

RECEIVING GOD'S GREAT GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

Yesterday we talked about the great sacrifice of God's Son for the sins of mankind. We talked about why it was necessary for God to send His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, yet without sin, to die for all our sins. Paul wrote, "³ For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ⁴ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:3-4 (KJV).) Walking after the Spirit is to live according to the Spirit's teaching.

Yesterday, I told you that we receive this grace God's forgiveness through faith; but it is a certain kind of faith...a faith we learn from God's word. In John 12:42 we read of some people who believed in Jesus, but they would not confess that publicly. "⁴² Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: ⁴³ For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." John 12:42-43 (KJV).

Friends, I don't get to dream up the way I want to receive God's grace of forgiveness. I may wish to keep the praise of men and draw up my own terms of surrender to God. But God demands conditions; conditions of the heart and conditions of behavior that includes a public confession. God also includes repentance and baptism in water as conditions for receiving His great forgiveness. That's right! My faith must come from hearing the word of God, all of the word of God and not just some selected passages (Romans 10:17). The Bible writers sum up these conditions in one word, Faith.

For instance, the word Faith sums up what Jesus did for us. It is called the Faith of Christ. How does God justify Himself for forgiving you of your sins? By the faith of Christ (Romans 3:22). Paul wrote that "we Jews" "¹⁶ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal 2:16 (KJV).) Likewise, the word Faith sums up the conditions that we must

meet in order to receive God's forgiveness, the remission of our sins. Have you met God's conditions for accepting the great gift of the forgiveness of your sins?

What do I mean by conditions? Didn't John Calvin teach that grace was unconditional? Well, God's gift of His Son was unconditional. The world did not have to meet any conditions for God to send his son. God gave His Son to die for the sins of the world, whether you and I receive it or not. It is an unconditional gift. But, there are conditions of accepting God's gift.

For instance, there are conditions of the heart, and of course, the cornerstone of our heart condition is faith. We must believe that Jesus is indeed the son of God and that he died for our sins, was raised the third day, and then ascended to sit down at the right hand of God until such time when God will send him out again to signal the end of the world. Paul put it this way to the Corinthians, ³ For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴ And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:" (1 Cor 15:3-4 (KJV).) We must believe that Jesus died for our sins.

The people who gathered to hear the apostles on the day of Pentecost met this condition. When they had heard Peter preach the gospel to them, the Bible says they were pricked in their hearts, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Obviously, they believed what Peter had just told them. What had he told them? Well, among other things, he told them that Jesus had died according to God's plan and that God had also raised him from the dead. Furthermore, "God hath made that same Jesus whom you have crucified both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36.) When they heard that they were pricked in their hearts. Here is a heart condition that must be met. Faith comes to the heart by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17.)

These people then asked the apostles what they should do next. Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you and to all them that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort saying "save yourselves

from this crooked generation.” Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and there were added unto them that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-41.)

Repentance is a condition of the heart. If you don't repent you cannot receive God's remission of sins. Paul asked the Roman Christians, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid!" (Romans 6:1.) Repentance is a sorrowful heart that fervently desires to change something that is wrong. A person has been traveling the wrong road, but now he has changed his mind. He wants to turn over a new leaf. He wants to change direction. He wants to follow Christ. The repentant heart wants to turn away from sin. This is repentance. Jesus had said to some people, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Lk. 13:3.) Repentance is definitely a condition of faith that must be met in order to receive God's salvation. Why repent if you don't believe? Repentance flows from faith.

Sometimes repentance is expressed through actions. For instance, the Philippian jailor "washed" Paul and Silas' stripes on their backs the same night he was baptized. (Acts 16:33.) It was his way of showing his repentance. He may very well have been the one who had whipped them.

Not only did Peter command the believers on Pentecost to repent, but he also commanded them to be baptized. "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ." Baptism is immersion in water. Later on when the preacher Philip had taught the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch in the man's chariot, they came to a certain water and the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What doth hinder me from being baptized? And Philip said, if you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch: and he baptized him." (Acts 8:36-38.) Repentance and Baptism are conditions by which we receive the grace of God, the forgiveness of our sins, purchased by the blood of the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.

The apostle Paul tells us that baptism is the burial of our old man of sin and the resurrection of the new man in the likeness of Jesus' burial and resurrection. In Romans 6 he discussed this. "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ³ Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: ⁶ Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." (Romans 6:2-6 (KJV).) And so, baptism marks a clear-cut break between that old life of sin and the new life of the Christian. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:26, 27.)