

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (08).

September 09, 2007.

Review.

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. I want to quickly review what we covered in the last two studies before turning to today’s study. We saw in *Lk.24:46-47* that our Lord commissioned His disciples to go and preach the message of repentance for forgiveness of sins in His name. In *Lk.13:3 & 5* Jesus made repentance compulsory. He said two times in quick succession, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

In our first study we saw that the Bible alone teaches that God completely forgives all of the sinner’s sins in this life. Nehemiah described God as “a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate.” (*Neh.9:17*). *Rom.5:20* says, “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”

In our second study we began by surveying the Hebrew words used for forgiveness in the O.T. and the Greek words used for forgiveness in the N.T. The key word in the O.T. is **kaphar** which relates to the removal of guilt and sin through offering sacrifices. **Kaphar** refers to the process by which the barrier between God and His people may be removed. It refers to the appeasing of God’s wrath. God’s wrath is the inevitable divine response to the violation of His Law. God’s wrath is appeased or propitiated and set aside only if the sacrifice of atonement is offered with a true spirit of repentance and sorrow for sin.

In the N.T. the key word is **charizomai**. The root of this verb is “**grace**”. This verb emphasizes God’s favor, kindness and willingness to forgive sins. It reflects what the

psalmist said in *Psa.86:5*, “For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.”

The next point we looked at was O.T. atonement which, we saw, is a figure of the atonement Christ would accomplish on our behalf. The doctrine of atonement shows us that while God is a God of forgiveness, God is also utterly serious about sin. We saw from various verses that God said He cannot leave the guilty unpunished. God had to devise a just and satisfactory means to forgive the guilty law-breaker without leaving his sin unpunished. The means in the O.T. was the substitutionary atoning sacrifice of animals. This is described in detail for us in *Lev.16*. The means in the N.T. was the substitutionary atoning sacrifice of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That which was figurative in the O.T. found its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are two verses I want to bring to your attention here. The first is *Heb.9:22* which says, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” The second is *Heb.10:4* which says, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The N.T. makes it clear that the Lord Jesus made atonement for our sins by dying on our behalf. He was our substitute. Jesus said in *Matt.26:28*, “this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”

In closing our second study I gave you the following summary : We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus gave His life as a ransom for us. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus, by His atoning death on the cross, poured out His blood for us. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ, by His death, has taken away our sins effectively and completely. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ, by His death, has put away or cancelled our sins. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross. We are forgiven because the Lord Jesus Christ, by His death, propitiated or appeased the wrath of God against us because of our sins. In forgiving us, God, the Initiator, has reconciled us to Himself. In forgiving us, God has washed clean the record of all our sins. In forgiving us, God has ceased counting our transgressions against us.

God Made Him Sin.

Now let us turn to *2Cor.5:17-21*. (**read**). When God saved us He made us a new creation in Christ. When God saved us, He reconciled us to Himself through Christ. When God saved us He stopped “counting” our trespasses against us. The files containing our records of sins were wiped clean. They were deleted. They were erased. They were cancelled. (*Col.2:14*). “Not counting” means that God, having washed the page the clean, He will no longer be making and keeping any new records of sins against us.

The basis of all that God has done for us in Christ is *vs.21*. Paul wrote, “He (**God**) made Him (**Christ**) who knew no sin, sin on behalf of us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Before opening up the meaning of this verse for you, let me share a few reactions to it. **Paul Barnett** wrote, “*Here, stated succinctly and with power, is the heart of the gospel.*” **Murray Harris** said that in this verse “*we penetrate to the center of the atonement and stand in awe before one of the most profound mysteries in the universe.*”

Harris added, “*In a manner unparalleled in the NT, this verse invites us to tread on sacred ground. We should never overlook the wonder and mystery of the fact that it was the all-holy God Himself who caused Christ, His spotless Son, to become sin and therefore the object of His wrath.*” **Philip Hughes** wrote, “*In these few direct words the Apostle sets forth the gospel of reconciliation in all its mystery and all its wonder. There is no sentence more profound in the whole of Scripture; for this verse embraces the whole ground of the sinner’s reconciliation to God and declares the incontestable reason why he should respond to the ambassadorial entreaty*”, “we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

Vs.21 sets before us parallel statements. We can state the parallels as follows :

Christ knew no sin.	We are sinners (or, we knew no righteousness).
God made Him sin.	We become the righteousness of God.

