

Forgiveness

- *Forgiveness is one of the foundational truths found in the Gospel. Without forgiveness there could be no good news, only judgment and condemnation.*
- *Forgiveness is a theme that runs both through the Old and New Testaments. Without forgiveness there is no salvation.*
- *Often, when a person who does not know Christ is asked how they can get to Heaven, their responses may vary from “If my good deeds outweigh my sins,” to “I am generally a good person.” It is apparent from their answers that they don’t believe in God’s forgiveness as the means to salvation.*
- *The theology of salvation through good works is an oppressive theology filled with the colossal task of trying to right the wrongs we have committed, combined with the fearful uncertainty that our good works will never really be “good enough” to earn us salvation.*
- *The truth is that no matter how good we try to be, we continue to fail. Even our best efforts can never make up for the damage our sins have caused to ourselves and to others, nor are we able to remove our guilt before God.*

Psalm 32:title–5 (NKJV)

A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.

¹Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long.

⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah

⁵I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Selah

- *King David, who committed the great sin of adultery and then in a cold-blooded attempt to cover his sin, murdered Bathsheba’s innocent husband, wrote the words of Psalm 32 after the full weight of his transgression crushed him and his eyes were opened to his own sinful self-deception.*
- *From this psalm we can learn a number of important truths about receiving forgiveness, no matter how terrible our sins, or how long we have resisted God.*

- *“A Psalm of David” – David did not write this psalm anonymously. He plainly acknowledged that he himself had not only sinned, but admitted he tried to cover up his sin.*
- *The Bible does not sugar coat the failures of God’s people. Scripture provides a complete picture of both the failures of men and the grace of God that enabled them to receive forgiveness, healing, and restoration.*
- *“A Contemplation” – David described this psalm as one of contemplation, one we need to really think about, meditate on, and absorb into our way of thinking and living.*
- *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.” – David described how blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven and no longer has the fear of judgment or condemnation hanging over their head.*
- *The word “blessed” is an apt word to describe the relief, joy, and thankfulness that pours out of the heart of one who is clearly guilty of great transgressions. We can receive complete forgiveness because of the great mercy and love of the One who is both Judge and Saviour. Jesus paid the full penalty for the person’s sin, taking the debt Himself, and paying for all the damage that sin caused.*
- *“Blessed is he” – The word “blessed” is the most appropriate word and possibly the only word that the Bible could use to describe the one who has been forgiven.*
- *What elation, what unspeakable joy for the one who had been carrying upon themselves all their evil actions, words, and even thoughts, accompanied by all the guilt and shame associated with their sins, only to find that as they faced the Judge of all Creation they have been released and forgiven.*
- *1 Peter 1:8 describes the response of our hearts to the blessedness of God’s love for us as “leaping with joy unspeakable and filled with glory.”*
- *In Romans 4, Paul quoted from Psalm 32 to reveal the full extent of the blessedness of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and grace.*

Romans 4:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

- *Paul revealed that the blessedness of God's forgiveness links the removal of all our guilt and transgressions with an accounting of us as righteous.*
- *David knew the joy of believing "on Him who justifies the ungodly," because David knew he himself had been ungodly.*
- *David knew the joy of being accounted for righteousness not based on any of his "good works," but simply because He had put His faith in the One who is both righteous and merciful.*
- *David knew the joy and blessedness of receiving imputed righteousness apart from works.*
- *Imputed righteousness is not based on anything we did or could possibly do, but solely on God's righteousness.*
- *Man-made religion seeks to find a remedy for sin from within, with the result that instead of the person finding some way of deliverance or relief, it makes the burden of sin even more onerous and impossible to carry. Eventually, the weight of it crushes the person with guilt and condemnation.*
- *However, in Psalm 32, David "describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works." The burden of condemnation is lifted off and the righteous Judge accounts us as righteous with His righteousness, simply because we put our faith in Him!*
- *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered" – This blessedness goes beyond our transgressions being forgiven and extends to our sins being covered.*
- *In one aspect "our sins being covered" can speak about no longer having the nakedness of our sin exposed to cause us to live under the shame and regrets of our past.*
- *When we have truly received Christ, we are able to share our testimony of God's saving power in our lives without feeling the shame of our past failures.*
- *Instead, we share our testimony with a heart of thanksgiving, because we can say even as David said, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered."*
- *God can use our past failures as a testimony to others of Christ's saving and redeeming grace, so others can receive the same salvation we have received.*

²Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

- *In Psalm 32, David continued by adding to the list the blessedness of those who turn to God, “and in whose spirit is no deceit.”*
- *“In whose spirit is no deceit” – Not only does God forgive us and impute His righteousness to us, but then He works in our hearts and attitudes so that the sins that have caused us to act ungodly are removed and cleansed from the inner man. Not only do we have imputed righteousness (justification), but we have imparted righteousness in our souls (sanctification).*

³When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long.

