



A Measure of Forgiveness

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On the list of frustrating things, heavy traffic ranks pretty high. And drivers who don't signal, don't look, won't move over, cut people off, speed, tailgate, go too slow, or drive incredibly noisy or incredibly large vehicles rank among the world's most frustrating people.

I find it surprisingly easy to condemn drivers—other drivers, that is. I find it just as surprising how easy it is to forgive my own driving mistakes.

I wish I could say this phenomenon only pertained to driving. But the truth is, I find it far easier to forgive myself for just about anything than to forgive the same mistakes in others.

Jesus casts the spotlight on this all too human tendency when he says, "With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more."

At first glance, this might seem to be a simple matter of cause and effect: you forgive and then your act of forgiveness will merit forgiveness for you. But to understand Jesus' statement on those legalistic terms would be a mistake.

Jesus makes a similar point in Matthew 18:35, when he says, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

It might be easy to assume from this statement that God forgives us on the basis of our forgiveness of others. But that would be a false assumption.

God forgives us on the basis of Jesus' perfect sacrifice on our behalf and in our place.

In these statements, Jesus is not prescribing a new form of legalism; he is describing the nature of hearts that trust in him.

For example, when we trust in Christ, we no longer have anything to hide. The day will come, of course, when nothing

remains hidden (verses 21-23), and that is true whether we trust in Christ or not.

But for those who do trust him, that day is in effect already here—they have nothing to hide from him.

But the reason they have nothing to hide from Jesus is not that they are suddenly sinless. It is that they trust him to love them unconditionally and to forgive their sins, sins which they are no longer afraid to show him.

In the same way, those who trust Christ are free from the craving to measure others with the stern rod of selfishness.

Because they trust Christ, they can commit their fears and anxieties to him, which frees them from the need to get even or get back at others.

In other words, they know they are measured by Christ's rod of grace, which takes the starch out of their natural tendency to condemn others.

Whether it's in traffic, at the courthouse or around the dinner table, we're no longer slaves to our raw impulses. We are free to forgive others as God, for Christ's sake, forgave us, and as Christ lives in us, we do.

What Jesus says in verse 25 is a condemnation only to those who don't trust him—their selfish measuring rod is the only standard they know and the only one they understand.

But for those who trust the Redeemer, there is only one measure—the ever-unfolding heights and depths of the love of Christ.

I'm learning not to listen to my kneejerk reactions to miserable drivers. I'm learning to mutter, "God bless him" instead of... something else.

It's not only a good reminder of who I am in Christ, it's a hazy reflection of the heart of Christ which, by his grace, dwells in me. □

—J. Michael Feazell