

Psalm 32:1 How blessed is the person whose rebellion is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

You are forgiven through Christ! Those are tremendous words! They ooze joy and peace! They calm in the midst of chaos; comfort in the midst of sorrow; and give security in the midst of fear! Hear them again: you are forgiven through Christ!

Yes you - miserable, wretched, full of sin you – are forgiven through Christ. You – who can't even go a single day without dishonoring the name of your Lord and Savior – are forgiven through Christ. You – who argue, fight, tear down with words, and act unloving – are forgiven through Christ. You – who frequently put God second in your life, chase after the things of this world at the expense of God, and so often love yourself more than God – are forgiven through Christ. You – the worst of sinners – are forgiven in Christ.

Such a truth is incredible! It's astronomical! It's mind-boggling! It's phenomenal! And, it's true! Today as we listen to the words of a man named David - who knew a thing or two about sin and forgiveness - we stop to consider yet again this most awesome, remarkable, amazing truth...we consider the blessedness of knowing sins are forgiven.

1. Discuss/consider the different ways our worship service declares the forgiveness of sins.

2. If we already have forgiveness in the gospel and in confession and absolution, why do we need Holy Communion? Does the Lord's Supper give us extra, more powerful forgiveness?

*Prayer: I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us from the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus to wash my crimson stains
White in his blood most precious till not a spot remains. Amen. (CW 372:1)*

If we are going to talk about being forgiven, the place to start is by talking about Christ – for there is no forgiveness without Christ and his payment for sin. The place to start is by talking about how God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to be our Savior. The place to start is by talking about how, when the time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, to be born under law, to redeem those under law. So Jesus, true God and true man in one Person, came to earth to be our Substitute.

As our Substitute, Jesus obeyed the law of God perfectly in our place. As our Substitute, the Lord laid on him the transgression, sin, and iniquity of us all. As our Substitute, Jesus died on the cross for all people. When he had fully paid for our sins and satisfied God's justice he cried out, "paid in full." Then, on the third day God raised him from the dead because Jesus had won forgiveness for us.

Yes, I know you've heard it all before, but you need to hear it again. For the forgiveness of sins is found in this single message alone: you are forgiven through Christ. God does not come and say there is "the possibility of future forgiveness" if certain conditions are met. No, he says you are forgiven through Christ. God does not say that you "might" be forgiven. No, the truth of what Jesus did is that your sins are forgiven. What else can it mean when he says, **"He was delivered over to death [because of] our sins and was raised to life [because of] our justification"** (Romans 4:25).

1. Why can there be no forgiveness without Christ?
2. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead declares what?
3. Why is it so important to know that God doesn't say, "you might be forgiven if certain conditions are met"?

Prayer: Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, ours included. Have mercy on us and help us to sing your praise all our days. Amen.

Jesus died for all. He paid the ransom price for all. He took away the sin of the world. He is the cover for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. His resurrection is the proof that the sins of the world are cancelled and forgiven. Through the whole process of Jesus' suffering and dying for the sins of the whole world, God was reconciling the world to himself. And so, in Christ, God forgives sins and God punishes sins.

There is only place where we will find it possible to believe that every sin is punished and that every sin is forgiven. That place is the cross where the eternal Son of God was forsaken by his heavenly Father to suffer for the sins of the whole world which had been laid on him. That place is the open tomb from where we see the sins of the whole world have been paid for in a way that satisfied the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Sin is cancelled, wiped out. You are forgiven through Christ.