⁴For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah

- *David continued in Psalm 32, describing a time prior to confessing his sins to God, when he tried to hide his sins and refused to deal with them.*
- *“When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long” – When David kept silent and did not confess his sins, his body was wracked with pain (my bones grew old). His heart was in turmoil as he groaned within himself from carrying the burden of his shame and guilt.*
- *“For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me” – One of the signs that we are a child of God is that He chastens us when we continue to walk in sin (Hebrews 12:6). God’s loving hand can be heavy as He brings correction to us.*
- *“My vitality was turned into the drought of summer” – When we refuse to deal with sin in our lives it results in a spiritual drought that robs us of any true joy, peace, or contentment. This is the very reason backslidden Christians are so miserable.*

⁵I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

- *But then the great breakthrough comes when David says, “I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden” and “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.”*

- *God's response to David's confession of his great transgression of not only adultery and murder, but also of turning from God and trying to hide his sins, was immediate and rich in mercy, "And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."*
- *Amazingly, God did not say, "For a year you refused to confess your sin and now you expect to be quickly forgiven?" Instead, His response was immediately to forgive David and embrace him as a father embraces a wayward son who returns.*
- *nothing we can do that will cause God to withdraw His love from us (Romans 8:35). However, un-confessed sins will hinder us from experiencing and benefiting from His love.*
- *God's love for us does not mean we will not suffer from the consequences of sin if we continue to walk in willful and unrepentant sin.*
- *The blessedness of God's forgiveness is that the moment we confess our sins and turn back to Him, He immediately forgives us and restores our fellowship with Him.*
- *God is our loving Father always waiting with open arms for us to return to Him when we fail.*
- *The Old Testament provides many examples where people asked God for forgiveness.*
- *There are examples in the Old Testament where individuals asked God to forgive them personally. "Look on my affliction and my pain, And forgive all my sins." (Psalm 25:18).*
- *There are also many examples in the Old Testament of people who asked God to forgive the nation for their corporate sins, "O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name." (Daniel 9:19).*
- *Although the topic of forgiveness of sins is intricately woven into both the Old and New Testament there is one startling difference between the Old and New Testament.*
- *While in the Old Testament people asked God to forgive them, in the New Testament there is not one instance where anyone asked Jesus for forgiveness, or asked God the Father for forgiveness.*

- *In fact, there is no place in the New Testament where we are instructed to ask God for forgiveness!*
- *However, that being said, this does not mean that we don't require forgiveness, nor does it mean that we receive forgiveness automatically without responding to God.*
- *The New Testament teaches that two actions are required for us to receive forgiveness for our sins: confession and repentance.*
- *The first action required for us to receive forgiveness is confession.*
- *Confession takes on two forms: the confession of our faith and the confession of our sins.*

Romans 10:9 (NKJV)

⁹that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

- *A confession of faith in Christ releases God's grace to bring forgiveness to us as sinners and our sinful state, resulting in salvation through the new birth and imputed righteousness.*
- *The Greek word for confession is ὁμολογέω *homologeō* and it literally means, "to say the same thing."*
- *Confession is not simply speaking words. Confession occurs when what is in our heart lines up with the words we speak. The Bible defines confession as occurring when our heart and words agree and say the same thing.*
- *Some people mistakenly think that simply mouthing words of a prayer to receive Christ will save them, but it is only when there is genuine faith in their heart and they respond by confessing Christ that they are saved.*
- *Another word for describing biblical confession is sincerity.*
- *The antithesis of confession is hypocrisy which occurs when the person says one thing, but their heart attitude is totally different.*

