

# THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (12).

**December 02, 2007.**

## **Review.**

In *Lk.24:47* the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to preach repentance for forgiveness of sins in His name to all the nations. What does it mean to “**forgive**”? It means to remove sins from someone. To forgive sin 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.

We have been studying the subject of forgiveness. I want to briefly survey some of what we have covered before coming to today’s study. The focus of our study has been the forgiveness of our sins that leads to salvation in Christ. We noted that this forgiveness is judicial. In this forgiveness God is dealing with us as Judge. We saw that God cannot simply forgive the sinner, as it were, with the wave of a hand. God is holy and just and cannot simply set aside His Law and the penalty demanded for breaking His Law. The transgressor of God’s Law must be punished.

If the sinner is to be forgiven, a substitute must take his place. This substitute must take his guilt. This substitute must take his condemnation and sentence. This substitute must pay the full penalty the Law demands. No ordinary substitute can do this for the sinner. The substitute must be sinless. The substitute must be perfectly righteous. The only substitute who was qualified to do this was the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is what the Lord Jesus did for the sinner. He became the sinner’s substitute.

From *2Cor.5:21* we studied the imputation of the sinner’s sins to Christ, the Substitute, and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner. We noted that the transaction

that took place here was legal. The sinner who is forgiven in Christ goes to heaven for two reasons : (1) all of his sins, past, present and future were imputed to Christ and Christ paid the full penalty for them by His death on the cross; (2) Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner. The sinner has no personal righteousness that makes him acceptable to God. The sinner is only acceptable to God because he is dressed or covered in the righteousness of Christ.

### **As Far As The East Is From The West.**

This brief review brings us to the point I want to deal with today. I have entitled the point : **“As far as the east is from the west.”** There will be some repetition here but it is my desire to firmly bend over the nails of these truths in your hearts. *Neh.9:17* says, “You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.” God is characterized as a God of forgiveness, as the God who forgives sins. Nehemiah's statements are rooted in God's revelation of His glory to Moses in *Exod.34:6-7*. Here the Lord revealed Himself as “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth, ... who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin....”

In *Micah 7:18* the question is asked, “Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity?” The question demands the answer, **“no one!”**. There is no God like this God who pardons or lifts up and bears away our sins. The question emphasizes the incomparability of Yahweh to all others gods and goddesses. The last sentence in the verse tells us that God forgives “because He delights in unchanging love.” **“Unchanging love”** is that rich Hebrew word *hesed* which also means unfailing love or lovingkindness.

I want to emphasize this fact : there is no religion in this world that teaches about forgiveness as Biblical Christianity. And there is no God in heaven and earth who loves and forgives sins as Yahweh does.

Now, let us turn to *Psa.32:1-2*. David wrote, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!” There is an expression of joyous excitement in these verses. Note the repetition of the exclamation, “How blessed!”. The expression is plural and literally, “Oh the blessednesses.”

*“Oh the blessednesses, Oh the happy estate of the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! Oh the blessednesses, Oh the happy estate of the one to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity!”* The psalm begins on a jubilant note, expressing the great joy of the person whose sins have been forgiven by God. Have your sins been forgiven in Christ? Are you happy? Are you jubilant? Are you rejoicing? You should be happy and jubilant and rejoicing because it is God’s delight or great pleasure to forgive you in Christ. The God of unchanging and unfailing love is happy to forgive you in Christ. You should be happy and rejoicing that you have received the forgiveness of your sins from Him.

Whatever your condition in this life, whatever your struggles and distresses, when your mind focuses upon your salvation in Christ, joy should come to your heart. The words should flow from your lips, *“Oh the blessednesses, Oh the happy estate of my soul that my sins have been forgiven in Christ.”* Even if you are a poor hungry beggar like Lazarus with your body covered with sores (*Lk16:20-21*), when you think of your salvation in Christ you should be happy, jubilant and rejoicing. Why? Because you have no eternal wrath to face. Why? Because you will not be facing God as Judge on that final day. Why? Because you will have no sins to account for on that final day. Why? Because your eternal destiny is the glories of heaven conformed to the glorious image of Christ.

