

Biblical Forgiveness- The Foundation

We are beginning this series in preparation for the next study we will be doing in 1 John. This study began as I struggled to understand 1 John 1:9- **If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Now, when you read this verse, does it cause any of you any confusion? Well I am a person that has an amazing capacity to float two mutually exclusive ideas at the same time until it is brought to my attention that they contradict. I often schedule 2 things for the same time and there is no trigger in my brain that tells me there is a problem.

Well this verse is easy to understand in one sense. If we confess our sins God forgives them. I believe that. And then, if I am studying the atonement of Christ I also believe that when Christ died, he paid the price for every sin that any believer would ever commit. No future payment for the forgiveness of sins would ever need to be made. All sins that would be forgiven were forgiven by Christ's death.

Do you see the problem here? We were forgiven and we need to be forgiven. Some work is needed to reconcile these two truths in scripture. Our sins are forgiven, once and for all in Christ's crucifixion. Our sins still need confessed in order to be forgiven. Both are true, but work needs done to determine **how** they are true.

And that is what inspired this study.

When we are done I am hoping that we will understand these things-

1. How does God forgive sins?
2. What does confession of sins for a believer accomplish?
3. What does it mean when a believer forgives another believer of sins?
4. How can you know if you have forgiven someone?
5. What does forgiveness entail?
6. What does forgiveness not entail?
7. Can I, should I, forgive someone who has not confessed sin?
8. For whose good should I forgive someone else? Mine or theirs?
9. Does a believer's forgiveness of someone else transact any business between that person and God, or is it just a sentimental psychological statement?

Now we face two dangers here in this series. We can make more of forgiveness than what it is. And we can make less of forgiveness than what it is. I hope, as we study this together, we come to the happy medium where we see forgiveness exactly as it is.

OK Let's look at forgiveness from a Biblical perspective.

I am going to begin with a statement that puts forgiveness in its proper perspective.

There is no sin that goes unpunished.

That is the most important fact to understand about forgiveness.

There is no sin that goes unpunished.

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

²³ For the **wages of sin is death**, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Genesis 2:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Romans 3:20-26 (NKJV)

²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through **the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,**

²⁵ **whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,**

²⁶ **to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

Hebrews 2:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, **to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**

(propitiation is the appeasement or averting of God's wrath and justice Holman Bible Dictionary.)

¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ 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.
² And He Himself is **the propitiation for our sins**, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

1 John 4:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to *be* **the propitiation** for our sins.

John 1:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The **Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**

These verses are to show 2 things.

Our sin deserves punishment.

Christ took upon Himself the punishment for our sin.

There are lots of other verses.

This is primarily to show one thing. **There is no sin that goes unpunished.**

That leads to the question- **how does God forgive sin?**

Are there any sins that we confess to God and God says, that sin does not matter. I will simply forget about it?

I don't think that anyone can come up with a verse that says that.

All good theology says that if it was a sin, it deserved punishment. In order for God to **remain Just** He had to punish it. So it will either be punished in **Christ's death**, or it will be punished in **our death**. It has to be one or the other.

So how does God forgive sin? He arranged for it to be punished in someone else, namely Christ. It is extremely simple. Sin is never ever overlooked. It is punished.

There is a sense that **God never forgives sin**. He **punishes** sin. But He forgives **sinners** of their sin by placing the punishment on Christ.

There is not a single sin ever committed that is granted immunity to punishment by forgiveness.

God never simply overlooks a sin and allows it to exist without punishment.

There are no **sins** that are ever granted immunity by forgiveness. There are only **sinners** that are granted immunity by forgiveness.

Do you see the important difference? If we are to understand forgiveness, we have got to understand this. **Justice demands the full penalty for sin**. And that is the reason that Christ had to die. If God could grant immunity without punishment for sin, if He could forgive sin without a just penalty, there would have been no need for Christ to die. Forgiveness by God comes with a price tag that only He can give. This is foundational truth to everything else that follows.

Also, we need to understand something about sin. When a child steals a cookie out of a cookie jar, that is a sin that required Christ to die. When we deceive each other, those are sins that required Christ to die. Justice must be accomplished. So we do well to never get soft on our own sin. It is never **not** a big deal. It's very existence is repugnant to God.

So we see that God punishes sin. That is the starting point.

So then how do we humans gain this forgiveness for our sin?

Romans 3:²¹ **But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,**

²² **even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.**

Our focus is on the last phrase. Humans receive forgiveness by **believing in Christ**. What does that mean? Among other things it means that we believe that what Christ did on the cross counts for us. We come to Christ because of our sin and our sin is discovered to have been already **paid for** by the blood of Christ. We count on Christ as a propitiation toward God for our sin. He appeased God by taking upon Himself our penalty.

Ephesians 2:4-9 (NKJV)

⁴ **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,**

⁵ **even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**

⁶ **and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

⁷ **that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

⁸ **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,**

⁹ **not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

So we enter this relationship with God where **God** provides for us those things we could never deserve and never earn- which is **grace**. And we enter it by faith in Christ. And this faith results in a forgiven past and a new life.

