

## WHEN THE LORD FORGIVES

One of the most memorable stories in the entire Bible is recorded in Luke 15. It is a story that Jesus told about a father and his two sons. The younger son got his inheritance, then went into a far country and wasted all that he had. In the end, he came home to his father, who received him “with open arms.” This account, often called “the Parable of the Prodigal Son,” is a message about forgiveness, love, and the proper attitude toward those that go astray.

Who is there among us that in the past has not stood in need of God’s forgiveness? The Bible’s teaching is too plain to miss: all have sinned (Romans 3:9,10,23). An Old Testament prophecy foretold how the Messiah would be wounded for our transgressions, and though “*we like sheep have gone astray*,” God laid the iniquity of us all on His Son (Isaiah 53:5,6). Thank God for what Jesus the Christ did for us!

A great deal is said in the Bible about the topic of forgiveness. Sometimes in the Scriptures, forgiveness is called “remission of sins,” “cleansing,” “washing away” sins, or the “blotting out” of sin. Regardless of how it is stated, the Lord’s forgiveness is a major Bible theme. With that in mind, let us consider what happens when the Lord forgives one that has sinned.

**When the Lord forgives, He does something that we do not deserve.** The God of heaven is a God of forgiveness: “. . . *God, for he will abundantly pardon*” (Isaiah 55:7). The Bible also portrays God as a God of mercy. In Psalm 130:7 it is written, “*Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy.*” When God, “*who is rich in mercy*” (Ephesians 2:4), forgives a person that has sinned, He does not do so because He is in debt to that person, nor does He do it because that person somehow has earned or deserves such treatment.

**When the Lord forgives, He does so with**

**gladness.** The Lord has *the power* to forgive sins (Mark 2:7). Just as important, the Bible shows that He *does* forgive sins (2 Samuel 12:13). But, God not only has *the power* to forgive, and not only *does* He forgive, but He *wants* to forgive. He is “*a God ready to pardon*” (Nehemiah 9:17). Again, it is written, “*For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive*” (Psalm 86:5).

Those three great parables of Jesus that we read in Luke 15 (Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost/Prodigal Son) all point to one basic reaction on the part of those that find that which had been lost. What was their response when the lost one or thing was found? Rejoicing (15:6), joy (15:7,10), being merry and glad (15:32). Such words are an indication of God’s attitude when He forgives sinners – He rejoices at their repentance, and He is happy to do the forgiving.

**When the Lord forgives, He does it according to His own will or conditions.** Where does forgiveness take place? Answer: in the mind of God. The general principle is, in order to have our sins forgiven, we must obey Jesus (Hebrews 5:9), which is the same as doing the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). Specifically, for a non-Christian, the Bible teaches that a person’s sins are forgiven after he/she has met the following conditions: believe that Jesus is God’s Son (John 3:16-18), repent of past sins (Acts 3:19), confess faith in Jesus (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

When one that is already a Christian sins, God’s law of pardon is different (from what is required for a non-Christian). A child of God that sins can be forgiven through repentance (Acts 8:21-23), confession of his/her sins (1 John 1:9), and prayer for forgiveness (James 5:16). Let it be clear to all: to receive forgiveness from the Lord, we must “do it His way,” or else forgiveness will never come.

**When the Lord forgives, the ones forgiven still have to deal with the consequences of the**

**sins which they have committed.** In Bible language, “. . . *whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*” (Galatians 6:7). King David sinned against God when he committed adultery and murder. The Bible says that the Lord forgave him, but he still had to face the consequences of his tragic mistakes, which consequences included the death of his son and turmoil within his family (2 Samuel 12:9-14).

Then, there was Peter, who denied Jesus three times. The Lord forgave him (Luke 22:31,32), but Peter has always been known as “the denier.” If you and I have told lies, it is possible for us to receive the Lord’s forgiveness, but we also know that the lies which we told will cause others to mistrust us in the future. A man might get drunk, then drive a vehicle and be involved in an accident that causes him serious bodily harm. For certain, it is possible for him to be forgiven of his wrongdoing, but the consequences of his sin – damage to his vehicle and his body, will remain. Forgiveness does not do away with sin’s consequences.

