



Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

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God In Christ by Herb Montgomery

"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both." — Luke 7.42, 43

This month, I would love to pose a question to you that was revolutionary when I

confronted it years ago. I was just finishing up a presentation to a very large group of people, and on the way out of the meeting, someone in the audience reached out and grabbed my hand. Looking me in the eyes, with the utmost sincerity, he asked one of the most profound questions I have been asked in all my years of speaking. "Did God *punish* me for my sins in Christ or did God *forgive* me for my sins in Christ?"

Punishment is defined as inflicting a penalty or sanction on someone as retribution for an offense or a transgression of a legal or moral code. Forgiveness is defined as refraining from imposing punishment on an offender or demanding satisfaction for an offense, to release from the liability for or penalty entailed by an offense, to not demand punishment or redress.

Many of the theological quandaries we get into over the cross stem from looking at Calvary as an act of punishment rather than forgiveness. But what if the lens we should be looking at the cross through is not how God found a way to punish our sin and still let us live but, rather, how God found a way to forgive our sin without immortalizing it?

In the passage quoted above, Jesus doesn't say that the creditor went out and found a slick way to have someone else pay for the debts instead of the debtors themselves. Jesus said that the creditor *forgave* the debt.

Pay close attention to the wording of the following passages:

That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, *not counting people's sins against them*. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5.19, emphasis added).

Did you catch it? God was not in Christ counting our sins against

us in such a way that we could still live; rather, God was in Christ NOT counting our sins against us.

Again:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God *forgave* you (Ephesians 4.32, emphasis added).

Paul is too clear to be mistaken here, but even if he were, he gets even clearer in the next text:

He *forgave* us all our sins, having *canceled* the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it *away*, nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2.13-16, emphasis added).

The Greek word for canceled here is "exaleipho". It means to obliterate, wipe out, or do away with. It's as if God on the cross was saying to the world, "The charges have been dropped." Calvary, rather than revealing a God who punishes sin in Christ, reveals a God who who, having been wronged, refused to press charges.

Was your sin punished or was your sin forgiven?

"What about substitution?" some may ask. Substitution is extremely problematic when we look at it through the lens of punishment. How can someone pay for the crimes of someone else? But when we look at substitution through the lens of forgiveness, we realize that every act of forgiveness is an act of substitution. Substitution becomes liberated from its legal entanglements when we see what the nature of forgiveness actually is. Every time I forgive someone, I choose to bear what he has done to me, to suffer in his stead, and to set him free from his offense. Only one person has the right to set him free from it, for he is the one who will have to bear the loss. It must be done voluntarily, of his own volition. This is what I see God doing at the Cross. Read thoughtfully the following words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Everyone who forgives someone bears the other's sin." When God decided to forgive us rather than punish us for all the ways we have wronged him and one another, he went to the cross in the person of Jesus Christ and died there.

What does this mean for us? First, it means that God is radically more forgiving and embracing than perhaps we have yet realized. Second, it means that we stand not in a state of condemnation but in one of full and free forgiveness. If any are lost at last, it will not be because we did not do enough to convince God to forgive us but that we never truly believed how forgiven we really were. And third, it's a call for those who have believed this to take up

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The following is taken from the news page on our website. For more up to date news on each event involving Herb and RHM, please see www.renewedheartministries.com and look under the "News" tab.

Reno, NV January 13-14, 2012

For all of you who were praying for this weekend, thank you. And for all of you who traveled the distance to come and be a part of this event, thank you. Some of you I haven't seen for quite some time, and it was so good to see you. I chose to share an abbreviated version of The Jesus Dialogue. We began the weekend by generating a lot of good, honest, and positive questions from Friday night's presentation. Then, we spent the rest of the weekend endeavoring to answer those questions with a collection of revelations Jesus gave us about what type of person God really is and what kind of people He is calling us to be in revealing that kind of God to the world around us.