This verse takes us into God's courtroom. What unfolds before our eyes in God's courtroom is judicial. We must keep this fact constantly in our minds as we proceed. Our legal standing before God the Judge is that we are sinners. We are guilty of breaking God's Law. The irreversible judicial penalty we are facing for breaking God's Law is death, the second or eternal death in the lake of fire. (cf. **Rom.6:23**; **Rev.20:14-15**). We have seen that God cannot ignore sin and forgive the sinner, as it were, with a wave of the hand. The sinner must be punished. The sinner's only hope is that a worthy substitute must take his punishment.

The Lord Jesus Christ is also in the courtroom. He is not a sinner. He has never sinned. He never knew sin. He never had any personal acquaintance or experience with sin. The verb "**know**" speaks of knowledge gained by personal participation in something. The verse simply states the bald fact that Jesus was a complete stranger to sin. The peculiar focus here is on Christ's life on earth. It is His sinlessness as a Man that qualified Him to effect atonement for fallen man. He is our worthy substitute. **Hughes** noted, "*Only He who had completely and uninterruptedly obeyed the law of God was fitted to suffer the punishment due to those who have willfully disobeyed that law. Only He who was entirely without sin of His own was free to bear the sin of others.*"

"God made Christ who knew no sin, sin on behalf of us." It is important to note, firstly, that Christ was not made a sinner. Paul "*does not say that God made Him a sinner; for to conceive of Christ as sinful, or made a sinner, would be to overthrow the very foundation of redemption, which demands the death of an altogether Sinless One in the place of sinful mankind.*" (**Hughes**). Paul continued here to emphasize the divine initiative. This is what God did by divine appointment. God made Him sin. God gave His only begotten Son. (**Jn.3:16**). God demonstrated His love for us in the death of Christ. (**Rom.5:8**). At the same time let us not forget that Christ was a willing participant in the divine initiative. The Father did not force the Son to do what He did on behalf of sinners. The Son did not force the Father to take action to save sinners.

Secondly, we must not miss the emphasis on substitution. God made Him sin for us, on behalf of us. One writer noted, *“Christ does not become human in order to stand in solidarity with humanity but to stand in its place and to participate in a two-fold imputation : He receives the burden of humanity’s sin while humanity receives God’s righteousness.”* (cf. **Garland**).

When Christ took our place as our Substitute, what happened? God imputed to Him our sins. God transferred to Him our sins. When Christ took upon Himself our sins, He also took our guilty verdict and the Divine sentence passed upon us. **Harris** wrote, *“In a sense beyond human comprehension, God treated Christ as “sin”, aligning Him so totally with sin and its dire consequences that from God’s viewpoint He became indistinguishable from sin itself.”* Christ was made one with the reality of sin, our sins, and its consequences. And Christ came to stand in that relation with God which normally is the result of sin, estranged from God and the object of His wrath. **Garland** noted, *“The One who lived a sinless life died a sinner’s death, estranged from God and the object of wrath.”*

This is why Christ died on the cross. Our sins put Him on the cross. The hymn-writer wrote, *“Ah, Lord, our ins arraigned Thee, and nailed Thee to the tree.”* His death on the cross was no ordinary death. Yes, men were putting Him to death for their own reasons in keeping with “the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God”. (*Acts 2:23*; cf. *Lk.22:22*). But, most importantly, He was dying because God, the Judge of all the earth, was putting Him, our sin-bearer, to death. The Judge of all the earth was pouring out His wrath upon Him, our sin-bearer. His death was judicial. He was dying in the stead of guilty and condemned sinners. He was paying the full penalty for their sins. He was drinking the cup of divine wrath to its last bitter drop on behalf of sinners.

In the last week I have begun to read again in God’s word and in various writers about the death of Christ with the earnest prayer that His death would grip my soul afresh. I have a yearning desire in my heart to understand afresh what Christ did for me in order to save me. I say with great sadness of heart that far too often we do not spiritually

understand what Christ did when He died to save us. We do not spiritually understand Paul's awesome declaration, "the Son of God loved me, and gave Himself up for me." (*Gal.2:20*). We do not stand before such a declaration lost in awe and wonder, love and praise.

