

FORGIVENESS IS BLESSED

– JUNE 13. – PSALM 32. –

SINS FORGIVEN, COVERED, BLOTTED OUT – INIQUITY NOT IMPUTED – THE GUILILESS SPIRIT – WHO MAY PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS – UNDER THE LAW COVENANT – UNDER THE COVENANT OF GRACE – UNDER THE NEW COVENANT – SOME SINS NOT FORGIVABLE BUT EXPIABLE – "LET THEM PRAY OVER HIM" – MORTAL SIN OR SIN UNTO DEATH.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." – Verse 1.

THE Scriptures bring to our attention the thought that sins may be forgiven in the sense that God will not continue to treat us as sinners, the sins, however, remaining to be dealt with – merely covered. They also show that the time for actually blotting out sins is in the future, not in the present life. To illustrate: The Christian who has transgressed Divine Law quite unintentionally and entirely through inherited weaknesses may promptly go to God for forgiveness through the Redeemer, and is assured that his sin is covered, that God will not remember it against him nor treat him as a sinner, because Jesus Christ the righteous made full atonement for such sin.

There is another class of sin, partly of weakness and heredity, and partly assented to by the mind. This we might term a mixed sin. The Lord, in forgiving this sin, will restore the joys of His countenance to His child and entirely cover or overlook the transgression in proportion as it was unwilful, unintentional, through ignorance; but He will punish that portion which was of knowledge and connivance or assent of the mind.

There is still another kind of sin, which the Bible describes as a wilful sin – against light, against knowledge. This is sometimes spoken of as a sin against the Holy Spirit, because the light of knowledge and Truth is the light of God's Spirit of Truth; and whoever wilfully transgresses it transgresses the Spirit of Truth. Such sin Jesus declared has never forgiveness, neither in this Age nor in the Age to come. (Matthew 12:32.) But this does not mean that the individual will be punished for it forever. It simply means what it says – that such a sin cannot be forgiven and could only be expiated. If, however, it were a sin against full light, the expiation would mean the Second Death. We have reason to believe [R5690 : page 153] that on account of our inherited weaknesses and unholy environment, nearly all sins committed by God's people may be classed as mixed sins – only partly wilful.

In any event, a man who realizes his transgression forgiven and his sin covered must have great peace and joy toward the Lord, and blessing that is beyond description. He may, however, at the same time, carry the marks of those forgiven sins in his body to his dying day; and he may perhaps be troubled with aches and pains and with various diseases as a result of sins that are forgiven – to his dying moment. The sins, therefore, are not blotted out all that while, although they are forgiven. The marks of them are seen in his flesh or his mind or in whatever way they have blemished him.

St. Peter tells us that our sins are to be blotted out fully at the Second Coming of Christ. We can readily see how this will be; for the promise to the Church is that in the resurrection they will be given perfect bodies; that which is in part and imperfect will be done away, and that which is perfect will be theirs forever in the body of the resurrection – "sown in dishonor, raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power; sown an animal body, raised a spiritual body." – 1 Corinthians 15:43,44.

CONDITIONS FOR FORGIVENESS

Much confusion of thought prevails respecting the conditions upon which forgiveness of sins may be expected. This is not the fault of the Bible, which makes the matter very clear and very plain. It is the fault of our confused theologies, which have mixed up everything for us. To understand the matter we must remember that the whole world, as the children of Adam, rest under Divine sentence of death, with no offer of hope directly made to them. The Lord's people have a Revelation from Him, informing them that God purposes great things for the world by and by through Messiah's Kingdom, but that these are not applicable to them at the present time. The mercies and favors of God, including forgiveness of sins, are all confined for the present to those who come into covenant relationship with God.

What is meant by covenant relationship? some may ask. We reply that God entered into a Covenant with the Jewish nation, through Moses as the mediator of their Law Covenant. A part of that arrangement was that on the basis of certain sacrifices for sins – sacrifices of bulls and goats – God entered into a Covenant, or bargain, with that nation. These sacrifices of bulls and goats every year on the Day of Atonement imputed to the nation forgiveness of sins for that year; that all the people might be in relationship with God. Thus they had the right to come to God in prayer in respect to any matter of God's promise or in respect to the forgiveness of their sins, as in the case of David.

But this privilege did not extend to the Gentiles – it was merely an arrangement made with the Jews. And even with the Jews it was only a typical arrangement. It foreshadowed the permanent arrangement of this Gospel Age, based upon the "better sacrifices" of the antitypical Moses – Jesus.

Since the time of Jesus another Covenant has been opened, while the Law Covenant may be said to be inoperative for the

present. The Covenant now applicable to Christians is called Scripturally a Covenant of Sacrifice (Psalm 50:5), or a Covenant of Grace. It is a Covenant of Sacrifice because all who enter into this Covenant with God sacrifice their earthly rights and interests, accepting instead the spiritual blessings, which God has promised and which they can see with the eye of faith.

Jesus was the first One who made the Covenant of Sacrifice. Holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners, He presented His body a living sacrifice to God, saying, "Lo! I come, as in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, to do Thy will, O My God." (Psalm 40:7,8; Hebrews 10:7.) Thus He surrendered His will, and with it everything and every power He possessed. During the three and a half years of His ministry, He zealously carried out this Covenant unto death, even the death of the Cross. For this cause God highly exalted Him, giving Him the perfection of the spirit nature, to which he attained at His resurrection – glory, honor and immortality forever. – Phil. 2:8-11.

