

Title:        **HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?**

Text:        1 John 1:9

Subject:    *God's Justice in Forgiving Sin*

Date:        Sunday Evening — April 1, 2012

Tape #        1 John #9

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles to 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9.

Men and women today like to have things easy. If they learn anything, they want to learn it quickly, without expending much effort. Our generation professes to be very intellectual. We like to think ourselves wise and knowing. But, in reality, if you consider the vast amount of material at our disposal, this is the most illiterate generation in American history. Men and women carry college degrees today who could not have gotten a high school diploma fifty years ago. Today, people accept superficial answers to superficial questions. This generation builds science and medicine, psychology and sociology on speculative theory. And, regrettably,

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most of our modern day religion is built upon the same sand. To thinking people, this will never do.

It is my purpose in this message to seek from the Word of God the answer to the most profound question that can ever be raised in heaven or earth: — **HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?** This question is seldom raised by men. We say, in agreement with the Apostle's Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." But, if we are asked how it is that a holy, just, and righteous God can forgive sin, very few could give an answer from the Scriptures. Most preachers and religious teachers never examine this crucial question. I went through several years of study at two of our nation's leading Bible colleges, without once hearing anyone raise this question. Yet, the answer to this question is essential to an understanding of the gospel. I trust that God the Holy Spirit will now take the things of Christ and show them to us.

**HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?** This is the first question that arises in a man's soul when he is

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convicted of his sin by the Holy Spirit. When the soul is seriously impressed with the conviction of its guilt, when terror and alarm grip a man's conscience, realizing the inevitable consequences of sin, he is afraid of God. At that time, every attribute of the eternal God is a terror to his mind. But most of all, the guilty sinner is afraid of God's justice. This was a problem which **Eliphaz** could not understand. He said, "*What is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, God putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?*" (Job 15:14-16). **Bildad** was also perplexed with this problem, "*How can a man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?*" (Job 25:4). **The Psalmist** was much troubled about this matter. He said, "*If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*" (Psalm 130:3). And I say this is the greatest concern of a convicted sinner: — **HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?** He says to himself, "God is a just God; if he is just, how can he pardon

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my sins? My iniquities cry aloud for punishment. My transgressions demand that his right hand slay me. How can I be saved? Were God unjust, he might forgive; but unjust he cannot be. God just, requiring exact righteousness. *‘He layeth justice to the line, and righteousness to the plummet.’* He is the Judge of all the earth. He must do right. How, then, can a poor sinner escape his righteous wrath?”

The sinner is right in his conviction about the justice of God. God is inflexibly just. The justice of God, in itself, is a great barrier to the salvation of sinners. There is no possibility of man overcoming that barrier. It can only be removed in one way, and that is through the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. **Mark you, God is absolutely just.** He must punish sin. **Burning Sodom** tells us of God’s wrath against sin. **The old world**, being buried in a flood of wrath, tells us that God is angry with the wicked every day. The earth opening up to swallow **Korah, Dathan, and Abiram** tells us that the ungodly must perish. The buried cities of **Nineveh** and the relics of **Tyre and Sidon** are monuments of divine justice, telling

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us that god will by no means clear the guilty. **Hell's bottomless pit** of torment declares the awful vengeance of God against the sins of our race! The sighs, and groans, and moans, and shrieks of those condemned by God rise in our ears and tell us that God will by no means clear the guilty. He will not wink at iniquity, transgression, and sin. He will avenge his righteous law. His justice shall have a full satisfaction for every offence.

