



1 Peter 3

“8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

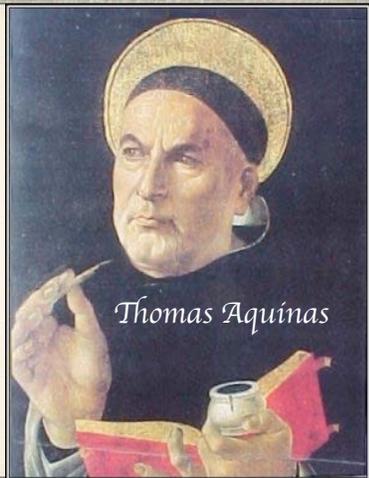
“There are two serious arguments against the existence of the Christian God.”

The challenge of **science**

- Faith

The challenge of **suffering**

- Forgiveness



The challenge of forgiving

- Why is it so hard to forgive others who have hurt us?
- What are the obstacles that hinder us?
- How can we deal with them?

Levels of offense

Light Offenses
issues that are common to most relationships
(failing to keep a promise)

Moderate Offenses
severe but superficial damage
(stealing of families retirement)

Severe Offenses
with deep, long-term damage to one's soul
(**extreme sexual abuse**)

Matt. 18:21-35 Contrasting responses

The Grateful Master	The Ungrateful Servant
Had a just claim	Had a just claim
Was asked for patience	Was asked for patience
Showed compassion	Showed no compassion
Forgave the debt	Demanded full payment
Suffered the loss of the outstanding debt.	Refused to absorb any loss

Matthew 18

“²⁸ But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ ²⁹ So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ ³⁰ He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ³¹ So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. ³² Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. ³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.’”

Obstacles to forgiveness

- **Stuffing it** - Refusing the need for justice.
- **Short sightedness** - Refusing to see beyond the personal pain.
- **Faithlessness** - Refusing to claim the freedom (power) to forgive.
- **Holding on** - Refusing to close the account and take our baptism seriously.
- **Lack of empathy** - Refusing to share experiences.



Meryl Streep

“The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy, we can all sense a mysterious connection to each other.”



Kim Harrison
(author)

“treat people with understanding when you can, and fake it when you can’t – **until you do understand.**”

Empathy is the front door to the house of social ethics.

To enter by any other way is to never quite be at home there.

Understanding empathy

- It is a powerful connection with others that empowers and liberates.
- It is a cognitive, logical function not just an emotional feeling.
- Empathy is at the heart of the Golden Rule.
- Empathy is at the heart of American civic morality, human rights, and social cohesion.
- Much of our social / political conflict at home & abroad is tied to a lack of empathy.
- Healthy empathy has boundaries.

We forgive because we are forgiven.

Colossians 3:13

“bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; **just as the Lord forgave you**, so also should you.”

Matthew 18

“³⁴ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

What will “heavenly Father” do to you?

“hand him over to the torturers”
(translated “torment” in Matt.8:6)

What do the torturers do?

force “repayment of all that was owed”

If the torturer is God

1. Our eternal life depends on our ability to forgive all who have hurt us.

But how is this consistent with the Gospel of grace?

In what sense is the Gospel - good news?

2. A marker sign of true faith is a forgiving spirit.

Why do the Epistles exhort true believers to be forgiving?

Are we to take this teaching in a more general way and if so why not apply the same response to all the teaching of Jesus?

If the torturer is man

3. This is about temporal social issues not eternal life.

It reveals the loving discipline of God.

We will be put in life situations where we will be treated just the way we treat others.

Matthew 18:34

“And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers **until he should repay** all that was owed him.”

Matthew 7

“¹ Do not judge lest you be judged. ² For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”

How do we develop empathy?

Reflect on painful personal experiences.

Commit yourself to be the answer to someone else's prayer.

Modeling

- parents
- early childhood

Romans 12

“¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ **If possible, so far as it depends on you**, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” ²¹ **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**”

“Wrath”

οργη **orge**

“A settled verdict of indignation”

(not emotional revenge)

More often translated “anger”

“Vengeance”

εκδικησις **ekdikesis**

“That which proceeds out of justice (*dike*)”

(not emotional revenge)

Could be translated “justice”

Responding to the Unrepentant offender

- We are to **do all we can** to make peace.
Rom.12:18
- We are to forgive others as God has forgiven us. God’s forgiveness is offered to all who **repent**. 1 John 1:9
- With no repentance - **discipline** is needed, but only by those qualified (elders, government, etc.) Matt.18:15-18
- When there is no reconciliation - **move on** “shake the dust off your feet.”
- Take **baptism seriously** - “living sacrifice”, “forsake family” etc.

God’s empathetic love

**calls us to Him,
confirms us to Him,
and connects us to
the ones He loves.**