

➤ Other Voices ➤

So to live a “forgiven” life is not simply to live in a happy consciousness of having been absolved. Forgiveness is precisely the deep and abiding sense of what relation—with God or with other human beings—can and should be; and so it is itself a stimulus, an irritant, necessarily provoking protest at impoverished versions of social and personal relations.

ROWAN WILLIAMS, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*

The biblical gospel is not that humans can save themselves inwardly or that whatever happens outwardly is meant to be, but rather that a personal God loves them and that, with divine help, they can freely love others. Human beings are not God, and human sin and suffering are real; to think otherwise is false consolation. That forgiveness and charity can be equally real, however, is the good news that does not grow old. Humans can participate in the grace manifest in Christ, and, being forgiven by God, both give and receive joy. Embodiment of that joy is all that Christian ethics has ever been or will be.

TIMOTHY P. JACKSON, “The Gospels and Christian Ethics”

God’s forgiveness of us is essential because without it we are dangerous. Unless we recognize our own need to be forgiven, forgiveness has a violent underside. Immersed in our own sense of controlled self-righteousness, protected from shame through denial, we hotly oppose forgiveness for those we do not want to forgive. In this case, as in the case of the adulterous woman’s accusers, Jesus’ forgiveness awakens our searing hidden shame, and we long to rid ourselves of the One Who Forgives.

MARGARET G. ALTER, *Resurrection Psychology*

Jesus is convinced that human beings languish in their need for forgiveness. No matter how obviously guilty or no matter how righteously self-justified they are, Jesus seeks to return human beings to themselves, to their communities, and to God. No individual is too deeply alienated—not Zacchaeus, traitor to his people, nor the woman caught “in the very act of adultery.” Jesus meets these people in their suffering with forgiveness. But Jesus’ compassion extends beyond the obviously shamed

and shameful. He seeks to expose the denied shame buried in a disguise of self-righteousness. He is convinced that no individual is sufficiently self-justified to alleviate this human burden alone. Through parable and confrontation, Jesus holds a mirror before the fragile self-defense of the righteous just as he did with the woman's accusers. In this way he opens an approach for ending their alienation and bringing about their inclusion and return to a different sense of community, to themselves, and to God.

MARGARET G. ALTER, *Resurrection Psychology*

We have traditionally understood John 3:16 as a creedal formula. We tend to place the emphasis on the part that says, "Everyone who believes in him . . . may have eternal life." What counts, in terms of faith, is the belief.

However, look again. Embedded in the verse is the story of a parent who gave up a child . . . This sacrificial choice is at the heart of God's search for reconciliation.

I can no longer take John 3:16 as a short formula for salvation. I can only understand it as a foundational principle of reconciliation. It is an ethic based on willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of an enemy. It is an ethic undergirded by and made possible only through the immeasurable love and grace of God.

JOHN PAUL LEDERACH, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation*

Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the grace of the Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but continuous, uninterrupted forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other.

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546), *The Large Catechism*

Not only is it wonderful that God forgives our sins, but also that God neither uncovers them nor makes them stand forth clearly revealed. Nor does God force us to come forward and publicly proclaim our misdeeds, but bids us to make our defense to Him alone and to confess our sins to Him . . . God forgives our sins and does not force us to make a parade of them in the presence of others. God seeks one thing only: that the person who benefits by the forgiveness will learn the greatness of the gift.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (c.347-407), *Baptismal instructions (adapted)*