



YOU CAN BE FORGIVEN

Quest Lesson A-8

The Problem: A group of young men were talking in the church yard after a Bible class. One of them sadly declared, "I can never serve Christ. I have committed too many serious sins already. God can't forgive all that." His friends gently appealed to him. "Certainly God can forgive," they argued. "What about the dying thief, Mary Magdalene, David, Moses, and myriads of others whom the Lord forgave and used in His service! And God will forgive you too! He can forgive all of us." But the young man would not listen. He went away unconvinced and gave up the faith. His subsequent life outside of Christ was filled with sorrow and tragedy. A few years later it ended in a motor accident.

This tragic story emphasizes the dilemma of many people today. They are so overwhelmed by a sense of guilt that they cannot respect themselves. Because they cannot forgive themselves, they seriously doubt that God can forgive them either. Sometimes they try to bury their guilt by strenuously involving themselves in work or pleasure, but it comes back every once in a while to haunt them. Or the guilt which has not been handled may be the underlying cause of attitudes and complexes that provoke unsatisfactory kinds of behavior. Some people visit a psychiatrist and confess it all to him. Others confess to a priest or a minister. But always: there is the lurking suspicion that, because these people are just human like themselves, they cannot really forgive their sins. The guilt remains, and is even more intense because the past failure has been mulled over so much in conversation.

What is the answer? How can a person know for sure that his sin is forgiven? How can we have peace and self-respect, knowing that the past is taken care of, and that we are accepted by the Lord?

Objectives

First, we will note how the Cross of Christ makes forgiveness possible.

Second, we will see that God's forgiveness takes care of the past

Third, in Scripture forgiveness includes transformation of life.

Fourth, we will observe the Bible teaching that God's forgiveness and justification are one and the same.

Fifth, the question will be answered: "How may you have forgiveness?"

I. The Cross Makes Forgiveness Possible

Because Jesus Christ died in our place, bearing our guilt and suffering our punishment, our sin can be forgiven. That is the clear message of Scripture.

The Word

1. Why did Christ allow His blood to be poured out on the Cross? Matthew 26:27-28.
2. What did Christ take upon Himself that caused His great suffering? Isaiah 53:6; 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21.
3. How many sacrifices were necessary for Christ to earn the right to forgive us? Hebrews 7:27; 9:28; 10:11-12.
4. What is one of the great covenant promises which the Lord says will be fulfilled to believers in Christ? Hebrews 8:12; (compare Jeremiah 31:34).

Explanation: Christ's death upon the Cross renders it possible for us to be forgiven. He died for the sins of those who had believed in Old Testament times (Hebrews 9:15). They had been forgiven already, but conditionally upon Christ's dying for them. (See 1 Corinthians 15:17-18). He provided expiation for our sins, "and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2; compare 4:10). Expiation (propitiation) is making amends for wrongdoing. Such amends for our sin were made when Jesus suffered and died. The death and resurrection of Christ are the most significant events in history. Because of Jesus' suffering our guilt can, metaphorically speaking, be cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Our sins can be placed as far from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). And that is an infinite distance because the earth is round.

Relevance: It is unconscious blasphemy to say, "God cannot forgive me. My sins are too serious." In the light of the infinite suffering of Jesus on Calvary's Cross, it is clear that your sin can be forgiven. He has already suffered for it. Your part is to accept the Cross as being for you. This is why Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

II. God's Forgiveness Takes Care of the Past

There is a legal aspect in God's forgiveness of our sin. Because of the Cross, He abolishes the guilt which we incurred by the sin which we committed.

The Word

5. What steps were taken in the earthly sanctuary making it possible for God to reconcile a guilty Israelite to Himself? Leviticus 4:29-31.
6. What must we do if we wish to be forgiven? 1 John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13.
7. What necessary work is done by our heavenly High Priest in the sanctuary above providing forgiveness for us? Hebrews 9:11-15, 24; 1 John 2:13 1 Timothy 2:5.

Explanation: In the ancient sanctuary service, the past was atoned for when the sinner brought his animal sacrifice and offered it in the manner specified by God (Leviticus 4):

1. He placed his hand on the head of the animal, symbolizing that he was a penitent, and that this was his sacrifice;
2. The sinner himself took the life of the animal;
3. Then the priest sprinkled the blood either before the veil in the Holy Place or upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering in the court. (See Leviticus 4:6, 17, 25, 30). Priestly sprinkling of blood was vital because the text says, "... the priest shall make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him" (verse 31; compare verses 20, 26, 35).

Notice that "atonement" was not provided by the sacrifice only. The sacrifice was absolutely basic and essential, but priestly ministry in some part of the sanctuary was also necessary. Only then was it true to say that atonement had been provided and the confessing sinner forgiven.

Just so, for the Christian today there are three acts necessary for the forgiveness of our sins:

1. We must confess to God in the name of Christ;
2. The death of the Savior was essential. His death was foreshadowed by every animal sacrifice in the ancient Israelite sanctuary or temple;
3. Christ, our heavenly High Priest and Mediator, must present in the heavenly sanctuary the benefits of His sacrifice on behalf of the confessing sinner. Just as the earthly priest sprinkled the blood on some part of the temple structure or furniture, so our High Priest today presents in the heavenly sanctuary the merits of His shed blood for the repentant sinner.

Only Christ can forgive sin. No human can offer in heaven the merits of an atoning sacrifice which he did not make. Only Christ is our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) and heavenly Advocate (1 John 2:1), because only He provided the sacrifice. Christ earned on Calvary the right to forgive sin. No human being has that right, because no human being could ever bear our sins in his own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24).