**Yes, the sinner is right in his conviction that God is just. And the inference that follows is also right. — Since God is just, my sin must be punished.** If God did not punish my sin, then he must cease to be what he has always been, perfectly just and inflexibly righteous. And that cannot be, for God himself declares, “*I am the Lord, I change not!*” There has never been, not since the beginning of God’s creation, a sin absolutely pardoned without a satisfactory atonement. There has never been the slightest offence remitted by the great Judge of heaven and earth who must do right, until the law has received its fullest vindication. Be assured, my dear

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friends, the God of the Bible must punish sin! Every transgression shall have its just recompense of reward. Every offence shall have its due punishment. Every iniquity shall have its doom. — *“The soul that sinneth it shall die.”*

**Is it possible, then, that the just and righteous God can forgive sin? Is there any hope for a poor, condemned, guilty sinner?** Yes, there is. The Psalmist said so. *“There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”* God himself calls sinners by the gospel to come to him for forgiveness. — *“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool”* (Isaiah 1:18). But, how can this be?

**HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?** That is the great riddle of the law, and the blessed discovery of the gospel! Let the heavens hear and the inhabitants of the earth be astonished! Like all men, we have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But now we are *“justified freely by his grace through the*

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*redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God: To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:23-26).*

**This is the message of glad tidings from the God of glory to perishing sinners upon earth.** — That very justice which stood in our way and prevented us from being pardoned has been appeased by the sacrifice of Christ in our place. **By the rich atonement offered up on Calvary, justice is satisfied. It has sheathed its sword. Now, the justice and law of God have not a word to say against a believing sinner! More than that, the very justice of God, once so angry, so fearful, so dreadful, has become our advocate, pleading for the pardon and cleansing of every soul that believes on Christ!**

## **HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?**

**Proposition:** This is the message of our text. **HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?** — God freely forgives all our sin upon the merits of Christ’s sacrifice as our Substitute; and we receive that forgiveness when we confess our sins, trusting Christ alone to cleanse us from all sin. Read my text with me. — 1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

This verse of Scripture shows us both how we obtain the forgiveness of sins at the beginning of our Christian life, and how we continue to obtain that forgiveness throughout the days of our pilgrimage upon the earth. Here is a message for everyone who hears my voice: saints and sinners, believers and unbelievers, saved sinners and lost sinners, you who are nearest heaven and you who are nearest hell. — *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*



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**Divisions:** There are three things that I want us to see in our text.

1. There must be a confession of sin before we can receive the pardon of sin.
2. God forgives the sins of his people according to strict justice upon the grounds of Christ's finished work.
3. God's forgiveness of our sin is both certain and complete.

## **CONFESSION NECESSARY**

In the first place, our text tells us that — **There must be a confession of sin before we can receive the pardon of sin.** — *“If we confess our sins.”* We do not believe that repentance, faith, and the confession of sin accomplishes our pardon. That cannot be. The pardon and forgiveness of sin is an act of Divine justice, accomplished at Calvary. When Jesus Christ paid the price of our redemption, the price of his own precious blood, justification was accomplished. At that time, he made an end of sin and brought in an everlasting righteousness. But we, being by nature

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the enemies of God and children of wrath, still bear the guilt of sin. That guilt is not removed from our conscience and hearts until the blood of Christ is applied by faith. It is in this sense that the confession of sin is a condition of forgiveness. “*If we confess our sins,*” we have forgiveness. If we do not confess our sin, we make God a liar, and the wrath of God is upon us.

**The Apostle John writes to us as men who know themselves to be sinners in need of forgiveness.** —

If that were not the case, we would not need to confess our sins. And if we confessed our sins without having felt and known our sinfulness, we would only be adding to our many sins hypocrisy and pretence.

We all need forgiveness, because all are sinners. He that does not know that does not know anything about the gospel. It is the very A – B – C of Christianity that a man know his right place in the sight of God, and understand his just condemnation.

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The first step towards heaven is to see clearly that we deserve hell.

**We are all great sinners.** Never did the wisest of men speak more wisely than when he said, “*There is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not*” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Paul writes, “*There is none righteous, no not one,...All have sinned and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:10, 23).