In this passage there are three words that describe sin : **transgression; sin; iniquity**. These three words do not signify three distinct kinds of sin. They are used synonymously and their meanings overlap. **“Transgression”** speaks of acts of rebellion against and

disloyalty to God and His authority. **“Sin”** is the most general term that describes an act that misses or falls short, often intentionally, of God’s expressed and revealed will. It is the deliberate turning away from the true path. **“Iniquity”** means corrupt, twisted, crooked. It describes a crooked or wrong act, often associated with a conscious and intentional intent to do wrong. (**Van Gemenen & Craigie**).

The psalmist also gave us three words that describe the absoluteness and blessedness of divine forgiveness : **forgive; covered; not impute**. “To forgive” is literally **“to carry away”**. It describes the act of removal of sin, guilt, and the remembrance of sin. Note that : the sin is removed and the remembrance of it is also removed. The word “cover” is taken from the imagery of the Day of Atonement. It describes the gracious act of atonement by which the wrath of God is propitiated and the sinner is reconciled to God. Covered sin becomes a matter of the past and the Lord does not bring it up anymore as a ground for His displeasure. (**Van Gemenen**). The third verb is the negative “does not impute” or **“does not count”**. We have looked at this verb in the past. This verb tells us that in forgiveness God has not only erased the records of the sins we have committed against Him. It also tells us that God will not be making and keeping new records of sins we have committed against Him.

Now I want us to consider a few more verses that buttress what we have just seen.

**I). Isa.38:17.** King Hezekiah said, “It is You who has kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.” There are two points to be noted here : **(1)** the word “all”; **(2)** to cast some thing behind your back is a vivid picture of what is no longer the subject of attention or concern. When the Lord God forgives you in Christ, He forgives all your sins. And having forgiven you all your sins in Christ they are no longer the subject of His attention or concern.

**II).** A similar picture is seen in **Micah 7:19**. Please turn to **Micah 7:19**. The verse says, “He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” The picture here

brings to mind the defeat of Pharaoh and his army and their overthrow in the Red Sea. The expression “tread under foot” also means to “**subdue**”. Sin is pictured as an enemy that God defeats, subdues, conquers and liberates us from.

God defeated Pharaoh and his army. He liberated the Israelites from the power of the Egyptians. He set them free from their slavery to the Egyptians. The final act was in overthrowing and destroying Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. Prior to this final act, Moses said to the Israelites, “the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever.” (*Exod.14:13*). The sins you see, as you come to God in confession and seeking forgiveness in Christ, you will never see them again forever.

When God forgives us, He treads under foot our sins. He liberates us from the guilt and power of our sins. He sets us free from our slavery to sin. The final act is that He casts or hurls all our sins into the depths of the sea. **Kenneth Barker** wrote, *“This ... speaks of the complete forgiveness of sin and the removal of its guilt forever. God not only puts our sins out of sight [Isa.38:17]; He also puts them out of reach (Micah 7:19; Psa.103:12), out of mind (Jer.31:34), and out of existence (Isa.43:25; 44:22; Psa.51:1,9; Acts 3:19).”*

**Bruce Waltke** wrote, *“Israel’s sins are now implicitly personified as the Pharaoh and his picked troops. Unless their sins are triumphantly subdued and completely hurled into the depths of the sea, the elect nation has no hope of liberation from the sin that enslaves them. Full salvation from this sin both in extent and in time is indicated by the countable plurals (“iniquities; sins”), by “all”, and by the metaphor “hurl [cast] into the depths of the sea.” Israel’s liberation from the powerful Egyptians at the beginning of its history now becomes a type of its even great spiritual salvation from enslaving sin in the future. All their sins are completely vanquished by God’s grace and – as the rest of Scripture testifies – through the cross of Jesus Christ (Col.2:13-15).”*

So often, we find it difficult to accept that God has forgiven us in Christ so completely. And so, we waste time standing on the seashore looking to see if any forgiven sins will resurface. We seem unable to accept what God has said, turn away and begin our journey to the promised land.

