

FORGIVENESS #1

In Exodus 33 Moses has gone up into the mountain to receive the 10 Commandments, to have dealings with God for 40 days and nights, and when he comes down he finds that Aaron and the people have made a golden calf and they are engaged in horrible acts of defiance of God's law. Moses manifested righteous anger and God manifested anger. Moses intercedes on the peoples' behalf and God turns away His anger. God, then, apprizes Moses of His intention that He will show mercy. Moses is to go back up into the mountain to receive two new tablets of stone afresh, the revelation of God's will, in those 10 Commandments.

Exodus 33:12 “*And Moses said unto Jehovah, See, You say unto me, Bring up this people: and You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, I know you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight. 13 Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in Your sight, show me now Your ways, that I may know You, to the end that I may find favor in Your sight: and consider that this nation is Your people. 14 And He said, My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest. 15 And he [Moses] said unto Him, If Your presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. 16 For wherein now shall it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not in that You go with us, so that we are separated, I and Your people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth? 17 And Jehovah said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight, and I know you by name. 18 And he [Moses] said, Show me, I pray Your glory. 19 And He [God] said, I will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the Name of Jehovah before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 And He said, you cannot see My face; for man shall not see Me and live. 21 and Jehovah said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand upon the rock: 22 and it shall come to pass, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand until I have passed by: 23 and I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen. 34:1 And Jehovah said unto Moses, Hew two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon the tables the Words that were on the first tables, which you broke. 2 And be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mount. 3 And no man shall come up with you; neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount; neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount. 4 And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto*

mount Sinai, as Jehovah had commanded him, and took in his hand two tables of stone. 5 And Jehovah descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the Name of Jehovah. 6 And Jehovah passed by before him, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, 7 keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation. 8 And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.”

What does the Bible mean when it says, God forgives sin? On what basis, if any, does God forgive sin? What does it mean to forgive one another? When are we obligated to forgive one another? If we are forgiven all of our sins when we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, why do we need to continue to ask for forgiveness? Is God's forgiveness of us unconditional? Should our forgiveness of others be unconditional? As we take up the subject of forgiveness and we consider the major passages dealing with this subject, both in the Old and the New Testaments, these and similar questions will be addressed and answered. This subject will be opened up within a structure that starts with **foundational** issues and moves to **secondary** issues, and then moves out to some of the more **knotty questions** in the application of the biblical doctrine of forgiveness.

In this first study one simple, central, foundational concern will be addressed. The concern is this, to demonstrate:

THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN BIBLICAL REVELATION.

COMMENTS OF INTRODUCTION

God has **two great theaters** within which He has revealed Himself. (1) Psalm 19 is a celebration of that reality. In the opening verses of Psalm 19, the Psalmist celebrates the fact that God has revealed Himself in **THE THEATER OF CREATION**. This is known as **GENERAL REVELATION**.

Psalm 19:1 “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. 2 Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge.”*

Day unto day and night unto night there is **a revelatory activity of God** in the created order above us [in the heavens] and around us [in the firmament]. Furthermore, according to **Romans 2: 14-15** God has revealed Himself in this theater of **general revelation**, not only in the **created order above us** and **around us**, but in the created order **within us**. Paul says that those who have never seen

the pages of a Bible, demonstrate **the work of the law in their hearts**, in the function of **conscience**, in the consciousness that is inescapable by any man, woman, boy or girl, in any part of the world. They are creatures accountable to God and that accountability thunders in the function of conscience.

(2) But then God is not only revealing Himself in general revelation, in the world above us, around us, and within us, but in **SPECIAL REVELATION**, that is, in **HIS WRITTEN WORD**. For the Psalmist goes on to say, **Psalm 19:7** "*The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul: the testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple.*"

And it is in **special revelation** that **God has revealed to us those things that could never be known in general revelation**. Were we to gaze at the stars with the keenest of eyes and the most powerful telescope for a billion years, there are things about God that could never be known. Were we able to look within ourselves with the most minute and accurate analysis of who and what we are as creatures, made in the image of God and made accountable to God, there are things about God we can never, never discover. So God in mercy has given us **special revelation** in **His Written Words** in which He discloses Himself to us.

