessing.
 - * Noah and his family: Despite a new beginning after the flood, Noah acted sinfully (getting drunk – Gen. 9:21), showing that the fallen state of humanity continued.
 - * This demonstrates that humanity requires a deeper change.
 - * King David, after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, repented and wrote Psalm 51, seeking a pure heart and a renewed spirit from God, which God provided.
 - * Israel as a Nation: Throughout their history, the Israelites showed rebellion, disobedience, disloyalty, and forgetfulness, often breaking their covenant with Him and falling into idolatry.
- * The Provision of Forgiveness Through Christ:
 - * God's willingness to forgive is not based on human merit, but on His mercy and Jesus' sacrifice.
 - * God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us [Rom 5:8]. This is the basis of forgiveness.
 - * Forgiveness is a part of justification, which is God's act of grace.
 - * Justification is a declaration once and for all that God accepts sinners through His Son.
 - * It removes condemnation and confers righteousness.
 - * Jesus atoned for humanity's sins one time and for all time.

- * God's plan of salvation for fallen humanity unfolds throughout the Old Testament and is realized through Jesus, the Savior of humanity.
- * Jesus is presented as an advocate and "defense lawyer" on humanity's behalf.
- * He is the "antitype" to Adam, fixing what Adam "broke" and bringing righteousness and eternal life through His grace.
- * The New Covenant
 - * is sealed by Jesus' blood,
 - * promises a change of heart, and
 - * enables reconciliation and transformation through the Holy Spirit.
- * Forgiveness is described as the greatest miracle Jesus ever performed, meeting the greatest need, costing the greatest price, and bringing the most lasting results.
- * Conditions for Receiving Divine Forgiveness
 - * Repentance:
 - * Acknowledging God's righteousness and His lordship is necessary for repentance.
 - * Faith in Jesus:
 - * Salvation, including God's forgiveness, is based on genuine faith in Jesus and is permanent.
 - * Faith in Jesus, the Son of God and 2nd Person of the divine Trinity, grants eternal life and the means for which we pass from death into forever life.
- * The Conditional Nature of Forgiveness:
 - * Jesus explicitly states that if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matt 6:14-15).
 - * Motivation for Forgiving Others:
 - * Appreciating the enormity of God's forgiveness towards oneself should lead to a willingness to forgive others.
 - * Forgiving others demonstrates the grace within our life and points to Jesus.
 - * Christ-likeness:
 - * We are never more Christ-like than when we forgive someone who has sinned against us.
 - * Loving Enemies:
 - * Christians are called to "love your enemies" and "pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).
 - * This requires conscious willpower and is a victory over natural anger and bitterness.
 - * Prioritizing Reconciliation:
 - * Jesus teaches that it is more important to be reconciled to a brother than to perform a religious duty.
 - * Christians are called to quickly forgive people, be slow to anger, and not to harbor bitterness or anger.
 - * He never condoned sinful behavior, but chose to show mercy even while still calling out our sinful behavior.
- * God's Sovereignty and Use of Human Error for Good
 - * God's plan of salvation unfolds through history, even using imperfect individuals and their failures.
 - * God forgave King David's severe sins, demonstrating that our weakness is the perfect opportunity for God's grace, power, strength, forgiveness, justice, and holiness to shine brightly through all our 'muck.'
 - * David's life serves as an example of someone who sinned, sought, and found God's forgiveness.
 - * In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father embodies God's compassion and love, waiting patiently for his younger son to return and then running to embrace him with love and acceptance, celebrating his return as an honored guest.
 - * God's grace can calm fears, overcome anxieties, and soften hearts.
 - * God's faithfulness is evident in the Exodus narrative, where God remembered His covenant — He was mindful, considered, and then acted to free, deliver, and redeem, His people.
 - * God consistently provides ways to rebuild relationships with Him after we have sinned, allowing us to embrace our identity as forgiven and clean.
 - * Human choices do not and cannot deter God's action or His plan.
 - * God works through human choices, and He can use evil to further His ultimate purposes for the world.
 - * God's grace not only redeems individuals from sin but also reclaims their stories for His purposes.
 - * Our successes and failures can be used by God for our good and His greater purpose, making our own lives point to Christ.

IV. Human Response to Divine Grace

- * Joseph's forgiveness reflects a divine attribute, as early church fathers like Ambrose drew parallels between Joseph and Jesus, noting that both "suffered and were sold, elevated, and forgiving."
- * God's mercy, grace, and love call believers to mirror these divine attributes in their own lives.
- * Call to Repentance and Mercy:
 - * God wishes for people to be obedient and repentant.
 - * Repentance involves a change of mind and conduct, a turning from sin against God's wishes.
 - * Repentance is itself a gift from God.
 - * Biblical Jewish faith considers repentance (teshuvah) and blood sacrifice essential for atonement, emphasizing humility as key to restoring relationships.
 - * We know the blood sacrifice was/is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.
 - * Believers are called to imitate God's mercy: Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy (Matt 5:7).
 - * Those who show mercy have already received it from God.
 - * Christians are encouraged to be bold in prayer, including praying for fellow sinners.
 - * True Christian love "keeps no record of wrongs" and involves blessing those who curse or slander.
 - * Ultimately, God's love and forgiveness are intended to lead humanity to holiness and transformation.
 - * Confession and Contrition are essential steps to reconciliation.
 - * We are to recognize and admit our wrongdoing honestly.
 - * True humility leads to lifestyle changes reflecting love for God and neighbor.
 - * Forgiveness is a crucial element of Jesus' teaching, with both a vertical (asking God for forgiveness) and horizontal (forgiving others) application.
 - * Christians are instructed to forgive one another, "just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).
 - * Refusing to forgive others hinders our receiving God's forgiveness for ourselves.
 - * If we refuse to forgive others, we cannot expect God's forgiveness.
 - * Forgiveness is an ongoing process for believers, requiring continuous asking for God's forgiveness and mirroring His love by continuously forgiving others.
 - * Forgiving others frees the forgiver from resentment and bitterness and is key to healing relationships.
- * To be compassionate toward others, we must see them for who they are, rather than how we think they should be.
 - * While God tests, He does not tempt, and our faith is revealed through these tests.
- * God, as our Shepherd, leads His flock away from danger; we can trust that He will lead us on the right path.
- * "Pray for a short memory as to all unkindness." – Charles Spurgeon

"Forgiveness is the odor which a flower yields when trampled upon." — Anonymous