

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (06).

August 11, 2007.

Review.

We return this morning to the series of studies that I have entitled, “**The Christian Life**”. In this series we have been looking at some aspects of what the Bible says about our salvation in Christ. The prophet Jonah declared “Salvation is from the Lord.” (*Jon.2:9*). We have seen this truth again and again in the last five studies I have completed in this series. From eternity to eternity salvation is God’s work in the sinner. The sinner does not and cannot save himself. The Lord God is the One who saves you. When the Lord saves you, He changes you.

There is no denying the fact that men can change themselves. But when a man changes himself, his changes are only outward. His changes are cosmetic. His changes are an outward renovation. And more than often, his changes are temporary. When God changes the sinner, He changes the sinner from the inside to the outside. In *Ezek.36:26* the Lord promised, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Note the word “**new**”. It is the same word Paul used in *2Cor.5:17*. The change God works is radical and permanent. God does not renovate. God changes. He removes the old and replaces the old with the new. I want you to mark this fact in your minds : God does not merely remove the old. He replaces the old with the new. God changes the sinner’s heart, mind, will and thoughts. This brings automatic change to the sinner’s outward conduct. This is very important for the study of sanctification which we will come to later.

In our studies I worked out for you the details of the extensive and radical changes God makes when He saves the sinner. *2Cor.5:17* sums up what God does by saying that He makes us a new creation in Christ. There are those who try to dispute that salvation is all

God's work in the sinner by arguing that it is the sinner who must repent and believe. We are not disputing this fact. However, the Bible makes it absolutely clear that saving repentance and saving faith are gifts God gives to the sinner. *Eph.2:8* and *Phil.1:29* tell us that saving faith is God's gift to the sinner. Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Paul is continuing to emphasize God's initiative and activity in our salvation. He does not want us to forget that salvation is all of grace, God's grace. Paul's next point is that the response of faith does not come from any human source. It is God's gift to us. Paul's word order is emphatic. Paul wrote : "and this not of yourselves, of God the gift." A sharp contrast is set up between "**yourselves**" and "**God**". The faith that saves us does not originate with us. The faith that saves cannot be exercised by mere human ability. This faith that saves us is God's gift to us. The exercise of this faith is the result of God working in us.

Phil.1:29 reaffirms this truth about saving faith. Paul wrote, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Paul's statement is emphatically Christocentric. What God is doing for the Philippians is all about Christ, for His sake and for His glory. The verb "**granted**" is the Greek verb *charizomai*. The root of this verb is *charis*, "**grace**". The verb means "**to give graciously as a gift.**" Paul's point to the Philippians and to every believer is that you are a peculiarly privileged people. God has graciously granted you two gifts. The first is, to believe in Christ.

Peter told the Jewish religious leaders that God exalted Jesus "to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." (*Acts 5:31*). How did the apostolic church describe the repentance of the Gentiles? They said, "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life." (*Acts 11:18*). Without this gracious granting from God there can be no repentance and no forgiveness of sins.

Side by side with God's saving grace, we saw God's preserving grace. God saves the sinner and God preserves the sinner for all eternity. The God who has the ability to save is the same God who has the ability to preserve or keep. Jude said He "is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." (*Jude 1:24*).

Forgiveness.

Today, we come to look at what the Bible teaches us about the forgiveness of our sins in Christ. What does it mean to "forgive"? It means to remove sins from someone. To forgive sins is not to disregard them and do nothing about them, but to liberate a person from them, their guilt, and their power. When we ask God to forgive our sins, we are asking Him to remove them away from us so that we do not stand guilty of them or under their power.

Please turn to *Lk.24:44-49*. (**read**). The Old Testament wrote about Christ. Jesus is the topic of the Old Testament. Today we have to say that the topic of the whole Bible is Jesus. Each time we come to the word of God, we must have the attitude of the Greeks who came seeking Jesus. These Greeks came to Philip and said, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." (*Jn.12:20-21*). Our prayer as we read God's word must be, "O Holy Spirit, we wish to see Jesus. Open our eyes, our minds, our understanding, so that we could see Jesus."

Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews, "if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me." (*Jn.5:46*). The Jews knew that Moses wrote about the Messiah and that the Messiah was coming. Peter quoted Moses on this point in his second sermon in *Acts 3:22*. But the Jews had no clear understanding who that Messiah would be and how to identify Him. The disciples were facing the same problem of not understanding. In *Lk.9:43-45* when Jesus spoke of His suffering and death, we are told that the disciples "did not understand this statement." In *Lk.18:34* we have the

same problem. Jesus spoke about His impending suffering and death and we are told, “the disciples understood none of these things.”

And so Luke tells us that after Jesus made it clear that the O.T. spoke about Him, He opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures. And He reaffirmed that His death and resurrection were the fulfillment of what was written about Him. And then He commissioned them to their task. Beginning from Jerusalem, they must go out into the world and preach a message. The message must be preached “in His name”. They are His servants, His messengers and they are preaching by His authority. The message they must preach is “repentance for forgiveness of sins.”

Repentance involves, first and foremost, a turning. The basic premise about repentance is that you are wrong about what you know about God, what you think about God and what you believe about God. You are wrong about what you think about yourself before God and believe about yourself. You are wrong about what you think is the way to God and how you can approach God. You are wrong about what you think and believe about sin. You are wrong about what you think about Christ and believe about Christ. You are wrong about what you think about God’s word and believe about God’s word.

The Bible is clear about the fact that there is only one true and living God and this God has revealed Himself to us. (*Isa.44:6; 45:5; Psa.9:16*). There is one clear way to identify this true and living God. He has a Son. His Son’s name is Jesus. (*Matt.1:21*). And He has sent His Son into this world to be our Savior. (*Jn.17:3*). The Bible is clear on the fact that there is one and only one way to God. Jesus declared, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (*Jn.14:6*). “No one” means there are no exceptions to this rule. The Bible is clear about the fact of who you are as a man or a woman and as a sinner before God. The Bible is clear about the fact that there is only one Savior who can save you from your sins, and that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. (*Matt.1:21*).

Repentance requires that you change your mind about God, what you think about God and the way to God. Repentance requires that you change your mind about who you are and how you can approach God. Repentance requires that you change your mind about sin and your ability to overcome sin on your own and change your own life. Repentance requires that you change your mind about Christ and His absolutely indispensable role in your salvation. Repentance requires that you turn from your old way of life, that you turn from your idolatries, and that you turn to the true and living God and embrace Him in faith. (cf. *1Thess.1:9*). Repentance requires that you change your mind about what you think about God's word and believe about God's word.

As a Christian you are constantly correcting, refining and deepening your knowledge about God and your understanding of God. The more you come to know about God and know God, the more you realize how little you know about God. If this is true about you as a Christian, then what can be said about the sinner who does not know God and who, as Paul said, "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised"? (*1Cor.2:14*).

Do you want forgiveness of sins? Then you must repent. Jesus said in *Lk.13:3*, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Did He mean what He said? Yes, because He repeated Himself in *vs.5*. He reaffirmed, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." If you do not repent, you will not receive forgiveness for your sins. If you do not receive forgiveness for your sins, you will perish. Forgiveness of sins brings you salvation in Christ. To perish is to be without salvation and to be cast into eternal punishment in the lake of fire. (*Rev.20:14-15*). In *Matt.25:41* Jesus said eternal fire is waiting and in *vs.46* He said eternal punishment is waiting.

You may say to me, from what you just described about repentance, how can I ever hope to do all those things and receive forgiveness of my sins? What I described to you is the beginning, the continuation and the end. Repentance is not a once for all act. You do not repent, dust off your hands, wipe your forehead and say, "*Whew! I'm glad I got that*

done.” Repentance will be your daily companion until you die. Until the day you die you will be making changes and making corrections about what you think, understand, believe and know about God, Christ, man and salvation in Christ.

If you want forgiveness for your sins, what you need to do is come to God and acknowledge the basic premise of repentance. Humbly acknowledge how terribly wrong you are and have been and how perfectly right God is. Ask Him to forgive you and save you in Christ. And commit yourself to making ongoing changes with the grace, help and strength that He will supply. The forgiveness of your sins enables you to come into a relationship with the triune God because the barriers caused by sin are removed.

