

AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST
“FORGIVENESS”
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PREFACE

Sin or iniquity is definitely a part of the human race. From its smallest expression to its most horrific and shameful manifestation. The apostle Paul said “for the mystery of iniquity doth already work:” (II Thessalonians 2:7). It is a mystery and has put the world in chaos from generation to generation. It is a terrible misfortune for mankind; not only does it define our character it also grieves the heart of God and puts us in danger of divine retribution.

What can be done? What is the answer? Actually, there is only one answer: and that answer is “forgiveness”. This book is about forgiveness. The scripture that so wonderfully conveys this truth says “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” {Psalm 103:12}.

The scripture references in this book are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Contents

Chapter One: The FIRST ADAM	4
Chapter Two: THE SECOND ADAM	10
Chapter Three: LOVE	17
Chapter Four: WHEN A RIGHTEOUS MAN SINS	23
Chapter Five: SAMSON FORGIVEN	29
Chapter Six: DAVID FORGIVEN	36
Chapter Seven: SOLOMON FORGIVEN	42
Chapter Eight: PETER FORGIVEN	47
Chapter Nine: PAUL FORGIVEN	52
Chapter Ten: THE PRODIGAL SON FORGIVEN	57
Chapter Eleven: THE THIEF ON THE CROSS FORGIVEN	61
About The Author	65

CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST ADAM

Everything starts somewhere. The book of Genesis opens with the words “In the beginning,” then unfolds the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them by the hand of God. By his commands and by his power everything came into existence. Then God created man in his own image and he created the woman from the man and declared that everything was very good. Adam and Eve were placed in Eden and were basically told to enjoy life, but one command was given. There were in the garden two unique trees, one was “the tree of life” the other was “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. The command to them was that they not partake of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for it would bring death to them. They broke the commandment and sin and death did enter the human race and continues with us unto this day.

It was in the garden that sin entered into man and the image of God within him was marred. Paul the apostle said, that “By one- man sin entered into the world and death by sin” (Romans 5:12). So now we know when sin entered into mankind, but we are also told how it entered. It is so important that we understand that sin did not originate with man; it entered into man by means of the influence of the Serpent. The book of Genesis reveals the presence of a serpent that caught the attention of Eve and encouraged her to eat of the forbidden fruit with assurances that to do so would not bring death, but would rather make them like God.

The serpent also said that God knows this to be true. Well it wasn’t, because, the serpent was a liar. It is affirmed throughout the scriptures that Satan was using the appearance of a serpent to tempt Adam and Eve to disobey the commandment of God. Whatever form he may take we must remember the kind of being he really is. In the scriptures he is called by names that highlight his true

character. Here are a few; “The wicked one” (Matthew 13:19), “A liar” (John 8:44), and the apostle John referred to him, as “the dragon, that old serpent, the devil and Satan, that deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). He also appears as “An angel of light” (II Corinthians 11:14). We must not forget that as in the beginning Satan still seeks to influence the hearts and minds of men to get them to continue to do evil in every generation. Adam and Eve found out the hard way that they had been deceived. But the wrong had been done and the consequences have continued to this day. But at least we now know that sin came into us from the influence of another presence.

Sin continued to be part of the nature of Adam and Eve and appeared in Cain who killed his brother Abel. And from generation to generation sin has appeared in man and appears among us in various ways. But hope was also given in the garden when God said that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. We know today that the “woman’s seed” referred to Christ who would come into the world through a woman and who would defeat the evil one and bring forgiveness to man and the hope of eternal salvation. The scriptures make it clear that all men have sinned in some way or another. Lest we deceive ourselves, Paul declared “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). No matter how good we think we are, our sinful nature remains and we still fall short of the glory of God. His original intent was that we should be as he is, for we were made in His image, not a physical image, but a spiritual image. It is the inward man or woman that is the true essence of our being. Its not how we look in our outward appearance, it is what is going on within us that produces our behavior in this life.