General revelation will never answer any of these questions about forgiveness, whether the questions are forgiveness in the Godward dimension or forgiveness in the manward dimension. We are indebted to this Blessed Book for anything we can know about the doctrine of forgiveness. If any demonstration of forgiveness must be set forth, it must be demonstrated from this Book of Special Revelation.

In demonstrating the central place of forgiveness in biblical revelation, it will be understood that we are not dealing with the periphery of biblical revelation, but we are dealing with the very nerve centers of what God has revealed in His Holy Word. To state it more bluntly, to be ignorant of the biblical doctrine of forgiveness is to be ignorant of one of the most crucial dimensions of truth revealed in Holy Scripture.

Furthermore, this study will whet the appetite of your heart and mind to grapple with this multifaceted theme so that as we begin to wrestle with the many passages which deal with it –and some of these things are not easy to be understood– that you will not copout in mental and spiritual laziness, but you, with me, will be prepared to wrestle and to grapple until, by the grace of God, you have a well formed biblically-based understanding of the biblical doctrine of forgiveness.

In attempting to set before you the central place of forgiveness in biblical revelation it will be presented under three headings:

#1 THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE CHARACTER AND DISPOSITION OF GOD HIMSELF.

Why start here? Because it is always safe to start where the Bible starts. What are the first words of the Bible? "*In the beginning God.*" We are apprised in Genesis 1:1 that whatever this Book is going to tell us, ***the fundamental reference point is God, Himself**, and if we approach any and every subject in that way we are on solid ground. Most of our skewed thinking about anything is because we've not started with God. Or if we started with God, we have a distorted view of God Himself, or of God's relationship to the thing, concerning which, we are seeking to understand. So we must start where God starts. The central place of forgiveness is in the very character and disposition of God, Himself.

In the Exodus passage that we read at the beginning of our study, Moses makes three prayers. His first prayer in Exodus 33 is that God would go with him and His people. And God says I will. Then his second prayer is that he would know the ways of God in verse 13 "*show me now Your ways that I may know You.*" And then he prays in verse 18, "*show me Your glory.*" Not content to know that he would have a further understanding of the ways of God, that he would have the promise of the presence of God, Moses is passionate that he might behold in new ways the very glory of God. This man had been in face to face communion with God in a way that no other human being had ever been for 40 days and nights, and yet what he had seen and known of that kind of intimate communion with God, rather than make him proud and satisfied, it made him insatiably thirsty for more. And so he says, "Show me I pray, Your glory." He wants to see a dimension of God's glory –in some way of direct vision, that he didn't have previously. But God says, 'No Moses, if I gave you what you asked, it would kill you. No man can see Me, in My unveiled, unmediated, undiminished glory and live. While you are yet in the flesh, while you are yet a man, here, unglorified, in spirit and body, it would kill you. I can't give you what you ask, but I'll give you the next best thing. I'll put you in the cleft of a rock. I'll hide you, and then I'll pass by and declare dimensions of My glory.' **Exodus 34:6 – 7 34:6** "*And Jehovah passed by before him, and proclaimed, Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness [or covenant love and faithfulness] and truth [that is trustworthiness] 7 keeping lovingkindness for thousands, forgiving* [and then the three words that take in the broad

categories of every kind of sin] **FORGIVING iniquity and transgression and sin**; and that will by no means clear the guilty [though He is a forgiving God, He is not an indulgent, unrighteous God] *visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation. 8 And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped."*

Moses ascribed worth and honor to this God. As he does so, what conception of God has just been given to him? God has proclaimed His Name, that is, His Essence, His very Character, to Moses. He has declared it in terms of being a merciful, gracious, and slow-to-anger God, so that from henceforth, for Moses ever to think of God as a God other than a merciful, gracious, slow-to-anger God, would be to deny the very substance of God's self-disclosure to Moses. Moses, did God show you His glory? 'Yes, He showed it to me in a limited way.' What was the substance of His glory? 'It was that He is a God Who is gracious, merciful, slow-to-anger. A God abundant in covenant faithfulness and love and trustworthiness. Who keeps lovingkindness for thousands. Who visits iniquity upon the third and fourth generation, but He is a God Who, **forgives**, Who is **forgiving**, –forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. A God Who is forgiving in His very character and disposition in the presence of every form of moral deviation.' So that from henceforth, Moses cannot rightly conceive of God as anything other than the God Who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin. Moses is brought face-to-face with the reality that **forgiveness is woven into the very character and texture of the Being of the God** of the covenant. Now how central is an issue which is part and parcel of the very character and disposition of God? This revelation to Moses is picked up by both psalmist and prophets throughout the rest of the Old Testament and becomes, as it were, almost a liturgical framework for subsequent prayers of the Psalmist and of prophets.