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- *The confession of our sins releases God’s grace to bring forgiveness for the specific sins we have committed. Confession cleanses our hearts resulting in sanctification, and it imparts righteousness, so we can walk in a righteous way.*
- *that we are sinners results in justification and the forgiveness of our sinful state—judicial forgiveness—freedom from the penalty of sin—freedom from damnation and Hell.*
- *Confession of our specific sins results in sanctification and the forgiveness of our specific sins—relational forgiveness—freedom from the power of sin—freedom from sinful habits and patterns.*
- *Judicial forgiveness makes way for the grace of God in our lives, so that in our reborn spirit we have the righteousness of Christ.*
- *Judicial forgiveness is a one-time event which occurs at the moment we put our faith in Christ and are born again and justified.*
- *Relational forgiveness is an ongoing process which needs to take place daily, any time we recognize an area where we have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*
- *Relational forgiveness makes way for the grace of God so that our relationship with God and others is unhindered and unencumbered by specific sins that we have committed.*
- *The second principle required for us to receive forgiveness is repentance.*

Acts 2:38 (TNIV)

³⁸Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- *Peter concluded the first evangelical message in the history of the church with the words, “Repent, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins.”*

- *Repentance is also required for both judicial and relational forgiveness.*
- *Just as confession is a consequence of a sincere desire to change, so is repentance.*
- *Repentance represents both a change of heart and a change of direction.*
- *Repentance is not just turning away from evil, but turning toward God.*
- *Repentance is a process, a lifetime journey that leads us closer and closer in our relationship with God.*
- *When we first put our faith in Christ, we literally turned away from the direction of sin and destruction and turned to face God. We made the decision to go in His direction and at that point we received judicial forgiveness and justification.*
- *However, we must continue to keep our eyes on Jesus every day, and continue to walk toward Him. As we do, we grow closer to Him and grow in holiness. That is called sanctification.*
- *As we walk on our path of repentance daily, which is facing Jesus, if we recognize an area of sin, we immediately confess it, resulting in relational forgiveness and a heart that is free to enjoy fellowship with God and with others.*

Romans 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

- *We have a companion on this daily journey of repentance. Our companion is the “goodness of God.”*
- *God’s goodness takes us by the hand and we can walk alongside God on the Highway of Holiness (Isaiah 35:8) toward our final destination—to be conformed into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:29).*
- *There are many factors which can hinder us from receiving forgiveness.*

Matthew 6:14–15 (NKJV)

¹⁴“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

- *Our unwillingness to forgive others will hinder us from receiving forgiveness from God.*
- *What does it mean when it says, “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses?”*
- *This is not referring to judicial forgiveness, which we received at the moment we received Christ, but relational forgiveness.*
- *Un-forgiveness has very negative effects on our relationship with God and with others. It even affects our spiritual growth and the quality of our lives.*
- *The Greek word for forgiveness contains the idea of “to depart, leave behind, cancel a debt.” It is important to note that the meaning focuses on the guilt of the wrongdoer and not on the wrongdoing itself.*
- *The Hebrew word for forgiveness contains the idea of “to release, depart, to take or carry away, to lift up.”*
- *Forgiveness is equated with freedom and liberty, because the debts that a person has incurred have been removed by the person who forgives.*
- *Forgiveness is not free because the debt or damage that has been incurred does not just disappear once someone is forgiven. It still must be borne.*
- *The person who forgives another of their debt, lifts that debt from the other person and absorbs that debt.*
- *If someone stole something from you, but you forgive them, then you have absorbed the loss yourself.*
- *When someone asks for forgiveness what is actually happening is that the person who had done the wrong is acknowledging that he has caused you damage and that he is unable to repair or undo what he has done. He is asking*

you to absorb the loss so his relationship with you can be restored—relational forgiveness.

