



# Forgiveness

By Mike Petzer

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# Forgiveness

## Introduction

The majority of us have always believed that God forgives. It is just that we have had serious doubts about how far that forgiveness extends and how long it can hold out for in the face of persistent sinning.

For most of us, we measure how far we have gone when we think about God's capacity for forgiveness (or the limits thereof) rather than the lengths God went to in order to establish solid, unquestionable, legal grounds for our eternal forgiveness. In short, we are far more preoccupied with our wrongdoing than with Jesus' finished work.

## The Foundation Of Forgiveness

Forgiveness never has depended on man's performance but on Jesus' death burial and resurrection. We are not forgiven because we did things worthy of forgiveness, but because Jesus paid for our sin. It is our blood-bought right to be forgiven for all our sin. According to the New Testament, neither feelings of regret nor sorrow **but faith in the finished work of Jesus is the only ground for forgiveness.**

The Bible says that, *without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*<sup>Heb.9:22</sup> No, you cannot pray long enough, cry hard enough, plead sincerely enough, promise never-to-do-it-again enough, regret enough or even fast enough for forgiveness. If any of these were the basis for forgiveness, then Jesus need not have died. Forgiveness and salvation would be available without his shed blood. Just as it says, *If righteousness comes through the Law [good works], then Christ died needlessly.*<sup>Gal.2:21</sup> Will we make a Christ out of

our repentance and regret? These are too vague and inexact conditions to stir up any faith. How will you ever know if you have repented or regretted enough to be forgiven? This would move forgiveness out of the realm of faith in a final sacrifice and into the area of mere speculation and emotion. A forgiveness based upon variable human opinion and speculation, which have no absolutes, is totally unacceptable for faith since there can be no faith in the undefined. No, it is by faith and by faith alone. No human additives, but confidence in what God has done.

### **No Record Of Our Sins?**

*God was reconciling the world to himself, not charging men's transgressions to their account.*<sup>2Cor.5:19</sup> Or as another translation of the New Testament puts it, *not putting down on the liability side of their ledger their trespasses.* God is not making a case against you. God is not making a list of your sins so that he can call you into account for them. He is not saving them up so that he can confront us with them and make us pay for them. God is not calling man into account for sins, but to account for his gift of life in Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist introduced Jesus to us as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*<sup>1Jn.1:29</sup> John writes in his first epistle that Jesus is *the propitiation [atoning sacrifice or the payment] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.*<sup>1Jn.2:2</sup>

We are confronted in these verses with the startling truth that, not only is God not holding the believer's sins against him, but he is also not holding the world's sins against it. When Jesus died, he paid not only for the believer's sins but he also died and removed the unbelievers' sins. Just as it says that *God gives proof of his love to us in Christ's dying for us while we were still sinners.*<sup>Rom.5:28</sup> As surely as he died for all men, just so surely have all men had their sins dealt with. Jesus has settled the sin issue for all men. There is no outstanding debt or any unpaid account as far as man's sin is

concerned. "*It is finished,*" was more than just a cry of relief, it was a statement of fact!

## Total Forgiveness

Scripture tells us that we were made alive together with him after he had *forgiven us all our transgressions* and *cancelled out the certificate of debt.*<sup>Col.2:13-14</sup> Yes, the certificate of debt or the invoice has been cancelled. It is as if we had never been billed. As if we had never owed anything. Sins that are forgiven are sins that are cancelled. They do not exist.

Most believers can accept that they have been forgiven of all their pre-salvation sins but what about our subsequent sins?

Firstly, Jesus died for all our sins. When did he die for our sins? The day we believed? No! He died for them approximately 2000 years ago. Jesus did not go to the cross and die for your sins the day you believed and were saved, but 2000 years before you were saved. When Jesus died for your sins 2000 years ago, how many of your sins were pre-salvation sins then? Yes, it is true, Jesus not only died for sins that were committed but also for sins that were yet to be committed.

Secondly, God is eternal, not only unrestricted by time, but timeless. Whenever God speaks, he speaks from his own point of view which is eternal. For him "**all**" is "**all!**" Without the restriction of past, present and future. In short, God's "**all**" is an unqualified "**all**" without any disclaimer attached to it.