Here are **SOME EXAMPLES** of the central place of forgiveness in the character and disposition of God.

Psalm 86:5 "For You, Lord, are good, and **READY** to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness unto all them that call upon You."

Psalm 86:5 "For You, Lord, **are** good..." in Your very character, You are a good God. You are not an evil God. In the very essence of Your soul is a disposition towards forgiveness. "You Lord are good and **ready to forgive**..." Forgiveness is not the importation of something foreign to God's very Being. He is, in His Being, a God Who stands **continually ready to forgive**. He is the God of infinite, unsullied, unchangeable, goodness. He is the God Who is

continually ever-ready to forgive. We must never think that something outside of Him must be imparted to Him, or imported into Him, to find Him a forgiving God. No. He is true to Himself when He forgives. He is never more true to Himself than when He forgives.

Nehemiah 9:16 & 17. Here we have a setting, of corporate confession of the sin of the nation. Nehemiah is the mouthpiece for the nation. Confessing the sin of covenant breaking and all of the various manifestations of that covenant breaking, and yet in the midst of it we find these words in **Nehemiah 9:16** "But they and our fathers dealt proudly and hardened their neck, and hearkened not to Your commandments, **17** and refused to obey, neither were mindful of Your wonders that You did among them, but hardened their neck, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage. [What would your hope be if you had to say that's what their sins were? That God would mercifully come, singled out this nation in free sovereign love and delivered them out of Egyptian bondage, yet they refuse to obey. They didn't remember His wonders, they hardened their neck, and they were rebellious and wanted a captain to lead them back into their bondage in Egypt. What hope would you have for a people like this? Look at Nehemiah's hope.] Verse 17 continues, "**But, You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and forsook them not.**"

Where did Nehemiah get this language? Do you hear the echoes of Exodus 34? He says, 'God, in spite of all this wretched horrible mess there is hope and this is why I'm praying, because You are a God Who in Your very character and disposition, stand **ready to pardon**.'

Micah 7: 18 is in a context in which the moral corruption of the nation has been acknowledged to the people through the prophet, and yet in the midst of all of this, notice what the prophet declares in **7:18** "Who is a God like unto You, that **pardons iniquity**, and **passes over the transgression** of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, because He **delights in** lovingkindness. **19** He will again have compassion upon us; He will **tread** our iniquities under foot; and You will **cast all their sins** into the **depths of the sea**. **20** You will perform the truth to Jacob, and the lovingkindness to Abraham, which You have sworn unto our fathers from the days of old."

Micah 7:18 "Who is a God like unto You [where is there a God, in His Being, and Essence, and Character, Who can be compared to You? Notice what Micah highlights against the backdrop of Israel's sin] that **pardons iniquity**, and **passes over the transgression** of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, **because, He delights** in lovingkindness. **19** He will again have

compassion upon us; He will tread our iniquities under foot; and You wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

You hear the words of that marvelous hymn, "Who is a pardoning God like Thee? And Who has grace so rich and free?" It comes right out of this text, and this text comes right out of God's self revelation to Moses in which He has manifested that forgiveness is woven into the very texture of the character and disposition of God.

Follow this line of thought. Where do we get the fullest revelation of Who God is and What God is like? We get the fullest revelation in Jesus Christ. John said, in **John 1:18** “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him [He has exeged Him].”

John 14:8 “Philip said unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us. **9** Jesus said unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and do you not know Me, Philip? He that has seen Me, has seen the Father; how do you say, Show us the Father? **10** Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I say unto you I speak not from Myself: but the Father abiding in Me does His works.”

