

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things which accompany salvation: Forgiveness

Good morning. Our subject today is 'Forgiveness'. The word forgiveness implies guilt. Guilty people need forgiveness whether they realise this fact or not. If someone stole from me and that person was subsequently apprehended, I could go to the courts of law and declare that I forgave that person. But because a crime had been committed, the wheels of justice would still move forward to convict and pass sentence upon the guilty person. The normal process of the law demands that the criminal be punished. This is all part of the process of government to uphold law and order either to protect people from crime or to show that crime does not pay. If, however, I stand up in court and not only state that I forgive the guilty person and that I am willing to take the punishment - then justice is satisfied and forgiveness is offered.

What is often not considered is that breaking human laws is only one part of the story. Crime, and possibly many other things, are the result of sin and sin is what God judges. Although human government might be satisfied with the punishment of a crime, God is not; a far greater issue is at stake.

The above illustration is a feeble attempt to introduce a greater story of how a righteous, holy and sin hating God can bring forgiveness to you and me, through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels illustrate the link between faith and forgiveness. The following show this truth.

Luke 5:17-26, has the incident of a paralysed man who was lowered through a hole in the roof to the feet of the Lord Jesus. Luke 5:20 states, "*When He [Jesus] saw their faith, He said to him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you'.*" The second incident is found in Luke 7:36-50. Luke 7:37-38 state, "*Behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil*". Luke 7:50 shows the Lord's appreciation: "*Then He [Jesus] said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'*" Both these incidents are worth reading to see the link between faith and forgiveness.

When Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God (see Genesis 2:15-3:7), they became guilty sinners. That disobedience had a massive effect upon the whole human race from that moment, damaging the close relationship that God had with His special creation, Adam and Eve. Additionally, it had a devastating impact upon the whole of creation. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve listened to Satan, acted upon his deceitful advice and the consequence of disobeying God was a guilty conscience. To try and hide their shame, they made clothes from leaves, felt exposed and hid themselves when they heard God coming to them in the garden paradise. No one can hide from God, not then, not now and not ever. God's action was to provide Adam and Eve with clothing made from animal skins. In this way God showed that something must die in order to be suitably clothed for His presence. Fig leaves were totally inadequate. God was teaching that sin had done serious damage, far deeper than outward clothing. There was inward spiritual damage. Judgement must be satisfied in order that true forgiveness can be effective.

There is a hymn by A. Midlane which summarises the situation very succinctly.

*The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Saviour's blood;
'Tis in the cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.*

*God could not pass the sinner by,
Justice demands that he should die;
But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be.*

*The judgement fell on Jesus' head,
'Twas in His blood sin's debt was paid;
Stern Justice can demand no more,*

And Mercy can dispense her store.

*The sinner who believes is free,
Can say, "The Saviour died for me:"
Can point to the atoning blood,
And say, "This made my peace with God."*

God's starting point

Let us look at a verse of Scripture to see God's starting point. Ephesians 1:7 states, *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."* We will look carefully at this verse to see how Paul, when writing to the Ephesians, unfolds slowly the amazing blessings contained in God's salvation. The first thing to notice that Paul starts with, *"In Him"*. Who is the Him? It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In the preceding verses Paul has unfolded further blessings and it will be worth turning to Ephesians 1 after the broadcast to read about God's blessings towards us in Christ. *"In Him"* or *"In Christ"* reminds us of the security that is true of the believer and the certainty of our salvation. Christ is perfect before God the Father. Being in Him, therefore, means that the Father sees us in the perfection of Christ. We are as near to the Father as Christ is Himself. No distance now in our relationship with divine persons! Remember Adam and Eve's broken relationship with God because they sinned.

"We have redemption". Paul is teaching that the believer in Christ has a redemption that cannot be taken away. This means we cannot lose our salvation. There is no way that having been delivered from condemnation we can be placed in that position again. Redemption tells us that a ransom has been paid, that we have been liberated from the bondage that we were in as sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ has bought us and we now belong to Him. We now have a new life since accepting Christ as our Saviour, no longer a slave of Satan but set free to willingly serve the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the price for our freedom!

