



F*A***T***H***E***R*, *forgive them; for they know not what they do.* (Luke 23:34)

For most of my life from the age of my Christian accountability I have heard it preached that Jesus forgave even those men who were crucifying Him on the cross at Calvary. But I am not so sure this is the case. Since our Lord had condemned the Jewish rulers time and again as *“children of their father the devil”*, and as a *“generation of vipers”*, I do not believe these words from the cross were intended for them. But the Roman consort whose mission it was to fulfill the dastardly deed on behalf of the Jewish rulers had no idea who Jesus was. To them, He was just another miscreant judged guilty and deserving of death. This, the Lord well knew. So why did our Lord not pronounce forgiveness outright to these?

One great issue which moved Luther to awaken to the true Gospel was the practice of indulgences granted by the Roman Church to sinners who could presumably be forgiven for sins in return for a specified donation. *“Although reformers had many complaints about the Catholic Church of the 16th century, the practice of selling “indulgences” raised the most opposition. An indulgence was a payment to the Catholic Church that purchased an exemption from punishment (penance) for some types of sins. You could not get an indulgence to excuse a murder, but you could get one to excuse many lesser sins, such as thinking lustful thoughts about someone who was not your spouse. The customers for indulgences were Catholic believers who feared that if one of their sins went unnoticed or unconfessed, they would spend extra time in purgatory before reaching heaven or worse, wind up in hell for failing to repent.”* **Against the Sale of Indulgences** by Martin Luther and by Jim Jones, West Chester University of Pennsylvania (c.2012) We find the classical definition in Webster’s Dictionary: *“In Roman Catholicism the remission by the pope of the temporal punishment in purgatory that is still due for sins even after absolution; for example, “in the Middle Ages the unrestricted sale of indulgences by pardoners became a widespread abuse”* Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary.

Of course, indulgencies are a lie out of the pits of Hell. The great penalty Jesus paid on our behalf negates any works of man to remit sin. The wages of Sin must be paid or else there is no forgiveness. When we sin, we must repent to the Lord and seek His forgiveness which is forever forthcoming. However, unrepented sin is another matter. The Lord said to the churches: *5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.* (Rev 2:5) He did not say *I freely forgive you for disobedience to my Word.* And the Lord expects no more, or less of forgiveness, of His people than He demands of Himself. Forgiveness needs to be sought, and we need to grant such forgiveness from one and all.

There are two reasons, in my thinking, that prohibited Christ from forgiving those who nailed the spikes into His hands and feet:

1. The sin begun by those who nailed Jesus to the cross would not be completed until the victim on the cross was dead; in other words, the sin was ongoing, and the Lord does not forgive sins that are not repented of.
2. He could not forgive them their sins in crucifying His Father’s only Begotten Son – that was a matter exclusively left to the Father. The pain of the Father was far greater than that of the Son on Calvary.

We sometime mistake the nature of forgiveness. If a man breaks into your home and rapes and murders your little daughter, will you calmly say to the culprit, *“I forgive you!”* Should you do? No, it is out of focus with the nature by which God forgives us our sins. We must first be penitent and seeking forgiveness. If we, or the Church, goes about forgiving the sins of others, willy-nilly, how could discipline ever be enforced in the Church or in the home. If your child, against your counsel, plays in the street, do you say time after time, *“Oh, its OK, I forgive you!?”* When the Pharisees offended the Divine nature of Christ, how did Christ respond? Did He say, *“Oh, that is OK, I forgive you?”* Let us see how He responded:

22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. (Matt 12:22-24) This was a grievous offense. Beelzebub was tantamount to calling the Jesus the Lord of the Dung Fly. So, what did Jesus say to them?

He responded by condemning them in their talk: *26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? 27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. 28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. 29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. 30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. 31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. 32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. 33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. 34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* (Matt 12:26-34)

Being referred to as a *generation of vipers* (poisonous snakes) and as being **EVIL** does not sound like outright forgiveness, does it?

I believe the clear utterance of the first words uttered by our Lord on the Cross demonstrate the two points I made concerning the forgiveness of sins and offenses. Despite the heresy of indulgences for future sin, God will not forgive 'future sin' until repented. Neither did Christ on the cross since the sin was in progress. But our Lord could neither forgive on behalf of His Father the egregious sin of horrific murder of His Son. It may be true, and most probably is, that some of the soldiers, especially the centurion, to accept the benefits of forgiveness and salvation once the deed was finished. *37 And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. 38 And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. 39 And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.* (Mark 15:37-39)