

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 22 June 2008

No. T0527

Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

Learning to be like Christ: Learning Forgiveness

The old woman was close to death; but she showed no fear. An Anglo-Catholic priest came to visit in order to give her what he termed “absolution”. She asked what the word meant. He replied, “I have come to forgive your sins.” The eighty-year old asked if she could see his hand. He offered it to her. She took hold of it, and turning it over, examined it for a few moments. She then released it and, gazing up into the eyes of the priest, said, “Sir, you are an imposter!” The cleric protested and asked what she meant. She replied, “The only man who can forgive my sins has a nail-print in His hand.” Of course, she was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

This story reminds us of two things: firstly, God alone can forgive our sins and secondly, there can be no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. The man who had forgiven the sins of the old lady was the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God the Son who became man in order to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He has dealt with the root cause of everyone’s problems – sin. In simple terms, sin speaks of a nature that is rebellious towards God. Christ has also dealt with the fruit of sin – sins. We commit an act of sin when we go our own way and do our own thing, instead of going God’s way and doing God’s will. The former (sin) had to be judged before there could be forgiveness of the latter (sins).

Hebrews 9:28 states that “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...” Here, the word “many” refers to all those who have put their trust in Him. Therefore, where God is concerned, not all people have their sins forgiven. “But,” you may say, “didn’t Christ die for all.” The answer is “Yes! But it is only those who trust in Him and His work who are made fit for the presence of God.” This is supported by Romans 3:22 which reads, “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe...” So although the righteousness of God is available to all, it only upon those who have trusted in Christ.

It is also written, “... The blood of Jesus Christ his (God's) Son cleanseth us from all sin” 1 John 1:7. Again, the word “us” refers to those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus and His sacrificial work. Scripture is adamant, and I repeat the words of Hebrews 9:22 “...Without shedding of blood is no remission.” These words are key to understanding the truth about real forgiveness.

In the Bible, the word “forgiveness” literally means “to send out” or “to send away”. When a teacher of a class of children reaches the end of the day, she dismisses her pupils. She sends them away. What a relief for the teacher! According to WE Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, forgiveness signifies the removal of the punishment due for sinful conduct. That is to say, the sinner is delivered from the penalty of his sin. He also states that it involves the complete removal of the cause of offence itself. However, both of these are dependent on the sacrificial death of Christ.

If we apply these to the relationship between ourselves and God, we can see:

1. God has been hurt by our sins. He therefore has a perfect right to judge us; and
2. We owe God our lives because He created us. We have forfeited life and communion with God by our sins and are subjected to death.

You will notice that there is no reference to “forgetting” sins. The reason being that sins are not forgotten. They are faced and dealt with and as they are remembered so is the righteous ground upon which they were forgiven. You may say, “Isn’t there a scripture that speaks of God forgetting sin?”

The nearest scripture to this is found in Jeremiah 31:34. The verse states: “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” This is a reference to the nation of Israel spiritually restored to the Lord. Through their faith, God is able to forgive their iniquity and remember the sin no more. He can do this because of the sacrifice His own Son offered at the cross of Calvary. The blood of Christ is the righteous ground that empowers God to forgive sin. Notice, it does not say He forgets it. Rather, He chooses not to call it up from His memory. It is remembered, but not recalled to be used against the repentant nation. If God were to forget our sins, then this means that He could forget the sacrifice made by His Son. That He will not do!

Another verse supports this. Speaking of Christians, John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). You will notice that it is not a *loving* and *kind* God who forgives our sins; but rather a God who is *faithful* and *just*. This shows, once again, that God is light, and the forgiveness of sins depends upon the sacrifice of Christ.

The word "confess" in the verse means "to agree with God" about our sins. In other words, we recognise that our sins are obnoxious and require the judgement of God. That judgement was borne by Christ on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24 reads: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." When we consider this, then humility and repentance are induced into our souls.

In Luke 7:36-50, we find the record of Jesus invited to a meal by a Pharisee. As they sat down to eat, a sinful woman entered the house with an alabaster box of ointment. She stood at the feet of Jesus and wept, washing His feet with her tears. She then dried His feet with her hair, kissed them and then anointed them with the ointment.

