

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (13).

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Review.

Your greatest need in this life is to have your sins forgiven in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without this forgiveness you are doomed to spend your eternity in hell paying the just divine penalty for your sins. To his great dismay the rich man in *Lk.16:19-31* discovered two things : (1) those who are in hell are never allowed to leave and (2) there is no relief from the sufferings in hell.

I have said it in the past and I say it again : in my opinion the most frightening verse in the Bible is *Rom.8:32*. Paul said God “did not spare His own Son.” What Paul actually wrote was, “He who did not even spare His own Son” or “Indeed, He who did not spare His own Son.” Note carefully the words “**His own Son.**” When God’s Son died on our behalf on the cross, paying the penalty for our sins, God “did not spare His own Son.” God did not mitigate the severity of the sentence and the punishment. The idea is this : if God did not spare His own Son, why would He spare those who reject the forgiveness of their sins and salvation in His Son. There will be no sparing for sinners in hell. Every sinner will pay for all eternity the just divine penalty for their sins.

As a sinner, your greatest need is the forgiveness of your sins in Christ. But for those who have had their sins forgiven in Christ, what a wonderful thing forgiveness is! The psalmist understood and experienced the great wonder of having his sins forgiven. And so in *Psa.32:1-2* he wrote, “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.”

Last Lord's Day I looked in some detail at what is taught in *Psa.32:1-2* and then I buttressed the points made with several verses from the Old and New Testaments. We saw what it means to have God forgive us and cast our sins behind His back. We saw what it means to have God forgive us and cast our sins into the depths of the sea. We saw what it means to have God wipe out our sins like a thick cloud or a heavy mist. We saw what it means when God says that in forgiving us, "I will remember your sins no more." This is not simplistic forgetting. This is an active action on the part of God. When God forgives you in Christ, He makes the deliberate choice to no longer remember your sins.

We closed our study by looking at *Psa.103:1-5, 11-12*. In this psalm David is rousing himself to praise the Lord with all his being. In praising the Lord, he is exhorting himself to not forget none of the benefits he has received from the Lord. At the top of David's list of benefits is the forgiveness of his sins. David saw God's lovingkindness and forgiveness as so great, he used immeasurable distances to express their greatness.

In closing, I made application to our worship of God. Several of you said that afterwards you felt freed to sing out to the glory of God. For that I give thanks to God. I did notice a marked change in our last song. Like David, you finally roused yourself to praise God. There are at least eleven references in the psalms that describe singing to the Lord in worship as shouting joyfully or making a joyful noise unto the Lord. In moments of victory and success you hear loud shouting and rejoicing. The young man proposes to the love of his life and she says, "yes". And when he leaves and he is out of sight he jumps and punches the air and shouts and rejoices. And guess what the young lady is doing in her bedroom?

Worship is not the making of unnecessary noise. It is not the shouting out of what amounts to meaningless expressions of worship. Such behavior falls within the category of what Jesus called "meaningless repetition" or "**meaningless babbling**". (cf. *Matt.6:7*). Such behavior may also fall within the category of taking the Lord's name in vain. (*Exod.20:7*). On the other hand worship is not rejoicing and giving thanks to God

with clenched teeth and mumbling. Clenched teeth and mumbling are usually associated with rebellion.

In the psalms the worshipper is pictured as worshipping God without reserve and with holy liberty. Worship is the vocal rejoicing and giving thanks to God for who He is and for what He has done. The emotions revealed in worship and prayer in the psalms can be very expressive and intense. Biblical worship involves the whole person and is rooted in truth, in doctrine, in theology, and in meaning. People who argue for and advocate various forms of worship run to the psalms for their support. But the forms are not empty forms. The forms are the vehicles for expressing worship that is rooted in truth, in doctrine, in theology, and in meaning. Lord willing, we shall return to this subject in due course.

God Our Father.

