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Assurance of Sin Forgiven

One key to spiritual growth is found when one beholds the greatness of God. As Moses prayed, "Lord, show me Thy glory"!

2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror [of God's word] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

From this I suggested that spiritual growth is NOT mechanical. And that God's word is NOT magic such that if simply read it you will grow. After all, heretics read God's word and non-Christians read God's word daily. And we can imagine that the damned of Matthew 7 read

God's word as they cast out demons and performed miracles.

No! The universal testimony of Scripture is that spiritual growth occurs as we come to a fuller understanding of who God is!

John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

Proverbs 14:27, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life..."

if you and I diligently labor to understand God's word.

Proverbs 2:5, "Then you will discern the fear of the Lord, and discover the knowledge of God."

Acts 9:31, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase."

in fact, one of the stated goals of preaching is beholding the greatness of God.

Isaiah 52:7, "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"

You want to grow in your walk with God? Behold the glory, the greatness, the supremacy of God! In light of this let me encourage you as you go to God's word each day to do so praying, "God, show me your glory!"

I want to consider one of the results of growing in your understanding of the greatness of God: The assurance of pardon.

[Assurance of Salvation vs. Assurance of Pardon](#)

We know that there are some in the body of Christ who do not possess the assurance of salvation. Yet by far that is a small minority. Most live their Christian lives anticipating that glorious time when they shall stand with Christ in glory! Truly, the assurance of salvation is a blessing enjoyed by most Christians.

Yet when it comes to the assurance of daily forgiven sin, that is an entirely different matter. I may have the confidence that on the Last Day I will hear those glorious words from the lips of Christ, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). Yet on a day to day basis, it is my observation that most in Christ live under the cloud of unforgiven sin — and so a cloud of guilt and shame. Once again, they've sinned and so let down God. And so once again, they must approach God and somehow make it up to Him. By virtue of the wretchedness of how they have recently lived, there is no way they can come before God

without first cleaning up their lives. Until that is done, they will feel distant from the Lord!

In fact, so common is this struggle, we've given a name to it. It is called "The Debtor's Ethic." This is where the Christian in his life is constantly working to make up for their daily sin. Jerry Bridges put it this way:

We act as if God's grace only makes up for what our good works lack. We believe God's blessings are at least partially earned by our obedience and our spiritual disciplines. We know we are saved by grace, but we think we must live by our spiritual 'sweat.' (Bridges, 2008, p. 22)

The text we are looking at addresses the radical forgiveness that is given the sinner in Christ. The book of Colossians was written to a group of Christians who were struggling with a pre-Gnostic heresy which mixed the teaching of Judaism with Platonic thinking. As such the false teachers in Colossae:

- Denied the deity of Christ.
- Taught that the physical realm was evil such that salvation was determined by one's abstinence from the sins and defilement of this world.
- Believed that our relationship with God revolves around "ascension" which occurs as you and I gain insight into "the mysteries of God" (cf. Colossians 2:2-3)!

Yet, we need to consider the broader context of Colossians 2 where Paul speaks of Christ.

Colossians 2:9-10, "For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."

Truly, Christ was no created being! Rather, He is God Incarnate and so the ruler of this world! Now as the King of kings, notice the work He accomplished in the flesh.

Colossians 2:11-12, "And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

Truly in Christ *today* we have been "raised up" from death and so possess life though we remain in our *physical* bodies! Now to the heretics of Colossae, that was unthinkable! And so, Paul answered the questions:

- How did Christ give us this life?
- How in Christ have we attained this incredible position?

The radical forgiveness that Christ accomplished was on the cross!

Colossians 2:13, "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, // having forgiven us all our transgressions."

This passage touches upon two massively important facets of Christ's redeeming work. When we were "spiritually dead", God "made us alive together with Him!" The Jews taught about the resurrection, but they believed it would only come at the end of the world. Yet when a person is saved, in this life they are spiritually regenerated and so live in the already/not yet Kingdom of God! In other words, today in Christ you have what every false religion in the world looks for at their death: life! But secondly notice that the basis for the spiritual resurrection/regeneration... it is "the forgiveness of sins."