Now let's look at how Christ described what forgiveness is. This is the ultimate teaching on Forgiveness. I would like us to read it all but for now there is one section I want to zero in on. The passage is Matt 18:15-35. This is your homework. Please read it several times and refresh yourself with what it says.

I very much encourage you to study this passage for the next 3 weeks. Read it and meditate on it. Jarrod read it earlier but I want to read it again.

Matthew 18:23-35 (NKJV)

23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28 But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'

29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done.

32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.

33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'

34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35 So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Forgiveness is seen by God as the release of a debt. That is one of the primary lessons of this story.

In the story no one else was made to pay the debt, like Christ did for us. So this is not describing the process for how **God forgives sin**. In the story people begged for the debt to be forgiven, but technically it wasn't even a sin.

So I don't think the primary point is about repentance or forgiveness.

What is the primary point then? The point is that we are to forgive as we have been forgiven. We are to grant to others the forgiveness we have been granted.

And it explains to us what the sin debt is like when it is forgiven. And what we learn is the debt existed and in forgiveness it was removed. That is the point we want to focus on right now. We can never expand too much on a parable. Parables usually have a few simple points and when you expand them beyond that you can get into great error.

So we learn in this parable-

Sin creates a debt and forgiveness is the removal of that debt.

Forgiveness, as God defines it, is when a sin debt that cannot be repaid is forgiven. When it is forgiven, no payment from the sinner to have the sin forgiven **is expected** or **could be paid** even if offered . It would be cruel and Satanic to demand it and it would be prideful to offer it.

In the parable Jesus uses the example of a real monetary debt to make the point that if you are forgiven that debt, you must be ready to offer that forgiveness and to do it with your whole heart, being glad to extend the forgiveness you received. That is the primary point.

Now let's think about this. What makes a sin a sin? Think about it. How do we determine if we have committed a sin. If my wife asks me to bring her her blue coat and I bring her her green coat, have I sinned? Probably not. Why? What I did does not cross the boundary of what God said is a sin. But if I steal someone's coat, then **I have** sinned. Why? Because God has stated that I am not allowed to do that thing.

Sin is determined by the truth of **what God says** and sometimes by the truth of **why I did or did not do that thing**. The real underlying point is that there is only **one source** that can determine what sin is. You or I cannot do it. This world and its people are not our creation. We have no idea what the world was created for and what violates the Creator's intention. There is only one source worthy of determining what sin is and that is the Creator God.

So if you sin against me, what makes it a sin? It is a sin because God says so. So logically, then, David understood this clearly in Psalms 51 when he says, **against you and you only have I sinned.**

All sin is sin because God said it is sin. So in one sense all sin is not primarily **against people**. It is against **the Creator of those people** because He said that people should and should not be treated in certain ways.

This is extremely important to understand. **All sin is ultimately against God** because God is the only one with the right to say what sin is.

Now follow me here. If all biblically defined sin is sin against God, what is all biblically defined forgiveness? Could it really be anything but forgiveness by God?

This is an extremely important question. If we answer this wrongly we will apply forgiveness wrongly.

If forgiveness of sin is the release of a debt, can there be forgiveness that **does not** remove that debt? If I say I forgive you but God does not forgive you, have I forgiven you? Have you been released from anything?

If forgiveness is the removal of a burden for which I must be punished, can it be forgiveness if the burden has not been removed?

We will be dealing with these questions in future sermons.

But there is one more very important question we need to answer and it is the one I started with this morning.

So if our sins, past, present and future, were taken on by Christ and already punished so we could be forgiven of them, why do we still need forgiveness?

Well, I suppose that if God's only goal in our salvation was the cancellation of our debt, any further application of forgiveness would be unnecessary. We could live blissfully unaware of our sin and go into eternity unchanged. But that is not God's purpose in salvation. He has removed the guilt in the court of law. Now He desires we learn to live for the pleasure of God. And He wants us to experience His uninterrupted fellowship.

We have got to get the idea that what we do has an effect on our fellowship with God. And when we sin, it is not God who has moved. It is we who have moved. We have distanced ourselves from God by choosing that which distances us.

If Christ's death paid for all sins that would ever be committed, what happens when we now confess our sins to God. We will talk next week about the ministry of reconciliation carried out by believers. But for now we will limit our scope to asking God for the forgiveness of immediate sins.

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There is something very important to know about this verse. The word forgive is in the aorist tense. This means once and done. He does not keep on forgiving. He has forgiven and it is complete.

John MacArthur says this- **What John is actually saying here about confession is that since believers are forgiven, they will regularly confess their sins. Stated another way, their forgiveness is not because of their ongoing confession, but their ongoing pattern of penitence and**

confession is because of their forgiveness and transformation.

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1-3 John.

He also says this.

