

Concerns Christians sometimes have Will God always forgive me?

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Hello, and welcome to the latest in our series entitled “Concerns Christians sometimes have”, and today we are looking at the question “Will God always forgive me?” The very brief and general answer is, “Yes.” To think otherwise would be to have the wrong appreciation of the nature of God and a misunderstanding of the enormity of the work that Christ completed by His death on the cross of Calvary. So, today I would like to base this talk on those two things and I trust that by considering again what I am sure are well known scriptures, our hearts will be encouraged and that our thankfulness and worship will be all the more sincere for what Christ has accomplished for the glory of God.

On Monday the 10th of July 2023 I was very struck to see that two completely separate daily devotionals that I read each morning had exactly the same verse. I cannot recall ever noticing that before. These things would have been put together some months, perhaps even years before, with no collaboration between the writers of them. As Christians, we do not simply believe in mere coincidences, so I felt that God wants to really bring this verse to our attention, and I want to read it with you now. I will be reading from the New King James Version as with all further readings unless otherwise stated. Let us read from John’s First Epistle chapter 2 verse 1.

“ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.
And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ
the righteous.”

In this one verse we can see the two points that I made at the start, the nature of God and the enormity of the work of Christ. Let us consider firstly the nature of God.

Nature of God

God is Holy and Righteous and hates sin, but He loves the sinner. John also writes in his Gospel, chapter 3 verse 16,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that
whoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

When we were children, the story was often told about the wee boy who heard this verse at Sunday School and he was asked what the word “whoever” means. His answer was quite simple, “You, me and everybody else.” In Matthew’s Gospel chapter 9 and the second part of verse 13 we get this quote from the Lord Jesus Himself,

“For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

There are so many quotes from the Lord's life here when He made it very clear why He came into this world, in which we can see the desire of God to have a relationship with man who He created.

As with all scripture, we can go all the way back to Genesis, often called the seed-plot of the scriptures, and we can see in chapter 1 that God made man in His own image. It is clear from this that He wanted mankind to have God-consciousness so that He could have a relationship with Him, this is not said of any of the other animals that God had created. Then in Genesis chapter 3, after sin had entered the world due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, we read that when God came down to the garden to commune with them they hid because they had realised they were naked and were ashamed. It is still the same today, we are often ashamed of our sins and therefore seek to hide from God instead of confessing our sins, repenting of those sins, and receiving God's forgiveness. Peter also further underlines this point in his second epistle chapter 3 when he tells us that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. So, if there was no desire on the part of God the Father to forgive sins then He would not have sent God the Son into the world to die on the cross of Calvary, in order to make forgiveness possible and then now to be our Advocate with the Father, as First John tells us.

So God is both righteous and at the same time wants to have a relationship with His fallen and sinful creature. By extension and in the same way He provides both the way of forgiveness, and the antidote should we continue to sin, that is the Advocate. We are both found guilty but can be cleared of all charges at the same time, all provided for by God's grace and not based on our own righteousness. This is a difficult thing for us to really grasp as both our human nature and every religion in this world would say that we need to do something, whereas true Christianity says that everything is done. Religion is mankind seeking to find something bigger than themselves whereas Christianity is all about God, the Person who is bigger, and above everything, and seeking to find mankind.

This is a fundamental truth and shows us the true character of a loving God who desires the eternal blessing of mankind for the glory of Himself. We are therefore accepted in Christ the day we accept Him as our Saviour and Lord, and we are no more fit for heaven however long our lives are beyond that day. Only Christianity gives us that assurance, religion expects us to perform works and to wait till the final reckoning before we know whether we have met the mark or not.

Think how strange that would seem if we used that principle in our marriages. If on our wedding day we gave to our spouse a rule book and said we would determine at some point in the future, perhaps thirty, forty or fifty years in the future, whether they had done a good enough job in keeping these rules and therefore meet our favour and acceptance. It would be absurd to do this with someone we love, and yet how many people believe that a loving God would do the same!

We have already considered the situation that Adam and Eve found themselves in after they had brought sin into this world by their disobedience but I now want to talk about another Old Testament story that highlights God's desire towards His creature man.

