

“Forgiven and Forgiving”

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, for New Horizon URC, April 9, 2017 second service
Heidelberg Catechism: Q. 56 Bible illustration: Ephesians 2:1-6; 4:31—5:2

[Introduction: 1. The clear basis of God’s forgiving us.]

All of us have a big problem. Whether we were born in a Christian family or in a non-Christian family. We all have this big problem. The problem is sin.

What is sin, according to the Bible? Well, at its heart, sin is a problem with our hearts, our minds, our souls. Sin at its root is **NOT** immoral behaviour—like getting drunk, or doing drugs.

Sin is, first of all, **a spiritual** (灵性的, 属灵的) **problem with our hearts, our minds, our souls**. The Bible says that by nature we are dead to God. Out of spiritual death, all of our desires and thoughts are turned away from God. Turned away from God, we turn inward, to ourselves. By nature, we are self-preoccupied (自我沉迷的), self-centered. We are focused on receiving more pleasures for ourselves. [Read Ephesians 2:1-3. Vs. 3: “the lusts of the flesh,” (肉体的情欲) “the desires of the flesh.”

That’s our sin problem. Everyone, including me and you, have this problem.

-What makes our problem worse is this: God hates our sin. As a perfectly righteous (公义的) God He perfectly hates all sin. And He must punish our sin.

[Read Ephesians 2:3---we are “children of wrath.” “Wrath.” That is God’s righteous anger against our sin. In His justice (公义), God declares that every sinner must die...not only physically, but spiritually. We deserve to be completely cut off from God. That’s spiritual death. In this life. And after this life./ So, our problem is not only our sin.

Our problem is also the wrath of God, falling hard upon us.

-But the Bible gives us “good news.” In fact, it’s the best news we could ever hope for.

That God has decided to show us mercy. Another word for mercy is “grace.”

[Read Ephesians 2:4-5

God knows our inner sin and knows His judgment on our sin. But God has decided to show us mercy. He sent Jesus into our world. God the Father made Jesus legally responsible for our sin. With our sins charged to Jesus, Jesus became the object of God’s wrath.

That’s why Jesus had to die on that cross. “Good Friday.”

On the cross, the wrath of God, against us, was poured out on Jesus.

So [Read Eph 1:7. “In him [Jesus] we have redemption (救赎) through his blood. Jesus’ blood. The blood from Jesus’ body, poured out as he was being crucified (被钉十字架) on that cross. Because of Jesus’ blood, we gain the “**the forgiveness of [our] sins.**”

As **we trust in Jesus**, taking our place, dying our death, then, our sins are forgiven by God.

-One meaning of the word “forgiveness” is this: it means that God **sends our sins away**.

In older English translations of the Bible, we would read that God “remits” (免除) our sins. Maybe you noticed it in the Form for the Lord’s Supper (圣餐): Jesus blood shed “for the remission” of our sins.

Illus: For example, you can “remit” (汇款) something in the mail. That is you send off your money. You make a payment and send it away. That’s the root meaning of God forgiving us our sin. When Jesus took our sin on himself, and died for our sin, God the Father sent our sin away.

God has completely “sent our sin away.” He has removed our sin from His sight. //

-Q. 56 in our Catechism (教理问答) asks “What do you believe concerning the “forgiveness of sins”?”

Answer: “I believe that God, because of Christ’s atonement (代赎), will never hold against me any of my sins....

Rather, in his grace, God grants me the righteousness of Christ, to free me forever from judgment.” Because of Jesus, we are “set free forever” from God’s judgment.

Notice: not only is our sin “sent away.” There is more: we are “granted” or “given” the righteousness of Christ.

That’s the teaching of justification (称义): as we trust in Jesus, we are credited with Jesus perfection, His righteousness. So in the eyes of God, we appear without any sin.

Appl: Is that you, this afternoon? I know it is for the vast majority of you...that you have trusted in Jesus. So you are completely forgiven by God of all your sin. God has “sent your sin away.” But there could be someone here....

2. Secondly, note this: we as followers of Jesus have a **CONTINUING NEED for forgiveness**.

God forgiving us our sins is not a mere one-time event. Oh, in some sense it is a one-time event.

When Jesus died on the cross he took **ALL** our sins on himself. Past, present, and future sins.

In that one moment, God the Father considered all our sins removed from us.

But, in our daily living, as Christians, we continue to sin—not merely committing wrong deeds.

But remember our definition of sin. In our minds, our hearts, our souls, we still turn away from God. At least,

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But remember our definition of sin. In our minds, our hearts, our souls, we still turn away from God. At least, sometimes. And sometimes we seek our own desires and pleasures.

Even as Christians! We sin daily. Thus, *we need daily, continual, forgiveness of our sins.*

Our Catechism, in answer 56, speaks of the reality of the Christian experience.

It refers to [quote] the “sinful nature which I need to struggle against *all my life.*”

You, and me, and every Christian. All of us struggle against the sin nature which is still in us.

-Some of you know the name, John Wesley. He was an Englishman, and a preacher, in the

1700's. Wesley did much good for the sake of the gospel both within and outside the Church of England. He and his brother Charles also wrote some beautiful classic hymns (赞美诗). But on one important topic, John Wesley was wrong: he claimed that every Christian could be free from all known sin in their lives. All known sin. Oh, it was possible, said Wesley, to have an *unknown* sin or two, remaining our lives. But in known thoughts, words, and deeds, Wesley taught that Christians could *be perfect*. This doctrine, teaching, is known as “perfectionism.”

