

# Beyond Belief – Understanding the Truth Forgiveness

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins  
and purify us from all unrighteousness. – 1 John 1:9

## Part I – Sermon Series – Beyond Belief

We are continuing our Sermon Series – **Beyond Belief**, where we are examining what we believe and trying to make sure that it is built on a foundation of Scriptural truth.

Each week we are looking at a different faith topic and then examining what God’s Word has to say about it so that we are really stepping out in truth. And once again, I will encourage you to write down the location of the scripture passages so that you can go back and look at them. And write down anything God might be speaking to your heart.

Today we are looking at the topic of “Forgiveness.” And before we really get started talking about this topic, I want you to each stop for just a moment and to think about the concept of “Forgiveness.” When you think about forgiveness is there a picture that pops in your head? Maybe it was something you studied in the Bible or maybe it is from a situation in your own life. Something from the past or maybe something going on right now. Think about that word forgiveness – does it make you feel a little tense, maybe a little anxious, or maybe it is just the opposite – maybe when you hear the word forgiveness you feel joy and relief. I’m just curious if you really recognize the impact that forgiveness has on your life.

You know, forgiveness goes two different directions. If someone should happen to do something to hurt us, then we are the one who needs to be able to forgive them and offer forgiveness. And from the other side, if we are the ones who have done something wrong, then we become the one who needs the forgiveness.

Today what I want us to focus on is our need for forgiveness and what it means to be forgiven by God for our sins. Because until we

really grasp and accept forgiveness from God, we can never truly be in a right relationship.

## Part II – Recognizing We Are Sinful

So, we begin by examining the issue of whether we even think we have a problem with sin and might need forgiveness. I wonder if in our culture today, if we are often oblivious to any sin or wrong that we might say or do. I have a feeling that we have gotten pretty good at rationalizing why it was OK for us to do things, even those things that we know deep down were not right or the best things to do. Somehow we are always able figure some way of looking at it where we can say that it wasn’t really “that bad” or it wasn’t our fault, we can instead blame it on someone else, or the situation, or our childhood... or anyone or anything else that we can pin the blame on - so that we don’t have to accept responsibility for what we have done.

If we never admit that we have sinned, then there is certainly no need for forgiveness. But let’s be honest folks, we may not be the best at taking true responsibility for our actions, but deep down we know that we have not always honored God with our thoughts and our actions, we have all sinned. We looked at **Romans 3:23 last week which simply says for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

*All have sinned, which unfortunately includes you and me, but... there is some really, really good news that is in this week’s Memory Verse which is from 1 John 1:9. But before we look at verse 9, I want us to look at the verse before it and the verse after it. **Verse 8 says – If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.** And verse 10 says – **If we claim we have not sinned, we make him (which is referring to God) out to be***

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*a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*

So, if any of us think that we are free of sin and wrongdoing, then we are both deceiving ourselves and calling God a liar.

## Part III – Blessed to Confess

Let's just go ahead and admit to ourselves, and each other, and to God that we are in fact sinners. Because when we are willing to admit it and confess our sins, then that is the moment of freedom and joy where we can claim what God has promised us in verse 9, our Memory Verse. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* How glorious is that! If we just confess, then God will take care of the rest – he will forgive us and purify us.

So, what does it mean to “confess” our sins? It is uncovering them, not trying to hide them anymore, but revealing them and admitting our mistakes. It is repenting of them as we acknowledge that they were wrong. And there is an incredible blessing that goes along with confessing. We are blessed to confess.

Actually, you can think of it like this: we do not have the power to really take care of our sins and the things we have done wrong. After we have done them, we can't remove the fact that we did them. So, we may try hide them and cover them up and pretend that they didn't happen... and for a little while we may actually get away with it with regards to other people knowing about what we did. And we may try to convince ourselves it was not really that bad and try to forget about it. But God knows, and really, we do too. And the only way to take care of the sin is to confess and “uncover” it. And notice when we uncover it – God “covers” it – once and for all. Psalm 32 verse 1 says – *Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

Because when God covers them, he covers them with blood (we'll come back to that in a moment). You can imagine that blood

being like a force field that is so powerful that those sins are never seen again, and God no longer *counts* those sins against us. Verse 2 says – *Blessed is the one whose sins the Lord does not count against them...* So, we truly are blessed to confess.

## Part IV – Trouble vs. Confess

Yet when we *do not* confess, it is like wallowing in our sinfulness. Because you can never really be right with yourself or with God until you confess and come clean. It is like a darkness or a poison inside you.

Kind David is the one who wrote Psalm 32 and those first two verses proclaim how glorious it is to be forgiven and how blessed it is that the Lord has covered the sins and no longer counts them. But what I also want you to see is what he says about when he tried to hide his sin. Verses 3 and 4 – *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

There are times when unforgiveness or not being right with God can be such a burden that it impacts one's health. Maybe it is depression or headaches or ulcers or high blood pressure or insomnia or any number of things. Because when you are not right with God then you are not right in your spirit. And everything is really connected – you can't separate your spiritual health from emotional or mental or physical health.