Jesus said, he who has seen Me, has seen the Father. ‘Philip, why do you say, show us the Father and that will satisfy us? Have you been with Me for such a long time, and you don't know Me? I AM the perfect representation of the Father.’ And where does this element of the character and disposition of God shine through in our blessed Lord most clearly? It shines through when He says to harlots and the outcast, ‘neither do I condemn you, go your way and sin no more.’ **John 8:11, John 5:14, Mark 2:5, Matthew 9:2, Luke 5:20, Luke 7:48.**

This pardoning and forgiving character and disposition of God shines through our Lord most clearly when He hangs upon a cross and the record of it is in **Luke 23:34**. He has just been impaled. After all of the brutal treatment, the disgraceful pummeling, spitting, beating, bruising, crown of thorns, stripping, and now He hangs naked with no dignity, He hangs as a crucified felon. While hanging as a criminal outcast, what does He say? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” People squabble about were they immediately forgiven, or were they forgiven on the day of Pentecost? Is this an indication of unconditional forgiveness? They missed the whole point. Jesus is saying, ‘I represent the God of heaven, Who in His character and disposition is a forgiving God.’ “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The central place of forgiveness is in the character and disposition of God Himself.

TO THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE THEIR SINS FORGIVEN.

Once you take your sins seriously and begin to take God seriously this will be the most difficult thing in the world for you to grasp. The biggest hindrance to a convicted sinner laying hold of God's offer of mercy in Christ is that it seems too good to be true. That's why God says through the prophet **Isaiah 55:6** “Seek ye Jehovah while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near: **7** let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly [many times] pardon.”

You begin to take your sin seriously and the holiness of God seriously and it seems as though you have to ask, ‘How can this Holy God ever forgive?’ We will consider the ground of forgiveness later, but you must believe that behind the ground of forgiveness is **A HEART AND A DISPOSITION INCLINED TO FORGIVENESS.**

TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

This is what we must come back to, again and again and again, or we will keep at distance from God when we've sinned and we've grieved the Holy Spirit. We say, ‘How can I come back? I've come times without number – hundreds of times about this same thing.’ Well, what is time going to do to change the fact that you sinned? It will do nothing. And unless you can continually believe that God is a God **Who is kindly disposed to forgive**, you will have days of distance and spiritual barrenness because you have doubts concerning the certainty of God's forgiveness.

Having considered **THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE CHARACTER AND DISPOSITION OF GOD**, consider 2ndly:

#2 THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE SUBSTANCE AND PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL.

(i) IN THE SUBSTANCE OF THE GOSPEL

The gospel is good news to sinners, and it's given to us in its distilled essence in such passages as **1 Corinthians 15:1**. Paul describes in verses 1 through 3 the gospel that he preached and here it is, **15: 1** “Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you received, wherein also you stand, **2** by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except you believed in vain. **3** For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that **Christ died** for our sins according to the scriptures; **4** and that

He was buried; and that He has been raised on the third day according to the scriptures.”

Christ died for our sins. However, when we ask **why** did He die for our sins? To what end did He die? When He died, what blessings did He procure for us? The answer of Scripture is clear. He died to procure **THE FORGIVENESS** of sins.

In that original institution of the Lord's supper, found in **Matthew 26:27** “*And He took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, unto remission [forgiveness] of sins.*”

There are two major Greek words for forgiveness and either one is properly translated “forgiveness.” Some translations translate one **remission** and the other **forgiveness**, but it gives a false impression as though there is something fundamentally different in the two. No. There are two major Greek words for forgiveness, and there are about three other words that are used very infrequently, but of the two major words that are used for forgiveness, one emphasizing **the grace of God** in the provision of forgiveness. The other emphasizes the very **nature of forgiveness** in the letting of a thing go. But it is forgiveness and Jesus said the very rationale for the shedding of His blood is “remission of sins for many.” So if the gospel is the heralding, “Christ died for our sins,” to what end did He die? *He died for our sins that our sins might be remitted or forgiven.* How central was that to the substance of the gospel? Jesus Himself says the substance of the gospel is to be understood in terms of **forgiveness** – procured by His violent bloodletting upon a cross.

In the language of **Hebrews 10:14 – 18** we have a similar emphasis that *He died for our sins that our sins might be remitted or forgiven* from the perspective of the writer to the Hebrews. **10:14** “*For by One Offering He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. 15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after He has said, 16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws on their heart, and upon their mind also will I write them; then said He, 17 And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. 18 Now where remission [forgiveness] of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*”

He is demonstrating that Christ's work must be understood in the framework of the new covenant, and one of the outstanding core blessings of the new covenant, heralded in the gospel, is that there is a way for sins and iniquities to be blotted out from the mind and the remembrance of God Himself. **Hebrews 8:12, Hebrews 10:17, Jeremiah 31:34, Isaiah 43:25.** The assertion is being made, that

FORGIVENESS HAS A CENTRAL PLACE IN THE SUBSTANCE OF THE GOSPEL, but what about:

(ii) IN THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL.