Why should we be reminded of this fact? Because we are prone to forget that even the best among us are not perfect in every way. In fact, the apostle Paul also stated that “there is none righteous no, not one” (Romans 3:10). In the full sense of the meaning of the word “righteous”, we still fall short of being without blemish. Some of us have attributes that put us in the best light in the presence of others. Yet, we all know our true shortcomings and the wrongs we have done in our lives.

How often do we say to ourselves “I wish I hadn’t done that”, or “I should not think that way”, or “I’m really ashamed of myself when I remember that shameful thing that I did”. We must be honest with ourselves and not be lifted up with a sense of perfection by comparing ourselves with others. Neither must we judge others harshly when they have failed.

There is a thing called “repentance” that changes everything in the sight of God. Anyone who has turned to God has had his own sense of wrongdoing and his consciousness of his personal failures in doing that which is right. After repentance he may begin to do more of that which is right rather than that which is wrong. But he also must not exalt himself above those who have not yet turned from evil to do good.

A personal sense of piety above others is a dangerous state of mind. Sometimes the more strictly religious we become, the more judgmental we are toward others. This is true whether we are religious Jews or religious Christians. We can tend to think that we have arrived, and begin to look down on others who have not yet turned to God and learned to walk in the paths of righteousness. Jesus told a parable that completely illustrates this truth. It is written that “He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others” (Luke 18:9). He was addressing some who were confident in their own righteousness and who looked down upon everyone else. The person he spoke of in the parable was a Pharisee, one who felt that he so diligently kept the law that he was absolutely above everyone else who was not like him.

Jesus said this Pharisee was in the temple praying and not far from him was another man praying, who was a Publican. A publican was a tax collector who took advantage of his position to do many things that were unfair to the people. Tax collectors did not have a good reputation. So many of them were unjust in their tax collecting duties and were not highly respected. Jesus said that the Pharisee saw the tax collector praying in the distance, and he thanked God that he was not like other

men, including the tax collector. He mentioned to God the fact that he himself was not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. The Pharisee also spoke to God of his fasting and his tithing (Luke 18:11-12). Jesus said that the tax collector would not even lift his eyes toward heaven, but beat his breast saying; "God be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Jesus said that the tax collector went home justified before God. He further stated that "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled; and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14). We must avoid the temptation to exalt ourselves above others simply because we are now God-conscious and walking in the light and not in darkness. If we have received forgiveness, we must give others the same right to turn to God as we have done. Actually, there are a number of places in the gospels where Jesus pointed this out in the presence of many of the highly religious ones of his time.

He was in the temple teaching the people and he was approached by the scribes and Pharisees who brought a woman before him who had been caught in adultery. They said that she should be stoned according to the law of Moses. They asked Jesus what he had to say about this; they waited for his reaction. He was silent for a moment and stooped to the ground and wrote in the sand. Some scholars think that he was writing the ten commandments. He then rose up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7). The words that Jesus spoke convicted them in their own conscience, because they knew that they were not blameless, and to begin stoning the woman for her particular sin was not right.

So, one by one they left, and the woman remained before Jesus. He then asked her what happened to her accusers, and were there none to condemn her. She said, "no one, Lord." And Jesus said to her "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11). We must be careful not to be too harsh in our judgment of others, because the memory of our own sins may come back to haunt us. Actually, we must accept the fact that we are all sinners. Some have sinned more and some have

sinned less. But the capacity to sin and the inclination to do so is in all of us to some degree. Our lives are multifaceted with many influences and circumstances that affect us in various ways.

It is obvious that the best neighborhoods, and the best families, and the right type of upbringing usually produce better types of people; not perfect people, but better behaving people. There are many reasons behind the terrible behavior of some people compared to the better behavior of others. If our circumstances and our situations in life were changed, and the influences around us were changed, our tendencies to do wrong may also be changed.

The wise words of Solomon, points out this fact, that if we “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). It is obvious that our upbringing has a lot to do with how we might act as we continue in life. The apostle Paul also points out the importance of the kind of companions that we mingle with, that they can have an influence on our behavior. He said; “Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habit’s” (I Corinthians 15:33).

