

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 56- God's Words on Forgiveness

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: There are many Christians who needlessly carry along a heavy load in their souls that eventually crush them from the inside. This heavy burden is sin. The heaviness of this burden often leads to depression, loneliness, and frustrations.

Only in the Holy Scriptures can you find the remedy 补救 God has provided for sin. But you don't need to carry this heavy burden, so let God's Word speak to you today on how he can remove your burden. You will hear his word concerning the ground and results of forgiveness.

Our headings are: The Foundation of Forgiveness, and The Freedom from Forgiveness.

Our goals are: That you will realize the greatness of your forgiveness, that you will rejoice for having it, and that you will learn to forgive those who sin against you.

56 Q. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE CONCERNING "THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS"?

A. I believe that God, because of Christ's atonement, will never hold against me any of my sins nor my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life. Rather, in his grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment.

The Foundation of Forgiveness

1. You cannot be forgiven without God. All sins are against him, so only he can remove them. Those who think that they can purge 清除 themselves of their sins by their own works are dreaming and they must wake up. Their dependence upon themselves will eventually become a nightmare when they wake up in hell. Look at God's work.

Psalms 103: 3 Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, 4 Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Another beautiful picture of God's forgiveness of your sin is seen in:

Micah 7: 18 Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. 19 He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

God calls you to forgive those who sin against you, but you don't take away sins. Only God does. When you forgive someone, you are saying that you will not hold his sin against him...and that your heart is right with God!

2. The foundation of your forgiveness from God is the once-for-all-times sacrifice of Jesus Christ, his Son. In other words, there is no forgiveness without sacrifice...and specifically, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

2Corinthians 5: 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

So those who try to relieve the pressure of their souls sin by their own ways sin and mock the sacrifice of Jesus. Worse, they will remain in their sins. Those who think that washing in the Ganges River, making a trip to Mecca, living as a hermit, repeating certain prayers many times or many prayer at certain times, giving of alms 救济 to the poor, doing yoga or other meditation 冥想, making the "Via Dolorosa" walk, or serving those starving children in Africa or India, would take away the guilt of sin, only deceive themselves. They may also deceive those who are of like foolish minds.

Hebrews 10: 11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

3. Your forgiveness by God through the Savior Jesus Christ...is only through grace. It does not come from any merit. It does not come from foreseen faith. You only respond in repentance after God has worked in you.

John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise

him up at the last day.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will... 7 **In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins**, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, Knowing that your forgiveness is free is the foundation of understanding your relationship with God. If you know that forgiveness of sins was not a 'give and take' negotiations, but that it is all of grace, it will change the way you deal with God. You will see him as he is... a gracious God to whom you are indebted with your life. You will worship him better. You will work harder. You will obey more diligently.

4. Your forgiveness through Jesus Christ is complete. This means there is nothing you need to do...or nothing you can do for forgiveness. No pilgrimages are necessary. No penance^{忏悔} is necessary. No panic is necessary. No meditation is necessary for spiritual cleansing. The foundation of your forgiveness is Christ on the cross...and in God's mind your forgiveness took place before the foundation of the world. Notice how this is made clear in Ephesians 1:3 above. Of course you will do good after you are forgiven. You will help the poor. You will visit the sick. But you do those things as a result of your forgiveness. You do not do good works in order for God to forgive you; you do good works to show that God has forgiven you.

1John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

5. You are assured of God's fatherly forgiveness as his child. (Judicial forgiveness is when you become a Christian; fatherly or paternal forgiveness is what you get after you become God's child.) God knows that as a Christian you struggle with sin and so you dearly and daily need his forgiveness. The Apostle Paul encapsulates this for you in his personal struggle.

Romans 7:21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

So do not despair when you struggle with sin. Ask God for forgiveness. Jesus taught you, his covenant children to ask for forgiveness of the Father in the Lord's Prayer. He said: "Forgive us our debts..." Ask him for help to obey better in the future.

6. Christ forgiveness is applicable to the whole world and sufficient for the whole world.

1John 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Jesus Christ reminds you here that God loved the entire world, not just the Jewish nation. (John 3:16) God started with the Jewish nation, but salvation and forgiveness was never limited to the Jews. (Romans 11) Jesus Christ's sacrifice for sins was so great that it was sufficient for the whole world. Of course Jesus Christ's sacrifice is not effective for the whole world, or given to the whole world, as the whole world will not be saved.

The Freedom from Forgiveness

1. Since your reconciliation was complete when Jesus died on the cross, God can never hold against you any of your sins. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed your transgressions from you. They are gone and forgotten and will never be brought up again... God is better than your spouse or earthly father who might remember in details your sins of the past and throw them in your face. See Psalm 103, above.

Colossians 1:19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, **and blameless, and above reproach in His sight**—

2. When God forgives your sins through Jesus Christ, he permanently frees you from eternal judgment.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

Nothing is worse than to anticipate the severity of God's punishment for sins. (Know how you some anticipate a needle in the arm?) On the other hand, believers in Jesus Christ have a better anticipation, like the joy of anticipating getting married, except that forgiveness is better. So when you know with confidence that your sin are forgiven, you will get an unmistakable sense of relief and spiritual freedom.

John 3: 17 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Do you now see why you are so comforted by this doctrine? Jesus Christ freed you from carrying an unnecessary burden. Who likes to carry a 150 kg weight on his back knowing that soon your knees will buckle and it will crush you?

3. Forgiveness is not only good for the soul; forgiveness is good for the body as well. Consider how the Psalmist describes his physical relief when God forgave him!

Psalm 32 -1 Blessed is he whose transgressions 越轨 are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

2 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, **my bones wasted away** through **my groaning all day** long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my **strength was sapped** as in the heat of summer. 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"— and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

4. Only those who truly know of the freedom they have received can properly focus on the freedom

of others. A slave would not normally want to work for the freedom of others if he himself is in slavery. Yes, God has used non-believers to speak his word and bring others to himself, but he specifically intends that the forgiven will speak of his forgiveness to others so others can be saved. Look at how David expressed this.

Psalm 51: 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

13 **Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,** And sinners shall be converted to You.

Psalm 145 -8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. 9 The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. 10 All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. 11 **They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might,** 12 so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom."

Conclusion:

No one is forgiven without going to God. And God has made it clear that for you to go to him you have to do so through Jesus Christ the Lord. Then when he forgives you, you must work for him.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Rejoice that you sins are completely forgiven through Jesus Christ. You did not deserve forgiveness. You did not earn forgiveness. But God has graciously given you this greatest gift of all.
2. Learn to forgive others who sin against you. Remember, you have been given the greater gift.
3. You have to learn to speak of God's forgiveness to others so that they can receive the comforts that you receive from your forgiveness.

Finally: Try as you might, your only means to remove your sins in through Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of all who are redeemed. If you truly want to be reconciled 调和— if you truly want peace between God and you, ask him to count Christ's life and death as yours.