Did the apostles obey the Lord Jesus Christ and go out and preach the message of repentance for forgiveness of sins? Or did they go out and do their own thing as many are doing today? Did they decide to change the message as many are doing today because Jesus did not understand that His message would be regarded as too dogmatic and even bigoted? Did they decide to tone down the message as many are doing today because they did not want to offend all their Jewish friends and neighbors and all those sincere and religious Gentiles who had their own religions? No!

The apostles went out and preached this message faithfully in complete obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. They preached this message boldly and dogmatically even though their message offended many, angered many and provoked many into persecuting them. They preached this message faithfully because they knew that all those who rejected it would have absolutely no hope of salvation. They preached this message faithfully because they knew that all those who rejected it would be cast into an eternal hell.

On the day of Pentecost Peter declared to his audience, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.” (*Acts 2:38*). In *Acts 5:30-31* Peter told the Jewish Sanhedrin Council, “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant

repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” *Vs.33* says when the Jewish religious leaders heard Peter’s message, “they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them”, that is, Peter and John.

In *Acts 10:43* Peter told the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’ home, “through His (Jesus) name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.” In *Acts 13:38* Paul declared, “Let it be known to you ... that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” In *Acts 26:18* Paul told Agrippa and all those assembled in the Roman court in Caesarea that the Lord Jesus Christ sent him to preach to the Gentiles “that they may receive forgiveness of sins.” The Greek word used for “**forgiveness**” in all these verses is *aphesis*. We will come to look at the words shortly.

The God Who Forgives.

There is no other religious book in this world except the Bible alone that teaches that God completely forgives all of the sinner’s sins in this life. Let us take note how God has revealed Himself to us in His word. In *Exod.34:6-7* the Lord proclaimed to Moses, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness, ... who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.” In *Num.14:18* we read, “The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression.”

In *Neh.9:17* we read, “You are a God of forgiveness.” In *Dan.9:9* we read, “To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness.” In *Psa.99:8* we read, “You were a forgiving God to them.” In *Psa.130:4* we read, “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” *Neh.chap.9* is a lengthy prayer. “You are a God of forgiveness” is the key phrase in this whole prayer. In spite of all the peoples’ failures, God kept on forgiving. The verse says the Israelites refused to listen to the Lord. They did not remember His wondrous works. They became stubborn.

And then came these gracious and most compassionate words, “But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And You did not forsake them.”

God is the same today. Despite our sin, God is gracious. Despite God’s grace, we continue to sin. Despite our continuing to sin, God continues to be gracious. **Rom.5:20** says, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” One writer noted, “*God’s forgiveness is something no human could devise but can experience.*” (NAC; **Nehemiah**). Let the truth grip your soul : But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And He does not forsake you.

As we shall see, it does not matter who the sinner is and what the sinner has done. The good sinners, the not so bad sinners and the downright bad sinners, they are all facing God’s judgment and eternal wrath in the eternal fires of hell. But the sinner who humbly comes to Christ in repentance will receive the forgiveness of all his / her sins and the free gift of eternal life. (**Rom.6:23**).

If you are a sinner today whose sins have not been forgiven, you have hope in Christ. You have God’s faithful promise that if you turn to Christ in repentance and put your trust in Him to save you, you will receive the forgiveness of all your sins and the free gift of eternal life. You do not have to wait until you stand before God in the final judgment to know if you have forgiveness. Then it may be too late for you. You can have forgiveness in Christ today. You can know today that your sins have been forgiven in Christ. **Psa.32:1** says, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” You can become a blessed man, a blessed woman, a blessed young person and a blessed child to day.

I ask you in closing : Do you know this God who forgives sin? This God says in **Ezek.18:23 & 32** that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. His pleasure is in seeing the wicked turn from their wicked ways in repentance and live. In **Ezek.33:11**

we read, “‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die...?’” In *Isa.45:21-22* we read, “there is no God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.”

This is the gracious invitation the God who forgives sins is giving to you. In His invitation He is pleading with you. The sovereign God of heaven and earth has graciously condescended to invite you and plead with you to repent, to turn from your sins and to receive from His gracious hands the free gift of eternal life in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Is this gracious God casting pearls before swines this morning? Or is He offering pearls of salvation to hearts longing for divine love, forgiveness and salvation? I beg you, do not reject God’s gracious invitation. Do not choose death. Why then will you die?