

Wednesday, March 17

Repentance

It is not unreasonable to want repentance from a wrongdoer before forgiving that wrongdoer, since, in the absence of repentance, hasty forgiveness may harm both the forgiver and the wrongdoer. The forgiver may be harmed by a failure to show self-respect. The wrongdoer may be harmed by being deprived of all all-important incentive– the desire to be forgiven–that could move him or her toward repentance and moral rebirth.

Does Christianity in fact require forgiveness without condition?

... Jesus' words from the cross are surely *not* offering universal forgiveness. Indeed, Jesus takes the trouble to offer a *reason* why forgiveness should be bestowed on *these particular wrongdoers*–namely, their ignorance that they are sacrificing the true son of God. (Do you think– in different circumstances– he would have said, “Father, forgive them even though they know full well what they are doing”?)

And consider the passage from the Lord's Prayer. One natural reading of the English word “as” is “in the manner of”– for example, “Do it as I do.” Thus one perfectly natural reading of the passage from the Lord's Prayer “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” is this: “in the realm of forgiveness, God, I pray that you treat me in the manner that I treat those who wrong me. If I will not forgive them unless they repent, I do not expect you to forgive me unless I repent.”

Jeffrie G. Murphy, Getting Even: Forgiveness and Its Limits