

The Forgiveness of Sins
Ephesians 1:7
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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. **Introduction:**

- A. Today I'm preaching on the subject, "The Forgiveness of Sins." This is the 3rd in a series of messages on the topic of being "Blessed in Christ." To refresh your memory, this series is an exposition of what reads as if it is one long sentence found in Ephesians 1, verses 3-14. And in these verses Paul sets forth the multi-faceted blessings of salvation by God's Sovereign grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. Now this morning, we're going to focus (as I did in the message previous to this) on Ephesians 1, verse 7. But so as to keep in mind the overall context, follow with me as we begin our reading back in verse 3:
1. ...where Paul wrote, "***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ***:" And as we've seen and will continue to see, all the blessings that accompany the eternal salvation of God's sheep, as brought out in this passage, are in Christ.
 2. And as we move forward, in verses 4-6, Paul said that these saints have been blessed in Christ, "***According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him <, >in love: ⁵Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.***" – the beloved being the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. Verse 7: "***In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;***"
- C. In the message preceding this one, we began to explore what these eternally blessed saints to whom Paul is writing (described in verses 3-6 as chosen, predestinated, and accepted, all in Christ) – what they also have in Christ by virtue of His shed blood – specifically, "Redemption through His blood" as the prior message was titled. But this morning I want to focus on the blessing that is closely connected to and linked with redemption here in verse 7, a blessing that all believers possess, "The Forgiveness of Sins." And oh what a wonderful thing it is to discover you're among those whose sins have been forgiven through His blood!

D. You will recall in studying the blessing that all the saints in Christ have – the blessing of ‘redemption through His blood,’ that we examined Romans 3:24 where it teaches us that all who are justified (declared righteous, holy and without blame before God by virtue of having the merits of Christ’s obedience unto death imputed or charged to their accounts) are so justified “...*freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*” So we see from Ephesians 1:7 that in Christ, sinners have redemption and the forgiveness of sins through His blood and (from Romans 3) that they are thereby found acceptable, justified before God through that very redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Now this shows us how these distinct aspects of eternal salvation in Christ are truly inseparable. All who are justified before God are so justified by Christ’s shed blood at the cross which redeemed them and through which they have the forgiveness of sins.

E. It is important to know that the forgiveness or pardon of sins for all who are saved is due unto the fact that perfect satisfaction to God’s justice has been rendered for them. Everyone for whom Christ died has been forgiven of their sins. The debt before God’s holy justice was paid in full at the cross of Calvary for all the demerit of the sins of these objects of God’s everlasting love – for their sins were laid upon or imputed to the Lord Jesus Christ (Quote 2 Cor. 5:21). In other words all of the demerit of God’s elect (sin) was charged or imputed to Him just as all of the merit of His obedience unto death, His righteousness, has been imputed or accounted unto them. Keep in mind that, redemption is not some mere attempt made to save sinners, but it speaks of a price paid and that in full, no balance remaining due – a debt paid for all the sins of every sinner for whom He lived and died. Redemption is a price paid to God, whose justice is offended and thereby sins are forgiven.

II. Distinct Blessings Due unto the One Act of Redemption

A. So here we see that the blessings of redemption and the forgiveness of sins are all due unto 1 act – as it reads, “through His blood” – the death of Christ their Savior. And yet the Bible distinguishes between these different facets or glorious blessings which all are part and parcel to the one great eternal salvation that the saints enjoy in having been made one with Christ by God’s grace.

B. Consider that by the one act of redemption (by Christ’s death on the cross) the redeemed sinner is justified (through redemption pronounced righteous before God from all eternity) and (2ndly) he or she is absolved from all guilt. They are pardoned or forgiven. So while these blessings are not detached from one another, we recognize that they are distinguished in the scriptures as distinct aspects of the one great eternal salvation of the saints in Christ.