In order for you to visualize this more clearly, imagine a long line that stretches to your left as far as you can see it and still continues. Next, continue the same line to your right as far as you can see it and it still continues. Now, place a 12" ruler on the line. This is time on the background of eternity. Now place your left hand at the beginning of the ruler. You are now at the beginning of time. Next, place your right hand at the end of the ruler. You are now at the beginning of time and the end of time at the same

time! From this perspective, your "**all**" includes all of time. Just so with God. When he dealt with **all** sin it was with absolute knowledge. God does not learn anything, he has always known everything. Because God already knows everything, his knowledge cannot increase. No sin you can commit can catch him by surprise. He knows every sin that has been committed and will be committed and because of this he is thoroughly qualified to have placed **all** our sins upon his Son. We will never do anything that he has not already made provision for. **Total forgiveness!**

### **The Perfect Sacrifice**

The old covenant required constant repetition of the sacrifice because the sacrifice was limited in its consequences. It paid for the sins that were committed most recently by the individual or, as in the yearly atonement, it paid for the sins committed by the nation of Israel for the entire previous year. This left those under the old covenant with the unhappy situation of always having to live on credit for the next year. So the old covenant sacrifices were only concerned with former sins never with future sins. As such it was an imperfect covenant. The book of Hebrews calls it imperfect simply because it did not deal with future sins. *Heb.7:11,19;9:9;10:1*

More than this, the scripture reveals that the sacrifices were themselves never the actual basis for forgiveness. On the basis of them God merely *passed over the sins previously committed.* *Rom.3:25* The sacrifices were only "*shadows*" of the perfect sacrifice and the perfect sacrifice would, when He came, have to pay for these sins also so that God could be just in having passed them over.

Remember that it is on the basis of justice satisfied and punishment served that sins are forgiven. God could not just forget men's sins. He had to punish them to uphold his justice. So, through Jesus, he dealt with sin and its punishment. By this

he established the fact of his having forgiven men, as a righteous thing for him to have done.

Since there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, if there is still a need for more forgiveness then there must be another sacrifice brought. It is precisely this reasoning that caused the believers in the book of Hebrews to return to the old covenant sacrifices. For them, the blood of Jesus was no more effective than the blood of bulls and goats in that it only paid for their former sins. Subsequent sins therefore, needed subsequent sacrifices.

The only alternative to animal sacrifices, as far as they were concerned, is that Jesus should come down from heaven and die again. The writer of the book of Hebrews points out that this is unnecessary, since Jesus' sacrifice is perpetually valid. That is, no future sin, no matter how bad, can invalidate its effects and require an additional sacrifice. His single sacrifice has pre-empted all possible sins and paid for them for *all time*. The book of Hebrews emphasizes no less than nine times from chapter 7 to chapter 10 that **Jesus died once, for all sin, for all men, for all time**. Thus he terminates the necessity for any additional sacrifice and the old covenant that required it. <sup>Heb.7:27; 9:12,26-28;10:2,10-14</sup>

## **What About The Unforgivable Sin?**

While the whole background of the argument in the book of Hebrews is still fresh in our minds, let us deal with the two difficult scriptures found there. In Hebrews 6 the teaching on the impossibility of renewal to repentance has specific reference to the rejection of the perfect sacrifice. If the new covenant is rejected, not by open rejection, but by insisting on adhering to the old covenant sacrifices, there is no power available in the old covenant to bring about a changed life. Since the animal sacrifice is a shadow of the final perfect sacrifice of Christ, the repetition of the animal sacrifice is in effect a crucifying again of Christ in

the type of the animal sacrifice. The writer could not possibly be meaning that there could be a literal crucifying of Jesus for a second time, or that he could even ever be made to die for sin for a second time. He insists that Jesus has died once for all.