The host of the feast thought to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner." He was then surprised to hear Jesus answering his thought, saying, "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" Simon answered saying, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most." Jesus commended the answer before saying, "Simon, seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." Jesus then addressed the woman saying, "Thy sins are forgiven." However, those sharing the meal with them were troubled thinking, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" But Jesus said to the woman, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

In this Biblical record, we find three main characters. The first is a self-righteous Pharisee called Simon who didn't have the decency to treat Jesus as he would any other guest. The second is a woman well known for her sinfulness who recognised Jesus to be the One person who could help her in her need. The third is Jesus Himself, the sinless Son of God.

There are many Simons in this world today. People who believe they are morally upright and, therefore, better than others. They may even have a religion to which they pay lip service. There are others who are more like the sinful woman. She was burdened by her sinfulness, felt her guilt and knew she needed forgiveness. Yet both of these were sinners in the sight of God. Both of them deserved the judgement of God to come crashing down upon them. The words of Romans 3:23 condemn us all. They state: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." While, 1 John 1:8 applies to those who are self-righteous: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

The major difference between Simon and the woman was that she recognised Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. She treated Him according to her need. Tears of repentance flowed from her - enough to wash the feet of Jesus. She used her personal glory, her hair, as a servant's towel to dry His feet. What humility! She then expressed her love for Him by using the ointment to anoint His feet. This was an expensive act. Usually, alabaster boxes of ointment were kept by women for the day of their marriages. Repentance, humility and love! Her attitude reminds us of Psalm 34:18 which states: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Have you ever shown before God, a heart that has burst? Has your spirit been crushed in His presence? If so, salvation is near.

The thought of Simon could not be hidden from the Lord Jesus: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner." Simon despised the woman and also despised Jesus. However, the Lord Jesus proved Himself to be more than a prophet. He relates the story of the two debtors. One owed a large amount, 500 pence. In those days, a penny was the daily wage of a labouring man. The other owed 50 pence - a tenth of the previous amount. The creditor forgave (or more literally, "showed grace") to them both by cancelling the debts. The question of Jesus, "Which of them will love him most?" was well answered by Simon who indicated the person who had owed the most. Jesus immediately states the principle that those who are forgiven many sins, love much in response. While those forgiven little, only love a little. He then applied this to their situation. Because of great sinfulness, the woman owed God a great deal; but her attitude is the proof of her love for Him.

During the story mentioned before, the Lord Jesus was indirectly, claiming to be God. Hence, He can say to the woman, "Thy sins are forgiven ... Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace." What a release! What a result! So, we have seen that faith, repentance, humility and love are the required conditions of the sinner if s/he is to obtain

forgiveness. On the other hand, the sins of the woman could only be forgiven righteously because Christ was to bear the punishment for them later on the cross. The hymn writer, Albert Midlane expressed it this way:

*God could not pass the sinner by,
Justice demands that he should die;
But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be.*

*The judgment fell on Jesus' head,
'Twas in His blood sin's debt was paid;
Stern Justice can demand no more,
And Mercy can dispense her store.*

The answer to the question, "In whom do we have forgiveness?" is found in Colossians 1:12-14 which says: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins..."

Here, redemption by blood and the forgiveness of sins go together. These both emphasise the work of Christ. On the other hand, the words "in whom" show us how vital it is to have a faith in the Son of God. There is no forgiveness outside of Christ. The sacrificial Lamb is now the fountain of forgiveness!

God's forgiveness for sins is gained when a person puts his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 10:43 states: "To him (Jesus of Nazareth) give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." This remission or forgiveness of sins applies to all our sins, past present and future. This forgiveness may be known NOW! The apostle John wrote to believers in Christ saying, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins **are** forgiven you for his name's sake" (1 John 2:12). The "are" is present tense and applies as much to Christians today as it did to Christians in the period of the early church. We may confidently say that our sins **are** forgiven for His name's sake. The latter also shows that the Lord Jesus receives the honour and the glory in the forgiveness of sins. This, of course does not give us a license to sin. Those who have put their trust in Christ are born again. They are children of God and they have a new nature within them. A nature that hates sin. Therefore, although a Christian may fall into sin, he does not practice sin as he did before his conversion. Furthermore, when the Christian sins, he is to confess his sins to God who will then forgive him and cleanse him from all unrighteousness. The result is so communion between God and himself is maintained.