Relevance: When your sin is forgiven by Christ you do not have to condemn yourself any longer. (See Romans 8:1). You are free from guilt and in the eyes of God you are as though you had never sinned.

III. Forgiveness Involves Transformation of Heart

Forgiveness provided in the ancient sanctuary service involved cleansing of the soul from sin. It did not merely take care of the past. Forgiveness in the Old Testament, as in the New, involves restoration of the penitent to covenant union or fellowship with God, and an inner spiritual renewal by which the soul is made a partaker of the divine nature.

The Word

8. When priestly "atonement" or ministry was provided, what was the result for the individual? Numbers 8:21; Leviticus 16:30; (compare Leviticus 4:31).
9. What does the book of Hebrews teach is done for our inner spiritual life when the merits of Christ's sacrifice are applied for us in heaven? Hebrews 9:12-14, 18-24; 10:19-22.
10. What does John say the merits of Christ's sacrifice do for us when we accept Him? 1 John 1:7-9.
11. When David was seeking forgiveness, for what inner spiritual experience did he plead? Psalm 51:7, 10.
12. What does Jesus' forgiveness do for the person who has been a captive of sin? Luke 4:17-18; (compare Colossians 1:13-14).

Explanation: The believer today may "enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus" and have his heart "sprinkled clean from an evil conscience" (Hebrews 10:19, 22). The application of Christ's sacrifice for us in heaven results in our "conscience" (or consciousness) being purged "from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14). The "deliverance" which Jesus offered was "forgiveness" (Greek of Luke 4:18). When Jesus forgives He does not merely wipe out the past; He transforms lives. He delivers us from the dominion of Satan and the shackles of sin. God's forgiveness, as one writer says, "is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness for sin, but reclaiming from sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart." Ellen G. White, *Mount of Blessing*, p. 114.

Relevance: Christ's forgiveness is cleansing of the soul from the power of sin. When we forgive one another we agree to forget the past. But Jesus does much more than that! He comes into our lives, purifies us, and provides the power not to commit the sin again. (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Romans 6:18-22).

IV. Forgiveness Is Justification

"Justification" is a word used by the Apostle Paul to refer to God's act of making the sinner right with Himself. All that we have seen as involved in forgiveness is also involved in justification. In fact, the two words in Scripture refer to the same experience.

The Word

13. How did Paul relate "forgiveness" and "justification?" Acts 13:38-39.
14. In what terms does Paul identify justification and imputation of righteousness? Romans 4:1-5.
15. How does he identify imputation of righteousness with forgiveness? Romans 4:6-8.

Explanation: In Romans chapter 4, Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." The word "counted" is a translation of the Hebrew and Greek words which mean "imputed" or "reckoned." The passage simply means that when Abraham believed God, he was given the gift of righteousness, just as the same gift is given to us by the Holy Spirit when we believe (Romans 8:9-10). We do not earn righteousness by what

we do. We believe in Christ, and He bestows upon us His righteousness. This experience Paul calls justification. Then he identifies the same experience with forgiveness (Romans 4:7-8). Forgiveness is justification, or the imputation of

righteousness. That simply means that when you are forgiven, or justified, God's righteousness is poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 5:53 Titus 3:5-7).

Relevance: Justification, like forgiveness, is transformation of heart. When Christ justifies you He provides the new birth experience so that you become a "new creature" in Christ Jesus. This is what Paul means by reconciliation with God (2 Corinthians 5:17-20). Now you have peace because guilt and fear of punishment have gone. Now you have found Jesus to be your "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Corinthians 7:30).

V. How May You Have Forgiveness?

There are three simple conditions upon which God will accept our confession of sin, and give us complete forgiveness.

The Word

16. How do we become willing to repent, or turn away from sin? Acts 5:31; Romans 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25.
17. If we are willing to forgive others what will God do for us? Matthew 6:12, 14-15; compare Matthew 18: 21-35.
18. How does John describe the importance of trusting Christ completely? 1 John 4:15-19.

Explanation: First, we must be willing to accept Christ's gift of repentance. Repentance is sorrow for the past and turning away from it. Such attitudes are the Lord's gift to us. You cannot force yourself to be sorry for sin and to turn away from it. You must receive God's gift by faith. Forgiveness is always associated with genuine repentance. (See Isaiah 55:7; Mark 1:43 Luke 24:47).

Second, we must be willing to forgive others who have wronged us. Jesus cannot forgive our sins if we cherish a bitter, unforgiving spirit towards others.

Third, we must trust the Lord Jesus Christ. If you love Him you will trust Him, and believe that He takes away your guilt and changes your heart. The first and second points are dependent upon this one. We can only repent and forgive others as "we know and believe the love God has for us" in communion, fellowship, and total union with Christ (1 John 4:16). Believing in Him is much more than merely accepting the historical facts of Christianity. It is total surrender to the lifestyle which He wants us to enjoy. Believing in Jesus is entering into a close spiritual union with Him, so that His way of life becomes ours. It is allowing Him to live out His life through | us (Galatians 2:20). That is why belief makes forgiveness a reality for the Christian. You know that your past guilt is forgotten, and you know that a new power has come into your life. That power is Christ. 'To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43 RSV).

Relevance: Are you willing to believe and receive the wonderful blessing of forgiveness which Jesus is offering you?

Will you trust Him and not condemn yourself any more or doubt that you have been forgiven?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The Bible teaches that we should confess our sins to a human priest.
 - b. Jesus suffers His atoning sacrifice many times.
 - c. Jesus' ministry in heaven is essential to the forgiveness of our sins.
 - d. Justification is only a legal declaration by God. It is not transformation of heart.
2. Discuss: Are there times when we should confess our sins other people as well as to God? (See Matthew 5:23-24).