We find the same thing, **THAT FORGIVENESS HAS A CENTRAL PLACE IN THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL.** In Luke 24, our Lord is summarizing the whole thrust of Old Testament revelation.

Luke 24:45 “*Then opened He their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; 46 and He said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; 47 and that repentance and remission [Forgiveness] of sins should be preached in His Name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*”

All of the Old Testament points to the sufferings and resurrection of Jesus. They form the basis and foundation of offering a righteous remedy for sin, and now Jesus says, what is to be preached among the nations is **repentance** and **remission** or **forgiveness** of sins. It is central and here in this passage we could say according to Jesus it is the very essence of the proclamation of the gospel.

The Apostles obeyed their Lords command when He said in **Luke 24: 47** “*that repentance and remission or forgiveness of sins should be preached in His Name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*”

On the day of Pentecost, as recorded in the book of Acts, the first gospel sermon is preached after the descent of the Holy Spirit and men are pricked in their hearts as Peter's preaching is attended mightily by the Spirit of God. The hearers break him off in the middle of his sermon and say, “what must we do” **Acts 2:38** “*And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ unto the [forgiveness] of your sins;*” That's what it's all about: The way of obtaining forgiveness of sins.

Acts 3:19 “*Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out . . .*” *Blotted out* is one of those secondary words or phrases for forgiveness –that your sins may be *blotted out* or forgiven.

In **Acts 5:31** Peter is again preaching and he says, **Acts 5:31** “*Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission [or forgiveness] of sins.*” Here forgiveness is made the very core blessing held out in the gospel.

Another example of this is found when the Apostle Paul is preaching in **Acts 13:38**, “*Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission [or forgiveness] of sins:*” Paul is saying, ‘This is what is proclaimed in the gospel.’

Why be so excited about this remission or forgiveness of sins? If you sit here and you know nothing of God's way and gift of forgiveness in the gospel, you are a stranger to the knowledge and power of the biblical gospel.

A gospel that has as its central blessing the promise that you will feel good if you come to Jesus **is not** the biblical gospel. Of course you do feel a lot better when you don't have a condemning conscience, but that's not what is held out in the gospel. A gospel that promises that you'll get your act together, that you'll restore your self-esteem is also not, the gospel. Of course a benefit of the gospel is that an inner renovation takes place in the soul. There is a restoration of that soul to the image of God. So, in that sense we do get "our act together," but we do not get "self-esteem." Instead, we enter into an accurate self-image. The gospel is not, "you'll get a good marriage, a healthy body, or a fat checking account." That is not the gospel. The gospel is, "there is a way for you to be righteously forgiven before a holy and righteous God who cannot tolerate sin." And if you have no interest in that, then you better get one, because a time is coming when the only thing that will matter is that you didn't have an interest in the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness of sin is a vital subject because:

#1 THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE CHARACTER AND DISPOSITION OF GOD HIMSELF.

#2 THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE SUBSTANCE AND PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL.

but thirdly we see:

#3 THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE INITIAL AND ONGOING EXPERIENCE OF THE CHILD OF GOD.

(i) FORGIVENESS IS CENTRAL IN THE INITIAL EXPERIENCE OF GRACE.

In Ephesians 1, Paul is breaking out in this marvelous eulogy or, in other words, speaking well of God. He is speaking well of God in terms of this majestic, glorious salvation that He has purposed and applied to hell-deserving sinners, and in this marvelous eulogy, extending from verses 3 to 14, Paul demonstrates that it is a Trinitarian salvation. As someone has said, it takes the whole Trinity to save one sinner. This is what Paul is blessing God for. So, in the opening verses, in verses 3 to 6, Paul is blessing the Father for His electing grace, His predestinated purposes in Christ. In verses seven and following, Paul is speaking of the place of Christ in that salvation. Picking up the flow of thought in **Ephesians 1:6**

"to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved [Christ]: 7 in Whom, we have our redemption through His blood, [Paul, what's the central blessing of that redemption? that being purchased out of bondage? what's the core blessing of it Paul? Paul continues on in verse seven and basically says, 'here it is'] 7 in Whom, we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." Paul says in Christian experience the forgiveness of trespasses is central in **THE INITIAL** experience of grace.