What does Paul say here... "...having forgiven us ALL our transgressions"? Do you see the "all" in the text? If Paul were talking just about past sins, the word would be unnecessary. We understand that "death came through sin" (Romans 5:12). Accordingly, if there is to be a regeneration/resurrection of our spiritual being, it could NOT have occurred unless all PAST sins were forgiven.

2. That Paul inserts the word "all" tells that what is in mind here is NOT simply past sins, BUT "ALL sins"- every sin the Christian would ever commit- past, present, and future.

Did you get that? That is why we speak of the forgiveness of Christ as Radical Forgiveness. It encompassed NOT ONLY the sins we had committed up to the point of our salvation, BUT every sin that we would ever commit. Do you understand what that means? The forgiveness that is found in Christ is all encompassing!

So, understand that when Christ told sinners, "Your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20), He wasn't lying or overstating the case! And so, when you came to Christ and confessed your sin and He said, "Your sins are forgiven", you on your part may only have been asking for 1/1 trillionth of your sin to be forgiven (for those are the only sins you saw at the time); yet the text before us tells us that Christ forgave them all!

Colossians 2:13b, "...He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us ALL our transgressions."

We see this same truth taught throughout Scripture.

Isaiah 38:17b, "It is Thou who hast kept my soul from the pit of nothingness, for Thou hast cast all my sins [past, present, and future] behind Thy back."

Psalms 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Isaiah 43:25, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and

I will not remember your sins.”

Jay Adams pointed out the difference between “not remembering” and “forgetting:”

‘Forgetting’ is passive and is something that we human beings, not being omniscient, do. ‘Not remembering’ is active; it is a promise whereby one person (in this case, God) determines not to remember the sins of another against him. To ‘not remember’ is simply a graphic way of saying, ‘I will not bring up these matters to you or others in the future.’ (Adams, 1994, p. 18)

Isn’t this glorious? Full forgiveness of all our sin! Now as wonderful as this may sound, how can it be? How is it that God upon our conversion forgave ALL our sin- not just the sins of the past or those we simply were mindful of?! In explaining how ALL our sins can be forgiven, Paul wrote of what God did with them,

Colossians 2:14, “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.”

In Bible times, Rome dealt with unpaid debts by utilizing Debtor’s Prison. Here an individual with the inability to pay a debt would be thrown into prison “until he should pay back what was owed” (Matthew 18:30)! “Nailed” to his prison door would be “a certificate of debt” which detailed both the debt as well as the company/person that was owed.

Now if in the course of time a relative or friend paid the debt (or through his slave labor the prisoner himself was able to satisfy his obligation), the Roman official would take the “certificate of debt” and write a statement across it so that the individual could never again be accused of not paying the bill. What was that statement? *τετέλεσται (tetelestai)- paid in full!*

Now redemptively, what is the significance of this statement? What is Paul’s point in this verse? Consider the last words Christ spoke before He died.

John 19:29 & 30, “A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop, and brought it up to His mouth [cf. Matthew 27:48]. When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, ‘It is finished!’ And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit [cf. Matthew 27:50].”

Do you know the Greek word Christ uttered here when He said, “It is finished!”? It was *τετέλεσται (tetelestai)*! The very word stamped across the “certificate of debt” that was “nailed” to the prison cell door when a prisoner was interned!

That is the background behind the text before us:

Colossians 2:15 “And when you were dead in your transgressions 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 [NOT to OUR prison cell, BUT...] to the cross.”

So, understand what happened at Calvary! Way before you ever confessed a sin to God, Christ paid for ALL of them! Across your “Certificate of Debt” was written in Christ’s blood, “It is finished!”- τετέλεσται (*tetelestai*)!!

So, how is it that God could revive a fallen sinner and so give him life in their mortal body? Because He completely removed the poison that had killed him spiritually: Sin! And so, we see the radical forgiveness that is granted in Christ! It is radical because it includes NOT simply the sin you were mindful of, BUT ALL your sin! In light of this, let us heed the words of C. Jack Miller, reflecting on Christ’s radical forgiveness:

Never again look at your sins apart from Christ. You can't handle them. You'll either suppress them and deny that they're there, or if you see how bad they are, they will overwhelm you. Learn to view your mistakes, your failings, and your transgressions in the light of Jesus's forgiveness. (Sermon on Matthew 9:2)

Oh Christian! Praise Be To God For Great Things He Has Done!