Let us turn our attention now to the points I want to deal with. When God forgives us in Christ unto salvation, God is dealing with us as the Judge of all the earth. (cf. *Gen.18:25*). The scene is God's court. We are there because we are guilty of transgressing God's Law. Christ, our Substitute is also standing there. Here in God's court, because of Christ's death on our behalf we found unfathomable divine grace, rich divine mercy, great divine **hesed**, that is, great divine lovingkindness or unchanging and unfailing love. Forgiveness in Christ here means we will never have to face the coming final judgment. Forgiveness here means that which is covered in Christ will remain covered and will never be revealed; that which is hidden in Christ will remain hidden and will never be made known. (cf. *Lk.12:2*).

But those who do not come to God's court now for forgiveness in Christ will have to stand in that final court for final judgment. On that day there will be no forgiveness in Christ because Christ will be in that final court as the Judge of sinners and not as the Substitute and Savior of sinners. (cf. *Acts 17:31*). On that day there will be no

unfathomable grace, no rich mercy, no great **hesed**, that is, no great lovingkindness or unchanging and unfailing love. On that day every transgression will be revealed and every sin will be made known. On that day every evil deed that was done in the dark will be brought to the light. On that day God's justice will be praised and magnified as justice is dispensed to those who rejected salvation in Christ.

Now, for those who are forgiven in Christ, the scene changes immediately. God the Judge forgives you in Christ and then He adopts you into His family. And He becomes God your Heavenly Father. The sinner is a child of the devil (**Jn.8:44**), a child of disobedience (**Eph.2:2; 5:6**), a child of wrath, (**Eph.2:3**), an enemy of God (**Col.1:21**), and a hater of God (**Rom.1:30**). The psalmist was most jubilant in his rejoicing when he declared, "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." This brings to mind the scenes of rejoicing that take place when a man charged with murder is found not guilty and set free. The declaration "**not guilty**" brings forth the spontaneous response of jubilant shouting and rejoicing. The psalmist was charged with crimes far greater than being a murderer and the sentence he was facing was infinitely greater.

When a man who has been charged with a crime is declared to be not guilty, he is then dismissed by the judge. He is free to leave the court and go to his home. But this is not the case with the forgiven sinner. The forgiven sinner is sent into another court room. The same Divine Judge appears and He proceeds to adopt the forgiven sinner into His family. The forgiven sinner is not dismissed and sent to his own home. The forgiven sinner is legally adopted into the family of God and brought into the household of God, his Heavenly Father. The reasons for the Christian's jubilant rejoicing, thanksgiving, and whole-hearted worship have just intensified. The Christian is not only a forgiven sinner. This forgiven sinner has just moved from being a child of the devil and an enemy of God to being a child of God with all the rights and privileges of sonship.

Now I want to turn your attention to several verses. But in doing so, I want to make it clear that I am not starting a series on adoption. Lord willing, this will come later. All we are going to do is wet the tips of our toes in this theological ocean. We begin with ***Eph.1:5-6***. (turn). Paul wrote, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." Now look over to ***Eph.2:19***. Paul wrote, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." Turn to ***Gal.4:4-6***. Paul wrote, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"." Now look above to ***Gal.3:26***, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Turn to ***Rom.8:14-17***. Paul wrote, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not receive a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirits that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

In ***John 1:12*** we read, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." Now turn to ***1Jn.3:1-3***. John wrote, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.... Beloved, now we are children of God...." In ***vs.10*** John added, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor does the one who does not love his brother."

Turn to *Phil.2:14-15*. Paul wrote, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.”

Now, by way of summary, I want you to note the following : Adoption is divine grace and love granted to the forgiven sinner in Christ. There is absolutely no merit here. Even though you have been forgiven in Christ, you know in your heart the truth expressed by the prodigal son to his father, “I am not worthy to be called your son.” (cf. *Lk.15:21*). The believer’s adoption as a child of God was determined by God from eternity. God “predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.” That which God determined in eternity was fulfilled in time when you repented of your sins and put your trust in Christ to save you.

