

God's Forgiveness and Restoration

Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, died on Calvary's cross and became the atoning sacrifice for the sins of men. Jesus testified of Himself saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6). The Apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressed the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leaders who had arrested him. He spoke of God's salvation through Jesus Christ and through Him alone saying: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

Jesus Christ, the spotless, blameless Lamb of God laid down His life for all of those "who are beloved of God" and "called as saints" (Romans 1:7). And then on the third day, He rose again according to the Scriptures, and He is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Luke 24:46-47, Hebrews 8:1).

Jesus Christ became righteousness for us, as Paul taught saying: "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested.... even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ

Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood...”

(Romans 3:21-25).

In another passage in his letter to the Romans, Paul again taught about the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation to God being accomplished for us through the blood of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Romans 5:8-10).

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The Bible teaches that it is only through the blood of Jesus Christ shed on Calvary’s cross that our reconciliation to God has been accomplished. There is no other way to God the Father, no other way into the kingdom of Heaven. This is the crux and the essence of our Christian faith.

In his first letter, the Apostle John also taught about the forgiveness of our sins coming through the blood of Christ. John wrote: “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we

say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:5-9).

Continuing in chapter 2, John wrote: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1-2).

Everyone who comes to faith in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, regardless of nation or race, obtains the forgiveness of their sins through His shed blood. And we find this same teaching again in Revelation 5:9 where we John wrote: “...You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

Set Free from Sin

Sin is disobedience to God’s commands as they are set forth in the Holy Bible, which is God’s word. In Romans 6, we learn that when we were called to faith in Christ, a transformation occurred in our lives. Paul taught that when we were still unbelievers, we were slaves to sin, but when we came to believe in Christ, we became slaves of God and His righteousness. In other words, the believer is not enslaved to sin and powerless to be freed from it as unbelievers are. As slaves of God, we have been set free from sin

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(Romans 6:22), and by God's grace and power we have been given the means to rid ourselves of it. Paul also wrote in this passage: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14).

Even though we are no longer slaves of sin, we can see from the Scriptures that many times we will find ourselves struggling against sin. Paul taught about the ongoing struggle against sin that every believer will experience as he revealed his own struggle in Romans 7:7-25.

James also understood the believer's struggle against temptation and sin, and he gave us this exhortation: "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7-10, emphasis added). Teaching along these same lines, the Apostle Peter also wrote of the believer's struggle against temptation and sin when he gave us this exhortation: "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." (1 Peter 5:8-9, emphasis added). So both James and Peter exhorted believers to continue to resist the temptations of the devil.

Though God does allow both believers and unbelievers to be tempted, He Himself tempts no one. James made this clear when he wrote: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is

tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” (James 1:13-15).

Within these verses James taught that lust, or unlawful desire, when acted upon gives birth to sin, and sin results in death when it has run its’ course. The end result of sin is death: eternal death and separation from God for the unbeliever, and according to 1 John 5:16-17, sin could even result in physical death for the believer. Paul also taught that “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

There are many Scriptures that speak of the painful and damaging consequences of sin. But we also see from the Scriptures that God has given

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every believer the power to overcome sin in his life: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:4).

God’s Discipline in the Lives of His People

In another teaching from Romans, speaking of the saints of God, Paul wrote: “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). It is God’s will that every believer is to be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ, who led a life separated

from sin. Therefore when we do sin, God sends His disciplines into our lives in order to separate us from our sins. God's discipline is itself a sign that we belong to Him, as we learn from Hebrews 12. The writer of Hebrews quoted a passage from Proverbs 3:11-12 when he wrote:

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,

Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him,

For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,

And He scourges every son whom He receives.” (Hebrews 12:5b-6)

Sin always brings God's rod of correction into the lives of His people.

On those occasions when we know that we are experiencing the consequences of our own sin, let us confess our sin before God, repent of it and forsake it, being fully determined to root it out of our lives.

God's promise of forgiveness is ours as believers, but we must understand that He will not allow sin to persist in the lives of His people. He will surely separate us from our sin, and we will not like the means that He uses to do so. The writer of Hebrews instructed us again when he wrote: “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).

While God may allow sin to continue for some time in the lives of unbelievers with no apparent consequences to themselves, He will not allow it in the lives of His people. Sin in the life of a believer always brings about God's discipline, which serves to restore us to obedience.