This brings us to the verse in chapter 10. Chapter 10 is the great culminating chapter on the perfect sacrifice, that perfectly deals with sin and therefore never needs repetition since repetition is a mark of imperfection. No new sacrifice is needed because *we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*"<sup>Heb.10:10</sup>

More than this, *for by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*<sup>Heb.10:14</sup> In the light of these two great truths the Holy Spirit brings us the revelation that *where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*<sup>Heb.10:18</sup> He does not mean by this that sin has exhausted or used up the effect of the offering, but that the offering has exhausted the effect of sin!

It is because of this that God says, *their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no longer.*<sup>Heb.10:17</sup> Not because God is forgetful, but because the perfect sacrifice has so perfectly dealt with our sin that God no longer remembers what no longer exists.

It is in this context that we must understand *there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.*<sup>Heb.10:26</sup> No sin can ever annul the validity of the perfect sacrifice except the rejection of the perfect sacrifice - Jesus. This is another repetition of the truth already alluded to in chapter 6. That is, that subsequent sins will not need a subsequent sacrifice. Jesus is the end of the need of all sacrifice.

The sin of these people here is that they have rejected the perfect sacrifice. They have *counted the blood... an unholy thing.*<sup>Heb.10:29</sup> That is, they have regarded it as defective or ineffective in some way. This they did by relying upon animal sacrifices again, the very thing that the book of Hebrews was written to stop them from doing. Do you think the blood to be an "*unholy thing?*" Short lived in its effect and usefulness? Something to be used and discarded like you did with the dead animal you brought last year? Is he not the

One who *is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them?*<sup>Heb.7:25</sup>

## Jesus' Teaching On The Unforgivable Sin

Jesus' teaching on the unforgivable sin in Matthew 12:32 and in Mark 3:28-29 has been a source of turmoil for many believers. For the sake of clarity it is first necessary that we eliminate what it is not.

This does not refer to a perpetual sin repeated to the point where there is no longer forgiveness available because the believer has gone "*too far.*" This is not a sin that was once forgiven but now can no longer be forgiven. The scripture clearly says that *all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men,*<sup>Mk.3:28-29</sup> but he who offends in this sin *never has forgiveness.* That is, this sin was never forgivable in the first place.

Secondly, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot refer to making fun or mocking at the working of the Spirit. The large crowd which gathered on the day of Pentecost mocked those who were filled with the Spirit by saying that they were drunk. A great number of these mockers, if not most, were part of the 3000 converts after Peter's sermon.

Thirdly, some have suggested that because the scripture says that Jesus was saying this because they were saying, *He has an unclean spirit,* that this is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. But it is evident that this insult was aimed at the Son of Man. He clearly was the subject of their mockery. And *whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him.*<sup>Matt.12:32</sup> So what is this unforgivable sin then?

The words, *have insulted the Spirit of grace*<sup>Heb.10:29</sup> give us the necessary insight. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the rejection of the New Covenant also called the *ministry of the Spirit.*<sup>2Cor.3:8</sup> In short, a refusal to believe in Jesus and so receive him. This hardness of heart being evidenced by the need to explain away all



supernatural phenomenon worked by the Holy Spirit to confirm that Jesus is the only way of salvation. Those who refuse to trust in Jesus for salvation commit the sin that never has forgiveness neither now nor forever.

## **What About Confession Of Sins?**

There has been much abuse of confession which we cannot go into now, but we will deal with some fallacies and insecurities that have arisen because of the incorrect understanding of this doctrine.

First, salvation depends on the believer confessing Jesus as Lord, <sup>Rom.10:9-10;Matt.10:32-33</sup> and not on him confessing all his sin. Salvation would then depend upon the effectiveness of the memory of men. Under the old covenant every time someone wanted to approach God, he had to confess sin because that is what stood between him and God. In the new covenant they have to confess Jesus because that is who now stands between them and God. Sin no longer stands between man and God because Jesus' work of taking the sin of the world away is a success. If sin is still there, then his work is a failure.

If man must confess all sin to be saved, what would happen if he forgot one? How could he ever be sure that he had remembered them all?

