

## FORGIVE ME

Forgiveness is a fundamental part, a bedrock, of the Christian hope. Christ was crucified so that we might obtain forgiveness. After all, without Christ and the forgiveness His sacrifice provided through his death, what hope could we find of eternal life? As Paul once put it, if Jesus is not raised - our faith, hope, and confidence is all for nothing (1 Cor. 15:14-19). Why? Forgiveness is not possible without Jesus' resurrection, and salvation is not possible without forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross that we might receive forgiveness and through it salvation. He rose again to assure us of the solidity of that promise. It was always a part of God's plan to provide a better way than the ordinances of the Old Law. Throughout the old scriptures there was a constant expectancy of Jesus.

Prophetically, David looked forward to the day when Jesus would come. He looked forward to that age when forgiveness would abound. He prophesied at length of Jesus and the *"Stone which the builders set at nought..."* (Acts 4:11; Psa. 118:22), and said, *"This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"* (Psa. 118:24). We are living in that day, the day of forgiveness.

God has said He will forgive and forget. He will separate us from our iniquities. David said it like this,

*"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."* (Psa. 103:8-14)

Could there be any scripture more comforting to one seeking forgiveness?

Peter questioned Jesus about forgiveness. He asked how many times he had to forgive his brother. He thought seven was a good round number. Jesus put an end to that nonsense. He said, "How about seventy times seven?" (Matt. 18:21,22). So, forgive him four hundred and ninety times a day?

Absolutely not. In other words, forgive him as many times as he asks. Luke recorded another teaching, *"...And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him"* (Luke 17:4). Remember, seven is often used to signify an infinite number in scripture. Given that was our directive, would God do less than He asks of us?

I know what you may think: "But I've asked so many times for the same sin, over and over again. Didn't the writer of Hebrews talk about not being forgiven for willful sin?" He sure did. Right after he talked about leaving off going to church and leaving Jesus behind. In the same chapter he quoted God's earlier statement too, *"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more"* (Heb. 10:17). If He doesn't remember them, do we think He keeps some sort of scorecard of all our past sins? The true answer lies not in a scorecard, but in our heart.

If our heart is not right with God, that's another story all together. That has more to do with a lack of faith or a lack of commitment to follow Him rather than forgiveness or perfection; those come after the heart is made right. Many preachers spend years teaching us that we are wicked awful creatures, and we are. Now what? That's the rub. That's where it gets a little complicated.

Talk about complicated; Paul sent an entire letter trying to explain it to the Romans. He talked about how he sinned when he didn't want to and how he didn't do what was right when he wanted to. He talked about how miserable and how wretched a man he was and by extension, we are. He taught how you could not sin willfully, and definitely not just act any old way, simply because God was in a forgiving mood (Romans 7). But then he made the most magnificent statement ever penned, the most glorious and wonderful utterance that could ever be made to anyone on the planet in any time period, past or present. You can almost hear him dictating it in a slow, deliberate tone to Tertius, enunciating each word precisely. After seven chapters of explanation, he finally came out and said it: *"There is therefore **now no** condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death"* (Rom. 8:1-2, emphasis added).

Tertius had probably heard this a dozen times as he had met and worked with Paul. Can you imagine what he would have

said if he had just heard it for the first time? "Excuse me. Did you just say what I thought you said?" "Yes," would come the answer loud and clear. "Weren't you listening before when I said, 'ye are not under the law, but under grace'?"

That's what so many preachers have not taught for so many years. Either out of a lack of understanding about what grace is, or a fear that everyone in the church is going to go "hog wild" if they find out. "Find out what?" you may ask. We are not under a law of 'thou shalt's and 'thou shalt not's. News flash: If you are not under a certain law, you cannot break that law. Instead, we are under the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25; 2:12) and saved by grace, God's forgiveness.

God suspended the justification-by-law thing of the days of Moses. The only thing a law does is tell you what you are doing wrong. It cannot save. It cannot make anyone upright. The only purpose and function of a law is to condemn.

*"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:19,20)*

So if you want someone to be perfect according to the law, the only thing you can do is remove the law. Paul said that's what God has done. *"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances"* (Eph. 2:15). That's not to say we can't sin or lose our salvation, though.

Paul was quick to point out in many places that we could fall from this grace. He said he watched his actions carefully because he did not want to be lost (1 Cor. 9:27). He pointed out we cannot continue to sin willfully, simply because we no longer live in sin (Rom. 6:1,2). It's a kind of an irresolvable paradox. You are not under a law, you cannot be justified by it, and therefore you cannot sin. But if you sin willfully, you are not under grace, but back under the condemnation of the law of sin (Rom. 6:16-20). You see it all boils down to allowing sin to have dominion in your life. If you love sin, indulge in it with a grand appetite, and walk as if your actions were unimportant, you are not walking in the Spirit.

We are sinful creatures. We sin, period. When you get right down to it, most every sin is technically willful. The answer still lies in our heart. Not necessarily our actions. When describing the judgment, didn't Jesus talk about those who protested their sentence? They said, "We followed you, we cast out devils in your name, and we did many wonderful things for you." He still told them to depart. He flat out told them, "I never knew you" (Matt 7:21-23). Wow! He never knew them. It's more about our relationship with Jesus than the perfection of our actions. We might very well achieve perfection and still be lost. Remember Paul's comments to the Corinthians?

*"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."* (1 Cor. 13:2,3)

How could you have the faith to remove a mountain and the fortitude to be burned for Christ and still be lost? Because your heart is not right. You're not doing it out of love but out of duty.

