

## —THE WHOLE OF FORGIVENESS—

### *1. Introduction To The Subject*

Forgiveness is at once both very simple, and also most difficult to understand. It is simple because God, in His profundity is always simple, and His ways will be simple. Man, in his sinfulness is always complex, and cannot understand simple things. That is why one has to become as a little child in order to be in the Kingdom and to understand it. One of the things of the Kingdom is forgiveness.

With man's sinful complexity are included a number of factors. One is that God is Giver. Man, in the beginning, wished to blind himself to this aspect of God as he also blinded himself to other aspects of God. We are told 'He was not thankful' (Rom. 1:21). He cannot therefore understand giving in its pure form nor participate in it. He regards giving suspiciously, or uses it with devious motivation. God alone can give truly (James 1:17-18, cf. John 4:10, II Cor. 9:15). Since man cannot understand giving, he likewise cannot understand forgiving. For giving, in a sense (cf. French pardonner) is a giving back what one has lost or forfeited which has been previously given. It is also not demanding back. Man cannot understand this purely.

Nor is this all. Man cannot understand because to understand is to be for given, and to be forgiven is to come under the obligation of love. We do not prove this point here but simply indicate it. We mean that man sees forgiveness as humiliating and demeaning, and of course it is where there is no sense of shame for failure, no willingness to repent, and no sense that one has failed or should effect restitution. Man sees gratuitous forgiveness as demeaning.

One of the reasons for this is that man does not understand the nature of sin. He cannot, of course. He is not foolish enough to evade the fact that sin and sins are destructive and harmful in their affect and effects. However he either turns away from this truth in empty optimism, or grows angry because of it and lays the burden of guilt upon God, or circumstances, heredity and environment, or he simply retreats into his anger in neurotic and psychotic ways. He cannot understand sin because he dare not. Not only is he involved in it subjectively and emotionally so that he cannot make detached and objective assessments of it, but were he to see and admit the heinous nature of sin he would be proven to be a very low creature indeed.

We see then that for the writer of this study as also the reader of it, the study of forgiveness is not an easy task. As usual all God's truths (and truth) stand in need of Divine revelation. Hence Jesus said, 'When the Spirit of truth is come...he will convict (i.e. convince, rebuke) the world of sin...'. Apart from the Spirit forgiveness cannot be known.

When it is known then the deepest revolution the human spirit can know takes place.

## ***2. God Is The Forgiving God***

Whatever the idols, gods and lords of human and demonic powers may do to their devotees, they do not forgive. Man may buy their acceptance, bribe them for their gifts, give them servile obedience for their protection, but they know nothing of gratuitous forgiveness. Only God is the God of forgiveness.

It is good to see this before we plunge into the more difficult aspects of our study. It is good just to read what the Scriptures say of Him: 'For Thou, O Lord, art good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon Thee' (Psalm 86:5). 'There is forgiveness with Thee' (Psalm 130:4). 'The Lord, the Lord, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...' (Exodus 34:6-7). 'But Thou art a God ready to forgive, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...' (Nehemiah 9:17). 'Bless the Lord...Who forgives all your iniquity...' '...as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us' (Psalm 103:3, 12). 'Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy Back...' (Isaiah 38:17). 'I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions' (Isaiah 43:25). '...though your sins be like scarlet;- they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall become like wool' (Isaiah 1:18). 'Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea' (Micah 7:19). 'I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more' (Jeremiah 31:34). 'Who is a God like Thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression...', 'He will tread all our iniquities underfoot...' (Micah 7:18f).

These are but a few of the statements which point to God as the forgiving one and everyone of them is from the Old Testament. The New Testament of course abounds in the fact that God forgives. '...God for Christ's sake has forgiven you' (Ephesians 4:32). '...as the Lord has forgiven you...' (Colossians 3:13). '...Who has loosed us from our sins...' (Rev. 1:5). The N.T. of course speaks in terms not only of forgiveness but of justification, and of right-standing before God and His law - all given as the gifts of God. That is why Daniel can say in his day, 'To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness...'. That is why Solomon can plead with confidence, '...then hear Thou from heaven and forgive the sin of Thy servants...forgive Thy people who have sinned against Thee, and all their transgressions which they have committed against Thee...' (I Kings 8:36, 50). In Jeremiah 36:3 God speaks of the turning of Israel, '...that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.' This is in line with God's revelation, '...I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God' (Ezekiel 18:32).

Doubtless many of us wonder why God should forgive, and even how He can, but the Scriptures make it unmistakably clear that God is the Forgiver as well as the Giver. Indeed the two are bound closely together. This we will see.

### ***3. A Short History Of Forgiveness***

Before we plunge into an examination of the nature of forgiveness we ought to look briefly at the fact and history of forgiveness in the Scriptures. We find the theme to be a rich one, and to extend from the first to the last books of Holy Writ. With the fall of man there is need for God to be merciful and not immediately destroy man. Genesis 3:15 indicates that God will do something drastic about evil, and do this through human seed. Hebrews tells us that Abel offered up his sacrifice by faith, and it was effective. By contrast Cain's was not accepted, doubtless because of lack of faith. The point is made, however, that sacrifice was efficacious. Cain's sacrifice was useless because his spirit was wrong. I John 3:10-12 makes him to be a child of Satan. In Genesis 4:1-6 insights are given in regard to the nature of sin. If one has a bad conscience, then one is open to the deprivations of sin. If one's conscience is clear then one can overcome sin.

Doubtless the forgiveness of sins attached to sacrifice, and more especially to blood sacrifice. Later a rationalisation of this is given in Leviticus 17:11.

If then all sacrifices offered in faith in the propitiating God (cf. Luke 18: 13-14) are efficacious, then there is little need to examine much of Patriarchal history and its happenings. One thing we do glean from them is the truth of covenant, and of justifying faith (Gen. 15:6). Somehow Abraham must have understood the principle of the (yet-to-be) Cross. We gather this from Genesis 22, especially verses 8, 14, cf. John 8:56, Hebrews 11:17-19.

In Israel there was a sacrificial cultus which ensured the forgiveness of sins to the penitent offerers, and in the various offerings the sins of the people were covered in a collective way, eg. the sin-offering and the sacrifice of the Atonement.

The exile presented problems since there was no altar, and a substitutionary altar could not be erected outside of Jerusalem. However, the prophets spoke of forgiveness of sins related to the New Covenant, and to the coming Kingdom of God. It related this forgiveness in some way to Messiah, and the full forgiveness of sins became a prophetic promise and an eschatological certainty. Hence when John the Baptist came preaching the Kingdom, the time of the outpouring of the Spirit and the coming of Messiah, he also spoke of the forgiveness of sins. Indeed his baptism was for this, and repentance was its basis. He pointed to Christ and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.'

Jesus for his part, whilst ministering something of forgiveness to those who heard him, also placed forgiveness in the future, relating it to the Kingdom, and to his work as suffering servant. He gathered up many elements of the prophetic promises in regard to the forgiveness of sins, and at the very last claimed his death would be for this forgiveness (Matt. 26:28, cf. Jer. 31:31-34). On rising from the dead he spoke immediately of the forgiveness of sins. In John 20:19-23 he gives authority to forgive sins, and in Luke 24:44-47 he says the prophecies will be fulfilled which spoke of his death and the universal proclamation of forgiveness.

From the day of Pentecost onwards the followers of Jesus proclaim the forgiveness of sins. They do this in the light of his Lordship over death, and the fact of his Cross. As a result thousands come into the forgiveness of sins. In Acts 5:31-32 the apostles declare to the Sanhedrin that God has raised Christ up to forgive the sins of Israel. In Acts 8 Philip declares this is also for Samaritans, and in Acts 10:43 Peter declares it is also for Gentiles (the nations) and that the prophets themselves have declared this. The Epistles affirm this matter, and the Book of the Revelation is in accordance with this principle, even to the point of showing the liberation from sin, and the cleansing from its defilement (1:5, 7:14).

From beginning to end then the gift of forgiveness is made available for the human race. However simplistic this brief sketch may appear, the essence of it is that God has never denied forgiveness to the sincere and repentant suppliant. There are doubtless many questions raised by such an offer, but the fact of it is there. We may now proceed to look at the nature of forgiveness, the basis of its reception by sinners, and the effects it has upon the human race, and indeed, all creation.

#### ***4. Words and Terms Used For Forgiveness***

Doubtless each word has its own special meaning or variety of meanings, derived from its history within the usages of human beings in their own history, circumstances, myths and legends. Doubtless we would understand words better were we

to know them within their contexts, the backgrounds from which they derived. At the same time, words do service at any point in history that they are required for use. Such a word is forgiveness. It has particular meaning within the Judaic Christian theology and culture. It is not simple, in a word study, to settle for its origins, but then a general sense of its meaning can at least be established.

Biblical Hebrew has its own ethos. It is a world of covenant and kingdom, of sacrificial cultus, of terms such as redeemer, redeemer-kinsman, of redemption, ransom, propitiation, justification, atonement, and the like. Only in their con text can we fully understand forgiveness, for this relates to the disposition of God, His Being as Creator, as Father, as King, and as Initiator of covenant, and the Provider of covenant grace. For this reason we have to leave the scholar to sort out the delicate variations in meaning, the subtle nuances which belong to this word or that, and settle, practically, for words which themselves indicate something of their own origins.

### **(i) Words and Terms in the O.T.**

In our introductory paragraph we saw some of the verbs used in relation to forgiveness. Some of these are used as figures, such as to tread underfoot, not to remember, to cast into the sea, and so on. More regularly used are certain verbs and nouns. In the following Scriptures the verb *salach* is used of divine forgiveness, meaning ‘to send away’: Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35, 5:10, 13, 16, 18, 6:7, 19:22, Numbers 15:25, 26, Psalm 103:3, I Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50, II Chronicles 6:21, 25, 27, 30, 39, 7:14, Jeremiah 31:34, 36:3, Daniel 9:19, Amos 7:2. The noun *selichah* is used in Psalm 130:4 and Daniel 9:9. The verb *kaphar* ‘to cover’ is used in the priestly tradition, and relates to the ideas of propitiation and atonement. It is found in Exodus 29:36, 30:10, Leviticus 8:15, 16:20, Ezekiel 43:20, 45:2a. Two interesting usages of it are found in Psalm 78:38 and Jeremiah 18:23. A third word group speaks of ‘wiping away’ or ‘rubbing away’, i.e. erasing, often translated ‘blotting out’, as in Psalm 51:1, 9, Isaiah 43:25, 44:22, and Jeremiah 18:23. This word *machah* is also used of blotting out other matters such as one’s name from the book of life. These words are used particularly of the forgiveness of God, whilst the commonly used word *nasa* is used of God’s forgiveness and man’s forgiveness also. It too is used in significant contexts. See Genesis 50:17, Exodus 10:17, 32:32, Numbers 14:19, Joshua 24:19, I Samuel 25:28, Psalm 25:18, 32:5, 85:2, 99:8, Isaiah 2:9, and 33:24.

These words are of great importance, especially when studied in their con texts. They reveal the nature of forgiveness, and the things to which forgiveness appertains. As we have said, they also need to be further understood in the light of the sacrifices, and the theological elements of law, judgement, propitiation, atonement, the grace and goodness of God, and so on.

### **(ii) Words and Terms in the N.T.**

#### **(a) Hebrew Terms in the Septuagint Version of the O.T.**

The use of the Hebrew terms as they relate to N.T. thinking can be derived from seeing the usage of the Hebrew words as they are translated into the Greek of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. The Greek verb *aphiemi* (‘to send away’) translates the verbs *salach*, *kaphar*, and *nasa*. *Nasa* is used as release from guilt or punishment (Gen. 18:26, Psalm 25:18, 32:1, 5, 85:2, and Isaiah 33: 24). *Salach* is used to cover, to pardon or to forgive (Leviticus 4:20ff, 5:6ff, Numbers 14:19f, and Isaiah 55:7). *Kaphar* is used for ‘to cover’, ‘to make atonement’, as in Isaiah 22:14.

It is also interesting to work back to the Hebrew from the Greek, especially in the term of *aphesis* (the noun 'forgiveness' from the verb *aphiemi*) and discover that only once is it used as forgiveness, and that in Leviticus 16:26 where it is 'to send away', and primarily relates to the scapegoat. Other uses are for the year of jubilee in Leviticus 25 and 26, and for the release of prisoners and slaves in Isaiah 61:1, Jeremiah 34:8, 15, 17, and Ezekiel 46:17.

All of this gives us some indication of the ideas of forgiveness as used by the translators of the LXX. Again we recognise that forgiveness is understood in the widest framework of the law, the sacrifices, and the understanding of the nature of God, of man, and of creation - matters we will presently consider.

### **(b) The Terms Used in the N.T.**

The word *aphiemi* is used 142 times in the N.T. Forty-seven uses are in Matthew, thirty-four in Mark, thirty-four in Luke, and fourteen in John. There are only thirteen other occasions throughout the remainder of the N.T. It is used for forgiveness only 45 of these 142 times, and that is 24 times in the Gospels and 21 times for the rest of the writings. Paul uses it only once. Its use apart from forgiveness is in the sense of letting, leaving, divorcing, dismissing, release and so on, all of which have an action corresponding to some element of action against sin.

The noun *aphesis* is used some 17 times, 15 of which are directly used for forgiveness or release from captivity. Paul uses the term only twice (Ephes. 1:7, Col. 1:14). The noun *paresis* is used in Romans 3:25, and here only, for the passing over of sins. However, the term 'the forgiveness of sins' (*aphesis hamartion*) is nevertheless most important, especially as it links it with the same concept in the O.T. Thus the covenantal idea of Jeremiah 31:31-34 and 33:8 is strongly brought out in Matthew 26:28, Mark 1:4f, and Acts 5:31. It is not the number of usages of a term which primarily determines its importance and significance. As we have said, Paul uses *aphesis* twice, and *aphiemi* only once. Yet he uses the verb *charizomai* at least a dozen times for the idea of forgiveness, whilst it is used for this only twice in the Gospels. The verb is related to grace (*charis*) and to giving (cf. 'freely given' of Romans 8:32, I Cor. 2:12), but giving in the sense of unmerited giving.

When we go beyond these basic verbs and nouns we find ourselves in the midst of many terms such as we have seen in the O.T., mainly those connected with propitiation, atonement, ransom, rescue, and so on. For example, in James 5:20 and I Peter 4:8 the verb to cover (*kalupto*) is used in regard to sin, and in the same sense *epikalupto* is used in Romans 4:7.

Given in the use of these words in both Testaments, we are yet faced with the need to discover what the Scriptures mean by forgiveness in all its aspects.

## ***5. Discovering The Nature of Sin and Forgiveness***

### **(A) The Nature of Sin**

In order to understand the nature of forgiveness we are bound first to understand the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, and the doctrine of creation. This is a tall order. It is obvious that we cannot understand the nature of sin until we see what man is and that from which he has fallen. Since man is in the image of God, then we must understand God in order to understand man as created. Man cannot be separated from the entire creation, nor from the purposes which God has for creation.

**(i) The Doctrine of God**

It would be simplistic to say that - in a paragraph or two - we could compass this doctrine. It is enough to say here that the term 'living God' in the Scriptures indicates that God is life-giving, life Himself, and the God who acts. He acts in creation, in providence, in redemption, and the events of the eschaton, when He restores all things and glorifies them. He is seen as being essentially Father, Creator and King. He is active in these offices so far as man is concerned. His livingness is shown in the term 'fountain of living waters', meaning He flows out in the great issues of Himself (often called attributes) which are known as love, holiness, righteousness, goodness and truth. He is purposeful, having planned the modes by which His creation must live (Gen. 1:31, Eccles. 3:11, Prov. 16:4, etc.), and the work it must do (Gen. 1:28ff) for the goal/s He has purposed. Isaiah 63:16 says He is not only Father but Redeemer 'from eternity', i.e. He manifests nothing of Himself in time which was not always His nature in or from eternity.

**(ii) The Doctrine of Man**

Man is made in the image of God, and is the glory of God (Gen. 1:26, 9:6, I Cor. 11:7, cf. Psalm 8:3ff). Man then is intended to reflect the nature and action of God, to derive his life in continued dependence upon God (Acts 17:28), and to correlate with God in His being of Father, Creator, King - man being son, creature and subject. This correlation is the way in which man glorifies God. As God is the living God, so man lives by God. As God is the God of action, so man reflects His glory by his (directed) action. The mandate of Genesis 1:28ff (cf. Gen. 9:1ff) shows man as purposeful, and his existence as having meaning. He glorifies God in and by his obedience. This means he reflects, in his actions, the love, holiness, righteousness, goodness and truth of God. He must keep his heart with all diligence for from it flow the same issues of life as flow from God (Prov. 4:23).

**(iii) The Doctrine of Creation**

Psalm 19:1f, and Romans 1:20 indicate that creation displays the glory of God and makes manifest His nature so that those who should and would know Him are not left ignorant. All His created works praise Him. The earth is the fullness of His glory (Isaiah 6:3). All things are essentially good (Gen. 1:31, Eccles. 3:11) and thus work functionally in accordance with God's creative goodness, and His purposes (Prov. 16:4, cf. I Tim. 4:4, 6:17). Man, of course, is an important part of this creation. He must fill the earth, subdue it, and have lordship over it as the image and agent of God. It could be said of the mandate for work given to man by God that it presupposes some kind of an eschaton, i.e. when it is filled up, subdued and under full authority, some kind of a goal is in sight.

**(iv) The Nature of Obedience**

The doctrines of God, man, and creation presuppose a purposeful functioning of all things to the glory and purposes of God. Such functioning must be congruous with the created nature of things, especially as they correspond to the nature of God. All things are, by creation, congruous and correlative with the nature of God. That is they are essentially this way, especially as they are contingent upon God. It would therefore be an affront to God to depart from the essential created norm. To live in accordance with this norm is to be truly a thing of creation, and to be to the praise of God. Doubtless such obedience is assisting the

fulfilment of the creational mandate. It also constitutes the fulfilment of each part of creation, and of all creation as a whole.

#### **(v) The Nature of the Fall: The Nature of Man's Sin**

God is Triune according to all Scripture. Man is made in this Triune image. His essential being is always so in a state of contingency (cf. I Cor. 8:6), and man is always needing to be sustained by God's power (Col. 1:17, Heb. 1:3, cf. Psalm 104:29-30). Man is like God. In the temptation he was called to become as God (Gen. 3:5). The nature of man's fall is that he sought to become an independent moral agent or being, i.e. he wished to know good and evil of himself and not of God. This means also that he wished to determine his own goals, or the modes of goals, even if goals were given by God. Since man is primarily a relational creature, then his refusal to relate to God as commanded is a breach of that relationship of son, creature and servant. At the Fall a breach of relationship with God simultaneously brought about a breach between man and woman (creature and fellow-creature). This relational breach is man's crime, i.e. against God, his fellow-being, and himself. His sin is against God because it is against His creation. It is a denial of the essential nature and functioning of man. The dimensions of man's evil cannot be computed. It is a flagrant rebellion against the entire nature of God, man, and creation. It is a rejection of the Triune God, and His whole Being.

#### **(vi) The Effects of the Fall**

Man in refusing to live within the essential nature of contingency aborted his understanding of his being as creature, son, and servant. In seeking autonomy he denied contingency. Doubtless he cannot essentially be autonomous but practically he endeavours to be independent. This constitutes at once his mind of rebel lion and his anguish as a disoriented, dissociated, dislocated person. His existential anguish and awryness gives the lie to his state of autonomy being what it is (essentially) to be a man, to be a person.

A study of Genesis 3 and Romans 1 is essential to understanding fallen man, and the effects of his sin. Genesis 3 shows him as becoming aware of his nakedness and of the compulsion to cover himself and to hide from God. He is in fear of God and not in any sense as God. Romans 1:21ff is a remarkable analysis of what happened to man.

In refusing the glory of God (i.e. His nature as known to man), and in rejecting the need to be grateful to God, man rejected the nature of man and the universe. As a rational being he was faced with the compulsive necessity to rationalise God, man and creation, and this he did through the order of idols. Idolatry is a system of rationalising worth and order and function. Man then correlated with his idols and not with God. The consequences are shown in the various stages which followed, i.e. sexual immorality, sexual perversity, and finally all the elements which flow from a reprobate mind. Doubtless these stages did not necessarily follow, one upon the other, but may have been simultaneous. However that may be, they all gripped man in a frightful complex of evil. Far from attaining some godhead man debased himself.

We have said that man cannot understand sin. That is because he is committed to his own rationale of God, man, and creation. He cannot afford to renounce this. That is why he does not wish to retain the knowledge of God in his mind (Rom. 1:28). Romans 5:12 includes all humanity in the choice and act of that original sin of Adam, i.e. 'all sinned', this being in an aorist tense. We all sinned in Adam. We repeat, man cannot possibly understand the enormity of his sin, nor realise the dreadful attack it constitutes upon the holiness of God.

The basic effects of the fall are that man is now depraved and deprived. Depravity means that his heart is now evil, thinking wrongly, polluted and incapable of moral achievement. See Proverbs 4:23 and 25:26, with Jeremiah 17:9, Mark 7:20ff, and Ecclesiastes 7:29. These Scriptures show that man has become evil because being in the image of God he is using his humanity for his own selfish aims, and is despising the true nature of God, as also the mandate he (man) has been given. He has broken the vital relationship he had with God, and so the vital relationship he had with his fellow beings, fellow creatures, and the creation. This is his depravity.

His deprivation is that the glory he knew in terms of fellowship with God, man, and creation he has now lost. He has lost a true experience of joy and serenity, as also a true use of the faculties God has given him. What he is about cannot yield the true satisfaction, the wholesome sense of genuine accomplishment. He has deprived himself of what it is to be truly himself.

### **(vii) The Nature of Sin**

We repeat; it is difficult to nominate this. Whilst the Scriptures tell us that sin is transgression of the law, that it is falling short of the (prescribed) mark, that it is acting in doubt where there should be faith, and is in fact rebellion against the revealed will of God, yet such statements though true do not convey, so to speak, the sense of the nature of sin. By the law is the knowledge of sin, yet the conviction of its evil has to be a work of the Holy Spirit. Man's mind-set is against knowing, against being confronted with the enormity of his rebellion and the utter pollution of his being. If, however, we do not know what sin is then we cannot see how reprehensible it is. We observe, then, the following facts.

#### **(a) Sin is Known in the Light of God's Holiness.**

Isaiah 6 is the classical passage which shows this principle. In the revealed presence of God Isaiah the prophet is brought to despair and horror at his own sin and uncleanness. Not by looking to sin do we discover its nature, but by looking to God. In the light of purity we see our impurity. In the light of His perfection we discover our own depravity. In the light of His glory we see our own dishonour.

#### **(b) All Sin is Against God.**

Man's sin is in not being in the full glory of God. Paul's statement, 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God,' must mean that man is reprehensible because he is not in the true glory of man, which is to glorify God. Any violation of the functional operations of God's creation constitutes sin. Primarily there can be no sin against man or creation. It is sin against God because it is God's creation. David said, 'Against Thee, and Thee only have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified in Thy sentence, and blameless in Thy judgement.' This declares that sin against other human beings (e.g. Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite) is sin against God. Likewise sin against the true order of His universe is sin against God. That is why the prodigal son said, 'I have sinned against heaven and before you'. Of course we can sin against persons as Peter indicated by saying, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?' Yet even then this sin is against God. This is the principle of Genesis 9:6 where God says that the beast or person who kills a man must himself be killed since man is the image of God, i.e. in reality the act is against God.



**(c) Man Cannot Erase Sin: He Cannot Expiate It.**

Habakkuk 1:13 indicates that God cannot look on sin and leave it unjudged. Violations of His law cannot be overlooked. This is seen in Leviticus 11:44-45, 20:7, Deuteronomy 7:6. Romans 3:25-26 needs to be studied closely. God seemed to have passed over sins (i.e. violations of His law) but in fact He had not. He has reserved the work of the Cross to deal with such sins. He had never really passed over them.

It is clear from Scripture that under certain conditions God does forgive sins. At the same time that forgiveness is *eudokia*, i. e. God's will or pleasure. Forgiveness is gratuitous, not resting upon man's merit. Man may attempt by sacrifices and other works to pay for his sin, but this is not permissible (cf. Psalm 130:1-3, 143:1-2, Gal. 2:16f, cf. Gal. 3:10, Rom. 4:1-4).

**(d) God and His Law: Sin as Transgression.**

The law given to Israel is not the beginning of God's law. Genesis 26:4-5 shows that Abraham knew law. Jesus indicated that marriage was a creational law, as also non-divorce (Matt. 19:1-5). The principle of the Sabbath is also creational. Analysed, the ten commandments constitute love to God and love to others. This is rooted in the principle of creation. John sees love, as 'from the beginning', and Paul and James says that God's law equals love (Rom. 13:8-10, James 1:25, 2:8-10, cf. Gal. 5:13-14). We may conclude that God's law is the functional and operative principle of His creation, and proceeds from Him. Psalms 1, 19, and 119 speak of the beauty and power of law.

Law when it is divorced from God becomes a legal entity in itself, and so the conscience of fallen man becomes a tyrant. In the O.T. it is the heart which relates to law, e.g. David's heart smites him when he cuts off a portion of cloth from Saul's robe. In the N.T. it is the conscience which keeps man linked to law. We mean that heart obedience is the climate in which the true nature of law and of God is known. Paul says that the law in its other sense is for sinners only (cf. I Tim. 1:8-11).

Sin then, whilst it is transgression of God's law, is in reality a personal act against God since He cannot be separated from His law. Sin is a violation of God.

**(e) Sin is without recall and Unforgivable.**

Any violation of the will of God cannot be recalled. It can be regretted, and one can repent of it, but it cannot be erased or recalled. Man may seek to expiate by sacrifice or forms of penance but this does nothing in relation to the actual sin. It has been committed. It is laughable to think that obedience to the law can accumulate merit or in any sense balance wrong deeds done. When one has obeyed law there is no merit to that. There can be - by nature of the case - no authentic works of supererogation. Whilst God forgives sins according to His own reckoning and understanding, yet so far as the law is concerned there can be no such thing. God must be 'faithful and just to forgive us our sins' (I John 1: 9), i.e. His promises and action of forgiveness must be consonant with true righteousness. How God does just that we will see, but we must be clear that when God says, 'I will by no means acquit the guilty,' He means just that. See Exodus 34:7, Numbers 14:18, Nahum 2, 3, 6.

**(f) Sin Enslaves Man.**

Forgiveness cannot be understood except in terms of God's total deliverance of man-from the elements of sin which enslave him. Passages such as Proverbs 5:22-23,

John 8:34, Romans 6:17, and II Peter 2:19 show how sin enslaves. Man ~s under the power of sin. He is under its power in two ways, the first being because of the guilt of sin (Romans 6:12-14, cf. I Cor. 15:55-56), and secondly because of habituation in sin. He cannot escape this enslavement either of the guilt or the habituation. He is also under the guilt of the penalty of sin. Objectively guilty for sinning, and objectively guilty for being in a state of sin, he is laden with guilt. He fears the penalty such as death and the judgement which lies beyond. Romans 1:18 indicates that he is presently under wrath also. Man, also, is under the pollution of sin. God requires a pure heart, and truth in the secret heart, but man has only pollution (Prov. 25:26, Jer. 17:9, etc.). This pollution doubtless brings shame, at least when it is exposed as moral defilement. Man also is in the constant presence of sin, or, alternately, sin is always present with man (Rom. 7:21).

Since man cannot expiate or destroy sin and overcome it he is in a desperate state. Since he cannot depollute his moral defilement he is in a desperate plight. Since he cannot erase the presence of sin he is faced unremittingly with its ; action. He is the slave of evil. Sin itself links him to Satan, evil powers and the anti-God world system, so that by virtue of his sin and sinfulness man is linked in with this whole complex of evil. He is enslaved from all directions, so to speak.

#### **(g) Sin and Sinfulness Places Man in en Insoluble Dilemma.**

Sin, especially the sin of idolatry, has placed the focus of worship and devotion on another centre than God. The perversity of wrongly used love brings man into such liaison with evil as he can neither desire to extricate himself, nor be able to do so. God speaks of Ephraim, saying, 'He is joined to his idols: let him alone,' i.e. he is crazed in his immoral relationship. Hosea 5:4 has it of the unfaithful in Israel,

Their deeds do not permit them  
to return to their God.  
For the spirit of harlotry is within them,  
and they know not the Lord.'

Man then does not seek to extricate himself from sin. Secondly he has no ability to do so. He is morally impotent. Paul says, 'When we were without strength...' (Rom. 5:6). Most of all man in being evil and unholy is under the judgement of God. He cannot pay the penalty. He cannot expiate his guilt. God is holy, and man's dilemma is that he is doomed because of this.

When we add to that doom the experience of man in his shame and guilt, in the heaviness that lies over him as a burden too great to be borne, and when we add to that the misery and anguish that depravity and deprivation bring to man, then we realise his awful predicament. It is no use seeking to invoke in God the kind of pity sinful man feels for sinful man. God's holiness does not operate on this level. That holiness is not against His love and mercy, but His mercy and love must be holy. They must not oppose His holiness.

## **(B) Sin and The Forgiveness of God**

### **The Dilemma Before God and Man**

Bildad the Shuhite asks the pertinent question, 'How then can a man be righteous before God? How can he who is born of a woman be clean?' (Job 25:4, cf. 14:4, 15:14-15). There is at once both sense and cynicism in this question. Psalm 143:2 says, 'Enter not into judgement with Thy servant, O Lord; for in Thy sight shall

no man living be justified.’ This latter statement is also truth but without cynicism. It more than hints that God will not judge where He has a right so to do. This is also in Psalm 130:3, ‘O Lord, if Thou shouldst mark iniquities, Lord who could stand?’ There is the insistence that none can stand guiltless before God, and God is right to judge, but somehow He may not.

In other words, God must judge in accordance with His own person, His righteousness and holiness and holy law, but should He do so man would be destroyed. If He does not judge He is unholy, and if He does then He must destroy man. If He forgives arbitrarily then His law no longer has validity, and its sanctions are mocked. Man is in a dilemma, and in a manner of speaking, so is God.

Well meaning folk seek to make a reconciliation of these elements after the following patterns. Some say that God tempers His justice with mercy. Whilst this is true it all depends what is understood by this statement. If we mean His justice is too severe then we are wrong. If we mean there is conflict between His mercy and justice then we are wrong. If we mean, however, that there is a valid exercise of His mercy which does not violate, but rather which upholds His justice, by which man may be forgiven, then we are correct. The question is, ‘How, by nature of the case, can God possibly effect this?’ We must dismiss any idea that God can issue a fiat of pardon which violates His law or His own holiness. God can only do that which is consistent with His own character.

### **The Solution of the Dilemma**

Some see the solution of this dilemma in God forgetting the evil of man. Whilst this may satisfy the immediate mind of someone simplistic enough to think up this idea, it will not satisfy any human conscience. Conscience, in the ultimate, is linked to the holy law of God, and will not let man off the hook with so superficial an expedient.

The only way God can solve the dilemma is by doing that in time and history which will effectively erase the guilt, power and pollution of man’s sin and sins. This appears, by nature of the case, to be impossible. In order to see how the grace of God accomplishes this we must discover yet more of the nature of sin, especially as we see it in the O.T. The Hebrews were scarcely interested in abstractions, much less sin as an abstraction. Also they ‘felt’, so to speak, the action and powers of sins.

A Hebrew understanding of sin ran along something of the lines that follow: Words used for sin were particular and not generic. They covered the ideas of wickedness, confusion, iniquity, perversion, guilt, wrongness, trouble, vanity, lying, deceit, evil, trespass, breach of trust, error, negligence, injustice, disobedience, transgression. They included the component elements of sin so clearly expressed in the Psalms such as restlessness, burden, dread, fear, turmoil, and the like. The Hebrew word *owon* approximates to our idea of guilt. So David can say, ‘Thou hast taken away the *awon chattatti* (guilt of my sin)’ (Psa. 32:5). Guilt seems almost to be an entity in itself, although it is vitalistic. Sin, in any case, is vitalistic. Each sin is vitalistic. In Genesis 4:6 Cain’s sin is couched at the door of his tent (dwelling) to pounce upon him and ravage him, if his conscience is not clear. In fact it did this, causing him to murder Abel. This is the process that James describes so powerfully in 1:14-15 of his epistle:

‘...but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.’

In Psalm 65:3 the psalmist says, ‘...our transgressions prevail over us’ He

pictures them in much the same light as the sin of Genesis 4:6. In Psalm 40:12 a similar picture is given; 'For evils have encompassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, till I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.' These sins have overtaken him. He is under their power. This is also similar to Proverbs 5:22-23, 'The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is lost.' The words tell their own story. In Isaiah 57:20-21 the dynamics of pollution are revealed, 'But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.' Psalm 51:6-10 shows the effects of moral pollution on David's mind, and indicates his yearning for total purity; 'Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.'

Again in Psalm 31:10 the writer describes the symptoms of his sin experience. He says, 'For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.' This principle is repeated powerfully in verses 3 and 4 of Psalm 32: 'When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.' These sum up the internal, subjective experience of sin. Man seeks to contain within himself the evil he has done, but it, so to speak, yeasts within him, pounding away at him, like new wine in a leather container. Psalm 38:1-8 shows how terrifying this can be:

'O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy anger,  
nor chasten me in Thy wrath!  
For Thy arrows have sunk into me,  
and Thy hand has come down on me.  
There is no soundness in my flesh  
because of Thy indignation;  
there is no health in my bones  
because of my sin.  
For my iniquities have gone over my head;  
they weigh like a burden too heavy for  
me.  
My wounds grow foul and fester  
because of my foolishness,  
I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;  
all the day I go about mourning.  
For my loins are filled with burning,  
and there is no soundness in my flesh.  
I am utterly spent and crushed;  
I groan because of the tumult of  
my heart.'

We see then that man is subjected to the wrath of God through his sin. This is powerfully delineated in principle in Romans 1:18-32. Whilst we cannot say that God's wrath is sin, we can say that sin is God's wrath. We mean what Psalm 7:11 says, 'God is angry with the sinner every day.' We mean that man, deprived of true fellowship with God, feels His absence in the form of angst i.e. dread and loss, apprehension and fear. God's presence to his person in his sin is even more devastating (cf. Job 13:16-21). God's wrath is seen in that God gives man up to his sin (Rom. 1:22, 24, 26) and that sin, boiling, so to speak, within man, is the anguish he feels as God personally relates to him, sinner though he be.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See note on next page (p.40).

We see then that sin is dynamic, vitalistic, feeding upon man, stirring him in his being, compounding his rebellion and disobedience, increasing his guilt and further motivating him in his hatred of God, and the evil which he does. Such sin and sins, to be erased and destroyed, must need a special treatment, and such treatment is not at all possible on the human level. Man is fated to live with his evil and to take it, with its consequences, into eternity. This must be what is meant by statements such as, 'Be sure your sin will find you out,' and 'The soul that sinneth it shall die.'

What then is the solution to man's dilemma? The Bible appears to indicate it along the following lines:

**(i) In the O.T. Sacrifice Relates to the Atonement of Sins**

This seems to be the case with Abel's offering (cf. Hebrews 11:4) since God 'accepted his gifts'. Cain's were not accepted for they were not given in faith (cf. Hebrews 11:6). Sacrifices were offered before those prescribed in the Pentateuch for Israel. Even so the principle of these is shown in Leviticus 17:11, 'For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.' Note the principle, '...it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life.' Sacrifice then is the principle God has implanted for propitiation, and so, justification. Justification is the accounting of (legal) righteousness to a person, and the non-accounting of their sins and crimes to them.

**(ii) Sin Must Be Borne**

This principle of bearing sins is also linked with the sacrifices. The worshipper's identification with the lamb which was to be the victim was his assurance that the victim was accepted as his substitute. See the Book of Leviticus where this is propounded. In Leviticus 1:4, 'He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.' The problem with such sacrifices is pointed out by the writer of Hebrews 10:1-4 where he suggests such sacrifices were not *ex opere operantis* efficacious.

\* (Note from page 39). We must not think of God's wrath as arbitrary, or parallel with mere human anger. The following quotes indicate something of its nature: G. O. Griffith: 'We picture "wrath" as we might think of the fury of the storm. The Hebrew prophets, when they spoke of "the wrath of God", ethicised the idea of anger so that it meant the implacable hostility of the Divine Holiness to every form of moral evil.' ... 'The wrath is no fitful outburst of personal anger, but the implacable antagonism of holiness for evil, and antagonism that burns eternally.' (St. Paul's Gospel to the Romans, pp.21, 85f). Peguey says, 'Wrath is the emotional response of a sound personality to anything low, vile, or mean.' J. G. Mackenzie quotes Father Danielou as saying, 'There is hardly anything in the terminology of religion that gives more offence to the pious (or prudish) ears of the modern world than this expression: the wrath of God. In our day, Simone Weil, for example, finds it simply intolerable: for she, like Marcion of old, contrasts the New Testament God of love with the Old Testament God of wrath. Unfortunately for the position, there is love in the Old Testament, and wrath in the New, as Tertullian pointed out long ago. We have to reckon, whether we like it or not, with wrath as one of the divine attributes; and what is more, for all its anthropomorphic appearance, this particular word may carry a stronger charge than any other, and afford the deepest insight into the meaning of the divine transcendence.' (*The Meaning of Guilt*)

Nevertheless since God had appointed such He honoured them with the promise given. What, then, is the bearing of sins? It is surely the lifting up of the weight of sin, and carrying it about without remission. Cain complained, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear!' (Gen. 4:13). Leviticus often states, 'He shall bear his iniquity,' and this parallels the statement, 'He shall be guilty.' Objective guilt is his, and he shall know it in the bearing of his guilt of sins.

In other words, all the terms we have used for sin, i.e. its internal nature, its constituent components are borne by man in every part of his being. He is guilty and the weight and nature of his guilt keeps him in pain and anguish. Vicariously a sacrificial victim may be accounted as bearing these (transferred) sins. In practical fact we have to say, 'The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins' (Heb. 10:4). It is impossible by nature of the case.

### **(iii) Forgiveness is Linked with Covenant**

This is certainly the case with Israel. Covenant brought them into special relationship with God, who in turn gave them the sacrificial cultus which was to be for the forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, as the prophets point out, sacrifices per se could not obtain forgiveness. The true sacrifice of God was a heart broken in repentance (cf. Psalm 51:16-17). Even so faith was necessary, and such faith was shown by the tax-gatherer (Luke 18:9-14), who, it appears, believed God would make propitiation for him. Thus he was justified.

Forgiveness of course is linked also with the New Covenant. We will need to see how it was, because in the New Covenant the Mosaic ritual would be outmoded. Nevertheless passages such as Jeremiah 31:31-34, 36:3, Ezekiel 36:24-28, when linked with Matthew 26:28, show us that forgiveness was made possible.

### **(iv) Forgiveness is Linked with the Prophetic Promise**

Isaiah 53, which speaks of the Suffering Servant (cf. Mark 10:45), gives a powerful rationale of the basis of forgiveness. Linked as it is with other O.T. ideas of the lamb (sacrificial, passover, etc.) it speaks of the Suffering Servant bearing the sins of man, taking their grief's and sorrows, and being smitten by God. Other prophecies speak of deliverance (e.g. Isaiah 61:1f), or cleansing (Zech. 13:1, Ezek. 36:25-26), and constantly of the forgiveness of sins. Apart from the mysterious Isaiah 53 there is no great rationale, but there is nevertheless the promise. Thus when John the Baptist speaks of Messiah, the Kingdom and the Spirit these pertain to the forgiveness of sins, as forgiveness, also, pertains to them.

### **(v) The Solution of the Dilemma Lies in the Cross**

Jesus had spoken much of the indispensability of the Cross-death (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32). Later he rationalised it as indispensable (Luke 24:26-27, 44f). The apostles took much the same line. Their speeches indicate this. Acts 2:23, 17:1-3, I Corinthians 15:1-3 and similar passages show they see the Scriptures as indicating the death of Christ is for the forgiveness of sins. Just how it is we must now see, but that it was for sins is the message of the N.T.

How the Cross availed for the forgiveness of sins according to the statement of Matthew 26:28 (cf. Luke 1:77, John 1:29, Jer. 31:31-34) must be seen along the following lines:

**(a) Jesus' Death was Sacrificial.**

Mark 10:45, Romans 8:32, Ephesians 5:2, Galatians 2:20, Romans 3:24f, I John 2:2, 4:10, I Peter 1:19 are some of the Scriptures which state this. The epistle to the Hebrews contrasts Christ's sacrifice with those which had gone before. His alone is the one true and efficacious sacrifice (9:26 - 10:18). It is also notable that the writer connects the sacrifice for sins with the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Notice that all the references to the blood of Christ and the blood of the Cross relate to sacrifice.

**(b) Jesus' Death was the Bearing of Sins.**

Consonant with the idea of bearing, Jesus took the weight and nature of the guilt of man upon him, and bore it, even to the point of exhausting its inner dynamic and vitalism. This must relate to his being made sin for us. Becoming man's sin he bears it to the utmost. Cf. I Peter 2:24, and II Corinthians 5:21. Peter concludes, 'He suffered, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God' (I Peter 3:18). This must also be linked with Isaiah 53, especially where it says, 'He bore our grief's and carried our sorrows'. Also it declares, 'He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors.'

**(c) Jesus' Death Was That of a Substitute-in-Identification.**

The offerer identified himself with his victim offered. Jesus identified with man. 'It becomes us to fulfil all righteousness.' 'He was numbered with the transgressors.' 'We judge that if one died for all, then did all die.' 'I have been crucified with Christ'. 'Our old humanity was crucified with him.' These are similar Scriptures which indicate that his work of substitution was not apart from his identification with man. He could not bear their actual sins had he not done so, and one cannot bear the punishment of sins apart from the sins, or the sins apart from identification with the person. That is why it is said, 'He (God) judged sin in his flesh' (Rom. 8:3). This is what it means for him to be the propitiation for sins (I John 4:10, Rom. 3:24f).

**(d) Conclusion as to the Solution of the Dilemma.**

Were there no sacrificial rationale and practice prior to the coming of Christ, and were there no prophetic insistence that God would break the deadlock between man's sin and God's holiness then the coming of Christ would have been irrelevant, and certainly unrelated to what was before, and what was (prophetically) to come. The case is that the apparatus for understanding redemption as well as effecting it had been created and coordinated by God. In the fullness of time He sent His Son to be born of a woman, to be born under the law to redeem them that are under the law, so that by becoming curse for us, he should fulfil the demands of a holy God, and His holy law, and set men free from guilt and the consequent power of sin. The Son by taking into himself the evil of the world was able to bear it to extinction, to cleanse its impurity within his holy love, and burn it out by purity of his conscience and the glory God the Father had given him.

God then has the just basis of forgiveness in the redemptive suffering of the Cross. He, as Father, took the initiative, and His Son fulfilled that project. The result was acceptable to the Initiator. Redemption was accomplished in that the basis of forgiveness was laid. God had promised such forgiveness. He was, then, faithful and just to forgive man his sin - where there was repentance - and to cleanse him from all unrighteousness.

## (C) Forgiveness and The Triune God

### (i) The Father Forgives

Jesus commanded men to pray, 'Our Father...forgive us our sins'. As we will see in our next section, Christ was given authority to forgive sins, as certainly no other man has been given authority. Nevertheless it is the Father who forgives. Ephesians 4:32 has it, 'As God, for Christ's sake has forgiven you'. Colossians 3: 13 parallels this principle. Ephesians 1:7 speaks of the forgiveness of sins being given by the Father, and Colossians 1:14 points out that it is 'in Christ Jesus' that we have forgiveness rather than from him.

In the Gospels Jesus points to the Father forgiving. This we saw to be so in the Lord's prayer, and in Matthew 6:14, 18:35, cf. Mark 11:25 our forgiving others relates to the forgiveness the Father gives to us. Again, on the Cross Jesus prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' This must mean that forgiveness comes primarily from the Father. Where Christ pronounces forgiveness he says, 'Thy sins be (are) forgiven thee.' In John 20:23 he is literally saying, 'If you forgive the sins of any they have (already) been forgiven.' This relates also to the binding and loosing mentioned in Matthew 16:19.

In recording these facts of the Father's forgiveness we must then turn to the love which causes that forgiveness to come to pass, and to be able to come to pass. I John 4:7-10 shows that love is in propitiation. Luke 7:47 (and context) shows that to be forgiven much is to love much, i.e. to respond to the love that forgives. Hence John says (I John 4:19), 'We love because He first loved us.' The story of the prodigal son (the lost son) is powerful in meaning. The whole chapter needs to be read because it indicates that God receives sinners, that in His heaven there is joy over the ones repenting of sin, and doubtless the parable is intended to show the love of the Father. John 3:16, I John 3:16, I John 4:10 and other passages show the love of the Father in giving up His Son for the sake of obtaining righteously based forgiveness for men. His love then is personal and forgiving, and this is what should draw men to Him, as Father.

We will see also that other elements such as justification and redemption which are linked with the forgiveness of sins are equally the work of the Father, and are of the essence of His love.

### (ii) The Son Forgives

Perhaps more correctly we should say he mediates forgiveness. His prayer on the Cross is to the Father so that He will forgive. When we come to the story of the healing of the paralysed man we are confronted with a problem. The account in Luke's Gospel (5:17-26) indicates that 'Pharisees and teachers of the law from every village of Galilee and Judea, and from Jerusalem' were present. Doubtless they were there to test out this claimant for Messiahship. His statement to the palsied man, 'Son, take heart, thy sins are forgiven thee!' was a statement of such blasphemy as to be shocking. Only God could forgive sins they said, and they were right. In Luke 7:49 they make a gibe, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Rightly they know only God can forgive sins.

It is strange that Jesus seems to expect their acceptance of his forgiving act. It is when he says, 'That you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' that the matter becomes clear. In Daniel 7:13ff the Son of man is the one who has authority to judge the nations and to rule the Kingdom. Naturally enough his authority to judge must contain the authority to pardon. Doubt less Jesus had, prior to this, given out that he was Son of man. They had assumed



what they had yet to prove, that he was not Son of man, and not Messiah. It was the mistake the high priest made at the judgement of Jesus. No one is a blasphemer if he claims to be the Son of man. He is only shown to be a blasphemer when it is proved he is not the Son of man. His statement to the paralysed man should have alerted them to test whether or not he had authority. By healing the man he showed he had communicated forgiveness to the sick person. We notice that they are convinced, and are turned from a hostile audience to one giving great praise to God that He had 'given such authority to men' (Matt. 9:8). Luke 5:26 says, 'And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God, and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today."' "

The Son, as we have seen, is the mediator of forgiveness, in that he bears away the sin of the world (John 1:29) by shedding his blood for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28), and bearing them in his body on the tree (I Peter 2:24). Paul says, 'He died for our sins, in accordance with the Scripture,' 'He was put to death for our trespasses,' 'He gave himself for our sins,' and numerous other similar sayings. His death was for sin, or in regard to sin, so that the death was wholly for sins. Thus the Son secures forgiveness in the Cross, and by it. That is why Paul can say, 'Through him, this day, is declared unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him you are justified from all you could not be justified by the law of Moses' (Acts 13:38f).

We must see this too, not only as obedience to the Father Who initiated it (John 10:17, John 4:34, Rom. 5:19, Phil. 2:8, Heb. 5:8), but as personal love to men by the Son (Gal. 2:20, Ephes. 5:2, cf. II Cor. 5:14, I Peter 1:8). We love him for effecting forgiveness as we love the Father for giving it.

### **(iii) The Spirit Forgives**

Again we must say that the Spirit brings forgiveness to the heart of man. Not only was the Spirit in all that the Son did in securing forgiveness, but he aided him also. Hebrews 9:14 discloses this. The Acts show that the Spirit is always present when Christ is presented (I Cor. 2:4-5, I Thess. 1:5, I Peter 1:12). Through him comes the revelation of the Son, of the Father, and of the truth (John 16:12-15). The Son has been raised up (ascended) 'to give repentance and remission of sins to Israel', but it is the Spirit who communicates the same. He is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus who makes men free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:1-3).

The Spirit helps to initiate repentance and faith in man so that he comes to those conditions through which he is truly able to receive the gift of forgiveness.

### **(iv) Conclusion**

We may conclude then that God is working to bring men and women to forgiveness of sins. Father, Son and Spirit work in the securing of this forgiveness. The Father personally forgives those who are repentant and believing. The forgiveness comes to men in the Son, and by the Spirit. Thus the love of the Godhead is shown to man, the rebellious sinner, the lost son, the angry elder brother.

## **(D) The Receiving of Forgiveness**

We have seen in the O.T. that there were conditions for the receiving of forgiveness. Doubtless the primary condition for receiving forgiveness is repentance, i.e. metanoia or 'a change of mind'. Psalm 51 is the classical passage to examine repentance. This, in the ultimate was 'a broken spirit, a broken and contrite

heart'. Repentance is occasioned by the goodness and kindness and forbearance of God (Rom. 2:4, cf. II Peter 3:9). The prodigal sees his father's love, the thief on the Cross hears Christ's prayer for the forgiveness of others, Zacchaeus is touched by the kindness of Christ, and so on. Jesus spoke of perpetually forgiving but insisted that without repentance such forgiveness could not be received (cf. Luke 17:3-4).

Faith, also, is a condition. One must believe one will be forgiven. Matthew 9:2 says that Jesus saw their faith, i.e. of the friends of the paralysed man and perhaps that of the sick man also. John's Gospel and the Acts lay down faith as a condition for salvation. Doubtless all of this arises from the work of the Spirit (John 16:7-15).

It would be well for us to deal with the problem raised by Matthew 6:12 and 15, as also Matthew 18:35. These passages seem to infer that the heavenly Father will not forgive unless we forgive men their sins. This is categorically true, but then it seems best to set this against the whole message of the Gospel. God's forgiveness is so great, Matthew 18:21-35 tells us, that men's debts to us are trifling against the debts God has forgiven us. How can we be forgiven and not forgive? It is not simply that God withdraws the forgiveness He has given us, since the gifts of God are without recall (Rom. 11:29), but such forgiveness will always be unreal to us when we do not forgive others.

Repentance will not come without also a conviction of sin, and this is a pre requisite to fully receiving forgiveness. One would not desire such forgiveness without knowing the terrible nature of sin.

## **(E) The Effects of Forgiveness**

### **(i) In the Person of the Believer**

The primary effects of forgiveness are objective. That is, man's guilt is taken away, sin's penalty is wholly remitted, sin's pollution is fully cleansed, and man is declared justified. He is redeemed from the powers of evil. He is reconciled with God who does not impute his iniquities to him. He is no longer, objectively, under any bondage.

These objective effects will affect man subjectively. With guilt taken away he will experience relief. Joy and peace will come. With the cleansing of his moral pollution a sense of purity will replace a sense of shame. With reconciliation old fear and loneliness will no longer be the order of experience. With liberation from former enemies the new man will glory in new freedom.

Many things will change with these changes. Hatred is doomed, and love is encouraged. Reconciliation with God means, simultaneously, reconciliation with man. Forgiveness from God means forgiving others. Most of all a primary relationship will be established with the Father and the Son. The effects of these effects will be vast. A whole new relationship with God, fellow man, and the universe is established and the true nature of creation is revealed to the new person. He thus both delights in it, and is sensitive to the despite man does to his creation. The deceit of sin is taken away and he sees sin and evil unmasked, and is shocked. At the same time the things which made him lonely are exchanged for the things of love. Where his purpose and actions were egocentric they are now Father-centred, Christ-centred, and Spirit-inspired. With the gift of forgiveness comes the gift of life.

All of this is summed up under the heading of Psalm 32:1-2, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom

the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.' Man is now blessed in that he is not under doom, not caught in the vortex of existential anguish, pain, and awryness. He is not put on to justify himself by efforts of his own. His cosmetic endeavours lessen as he knows he is forgiven. His venue of life has been changed for he has been transferred from the powers of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, even through forgiveness (Col. 1:13-14). He may now approach the Father and His throne of grace for worship, fellowship, and grace in time of need (Heb. 4:16, 10:19-22).

He now has no need to fear his former enemies for he has been delivered from them. The link or hold of guilt which they used to grip him has now been destroyed. He is beholden to none but God. The power of sin has been broken with forgiveness (Romans 6:12-14), for the guilt has been destroyed.

When in addition we realise that forgiveness, justification, cleansing and reconciliation are all in the one saving complex which has been effected, then the power of forgiveness becomes more apparent. The work of the Cross and the Resurrection done for man is also effected in man by union with Christ in baptism, i.e. the death, burial and resurrection becomes his possession with all that they imply for the obedience of faith. This new dynamic of release and enablement, stemming from the internal work of the Spirit as he applies forgiveness, also has its out working in the life of the community of faith, i.e. the people of God.

### **(ii) In the Community of God's Family**

Galatians 4:4-6 (cf. Romans 8:14-17) shows that forgiveness and redemption bring with them the new life of sonship, participation in the family or household of God. God does not remember man's sins any more (Jer. 31:34), so that the believer also does not remember the sins of his brethren. He does not remember his own hurts or feel past wounds or finger old scars. He is free from all that! Hence he forgives, and forgives immediately. This is not merely an ideal set before him, but a demand of the new life of faith, for it is that way of faith (cf. Ephes. 4:30-32, Col. 3:13f, I Cor. 13:6, I Peter 4:8). The removal of guilt releases the believer into the true and right use of his person, aided as he is by the gifts given to him at birth, and the other gifts given at new birth.

Since forgiveness is the way we came to know the love of God, and go on knowing the love of God, so forgiving is the way others come to know and live in our love for them.

### **(iii) In the Wider Community of Man**

We have seen that in his very first appearance to his disciples after his resurrection Jesus spoke of the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins as the message the disciples were to bring to all nations, commencing at Jerusalem. In John's Gospel he breathes the Spirit upon them and says, 'Whosoever's sins you forgive they are forgiven, and whosoever's sins you retain they are retained.' We saw in Acts that they were urgent with the message of the Lordship of Christ, which had effected the forgiveness of sins, and offered forgiveness of sins to the repentant.

No man can receive this liberating, healing, and edifying gift and not, in turn, offer it to the wider family of mankind, those who live in (or are dead in) their trespasses and sins. Love obligates to share the message with enslaved men and women. Gratitude insists we share the riches of His grace.

This brings us to the point of the universality of the offer of forgiveness.

John said, 'Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.' John the apostle writes, 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world.' The disciples were told to go into all the world. Such statements do not go against the fact that there is an elect people of God, and that these are the ones who respond. The offer of forgiveness to all men is real and not merely apparent. On the other hand, man of himself does not have the power to respond and be forgiven. Yet the gifts of repentance and faith - and they are gifts, cf. Acts 5:31-32, 11:18, Ephesians 2:8-10, Philippians 1:29 - have been made available to all Israel and the nations.

Paul then sees this gift for the nations, 'the nations...that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins, and a place among them that are sanctified by faith in me' (Acts 26:17-18). Hence in Romans 1:5, 15:18, and 16:25-26 he speaks of the obedience of faith of the nations. Certainly the gift is for all men, and must be proclaimed universally. That does not mean all will respond, but those who do will have obeyed the word of the Gospel and come into the forgiveness of sins.

## **6. *Living In Forgiveness***

### **(i) Introduction**

Doubtless we have already spoken of what it is to live in forgiveness, especially in the sections just completed. Nevertheless the understanding of forgiveness has to be total for the believer. If there are doubts as to the nature of God's forgiveness then he will not live in strong assurance. We need then to discover the fact and nature of the totality of God's forgiveness. This will ensure true holy living.

### **(ii) The Totality of Forgiveness**

The New Testament speaks of the *aphesis*, i. e. the forgiveness of sins. This is undoubtedly a total gift, and not a partial one. All one's sins are forgiven. We hesitate to use the statement, 'sins, past, present, and future,' for in one sense there can only be past sins for anyone. The moment a sin has become a sin it is a past sin. In another sense there are no future sins, for such have not been committed. In practice we know ourselves often to be in the midst of sinning a sin, and also know, sadly enough, there will yet be more sins. Is then, one only forgiven sins which were past when we came to faith, conversion, justification? Does one then - if one were able - have to expiate future sins?

Obviously very clear thinking on these matters is required. One thing is obvious - all our sins - those we call past, present, and future - were taken by Christ upon the Cross, and dealt with on that Cross. In God's reckoning all our sins called past, present and future have been dealt with. He has forgiven all our sins. There are no sins which He has not forgiven. Of course we have a time problem in this regard, even though God does not have one, and we have to understand things in time.

Shortly we will look at the relationship between justification and forgiveness which is certainly there in Scripture. Forgiveness, as we have suggested, is the personal act of God in forgiving us the violations done to His Person. Justification is the removal of our legal guilt, i.e. is a legal acquittal before the law of God from its accusation. The statement, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,' must mean the guilt is erased, however much subjective guilt may linger within us, or shame be felt on occasions of sinning.

Nevertheless the legal guilt has been erased entirely by the Cross. In the same way the guilt of sins is erased in regard to forgiveness. God has forgiven us wholly, and we must reckon on this every moment of our lives. Our reconciliation with Him is total no matter how little we feel that to be.

### **(iii) Forgiveness, Repentance, and Confession**

Repentance in the N.T. is primarily a total change of mind, once for all, effected by the Spirit through the word of the Gospel. Christians are not called upon to repent the second or third or fourth time. The epistles do not mention repentance as such, and certainly not in this regard. What we must do is live consistently in line with the repentance already executed. The change of mind must constantly need renewal to keep it at right pitch and right thinking. This is the thrust of passages such as Romans 12:1-2, 'the renewing of the mind', and Ephesians 4:22-24, with Colossians 3:9-11. The world keeps seeking to condition us by its thinking. We must be renewed by the Spirit and the Word, daily.

Some feel that continual brokenness is required for receiving continual forgiveness. This is partly correct, but not wholly, and is therefore dangerous teaching. In Christ the new man lives by dependence. Brokenness such as is spoken of in Psalm 51 is part of initial repentance, and as we have said we must live consonant with that. However it is dangerous to think either prior to conversion, or following it, that anything we do in any sense merits or warrants forgiveness. It is always the gift of God.

One of the problems is that Christians fail to realise that forgiveness, far from making it easier to sin, is a powerful sanction against sin. The Christian is far more sensitive to sin than he was formerly (cf. Ezekiel 36:31, Romans 6:21), and may feel deep sorrow and much shame when he sins. This right and proper. However, he is not guilty in an objective way, seeing he is justified, seeing he is forgiven.

In the Revelation in chapters 2 and 3 Christ calls many of the churches to repent. When we examine the nature of their sin we can see it is, in many cases, a departure from the faith. There is participation in idolatry, adultery, heresy, and the occult. The epistles tell us that those who do such things will not enter the Kingdom of God. Christ is recalling to the Christian faith, as much as the call to repentance went out to Israel in her sin and apostasy. Only in this sense can repentance be called for. In the life of the faithful believer it is not a daily act of change of mind, seeing that has happened once for all. It may however be thought of as being consistent with that once-and-never-to-be-repeated act.

Confession of sins is a teaching of the epistles, although curiously it is only mentioned twice. It is mentioned in James 5:13-18 in relation to the healing of a sick person by elders. Confession seems to be helpful in doing this teamwork of praying and healing. Confession of faults one to another is 'that you may be healed.' Notice, not forgiven but healed.

The second mention is in I John 1:6-10. The James passage is of mutual confession which is not to God and could not possibly bring forgiveness. The Johannine passage is addressed primarily to people who say they have no sin! This is quite amazing. Commentators have suggested such were gnostics who claimed Christian allegiance. Greek gnostics thought that they did not innately sin, but their bodies sinned. Their spirit within the body remained pure and inviolate. Whether this foolishness were the case or not John addressed his words to people who did not believe they had sinned. Perhaps they were sinless perfectionists. In verses 6 and 7 John has nominated the norm for a believer, i.e. walking in light (in fellowship with God and the brethren) during which experience all sin was being

cleansed. However for those who lived in the heresy of having no sin, no sin was being cleansed. If those who espoused such foolishness came to acknowledge their sin, then they too would be forgiven. It is doubtful whether John is addressing people who know, continually, that they sin.

This brings us to the point of confession as a practice. The word simply means 'acknowledge' or as it has been said, 'agree with God about our sin/s'. However, in many minds it is confused with penance, a teaching not found, as such, in Scripture. Penance has three elements, contrition, confession and satisfaction. One may confess without conscious contrition or one may have it. It is not laid down as a necessity. One can offer no satisfaction to God. Christ has done this. If confession then is thought of as 'sweating it out before God', then that is derogating the work of the Cross. Christ, we say simply, has 'sweated it out'. Confession does not obtain forgiveness for us. That is God's gift. Confession at most is catching up with God's forgiveness. God does not forgive us because we confess, but we confess because God forgives us, or, better still, has forgiven us. Not to confess, either in intention or act, is to lock back into ourselves that which God has forgiven. It is locked in, so to speak, because we do not acknowledge the need for forgiveness on that score.

Before we consider the confession of sins we ought to do a Scriptural study of confession. We will find that the major part of confession is praise to God, acknowledgment of His nature, His glory, His greatness, and joy in the fact of His grace and love. This kind of confession is edifying, and indeed increasingly reveals to us the greatness of God so that we trust His grace and forgiveness and understand that it is a simple and loving matter for Him to forgive us. We are not anguished suppliants but joyful and confident confessors. We know, not the agony of confession, but its great joy and liberating power.

### **The Dribs-and-Drabs God.**

What we have to guard against is the idea that God is one who is parsimonious, who relegates us to the forgiveness-by-installment plan, who passes out forgiveness on the dribs-and-drabs principle. Paul says, 'Where sin did abound, grace did much more abound'. Hence, 'grace to cover all my sin,' is a thrilling understanding. He gives us all things richly to enjoy. Paul said that He who delivered up His Son for us all will He not also with him free give us all things? This is the God of Hosea who said to sinful Israel, 'I will love you freely'. This is the One who forgave sinners, and in fact received them and ate with them. We must not then see God as the reluctant Forgiver. To the contrary He is the God of grace, of great grace, prodigally using the riches of His kindness.

### **The Fact of Future Judgement.**

What troubles some folk is the statement of II Corinthians 5:10, 'We shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ to receive back the things done in the body, whether good or bad'. Some have curious notions that if they die with (consciously) unconfessed sin that something will have to happen about it at the judgement, as though that sin had not already been judged and forgiven through the Cross! Scriptures such as John 5:24, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life', and Romans 8:1, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,' tell us that judgement for eternal life is past. Judgement for losses and rewards may well be our experience, but this alters nothing in regard to justification and forgiveness. A close study of Revelation 20:11-15 will reveal that whilst the measure of what a person has been and done will be judged by what is written in the books, yet the decision as to whether one enters eternal life or not is not dependent upon what is written in those books. It is dependent upon whether one's name is written (or not) in the

Book of Life . This means that every believer has assurance of eternal life. A judgement for losses and rewards will only determine how well, or not, he has used that life given to him whilst on earth.

### **Conclusion as to repentance and Forgiveness.**

Let us conclude then that repentance, and even confession of sins brought us into the knowledge of sins forgiven. Repentance as an act is not required to be repeated although is to be lived consonant with that initial act of repentance. The mind must continually be renewed by the Spirit and the Word. Confession is the simple acknowledgment that such and such is sin, and indeed that it is also covered by forgiveness. Refusal to acknowledge is a foolish locking into our selves that which has been borne upon the Cross. The death of the Cross is continually efficacious in that if we sin he is (goes on being) the propitiation for our sins, and his blood goes on cleansing.

Forgiveness as a gift is not revoked by God because of failure. Rather we stand in deeper need of it, so to speak. Forgiveness is a constant reminder, not only of our weakness, but of God's unfailing love. How can God possibly ask us to forgive others incessantly and He Himself not do likewise (cf. Matt. 18:21-22)?

#### **(iv) Continuing Forgiveness a Guard Against Further Sinning**

One problem which confronts people is the thought that if the forgiveness of God is continual then it will weaken persons morally. Being forgiven time and again for habitual sin they will take the forgiveness for granted and regard it as a sort of licence for further sin. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Let us examine the fact practically. If one is using forgiveness as a cover for one's sin, then the sense of guilt will not be absent and will be a power to compound that very sin. Repentance fixes the attitude in regard to sin, and so if a failure comes one will regret that. Forgiveness received will be a spur not to repeat the failure. The love known through forgiveness will motivate to obedience. Where there is a sincere desire to defeat the sin the power of God will prevail. If there is no forgiveness then the person will be depressed, left to guilt's de vices, and failure will compound. For the Christian this does not have to be the case. All forgiveness gives a sight of grace and love and inspires obedience. Forgiveness, far from condoning failure, acts as a guard against it, and as motivation for positive obedience. Love, of course, is the true motivating power for obedience, but is love which is also a reverent fear of God, 'There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.' Slavish fear has gone, but holy fear is the truth of genuine love for God in response to His love for us.

It is guilt which de-sensitises us as to the nature of sin, and forgiveness sensitises us to its true nature. Hence forgiveness keeps open the channels I between God and man and acts as a barrier to further sinning. This is what is meant by the statement, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. This grace is available for man in his times of weakness.

This continuing principle of being forgiven, or acting in faith on God's total forgiveness must also apply, as we have said, in our relationships with others. We too must continually forgive. Others will receive the good of this forgiveness only when their attitude is consonant with their initial change of mind or repentance. Their attitude should have nothing to do with our choice to forgive them.

Finally we need to see that God's total forgiveness makes us proof against

the accusations of evil. This can be seen in Romans 8:31ff, where Paul says that it does not matter who condemns seeing it is God who justifies. Likewise in Revelation 12:10 those accused by Satan overcome him by the blood of the Lamb which must mean they rest in the work of the Cross through which forgiveness and justification is theirs. Doubtless this is what Paul means by saying the shield of faith quenches the fiery darts (of accusation) of the Evil One. When accusations of guilt are resisted through the knowledge of forgiveness then forgiveness is a dynamic for holiness.

## ***7. Forgiveness and Justification***

Whenever one theme is picked out from Scripture and pursued in this somewhat reductionist manner, then its discussion will always be limited to some degree. In Scripture salvation covers a number of things such as basic repentance and faith which bring to forgiveness of sins, justification, redemption from evil powers, sanctification, and sonship. In fact these are so intimately related that they form one powerful complex. Closest to forgiveness is justification.

Justification is the action of God by which He does not impute a person's sins to him but rather imputes righteousness to him, i.e. legal righteousness which amounts to acquittal from the accusation and condemnation of sin. The closeness of forgiveness and justification is seen in Psalm 32:1-2 and Romans 4:1ff, where this passage is quoted, namely, 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. This conjunction of forgiveness and justification is also seen in Acts 13:38-39, 'Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.' Paul does not think in terms of forgiveness and justification being apart. We have already seen that sin is an attitude and an act against the person of God, and is therefore personal. It expresses man's rebellion and hatred. Hence forgiveness is a personal act of God.

We have seen that sin is also a violation of the law of God, and that justification is the refusal of God to impute the sin committed against the repentant sinner. This is not because of the sinner's repentance, but because of His own grace and love. He has provided for the demands of the law to be met in full in the death of Christ. Forgiveness and justification, then, both relate to, and spring from, the Atonement. This is shown clearly in Ephesians 1:7, 'In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses'. Redemption then relates to forgiveness. Likewise in Galatians 4:4 redemption relates to liberation from the law. Galatians 4:4 has it, 'In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem them that were under the law'. This is of course, justification.

Again all the Scriptures which refer to God's judgement upon sin, and Christ's bearing of them in his body equally refer to forgiveness and justification. We conclude, then, that forgiveness and justification are not only compatible as elements of the Atonement, but that both are based upon the sin-bearing of Christ, and the judgement upon sin by the Father. As we have seen the Cross thus makes the just basis for God both to justify and to forgive.

## ***8. Forgiveness and Redemption***

As Ephesians 1:7 indicates, 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses'. Redemption is the buying of one out of captivity, slavery or debt. Christ said he had come to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).



Peter likewise spoke of the principle, 'You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot' (I Peter 1:18-19). In I Corinthians 1:30 Paul says Christ is made unto us, redemption. In I Timothy 2:6 he says that Christ gave himself as a ransom for all. In Titus 2:14 he spells it out, 'He (Christ) gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous to do good works.' In Acts 20:28 he had spoken of Christ obtaining the church with his own blood.

It is, however, the connection in both Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 where Paul connects redemption and the forgiveness of sins. As we have seen, these are his two uses of the word *aphesis*, and these uses are linked with redemption. In Colossians 1:13-14 redemption is from the powers of darkness into the Kingdom of the Son of His love.

Redemption has a wide usage, embracing the enslavement of sin, the indebtedness of the sinner, the captivity of man by Satan and his powers. Redemption releases from them all. Thus in Galatians 1:4 Paul speaks of Christ who 'gave himself for our sins that he might rescue us from (up out of) this present evil age'. Redemption then is rescue, for when the guilt and condemnation of sin is taken away, man is loosed from evil powers. That is why Revelation 1:5 says he 'loosed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father'.

In this sense, then, redemption and forgiveness are of the one piece.

## ***9. Forgiveness and Reconciliation***

The word 'atonement' is divided, of course, into at-one-ment. Man is reconciled to God by the Cross. This is stated in Colossians 1:20. Prior to this man was an enemy of God. II Corinthians 5:18-19 says, 'All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.' Notice that reconciliation comes through God not imputing our sins against us. Here is the echo of Psalm 32:1-2 where justification and forgiveness are linked. The basis of non-imputation, and the foundation of reconciliation is the fact that Christ was made to be sin for us.

Man cannot and will not take the step of reconciliation. In one sense God has to be reconciled to men, in that man has no right even to approach God with a view to reconciliation because, as Isaiah 59:2 says, 'Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God'. God in His grace takes the initiative, and makes the way open for reconciliation. He lays the basis for it. He deals with sin upon the Cross so that His forgiveness is valid. That is why Paul says in Romans 5:1, 'Wherefore, being justified by faith we have peace (i.e. reconciliation) with God'. This too is the import of Ephesians 2:16, where he describes the work of the Cross and concludes, 'that he (Christ) might reconcile us both (Jew and Gentile) to God in one body through the Cross.'

Reconciliation with God also means reconciliation with man, and a renewal of true relationships with the creation.

We conclude then that the doctrine of forgiveness relates to all aspects and details of salvation. The forgiveness of sins liberates man from evil, and releases him unto God.

## *10. Forgiveness and Sonship*

Often missed is the work of the Cross to do two things mutually inclusive, namely to bring humanity to personal sonship of the Father-God, and at the same time to bring the redeemed sons into the family of God. We might go so far as to say that God's family is formed through forgiveness.

The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is surely that of the earthly for giving father who is an analogy of the heavenly forgiving Father. In fact not one word is said about forgiveness, but then the whole account is pregnant with it. The elder brother objects to such forgiveness. He sees righteous treatment of his offending brother is to exclude him from the home. As has often been pointed out there is no explicit Cross in this story. Nevertheless the Cross is implicit. It is the love of the father which ultimately draws the lost son back. The father says, 'My son who was dead is alive. My son who was lost is found.' The work of the Cross and the Spirit is to give life where there was death, and to draw the lost powerfully to God. Paul said, 'There be gods many and lords many, but for us there is one God, the Father and one Lord, Jesus Christ.' He is saying that the gods and the lords are not essentially real. Man's true relationship - the relationship which makes him truly man - is that with the Father and the Son. It is also the relationship which makes him personally a son, and corporately the family.

Galatians 4:4-6 says, 'But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"' Paul shows:

- (i) That God has sent the Son to redeem from the law,
- (ii) This is so that we will receive the sonship, and
- (iii) Because we are sons we receive the Spirit of the Son, and the Spirit cries, 'Abba!', i.e. 'Father!' within us.

The same thought is in Romans 8:14-17. Notice that here redemption and sonship are linked. In Galatians 3:26-29 Paul has shown that faith in Christ makes us sons, and that through baptism we have put on Christ which makes us corporately one, i.e. the family.

In Ephesians 2:11f, Paul shows that humanity has been split into two, namely the Jews who were the people of God, and the Gentiles who were outside the promises, the covenants, being without God in the world. A comparison of this passage with the relevant Romans 9:4 shows they were also without 'the sonship'. Paul proceeds to teach that through the Cross a new humanity was born which was neither Jewish nor Gentile, nor even an amalgam of the two, but a new humanity, freshly, uniquely minted. He tells the Gentiles they are no longer strangers and sojourners, but they are members of the household of God, i.e. of the family of God. How then is this accomplished. The answer is, 'Through the Cross,' i.e. through the redeeming work of Christ.

When we come to the practice of the matter we see this initially happened at Pentecost. When thousands listened to the witness of the apostolic band, and cried for help, Peter told them to repent, and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins, and to receive the gift of the Spirit. This they did, and the family, so to speak, was born. Notice that personally each received the forgiveness of sins, and the result was the fellowship of the family. None of this, of course, was possible apart from the Cross, and the Spirit's revelation and application of that work. This is shown powerfully in Hebrews 2:9-11, where the writer shows the necessity of Christ's total suffering to 'bring many sons into glory', and adds that Christ is 'not ashamed to call them brethren'.

We ought also to note that the family comes together so well because now

there is no guilt between its members. When God forgives these children of His they likewise forgive each other. There is no impediment to reconciliation, because the Cross has erased the guilt which had been so divisive. Also it continues to keep them in that intimate fraternal and familial fellowship.

All of this takes us back to the truth we have already scanned, namely that it is the Father who forgives. John 1:11-13 shows us that sinners become children of God through Christ and birth by the Spirit (cf. John 3:1-14). There is, nevertheless, a sense that re-birth implies original birth, and not merely original physical birth. Man, so to speak, is not merely a sinner, but an erstwhile son of God, as indeed an erstwhile creature, and an erstwhile subject. Through grace he is restored to his creational being, with the added 'plus' of the gift of grace. This too applies to man corporately. The members of the erstwhile family are also restored to true family-hood. All of this through the forgiveness of sins.

### ***11. Life Without Forgiveness: The Unforgivable Sin***

The truth of forgiveness, i.e. God's forgiveness, is breathtaking. Should one pause and imagine what life would be without it, then the result would be stunning, even terrifying. Continuance in guilt, fear of death and judgement, denial of peace in the conscience are all elements which affect man deeply. Domination by the dread enemies of the human spirit, continuance in moral defilement and degradation are too terrible to contemplate. Failure to be liberated, denial of genuine holy love, inability to live in reconciliation with God and man, and a host of other things would be the case were there no forgiveness. Primarily there could be no knowledge of the love of God. Indeed without forgiveness how could we know, 'God is love!'

This would be the case were there some sin which could not be forgiven. It has been said that the only sin which is not forgiven is the sin for which forgiveness is not asked. This is a fair statement, for whenever Scripture speaks of sin being unforgivable it is primarily referring to a state of mind of the sinner, rather than to a particular sin which places man outside forgiveness. This state of mind is common to the contexts in which unforgivable sin is indicated.

The first mention of unforgivable sin is in the O.T. Numbers 15:30-31 says, 'But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.' Sin done with a high hand is that of arrogance, and deliberate insult to God. Doubtless there is an element of this in every sin, but there seems to be a class of sinning, i.e. attitude of the sinner which precludes repentance on his part. This is seen also in Numbers 16:26, 32, I Samuel 2:25 and Jeremiah 14:12. Doubtless it is the inability to repent which is a key to sin done with a high hand. One, so to speak, sticks by his sin. Since repentance is metanoia, i.e. 'a change of mind', then the unchanging mind is doomed to live with its sin. Christ said that one should go on forgiving one's brother, but added, 'if he repent,' meaning that forgiveness can be received only where there is repentance.

In the N.T. we have a number of references to the subject. There may be a hint in Hebrews 9:22 (cf. Lev. 17:11), 'Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood.' It is, however, in Matthew 12:31f (cf. Mark 3:28f, Luke 12:10) that the words appear, 'Therefore....age to come.' Note that in this passage that blasphemy will be forgiven men, but not against the Holy Spirit. Matthew 12:28 says that what Christ did he did by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 10:38). The attitude of those to whom Christ spoke was that they attributed what the Holy Spirit was doing to unholy spirit/s. In some sense this must mean their minds were perverse and they had lost the discernment of seeing what was holy,

attributing it to evil. This attitude is condemned in Isaiah 5:20-21, and Matthew 6:22-23.

In John 20:23 is mention of the retaining of sins, i.e. of their not being forgiven. Doubtless this is exemplified by the attitude of many in the Sanhedrin in Acts 4 and 5, where Peter virtually preaches the Gospel to them, but these refuse it.

In I John 5:16-17 John speaks of a sin for which he does not commend prayer, although he does not say explicitly that one should not pray for it. He does not mention what it is but implies that his readers will know it when they see it. It would appear to be of the same order of attitude described above. This passage has led to the distinction made in the Roman Catholic church of mortal (death deserving) and venial (pardonable) sins. It appears difficult to nominate the actual sin and it is better to think of an attitude which cuts one off from forgiveness as being that which is mortal.

Finally there are passages in Hebrews which seem to indicate something like the unpardonable sin. They are 6:4-8, 10:26-31, and possibly 12:15-17. These are not easily disposed of. There are two schools of thought. The first sees the Chapter 6 passage as referring to apostasy, meaning that one has indeed been a believer but has deliberately defected. The second school sees the passage as referring to one who has come up, so to speak, to the very edge of salvation, and being convinced it is the truth, has turned his back upon it. Again this seems something done with a high hand. In Chapter 10 two schools similarly obtain. To sin deliberately after the knowledge of the truth seems to the first school to have apostatised, whilst the second school sees it as actual rejection of the truth without having participated in the truth. The Chapter 12 passage is seen by some as repentance denied to Esau, and others as Jacob refusing to repent of his blessing upon Isaac.

What is important to note is that folk of a morbid disposition of mind come under a desperate sense of having committed the unpardonable sin. The best that can be said is that he who has committed such sin has no regrets, no despair, but only a hardened, calloused spirit and a seared conscience. Anyone who is afraid he may have committed the unforgivable sin most evidently has not.

## *12. The Passing Over of Sins*

Romans 3:25 says, 'whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,--to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins'. What is meant by passing over sins? The context shows us that God only seemed to pass over them. In practice this means He did not immediately judge. God's judgement is called righteous (Rom. 2: 5). The Book of the Revelation constantly points to this fact. God tells Abraham He will not judge the Amorites until their iniquity is ripe. God has longsuffering and forbearance, otherwise He would judge immediately and totally. Instead He is long-suffering (cf. II Peter 3:9). The fact is that He knew the Cross was where He would judge all sin (Romans 8:2-3). So all sin was judged in the Cross, and man was given the opportunity to believe in that sacrifice and be justified, justification being God's grace gift.

In Acts 17:30 we read, 'The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He command all men everywhere to repent'. The 'times of ignorance' are those, of course, of idolatry. Now, in Christ, has come the time of revelation. Man can no longer claim to be ignorant. Also Christ is judge, and judgement will henceforth ensue. Man therefore must repent. God has 'overlooked' temporarily, but hence forth does not overlook. This is a stimulus to repentance.

### ***13. The Proclamation of Forgiveness***

We have mentioned that one cannot be forgiven without wanting to share that great message. In Luke 24:44-47 Christ stated that prophetically it was predicted that such repentance and remission of sins would be preached. It was not, then, a departure from the economy of Israel, as such, but was to be the fulfilment of the prophecies. This was what vindicated the preaching of the apostles. So much so that Paul claims he is ‘testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass,’ and, ‘...we bring you the good news that what God had promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled by raising Jesus...’, and, ‘believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets.’ (See Acts 26:22-23, 13:32-33, 24:14.) Hence in Acts 17:3, and I Corinthians 15:3 Paul claims that forgiveness of sins is according to the Scriptures.

We have seen that this message of forgiveness, coupled of course with the other great related themes of justification, redemption, reconciliation and sonship, is the message which alone can liberate men from the bondage of sin and evil powers. It seems impossible then that forgiven people would not proclaim forgiveness. Their proclamation of course would be by the Spirit who brings revelation, conviction, and the gifts of repentance and faith. They also proclaim by their life of living under the continuing forgiveness of God, and so within the context of the forgiving church, and their own personal forgiving of others.

We have seen that the remission and retention of sins is innate in the proclamation of the Gospel. This means that the Gospel should be preached with all pureness and nothing of preaching at the conscience must be permitted. That is we must not raise up guilt in human beings by methods that are not of the Word and the Spirit. To preach to the conscience is another matter, for that is the sensitive area of man. The Word and the Spirit can then bring conviction, and the result will be either acceptance or rejection of the Gospel, i.e. the forgiveness of sins, in which case remission or retention of sins takes place.

It can also be noted that the manner in which we approach sinners is vital to true proclamation of the grace of God. The gracious acceptance of sinners by Jesus neither condoned their sin, nor patronised their persons. Likewise we should proffer the grace of God. The way in which we forgive is significant of the way in which we see God forgiving us. If we make people ‘sweat it out’, so to speak, then we assuredly think of God as doing that with us. For this reason we ought to read Matthew 18:21-35 thoughtfully, and many times.

### ***14. Forgiveness Is Eschatological***

Forgiveness belongs to the last days and the end time. This will be confirmed below as we see how Kingdom and Covenant relate to forgiveness and the eschaton. In Revelation 1:5 John says, ‘To him who loves us and has freed (loosed) us from our sins by his blood, and has made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father’. In Revelation 7:14 stands the great multitude having made, each one in it, his robes white in the blood of the Lamb. Galatians 5:5 speaks of waiting through faith and by the Spirit for the hope of justification. It could equally be said, ‘the hope of forgiveness’, for that forgiveness is eschatological. Both justification and forgiveness are here, in this time, by faith. Then they will be by sight. At the end time the redeemed community will know total forgiveness.

Further to this we see that both Kingdom and Covenant are linked with the eschaton. Galatians 1:5 says Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us up out of this present evil age (aeon)’. The new age or aeon is the eschaton. In I Corinthians 10:11 Paul says we are those upon whom the ends of the ages have come,

i.e. we stand in the ellipsis of the two ages. Ephesians 1:21 tells us Christ is over this age and the age to come, whilst Hebrews 6:5 says the powers of the new age have already irrupted (in some measure) into this present age. The forgiveness of sins then both releases us from the old age and brings us into the new. Forgiveness also is intimately linked with the Kingdom and the Covenant, as they with the new age.

### **(i) Forgiveness and the Kingdom**

The Kingdom of God is primarily not a realm but a reign. It is the Reign of God. It is so from creation, although the rebellion of man and celestial creatures has brought rebellion into it. This Kingdom was particularised in the people of Israel (Exodus 19:5-6) but not completed. The prophets spoke of the days of the coming Kingdom in many ways. It was this Kingdom the people anticipated in the coming of Messiah, the Davidic King. Such a Kingdom would be universal, and ultimately all rebellion would be eradicated. When God's Kingdom finally came on earth all would be obedience.

John the Baptist came preaching this Kingdom, demanding repentance as preparation for it. Such baptism was to be with a view to (Greek *eis*) the forgiveness of sins. Both John and Jesus preached the good news of the Kingdom, and part of this good news was the promise of the forgiveness of sins. The sermon on the Mount related to the Kingdom. Indeed it could be called Kingdom teaching. Para mount in it was the prayer Christ gave to the people of God, namely the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is addressed to 'Our Father,' and asks for His Kingdom to come amongst men. With this it asks for the forgiveness of sins. It also indicates that forgiveness of others is part of the life of the Kingdom. In Matthew 18:21ff Jesus says the Kingdom of God is likened to a King who, finding a servant in great debt forgives and expects he likewise will forgive a fellow servant who is indebted.

In Luke 5:17-26 Jesus forgives the paralysed man. He says that it is the Son of man who has authority to forgive sins. This of course is a reference to Daniel 7:13ff where the Son of man is given the Kingdom. His authority to judge must contain the power to condemn or forgive. This Kingdom is of course, eschatological. On the night of the last supper, Jesus tells his disciples that he appoints to them a Kingdom, as indeed his Father had appointed it to him. In the use of the bread and wine he speaks of not drinking the wine until he does in the (coming) Kingdom. In the same context he speaks of the forgiveness of sins (see Luke 22:29, 15-18, cf. Matt. 26:28).

It is clear that Exodus 19:5-6 which refers to Israel now refers to the new people of God, the household of God which is at the same time the people of the Kingdom, for Peter makes this equation or transference in I Peter 2:9-10. In Acts 8:5 and 12 Philip offers the Samaritans the gospel of redemption which is at the same time the Gospel of the Kingdom (cf. Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 30-31). In fact the gospel of the Kingdom is preached throughout Acts, if not under that term, yet under the fact of the Lordship of Christ, i.e. Messiah of the Kingdom. He is the one who, out of his Lordship, can and does forgive sin. This fact is underlined by Paul's statement in Colossians 1:13-14, 'He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.' Here he links the transference from darkness to the Kingdom with the forgiveness of sins. As repentance and faith with the reception of forgiveness constitute entrance to the Kingdom, so forgiveness by God and forgiveness to others constitute life in the Kingdom, now.

When the Kingdom has fully come with the defeat of evil, and the advent of Christ, then forgiven men and women will inherit the heavens and the earth. The life of the Kingdom will be complete. This will be the true eschaton.

## **(ii) Forgiveness and the Covenant**

The New Covenant is linked with the eschaton. This is evident from O.T. prophecies such as Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 37:26, 36:24-28 which all speak of 'those days'. Luke 1:72-78 links the Abrahamic Covenant with the New Covenant, and promises forgiveness of sins. Jesus of course links forgiveness with his death, saying it is in the New Covenant made in his blood. The writer of Hebrews dwells strongly on Jeremiah 31:31-34, the death of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. In 8:1-13 and 10:1-18 he shows the new covenant outmodes the old covenant which could not effectively give forgiveness of sins. In Galatians 3:6-18 Paul insists that the covenant with Abraham promised justification and the law coming after that promise could not annul it. He shows that in the death of Christ the promises of covenant were fulfilled.

In the same passage Paul links the promise of justification with the promise of the Spirit. This outpouring of the Spirit is seen by John the Baptist to be linked with the Kingdom, and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>2</sup> Joel 2:28f is quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost in regard to the outpouring of the Spirit. This prophecy commences with, 'In the last days...', and concludes with, '...before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes.' Thus Covenant, Kingdom, and the outpouring of the Spirit are linked, and all three are of the eschaton.

We conclude then, as we suggested above, that forgiveness and the eschaton are intimately linked together.

## **(iii) Forgiveness, the Sacraments and the Eschaton**

### **(a) Baptism and Forgiveness.**

On the day of Pentecost Peter said, 'Repent and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' Baptism and forgiveness are linked. This was the case also with John's baptism. Forgiveness in the latter is proleptic. In the former case baptism is the sacrament of forgiveness. This thought is present in Acts 22:16, where Paul is told, 'Rise and be baptised, washing away your sins.' This accords with I Peter 3:21, 'baptism....now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience,' i.e. the removal of dirt from the conscience. The writer of Hebrews sees the death of the Cross as accomplishing this, 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water' (10:22). This must also be the meaning of Titus 3:5 (in its context) when Paul speaks of, 'the washing of regeneration and the renewal in the Holy Spirit.'

In Acts 3:19 Peter calls for repentance and conversion, 'that your sins may be blotted out and that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.' In this statement Peter does not explicitly call for baptism, but the demand is there implicitly. Also it is in the context of the eschaton with (a) Times of refreshing, and (b) The imminent coming of Jesus (verse 21). In Acts 16:31 Paul tells the

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<sup>2</sup> The forgiveness of sins and the covenant, as also the Kingdom are linked with the outpouring of the Spirit. The outpouring of the Spirit is the gift of the eschaton. Note the gift of the Spirit always accompanies the gift of forgiveness. In the O.T. the promise of the Holy Spirit is always accompanied by the promise of the Kingdom

Philippian gaoler that he must be baptised to be saved, and as a result there is a household baptism. Salvation of course is the forgiveness of sins.

In Colossians 2:11-15 and Romans 6:1-6 the believer is said to have been buried with Christ, into death in baptism. The result of this is his emergence into life. Doubtless Paul is referring to the experience of identification with Christ in his death and resurrection. Some contend fairly that this may not necessarily be linked with the act or ritual of baptism. That may well be so, but it is related to the principle of baptism and so there is no reason why the rite of baptism should not be linked. We must guard against the view that baptism *ex opere operato* brings forgiveness of sins. We must also guard against the view that baptism as a ritual is not wholly linked with the forgiveness of sins. Baptism, as we have seen, is related to the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of sins. It is also related to justification, as we see in Titus 3:3-7, and so, regeneration.

We see then the importance of the principle and rite of baptism. Such baptism incorporates the recipient into Christ and the people of God (e.g. Gal. 3:26-29). It is emphasising that those baptised are forgiven, and their sins washed away. Without this sacrament or ordinance, the lines would not be clearly marked, nor the point of forgiveness made so distinctively. Of course the sacraments are intended to aid us in our weakness and to relate to us where we are as humans, needing the physical acts to underline the spiritual truth and power of forgiveness.

#### **(b) The Lord's Supper and Forgiveness.**

Jesus' words, 'This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins,' tells us the death is for forgiveness of sins. Some MSS of Luke 22:20, 'Do this in remembrance of me.' Paul repeats this statement in I Corinthians 11:24, and adds in verse 25, 'Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' His own comment, as he reports these sayings of Christ linked with both the bread and wine, i.e. body and blood, is, 'For as often as you eat this bread, and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'

The Lord's Supper has three tenses linked with it. The believing company, as it shares the Supper looks back to the event of Calvary where its sins were forgiven. The remembrance is in the present and is a dynamic remembrance, directing the heart to current effects of that past event. Forgiveness is now. The 'until he comes' directs the heart to the future, to the eschaton, to the glorification of the church, the ultimate liberation from sin's presence. These elements indicate why the realism of the Eucharist affects the church as it shares it.

Without this continual participation in the present, of the past event, there is no hope for the future. Faith is fed currently, and the reality of forgiveness within the community of God's people is powerful in its effects. It also stimulates the people of God, continuously to proclaim the forgiveness of the Father to the world.

It is in the Lord's supper, that the Lord continually directs his people to his forgiveness, and thus keeps their love alive and fresh. Their obedience to him is rooted in the love of forgiveness. They share with him in bringing this forgiveness to the world. They cannot be the sacramental community without being the proclaiming community. Every day guilt is defeated by the Cross. Grace is thus magnified, and proclamation consequently stimulated.



## ***15. The Community of Forgiveness: The Forgiving Community***

We are now ready to draw our threads together and conclude our study on forgiveness. To do so we need to see that the matter of forgiveness whilst personal is never individualistic. Whilst it is true that a person is forgiven, yet the gift of forgiveness is primarily to the community. Acts 5:31 has it, 'God exalted him at His right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.' Notice that forgiveness (with repentance) is the gift to the whole community. A study of Acts 10:43 - 11:18 brings the conclusion that it was likewise with the Gentiles. Forgiveness is for the birth of the community as well as its life.

In practice one is not converted by a doctrine of forgiveness. One meets that doctrine only where people are forgiven. It is the forgiven community which proclaims what it knows because it has experienced it. Man meets forgiveness where it has already been experienced. It is from the word of forgiveness that man finds forgiveness but the word as it issues from the forgiven community. The Cross is the ground of forgiveness but then the true community is under the Cross.

The forgiven community is the community which forgives. We have seen from Ephesians 4:30-32 that the thrust of the Spirit is what keeps the new community in tenderness, love, and forgiveness. This is underscored by Colossians 3:12-15. As God forgives, so the community forgives - instantly. The children of God do not call on one another to expiate their sins within the community. I Peter 4:8 exhorts, 'Above all hold unfailing love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins.' This is the equivalent of I Corinthians 13:6, 'Love does not rejoice at the wrong, but rejoices in the right.' The community holds at its heart the truth stated in the Lord's Prayer, and amplified in Matthew 18:21ff, that the children of the Father forgive as does the Father.

The forgiving community knows itself to be eschatological, that is to be the community of the covenant and the Kingdom. Covenant brings forgiveness, and so generates forgiveness amongst its people. The Kingdom is the place of victory over evil. It is under the Lordship of Christ. The community is subject to its Head who has redeemed it. His plea for the forgiveness of his executioners, and his mighty death for sin also motivates the fruits of his suffering - the new community - to practise mutual forgiveness. They know themselves to be in the end time, in the era of the Spirit. Moreover they are the sacramental community, daily sharing the dynamics of the Cross through baptism and the eucharist. The community is not allowed to forget forgiveness. Individuals who pursue their lonely way may easily forget. It is the warmth of response, the grateful love of the forgiven which keeps them in the love of God. II Peter 1:9 speaks of the disaster of the man who deliberately forgot he was purged from his old sins, and whose life consequently became dulled, and he blind and short-sighted.

Sometimes the community, too, can forget. This is the sad story of the church at Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7). Somehow baptism was not an assurance of forgiveness and the Holy Communion a dynamic reminder of the force of forgiveness. This community worked well, kept its moral practice tidy, and discerned and rejected heresy, but love had been abandoned. Love springs from forgiveness and its freshness from continuing forgiveness and forgiving. Such a community must return to its first love and its first works - those springing from forgiveness.

Finally, the new community is the proclaiming community. It cannot know the constant dynamic of grace, and not proclaim. As strong as is its sense of God's love in forgiveness, so it will proclaim out of responding, grateful love. It cannot look upon man who is dead in his sin, inert in his death, suffering in his guilt and not proclaim the way of forgiveness, the peace of justification, the relief of moral cleansing. Moreover it looks to 'the recompense of the reward', i.e. the commendation of its Lord for fruitful obedience, and liberating proclamation.

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