**III).** *Isa.44:22* says, “I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist.” There are two points to be noted here. *Firstly*, take note of the verb “wipe out”. It may be also translated, “**wipe clean**”. This idea is seen in *2Kings 21:13* where the Lord said, “I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.”

This is the same Hebrew verb David used in *Psa.51* as he prayed and confessed his sins. In *vs.1* David prayed, “according to Your lovingkindness, according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.” In *vs.9* David prayed, “Hide Your face from my sins and blot out my iniquities.” Our verb is translated “**blot out**”. Sin blots our character. The Lord sees the mark or blot that sin leaves. When the Lord forgives, He blots out the mark or blot that sin leaves. In blotting out our sins, nothing is left to be seen. There is nothing left to remind the Lord of our sins.

In *Acts 3:19* Peter declared, “Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away.” Peter’s verb is the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew verb. It means to wash over, to wipe out, to obliterate, to cancel a debt. The verb was used for wiping out the memory of an experience from one’s remembrance or one’s mind. It was used for canceling a written agreement, a certificate of debt or a bond. Paul used this same verb in *Col.2:14* where it is translated “cancelled.” The forgiveness of our sins is described as the canceling out of the certificate of debt.

*Secondly*, “cloud” and “mist” represent that which are easily and completely obliterated. This vivid picture is seen in two verses. In *Hos.6:4* the Lord asked, “What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud and like the dew (**or mist**) which goes away

early.” In *Hos.13:3* the Lord said to Ephraim in view of their idolatry, “Therefore they will be like the morning cloud and like the dew **(or mist)** which soon disappears.” The Lord blots out our sins like the cloud and the mist that are completely obliterated and no longer seen. As a matter of fact, the disappearance of the morning cloud and mist is such, there is no evidence that they were ever present. The nature of the forgiveness we receive is such, God leaves no evidence to show that our sins were ever present.

**IV).** *Isa.43:25*. The Lord said, “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins.” In *Jer.31:34* the Lord said, “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Let us note the following :

(1). God forgives our sins for His own sake, that is, for His own glory. The benefit of His forgiveness is ours but the glory of His forgiving our sins belongs to Him.

(2). The verb **“wipes”** is the same we have met already. This verb is used to describe how God deals with our sins. But, as we saw, it was also used to wipe out the memory of an experience from one’s remembrance or one’s mind.

(3). In *Isa.43:25* the Lord has set before us a repetition that greatly emphasizes how he deal with our sins. Firstly, He wipes away our sins for the glory of His name. But then, He also wipes away the memory of our sins from His mind. And then He added, “I will not remember your sins.” The questions arise : Is it possible for God to forget? If God is omniscient how is it possible for Him to forget? There are two points to note here.

**Firstly**, here is a profound mystery about God. The God who is omniscient says He will wipe away the memory of our sins from His mind. The God who is omniscient says, “I will not remember your sins” and “their sin I will remember no more.” When Satan comes before God to accuse you, he is foiled by God’s inability to remember your sins.

(**Motyer**). When you stand in the final judgment, any attempt to condemn you will be foiled by God's inability to remember your sins.

The *second* point to note here is : **forgiveness includes the promise not to bring up again what has been forgiven** as a ground for displeasure. Forgiveness does not allow forgiven sins to rise up again in order to challenge or condemn. (**Motyer**). *Rom.8:1* fits perfectly here, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Why? Forgiven sins are not allowed to rise up and condemn you.

(4). The context of this verse from Jeremiah is the prophecy that was made regarding the establishing of the new covenant. The new covenant was established by our Lord through His death on the cross. At the last Passover meal the Lord declared, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." (*Lk.22:20*). In *Matt.26:28* we read, "this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."

Jeremiah's prophecy is repeated in *Heb.10:15-18*. (**read**). Note the repetition of the promise in *vs.17*. (**read**). *Vs.18* reminds us that forgiveness is based on Christ's offering of Himself. There is nothing you can add to what Christ has done. Forgiveness does not include any form of punishment or penance prescribed by priests or any form of self-punishment that you may prescribe upon yourself.