So what does it all mean? If we are walking with Christ, we won't want to sin. We may sin, probably will, because the flesh is weak, but we will hate it when we do (Rom. 7:24). So when you question whether or not you are forgiven, simply remind yourself you are not somehow that one special person in the "No Forgiveness" column of Heaven, the "Used Grace Too Much" list, or the "Too Weak to Forgive Again" book.

Paul explained it all one more time to Timothy in a lot fewer words, because he knew Timothy already understood.

*"And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."* (1 Tim. 1:14-16, emphasis added)

Christ forgave a wicked and sinful Paul, who by his own admission struggled every day to beat down his body and

keep it under subjection, so it would set a pattern for all who would follow.

So when the little voice in your head begins to talk..."God is not going to forgive you anymore." "You've sinned one too many times." "You had your chance." "One shot, that's all you get, and you blew it." "So, you think you're special enough that Christ will accept you?" Rest assured God knows all about what you've done. The "Accuser of the Brethren" has made sure of that. Tell the little voice what Christ told the blessed apostle Peter when he wanted to change heaven's plan, "*Get thee behind me, Satan!*" (Matt. 16:23) What is another of heaven's plans? Forgiveness of sin and a daily walk with Christ. Do I honestly think God will forgive you one more time for that same sin? Quick questions: Are you sorry? Are you trying not to continue in it? Are you trying to walk with Jesus? If you honestly answered yes to these, I assure you, God has forgiven you.

It's a dangerous thing to tell people they are not under a law of 'thou shalt's and 'thou shalt not's, unless they truly love God and would serve him anyway, law or not. Can't you see, though, that is exactly the kind of love and servant God is looking for? He called the best of the best, Friend.

**RON SCOTT**  
(Bloomington, IN)

## APOLOGIA

QUESTION: If God is love (1 John 4:16), then why does He permit natural disasters to happen and allow thousands of people to suffer?

The answer lies in Hebrews 2:14: "*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he [Christ] might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*" Notice that at the present time Satan has the "power of death".

Remember also that Satan is called the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), and he is constantly at work in his realm. "*Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Pet. 5:8). He has the "power of death" because he is the one who introduced sin

into the world through Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is sin that produces pain, suffering, and death!

So we can't really blame God for all the suffering that occurs in the world today, can we? God made a perfect universe in the beginning (Genesis 1), but it was the Serpent that made this world imperfect and full of sin. One day Jesus Christ will return and claim all those who belong to Him and finally "*put all His enemies under His feet.*" And "*the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*" (1 Cor. 15:24-26). But until that time, the world will be imperfect through sin and will know pain, hunger, and death because of the influence of the devil.

But doesn't God have the power to stop Satan now? Of course He does, but we also have to understand that many times God will permit suffering to take place, if it is according to His will. Remember when Jesus was crucified? God had the power to stop His suffering, but didn't God turn away and allow His only Son to die? In that instance God permitted an innocent Man to suffer, but in the overall scheme of things, it was necessary so that each one of us could have the opportunity for eternal salvation.

Before we hastily judge natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, and tornadoes to be unnecessary evils or works of the devil, we need to look at the whole picture. In fact, all of nature which God created is very good (Gen. 1:31). Occasionally there are destructive aspects of nature but they are so few in comparison with its blessings that we must all agree in favor of God's system.

Remember that God created the heavens and the earth, and He planned the universe so that it would run by a system of natural laws. By these laws everything functions. In the case of earthquakes, what if there were no faults in the earth's surface and all this pressure was building up in the center of the earth? What would happen then?

Batsell Barrett Baxter, a famous preacher, once said, "Gravity can be cruel, when someone falls from a height and is crushed in the fall, but without gravity it would not be possible for the normal activities of life to go on. Similarly, fire is destructive on occasion, but without fire it would not be possible to cook man's food, nor to provide power for many of life's activities. Sunshine and rain are great blessings, though occasionally the sun

causes droughts and the rain causes floods."

Through it all, we should have no fear during natural disasters because God will watch after us. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah."* (Psa. 46:1-3)

If we have done the proper things that will prepare us for the life after death, we should not live in fear of natural disasters or of anything else on this earth.

Adapted from a sermon by RAY MCMANUS  
(Deceased)

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. After the victory over the Canaanites and Perizzites where the Israelite tribes captured the enemy's leader, Adoni-Bezek, what did they do to him?
2. After Job mourned the brevity of life, and Eliphaz speaks again, Job addressed his visitors, referring to them as what?
3. According to the book of Jeremiah, whom or what did Jeremiah say the house of Israel looked to as their mothers and fathers?
4. About how many swine drowned when Jesus allowed the demons to enter them, causing the swine to run down a hill into the sea?
5. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, what two suggestions did Paul offer regarding speech?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. Manasseh and Ephraim received an inheritance of land beginning at the Jordan and heading west. Joshua says that they were the descendants of whom? JOSEPH

(Joshua 16:4)

2. Ezra offers a census of the Jews who decided to leave Babylon with Zerubbabel. Not including slaves, how many were there in all? 42,360 (Ezra 2:64)
3. According to the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah said that the people who remained in Jerusalem were doing what? TRADING THEIR VALUABLES FOR FOOD IN ORDER TO SURVIVE (Lamentations 1:11)
4. What did Matthew say John the Baptist's diet consisted of? LOCUSTS AND WILD HONEY (Matthew 3:4)
5. In Galatians about what hypocrisy did Paul confront Peter and Barnabas? THEY WOULD NOT EAT WITH THE GENTILES WHEN CERTAIN JEWS WERE PRESENT (Galatians 2:11-14)