The astounding nature of God’s love in adoption is emphasized by John in *1Jn.3:1-2*. John is literally blown away by this “so great love”. John said we are children of God. And then he declared, “and such we are.” In other words, “*Wow! It’s true. It’s for real.*” But John has not gotten over the amazement. And so he says again, “Beloved, now children of God we are.!” It is believed that the epistle of **1John** was written somewhere between **85A.D.** to **100 A.D.** By this time John was an old man. And the old man who knew the Lord Jesus Christ face to face has not gotten over the utter amazement and joy of knowing that he is a child of God and a member of God’s household.

Let’s get back to the idea of worship for a moment. What are the things that bring you joy in the Lord and make you want to sing, rejoice, celebrate and worship in private and with the gathered household of God? The things that brought David, Paul and John joy in the Lord and made them sing, rejoice, celebrate and worship was the forgiveness of their sins and their adoption into the household of God. Picture John in his **80s**, hands shaking and shuffling towards you on the Lord’s Day. He stops in front of you, puts both hands on your younger shoulders and says, “*Can you believe it? Our sins have been forgiven. Can you believe it? We are the children of God.*” And he walks off, tears

flowing, face alight and whispering to himself, “*Wow! Bless God! What love! Wow! Praise God! What love!*” What makes you rejoice in the Lord and worship the Lord?

The children of God are led by the Spirit of God, that is, they live under the control of the Holy Spirit. Here we find the manifestation and exercise of Christ’s Lordship over you through the Spirit. Now note : as the children of God you are called to live above reproach and shine as lights in this sin-darkened world. John says you are to live righteously and you are to love your brothers and sisters in the household of God. The primary mark of your adoption into the family of God is love for your brothers and sisters in the family of God. John makes it very plain that those who do not love their brothers and sisters in Christ are the children of the devil. There can be no compromises here. There are no “**what ifs**” here. The implications of this are far-reaching.

Adoption grants to the Christian the rights and privileges of sonship. We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Peter says you have “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” (*1Pet.1:4*). God is our Father and we have the right to call Him, “**Abba! Father!**”. This concept of God as our Heavenly Father because He has adopted us into His family or household is unique to Biblically revealed religion.

One of the privileges of sonship is our Heavenly Father’s discipline of His children. Please turn to *Heb.12:4-11*. (**read**). Our Heavenly Father’s discipline proves that we are the children of God. Note the question in *vs.7*, “for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” The axiom is : fathers discipline their children. The clear warning in *vs.8* is that if you are without the Heavenly Father’s discipline, that is not a good thing. If you are continually getting away with your sins, then you must not rejoice. Then you must become very concerned. No discipline means you are not a child of God. Even though discipline is not joyful, its presence in your life must bring to you peace and assurance.

Now Brethren, how does this brief foray into adoption apply to the subject of forgiveness? When God forgives us our sins unto salvation in Christ, God is dealing with us as a Judge. This judicial forgiveness is once for all. This judicial forgiveness is unrepeatable. But it is clear in God's word that there is an ongoing forgiveness after this judicial forgiveness. And the question arises : what is this forgiveness? This forgiveness can be described as "**parental forgiveness**". In this forgiveness God deals with us as our Heavenly Father. This forgiveness relates to our ongoing sanctification in Christ, the day to day means by which God trains us to become obedient children, by which He disciplines us for our good so that we may grow in righteousness.

Christianity consists of that which we are in Christ and that which we must become in Christ. It consists of that which we have received in Christ and that which we must strive for in Christ. It consists of that which is completed in Christ and that which remains to be completed. Christianity is an arrival in Christ and a journeying in Christ. *Eph.5:1* commands us to, "become imitators of God, as beloved children." Paul's prayer for the Philippians was that their "love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment." (*Phil.1:9*).

In *Col.1:28* Paul said, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." In *1Thess.4:1* Paul wrote, "we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more." *Heb.12:1* says, "run with endurance the race that is set before you." *Rom.12:2* exhorts us, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Finally, *2Pet.3:18* commands to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

That which we must become in Christ, that which we must strive for in Christ, that which remains to be completed in Christ, that race which we must run in Christ, that holiness

which must be our pursuit in Christ, that excelling and abounding in growth in Christ, these things altogether describe our ongoing sanctification in Christ.

