

“How Blessed Is the Man Whose Sins Are Forgiven”  
(Romans 4:7-8)

Who is the most righteous man who ever lived in the eyes of the Lord, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ? Was it Abel who bore such an eloquent testimony to God through his sacrifice? Was it Noah who fearlessly preached to a wicked generation of people and who built the ark because he believed so strongly that what the Lord said about the Flood was true? Was it Abraham who left his family and friends to go to the place that the Lord had promised to give him, even though he didn't know where he was going? Was it Joseph who stood firm against the temptation to sin with Potiphar's wife and to seek revenge on his brothers who sold him as a slave into Egypt? Was it Moses who forsook the riches of Egypt in order to lead the people of God out of that land into the land the Lord had promised His people? Was it David who loved the Lord so much that he was called a man after God's own heart? Was it Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel or one of the other prophets, who fearlessly stood to declare God's full counsel to the rebellious people of Israel and Judah? Was it one of the twelve apostles of the Lord who gave themselves tirelessly to follow the Lord and to carry on the work of preaching the Gospel after the Lord had ascended into heaven? Or was it Paul who almost single-handedly evangelized the whole Roman Empire? Certainly all of these men were very godly. There were very few in the history of the world that could match their devotion and zeal for God. But would it surprise you to know that everyone of these men, if they stood by themselves alone in God's presence, without His grace, would fall infinitely short of God's glory. The psalmist wrote, “If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared” (Psalm 130:3-4). Paul tells us, “There is none righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). Apart from God's grace, everyone of these godly men would be as wicked a sinner as there has ever been. I think that very often we look at people like this, or at some of the other saints of old, or even at ourselves as though the things we have become or done for God we have done by our own power. If we excel in some small or great way, if we do some great work for the Lord, or if we avoid certain sins, then we are better saints than others. This can cause us to become proud or pharisaical, thinking that we are God's favorites and that others aren't loved by Him as much as we. But brethren, we need to understand that any good thing in us is not from us, but from God. Apart from God's grace we could do nothing good (John 15:5). Apart from His grace, we would be no better than the worst of sinners. Every good thing we have comes from Him, and none of it comes from us. That is why when we boast, Paul says, we must boast in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31). But there is one other thing we should consider. Though we all differ in this world, according to God's grace; though all of us come from differing backgrounds and have all been saved from different degrees of sin, yet in Christ we are all the same. You see it is Christ's righteousness that saves us. It is His atonement that washes and cleanses us from all sin. And everyone who receives this blessing, receives it in the same amount. That means that we all stand before Him in the same position. Yes, the Lord will reward each one of His saints according to what they do in this life. And there are some who do more for Him than others, who will also receive a greater reward. But as far as our position before the Lord, as far as how He views us as His children, as far as our righteousness before the Lord is concerned, we are all the same. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

This is the wonderful blessing of forgiveness that Paul, quoting King David, speaks of this evening, that *everyone whose sins have been forgiven, whose sins have been atoned for and covered by the blood of Christ, whose sins the Lord will never take into account in His court of justice, are blessed*. This evening, I would like for us to consider what the Bible teaches us about God's forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a wonderful blessing. Why? Obviously, without it we would all be forever destroyed in the lake of fire to the end of time. Without it, we would all justly suffer excruciating pain eternally in hell for our sins. Without it, even while we were on this earth, our consciences would also constantly pierce us and drain us of life and health, as we went through our short lives filled with guilt, sickness and misery. This is why David, in Psalm 32, writes, "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" (vv. 1-2). It is a great blessing to have our sins forgiven, the greatest a man could ever receive. This, by the way, is the same Psalm that Paul quotes in our passage to show that this forgiveness is not obtained in the way of works, but rather in the way of grace. It is the free gift of God. Literally, Paul writes, "How happy are those whose lawless deeds have been cancelled, and whose sins have been covered. How happy is the man whose sin the Lord shall by no means take into account." I like the way Paul puts this last statement, that "the Lord shall by no means take into account" our sins. It is the strongest way in the Greek to show that something is impossible, that God will not do it, that He never will do it. When God forgives our sins, He will never bring them into account again. When we realize what our sins deserve in the eyes of the Lord, that any one of them deserves death and hell, it can cause a great deal of mental anguish. It can also severely affect our bodies and our health. And when God does what He did in David's case, namely, put His hand upon him, since he was his child, it can make matters even worse. David wrote, "When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*" (vv. 3-4). God brought conviction upon David. It was meant, of course, to drive him to acknowledge his sins to God and confess them. While he was under it he had no peace. But once he acknowledged his sins, the Lord forgave them all. He writes, "I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin" (v. 5). What is David's conclusion? We should do the same thing. We should all seek this peace of conscience through God's grace. "Therefore," he writes, "let everyone who is godly pray to Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found. . . . Many are the sorrows of the wicked; but he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones, and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart" (v. 6, 10-11).