The work of this Gospel Age is to call out from amongst the sinner race such as may have a similar spirit, or disposition, to that which Jesus had. None, like Him, are holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; but what they lack in this respect is made up to them by the imputation of the merit of Jesus, so that, as the Apostle declares, they are accepted of God in the Beloved One. And being thus accepted, they are privileged to enter into the same Covenant of Sacrifice which Jesus entered into. With Him, they say to the Father, Lo! we present ourselves in harmony with everything written in Your Book, to do Your will even unto death. It is the same Covenant! and in describing this, the Apostle declares that we walk in Jesus' steps and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. – 1 Pet. 2:21; Col. 1:24.

Many seem not aware that only such as are in covenant relationship with God have any right to go to God in prayer, to ask

either forgiveness of sins or anything else. Nevertheless, this must be clear to every one who will think on the subject. God declares that He heareth not sinners, and that He has made only one provision whereby any may come to Him. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me," He declares. (John 14:6.) He is the Advocate for those who become His disciples and who engage to walk in His steps; but He is not the Advocate for the world – merely for the special class, His followers. In due time, at the close of this Age and the opening of the Millennium, He will become the Mediator for the whole world, will make satisfaction for all their sins, and will take over every member of the race under His Divine supervision. His Mediatorial Kingdom is arranged with this in view. Even then, the world will not go to the Father with their sins nor with their prayers, but merely go to the great Mediator between God and men – between God and the world. They will have blessings and favors then abundantly, under the arrangement provided; but they can have nothing now. The only ones who can get God's favors at the present time are those who come by the appointed Way – through the Covenant of Sacrifice.

THE ADVOCATE'S ONLY TERMS

With false ideas in our minds respecting the penalty for sin – with the idea that it is to be eternal torment – many imagine the Lord Jesus sitting tearfully and dejectedly, waiting for sinners to show the slightest sign of repentance, when He would fly to their relief and accept them without any particular terms or conditions. Nothing could be further from the truth – nothing could be further from the teaching of the Bible. On the contrary, if the sinner thinks of turning from sin to God and comes to Jesus to inquire if He will be His Advocate with the Father and make him satisfactory and acceptable, he is promptly told that he can have this privilege only on certain fixed conditions.

The conditions are stipulated – he must become a disciple [R5691 : page 154] of Christ. And this means all that the Master declared saying, "If any man will come after Me [be My disciple], let him deny himself [sacrifice his own will], and take up his cross and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24.) There is no short cut. There are no other terms, and Jesus does not urge any one to accept these terms.

Misinformed evangelists may, in the name of the Lord, urge and make different terms; but they are that far away from the authorized Message of God's Word. On the contrary, Jesus said to some in His time, "Sit down and count the cost" – be not hasty; know well what you are doing, and fully determine the matter before you undertake the responsibilities of discipleship. It is better not to vow than, after having vowed, to break the vow. It is better not to put your hand to the plow to become a servant of the Lord than, after taking these vows and entering the service, either to turn back or even to look back, as implying a half-hearted service. – Luke 9:62.

THE NARROW WAY – THE FEW

Some one may perhaps suggest that if these views were generally accepted, there would be far fewer professed Christians in the world. We agree to this; but we insist that the Christians would be of a better standard, more acceptable to the Lord. The Lord declares, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life [in the present time], and few there be that find it." These few are to constitute the Kingdom Class, the Bride Class, and with Christ are to be the Divine agency for blessing all the families of the earth during the thousand years of Christ's Reign.

Another point that might be worthy of notice is that when we first come to the Lord, it is not necessary to pray for forgiveness of original sin. He informs us that all the arrangements are made, completed, for those who desire to accept His terms and become

his disciples. All, therefore, we have to do is to go to the Lord intelligently, thoughtfully, and tell Him how glad we are that He has made these arrangements; and that we gladly accept the terms of discipleship, with the promise that His grace shall be sufficient for us, and with His assurance that all things shall work together for good to the called ones according to His purpose.

It is after these have come into covenant relationship with God that they have need to pray for the forgiveness of their trespasses – their sins of omission or commission conflicting with their covenant of consecration and the Divine requirements. Thus this class is privileged to offer the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." These trespasses thus to be forgiven do not include the original sin. That was forgiven freely for all those who accepted Christ and came under this new covenant-arrangement. The trespasses are our failures to come up to the standard required of the Lord after His grace has freed us from the transgressions that are past.

"LET THEM PRAY OVER HIM"

St. James calls our attention to some of the Lord's people who might become sin-sick to such an extent that they would not have access to the Throne of Grace themselves. Because of carelessness of living, neglect of duties and privileges, disregard of their covenant obligations, a cloud between them and the Father comes thick and dark. They are unable to penetrate this cloud. Their prayers seem not to reach the Father. He is hiding His face from them. Theirs is an extreme case. Through the Apostle the Lord says that if any one shall turn such a transgressor – a Christian who has gotten into such a wrong condition – from the error of his way, he will save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins.

The Apostle tells the procedure. The sin-sick one should realize his need, so that he would call upon the elders of the Church – the senior Christian brethren. He should confess to them his fault

or whatever he believes has had to do with separating him from the Lord's favor. They in turn, as members of the Body of Christ, may intercede for him to the Lord and may anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him, and the Lord shall raise him up to spiritual health and strength again. – James 5:14-16,19,20.

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