But did you know that it is possible for a person not to enjoy the blessings of forgiveness? Did you know you can forfeit the forgiveness won for you by Christ? That happens to those who refuse to repent and continue to live in their sin. That happens to those who reject the notion that the guilt of their sin makes them worthy for punishment. That happens to those who deny with their words and actions the need for Jesus to be their Substitute. That is unbelief. And it is of impenitence, repentance and forgiveness that David speaks in the words of our lesson. *“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away as I groaned all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy on me. My moisture was dried up by the droughts of summer. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover up my guilt. I said, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:3-5).*

1. What is repentance?
2. What is impenitence?
3. In this devotion we read, “He [Jesus] is the cover for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Does this mean everyone is going to heaven? Why or why not?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you set us free – accept our thanks eternally! Forgiven through your precious blood, we now are reconciled to God. Amen. (CW 123:1)

If you remember, David knew a thing or two about impenitence and repentance, about sin and forgiveness. Remember the whole sordid affair with Bathsheba? First, he broke the First Commandment as he placed his desires above the will of God. Those desires were in direct disobedience to the Ninth and Tenth Commandments which forbid coveting. But it didn't stop there.

The sin of the heart became the sin of the body, and the Seventh Commandment was broken as he stole Bathsheba from her husband; the Sixth Commandment was violated when he slept with her; and the Fifth Commandment was ignored as he killed her husband. During all this he abused his kingly power, a rebellion against the Fourth Commandment, and he drug God's name through the mud, a violation of the Second Commandment.

For nearly a year David lived in these sins, never confessing them or admitting their wrong; never turning to the Lord for forgiveness. Instead, he tried to conceal them by keeping silent about them. He tried to pass them off as insignificant by not thinking about them. He tried to busy himself so he could forget. But it didn't work. Hear his own words, **“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away as I groaned all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me. My moisture was dried up by the droughts of summer.”** He had forfeited God's forgiveness in impenitent unbelief.

1. What this devotion is speaking about is described in James 1:14,15 – “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” Who is responsible for our sins?

2. Is our sinful flesh capable of the same atrocities David committed?

3. How would you describe David's relationship with God during this time?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, fill our hearts and minds with pure thoughts. May we be led by your forgiving love to glorify you in all we think, say, and do. Amen.

Psalm 32:1-5 How blessed is the person whose rebellion is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² How blessed is the person whose guilt the LORD does not charge against him, in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away as I groaned all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy on me. My moisture was dried up by the droughts of summer. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover up my guilt. I said, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Since we are all sinners, David is speaking of something that probes the hearts of each of us. You see, there is a growing tendency in our world, yes even among us, to not take responsibility and acknowledge our sin. Instead, we try to minimize their seriousness and the consequences of them.

So take a moment and think long and hard. Is there a sin in your life that you are trying to cover up? Is there a transgression that you are trying to rationalize so it doesn't seem so bad? Have you softened the seriousness of your sin in order to convince yourself that you are better than others?

1. We are so often tempted to rationalize sin. Come up with some common ways that people try to rationalize sin.

2. We are so often tempted to rationalize sin. Consider ways that you have tried to do this. Once you have, take a moment to go to your Lord in private repentance.

3. We are so often tempted to rationalize sin. Do you see any sign of this in David's confession?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, forgive me for all the times that I have lived like an outsider to your kingdom. Amen.

Have impure passions driven you to improper thoughts or improper actions – and instead of repentance for the sins of lust and pre-marital sex have you simply blown them off saying, “What’s the big deal, we love each other; nobody thinks of it as sin anymore.” Have you minimized the sin of drunkenness or drinking and driving by saying, “No one has gotten hurt and I could think of a lot worse things to do?” Have you rationalized your anger or hate or unwillingness to forgive by saying, “Look at what they have done to me?” Have you tried to cover up a pathetic use of God’s Word or a scrooge attitude in your offerings by defending, “At least I’m in church once in a while and give a little, that’s better than most?” Search hard and long.

Are you living in these sins or others without repenting of them? Are you unwilling to give up your sin and in reality telling God not to meddle in your business? Are you trying to hide them or cover them by ignoring the guilt you feel? It isn't going to work, just like it won't work for an ostrich, fleeing from its enemy, to escape capture or death by sticking their head in the sand. That's impenitence, and impenitence forfeits the forgiveness of sin that Jesus has won for you.

