

But it's Your Job to Forgive!

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A number of years ago, someone who had an apparent financial need gave our church a call. Our hearts genuinely went out to her but she appealed to us during a time when our financial margins were very narrow, and we did not have it to spare. She became quite persistent and would not take “no” for an answer. The final blow came when she demanded that we pay her enormous overdue bill, and said, “You’re a church, you’re supposed to help me!”

This is how more than a few people feel about God when they are in need. They develop a notion that He is somehow obligated to respond to every desire and whim that comes across their minds, both great and small. If He does not come through, they become disappointed, angry, and demanding.

This was the attitude voiced by a dying man who had thumbed his nose at the Lord most of his life. On his deathbed he kept muttering, “God will forgive - that’s his job.”

This notion, however, is not founded on biblical truth. God certainly can do all things, but He is not legally or morally required to do everything we want, when we want it, and how we want it. In the case of forgiveness, He does it because He is kind, not because He has to. Beyond this, He works according to His own time schedule and His sovereign purpose.

The only thing we can claim from Him that is rightfully ours is His justice. Based upon what we really deserve, it is advised that we not demand to exercise that right. The blunt truth is that justice for all of us would be utter condemnation.

Just as it was wrong for the person who called us to assume that a church could not be good unless it gave to everyone whenever they made requests, we would be wrong to place this requirement on God.

In his work, *Your Father Loves You* by James Packer, he spells out the following: “God does not owe it to anyone to stop justice from taking its course. He is not obligated to pity and pardon; if he does so it is an act done, as we say, ‘of his own free will,’ and nobody forces his hand. So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it, (Romans 9:16). Grace is free because it is self-originated and proceeds from the One who was free not to be gracious.”

The truth is that God does not have to forgive us. The more amazing truth is that He really wants to! 2 Peter 3:9b makes very clear how God feels about every one of us: “He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.” (New Living Translation). Also hear this promise made to us all by the Lord Jesus, “...those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them.” (John 6:37).

Though we could never force God's hand, we can always trust His heart toward us. All He requires is humility. We will find that He is much more than willing to forgive. He promised in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."