What was the price that the Lord Jesus paid? *"Through His blood."* The price of our redemption has no monetary value. The price is of a different order entirely. There is not sufficient wealth in this whole world to compare to the value of the shed blood of Christ which He paid to secure the freedom of all those who trust Him as Saviour.

A meditation on Luke 22:42 which states, *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done"*, provides fruitful reasons for worship and gives us an understanding of the horror of Calvary. We find the Lord Jesus Christ as man in the garden of Gethsemane requesting the removal of the cup of judgement. Why would the Lord Jesus do this? Because He knew what it would mean to Himself, to be made sin under the righteous wrath of God. This was no light matter. That is why from the cross we get that agonising cry, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*, Mark 15:34. There is no answer because He was forsaken and God's judgement for sin was upon Him. This is confirmed to us from 2 Corinthians 5:21 which states, *"For He [God] made Him [the Lord Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* The result of that sacrifice upon the cross means simply that believers are made right with God. How? Because faith sees the Lord Jesus Christ as a substitute - He took the believer's place. Forgiveness comes at a very high price!

The next phrase is, *"the forgiveness of sins"*, the subject of our talk this morning. This forgiveness is from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is an eternal forgiveness to all who trust in Him as Saviour. It is not like the illustration given earlier which could only be effective in human courts of law which do not deal with sin, the root cause. Forgiveness removes the sins because the Lord Jesus paid the penalty. Forgiveness is part of God's wonderful salvation.

Let us just remind ourselves of this Gospel of the grace of God which brings forgiveness to those who trust the Lord as their Saviour:

- We are sinners and deserve God's judgement;
- The only solution to meet our guilt is in the mighty work of Christ's sacrifice.

The Gospel of God is the key to meeting our need, but more than that, it meets God's requirement for justice. In order for God to be righteous in all His ways, He must punish sin. That is not good news for sinners. Romans 3:23 states that everyone is a sinner. How then does God remain true to His holy standards of righteousness and at the same time make it possible to forgive the sinner? Who is going to step up to the judge and say I will take the punishment? I cannot do it for you because I am a sinner. You cannot do it for me because you are a sinner. In Job 9:1-35 we read about Job lamenting because there was no one who could embrace both God and himself to resolve his situation. In 1 Timothy 2:6 we are instructed that there is a Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is able to embrace both God and each sinner.

- The ransom was paid by the Lord Jesus Christ when He was crucified;
- He met all God's righteous claims that demanded punishment for sin;

- God was vindicated in His holy stand against sin;
- Death, the consequence of sin, was defeated;
- Real life is now possible because Jesus lives;
- The Holy Spirit now lives in each believer.

What the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross is fully capable of saving everyone, but a sinner must do the following:

- Truly believe that he or she is a sinner;
- That we are wrong and God is right;
- Truly repent of his or her sins;
- Accept by faith the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour;
- It is only then that we are forgiven.

At this point a person is forgiven because Jesus died and He took the punishment for all their sins. This liberates a person, sets them free from the bondage of sin and Satan and brings them forgiveness. Additionally, that person receives a new life and that life motivates to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. This new life brings about a number of other changes in each believer.

- A desire to find out more about the God who has forgiven them through reading the Scriptures;
- A desire to pray;
- To seek Christian fellowship;
- To turn away from old sinful habits, activities and unholy language;
- To realise that the indwelling Holy Spirit helps us live right.

I'm a Christian but I sometimes fail

Now you might be listening to this broadcast or reading the transcript, and think, "Well, I'm a Christian but I sometimes fail." Earlier I said we get a new life. You might like to read about Nicodemus in John 3:1-16. The Lord Jesus was speaking to Nicodemus about the need for a completely new beginning and He spoke of it as being born again.

In 1 John 1, we find the writer by the power of the Holy Spirit takes up the issue of what happens when a believer fails. Now John brings out a number of important truths.

In 1 John 1:6 we find the expression "*walk in darkness.*" A Christian is a person who walks in the light, not darkness. Colossians 1:3 states, "*He [God] has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*" As true Christians, we are no longer in darkness. The darkness represents the old life and Satan's bondage before being saved. Therefore, if a person states that they are a Christian but their life style is always like a non-Christian, then we may doubt the truth of their salvation. Because we have been saved and know forgiveness does not mean that we have become sinless. We would be deceiving ourselves.