So, this begs the question? Did David die in impenitent unbelief? No. The heroic grace of God stepped in and moved David: **“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover up my guilt. I said, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD,” and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”**

1. Why do we confess our sins?
2. What are we to acknowledge in our confession to God?
3. David committed some horrible atrocities. He acted without conscience. In his arrogance he had little regard for the property or lives of others. Doesn't it seem that he got off a little easy?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I confess my unworthiness to be called your child. Give me godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation in Jesus. Amen.

The Lord had David record these words for you! We are to acknowledge our sin. Do not cover up your iniquity. Confess your transgressions and see that we share in the responsibility for the sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. Realize the enormity of your sin; and then in faith receive the forgiveness Christ won for you. There can be no peace, no joy, no hope, no salvation for the soul unless sin be forgiven.

And please, please understand this: God does not forgive you because *you* are sorry; he forgives you because *he* is faithful and just. Your repentance is merely an admission that you are a sinner who desperately needs what God has given you. Your repentance is an act that flows from the faith created in you by the message that you are forgiven through Christ. That faith says, “God you are right when you tell me I’m a sinner. You are right when you tell me I deserve punishment in hell. You would be right to send me there. But God, you are also right when you tell me I’m righteous through Christ. You have not denied that I have sinned. You have not swept my sins under the rug. Instead, you punished your Son in my place. After viewing the perfect payment provided by Jesus, my Savior and Substitute, announce to me the verdict of ‘not guilty.’ I know you will not make me pay for sins that Christ has already paid for.”

With this in mind, live a life of repentance. Pay close attention to what you say. Mean what you say. Do not hide any sin from God. Do not simply go through the motions. And then receive, on the basis of Christ and his atoning sacrifice, your forgiveness. By faith know it; believe it; and rejoice in it. What blessedness to know that your sins are forgiven.

1. The Bible calls us to “repent.” Is this a law or gospel teaching?

2. Our Savior wants the entire life of believers to be a repentance. What does that mean?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us remember who we truly are: forgiven sinners who need your guidance for the future. Never let our hearts become overconfident, but keep us vigilant against the devil’s schemes. Amen.

ANSWER PAGES

PAGE 1

1. Discuss/consider the different ways our worship service declares the forgiveness of sins. In the confession and absolution at the beginning of the service; in the gospel message found in the readings and sermon; through the Lord's Supper; and proclaimed in song.
 2. If we already have forgiveness in the gospel and in confession and absolution, why do we need Holy Communion? Does the Lord's Supper give us extra, more powerful forgiveness? The host of a well-known children's program used to sing, "There are many ways to say 'I love you.' There are many ways to say 'I care.'" The love of a husband and wife, which they feel all the time, can be expressed in many different ways – by saying "I love you," by wedding vows, by a ring, by a hug or kiss, by a gift, and by helpful acts. We like to be reminded of the love that is there all the time by all of these different expressions of that love.
- In the same way, God expresses his forgiving love to us in many ways. He already said it all at our baptisms when he made us members of his family and promised us forgiveness through Christ. But he constantly reassures us of that same love in the reading or hearing of the gospel, in private and public confession and absolution, and in the Lord's Supper.
- For a person who has faith in Christ, God's grace is not a commodity that he distributes to us a bit at a time only whenever we ask for it. For a Christian, receiving forgiveness of sins is not like taking a shower once a week and getting rid of a week's accumulation of dirt. It is like standing out in a gentle rain that is constantly washing us clean. For those who have faith, God's forgiving grace is an attitude he has toward us all of the time. It is a condition in which we stand (Romans 5:1,2).
- Because of our need for assurance, God declares this forgiveness to us in many ways. The forgiveness we receive through the confession of sins at the beginning of the service, through the gospel message found in the readings and sermon, and through the Lord's Supper is essentially the same. What is special about the Lord's Supper is the unique way we are assured of that forgiveness – each one of us individually receives the very body and blood of Christ, given and shed to obtain our forgiveness. What more powerful declaration of forgiveness could there possibly be?
- God has many ways to say, "I love you; I forgive you." For our assurance and peace of mind, he wants us to use them all. The Lord's Supper has a special place among them.