**When the Lord forgives us, He no longer holds those forgiven sins against us.** When God forgives a person, He is said to cast his/her sins behind His back (Isaiah 38:17), or cast them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Elsewhere the Bible speaks of forgiven sins being “*covered*” (Psalm 32:1) or “*blotted out*” from God’s record (Acts 3:19).

We rejoice in God’s promise about how He would deal with sin under the new covenant: “. . . *their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*” (Hebrews 8:12). To say that God no longer “remembers” our sins indicates that after He forgives them, He no longer holds them against us. That is true, regardless of the nature of the sins that we might have committed. Paul, who “*persecuted the church of God*” prior to his conversion to the Lord Jesus, by the grace of God was completely forgiven of his horrible crimes against Christians (1 Corinthians 15:9,10). The

Bible shows that all those whom God counts as “*the unrighteous,*” even those that have been adulterers, idolaters, thieves, and drunkards, can have their sins washed away if they will comply with the terms of the gospel (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). It is true: when the Lord forgives or blots out our sins, they are gone forever!

**When the Lord forgives us, we need to forgive ourselves** (and not continue to beat ourselves up over our sins, regardless of how horrific they may have been). The Psalmist accepted responsibility for his sins, but he was also willing to accept the fact that the Lord had forgiven him: “*I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions . . . and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah*” (Psalm 32:5).

When children of God call on Him in prayer, saying, “*And forgive us our debts*” (Matthew 6:12), then once the debt has been cancelled or forgiven, then they need to stop trying to pay it again. Yes, we should have a sense of shame for our sins, a godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). However, we must not come before God’s throne and ask Him to forgive sins that He has already forgiven. When we heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, through the blood of Jesus the Lord forgave every one of our past sins, so we need to let them go! The same holds true for any sins that we have committed since becoming a Christian: if we have repented of them and brought them before the Lord in prayer, then per His promise, He has already forgiven those sins (1 John 1:7,9). Because that is true, it shows a lack of faith or trust in His promise if we keep bringing up our old, forgiven sins when we petition Him in prayer. Once our sins have been blotted out, we need to trust in God and move on with our lives.

**When the Lord forgives, He is setting a pattern for us to imitate.** “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you*”

(Ephesians 4:32). The forgiveness that you and I receive from the hand of God ought to motivate us to be willing to forgive others. In fact, if we do not forgive others, then the Lord will not forgive us. Is that not what Jesus taught? Hear Him: “*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Matthew 6:14,15).

How does God look at the matter of forgiving those that have erred? He is ready and glad to forgive them. And, we recall that when He forgives sins, He no longer remembers or mentions them. Should you and I not take that same approach when dealing with those that have sinned, even those that have sinned against us?

When brothers or sisters in the Lord stumble, we need to be ready to receive them with open arms when they repent of their sins. Is that not the way that we would want others to treat us if we were in that situation (Matthew 7:12)? Is that not what the father did in the “Prodigal Son” parable? (Luke 15:20-24). Just as we rejoice when a lost person leaves the kingdom of darkness and becomes a follower of Jesus, so we should rejoice when a child of God “comes home” (Luke 15:7,10). Does the Lord really expect me to forgive a person that has done something awful? He sure does. In fact, as we have seen, in part *my* soul’s salvation depends on my willingness to accept anyone that the Lord has forgiven.

Would it not be horrible to live in a world where no forgiveness was available?! Thank God for the forgiveness that He offers through His Son Jesus. Friend, may we assist You in receiving the forgiveness of Your sins so you can be prepared to go to heaven after you leave this world?

Union Grove church of Christ  
4889 Bates Pike SE      www.ugcoc.org  
Cleveland, TN 37323      TEL: (423)-479-8307  
Service Times: Sunday at 10:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.  
   Wednesday at 7:00 p.m.

This booklet was written by Roger D. Campbell.

**WHEN  
THE  
LORD  
FORGIVES**