C. To illustrate how these blessings are distinct from one another allow me to share an illustration similar to one I came across in my study. Consider that if a king or ruler pardons a criminal (which can be likened to forgiving him), that such an action does not entitle the pardoned criminal to inherit the king's estate, or his crown or his kingdom. But it does free him from punishment to which he otherwise would be subjected. But what if the king not only forgave or pardoned the criminal but legally adopted him so as to make him his son and an heir. Wow – what a double blessing because the adopted child then is entitled to the life of the kingdom and the happiness that such an inheritance brings. So have the children of God adopted in Christ. Not only have their sins been put away, but they have His perfect righteousness imputed – the entire merit of His obedience unto death. And as such, theirs is the kingdom of God, the King of kings – an eternal, incorruptible, inheritance!

III. Common traits of these distinct blessings of salvation:

- A. There certainly are other distinctions that can be made between these blessings, but in today's text, Ephesians 1:7, we read of that which is common or mutually true of both redemption and the forgiveness of sins. So we will focus our attention accordingly. That said, I won't elaborate on these common factors today since I did so in some detail in the prior message on redemption. But by way of review, remember that just as was true of the blessing of redemption, we see here in Eph. 1:7 that the forgiveness of sins likewise is:
1. In a person / "In whom." The God-man who offered the sacrifice of His sinless humanity at the altar of His Deity – the altar being that which set the sacrifice apart and gave it value.
 2. A thing possessed / "we have". As we continue in verse 7, we see that in Christ, "...we have redemption...<and> the forgiveness of sins..." Forgiveness of sins is a blessing possessed by all who are blessed in Christ. They have the forgiveness of sins.
 3. Through His blood. And thirdly, it is "through His blood." As you can see this morning, we are planning to observe the Lord's Table today. With that in mind, consider what Christ said at the Last Supper with His disciples as we read in Matthew 26:24: ***"For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*** It is His blood and that alone that remitted or paid the debt in full whereby sins are forgiven.
 4. According to the riches of His grace. And lastly, as the end of verse 7 tells us, just as with redemption, these saints who are accepted in Christ, the beloved, have the forgiveness of sins "...according to the riches of His grace." If it's according to grace that means that there is nothing any sinner can do to merit, procure, or acquire the forgiveness of sins for themselves. It is not of according to your works but according to the riches of His grace.

IV. Exposing False Notions concerning the Forgiveness of Sins: So in light of these observations from the clear, undeniable language of verse 7, let's consider the implications as it pertains to our topic today, the forgiveness of sins. The truth of this one verse, Eph. 1:7, stands in stark opposition to many of the false notions so prevalent in our day concerning the forgiveness of sins. It exposes how these widely held views are contrary to God's Word and sadly, in opposition to the very gospel of God's grace contained therein – the gospel which all of the redeemed, forgiven saints in Christ must and shall embrace by God-given faith (as will be confirmed just a few verses further into our study of Ephesians 1). So with Ephesians 1:7 in mind, consider the following:

- A. There is nothing any man or woman (any sinner) has to offer or can do to procure the pardon of sin for himself or for others. Sins are against God and only He can forgive. If forgiveness could be procured by the sinner, then admit the obvious. You cannot believe both that and Ephesians 1:7 for that would mean that (contrary to God's word) forgiveness is not through His blood and certainly not according to the riches of His grace.
- B. As such, we know that forgiveness is not procured by the sinner's exercise of faith and / or repentance. These blood-bought gifts flow from the sense of pardoning love manifested to saints in the day of God's power by His Spirit under the gospel of grace. Forgiveness isn't granted because of your faith or repentance – it is through His blood, according to the riches of His grace.
- C. Likewise, then forgiveness is not procured by any obedience that the sinner may render. Again, that would be according to works, not grace.
- D. And finally, I'd like to address a common scriptural misinterpretation that leads people to expect to be forgiven as a result of something other than through His blood – specifically the mistake of believing God forgives a sinner of his sins because of the confession of their sins. This error is often supported by a widely misunderstood verse, I John 1:9. So look with me there. It reads, ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”***
 - 1. Now the problem here lies in the fact that the word “if” is often used in conjunction with a condition as in “if you do this, then the following will result because of what you did.” And so many misinterpret this verse to mean that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse from all unrighteousness if we will meet the presumed condition of confessing our sins. So consequently, many mistakenly believe that sinners are forgiven because of or as a result of their confession.