In this ongoing sanctification we will sin often against God and one another. When we sin, we need to deal with these sins before God and one another. We need to come before God with confession and repentance and seek His forgiveness. The promise in *1Jn.1:9* stands firm. (**turn**). John wrote, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Note the repetition of the word “us”. John is addressing Christians, people with whom he is identifying.

There are two verbs that are used for confession in the N.T. and they are synonyms. The first is **exomologeō**. The verb means “*to confess, to admit, to express agreement, to concur with God in His verdict.*” The first use is in *Matt.3:6*. In *Matt.3:2* we are told that John the Baptist was preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” And in *vs.6* we are told that the people were baptized “as they confessed their sins.” Their confession was evidence of their repentance. Mark records for us this same account and used the same verb. (*Mk.1:4-5*).

In *Acts 19:18* Luke records for us what was happening as the Ephesians were being saved. Luke wrote, “Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.” This has to do with the practice of magic. The result was the multi-million-dollar burning of their books that were used in the practice of their magic. Our verb is also found in *Phil.2:11*. Please turn to *Phil.2:9-11*. (**read**). In the final judgment every human being will agree with the Father’s verdict concerning His Son and confess that He is Lord. This confession will glorify God but it will not save the lost sinner who is now facing final judgment.

The verb John used is **homologeō**. The literal meaning is “*to say the same thing*”. This is the only instance in which this verb is used with regards to the confession of sin. In the context it means there is verbal agreement with God’s evaluation of one’s behavior

as sin. Confession says, *“You are right. I did wrong. I sinned against you.”* What if you are not convinced that you did wrong? Then to confess is to lie. Consider this statement : *“I am not convinced that I did wrong (or, I am not convinced that I did you wrong), but if you say so, then I am sorry.”* That is not Biblical confession. You say, *“for peace sake I am accepting what the person is saying.”* **“For peace sake”** is not a good enough reason to make an unbiblical confession.

To confess your sins to God is to admit your sins to God and call your sins what God calls them. John wrote, *“If we confess our sins.”* There is no generalizing here. You must be specific. Your sin or sins must be named. You can’t agree with what God is saying about your sin unless you are specific in naming your sin.

John said God *“is faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* God is **“faithful”**. God is trustworthy. God can be depended upon to do exactly what He promised. **“Righteous”** means God will act in a righteous manner, in full accord with His righteous and holy nature. When God gave us judicial forgiveness in Christ, He promised to cease marking our iniquities. (*Psa.130:3-4*). He promised not to count or keep fresh records of our sins. (*2Cor.5:19*). God is faithful to His promise. He is acting righteously when He keeps His promise.

If we come to God in confession and repentance He is faithful and righteous to forgive us, to remove our sins, to send away our sins. Sin blots us. Sin defiles us. In forgiving us, God also cleanses away the blots, the defilements of sin. When God forgives and cleanses our sins, those sins can no longer stand between us and our Heavenly Father and disrupt our fellowship with Him.

The last point I want you to note is the nature of the promise in John’s verb **“confess.”** The verb is present tense. God recognizes that we will sin again and again and again with the same sin and / or with different sins. The promise in the verb is that each time we sin, we have the blessed privilege to come to our Heavenly Father for forgiveness and cleansing. The promise in the verb says that regardless of how many times we sin we

must come to our Heavenly Father for forgiveness and cleansing. The door to our Heavenly Father's room is never closed to His children, regardless of what the sin is and regardless of how many times you have repeated that sin.

At the same time I must warn that this blessed promise does not open the door to licentiousness. Sometimes, when we sin, God will simply forgive us and cleanse us. But there are those times when God will forgive us and cleanse us but He will also have to discipline us. We are exhorted in *Heb.12:5-6*, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."