A similar emphasis is found in **Colossians 2:13**. Here the Apostle is describing what happened when these Colossians were converted. He says, **Colossians 2:13** *"And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did He make alive together with Him, having FORGIVEN us ALL OUR TRESPASSES..."* Paul says in **THE INITIAL** experience of grace, here is the crowning grace, *"forgiven us all our trespasses."*

In **Acts 26:18** where Paul is summarizing his commission and what the risen Christ said to him, starting in **26:16**, *"But arise, and stand upon your feet: for to this end have I appeared unto you, to appoint you a minister and a witness both of the things wherein you have seen Me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto you; 17 delivering you from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send you, 18 to open their eyes [spiritual illumination] that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God [true conversion] that, [in order that] they may receive REMISSION [or forgiveness] of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Me."*

The risen Christ in commissioning Paul to preach the gospel says, 'Here's your ministry Paul, as you go forth in obedience to Me, through your instrumentality, blind eyes will be opened, people who are wedded to sin and to the devil will turn from the power of Satan unto God, and when they do, here is **THE CENTRAL BLESSING** they will receive in their **INITIAL EXPERIENCE** of grace: **FORGIVENESS OF SINS**.'

FORGIVENESS IS CENTRAL not only in **THE INITIAL** experience of grace, but **FORGIVENESS IS CENTRAL** in **THE ONGOING** experience of grace. [We are still under heading #3:]

#3 THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE INITIAL AND ONGOING EXPERIENCE OF THE CHILD OF GOD.

(i) FORGIVENESS IS CENTRAL IN THE INITIAL EXPERIENCE OF GRACE.

(ii) FORGIVENESS IS CENTRAL IN THE ONGOING EXPERIENCE OF GRACE.

And forgiveness continues to be central IN THE ONGOING EXPERIENCE OF GRACE in two directions. Godward and manward.

a) TOWARDS GOD

How do we know forgiveness is central towards God? Jesus said, in **Matthew 6:9** *"After this manner therefore pray ye. Our Father Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Your Name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And FORGIVE us our debts, as we also have FORGIVEN our debtors."*

In the parallel passage in Luke it's, *"forgive us our trespasses."* Later on in the Matthew passage, *trespasses* are used. **6:14** *"For if you FORGIVE men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also FORGIVE you. 15 But if you FORGIVE not men their trespasses, neither will your Father FORGIVE your trespasses."* The two terms, debts and trespasses are synonymous. When I sin, I have come into a fresh indebtedness to God against Whom I've sinned, and I am to pray as I pray for my daily bread, as I am to pray daily for the will of God to be done in me and in others here on Earth, until the consummation, and I am to daily experience forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* and John has just said, if we say we have no sin we lie and do not the truth. Anyone who says, I don't need continued forgiveness because I am not a continuing sinner is a liar and not in touch with reality. In THE ONGOING experience of grace, seeking forgiveness towards God is a central reality. Forgiveness is also a central reality towards man.

b) TOWARDS MAN

Of the six petitions in Matthew that form the framework of comprehensive prayer (the Lord's Prayer), which petition alone is amplified by our Lord Jesus? If you and I were composing a prayer we would say, 'Well, we ought to amplify the first one. Hallowed be Your Name, the prayer that God's Name be set apart as holy and honored in worship throughout the earth. Surely, the honor and glory of God should be the dominant concern.' Or that God's will would be done in earth as in heaven. But, no, it's that next petition in verse **12**: *forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors*, that is amplified by our Lord in verse **14**, *"for if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly*

Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The one petition Jesus amplifies is the petition that demonstrates forgiveness. Horizontal forgiveness, forgiveness towards fellow sinners, is an essential part of the ongoing Christian experience.

If you and I, as we shall see in subsequent studies, expect our Heavenly Father to forgive us as our Father, you and I must be a forgiving man or woman, boy, or girl.

Our sins are first dealt with in THE COURTROOM of our Heavenly JUDGE. The moment, IN THE INITIAL EXPERIENCE of grace, we cast ourselves in the desperation and abandonment of saving faith upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation, our sins, in their legal culpability, are dealt with in the courtroom. Our status is changed from guilty criminal to adopted child; and we become the children of God, and we have a Father Whom we are to please; and when we sin, we displease Him. We incur a new dimension of indebtedness to Him. We need His Fatherly forgiveness, and He says, 'Would you have your Father's forgiveness? You must be a forgiving man or woman.' If you are not, then the Father's ear is deaf to your cry for forgiveness.