The effect of knowing your sins forgiven is found in Romans 4:7 where we read: "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." Forgiveness of sins brings happiness and a feeling of well-being. Well might the Christian sing:

*Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.*

The outcomes of our forgiveness are at least two fold, namely, we preach it and we practice it. Luke 24:46-47 directs us to preach it: "...Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." We may not be a preacher in the sense of heralding the Gospel; but we may all be "gossipers" of the Gospel in personal witness. If we do this then both repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be spoken in the name of Christ.

Ephesians 4:32 instructs us to practice it: "...Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." If we have forgiveness of sins in the Lord Jesus Christ, then it follows that, in our responsible Christian lives, we should forgive those who hurt us in any way. As the Lord Jesus was hung upon the cross He asked the Father to forgive His enemies. In like manner, the first martyr, Stephen, as he was being stoned to death, asked the Lord not to put the sin of his enemies to their charge. We are called upon to love our enemies and do good to them that hate us.

Forgiveness is a costly process because we who forgive those who hurt us must quietly bear the burden or loss. For example, if a man takes out a loan to buy a car, then he is expected to repay the loan company or creditor that amount. However, if circumstances turn out for the worse and he cannot repay the loan, then the creditor can claim the car as payment. He would be within the law to do so. However, if the creditor writes off the money borrowed instead, then he has made himself responsible for the loss. So it is with God when He forgives us. So it is with us when we forgive others. We voluntarily bear the responsibility for the hurt or burden ourselves knowing that Christ died in order that our sins might be forgiven.

The Lord Jesus Christ outlines our attitude to forgiveness in Matthew 18:23-31. There we find a servant who owed his king a fortune in money. He could not repay the money. The king directed that he, his wife, his children and all that he possessed should be sold so that some payment might be made. The servant begged for time to repay the debt. The king was moved with compassion towards the servant and cancelled the debt. However, the forgiven servant found one of his fellow-servants who owed him 100 pence, took him by the throat, and demanded repayment. The fellow-servant pleaded for time to pay; but the forgiven servant had him thrown into prison until the money was found. When the king heard of this, he was angry. He called the forgiven-servant to him and said, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him." So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. Fellow Christian, if God for Christ's sake has forgiven us, then surely we, for Christ's sake, should forgive those who hurt us.

So how often should we forgive a brother who sins against us? This was a question asked by Peter in Matthew 18. The Lord Jesus answered, "Seventy times seven." Essentially, Jesus was teaching Peter not to count how often he has forgiven someone, but to just keep on forgiving. Earlier, in the same chapter, we read: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." This is confirmed by the Lord's words in Luke 17:3-4 where He says: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 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."

It seems then that such sins are faced and sorted out between individual Christians. However, if there is no repentance on the part of the offender, then a specified route to possible reconciliation is outlined in the same chapter for us to follow.

Forgiveness should be permanent. On the one hand, the forgiver should hold no grudge; even though the offence may have wounded deeply. On the other, the one who has been forgiven should feel no more guilt. Forgiveness frees us from the burden of guilt. Those who have been forgiven have been freed from the penalty of their wrongdoing.

In summary, we have seen that, **firstly**, "forgiveness of sins" means a "sending away of sins". They are dismissed. **Secondly**, there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. It is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross that has made it possible for God to forgive us on righteous grounds. **Thirdly**, our deep conviction concerning sin and sins is a measure of our love for Christ. **Fourthly**, we are assured of a permanent forgiveness of our sins by God as soon as we trust in the Lord Jesus. **Fifthly**, as God has forgiven us because of the work of Christ, then we ought to forgive one another for His name's sake. **Sixthly**, the forgiveness of our enemies may be unconditional; but our forgiveness of fellow Christians depends on their repenting when we confront them with the offence they've committed. Finally, we still need to confess our sins before God in order that our fellowship and joy with Him may be maintained. We do this knowing that unconfessed sin may result in some form of discipline from the Father who wishes us to live godly lives – but at the same time, we realise that we have been freed from the final judgement relating to sin. A judgement that would have sentenced us to an eternity of torment.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.