In Exodus, the second book of the Bible after Genesis, we get the story of the Children of Israel being brought out of slavery in Egypt and moving through the wilderness to the Promised Land. God gave the law to Moses that He wanted them to live by, the Ten Commandments being an integral part of this. We know from the New Testament that these laws were intended to show the people how far short they were from God's perfect standards and to show that they could never have been kept in their entirety. Nonetheless, however, in Exodus chapter 25 we are given the account of how God instructs Moses to take offerings from the people of various things as diverse as precious metals and stones to animal skins, oils, and spices. These things were to be used to build a mobile sanctuary where God could dwell among them. The next seven chapters of Exodus record for us the wonderful detail of how God wanted this sanctuary to be built.

This term sanctuary just means a place set apart for worship. Over the years, many of these set-apart places which would have been used for all sorts of worship, have been excavated. But this place was to be called the tabernacle, or literally the tent of meeting, where God would actually be with his people. This would be the place where the children of Israel met with God and therefore its construction, the things that were to be contained in it, the ordinances, and the practices held there, were all described in minute detail in these chapters of Exodus; and then further into the next book of Leviticus. All of which were a foreshadowing, or type, of the work and person of Christ and our subsequent approach to God through Him and His death on Calvary's cross.

The most relevant of these types in respect of the character of God and His desire for sin to be dealt with in order for our relationship with Him to be restored, I believe is in the detail surrounding the Day of Atonement. In Leviticus chapter 16 we have the exact details of what the High Priest had to do on this one day of each year to atone for his own sins and for those of the people. On that one day he had to enter alone into the very Holiest Place in that tabernacle where he actually met with God above the Mercy Seat. He could only go there with blood from the animal sacrifice that had been made and sprinkle its blood before and on the Mercy Seat.

In the book of Hebrews the writer explains, particularly in chapters 9 and 10, that these things were just a foreshadowing of Christ and His death on Calvary's cross. Those animal sacrifices had to be repeated each year and were just a reminder of the sins of the people and could never of themselves deal with sin and sins. Christ has become the fulfilment of the High Priest, the blood sacrifice Himself and also the Mercy Seat itself in that He, and His death are the very place where God is appeased in respect of sin. The thought of the Mercy Seat is very similar to the word used in some New Testament Scriptures as "propitiation." John tells us in his first epistle chapter 2 verses 1 and 2 that not only has Jesus Christ become our Advocate with the Father when we sin, but He has also become our propitiation. Quite literally the wrath of a righteous God against sins we have committed has been propitiated.

I heard a really good illustration of this recently. If I went out one morning to find someone had sprayed offensive graffiti on the wall of my house, I would rightly be angry. If then later that day, they regretted what they had done and came back and removed it but never apologised, the cause of the offense would have been taken away, but I would still rightly be angry, I would not be propitiated!

A further two very important points need to be stressed before we move on from this thought of Jesus as our High Priest. Aaron and his sons who followed him had firstly to make atonement for their own sins and then for the sins of the people, and this work was never completed, it had to be continuously done. Hebrews chapter 7 verses 26 and 27 tell us that Jesus Christ was undefiled and pure and didn't have to make an offering for His own sins as He was sinless; and that His offering for sin was so complete it was a once and for all time event.

So I trust we can see very clearly from these thoughts that the desire flowing from the true character of God is for sin to be judged and sins to be forgiven. It is worth noting that sin, the root cause of sins, is not forgiven, it is judged. It has been nailed to the cross of Calvary and when it is finally done away with in a future day, it will be on the basis of Christ's finished work. In the meantime however, it still does its work, and this comes forward in sins which God is willing and able to forgive based on the death of Christ on the cross.

Enormity of the work of Christ

This therefore brings us to our second point, the enormity of Christ's death on Calvary's cross. I would like to read two very clear verses from Second Corinthians chapter 5 that show us the enormity of this work. I will read verses 18 and 19:

“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

We have already mentioned the Epistle to the Hebrews as being key in understanding the importance of the death of Christ and in chapter 9 verse 22 we are reminded that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission, that is, forgiveness. So, when God was reconciling the world to Himself through Christ it was not just as He lived a perfect life here and gave a wonderful example that we should desire to follow, but rather that His perfect life was sacrificed on the cross to take the punishment for your sins and mine. The perfect outworking of all the types of those sacrifices of old that had to be repeated time and time again as we have considered earlier.

Those animals that were sacrificed on the day of atonement had the sins of the people conferred upon them by the priest laying his hands on their heads but this was merely a symbol. On the cross of Calvary, the Lord Jesus was actually made sin in order that sin could be judged. Only two verses on from where we have just read in Second Corinthians we are told,

“For [God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5: 21).