That forgiveness is central IN THE ONGOING EXPERIENCE OF GRACE in its MANWARD direction can also be seen in Ephesians 4. The context is Paul's call that the Ephesians live the lifestyle that is described in **4:17**. *"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the Gentiles [the heathens] also walk, in the vanity of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart;"*

17 *"... that you no longer walk as the Gentiles or the heathens"* and one of the crucial elements of not walking like the world, seething in its grudges, stewing in the vial juices of ill will, determination to never forgive, and wanting to get even, that's the world. The alternate lifestyle of the people of God is this, **4:31** *"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, [continually] forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you."*

In a parallel passage in **Colossians 3:12** *"Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; 13 forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do you..."*

Are you persuaded of the central place of forgiveness, not only in the character and disposition of God, in the substance and proclamation of the gospel, but in the initial and ongoing Christian experience as a child of God? There'll never be one redeemed sinner on earth before the return of Christ who does not sin against God and man and therefore continually needs forgiveness Godward and manward.

APPLICATION

Consider the marvelous, beautiful, organic relationship of these **THREE** things.

THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS, IN BIBLICAL REVELATION. In attempting to set before you the central place of forgiveness in biblical revelation, it was presented under three headings:

#1 The central place of forgiveness in the character and disposition of God Himself.

#2 The central place of forgiveness in the substance and proclamation of the Gospel.

#3 The central place of forgiveness in the initial and ongoing experience of the child of God.

Pray that God by the Holy Spirit will teach us and persuade us and help us to see it, to feel it, and grasp it.

The God Whose disposition and character is one of forgiveness has revealed and announced in the gospel the ground and the way of forgiveness by which He constitutes a community of men and women who are forgiven and forgiving sinners.

The God Who exists. Who is He? He's not only Holy, Unchangeable, cannot lie, but He is all His other attributes. Moses said 'God revealed Himself to me.' Nestled in the midst of that self-revelation is the God Who forgives iniquity, transgressions, and sin. This God, whose disposition and character is one of forgiveness, has revealed and announced in the gospel both **the ground** [the work of Christ] and **the way** [the way of repentance and faith] of forgiveness, by which He is constituting a community of people. (3) And what is their dominant characteristic? They are a forgiven and a forgiving community of sinners. Do you see the organic relationship between them?

So if you sit here now and you claim to be a Christian, part of the body of Christ, and you do not revel in God's gracious gift of forgiveness in the way of that forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, and if that reveling in being a forgiven sinner has not made you a forgiving sinner, you

are self-deluded. A person who is tightfisted and unwilling to forgive is not a Christian.

I'm not saying that in a given situation, A, B, C, or D, you may not struggle to come to the point of extending forgiveness to this brother or this sister. No, I'm not talking about ***the struggle you may have in any specific act of forgiveness**. I'm saying if the prevailing disposition of your heart is unwillingness to forgive –if that's what you're known for, if that's the reputation you've earned, you are deluded to think your heart has ever been softened with the wonder of God's forgiveness.

That's why Paul can use as his central motivation when saying in **Ephesians 4:32** "*and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*"

To the true child of God, that settles it. The God of heaven –Infinite, Vast, Immense, Holy– Who could have crushed me into hell. That God's forgiven me. Who am I, but a puny little sinner refusing to extend forgiveness to another puny little sinner. The thought is utterly incongruous.

Furthermore, if you sit here and say, "Oh, but I am a forgiven sinner," you are indifferent to the One who Alone has procured forgiveness; indifferent to the Person and the Work of Jesus; with no **love** for the One Who died; no **attachment** of will and affection to the Redeemer Who procured forgiveness; then you too are deluded because that community of forgiven and forgiving sinners is not only marked by their disposition of forgiveness to one another, but of attachment to the One Who has procured their own forgiveness; so that Peter can say, **1 Peter 1:8**, starting in **7** "*that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom not having seen you love; on Whom, though now you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*"

Every believing sinner is a sinner that loves Jesus, and if you love Jesus, you'll know it, because you obey Jesus. **John 14:15** "*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.*"