Now what exactly does God do when He forgives? The Bible pictures sin as guilt and pollution. Guilt is that which makes us liable to punishment. When we do something wrong, we become guilty. When we become guilty, that means that God may justly punish us for that sin. It's the same thing as in our justice system. If we were to steal something from a store and were caught and found guilty, then we would be liable to punishment, whatever punishment the judge thought was just, either to spend some time in jail, to make restitution or both. Of course, in God's court, every crime deserves hell, because every sin is committed against God. But sin is also pictured as something unclean, as something that stains our hearts and makes them filthy in the eyes of the Lord. If the condition of our souls were pictured as a white robe and sin as stains on that robe, our robes would be solid red. We are guilty before God and our souls are stained

with sin. But when God forgives, He washes us thoroughly from all our sins. He forgives all our guilt and removes all of our pollution. Now He removes all of our guilt immediately. But He removes our pollution only gradually. However, in Christ, we are seen by God to be perfectly clean and to be perfectly pure. This is why He can receive us directly up into heaven when we die, without making us go through some kind of purging process, such as the Roman Catholics believe about purgatory. Listen to what the Lord says through Isaiah the prophet. “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool’” (Isa. 1:18). David writes in Psalm 51, “‘Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. . . . Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow’” (vv. 2, 7).

Now when God does this, when He cancels out our lawless deeds, when He covers our sins in the blood of Christ, He does so thorough a job that none of our sins cling to us any longer. As Paul writes in our text, He will no longer take any of our sins into account, that is, He will no longer remember them against us in judgment. This is exactly what the Lord was speaking of in the blessings of the New Covenant. In Jeremiah, He writes, “‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the Lord, ‘I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more’” (Jer. 31:31-34). This doesn’t mean that God ever forgets our sins, or stops knowing all things, because He forgives us. But it does mean that He will never bring them up against us ever again. David says that it is like removing our sin from us an infinite distance. He writes in Psalm 103, “‘The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive *with us*; nor will He keep *His anger* forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 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. Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him’” (vv. 8-13).

When the Lord forgives, He forgives completely. He doesn’t hold any of our sins against us any longer. We stand on the same ground before Him as any other of His saints. Can you think of even one example in Scripture where the Lord placed any of His saints in a lower category or treated any of them as though any of their sins still clung to them? No. Now it is true that there may be some consequences in life for our sin. If we have stolen, we still have to make restitution. If we have murdered someone, we may still be executed. Forgiveness from the Lord will not change this. But in just about every other area, forgiveness makes us stand on equal footing before the Lord. God is no respecter of persons. He cleansed a prostitute named Rahab and made her a part of the lineage of Messiah. He changed the heart of a tax collector named Matthew and made him an apostle. He cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene and made her one of His most devout followers. He took a Christian killer named Paul, and made him one of the greatest evangelists of all time. Every person whom the Lord has ever chosen to be one of His children has fallen infinitely short of His glory, and if all have fallen infinitely

short, then what real difference can there be between any of them. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, “9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.” No one deserves His mercy. As I said before, sometimes we think we deserve it more than someone else. But this isn’t true. This is what the Pharisees thought, which is why they were so obnoxious in the eyes of the Lord. Remember, when the Pharisee and the tax collector went into the Temple to pray, it was the tax collector who was justified, not the Pharisee. The Pharisee thought he was so much better than others, but the tax collector knew he no standing before God and could only ask for His mercy.

The only difference that there can be between sinners who are forgiven is how thankful they will be for that mercy. How thankful should we be for it? Listen to this story from Luke’s Gospel. He writes, “And behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that [Jesus] was reclining *at the table* in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind *Him* at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet, and anointing them with the perfume. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.’ And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ And he replied, ‘Say it, Teacher.’ ‘A certain moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him more?’ Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’ And He said to him, ‘You have judged correctly.’ And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ And He said to her, ‘Your sins have been forgiven.’ And those who were reclining *at the table* with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this *man* who even forgives sins?’ And He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace’” (7:37-50).

In closing, I would ask you, Are you thankful little, or thankful much? Do you believe that the Lord only had to forgive a little bit of sin in your case, or do you see that He has forgiven mountains of sin? And now that you have been walking with the Lord for a while, do you see yourself as falling only a little short of perfection, or do you, as the apostle Paul, realize now more than ever how much you need the Lord’s grace (1 Tim. 1:15)? If we don’t see ourselves in the right way, it will cause us to become pharisaical. It will cause us like Simon to look down our noses at others. But if we see ourselves rightly, and know that we, as well as everyone else, fall infinitely short of the glory of God apart from the grace of Christ, then we will marvel that the Lord would call us or use us at all, and find that we won’t be able so easily condemn other people for their backgrounds or their sins (Matt. 18:21-35). May the Lord help us to understand that Christ has borne all of our sins and those of our brethren, and give us the grace then not to separate from, but to forgive and receive each other as brethren. Amen.