V). Please turn to *Psa.103*. The psalmist began this psalm of praise to God as follows : "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits." *Firstly*, take note of the word "all". The word "**all**" is repeated in *vs.2*, and as we shall see, in *vs.3*. A literal translation of *vs.2* is "And forget not all His benefits."

David is not offering to the Lord a half-hearted superficial worship. David is rousing himself to praise the Lord with his entire being. Do you rouse yourself to praise the Lord? Do you praise the Lord with your entire being? Praising God requires thought,

effort and preparation. Praising God is not the mindless parroting of popular praise expressions. Praising God is not the mindless shouting of popular praise expressions.

*Secondly*, the opposite of praising the Lord is forgetfulness, to forget the benefits He has graciously given to us. The Israelites were repeatedly warned to not forget. In *Deut.4:9* we read, "... keep your soul diligently, so that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen." *Deut.4:23*, "watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the Lord." *Deut.6:12*, "watch yourself, that you do not forget the Lord." *Deut.8:11*, "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God." *Deut.8:19*, "if you forget the Lord your God ... you will surely perish." *Deut.25:19*, "you must not forget." *Psa.78:7*, "they should ... not forget the works of God."

Yet this is exactly what they did. *Judges 3:7* says, "the sons of Israel ... forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals." *1Sam.12:9*, "they forgot the Lord their God." *Psa.78:11*, "they forgot His deeds and His miracles." *Psa.106:13*, "They quickly forgot His works." *Psa.106:21*, "They forgot God their Savior who had done great things in Egypt." Within the contexts of the verses we have looked at, you will find that forgetfulness leads to a departure from the Lord, pride, ingratitude, disobedience, and idolatry.

Are you guilty of this sin of forgetfulness? *Rom.1:21* makes it clear that those who forget God and His works will fail to glorify God and give Him thanks. This is a downward trek that leads to idolatry and ultimately to apostasy. Do you count your blessings? Do you count your blessings everyday, taking note of the things God did for you during the course of the day? Or do you live oblivious to God's gracious, loving and merciful providential dealings with you?

David wants to praise the Lord for all His benefits. David's praise is focused and specific. From *vss.3-5* he gave us a summary list of these benefits. Note in each line the repetition of the pronouns "who" and "your". This repetition personalizes these benefits you receive from God. At the top of the list is the forgiveness of your sins :

“Who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.” The meaning of the second line, “who heals all your diseases”, is synonymous with the meaning of the first line. The word “iniquities” is literally “**guilt**”. The point here is that God graciously removes the sin and the consequences of the sin. David wants to praise God with all his being because the God has forgiven him all his sins.

**Boice** wrote, *“The first thing David is thankful for is the forgiveness of his sins. Rightly so! For this is the greatest of all gifts that we can receive from God, and the first we need to have.”* **Boice** added, *“The forgiveness of our sins is the greatest benefit any of us can ever receive from God, and we can receive it only because God gave His Son over to death on the cross to procure it for us.”*

On the order of David’s list, note where “good things” come. They come in vs.5. One writer noted that “good things” include all that we receive for our nourishment, sustenance and comfort. What is at the top of your list for praising God? What is the most important thing for you in God’s dealings with you? That most important thing will always be present on your lips whenever you praise God. For David the most important thing was the eternal welfare of his soul. At the heart of the eternal welfare of your soul you would find the forgiveness of your sins in Christ. Is the forgiveness of your sins in Christ the most important thing in your life? Is the forgiveness of your sins in Christ the number one reason why you praise God? Or have you quickly forgotten all that God has done for you in Christ when He forgave you your sins?

Now look over to vs.11-12. David wrote, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Here David used immeasurable distances to express the Lord’s **hesed**, his unchanging and unfailing love and mercy and His forgiveness of our sins.

How high are the heavens above the earth? If you know the measurement, then you know the measurement of the greatness of God’s unchanging and unfailing love for you.

How far is the east from the west? **Boice** noted, “*Since east and west and directions and not points on the compass there is an infinite, unmeasurable distance between them.*” If you know the distance of the east from the west, you will be able to tell how far the Lord has removed your transgressions from you when He forgave you.