The point is simply this; we are not without the capacity to sin. Some have sin stirred up within them through various circumstances, and some through contact with various individuals. Their lives end up corrupted and distorted. Some may even end up in prison, some may become prostitutes, some may become drug dealers. We cringe when we see how far the pendulum can swing in the wrong direction. When we think of some people and their way of life and its consequences, that old saying comes to mind: “But for the grace of God, there go I.”

Sin can take us in so many directions, and some are further down the road of evil than others. But let us remember that we are all capable of doing that which is wrong. This emphasis on sin in this chapter is to help us get a glimpse of how far we have fallen as the descendants of Adam from the original glory of being made in the image and likeness of God. The original image of God within man has faded. The book of Hebrews reminds us that man was made “a little lower than the angels”

(Hebrews 2:7). The status of man has obviously changed. We must now understand that we all need mercy and forgiveness, because no matter how much or how little we may have sinned, there is really “none righteous, no not one.”

CHAPTER TWO

THE SECOND ADAM

There are numerous scriptures that compare Jesus to Adam. In fact, Jesus is called the last Adam. He came to help us start all over again. In the book of First Corinthians it is written “The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (I Corinthians 15:45). Jesus came to give us new life. Although he came through a woman, he did not come by means of a man. As it is written, “The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven” (I Corinthians 15:47).

When Adam sinned, the corruption began, and has continued throughout mankind. But as God promised in the garden, there was to come the seed of the woman (not the seed of the man) and he would show his power against the evil one. Not all was revealed in the garden regarding the coming of Christ and his effect within those who would believe. The scriptures as they would continue to be written, would reveal more and more about the coming of Christ and his eternal effect within mankind.

The prophet Isaiah stated most clearly and emphatically, “For unto us a Child is born. unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:6,7). In speaking of the coming of Christ, Isaiah was declaring that his birth would be like none other, for he would be a marvel and a wonder to the world. The apostle Paul put it this way: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (II Corinthians 5:19).

This all started with the woman, the one whom God had chosen to bear the Christ within her and to bring him forth into the world. We know now, of course, that her name was Mary. She was a most unique woman in God's sight. She was indeed a virgin and a most devout and God-fearing young woman. We are told of the visitation of the angel Gabriel to her, and his words to her were; "Rejoice highly favored one, the LORD is with you; blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28).

The angel also told her "You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33). Mary was astonished at the angel's words and asked, "How can this be since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34). She was engaged to be married, but her marriage had not yet been consummated. However, the birth of Jesus would have nothing to do with a man. The angel had said that Jesus would be called "The Son of The Highest". The angel then responded to her by saying "The Holy Spirit will come upon you; and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called The Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The angel was making it clear that this would happen by the power and presence of God that would surround her. The miracle of the essence of God being planted in the womb of a woman was the beginning of a new generation of man coming through Christ. The scriptures speak of the "new birth" or men being born again. Jesus famous words, "You must be born again" make it plain that we must start all over again, by receiving new life through Christ and that it will be perfected beyond the grave.

After Jesus was born, he grew and began to unfold as different, and deeply spiritual, and truly God-conscious. Even when he was young, he confounded the religious scholars and priests in the temple after staying behind while his parents were returning home from being taxed in Bethlehem. It was said that "All who heard Him were astonished at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:47).

He grew and matured and was later baptized by John the Baptist, who declared that he was not worthy to even remove Jesus sandals. When Jesus was baptized by John, the Spirit descended upon him and “A voice came from heaven, saying; “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Jesus had come into his full maturity as a man and was to begin his ministry. But, before actually beginning his ministry, he first had to face the Evil One in the wilderness for forty days and nights. We must remember that Adam was tested by Satan and he failed. Jesus was tested by Satan intensely, comprehensively, and in every possible way; not for a moment, but for well over a month.

We can assume that in every way possible, Satan tested Jesus responses to every question, every suggestion, and every proposition to get him to do wrong in the sight of God. It all ended with Jesus refusing to violate his conscience toward God. The scriptures do not reveal to us every way Satan tempted Jesus during those days in the wilderness. The only insight we are given as to the manner in which he was tempted is set forth in three different forms.