**The one common characteristic of our race that we all love sin by nature.** Man “*drinketh iniquity like water.*” We were born sinners. “*Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*” (Romans 5:12). We all must confess with David, “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psalm 51:5). We all went forth from the womb speaking lies. We have been sinners all our lives. We take to sin naturally. No child ever needs to be taught to do wrong. No devil or bad companion ever leads us into such wickedness as is in our hearts by nature.

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**We are all guilty in the sight of God.** We have broken his holy law. We have transgressed his precepts. There is not a commandment in God's Book that does not condemn us. *"All the world is guilty before God."* Therefore, *"It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment."*

**Even among those who have been regenerated by the grace of God and washed in the blood of Christ there is a constant mar of sin.** James says the truth, *"In many things we offend all"* ((3:2).

**The holy character and justice of God cause all to know that we deserve eternal hell.** God is holy and we are sinners. We must either be forgiven or be eternally lost. We must be forgiven, or eternally suffer the miseries of hell.

**Recognizing ourselves as sinners, we must confess our sins to God if we would obtain forgiveness.** Hear the word of the Lord, *"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and*

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*forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Psalm 28:13). “Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God” (Jeremiah 3:13). David shows us how to confess our sins. “I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest” (Psalm 51:3-4).*

### **We must confess our sins to God himself.**

- Our confession must arise from a humbled heart — a heart broken over sin.
- Our confession must be true, honest, and sincere.
- Our confession must be complete. — *“God be merciful to me the sinner.”*

**We must make confession of our sin to God, in humble sincerity, without guile.** You cannot mention every offence. But you dare not hide one. If you hide one sin, it will be a millstone around your neck to sink you into the lowest hell. Confess that you are vile by nature, evil in practice, and wicked in

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heart. Lie down as low as you can at the footstool of Divine grace, confessing that you are a wretch undone unless God has mercy upon you. God, be merciful to me, I am the sinner; a sinner in heart, a sinner by choice, a sinner by habit, a sinner deserving of hell.

Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin,  
And born unholy and unclean;  
Sprung from the man whose guilty fall  
Corrupts the race and taints us all.

Soon as we draw our infant breath,  
The seeds of sin grow up for death;  
Thy law demands a perfect heart,  
But we're defiled in every part!

I would disclose my whole complaint,  
But where shall I begin?  
No words of mine can fully paint,  
That worst distemper, sin.

It lies not in a single part,

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But through my frame is spread;  
A burning fever in my heart,  
A palsy in my head.

Lord, I am sick, regard my cry,  
And set my spirit free:  
Say, canst Thou let a sinner die,  
Who longs to live with thee?

To the soul who makes such a confession there is a promise of merciful forgiveness. To such a one the Lord will not impute iniquity. Only confess with David, “*I have sinned against the Lord,*” and the assurance shall return to your soul, “*The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die*” (2 Samuel 12:13).

**And, in the confession of sin there must be an eye of faith fixed upon Christ.** Realizing your sin, lying upon your face in the dust before God, you trust the blood of Christ to wash away your sin. Looking to that dear fountain of blood you cry, “*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be*

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*whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities” (Psalm 51:7-9).*

Such is the condition upon which we receive the forgiveness of sins. Recognizing our sinfulness, we confess our sins freely to God, trusting the blood of Christ alone to purge away our sins.

## **JUSTICE SATISFIED**

Now, in the second place, John teaches us that — **God forgives the sins of his people according to strict justice upon the grounds of Christ’s finished work.** — “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.*” — Here is the grounds of our faith; this is the glorious assurance of the gospel. In faithfulness to his Word, and in justice to his law, God forgives our sin for Christ’s sake.

**In forgiving the sins of believers God is faithful.** In all things the Lord God shows his faithfulness and



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his unchanging character. Even in this matter of forgiving sin, we see God's immutability.

### **In forgiving sin God is faithful to his Covenant.**

He established Christ as our Head and Representative, and made a covenant of mercy, grace, and forgiveness with him. He said, "*My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted...My mercy will I keep for him forever and my covenant shall stand fast with him...If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments;...Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips*" (Psalm 89:24, 28, 31, 33, 34).