It's like living in a dim room that appears clean, and then pulling up the shades or turning on the light, only to see that it is really dusty and dirty. Now even though the room feels dirtier now than before, you must see that the dirt was there all along. Likewise, when God in Christ forgave our sin, the text before us indicates that He forgave NOT simply the “dust”/sin that you saw with your impaired eyesight on account of the darkness in which you lived, BUT ALL of your sin!

It is so imperative that we understand this! Growth as a Christian involves a growing understanding of the world in which we live- comparable to the toggling up of a light switch in a dirty room. As such, you will NOT grow in Christ without a growing awareness of your sin. As this happens, this is a signal NOT for despair, BUT for hope!

So don't be depressed by what you see and learn about yourself as you grow! Rather own up to your sins by faith and disown them by confessing them!

Now at this point I'd love to give the doxology... but sadly, the story is not finished! For we have to factor into this glorious message our human weakness and frailty. What does our human weakness and frailty do? It actively works to supplant this glorious truth. After exhorting the Colossians no longer to live as if they were under the judgment of the world (vv. 16-19), Paul turned his focus to “Application” from which we learn why we continue at times to feel condemned even though we are forgiven.

Colossians 2:20-21, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!'" - in order to understand this text, we have to understand what is meant by "the elementary principles of the world."

What are these? In this context "the elementary principles of the world" refers NOT to a Creation ordinance (like marriage, work, and the sabbath), BUT to the rudimentary principle by which a man in his creatureliness relates to God: that is, their works and so their religious activity! And so as the sinner upholds certain standards, does certain things, or confesses the right words, it is believed by all that they can be made right with God (in the past I have called this our default programming). And that is our fatal flaw as humans: we believe that we can be made right with God on account of our good works (cf. Luke 18:9)!

Though we are Christians, nevertheless in our walks we frequently turn back to the "elementary principles of the world." And when we do that, we turn back the clock and so relate to God as if His love, kindness, and grace were predicated by our good deeds! It is as Paul asked in...

=Gal. 2:18, 21: here, dealing with the same problem as in Colossians 2:20, Paul wrote, "For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor [Do you see? Our problem when it comes to assurance of pardon- yea, even assurance- is our tendency to return to works-righteousness as the basis of our relationship with God. In light of this, listen to Paul's concluding statement...]

Colossians 2:21, "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

Christian, listen to that last statement, "If righteousness comes through law-keeping, then Christ died needlessly."

- Every time you look at your sin and feel condemned
- Or think that you need to compensate for them before God
- Or you look to your efforts to make it right with God- efforts which always fall short.

You are reverting to a system of law-keeping in your walk with God and so profaning the cross of Christ! In contrast, Christ did NOT die needlessly! Nor was Christ lying when He said, "Your sins- all of them- are forgiven!"

You say, "But what about passages like 1 John 1:9? They seem to imply that present forgiveness is based on our current confession of sin."

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."

Family of God, do you remember during Christ's last public discourse- right before the Upper

Room and the Lord's Supper? How God spoke to Christ in an audible voice seemingly to assure Him that He in fact had honored and glorified God the Father in His life? Why do you suppose God needed to assure Christ of His success as a Servant? He didn't! Listen to Christ speaking:

John 12:27-30, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 'Father, glorify Thy name.' There came therefore a voice out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The multitude therefore, who stood by and heard it, were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus answered and said, 'This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes.'"

This is how we understand statements directed at Christians like 1 John 1:9. Because of our tendency to "rebuild what was once destroyed" God gives multiple assurances of pardon throughout His word. Now get this: they are NOT given to teach that through our confession more of our sins are forgiven. RATHER they are given to assure the confessing saint that ALL their sins are forgiven... even the one they just confessed!

This is why, from the Reformation on this has been utilized in Reformed Worship! Because of our tendency as sinners to relate to God on the basis of our efforts (which are always failing), we need to hear it over and over again: In Christ you have been fully pardoned! So, let us leave from here fully assured both of our Salvation as well as our daily pardon for sin! When God looks at us, He beholds a beloved child whom He has cleansed from ALL sin!

References

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