God's Promises of Restoration

God's warnings about the consequences of sin are clearly stated in the Bible, and His will that believers live a life separated from sin is also clearly taught. But what if we have participated in sin, bringing the painful discipline of God's judgment into our lives? For such times, believers have not only God's promise of His forgiveness, but we also have His promises of restoration when we return to Him in obedience.

In Joel 2:18-19 we read of the Lord's promise to restore His blessings to His people after His judgment had been realized in their lives, and after their repentance. Later in this same chapter we again read of God's promise of mercy and restoration for His people who have forsaken their sin and returned to Him. God spoke through the prophet, saying:

“Then I will make up to you for the years

That the swarming locust has eaten,

The creeping locust, the stripping locust and the gnawing locust,

My great army which I sent among you.

“You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied

And praise the name of the Lord your God,

Who has dealt wondrously with you;

Then My people will never be put to shame.” (Joel 2:25-26)

After we have heeded God's call to return to Him, having forsaken

our sin and having resolved to move forward living our lives in obedience to His word, let us not dwell on the failings of the past. Instead, let us have the same mindset as the Apostle Paul had in his own life: "...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14).

In the book of Micah we again read of God's forgiveness, mercy and restoration for His people. Micah wrote:

Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity

And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?

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He does not retain His anger forever,

Because He delights in unchanging love.

He will again have compassion on us;

He will tread our iniquities under foot.

Yes, You will cast all their sins

Into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

Surely God will tread our sins underfoot. He will not allow sin to

continue or have dominion in the life of one of His children. With sin in the

life of one of God's people comes the rod of correction. If anyone can

continue in his sin without being disciplined by God, then he is illegitimate

and not a true son of God (Hebrews 12:5-8).

In Zephaniah 3:14-20, we see that God promised restoration to His people after the consequences of their sins had come upon them. In these verses Zephaniah encouraged Israel, telling them to rejoice and be glad. He said that God would take away their punishment and the harm that they feared. He also told them that God would take delight in them and once again quiet them with His love. Speaking through the prophet, God promised His people that He would deal with those who had oppressed them, He would restore their lost dignity and honor, and He would restore the fortunes they had lost because of their sins.

In the book of Zechariah, we find more of God's promises of restoration as He calls His people to return to Him. God spoke through the prophet saying:

“Return to the stronghold, O prisoners who have the hope;
This very day I am declaring that I will restore double to you.” (Zechariah 9:12).

In the book of Jeremiah there are more promises of restoration for God's people. In Jeremiah 31:3-5, God spoke to His people saying that He has drawn them to Himself with an everlasting love. He promised that He would restore them and build them up again. He said that they would again be joyful and plant vineyards, enjoying the fruit from them. God spoke through the prophet again saying:

“I have surely heard Ephraim grieving,
‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised,

Like an untrained calf;

Bring me back that I may be restored,

For You are the LORD my God.

‘For after I turned back, I repented;

And after I was instructed, I smote on my thigh;

I was ashamed and also humiliated

Because I bore the reproach of my youth.’

“Is Ephraim My dear son?

Is he a delightful child?

Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him,

I certainly still remember him;

Therefore My heart yearns for him;

I will surely have mercy on him,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:18-20)

God also spoke through the prophet Isaiah of His forgiveness, and He

called for His sinning people to return to Him as we read in the following

passages:

“I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake,

And I will not remember your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25)

“Remember these things, O Jacob,

And Israel, for you are My servant;

I have formed you, you are My servant,

O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me.

“I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud

And your sins like a heavy mist.

Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.” (Isaiah 44:21-22)

Speaking through the prophet Joel, God called to His sinning people

to return to Him “even now”, even after all the sins they had committed, and

He called to them to return “with fasting, weeping and mourning”. Joel said

that the Lord “is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in

lovingkindness”, and that He relents from sending the calamity of His

judgments into the lives of His people (Joel 2:12-13).

As those who have been called to faith in Jesus Christ, we have

received God’s mercy in that we have been forgiven our sins and reconciled

to Him through the blood of His Son. Even though we may sin at times after

we have been saved, we can take comfort in God’s promise that no power in

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