The Lord Jesus Christ was in the everlasting covenant, "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*" Thus it was that the Psalmist could write by inspiration hundreds of years before Christ was born, "*Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin*" (Psalm 85:2).

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**In forgiving sin God is faithful to his name.** *“The Lord passed by and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin”* (Exodus 34:6-7).

**In forgiving sin for Christ’s sake, God is faithful to his Son.** It was for this purpose that Christ Jesus was born of a virgin. *“Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21). Christ came to do the Father’s will, making sacrifice for sin. And now God does the will of his Son, granting forgiveness to all who call upon his name.

**In forgiving our sin for Christ’s sake, God is faithful to his Word.** This is God’s word to perishing sinners, *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteousness man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly*

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*pardon*” (Isaiah 55:7). *“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me”* (Jeremiah 33:8). Behold God’s readiness to forgive sin! God is more ready to forgive than we are to sin.

**This was the message of the Old Testament prophets.** *“To Christ give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43).

- Every sacrifice of the Old Testament proclaimed God’s forgiveness of sins.
- When our Lord sent his apostles into the world, he gave them this task. They were to preach the forgiveness of sin.

“He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should

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be preached in his name among all nations”  
(Luke 24:45-47).

- **The Holy Spirit came to convince the world of sin and of God’s righteousness in Christ, forgiving sin.** — He convinces us of the need of forgiveness. — He convinces us of the value of forgiveness. — He convinces us of the security of forgiveness.

**John not only shows us that God is faithful, but also that God is just in the forgiveness of sin.** — **HOW CAN GOD FORGIVE SIN?** — There is only one answer — Justice has been fully satisfied through the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. When man sinned, the law demanded that man must be punished. The first offence of man was committed by Adam, who represented the entire race. When God would punish sin, in his own infinite mind he devised a blessed plan. He would not punish his people, but he would punish their Head and Representative, the last Adam. By one man sin came. Even so, by another man, the last Adam, sin would

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be removed. **The Lord Jesus Christ took our sin upon himself, and enduring its full penalty, he satisfied the claims of justice against us. All that Christ endured, he endured as our Substitute.** He died “*the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.*” “*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*” **And, in as much as he is my Substitute, when he died, I died; the law being satisfied in my Substitute is satisfied in me. And now, God can both be just and justify me!** Let me briefly show you how the law is fully satisfied in our Substitute.

- The law is satisfied, because of the dignity of the person of our Substitute. He is the God-man.
- The law is satisfied, because of the relationship which our Substitute bears to the great Judge. He is God’s eternal Son.

**Illustration:** Brutus’ justice was unquestioned in the Roman court because he withheld not the whip from his own son.

**Illustration:** *The Chicken Thief*

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**We have the proof of God's inflexible justice in the fact that when his Son was made sin for us, God slew his own darling Son.** *"It pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief."* Our Lord Jesus was beaten and humiliated in Pilate's judgment hall. But that was not enough. Justice demanded death. And so we hear him cry, *"My God, my God, why hath thou forsaken me?"* Yet, justice shows no mercy. Rather the Father takes up his sword saying, *"Awake! O sword, against my Shepherd, against the man that is my fellow. Smite the Shepherd!"*

**Again, if you consider the terrible agonies endured by our Redeemer, you must conclude that justice is satisfied.**

- In all of hell the dignity of justice and vengeance is not so plainly displayed as it was in Gethsemane.
- In Pilate's judgment hall our Lord was humbled, mocked, falsely accused, and beaten.
- But go to Calvary. There behold the Son of God in all his sufferings, and know this: — The justice of God is more fully satisfied in the death of his Son

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than it could have been if all the world were eternally tormented in hell. When our Immanuel cried, “*It is finished,*” he declared, “The deed is done, justice is satisfied and the sins of my people are put away.” As God is satisfied with Christ’s one sacrifice for sin, my soul is also satisfied!