So the Lord Jesus both bore the punishment of our sins and was made the very thing, sin, in order that the first could be forgiven, and the later finally and completely done away with in a future day.

It may be possible in a small way for us to understand the sufferings that Christ endured at the hands of men as he was nailed to that cross. We will all have experienced, I have no doubt, what it is like to have a nasty cut, a broken or dislocated bone, our hair caught and pulled out or even a sharp object jagged into our flesh. All of these things are painful in their own right so we can perhaps imagine what it would be like to have all these things done at the same time. All our bones out of joint, our weight suspended upon them, hair plucked from our face, nails through our hands and feet and our back gouged open by a Roman whip, how awful it must have been for Jesus.

Those around were able to see these sufferings, and those who hung on the other crosses suffered to some extent the same pains. However, when the world was shrouded in a supernatural darkness at the time of day when the sun should have shone at its brightest, and God’s wrath against sin was fully meted out on Christ, nobody was able to see, nor could any person ever have any sense what this must have been like. An old hymn we often sing has a line that says;

“Thou stoodest in the sinner’s stead -
To bear all ill for me.”

Mrs A. R. Cousin (1824-1906).

We should never lose sight of this and it should draw out thanksgiving and worship from us when we consider it.

So, God desires for mankind to have their sins forgiven, and He has devised a means for this to happen through the death of Christ. There is a wonderful verse in Second Samuel chapter 14 and the later part of verse 14 that says,

“Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him.”

Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and therefore from the presence of God on account of their sin, and every man and woman who has ever lived inherit this same fate. We, however, can be brought back to Him and not expelled forever. Hence our original question must surely be answered with a resounding “Yes”, that God can indeed forgive us but as I mentioned at the start, this is the general answer and there is one other subject that I want to touch on before I finish.

Sin that cannot be forgiven

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Lord Jesus Himself talks about a sin that cannot be forgiven and that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is a very specific thing and I do not believe it would be readily committed in the day in which we live, if at all. C S Lewis said that when we look at the life and teachings of Christ as detailed in the Gospels, we can only have three options as to what we think of Him.

Option 1 is that we accept that He is indeed the Son of God who has given His life for us, and we fall in line with His claim that He is Lord of All.

Option number 2 is that we must conclude He is a lunatic with a God delusion, surely no man in his right mind would claim what Jesus did or said!

Or finally option 3, we plainly consider Him a liar.

Most people today would accept that Jesus was a good Man without accepting Him as Lord and Saviour. Many consider Him to be a great prophet and teacher. Yet, if we do not accept Him as Lord, how can we possibly consider Him to be a good Man? He therefore must be a liar or a lunatic. And yet all these views are forgivable based on all that we have thought about already. The great apostle Paul, as Saul of Tarsus before his conversion, was not only a blasphemer himself but sought to compel Christians themselves to blaspheme the name of Jesus. Yet even this awful sin did not merit the description of blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

In Matthew chapter 12 verses 31-32, Mark chapter 3 verses 29-30, and Luke chapter 12 verse 10, we have a very specific and narrow situation described. The Pharisees were in full view of the complete revelation and power of Jesus Christ. They had closely observed His every move and the miracles He had done. So too had many others who still had not believed at that time, the Lord’s earthly relatives, for example, who only believed on Him some time later. However, unbelief or lack of faith is still not classed as blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The key to this unforgiveable sin is that in the face of irrefutable evidence, the Pharisees chose to attribute the power of Christ to Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, rather than the Holy Spirit.

The reason I feel this is less likely to happen today is that we do not have fully manifested, undeniable evidence in the form of miracles or the actual person of Christ physically on the earth. Those who reject the claims of Christ do so for many and varied reasons, but unlikely I feel that it would be because they attribute His power to Beelzebub instead of the Holy Spirit of God. So let any listener who may feel concerned that they may have inadvertently committed this sin take comfort, and remember that the blood of Jesus Christ does indeed cleanse us from all sin.

Conversely, if any listening today have not yet accepted Him as Lord, please challenge your hearts as to the claims He made and ensure you do not miss eternal blessing because of any fanciful erroneous thoughts as to who Jesus is and the source of His power and love.

Thank you for listening to this talk today, number T1324, “Will God always forgive me?”

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