First; he was challenged to prove that he was the Son of God by turning stones into bread since he had been fasting during the 40 days of his temptation. Jesus responded by saying “It is written: man, shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). It was not bread that was sustaining him, it was God’s word. Jesus had total reliance upon God’s faithfulness and power as he fulfilled his mission upon earth.

Then Satan showed him from the top of a high mountain all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time and said that he would give him all power and authority over them if Jesus would worship him. Jesus responded with the words “Get behind me Satan for it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Luke 4:8).

Finally, Satan brought him to Jerusalem and, “Set Him upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “if you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here, for it is written that He shall give his angels charge over you to keep you, and in their hands they shall bear you up; Lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Luke 4:9-11). Jesus answered him with the words, “It has been said, “You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Luke 4:12). Jesus was saying in effect: I will not put myself in danger to test whether God will respond and save me. Then Satan left him for a season. It would not be the last time that Satan would try to dissuade, or distract Jesus in the course of his ministry. The writer to the Hebrews speaking of Jesus as our High Priest, after his resurrection declared “We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

After his temptation “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all” (Luke 4:14,15). He returned also to his home town of Nazareth and spoke there in the synagogue opening the book of the prophet Isaiah to the passage that said “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me. To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18,19). Jesus then closed the book and told the people that what he had just read to them was today being fulfilled in their hearing. The people “marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (verse 22).

Jesus did go on to fulfill the words he had focused on from the book of the prophet Isaiah. He showed great compassion toward the people. He healed the sick, he cast out devils, and he even raised the dead. He also taught the people many things that touched their hearts and the things he said drew multitudes to hear him preach. The Sermon on the Mount was a great example of the

response of the people to his presence among them. They would not leave the mountain, even to eat. They were deeply absorbed in his words. It was on that occasion that Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the multitude and satisfy their hunger. His ministry was miracle after miracle for those who came to hear him.

But the greatest wonder was his total forgiveness to many who had great sins in their lives and were looked down upon by those around them with disgust. His compassion for sinners is shown throughout the four gospels. One example in particular was the account of the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wiped them with her hair and anointed his feet with oil. (Luke 7:37,38). This happened in the house of a Pharisee who had invited Jesus to dinner. When he saw what happened, he had his own inward thoughts that questioned whether Jesus was truly a prophet; for if he was, he should know that this woman was a sinner. Jesus knew his thoughts and told a parable about two debtors: one who owed much, and the other who owed little. But neither could pay their debt. Jesus said that the creditor forgave them both. Jesus then asked the Pharisee which one of the debtors would love the creditor the most. Simon the Pharisee had to admit that the one who was forgiven the most would love the creditor the most. Jesus told Simon that he was right. He then said that the woman whose sins were many are forgiven her. He emphasized the fact that those who are forgiven much will love much in return. (Luke 7:47).

Many of those who were present at the dinner and heard Jesus speak wondered “Who is this that even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49). The use of the word “Even” points out that Jesus did so many remarkable things that caused the people to draw near to him throughout the land, and he even forgives sins! He was a deliverer, a comforter, a healer, a life-giver to those who had died and he raised them to life again, and now he was forgiving sins. In the minds of those who sat and ate with Jesus on this occasion it was hard to accept the fact that Jesus could forgive sins, for in their minds only God can forgive the sins of man.

In the book of Matthew, we read of another instance where Jesus forgave sins. A man was brought to him lying in a bed being carried by others who laid the bed down before Jesus.

The man was paralyzed and could not walk. Jesus said to him, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2). There were Scribes present who felt in themselves that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy in giving forgiveness of sins to the man. Jesus knew their thoughts and said; "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'your sins are forgiven you,' or Arise and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins---then He said to the paralytic, Arise, take up your bed and go to your house. And he arose and departed to his house (Matthew 9:4-7). The man did rise up and returned to his home no longer crippled or bed-ridden. The people marveled at this miracle and glorified God.