My faith doth lay its hand,  
On that dear Head of thine,  
While like a penitent I stand,  
And here confess my sin.

Here, my dear friends, is the only grounds upon which the eternal God can forgive sin. If he forgives sin, it must be in exact agreement with his justice. And that can only be accomplished by the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ in our place.

## **SURE, COMPLETE FORGIVENESS**

There is one more soul satisfying truth set forth in our text: — **God’s forgiveness of our sin is both certain and complete!** — “*If we confess our sins, he*

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*is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Mark the truth of this text, and let your hearts swell with praise. It is an act of justice on God’s part to freely and fully forgive the sins of every soul for whom his Son died at Calvary. **Because God is just, he must forgive the sins of every soul for whom Jesus Christ made atonement!**

**If Jesus Christ is my Substitute, my forgiveness is an absolute certainty.** I know that Christ is my Substitute, because he died for sinners. And of sinners there are none so desperate as I am. Standing at the foot of the cross, confessing my sin, and trusting Christ alone, I know that God forgives my sin! God’s very faithfulness and justice are at stake.

**The just God cannot slay those for whom Jesus died!**

- His justice will not allow it. If justice is once satisfied, it would be injustice to ask for more. If



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God has punished Christ his Son, he cannot punish those for whom Christ died.

- There is no supposed universal redemption here. — A redemption that does not redeem is not worth my preaching, nor is it worth your hearing. Christ Jesus shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. He did not die in vain. If Christ died in my place, there is no question about it, I must be with him in glory. — **Beloved, I say the justice of God pleads as loudly as his mercy for our forgiveness.**

From whence this fear and unbelief?  
Hast thou, O Father, put to grief  
Thy spotless Son for me?  
And will the righteous Judge of men  
Condemn me for that debt of sin,  
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?

Complete atonement Thou hast made,  
And to the utmost farthing paid,  
Whate'er thy people owed.  
If thou hast my discharge procured,

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And freely, in my room, endured  
The whole of wrath Divine.  
Payment God cannot twice demand, —  
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,  
And then again at mine.

Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest!  
The merits of thy great High Priest  
Speak peace and liberty.  
Trust in His efficacious blood;  
Nor fear thy banishment from God,  
Since Jesus died for thee!

**NOTE:** The theory of universal redemption cuts to the very heart of the gospel. It makes redemption dependent upon man's free-will. Can it be possible that Christ shed his blood hoping to redeem sinners who are forever to suffer in hell? Perish the thought! God forbid! It cannot be. Such a gospel is not good news, but bad news. It declares that the only Savior of men is a worthless, miserable failure! We declare good news to poor sinners.

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Jesus hath bled,  
And there is remission!

**How can I know that I am one of those for whom Jesus died?** — Christ died for sinners. If I come to him and trust him alone for forgiveness, I know that he died for me.

**This forgiveness of sin which God gives upon the merits of Christ's shed blood is complete.** — He cleanses us from all unrighteousness!

- God forgives us of all our sin for Christ's sake.
- God never remembers our sins against us for Christ's sake.
- God never treats us any the less graciously because of our sins for Christ's sake.
- God will never charge us with sin for Christ's sake.

### **Application**

Do you have this forgiveness of sin? — *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us*

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*[our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)*

If Christ is our Redeemer, we have the forgiveness of sin. What blessed souls we are! *“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.”*

- Do you want the forgiveness of sin? You must flee to Christ and sue for mercy.
- Child of God, as often as you feel the guilt of sin, confess your sin, and God will in faithful justice forgive your sin, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.
- When we stand before the bar of Divine justice in the Day of Judgment, the law will have no accusation against us. Indeed, the law shall demand our acceptance!

Let us join the Apostle in praising God for his rich grace in Christ.— *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ...In*

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*whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:3, 7). — “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:20-21).*

Amen.