1 John 1:8 clearly reminds us that we are not sinless. Whenever we realise that we have sinned or failed, then we must confess our sins asking to be forgiven for our failure. 1 John 2:1 states, "*My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*" An advocate is a person who intercedes on behalf of another. The advocate is like a barrister in a court of law. For us, the one who intercedes is "*Jesus Christ the righteous.*" In this way, we are reminded of Jesus Christ who died upon the cross to bring forgiveness. Therefore, praying to the Father for forgiveness for the failure, we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He then takes up our prayer and advocates on our behalf for a restoring of fellowship with God the Father. We have already seen that sin breaks the relationship or communion. For a Christian, even a temporary break in communion is disastrous. We need restoring as quickly as possible. Christian failure causes loss of power in our service for Christ. God cannot bless what we do if failure has come in. Our prayers on behalf of others or for Christian activity will go unanswered. Restoration is essential. Jesus Christ can truly restore our relationship with the Father because He does it on a righteous basis. He died and paid the price to redeem the believer. The sin that a Christian commits is a temporary failure needing recovery. Possibly we do not always realise the seriousness of drifting back into sins. But God the Father is a holy God and cannot tolerate sin even in His children. That is why John the Apostle writes in such a caring way, "*My little children*" as a warning but it also shows that the Lord Jesus in heaven cares about each one of us.

A forgiving attitude

The third area where forgiveness is needed is in our Christian fellowships, where we must maintain a forgiving attitude. When there are disagreements in the Christian fellowship, then things will not go well for our testimony to

others. We will find our Gospel endeavours hindered, there will be no blessing because those coming in will detect an atmosphere and will leave. Christians are expected to be different. Psalm 133:1 succinctly states, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”* Although this verse is found in the Old Testament, it is applicable for all time and in every Christian fellowship. Further to this, we are instructed to *“keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”*, Ephesians 4:3. The Holy Spirit has established a unity to which all Christians belong, whether this is considered globally or in our local fellowship. We are not told to make it but we are told to keep it!

We can best illustrate a forgiving attitude by turning to Matthew 18:21-35. The Apostle Peter asks the Lord Jesus the question as found in Matthew 18:21, *“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”* Now this is not a disagreement in terms of activity within the church or fellowship. For example, some in the fellowship might want to concentrate on youth work, others may want to use Gospel literature to give out to those living around your church or Gospel hall. As long as you have willing and sufficient volunteers, then both can go along in tandem. If there are not sufficient, then the sharing of time and personnel may be required to achieve both. What Peter is considering is someone who clearly does wrong to another in the fellowship, whatever that might be. Let us remind ourselves that this wrong would also be considered a sin and therefore God the Father would also be offended. When Peter answers his own question by stating *“up to seven times”*, he is limiting his act of forgiveness towards a fellow believer and implying that on the eighth time he can take matters into his own hands and deal with the trouble maker. This is not grace or love.

The Lord's response is, *“Up to seventy times seven”*, Matthew 18:22, that equals four hundred and ninety times! This number is found in Scripture in a number of different places. However, I believe the answer that the Lord gives implies that we forgive until the Lord Jesus comes and establishes His kingdom and when He reigns in righteousness He will personally deal with all problems. There is not time to go into the details of my conclusion but for those who would like to search out, then start in the book of Daniel through to the book of Revelation tracing the seventy weeks. A note of caution, the ‘seventy weeks’ prophecy has to do with Israel not the church. Now this does not mean that the Lord's reply does not apply to us; it does. As far as Christians are concerned, we are told that we do not avenge ourselves because the Lord states quite clearly that vengeance is His work, see Romans 12:19. Israel cry to God for vengeance upon their enemies. Christians pray for those who are their enemies. So, as Christians, we are always to seek peace, suffer wrong and maintain the truth of God's word.

Let us recap the talk this morning:

1. As a sinner I need God's forgiveness through Christ that I might escape God's judgement.
2. As a Christian, if at any time I fail I need Jesus as the Advocate to restore my temporary lost communion.
3. I must always endeavour to be forgiving in Christian relationships within my local fellowship.

Thank you for listening, and may the Lord's richest blessing be upon you.

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