I'm also happy to share, for those of you who emailed in and shared that the recording of Did Jesus Really Have To Die? was damaged from the longer version of the series on our Web site, that the presentation has been rerecorded and is now available. Feel free to give that a listen.

I have so much to be thankful for about in regards to this weekend. However, there is one thing that I keep returning to as I ponder how that weekend went. You see, in Jesus's day, there were those individuals made to feel as though they didn't belong, like they didn't really fit in. They were made to feel as if they were "outsiders" by those who were really good at playing some of the religious games that, too often, we are also known to play as Christians. These folks were the ones truly attracted to what Jesus taught and how He "explained" the character of the Father (John 1:18). Over the past two years, I have begun to notice more frequently an interesting dynamic, a polarization taking place in my audiences. Some folks get it, some don't, and that's ok. But what I'm noticing is that those who "get it", those for whom Jesus's representation of the Father seems to resonate on a profoundly deep level, are those whom we often judge as on the "outside." I'm meeting some people whom I consider incredibly dedicated and passionate Jesus followers, but for all intents and purposes, they really don't fit in to what we usually classify as "church" I don't know what to make of this dynamic yet, but it gives me hope. A new day is coming. If you are reading this right now, YOU give me hope.

Please keep this dear church in Reno in your prayers. They have been through a lot in the last twelve months. They are in transition. Let's partner with them in prayer that whatever comes out of this process in the end will not just be a more effective way of doing "church," but will bring about the enlarging of Christ's Kingdom in the surrounding Reno area as well

Williston, ND January 20-21 2012

"Today we have looked into the very heart of God"

I'm writing this on a plane to Nashville this weekend so please forgive the rushed nature. This last weekend I was in Williston, ND. The gold rush is on! This is such a unique town with its oil wells and man camps. Everything in this town revolves around the oil industry. People have gone from "just making it" to basking in enormous wealth, almost over night. Yet, in this busy and booming town you'll find a little church with a challenged history, whom today, are desiring simply to make a difference.

Here at RHM, some of you have noticed a tad bit of restructuring taking place in an effort to be more relevant to our culture and society at large. It's one thing to preach to the choir. It's quite a different thing to engage in meaningful dialogue and conversation with those who are different from us.

Today more than ever, we are convinced that the hope of humanity is in encountering, in a very real way, the truth of God's radical, other centered, self sacrificial love as seen through the lens of Jesus Christ. This love is much more than merely the intellectual communication of new information. It is a deeply profound, heart level, paradigm shift in our own pictures of God, our beliefs about His Character. At the same time, I believe all of this must be shared in a relationally responsible way, a culturally relevant way, and in a way that is in keeping with intellectual honesty.

One of the changes we have decided to make in 2012 is to separate some of the topics we feel passionate about and dedicate entire weekends to each topic. In the past, I have felt a tremendous burden to try and share as much as I can in each weekend as I may never get an opportunity to speak to these folks again. It was a "buckshot" approach if you will. Much good has been accomplished, but I believe much greater good can be accomplished by a little more focus each weekend. This will enable each topic to be shared with greater detail (although in different locations) and then made available to everyone everywhere on our website.

This weekend I decided to share a new more focused series on the topic of the primacy and centrality of Love in what it means to follow Jesus. This may seem like a no brainer, but the reality is that most non-Christians, when asked if they feel loved by us, say without hesitation, "No." The title of this new more focused series is Love's Awakening. (This will be available on our website shortly.)

Friday night we focused on God's original purpose in bringing us into existence, His desire for us to share in the existential bliss of the other centered love found in relationship that exists between the Triune God. Saturday morning we spent a little time looking at the objections which exist within the Church to moving to a more "love based" model. Then we took an honest look at the objections that abound from thoughtful, intelligent people who cannot harmonize the Christian idea that there is an "all loving" and yet "all powerful" God out there. "If God is so good, then why does my life suck?", is what I was asked recently by a fellow traveler on a flight. Saturday afternoon we finished off with two presentations.

