

Lk. 23:34a “Father, Forgive Them!”

For the Children: Imagine your teacher tells you to do some maths problems. You explain that even though you have been told what to do, you cannot do it because you left your books and pens at home. The teacher could punish you for being so forgetful, but perhaps he or she is merciful, giving you more time to obtain the necessary items. God would be in His rights to have punished the world for rejecting His Son, even by ending the world. Instead He has given time for us to receive the necessary things we need to repent and believe – His Word and Spirit – so that we may be saved. **Questions:** Is it fair to punish people who have not heard of the Lord Jesus? Will God forgive anyone who has not repented? How can we reflect God’s forgiveness in our lives?

Introduction:

First Point: The Two Aspects of Forgiveness

- 1) **For Whom He Was Praying:** Some might say that Christ was only praying for forgiveness for the elect, but the context indicates that He was praying for the Romans and Jews, the “they” who crucified Him (v. 33). Similar language is used of the Jews in Acts 3:17, 13:27ff; and re the Gentiles in Acts 17:30
- 2) **No Contradiction:** This prayer does not contradict election, or “limited atonement,” Jesus’ refusal to pray for the world in Jn. 16:9, or His warnings of judgement on Israel (Lk. 23:27-31) or the nations (Mt. 25:31f). For the word “forgive” (to “send away”) can refer not only to the once-for-all removal of our sins from God’s sight, resulting in salvation; it can also refer to a temporary suspension or reprieve from a deserved penalty – as is the case here. This is a prayer seeking *time* for elect Jews and Gentiles to repent, if God would hold back His wrath against those who crucified His Son. See Acts 17:30. This is a prayer based on Jesus’ mission, to bring salvation not (yet) final judgement (Lk. 9:54)
- 3) **Our Pattern:** These 2 aspects of forgiveness – temporary suspension of the full penalty, aimed at giving time for repentance and final forgiveness – is reflected in our forgiveness of others. Instead of seeking our “pound of flesh,” we refrain from revenge and from pressing every point to the full, in the hope that the offender will repent. When he does so, we can drop the matter finally. For we keep in mind that Christ put up with much greater hurt and refrained from “throwing the book” at us, to give us time to repent; in order that we would be saved. Seeking repentance does require, though, that church discipline be applied at times. Rom. 13 must also be upheld, so that crimes are dealt with by the State

Second Point: The Non-Excuse of Ignorance

- 1) **There Is No Ignorance:** In one sense, every sinner knows deep down that he has offended God (Rom. 1). The Jews must also have felt guilty that they nailed Christ to the cross (Acts 2:23). Ignorance will be no excuse in the final judgement
- 2) **But God Uses Means:** However, because God has ordained that men be saved by hearing the Word and receiving the new birth by His Spirit, time is needed for the elect to receive that work of Word and Spirit. In the meantime, the Lord withholds the full weight of His wrath, giving time for Word and Spirit to dispel the willful ignorance of the elect and to confirm the wicked in their stubborn ignorance
- 3) **Using the Time:** We honour this prayer of Jesus and the time God gives those who do not know Him, by zealously using the means He has chosen – spreading the Gospel and praying that the Holy Spirit will move where He will

Conclusion:

