
One of the themes of the Lenten season is Confession and Repentance from sin. As we are reminded of Christ's sacrifice for us, we come to him in our condition of spiritual brokenness for cleansing and healing. Listen to the words of Psalm 32 a Psalm of Confession.

Opening Scripture:**Psalm 32****Scripture****Romans 3:10-26**

For the past several weeks I have been talking about the phrase: **God Loves You!** That is a little phrase, but it has great significance. I have observed in my years of ministry, that while a lot of people like to say **God Loves Me**, it does not appear to me that they live as if they believe that. The reality of God's love does not impact the way they feel about God, about themselves. It does not impact the way they behave. The expression **God Loves You** is a theological statement. It is something that we believe to be true about God. But theology must be more than statements in our head. Theology must impact our living.

Because God does Love us, there are certain blessings that we enjoy. Last week I talked about the fact that because God loves us, when we become believers in Jesus, **God is now our Father, and we become His child.** That new relationship with God impacts our lives. Think about this: The **Holy God is our Father.** We are **members of His family.** We can **approach God** without fear. We can **trust Him** to take care of us, because He is our loving Father. When we believe that God is our Father, we have a new sense of our value and worth. We are no longer just an "ordinary" person. We live with a sense of confidence and peace about life and the future.

Today, I want to talk about another consequence of God's Love. Because God loves us, he offers us the gift of **Forgiveness** – Complete Forgiveness. If it is true that God loves us enough to forgive our sins, what will that look like? To be Forgiven means we can live without a Guilty Conscience. We no longer live with Shame. We are cleansed. This passage from Paul's letter to the Romans helps us to understand this gift of God's love – **forgiveness** – so I want to start today looking at this passage as Paul discusses the new condition of our heart when we are forgiven.

As we begin our discussion of forgiveness the obvious starting point is to state the obvious – **We are sinners.** Paul declares this obvious truth in these verses that I read – **There is no one righteous, not even one...there is no one who seeks God....All have turned away.** These are not pleasant words, and some people will push back against them, saying "I'm not that bad." We don't like to be accused. We don't like to be lumped together with really bad people. But when we are honest with ourselves, we would have to agree with Paul that **we are not perfect.** We have all **fallen short** of the righteous life that God expects us to live. As we read further in Romans, we understand that **there are consequences** when we do so. In Romans 6:23 we read: **"For the wages of sin is death..."** When the Bible talks about death as a consequence for sin, it is referring to spiritual death, not just physical death. Spiritual death is alienation from God Himself, confinement in eternal darkness and loneliness.

But the **good news** in this passage is that God has made provision for people to be spared from the consequences of sin. People who were previously sinners, can be made **Righteous**, and brought into right relationship with God. To be made Righteous means to be **brought into conformity with God's law and character.** Our sins are removed from us, and now God sees us as Righteous. In order for that to happen, someone else will have to pay the consequences for our sin. Then we do not have to face that eternal death. In verse 25, Paul says that **God presented Christ to be a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of His blood.** When Jesus died on the cross, he took my sin upon Himself and received God's wrath against my sin. And in the place of my sin, He put his perfectly righteous character on me.

Now where does forgiveness come in. The term that Paul uses for this experience of salvation is **Justified.** When we are justified, our sins are forgiven. Packer says, **Justification means the pardon of all sin, past,**

present, and future and our complete acceptance for all eternity. So that is what happens when we are saved. **All of our sin is removed from us.** The word Justification is a legal term. It means that our status in the eyes of the Judge has changed. We are Forgiven Completely of our sin. All of our Sin – All of our past sins are forgiven, all of our present sins are forgiven, and we receive pardon for all of our future sins.

It is important to note how we receive this gift: ***This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*** It is a gift that is given to us. There is nothing that we do to be forgiven. God offers it to us free of charge, based on what Jesus did on the Cross.

The gift of God's forgiveness is a wonderful expression of God's love for us. David, in Psalm 103 expresses his praise to God for this wonderful gift: **Psalm 103:8-13.**

So that is what forgiveness is. What does it look like in the life of a person who is forgiven. If we are forgiven, if that is true, how does that impact our lives?

- ***Rom. 5:1 – Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....***
- ***Rom. 8:1 – Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus....***
- ***Heb. 10:14 – For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.....***

As I mentioned, I have encountered people who believe God loves them, but they do not understand the great significance of what it means to be forgiven by God. Some who have become believers in Jesus, struggle with guilt and shame, long after they have invited Jesus to be their Savior, and received God's gift of forgiveness. Perhaps there are events or actions in their past, that they just have not been able to let go of. Maybe they said something or did something to hurt someone. Maybe they violated someone's trust. That sin is something that comes to mind every day. We may not be able to forget that event, but I believe we can get to a place where that no longer lingers in their mind. They can get to a place where they don't think about it every day. They no longer feel dirty. I believe talking with someone or some friends can help.

I sometimes encounter people who feel like they have to do something to earn this gift of forgiveness. God offers it to us as a gift. We receive it by faith – without having to do anything. But for some people that is not enough. They feel as if they must do something more. But God's love for us means that we can stop striving! Just enjoy the gift that He offers to you. Rest!

Now, before I leave this subject, I want to talk about why confessing our sin is so important, if God already forgives all of our sin when we put our faith in Jesus. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for forgiveness. I believe that this act of confession has to do with our fellowship with God. Even though we have accepted Jesus as our Savior, we will still sin. We do not lose our salvation every time we sin. But our fellowship with God is marred. And we must "clear the air", by acknowledging before God that we know that what we did was wrong. We ask for his forgiveness so that we can enjoy the intimacy of a child with his/her Father once again.

So I encourage you to meditate on this wonderful gift of God's love – his forgiveness. How will your life be different if you really believed that you are forgiven. I believe you will **live with a sense of peace and contentment.** It is more enjoyable to live in a relationship with someone if you didn't feel like they were **mad at you all the time.** I believe you will no longer be dominated by feelings of guilt and shame. I believe you will be drawn into a deeper level of intimacy with your Father. And finally, if you are better able to grasp the significance of God's forgiveness, I believe it will be easier for you to live in peace with others – to be reconciled and grant forgiveness.

Prayer and Blessing