

LIGHT BEARERS MINISTRY

MISSION

UPDATE

April 2003

2003
Convocation Schedule

4th Annual
East Coast Convocation
at Fletcher Academy Church
June 23-28, 2003

19th Annual Convocation at Malo—
July 1-5, 2003

Two Types of Forgiveness

by Herb Montgomery

Forgiveness is a broad topic in the Bible. Not only are there a great number of scriptures dedicated to this theme, but also a surprising number of seemingly contradictory statements that have caused debate through the centuries. As we travel these scriptural paths to understanding forgiveness, we will begin to see that these verses do not contradict themselves, but rather the Bible is talking about two related but unique uses of the word *forgiveness*.

The first use of *forgiveness* centers on what takes place in God's heart on the level of His emotions. In other words, these texts describe what God "feels" toward us as sinners. The second application refers to the work God accomplishes in the heart or *psyche* of the believer through the death of Jesus. This forgiveness deals with the "canceling out" of sin's consequences. The second type of forgiveness builds on and is spawned by the first. Let's look at each one as they are laid out in Scripture.

Starting with the first definition that speaks of God on an emotional level, consider the following:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NAS).

We see immediately that the gift of God's Son was preceded by a love for us that already existed in God's heart toward sinners.¹ This forgiveness did not emanate from the cross—it was already in place *before* Christ's sacrifice. Had it not been for God's preexisting love for us, the events of the cross would never have taken

place. It was *because* of God's love for the world that "He gave [us] His only Son." This is a vital point because many believe that God would have retained malice in His heart continually toward man if it weren't for the cross. Many teach that, through the cross, God was appeased of His enmity toward man. The cross, however, did not bring about any change in God's emotional response toward us; rather, it manifested or displayed God's heartfelt sentiments for man that He had held long before the events of the cross took place. Notice another passage that speaks of God's intrinsic forgiveness:

"In whatever our heart condemns us; . . . God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (1 John 3:20, NAS).

We have all experienced that nagging feeling deep inside after we've done something we know to be wrong, have we not? The apostle John reminds us that when we are conscience-stricken and wrestling under a weight of guilt, we are not to think the condemnation comes from God. God is greater than the heart. Although our hearts (conscience) do condemn us, His spirit of forgiveness and love is already working to win us back from sin's consequences.

Let's look at the story of the woman taken in adultery in John 8. After her accusers had crept away, Jesus asked her if any man condemned her. "'No one, Sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin'" (John 8:11, NIV).

Jesus, the revealer of God to mankind, showed us through His encounter with an

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adulteress that God’s attitude toward sinners is one of simple and complete love and forgiveness. We may not “feel” that He is relating to us that way, but faith is not “feeling.” Our job is to believe that God loves us and has forgiven us in spite of our sin, no matter how dark that sin may be. This must be our belief about God, whether we “feel” it is true or not. Believing in God’s changeless love in direct opposition to our feelings is the battle against self. *This* is the fight of faith.

The forgiveness in God’s heart not only preceded the cross, but it also preceded any response of faith and repentance on our part. This type of forgiveness refers to what God “feels” for sinners. God’s “goodness” is what leads us *to* repentance.² It preexists any response we make to Him. Therefore, the second type of forgiveness that we are about to discuss is wholly dependent upon this first example of forgiveness, which is, and always has been, present in God’s heart. It is the precursor of both the cross and our faith response.

Look at the second form of forgiveness as it is expressed in Scripture:

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7, NIV).

The above verse declares that redemption and forgiveness are not only synonymous, but the forgiveness spoken of here is *through Jesus’ shed blood*.³ This concept of forgiveness cannot be referring to the same forgiveness that resides in God’s heart, because John 3:16 assures us that God’s innate mercy toward us preceded the shedding of Christ’s blood for man. Ephesians 1:7 introduces a second kind of forgiveness that resulted from Jesus’ shed blood. To study out this second form of pardon, let’s turn to Colossians:

“And when you were dead in your trans-

gressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having *canceled out* the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it *out of the way*, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14, NAS, emphasis added).

We need to ask two questions here. First, “Where is this certificate of debt”⁴ that He canceled out and nailed to His cross? Second, “Out of *whose* way did He take it?”

In the King James Version, Colossians 2:14 speaks of Christ “blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us.” The Greek word there for “handwriting” is *cheirographon* (khi-rog’-raf-on), which was a handwritten document that functioned as a promissory note. This was not referring to the law itself, but to a record of charges that stood against an individual, a record of their indebtedness.⁵ Therefore, this second type of forgiveness is referring to God’s act of taking our debt of sin and blotting it out. But once again, *where is this record of indebtedness to God that He canceled?* The prophet Jeremiah gives us a clue:

“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart . . .” (Jeremiah 17:1, NKJV, emphasis added).

What is the Bible referring to by saying we have a record of sin in our heart? Simply that we have a conscience that constantly plagues us with guilt and condemnation, measuring all our actions and behaviors by our past mistakes. God’s second type of forgiveness is His canceling out the record of our indebtedness in our psyche, “setting us free” *today* from our inner guilt! God accomplished this miraculous change in us through our faith in the death of His Son. This was God’s motive in giving Jesus to the

world. Christ's death was not intended to appease any inborn malice in God's heart, but rather to liberate us from sin's psychological consequences. The following passage discusses this:

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, *cleanse your conscience* from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14, NKJV, emphasis added).