2. Well, even today, countless preachers will stand in pulpits across this land, some in this very hour, and tell their listeners that God will give them all the blessings of salvation (including forgiving their sins) if they will just <fill in the blanks> (e.g. – believe, say this sinner’s prayer in confession of their sins, invite Him into their hearts, walk this aisle or be baptized to confess Christ before men, or simply admit they fall short and thereby confess their sins, etc.)

But listen – no matter how often you may have heard or continue to hear such notions that suggests that at least in some degree or in some way your salvation and its multi-faceted blessings (including the forgiveness of sins) are conditioned on you, the sinner, know that that is not grace, no matter how often they may use the word, “grace.” Do not be deceived. It is a deadly presumption to imagine that a holy God will forgive you a sinner according to the works of your own sin-tainted hand. That is not forgiveness through His blood and that would not be according to the riches of His grace.

3. Instead, consider with me today how the word “if” is not always used to set forth a condition to be met. The word “if” is also commonly used to cite evidence or an indicator (as if to say “if this describes you, then the following is true of you”). For example, what if I said, “If you breathe, you live?” A reasonable person would not construe that to mean you could go to the morgue and approach a lifeless corpse and instruct that dead body to breathe so that it could thereby make itself alive.

No, a paramedic might well check an unconscious person to see if he or she is still breathing in order to determine if they are still alive. Their breathing would be an indicator or evidence of life. Well, from the whole of scripture we can know that 1 John 1:9 isn’t suggesting that by confessing your sins, you thereby can procure the blessing of forgiveness of sins for yourself. No, if you confess your sins, then you are among those forgiven in Christ.

4. Actually, the immediate context of I John 1 makes this clear when in verse 7, just prior to verse 9 it reads, “***But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.***” Likewise our text, Eph. 1:7, teaches us, it is “through His blood” that we have the forgiveness of sins – not through or on the basis of our confession.

5. And as I've said, sin is against God and He alone can forgive it. Recall the story recorded in Mark 2 when Christ was preaching in a crowded house in Capernaum. And a man sick with palsy was lowered on a bed through the roof into the crowded room because that was the only way they could bring him before Christ. And beginning in verse 5 of Mark 2 it says, "*When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee* ⁶*But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,* ⁷*Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?*" Even the scribes knew the truth that only God can forgive sins. They just didn't realize that Jesus was God. So, you can confess your sins before me, or this congregation, or some other ordained minister, or enter into a confessional booth before a priest, but hear God's word. None of these can absolve you of your guilt. Only God can and does forgive sin, and that through His redeeming blood.
6. And as I John 1:9 itself reads, God is faithful and just to forgive these who confess. So, the sin debt for all who are saved had to be paid in full by the only payment that could and did get the job done – the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, the God-man. Justice had to be satisfied on their behalf. Jesus Christ, their Surety, has so fully covered the sin debt so as to completely discharge the debtor – the justified sinner. That's grace! God does not set aside His faithfulness and justice to forgive sins. No, it is because He is faithful and just that these who confess, already have been forgiven through His blood.
7. So the confession of sins in the pardoned is not the cause of pardon. Like me, you may have heard "confession" defined as agreeing with God concerning our sin. And that definition seems appropriate when you consider that all of the saints, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blame before God (as Eph 1:4 has taught us) – all of these who were in time redeemed by His blood, are also in their lifetimes brought into the knowledge of the light of the gospel as they are given spiritual life and drawn to Christ under the gospel of God's grace. We will see this confirmed as we move into verse 9 of Ephesians 1 where it speaks of these chosen, redeemed, forgiven sinners as having the mystery of the gospel made known unto them. And thereby they discover the necessity and the reality that it is the blood of Christ alone that "cleanseth us from all sin" (as we read in I John 1:7). Their blood-bought, Holy Spirit-inspired confession has them all, without fail, eventually agreeing with God concerning their sin and the truth that nothing but the blood can wash away my sins!
8. And those so enlightened have the mercy in Christ their Savior that fills their desperate need. The born again believer who truly confesses his sin is one that the Spirit of God has convinced of it, and has shown him its exceeding sinfulness and the impossibility of being forgiven and accepted before God based upon anything He or she does or is enabled to do.