PAGE 2

1. Why can there be no forgiveness without Christ? The purpose of this question is to get us to think about the uniqueness of Christ as compared to every other "answer" for sin. Every other "answer" falls short somewhere, because every other "answer" has mankind as part of the solution. But with Christ, he has done it all. He is the only one who can do it all. He can be our substitute because he is true man. His sacrifice can be costly and precious enough to pay for sin because he is true God. That is why he had to be true God and true man. His life can count for us because he is true man. He was able to keep the Law because he is true God. Christ is the only one who truly DEALS with the problem of our sin and lack of perfection. Every other "answer" fails to remove sin and guilt. Likewise, every other "answer" turns God into someone who requires less than perfection and is simply satisfied with one's best.
2. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead declares what? This was at the heart of the sermon on Easter Sunday. Let me share a portion of that sermon here: "When God the Father raised Jesus to life on Easter Sunday, it was a clear declaration that Jesus was not guilty. It was as though he was saying, 'I agree with my you, my beloved Son. It is finished. Everything I sent you to do has been finished. Therefore, I justify you. I declare you not guilty.' Understand that last part well. Understand what God was really saying through that empty tomb, whom he was really justifying... It doesn't say that he raised Jesus primarily to make a statement about Jesus' justification. If that was all that happened that first Easter morning, we'd be here this morning doing nothing more than celebrating that things turned out well for Jesus. We'd be nothing more than a death row inmate hearing the news that an innocent man had been declared not

guilty. ‘Nice for that person,’ we’d say, ‘but it doesn’t do us any good.’ So listen closely to what our lesson says, because there’s one word that makes all the difference: “He was raised to life because of our justification.” Our. Me. You. We were declared not guilty at that empty tomb. When God raised Jesus back to life, he also declared us to be innocent, worthy of eternal life in Christ.

3. Why is it so important to know that God doesn’t say, “you might be forgiven if certain conditions are met”? This would leave our forgiveness constantly in doubt, yes, it would leave us without forgiveness. How are we to meet those conditions? We would fail to be able to meet even the slightest of conditions – for always doing what God says (not matter what it is) is an impossibility for us. It is because we don’t have to meet conditions that we can be absolutely certain of our forgiveness. Our forgiveness is completely and entirely dependent upon the work of Jesus.

PAGE 3

1. What is repentance? A good definition of repentance is that it is a change of heart about sin. It includes sorrow over sin, the desire to stop sinning, and faith in the forgiveness won for us by Jesus, which then motivates us to avoid sin and serve God.
2. What is impenitence? Impenitence is not being sorry for one’s sins. Many people reject God’s gracious gift of righteousness because they feel that they don’t need to have righteousness. Since that is the case they are not sorry for their sins.
3. In this devotion we read, “He [Jesus] is the cover for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Does this mean everyone is going to heaven? Why or why not? The answer to this question really deals with the difference between what is called objective and subjective justification. The teaching of objective justification is that God the Father declared the sins of the whole world forgiven because Christ had paid for all sin. To benefit from that payment and that declaration, it is necessary that a person be brought to faith in Christ as his Savior (subjective justification). Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, where both of these points are clearly stated.

Objective means that God’s verdict of forgiveness for the world does not depend on my feeling. It is an accomplished fact even before I hear about it or respond to it. Subjective means I joyfully apply this verdict to myself. The world’s sins are forgiven, therefore my sins are forgiven.

The Bible says that Christ is the Savior of everyone, even of those who do not believe (1 Timothy 4:10). Though they have been saved from sin by Christ, those who do not believe will never enter salvation because they throw away Christ’s payment. If I put money in the bank for you, it is legally yours. Your debt has been paid. If you do not believe me when I tell you about it and you never use the money that is yours, you never benefit from it. It is the same with justification. Christ has made the payment for us and God the Father has credited it to our account (objective justification). If I don’t believe that it was given for me (subjective justification), I will never benefit from it. Though God’s forgiving grace is universal, salvation will not be universal because many spurn God’s grace.

