

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us"

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For anyone who has a sense of law or a sense of what is right, forgiveness is not the first order of business. When someone offends us or breaks a law that affects us, we want justice; when someone owes us something, we want to be paid back what we are owed. And if someone breaks a law often enough or borrows from us too often without paying it back, we want to teach that person a lesson.

You and I are really quite good at seeing offences and debts, scandals and trespasses in the lives of others. In fact, most religions and ideologies of the world are built around probing offences and trespasses and detailing appropriate terms of debt repayment.

What you and I and most of the world around us are not very good at is acknowledging our own offences and debts, scandals and trespasses. Sometimes this is because we simply don't realise what we've done or said. Other times, perhaps most often, it is because we are so embarrassed by what we have done, that we have foolishly tried to cover it up, maybe even convincing ourselves that it never happened, maybe distracting ourselves and others from what we have done by busily pointing the finger at others, knowing all the time that eventually someone will find out.

Sometimes, we come to our senses. It is then that we stop, even if for only a moment, trying to find out where others have gone astray and we discover our own offences. We ask forgiveness. Sometimes we even stop berating and judging and trying to teach ourselves a lesson.

And then, and only then, we hear a voice speaking back to us. And what do we hear? Berating and demands for justice and pay-backs? A voice asking us whether we have finally learned our lesson? No, what we hear is a voice filled with infinite love, rejoicing to welcome us back, inviting us to a banquet in our honour and gently urging us to devote ourselves to the same service of inviting others to their banquet. And when we look up to see where the voice is coming from, we see that it is coming to us from a Cross, a still, small voice of calm, saying "Father, forgive them."

[followed by the singing of ["Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" by John Greenleaf Whittier](#)]