Notice that the blood of Christ cancels out our debt and cleanses our conscience from the guilt of our "dead works." "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). The word "remission" does not mean the forgiveness that occurs in God's heart. We have previously noted that God forgave us in His great heart *before* any blood was shed. Had God not already forgiven us in His heart, no blood would have ever been shed. "Remission" here is talking about the sinner's psychological freedom from the guilt of sin. Compare the two following verses:

"There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21, NKJV). "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4, NKJV).

Baptism is not about water cleansing the surface of the skin. The work of baptism goes deep, through our identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, to the work of cleansing in our conscience.

Let's go back to our second question. By doing this grand work in us, Jesus took our indebtedness "out of the way." Out of whose way? Consider a scenario: Have you ever owed someone something and couldn't pay it back? Did it get in the way of your relationship with

them? When you saw them, did you intentionally turn the other way? Without the cross, our indebtedness would have prevented us from ever drawing close to the Father. Not because the Father would have held our debt over us, but because our enormous guilt would have ever loomed whenever we encountered Him. On an emotional level in God's heart, He had already forgiven us. Our debt, however, was still in *our* way. We could never have come near to Him because of the guilt of our indebtedness to Him. Christ died to save *us*. He was crucified for *us*. It was for *our redemption* that He took our inner certificate of debt and nailed it to His cross so that we could have it blotted out today.

The apostle John puts it this way:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, ASV).

Here again, John is not talking about the forgiveness that takes place within God's heart. We are not to think that God's heart is closed toward sinners until they confess. Many believe and teach this unjust charge. He does not hold man at arm's length until we take the first step toward reconciliation. God freely forgave us from the tenderness of His heart long before we had even the first thought of confessing anything. 1 John 1:9 is referring to the same work that we have been reading about in the writing of Peter and Paul—the canceling out of our indebtedness.

Take note of what the verse itself is saying: "to cleanse *us* from all unrighteousness." This forgiveness centers, once again, on the cleansing work that God is doing in *us*. Look at Paul's letter to the Romans.

"Being therefore justified by faith, *we* have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1, ASV, emphasis added).

Notice that **we** have peace through the cleansing that comes by faith. The word "justification" here refers, not to any change that takes place in God when we believe, but to the change that takes place in us. When we believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, we (who were once plagued by guilt) will experience psychological and emotional peace.

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Both types of forgiveness are part of God’s wondrous solution to our sin. However, it is vital to our understanding of His character that we note the context of each passage for the type of forgiveness each contains. Let us not try to disprove one form of “forgiveness” with the Bible’s other use of the word. Let us receive both and take them as a perfect whole, not only in understanding the gospel, but also as a doorway into the compassionate embrace of a Father whose very nature is “love” (1 John 4:7-16).

1 See *The Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1893. “The atonement of Christ was not made in order to induce God to love those whom He otherwise hated; and it was not made to produce a love that was not in existence; but it was made as a manifestation of the love that was already in God’s heart, an exponent of the divine favor in the sight of heavenly intelligences, in the sight of worlds unfallen, and in the sight of a fallen race. . . . We are not to entertain the idea that God loves us because Christ has died for us, but that He so loved us that He gave His only-begotten Son to die for us.”

2 See Romans 2:4

3 See also Colossians 1:14.

4 The KJV uses the phrase, “blotting out the *handwriting of ordinances* that was against us.” The NAS comes closer to communicating the meaning from the Greek text.

5 The Friberg Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament.

6 “Pardon and justification are one and the same thing” (*Faith and Works*, p. 103), so pardon, justification, and forgiveness can be synonymous. Just as there are two types of forgiveness, there are also two types of pardon and justification: one that existed in God’s heart toward sinners *before the cross*, and a second that takes place when the sinner believes.

Events Schedule

- ◆ **April 4-5**
Houghton SDA Church, MI
Herb Montgomery—☎(906)523-0120
- ◆ **April 4-6**
Floral Crest SDA Church, AL, Men’s Retreat
Ty Gibson—☎(256)657-1195
- ◆ **April 17**
3ABN Live—Columbia Union College
James Rafferty—☎(800)752-3226
- ◆ **April 18-19**
Gardner SDA Church, MA
Ty Gibson—☎(978)464-2957
- ◆ **April 18-19**
Youth Congress—Warsaw, Poland
Herb Montgomery—☎(509)779-4444
- ◆ **April 25-26**
White Salmon SDA Church, WA
James Rafferty—☎(509)493-1463
- ◆ **May 9-10**
Burbank SDA Church, CA
Ty Gibson—☎(818)243-4661
- ◆ **May 9-10**
Hayden SDA Church, ID
James Rafferty—☎(208)762-9423
- ◆ **May 15**
3ABN Live
Ty Gibson & James Rafferty—☎(800)752-3226
- ◆ **May 17**
Cambrian Park SDA Church, CA
James Rafferty—☎(650)967-2324, ext. 16
- ◆ **May 22-25**
Volunteer Park SDA Church, WA
Herb Montgomery—☎(425)774-6278
- ◆ **May 24**
Republic SDA Church, WA
Ty Gibson—☎(509)779-4444

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Lift Him Up

3ABN Schedule
(GE- 4 Satellite;
Sky Angel Channel 9710)

Tuesday	4:30 p.m. (PST)
	10:30 p.m. (PST)
Thursday	11:00 a.m. (PST)
Saturday	10:30 a.m. (PST)

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Light Bearers is a non-profit ministry based in the beautiful northeastern mountains of Washington State. Our purpose is to help proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through the spoken and published word.