P D A T E

The first was on the clearest revelation of God's radical, self-sacrificial, other centered love—The Cross. And the second was on what it looks like for us, as followers of Jesus, to embrace the Cross, not simply as part of our message, but as our primary way of doing life in our current, surrounding culture.

I received so much good feed back from the folks in Williston, but the one comment that keeps echoing over and over inside of me is, "Today we have truly looked into the very heart of God." I could have received no greater encouragement than that.

I was humbled.

Nashville, TN

January 27-28, 2012

Church service starts sharply at this church. At 3:00 in afternoon sharp, to be specific! I love it! It's a church that is thinking outside the box and endeavoring to be culturally relevant. Let me say here at the beginning that it was very good to be back at Gracepoint. I fell in love with this church when I was there a few years ago, and I'm so happy to hear that they are still going strong. It was good to see friends again and to catch up on what has happened since my last visit.

I'll give you a little background on what is happening here at RHM that will help you really capture what this weekend at Gracepoint was all about. In the past, I have felt an urgency to share as much as possible in each weekend venue, but the downside of this has been that each weekend was a "buckshot" of significant but not always related topics that I believe help enable folks to experience a significant paradigm shift in a weekend's worth of time. It has worked, but it has its drawbacks, too.

As a ministry, we are deciding to take advantage of the global reach of our website and begin using our weekend venues as opportunities to give more focused seminars around some of these topics. In other words, we are beginning to isolate the buckshot and spend more dedicated time on each topic and make an entire weekend out of each. We have done this twice now with good results. In North Dakota, a couple weekends back, I presented Love's Awakening, which was on the primacy and centrality of love and what it means to follow Jesus, with attention being given to both the religious and secular objections to the idea of God being a God who doesn't just love but actually is love.

This last weekend, at Gracepoint, we shared a series titled, Forgive Us Our Trespasses. Here is its description:

Some of the most significant, relationally inhibiting misconceptions of God in our modern culture are the misunderstandings that surround the subject of divine forgiveness. We relate to God and to others the way we, in our hearts, perceive that God is relating to us. Does God really withhold forgiveness until we apologize? Which comes first, repentance and confession or forgiveness? Does a loving God require us to ask Him before He'll forgive? How can God require us to forgive those who have wronged us, even the ones who have never asked to be forgiven, if He Himself doesn't even give blanket forgiveness to everyone, too? What does forgiveness even

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God's forgiveness not simply as a "message" to those around us but as a way of life. We are called to be living conduits of this forgiveness to those around us as well. We are called to imitate God and live a life of this kind of love.

What does this look like? Forgiveness means refusing to make others pay for what they've done to us. And it is true that refraining from lashing out at someone when you want to do so with all your being is agony. It is a form of suffering. You are absorbing the debt, taking the cost of it completely on yourself instead of taking it out on the other person. It hurts terribly. Many people would say that it feels like a kind of death, a Cross. But it is a death that leads to resurrection. Not only are those we forgive set free but we too are ushered into the healing freedom that forgiving someone brings instead of lifelong bitterness and cynicism.

We cannot forgive others by trying to forgive them. Only by being forgiven is forgiveness awakened. Only those who are forgiven much forgive much. This week, take some time to meditate on how deeply you are in the heart of God. Take some time to ponder how forgiving He has been of you. Picture yourself emulating that kind of forgiveness with those in your life and then take your first step. Dedicate the next seven days to simply praying for those in the world you like the least. Just pray for them.

In the light of God's indiscriminate love this month, go love like that and thereby, keep building the Kingdom.