What would happen to a believer that died before he had a chance to confess just one sin? If we must confess every sin or else be unforgiven, would that mean that he would be lost forever and go to hell? Nonsense! We have already asserted that forgiveness is ours through what Jesus already did. We are the forgiven because we have placed our faith in Jesus as saviour and not because we remembered to confess every sin we ever have done. <sup>Eph.1:7;Col.2:13</sup>

Does that mean that there is no confession of sin, that it is unnecessary? If confession were unnecessary, there would be no

purpose for *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*<sup>1Jn.1:9</sup>

So what is confession and how does it fit in?

Firstly, why is God just in forgiving our sin? Because we remembered to confess them? In any court of law, mere admission of guilt is not the basis of pardon. Release is only obtained after the payment of the penalty. Would a judge be regarded as a just judge if he excused a murderer because he admitted to the crime? Never! Just so, God's justice in forgiving is founded upon the fact that Jesus has already paid the penalty for every sin and not because of confession.

Next, we need to have a better understanding of the word "confess" as used in the New Testament. According to *Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words*, the widest used meaning of the word "confession" is to speak openly and freely as the result of "deep conviction of facts." In the case in hand, it is quite obvious that those facts, according to the context, are the forgiveness provided by Jesus' shed blood and personal sacrifice. *The blood of Jesus... cleanses us from all sin,*<sup>1Jn.1:7</sup> and *he is the propitiation for our sins... also... for the whole world,*<sup>1Jn.2:2</sup> are two verses that 1John 1:9 is sandwiched between. These are the facts about which there is deep conviction expressed in confession.

Lastly, what is the Greek meaning of the word? The Greek word "homologeō" means to think the same thing and therefore to speak the same thing. To be united in thought and speech. In fact, to think and speak the same thing about our sins as what God does is the basis of forgiveness. If we think and speak the same things as God does about our sins, then our forgiveness will be a reality for us.

Jesus declared to the prostitute in John chapter 8 that she was uncondemned and forgiven yet she did not even come to him but was dragged there against her own will and she never confessed her sin to him.

The cripple man lowered through the roof was forgiven when Jesus saw the faith of the ones who had brought him there. There is no mention of him confessing his sins and yet he was immediately declared forgiven.<sup>Mk.2:3-5</sup> Confession was not a requirement for forgiveness in either of these cases.

## **The Prodigal Son, An Illustration Of Forgiveness**

Everyone is familiar with this parable, but a closer look at it will be a great blessing.

The two sons illustrate the two types of people under the old and new covenants and through the father's actions there is an illustration of the heart of the Father as the Law was never able to reveal him.

In this story, when the younger, malcontent son comes to his senses, he carefully rehearses his confession of sin and unworthiness but he never gets a chance to confess. Before he even has time to explain why he is coming home, the Father runs out to meet him (a most undignified thing for an old man to do in Middle Eastern culture) and embraces him and kisses that wayward son. No, he does not make him work in the fields for a couple of weeks first to see if he is really serious about repenting. He restores him to a position that seems to be even better than the one he had before he had left. The one who had no inheritance, now shares in all of the Father's wealth and forgiveness.

Does this sound all too much? It was so for the older son. His self-righteous wailing bemoaned the Father's generosity, calling him unfair and only stopping short of calling the Father's actions unrighteous. A perfect example of the self-righteous legalist's attitude to the freely given grace of God.

Come forgiven one! Know, believe and confess that you are the forgiven and you too will experience the joy of your salvation.

Mike Petzer 1994

Mike Petzer was born and raised in South Africa and is a naturalized citizen of the United States. Born again at the age of 14, he has been active in serving the Lord for the past 30 years. First as a youth leader, associate pastor and as a short term missionaries trainer. He has a passion for the Word and for reaching the lost. Pastor Mike has been a conference speaker and has authored several books, including: *Such A Great Salvation, Where The Word Of A King Is There Is Power, and God Has Judged America.*

<http://livinghopefamilychurch.org>

Revised by  
Revd Paul S Fermor M.Th.  
Deal Pentecostal Church  
69 Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. CT14 9EW  
[www.dealpentecostal.co.uk](http://www.dealpentecostal.co.uk)