That is why David wrote Psalm 32 - because he realized how painful it was during the time that he was hiding his sin, his bones wasted away, but then he also discovered what a blessing it was when he confessed, and God forgave. Psalm 32:5 goes on to say – *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.*

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Our tendency is to think it is safer to pretend we are always good and right. We think we are protecting ourselves when we hide our sins and yet by trying to hide them, we are causing more problems. Proverbs 28:13 says – *Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, by the way, it goes on to say - but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*

## Part V – Mercy and Justice

Mercy! Wow, I need mercy! I look back on my life and I realize how many times I have messed up. And I try to keep my eyes on the Lord and attempt to do what is right, and yet I realize that I am a long way from being perfect in all I think, say and do. So, thank goodness for God's mercy and forgiveness.

You know, there is a difference between justice and mercy. If you were accused of doing something that you really did not do, then you would want justice to prove your innocence. But if you really did do it, then when you stood before the judge you would really hope that they were a merciful judge, because you would know that if the judge gave you justice and you really did it then you would have to pay the penalty for what you did wrong. So, thank goodness for mercy.

As we said in our Call to Worship and as we sang in our Hymn of Preparation – “Have mercy on me, O God!” That comes from the beginning of Psalm 51, which is such a wonderful psalm – make a note of it and go back and read the entire Psalm. But the first couple of verses say (Ps 51:1-2) – *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

There is a turning point, that changes us when we realize how incredibly desperate we are and that we cannot survive... we cannot make it without God's mercy and forgiveness.

And we realize that we have to trust in God and depend on God.

Because before that point, we are just deceiving ourselves if we think can make it on our own strength and our own wisdom and our own goodness. And we are missing out on how glorious life can be when we are focusing on the Lord. In the first place, if we are allowing God to guide our steps then we will not get ourselves into as much trouble. And if we should slip up then we know to turn to God, and he will forgive us.

## Part VI – A Price to Pay

But do you think forgiveness is free? Psalm 86:5 says – *You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.* That just sort of sounds like this light joyful verse and I can almost imagine God tossing these flowery petals of forgiveness to everyone. And don't get me wrong: God is forgiving and good and abounding in love. But the very next verse says (6) – *Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my cry for mercy.* If we are crying out for mercy, then we know we are in trouble. And if we need forgiveness then we know we have sinned.

**Forgiveness is “easy” but it is not “free.”** It is easy because God has told us (look back our Memory Verse 1 John 1:9) that all we have to do is confess our sins and he will forgive us.

But let me point out something with that verse – when we jumped from confess to forgive in that verse, we skipped over the fact that **God is faithful and just**. Faithful means loyal, true and constant – and God is faithful to us, but even more importantly, God has to be faithful to who *he* is, he is always constant, he has to do things the right way, he is holy. And he is *just* meaning he will always do what is morally right and fair.

What this means is that if there is a sin – someone, somehow has to pay the penalty. God cannot just ignore it or pretend it didn't happen.

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In Exodus 34 (6-7) God is proclaiming who he is and his attributes to Moses and it is this wonderful list. – *And (God)passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.* But pay attention to this next phrase – *Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...* If there is sin or guilt, then somehow that penalty has to be paid. It is not free.

That is why in the Old Testament, God had a system of animal sacrifices, because if there was sin, then according to God's scripture, blood had to be spilled to cover that sin. As humans we are not perfect, even if we try, so those who lived at that time were constantly having to offer sacrifices to pay the price.

And then God sent his perfect Son, Jesus Christ to live on this earth and teach us what is right and show us how to live. And then once and for all *he died on the cross for all of our sins.* He poured out his blood to cover our sins.

## Part VII – Conclusion

Remember earlier I said that we cannot hide or cover up our own sin, and yet when we uncover it and confess, then that is when God covers it ... and pay attention, God covers it with his very own Son's blood. That certainly does not sound like justice – that the very one who lived a perfect life and never sinned, would have to be the one to give up his life to pay for all of our sins. But God knew that was the only way to make sure the penalty was paid, and we were given mercy.

I know that for most of us this is not new information. We know that Jesus Christ died for our sins. We know that our forgiveness comes from the fact that he shed his blood for us.

But I believe God's message for us today is three-fold and I pray that you will **Remember** these three things:

- 1) that we may recognize how much we **need** **forgiveness** – all of us,
- 2) that we may know that we have **assurance of** **forgiveness** - when we confess our sins to God, he will forgive us, and
- 3) that we will never ever forget **how much it cost our Lord to give us that forgiveness.**

We are indeed blessed to have such a merciful, loving, and forgiving God!

Amen.