I love you guys,

Herb

*For more information on various views of the reconciling work of Jesus on the Cross which exist within Christianity today, please see the eSight on our website dated February 12, 2012 at: <http://www.renewedheartministries.com/esights.aspx>

mean? When we place the transparency of the life of Jesus over these questions, a new dimension to our understanding begins to emerge. Did Jesus really mean, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father," and what does this mean when we apply it to what we believe about God's forgiveness? If you have ever wrestled with truly feeling that you are forgiven, this series is for you. If you have ever wrestled with truly forgiving others who have hurt you, this series is for you, too. Have your heart set free as you encounter God and experience His radical, self-sacrificial, other-centered forgiveness as you never have before. Experience the difference it makes when we embrace the truth that Jesus is the exact "image" of what God is like, especially in relation to divine forgiveness (Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:18; Matthew 5:44,45).

Both of these weekends will be available for free download on our website shortly, so be on the lookout and we'll keep you posted when they are released.

Thank you, each of you, for your prayers and your support. God shows up each weekend, and misconceptions are significantly impacted, lives are dramatically touched, and every weekend, Christ's kingdom gets' a little larger.

Testimonials

I've been thinking about emailing you guys for the last several weeks. Just to say "Thank You". Rather THANK YOU!!!!!! My husband and I have been church goers for years, but over the years we have felt ourselves feeling more and more like outsiders. We kept saying "wait, that's not what the gospels say" (to each other) and asking each other if we were just crazy. It got so bad that my husband felt like he simply wasn't welcome at church. We felt like the proverbial lepers. The people we work with are real people with real problems and we try to minister to them. It got to the point that we just didn't feel like anything about our church was even remotely relevant to them. In the middle of our discouragement a friend recommended your "Jesus Dialogue" series. It has changed our lives and breathed new life into our ministry that to us is simply and lovingly serving our clients (especially the hurting ones). I finally found comfort in the fact that I have NEVER been an "insider". Please keep doing what you are doing. I thought you might be able to use the encouragement. You are doing so MUCH and it really matters! - **S**

After listening to all but the last Jesus Dialogue, I am so excited! Pray for me. Being a dyed in the wool judge of other people until hearing your messages, my prayer is that I never forget the truth of God's value of each person. And that I will love those I meet with God's love enough to see where they are coming from and what they need before I jump in with my educated "two bits". Thank you for your ministry, God has used you to change my view of Him and thus my way of thinking about just about everything! Please don't forget to pray for me as I start to share this newer, truer view of God. Thank you so much! - **L**

Sermon of the Month



My Kingdom Is Not Of This World — by Herb Montgomery

Have you ever felt like Christianity, at large, was too political? That sometimes we trust too much to the power of our "vote" in America, than the revolutionary power to influence our society through radical, self-sacrificial, other centered love? The kingdoms of this world use their power *over* their subjects to maintain order. Jesus kingdom seeks to influence others by coming *under* people, regardless of their differences, and through humble servant love affecting society and culture from the inside out. Within Christian history we have been too quick to pick up the sword. This month's presentation is a call for those who follow Jesus, to lay down the sword and take up the Cross, not just as our message, but also as our way of life. It's our prayer that your heart will be renewed as you see God, once again, for who He truly is in this month's featured presentation, yours free!

Schedule

MARCH 9-10, 2012

Crescent City
Adventist Church
Crescent City, CA
707-464-5229

MARCH 16-24, 2012

Kaneohe Adventist Church
Kaneohe, HI 96744
808-247-4345

MARCH 30-31, 2012

Lee's Summit
Adventist Church
Lee's Summit, MO
816-697-3772

APRIL 13-14, 2012

Northern New England
Youth Conference
(Location to be Announced)
207-797-3760

APRIL 19-21, 2012

Princeton University
(Location to be Announced)
207-797-3760

APRIL 27-28, 2012

Lafayette Adventist Church
West Lafayette, IN
765-463-1221

APRIL 30 - MAY 4, 2012

Valley View Academy
Bluefield, WV
336-707-0077

MAY 18-19, 2012

Palo Cedro Adventist Church
Palo Cedro, CA
530-547-4777

MAY 27 - JUNE 2, 2012

North Carolina
Camp Meeting
Lake Junaluska, NC
704-596-3200

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