Lacking that spiritual understanding of His love, suffering and atoning death, our souls have not been prayerfully gripped by what He did. This is why we do not love Christ as we ought to. This is why we are not devoted and faithful to Christ as we ought to be. This is why we can sing "When I survey the wondrous cross" as mere words without peculiar meaning for our souls. *Isaac Watts* had spiritual understanding and his soul was gripped. The song he wrote reflects this fact. And this is why Watts was able to write in the final stanza, "*Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*"

Brethren, I want you to think with me for a moment. God made Christ sin for us. God imputed or transferred all our sins upon Him. Very specifically, the sins of His elect people were transferred upon Him. And in some mysterious sense that is not very clear, the sins of the whole world were transferred upon Him. (*1Jn.2:2; Jn.1:29*). In order to help you understand what it meant that God made Christ sin for us, I want you to take a brief journey with the Lord Jesus as He journeyed to the cross.

In *Lk.9:51* we are told, "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem." The term "ascension" assumes His death, burial and resurrection. "He was determined" is literally, "**He set His face to go**". And the idea in this expression is the determination to accomplish the task that one was facing.

In *Lk.12:50* Jesus said, "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished." The literal statement is, "**I have a baptism to be baptized with.**" In baptism the water literally overwhelms you. And so the verb "baptize" was also used in the sense of one being overwhelmed by a catastrophe. This "**baptism**"

Jesus spoke about was His approaching death. In this death the Lord Jesus will be inundated, overwhelmed, flooded over with the waters of divine judgment and wrath. “How distressed I am” points to the fact that the horror over what He had to undergo was already building up. The anguish of soul that surfaces here shows that in His mind the cross was becoming predominant. “Until it is accomplished” is literally “**until it is finished.**” When Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished”, it is the same verb He used. (*Jn.19:30*).

When Jesus came to the Garden of Gethsemane, what do we find? *Matt.26:37* tells us Jesus “began to be grieved and distressed”. One man translated this, “*great distress and desolation began to fill His mind.*” (cf. **Morris**). The verb “**distressed**” speaks of a restlessness of mind that wants to shrink back from some trouble that cannot be escaped.

In *Mk.14:33* we read, “He ... began to be greatly distressed and very troubled.” Mark is using very strong language to describe Jesus frame of mind. The verb “distressed” literally means “**to be amazed**” and describes a person being in a shuddering horror because of the dreadful prospect facing him. “Very troubled” speaks of extreme anxiety and restlessness. **Hiebert** wrote, “*The cause of Jesus’ sore trouble was not physical fear, but the pressure upon His sinless soul of the sin of the world, together with the knowledge of what bearing it involved. It came with stunning effect.*”

In *Matt.26:38* Jesus said, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death.” (cf. *Mk.14:34*). The idea here is, “*My soul is so overwhelmed, it is killing Me.*” **Hiebert** noted that Jesus’ “*sorrow was so great .. it swept Him to the very limits of endurance. The whole picture denotes an overwhelming agony which is quite beyond human comprehension.*”

Luke tells us that as Jesus began to pray He was in agony. Luke wrote, “And being in agony He was praying fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood,

falling down upon the ground.” (*Lk.22:44*). The intensity of the agony Jesus was experiencing was such, the blood vessels in His face began to snap and blood began to ooze from the pores in His face. The blood became mingled with the sweat and coagulated and slid off His face to the ground. What was Jesus praying about? Jesus was praying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not a I will, but as You will.” (*Matt.26:39*). The “**cup**” symbolized all that Jesus had to endure in the form of Divine judgment, wrath and abandonment in taking our place and paying for our sins.