Perhaps the most popular but erroneous view of confession in this context is that believers are forgiven of only those sins they confess. If that were correct, it would mean that Unconfessed sins remain with believers until the judgment seat of Christ, at which time they will have to give an account for those iniquities. But such is simply not the case. No one will enter heaven with a list of Unconfessed sins still hanging over his head (cf. [1 Cor. 15:50](#); [Gal. 5:21](#); [Eph. 5:5](#); [Rev. 22:15](#)), because the finished work of Jesus Christ completely covers all of the sins of those who believe, including those that remain Unconfessed.

As the apostle Paul wrote:

David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." ([Rom. 4:6-8](#); cf. [8:33](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 3:13](#); [Col. 2:13](#)).

MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1-3 John.

It is interesting that verse 6 in first John is talking about **fellowship** with God. **Fellowship** is different than **relationship**. Jeremiah is my son. Now there may have been times when our fellowship was not as good as it could have been. But our relationship never changed. There are times when his sin had cut off our communication. But he has always been my son.

That is how it is with God also. If we are a child of God, we are as saved as we could ever be. Every sin has been covered in such a way that they could never be held against us in the final judgment. We are sons and daughters of God. But can those sins **interrupt fellowship**? Yes. They can grieve God. If we will not confess those sins, if we will not agree with God, those sins will most assuredly cut us off from the closeness of God that we so need.

Consider the few examples in these verses-

Ephesians 4:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Psalms 66:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

1 Peter 3:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor

to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

And the last example is Jesus, who lost fellowship due to OUR sin, which is an exception to the rule.

Mark 15:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

When we choose to live in sin we experience **interrupted** fellowship with God. That is a certainty.

And how is that fellowship restored? It is restored by us agreeing with God that we have a problem that needs fixed. It is not that we need saved all over again. It is like Peter's example when Christ wanted to wash Peter's feet and Peter said no, wash my whole body. And Christ said that was not necessary. It is not that Christ must die again for this new sin that we have sinned. No. All those transactions are done and behind us. That which was done to forgive our sin is completed. But sometimes we need that which **was done in the past by Christ** to be **brought to bear** on what we have done **now**. We need to be reminded that we are forgiven of what we have done. And we need to be clear that **we** have been the problem in our relationship with God. We have to clearly say that we have sinned, we have no excuse for sinning, and we need to experience the forgiveness that Christ has provided again and anew. Repentance is part of that process where we change our mind about our sin. We get on board with **God's rule** and we abandon **our own rule** of our lives. So again we see that all forgiveness of sin, on the day that Christ died or today, is received on the completed work of Christ. It is a fresh bringing to bear what Christ has already done for us.

Now, most Christians probably don't have too much trouble agreeing upon what God's forgiveness is and how God forgives sin. And forgiveness is truly a wonderful thing. But when we move on to our next topic- the application of forgiveness, we will quickly move into the realm where there are dramatic differences in how we apply what Christ says about our need to forgive others. We will have many questions that need answered. And some are more easily answered than others. We will do our best to answer as many as we can. But for now I want to focus the rest of our time this morning on **the amazing wonderful joyful implications of forgiveness.**

If you are in Christ, He has done everything necessary for every one of your sins to be forgiven. In fact, in the sense of guilt and condemnation, they are

already forgiven. There is never a sin that a believer commits that will be held against them for condemnation.

In the sense of never facing condemnation for a single sin, if you are a believer you are as free from that as you can possibly be. Your sin burden has been removed forever in a legal sense. Your sin debt has been undone. You no longer owe the spiritual penalty for that sin. Your sins will never be brought up in judgment against you. It is impossible that such a thing could happen because Christ paid the penalty for them. God would now be **unjust** to refuse to accept the penalty that Christ paid for your sin. That is how rooted in justice your justification is as a believer.

So if you are a believer you can look in the mirror and say- Christ has paid the penalty for every one of your sins.

And this truth also works itself out in our fellowship with God. If we confess the sin that we have committed after our salvation, Christ promises that they will no longer interfere with our fellowship with God. The forgiveness of Christ will be brought to bear to the sin we have committed. Our fellowship will be restored and God will do the cleansing that is needed to free our lives of the sinful act or attitude when we confess that sin.

Now this is just wonderful. If we are in Christ there is no continuum on which our sins are forgiven in regard to our condemnation. They are absolutely and totally forgiven to be remembered no more against us. They absolutely cannot condemn us if we are in Christ. It can not happen.

And along with this, **to the degree** we confess these sins and agree with God about them and repent of them, our fellowship will also be restored. Now **this** is on a continuum. There are degrees in this. Our closeness to God does not need to be impaired by the sins we have committed. God promises that if we will deal with them as He prescribes they will be removed from impeding our fellowship with God.

Isn't that absolutely wonderful?

Forgiveness accomplishes 2 things.

It removes God's death penalty for sin from us.

It restores fellowship to God and to His people.

Forgiveness does not do everything. But it does the most important somethings.

Forgiveness by God is when the death penalty of our sins is removed by Christ paying the penalty for us. Forgiveness is experienced anew for each sin when the forgiveness that Christ provided is appropriated to cover a sin we have committed. This fresh appropriation of what Christ did restores fellowship with God and fellow believers.

This sets us up for next week's look at how we go about forgiving each other.