My faith is not a cause of my justification. It simply receives the gift God gives. Our faith does not complete justification. It simply accepts it. Even this acceptance is a gift that the Holy Spirit works in me.

PAGE 4

1. What this devotion is speaking about is described in James 1:14,15 – “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” Who is responsible for our sins? We are responsible for our sins. This is an important thing to keep in mind when it comes to repentance.
2. Is our sinful flesh capable of these atrocities David committed? Yes, we have the same sinful flesh as David had. That is why we always need to be on guard. We are so quick to look at the sins of others, but what we need to look at is our own sin. There is no sin our sinful nature is not capable of committing. The moment we think there is, we are standing on dangerous ground.
3. How would you describe David’s relationship with God during this time? David was resisting God’s call to repentance. He was living in willful sin. He had given up his faith. Paul’s words apply to David: “The

acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21).

PAGE 5

1. We are so often tempted to rationalize sin. Come up with some common ways that people try to rationalize sin. Sadly, there are no shortages of answers here, and these answers will vary. Here are some that are often spoken: I’m only human; no one’s perfect; it didn’t hurt anyone; you don’t know what I have to put up with; it’s just the way I am; I can’t help it; no one really calls this sin; times have changed; it’s not as bad as what others are doing; it’s not as bad as it could be; I can’t let people treat me that way; God’s wants me to be happy, right;
2. We are so often tempted to rationalize sin. Consider ways that you have tried to do this. Once you have, take a moment to go to your Lord in private repentance. Please take time to do this. Don’t ignore where you are guilty of making excuses. Then, truly repent. The life of the Christian is one of daily repentance.
3. We are so often tempted to rationalize sin. Do you see any sign of this in David’s confession? No. He confessed his sin completely and begged for God’s mercy.

PAGE 6

1. Why do we confess our sins? We confess our sins because God commands us to and because we long for forgiveness.
2. What are we to acknowledge in our confession to God? We confess not only what we do but what we are. We were born with a sinful nature that continues to cause us to sin daily in thought, word, and deed. Our sins deserve eternal punishment.
3. David committed some horrible atrocities. He acted without conscience. In his arrogance he had little regard for the property or lives of others. Doesn’t it seem that he got off a little easy? Yes! But that is the beauty of the gospel. David was freely forgiven. We need that same free forgiveness, because we are every bit as sinful as David was. We must also rely on God’s gracious mercy.

PAGE 7

1. The Bible calls us to “repent.” Is this a law or gospel teaching? The underlying idea behind the biblical words for repentance is “turn” or to “change one’s mind.” A person turns from sin to God. Turning from sin involves sorrow over sin (contrition). This is worked by the law. True repentance includes trust in God’s promise of forgiveness as its most important part. This is produced by the gospel. Both the law and the gospel thus have roles in working true repentance. It is the role of the gospel, however, which is of highest importance because there can be no true, God-pleasing repentance without faith worked by the gospel.

When it follows the preaching of the gospel, the imperative “repent” is not really a command of the law that we must fulfill. It is an invitation to believe the gospel promise that accompanies it. It is like the invitation given to a starving man as he is being fed, “Eat some of this food.” The power to accept the gospel invitation does not lie in the unconverted recipient of the invitation but in the gospel promise through which the Holy Spirit works. The gospel works that faith which it calls for. The Scriptures clearly tell us that we are saved by grace alone and that salvation is a gift of God, worked in us through his unfailing grace (Ephesians 2:8,9). Yet we are directed to hear (and read and study) his Word, to obey his commands, to seek his forgiveness with a contrite heart, and to lead a sanctified life as the natural outcome of our love of God.

2. Our Savior wants the entire life of believers to be a repentance. What does that mean? It means not only inward repentance, that is, not only a sorrow for our sin and telling God we are sorry for them and asking for forgiveness. It also means outward reflections of that inward attitude. A hatred for that sin and crucifying of the sinful nature so we don’t run back to it. It means a change in actions. It means that confession, repentance, and fruits of repentance are to be a daily thing.