- *Confession of our sins is also accompanied by repentance which can also be described as taking steps to undo some of the damage we have done by making restitution.*
- *For example, if you have been gossiping and slandering someone, you first need to ask for forgiveness. Then you need to go to back to those people who you spoke to and tell them that what you said was not right and was not true.*
- *Restitution does not always take away all the hurt. The person forgiving must absorb that, but restitution at least restores what is possible.*
- *The New Testament instructs us that if we have wronged someone we must go to that person and ask for forgiveness.*
- *The New Testament also instructs us that no matter how many times someone sins against us, we must respond by forgiving that person. (Matthew 18:22).*
- *However, that does not mean we must immediately fully trust the person.*
- *Forgiveness must be freely, generously, and unconditionally given, “even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” (Colossians 3:13).*
- *Healing the relationship and restoring trust in the other person are rebuilt through the process of restitution and restoration.*
- *If someone refuses to forgive us, does that hinder us from receiving relational forgiveness?*

Romans 12:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

- *If we have confessed our sins and asked forgiveness from the party we have wronged, even if they refuse to forgive us, our hearts are free.*
- *Relational forgiveness means our hearts are free before God and our hearts are free even toward the person we have injured. All we can do is pray for them, bless them, and seek God to heal their wounds.*

- *We have studied how both confession and repentance are required for us to receive forgiveness. We have studied the two types of forgiveness, judicial forgiveness and relational forgiveness. However, we have not yet answered the initial question, “Why doesn’t the New Testament teach that we must actually ask God for forgiveness before we are forgiven?”*
- *When we come to a person whom we have wronged asking for forgiveness, we cannot know in advance what their answer will be. However, when we come to God confession our sins and repenting, we already know His answer for His forgiveness is certain.*
- *An injured party still must decide if they will forgive us or not, but God sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for our sins at Calvary.*
- *God’s answer to us is that He has already paid the price for our sins, He has absorbed the damage and destruction that we caused through our rebellion, sins, transgressions, and self-will.*
- *Jesus’ words as He hung dying on the cross say it all, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:24).*
- *Before Jesus Christ was incarnate as a man and died for the sins of the world and was raised from the dead, the price for our sins had not yet been paid.*
- *The Old Testament sacrifices did not actually take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), but pointed with faith to the One who would come to be the true and ultimate sacrifice.*
- *When we come to God confessing our sins we can have full and unwavering confidence that He will forgive us no matter how dark our sins, or how often we have failed, or how long we have resisted Him.*
- *When we confess our sins and repent is it wrong to ask, “Forgive me?”*
- *No, but it is wrong if we are pleading with Him to forgive us, as if He hasn’t yet decided, because He already has paid the full price for all our sins.*

- *The enemy wants us to have uncertainty as to God's unconditional love and forgiveness for us, so he can keep us mired in a pit of despair and condemnation.*
- *We can come to God for forgiveness confessing our sins with a repentant heart and a mouth filled with thanksgiving and praise and a heart bubbling over with joy, thanking Him for His unconditional forgiveness.*

Luke 15:20–24 (NKJV)

²⁰“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

²¹And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.

²³And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;

²⁴for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

- “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” - *The prodigal son did not ask his father for forgiveness. His failure to ask did not reflect an unrepentant heart, only that he failed to understand the immensity of his father's love. He never imagined his father would actually forgive and restore him, and absorb the loss he had inflicted on his father, so he asked only to be treated as a hired servant.*
- “Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry”– *The father's response to his son's repentant heart was one of generosity and love. He forgave and restored him even though the son never asked for forgiveness.*
- *The crowning touch to understand the father's forgiveness, “bring the fatted calf here and kill it” – The sacrifice was made and his son was restored.*

Genesis 50:15–17 (NKJV)

¹⁵When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.”

¹⁶So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, “Before your father died he commanded, saying,

¹⁷“Thus you shall say to Joseph: “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.” ’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

- *Joseph’s brothers weren’t really certain if Joseph had truly forgiven them for all the evil they had done to him.*
- *However, long ago Joseph had forgiven them of all their wrongdoing and only desired to bless them and protect them.*
- *Joseph’s heart was never entangled with bitterness toward his brothers and he had forgiven them long before they had come to him.*
- *Joseph’s response to their doubts of his love and forgiveness for them was not one of anger or frustration but simply of sorrow, “And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.”*
- *When we receive Christ’s forgiveness with faith and thanksgiving it brings joy to the heart of God.*
- *Once we confess our sins and repent by turning back to God, He immediately forgives us.*
- *We still need to walk through a path of restoration. However, it is not a path of judgment, but one of healing and rebuilding those things which have been broken.*
- *There is nothing we can do that will cause God to withdraw His love from us (Romans 8:39) but un-confessed sin can hinder us from enjoying, experiencing, and benefitting from His love.*
- *We can bring joy to God’s heart by coming to Him every time we fail, confess our sins, and receive His forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ.*