9. The redeemed are brought to see that God is just and faithful to forgive them. And again, who are they? They are those described in Romans 3 to whom His righteousness is revealed in the gospel – the righteousness declared as verse 26 puts it, “...***that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.***” And He is faithful and just to forgive them. Who? Not those who believe in their believing (their faith) or believe in their repentance or believe in their confession of sins, but those which believeth in Jesus, based upon His doing and dying – the just satisfaction He made in paying their sin debt for them as their Substitute and Surety.

V. The Completeness of the Forgiveness of Sins: While we’re on the subject of forgiveness, I’d be remiss if I did not direct your attention to the completeness, the totality, and the eternity of the Forgiveness of Sins for each and every one of these for whom Christ died:

A. First, not one of their sins is left unforgiven. As we read in I John 1:7, “...***the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.***” That means that all their sin was put away by Christ – their original sin in Adam their federal head, their past sins, their present sins, and those that they have yet to commit. It includes their sins of commission and omission. It includes those of which they are keenly aware as well as those they fail to recognize due to remaining sin. And He has forgiven them their sins long before they ever confessed them, before they even come to see their need for God’s mercy and grace in Christ and for the forgiveness of sins through His blood.

B. Secondly, their forgiveness is eternal. The pardon shall never be repealed. God the Father has given this to the objects of His everlasting love in accordance with the terms of the everlasting covenant of grace made with His co-equal, co-eternal Son. Sins that are forgiven are always forgiven. As Hebrews 8:12 reads, “***For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.***”

C. Consider these other verses which touch on how completely, totally, and eternally God has forgiven the sins of those for whom Christ died:

1. “***As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.***” Psa. 103:12. Head east and you never reach west, unlike that which happens in traveling north / south at the north and south poles.
2. “***Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.***” Isa. 38:17
3. “***Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.***” Isa 1:18. Here we see the degree or awfulness of our sins have no bearing on the completeness of forgiveness – though red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

VI. Summary:

Well in closing, let's look back again at verse 7 where we read beginning with the end of vs. 6, ***"...accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;"*** And again I want to direct your attention to the truth that we have redemption and forgiveness ***"...according to the riches of his grace;"*** In the previous message, I touched on the truth stated here that these blessings are clearly according to grace, and so – not works. But as I close today let us consider that redemption and the forgiveness of sins, is not just according to grace, but according to the riches of his grace.

God's grace toward the objects of His everlasting love is beyond any limitations we might presume to impose upon it. If a rich man were to begin to distribute gifts to the poor and needy of the world, at some point, he would have to think of how to ration them so as to not run out. But the riches of God's grace are as infinite as His love and mercy. Remember, it is the shedding of the infinitely valuable blood of Christ that procured these blessings of redemption and forgiveness of sin. So this well shall never run dry, no matter how often you may have sinned or how awful your sins may have been. As Romans 5:20b puts it, ***"...But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:"*** Oh, the riches of His abounding grace!

Finally, let me direct your attention to the chief design behind God's forgiveness of sins. We know that God's chief design in all things that He does (including the salvation of forgiven sinners) is His own glory. And the scripture declares that God is glorified in the believing sinner's heart when that sinner beholds Him as he is – as both a just God and a Savior who is faithful and just to forgive us our sin through Christ's blood which was shed for the remission or payment due unto all their sins.

As God said through the prophet Isaiah in Isa. 43:25, ***"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."*** It really is all about God who alone is to receive all glory and honor and praise. And so is the case in the salvation of redeemed sinners who are completely and eternally forgiven ***"...according to the riches of his grace."***

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself – the Bible.