Why was the Lord Jesus in this state of mind as He entered that period that culminated with His death on the cross? I want to set before you two reasons. The first reason is sin, our sins. How many people are there in this world? At present there are over **6.5** billion people. From Adam to the last person who will be born on this earth, how many billions would that be? The Lord Jesus is the sinless Son of God. The Person whom Isaiah saw in his astounding vision was the pre-incarnate Christ. (*Isa.6:1-7*). In *Jn.12:41* we are told that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory. When the seraphim were crying out, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts”, in the context, they were speaking about the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, how does the Bible describe sin? Let us move from good to bad in seeking to find an answer. The Bible describes in the sinner’s righteousness as “a filthy garment” in *Isa.64:6*. The sinner’s righteousness is described as a bloody menstrual cloth. In *Phil.3:8* Paul compared his works righteousness to “rubbish”. The Greek word Paul used may refer to a rotted corpse, filth, human or animal excrement. In *Zech.3:3* the high priest, Joshua, is said to be wearing “filthy garments”. “**Filthy garments**” symbolized his sins. (*vs.4*). The word “**filthy**” refers to human excrement. This word is also used to refer to sin. In *Isa.4:4* the sins of the daughters of Zion are described as “filth”. *Prov.30:12* says, “There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, Yet is not washed from his filthiness.” The word “**filthiness**” is used synonymously with sin. If the sinner’s righteousness is described in such horrible terms, what is his sin like in the sight of God?

It is clear from the Bible that God hates sin. All it took was one sin to plunge the entire human race into its fallen depraved state. *Psa.5:4* says, "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You." *Psa.45:7* says, "You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness." *Hab.1:13* says, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor."

Now picture yourself for a moment. Let us assume that cleanliness is a big issue with you. You have a big evening planned. You get your clothes, clean them, iron them and lay them out so you can get dressed. You go to take a nice long shower. Meantime, there is a three-year old in the house. He does his thing in his diaper. Somehow, he pulls off his diaper and plays with the mess, then wanders into your room, touches your clean clothes at various points and leave. You get out of the bathroom, dry yourself, put on your best perfumes and get ready to put on your clothes. You pick it up but smell nothing because you are still savoring that wonderful smell of your perfumes. You start to get dressed and then your hand touches something sticky. You look at it and you are puzzled. So you sniff at it. And then there comes from you shrieks and howls that are heard half-way down the street. Loved ones rush to your room because they think you are being murdered. Your face has a most horrified look and you are twisting and turning as if you have gone mad as you desperately try to get the filthy clothes off your body.

There are over **6.5** billion people in this world. If everyone sins five times for the day, how many sins would that be? That would be over **33** billion sins per day. How much spiritual filth that would be? If you sinned **5** times per day in a life-time of **70** years, you would have sinned approximately **128,000** times. Now take all the spiritual filth of this world, from creation to the end, and put it on a coat, layer upon endless layer, and then ask the sinless, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord Jesus Christ to wear it. God made Christ who knew no sin, sin for us. God imputed to Him all our sins. God took all our spiritual filth and transferred them to Christ. The sin did not pollute Christ's being just as the child's filth did not pollute your being when you put on the soiled clothing. The clothing was extrinsic to you. The imputation of our sins to Christ is also extrinsic. But you were horrified.

Now, are you beginning to understand why He was so deeply grieved, distressed, horrified and shuddering? You didn't see the filth on your clothing. He saw with His all-seeing infinitely holy eyes all the spiritual filth that He had to take upon Himself and He shuddered and momentarily shrunk back from the dreadful prospect that awaited Him. I want you to understand that if it was your sins alone that He was paying for, the Holy Son of God would have reacted in the same manner. One sin would have been far too much for the sinless Son of God to take upon Himself, how much more horrible it was for Him to take upon Himself the sins of the whole world! This is why Paul was so overwhelmed with Christ's love for him.

It was because of love that Christ took Paul's sin upon Himself and went to the cross. It was because of love that Christ took your sin upon Himself and went to the cross. **Charles Wesley** wrote, *"Amazing love, how can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"* Herein lies the reason why, down through the centuries, men and women who have been gripped with Christ's love have been overwhelmed by that love and have made such amazing and great sacrifices in their lives to bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We come now to the second reason why the Lord Jesus was in this distressed and horrified state of mind as He entered that period that culminated with the cross. The second reason has to do with the penalty He had to pay for our sins. In the courtroom, God the Father is the Judge. When sentence is passed, God the Father is the One who must execute the sentence. The punishment Christ endured for our sins came from His Father's hand. The cup of Divine wrath was in His Father's hand. The hell He endured came from His Father's hand. In those three hours of darkness were compressed an eternity of hell for our sins. Think of this for a moment. Every sin you commit makes you deserving of hell. Christ's elect people is a company that cannot be numbered. The punishment for all their sins was compressed into those three dark hours.

