

What if: We actually can forgive sin?

For some time now, we've been exploring the stunning authority of the believer. It's hard to believe that God has given us so much favor... and that He's even given us governance over the earth. So let's explore another of our dimensions of authority.

"If you might forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you might retain any, they are retained." – John 20:23 (Berean Literal Bible)

You are forgiven!

Could this verse mean something beyond the obligatory phrase, "I forgive you"? Here are at least two more levels of application for this verse.

1. The believer has the right and power to forgive sins... in the eternal sense.

It's quite possible that this is more true than we may be comfortable believing. Can a human actually grant pardon to another person? Can a person erase the guilt of sin from another person? Well just think of it, if the priests of the OT could grant forgiveness through the sacrifice of an animal, then how much more can we in the NT, as priests to God ([Rev 5:10](#)), grant forgiveness via a much better sacrifice, Jesus ([Heb 8:6](#)).

As we're finding, the stature and authority of the believer is dramatically beyond our wildest imaginations. E.g. *"That we would be filled with all the fullness of God"*, *"We are the righteousness of God in Christ"*, *"We are as He is in this world"*, *"And they (we) will reign on the earth"*, etc. And look at this staggering verse:

"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" - Lk 10:19

So, do we have the power to forgive sin in the eternal sense? This would seem to jibe with Matt 18:18 - *"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."* – NASB (I've written on this topic [here](#) and [here](#).) Of course, we understand that our authority in the earth is only effective and empowered because of our position in Heaven ([Eph 2:6](#))... from Heaven, we exercise dominion on the earth.

Obviously, we're not saying that it is necessary to have earthly priests grant us forgiveness. We believe in the priesthood of all believers, which means that each person can approach the Throne of grace boldly ([Heb 4:16](#)) without an earthly intermediary. We have the best mediator, Jesus. But He's awakening us to our original commission to exercise dominion over the earth ([Gen 1:28](#)) and inviting us to partner with Him in co-rulership in the earth. So when we proclaim the richness of the Gospel message of forgiveness, we literally become Jesus' voice of hope and salvation to all who will hear ([1 Pet 4:11](#)).

Regarding the staggering authority God bestows on us, look at this passage which declares the magnitude and vastness of that authority:

"Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him." – Dan 7:27-28.

But even with compelling evidence, this first point is contested by some scholars. It seems to encroach upon Deity to all except to those who have a revelation of how deeply God desires to partner in us. Commentaries, [Expositors Greek Testament](#) and [Cambridge Bible](#) both corroborate this view of John 20:23.

Next, let's look at a second point with which we'll likely have no trouble agreeing.

2. The believer declares to a 'sinner' that forgiveness has already been granted to them (back at the cross – 2000 years ago). Upon hearing the 'good news', their faith is activated to receive that forgiveness. And likewise, if a believer neglects to inform a 'sinner' that forgiveness has already been made on their behalf, then their faith never gets activated to receive the forgiveness.

As we become aware of the powerful work of the Cross, we realize that Jesus' one time sacrifice for all sins for all mankind for all time, actually and completely forgave all the sins of the world – past, present, and future. So stunning in its scope! This makes the Gospel exponentially Good News!

Our powerful herald to the world is, "You are forgiven! God is not holding your sins against you ([II Cor 5:19](#)). It's so easy! All you have to do to experience it is choose to receive His magnanimous gift of love and forgiveness."

"My child...you have already been forgiven. Receive the forgiveness"
- Father God

Here's how it works:

(You) - "Hey bro, did you know that you are forgiven! That's right, your sins are already forgiven. Jesus took care of them on the Cross 2000 years ago. All you have to do is believe and receive. No hoops... just Good News!"

(Them) - "Wow, I thought I had to grovel and beg... and maybe I wasn't even worthy of Him giving me notice. If you're sure that He's not mad at me... and if it's really as good as you say, then I want in. I believe and I receive."

Bammmmm!!!... the Good News of forgiveness declared... faith awakened... and forgiveness received. Just as easy as that! And here's what just happened:

(They were) *delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of his dear Son* - Col 1:13

So, in both points, 1 and 2, our confident declarations of forgiveness lift the heads and hearts of precious people out of the darkness of their world of hopelessness and into the Kingdom of Light and hope. And Jesus gets joy out of the reunion of oneness with the people He loves... and the delight of partnering in us.

And folks... that can't be all bad! :-)

Now regarding the last phrase of verse Jn 20:23; the original Greek text does NOT include the word SINS. It simply reads, "*if you might retain any, they are retained.*" Is it possible that a more correct translation is;

If you retain people by declaring the forgiveness of God conveyed through the richness of the Gospel, they will be saved. - (Mark's paraphrase)

Now, doesn't this seem to jibe better with our Father's heart, especially considering that He's "*not willing that any should perish...*"? (Jn 3:16-17, II Tim 2:4, II Pet 3:9)

So hey, let's be more intentional in declaring forgiveness and retaining people into the Kingdom of God. Isn't it amazing... we have more clout than we ever realized!

-- MLH

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