But that is a wrong teaching. Listen to what Paul says this about himself in Romans 7: [quote]

“the good that I want to do, that I do not do. And the evil that I do not want to do, that I end up doing.” If that was Paul's experience, a preacher of the gospel, then, surely, it is our experience! No, not every time we are tempted, do we fall into sin, as Christians.

Often by God's grace, we are able to resist temptation to sin.

But sometimes, even many times, we do sin. More often than we like.

As Christians, we sin daily. So, *we have a continuing need* for God's forgiveness.

And that he promises to keep on forgiving us. Because of Jesus.

Because of Jesus' shed blood. And Because Jesus' perfect righteousness is credited to us.

Be encouraged, won't you? A continuing need....

3. Here's our third point: The Christian practice of forgiveness.

Our being forgiven by God, of our sin, means that we are able to forgive other people.

When they sin against us. When they hurt us by their attitudes, their words, their actions.

[Read Ephesians 4:32; 5:1-2. Out of God's agape love for us, we love other people.

We as Christians are to “walk in love. Based on God's agape love for us, we love other people. And, among other things, it means must forgive the people who hurt us.

Why must we forgive them? Read again, vs. 32....*because God has forgiven us*, our sins!

Now, you might say, “But you don't understand, pastor. That person in my past, he really hurt

me. He really did something very cruel to me.” Yes, he probably did. Or, you might say, “Pastor, my situation is quite different. You see, that certain woman, well, she really did something vicious (恶毒的) towards me.” And, yes, she may have done something horrible to you.

But let me ask this: what have **you** done towards God? Have you done *anything cruel* against

Him? Anything *horrible* towards Him? If God were a man, would He have been hurt by what

you did? Terribly offended? Oh yes, indeed! And listen: you continue to hurt God, every day! By your sin. By your inner attitude, turned away from him. By your inner desire and lust. Wrong desires for so many wrong things in life.

Yet, God continues to forgive us! He continue to send away our sins against Him.

So, we, then, must forgive other people.

Who in *your past* must you forgive? A parent, when you were a little child. An angry father?

An abusive mother? An adult child?

And, who is hurting you *now*, in some way? We're not saying that everything is alright.

Or that we excuse vicious behavior. If someone is harming you, terribly, there are steps you must take. Sometimes, even, the police should become involved.

But, in some way, we must be able to forgive people who hurt us.

People from our *past*. And people in the *present* moment. We must forgive friends who offend us; bosses who mistreat us; neighbours who bother us. That is part of Christian living.

And to be honest, this is very, very hard to do.

We don't have time to explain the dynamics of forgiveness. I have a book I can lend to you, if you want to explore this further. Talk to me after the service. Talk to Pastor Mitchell.

-Paul says: [Read vs. 32. //

In the Apostles' Creed we say this, together: “I believe in the holy, catholic church (that is, the universal church), the communion of saints (the community of believers) 圣徒相通.” Then, immediately after that line, we say: “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”

The communion of saints **AND** the forgiveness of sins.

You see, often it's not people out there, in the world, that we have to forgive.

Often, it's people right here, in the church, that we have to forgive.

It's brothers and sisters in the congregation, that we have to learn to forgive.

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But, you see, the church becomes a first place to practice forgiveness. Yes, also in the Christian Family—that's another kind of "communion" or "fellowship." And, yes, in Christian marriage. But then, the church. As church, with our brothers and sisters, we must put forgiveness into practice. How is that for you? Are you learning how to forgive? Sadly, some people don't learn that...or won't. Sometimes people will leave a church before they put forgiveness into practice. But God calls us, each one of us, to practice forgiving each other.//

4. From the Bible, and from our Creed (信条), we say: "I **believe in** the forgiveness of my sins."

I believe in forgiveness! I believe the truth of it, because the Bible says it.

-Remember, Christian believing is not merely something intellectual. Not merely something for our brains. It is also something that must live in our hearts, in our souls, our experience.

Believing in forgiveness must become **a confident belief, a life-transforming conviction** (信念).

-Sometimes I meet sincere Christians who have doubts, and fears. They know they have sinned terribly against God. They know they have wandered from him. They know they have loved themselves more than they have loved God. And they are filled with guilt.

But let me remind you, again, of the good news. The gospel.

As you trust in Jesus, God has forgiven YOU! No matter what the sin.

YOU ARE FORGIVEN in Jesus.

From a human perspective (视角), that sounds too good to be true. People often don't forgive us; why should God forgive us? And, let's be honest: there is no **human reason** why God should forgive us. There is nothing in us. There is nothing even in Him, alone.

God shows wrath, righteous anger against us, because of our sin.

But the Bible tells us that God the Father sent Jesus to our world. To take our sin.

And to take our punishment. As we trust in Jesus, God promises to forgive us all our sin.

That's why. There's no good **human** reason why. But the Bible gives us the **divine** reason why.

Why God forgives us. It's because God has punished Jesus, in our place./

God forgiving us, becomes, then, a power in our lives. A strong power.

In God forgiving us, ***we now, are able to forgive OTHER PEOPLE***. We have that power.

I'm preaching it to myself...and I'm preaching it to you.

Forgive **THOSE PEOPLE**...even as God, in Christ, forgave **YOU**. [Let us pray for His help....