The worst part of His punishment is found in His desolate cry, "Eli, Eli, Lama, Sabachthani?" "My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?" (*Matt.27:46*).

That Brethren, is the essence of hell. The people in hell are forsaken by God. King Saul came to experience what it means to be forsaken by God in this life. This drove Saul to take desperate actions. He sought out the witch of Endor to help him communicate with the dead Samuel (*1Sam.28:1-16*). To the witch's great shock, Samuel appeared. And Saul said to Samuel, "I am greatly distressed.... God has departed from me and no longer answers me." Samuel's response left Saul terrified and without strength. Samuel said to Saul, "the Lord has departed from you and has become your adversary." And he added, "tomorrow you will die." The people in hell will know for all eternity that God has forsaken them.

The Son of God who for all eternity has existed in the closest possible face to face fellowship with His Father, who for all eternity has been in the bosom of His Father (*Jn.1:1, 18*), found Himself forsaken by His Father as He became sin and paid for our sins. The horror of this experience made Him cry out in utter desolation. Here is a mystery we cannot hope to fathom. Here is a mystery we must stand in awe of and, at the same time, never try to probe.

I am fully aware that I would not be able to complete the exposition of *2Cor.5:21*. so let me bring this study to a close. The Lord Jesus Christ did not only take our sins. He also gave us His righteousness. To expound this and its application to us will take another sermon. But Brethren, I want you to understand that here, in this verse, the reason is found why we have the complete once-for-all forgiveness of all our sins. Here, in this verse, the reason is found why the wrath of God against us has been fully and completely appeased. Here, in this verse, the reason is found why we are reconciled to God or, to put it another way, why God in Christ has reconciled us to Himself.

We can never hope to fully understand God taking our place as sinners to pay the full penalty for our sins so that we might receive forgiveness. We can never hope to fully understand God becoming sin for us. We can never hope to fully understand God punishing God for our sins because God loved us who are sinners. We can never hope to fully understand God forsaking God because of our sins. We can never hope to fully

understand how an eternity in hell for sinners was compressed in those three hours of darkness on the cross. We can never hope to fully understand the infinitely gracious nature of this divine love that God loved us with, we who are totally undeserving sinners.

But if you are a Christian I want you to understand this. Your sins are no longer on you. They were put upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Your sins were reckoned to Christ's account. For this reason God is not counting your trespasses against you. Jesus took your condemnation and paid the full penalty your sins. This is why **Eph.1:7** says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." And this is why **Rom.8:1** says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Jesus became forsaken of God so that you can be reconciled to God. Jesus endured hell for you so that you live forever in heaven.

There is something else I want you to know. You can never hope to fully understand the great mystery of God becoming Man, becoming our Substitute and paying the full penalty for your sins. You can never hope to fully understand the infinite greatness, graciousness and wonder of Christ's love for you. But you can meditate on these truths, and earnestly pray that they would grip your soul. When they grip your soul, you would know. You would be overwhelmed as Paul was overwhelmed. You would be overwhelmed as Peter was overwhelmed.

We rob ourselves of joy inexpressible and glorious (cf. **1Pet.1:8**) when we are not gripped in our hearts by these great truths. We rob ourselves of joy inexpressible and glorious when we lose sight of these great truths. And so, from time to time, we need to return to the cross and spend enough time there until our souls are gripped afresh with these truths and we experience afresh joy inexpressible and glorious. Peter spoke of loving Christ whom we have not seen and greatly rejoicing with joy inexpressible and glorious within the context of so great salvation we have received from the Lord.

This morning, if you are not saved, I come to you with the message given to the apostle to preach. And the message is : God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not

counting their trespasses against them. And in virtue of this we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Come and deal with your sin problem in Christ and deal with it once for all.