When the Lord takes action to discipline us, we must treat that action with utmost seriousness. The verb "**regard lightly**" means to make light of something and thus to treat it as insignificant or of little value or even as worthless. To treat the Lord's discipline of us lightly is to treat the Lord lightly. It is to treat Him as if He is insignificant in your life and in what He is doing in your life. To treat the Lord and His actions as insignificant and of little value is dangerous because the Lord does not do anything arbitrarily. Discipline may also include "**scourging**", punishment that is harsher. In God's dealings with us as a Father, forgiveness does not exclude discipline and punishment.

There are several passages we would need to look at in the next couple weeks that deal with the conditional nature of the Heavenly Father's forgiveness of His children. Some of these passages have a direct bearing on how we must deal with one another with regards to sin and forgiveness. These passages will put us on the narrow road in our dealings with God and in our dealings with one another. The narrow road in *Matt.7:14* is the **thlipsis** road, the road of affliction. One man described the sanctification process that these passages will bring into your life as bringing spiritual gout into your life.

The questions arise : how will we respond to this relational **thlipsis**? How will we respond to this relational gout? How will we respond to the pain and sparks when iron must sharpen iron? (*Prov.27:17*).

King Ahab is a classic example of how people respond when they come face to face with rebuke and correction in God's word. Some respond with sullenness and anger. In *1Kings 20:42-43* we are told that the Lord sent His prophet to rebuke Ahab for sparing Ben-hadad's life when the Lord had devoted Ben-hadad to destruction. And we are told that as a result of the rebuke Ahab "went to his house sullen and vexed."

When faced with rebuke and correction some treat the pastors as if they are the enemy. Ahab wanted to get a piece of land from Naboth. Naboth refused to give him the land in view of the Lord's commands concerning the inheritance of land. *1Kings 21:4* says Ahab "came into his house sullen and vexed." Ahab's wife, Jezebel, had Naboth murdered so her husband could get Naboth's land. When Ahab went to take possession of the land, the prophet Elijah was waiting for him. And Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And Elijah's response was, "I have found you." (*1Kings 21:20*).

When faced with rebuke and correction some refuse to listen to the truth being preached by their pastors and go and find other pastors who would tell them what they want to hear. In *1Kings 22* Ahab has asked King Jehoshaphat to join him in battle against Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat agreed but wanted to hear what the Lord had to say. So Ahab sent for all his yes-men prophets who told them, "Go up, the Lord will give you victory." Jehoshaphat realized what was happening and asked if there was a real prophet that he could speak to. And Ahab said, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." (*vs.8*).

One final example. Some break fellowship with good friends when they cannot accept that they are wrong. The classic example of this is Barnabas and Paul in *Acts 15:36-41*. Barnabas walked out on Paul and their missionary team and gospel labors when they sharply disagreed on Mark's fitness for missionary service. How do we know that Paul was right and Barnabas was wrong? Paul chose Silas and received the church's blessing for their missionary labors. *2Tim.4:11* shows that Paul remained open to Mark and the

day came when he described Mark as “useful to me for service.” From all indications, Paul kept in touch with Barnabas and his continuation in the ministry. This is seen in *1Cor.9:6*.

How should you respond when the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, pierces our soul? (cf. *Eph.6:17; Heb.4:12*). This piercing of your soul may come as you read the word of God, as you hear it preached or through private rebuke from a brother or sister in Christ. The classic example of godly and humble response is found in Nathan’s dealings with David in *2Sam.12*.

David has sinned and covered up his sins. The Lord sent His prophet Nathan to expose David’s sin, rebuke him and pronounce judgment against him. David could have responded like Asa did in *2Chron.16:10*. Asa was a godly king who sinned against God. And when the Lord sent his prophet to rebuke him, Asa reacted angrily and jailed the prophet. This resulted in further judgment upon Asa, a judgment that led to his death.

When Nathan said to David, “You are the man!” and proceeded to severely rebuke David and pronounce judgment, David responded with godliness and humility. David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” (*vs.13*). And in *Psa.32* and *Psa.51* we find extensive descriptions of David’s repentance before the Lord.

The seriousness of David’s sin was such the Lord allowed it to remain the recorded exception in his life. In *1Kings 15:5* we read, “David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.”

May the Lord give us the grace to respond with godliness and humility when the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, pierces our soul.