Now in closing, I want to say something here about worship since the Lord, in His providential dealings with us has brought this subject before us today. I have been and pray that I will always be open to helpful suggestions for the ongoing Biblical and meaningful development of our corporate worship. As long as we remain in this world there will be room for development not only in our worship, but in every aspect of our ministries as a church. The perfect worship of God only takes place in heaven. And there is coming a day when we all will join in that perfect worship. We will sing perfectly. The musicians will play perfectly. But until that day our worship will be an imperfect making of a joyful noise unto the Lord joined with the efforts of seeking to make that joyful noise conform to improving standards.

I have a problem with criticisms of the worship of God that are not helpful and that border on looking for excuses to stay away from the corporate worship of God or to refrain from getting involved in the worship even when present.

I speak for myself now. My wife struggles to understand why I must get up at **4.15 a.m.** every Lord’s Day, even when I am not preaching. I do so because I need to prepare my heart by prayer, scripture reading and meditation for the worship of God. I am coming to worship the God who has forgiven me my sins in Christ and saved me in Christ. As a Christian this is the most important activity for me. I desire to enter into the worship of God with all my soul and to leave here with God’s blessings.

I prepare to worship God because **Heb.12:28-29** is always on my mind. These verses say, “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.” I prepare because of Nadab

and Abihu who were consumed by fire from God when they worshipped God with irreverence. (*Lev.10:1-3*).

I am a living contradiction when it comes to music. I love music. I can tell when the musicians have made a mistake. I can hear when someone's joyful noise is off-key. But I cannot read nor play one note of music. But you know what – because I prepared myself, the Lord helps me to ignore all these non-theological mistakes and push out of my mind all the criticisms I can make so that I can worship. I see no reason why I must sin against God and stop singing because someone has made an evident mistake. As a matter of fact, I see no reasons, regardless of what they are, that can stop me from worshipping God when I gather with His church. I see no reasons that can cause me to sin against God and stop my worship of God as an act of protest.

I am not here to judge your worship, your ability to play music, song-lead or sing. I am here to worship God first and foremost, and God giving me grace, there is nothing anyone can do that will be allowed to stop that. If I need to correct something I have seen, I will do so at the appropriate time. I am often amazed that some people are not struck down like Nadab and Abihu for taking sinful actions in the midst of the worship of God because some off-key note was sounded in the music or in someone's voice. God is truly a patient and gracious God.

The point in your worship of God is not the non-theological mistakes that are being made. If that is the key point in your worship or in your ability to worship, then your worship is neither Biblical nor to the glory of God. If that is the key point in your worship then I daresay that your worship is idolatrous. The point in your worship of God is this : did you come here with sincerity of heart to worship God in truth or to judge others in the mechanics of their worship? Did you prayerfully prepare yourself to be enraptured in the worship of God regardless of what is happening around you and even oblivious to what is happening around you? Are you a critic or a worshipper of the true and living God? Do you come to participate and celebrate or to find fault?

I want to say to you this morning : I wish all of us could read music and play music. I wish all of us could sing with correctness according to the written music and harmonize our singing. I wish the entire church sounded like a beautiful choir. But the fact of the matter is, we would not achieve this while we live on this earth. I say to all of us, whether you are on-key or off-key, whether you sound like a nightingale or a frog, make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Do so with all your heart and soul. Do so enraptured in the worship of your God who has forgiven you your sins in Christ. Do so to the best of the abilities God has given to you with sincerity of heart and rooted in truth. And let the blessed and glorious Triune God be glorified.

Vocal critics of the worship of God negatively impact and hinder those without nightingale voices in their worship of God. Who are you to tell a Brother or Sister in Christ : sing quietly because your off-key voice is disruptive to me? Did God command those with off-key voices to sing quietly so that they will not disrupt the nightingales? Remember this : off-key voices that worship with sincerity and in Spirit and in truth are a fragrant aroma to God. And nightingales who protest by their silence and rebuke of others are a dishonor to the glory of God.