Jesus is more than "The Son of Man" he also is the "Son of God". It is this dual identity that brings salvation to the human race. He identifies with man and he identifies with God. Before Jesus became the Son of Man, he already was the Son of God. The incarnation allowed him to enter the human race and identify with man. On one occasion Jesus declared; "Before Abraham was, I Am" (John 8:58). So, when Jesus forgave sins while upon earth, it was because he had the authority to do so, being the Son of God. Paul said that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Corinthians 5:19). The mystery and wonder of Christ being before man and being with God and actually sharing the glory with God still amazes us. Jesus put it this way "I and my Father are One" (John 10:30).

Jesus indeed was no ordinary man. He came from above to dwell among us and to give his life for the sins of mankind. The Old Testament is full of the accounts of innumerable sacrifices for sins that the Jewish people offered on the Day of Atonement every year. They had to bring a lamb without blemish to be sacrificed for the sins of the people. (Leviticus 23:12). In the New Testament,

John the Baptist said to the people regarding Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He is compared to the sacrificial lamb of the Old Testament. A lamb can never truly become the equivalent of a man, nor be of sufficient value to provide forgiveness for sins.

The sacrifices of old were to embed in the minds of the people that some living thing must give up its life to save men from the consequences of their sins. The gentle, innocent, and helpless little lamb was to be a symbol of the One who would come and be called the Lamb of God. In (Hebrews 10:11-12), regarding the insufficiency of the old sacrifices it is said; “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God”

God wants us to understand that salvation is not something that came to us easily, and not without a great sacrifice. Jesus came as a perfect man, and gave himself as the perfect sacrifice for mankind. He gave everything he was as the perfect and Holy One, to meet the highest requirement for the sins of the world. The prophet Isaiah spoke of Jesus as being “led as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7).

The first Adam sinned and brought us death. Our lives upon earth are limited and come to an end by death at some point. Jesus came into the world and through giving himself up in death, broke the curse of death and opened the door to eternal life. Jesus gave God a reason to forgive us and to let us live forever.

CHAPTER THREE

LOVE

It is of utmost importance that we come to understand that there can be no forgiveness without love. In the book of (Proverbs 10:12), it is written that “Love covers all sins”. We are not forgiven because we are worthy of forgiveness, we are forgiven because of God’s love toward us. The central message of the New Testament is found in the gospel of John, which says: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Notice the words, “so loved”. God’s level of love toward mankind was great enough and deep enough to move him to send Jesus into the world as a man, and as a sinless and perfect sacrifice to redeem man from eternal damnation. We were all rightfully under condemnation because of the many sins that we all have committed, and the capacity to continue to sin in a multitude of ways: but Jesus was not sent to declare condemnation, He was sent to bring salvation. John says; “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17}.

It was God’s love that paved the way for our salvation. It was Christ’s sacrifice of himself as the New Man, the Second Adam, perfect and holy to pave the way for our forgiveness. It all started with the love of God and ended with the love of Christ also toward us and his willingness to give himself for a ransom for our sins. Jesus paid the price, but behind it all was this precious thing called “Love”, both the love of God and the love of Christ. The level of love was in its highest expression in both the act of God in sending Christ into the world and the act of Christ in giving himself for the sins of the world.

Jesus told his disciples that “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). He then said, “You are my friends”. He went on to emphasize the importance of his disciples following him and being obedient to his words to bear witness to the world around them. Jesus made it clear that love at its highest level is when one man will give his life to save the lives of others. God has loved us enough to make a way for our forgiveness and spare us from his wrath to come. There will yet be the Day of Judgment when God will direct His anger toward the unrepentant and the continuous evils of mankind. But in the meantime, love prevails for those who will believe in the sacrifice of Christ as the atonement for their sins.

What do we have to do to obtain our salvation? Well, it has been initiated on God’s side with love, what will our response be? It must be this thing called “repentance”. There must be a change of heart toward God. There must be an acknowledgement that we have sinned, and we must have a desire to turn away from a life of sin and unrighteousness to a life that is pleasing to God.

Whether it is in the Old Testament period of life, or in the New Testament period of life; to obtain forgiveness from God there must be acknowledgment of our sins and the realization that we must be willing to change our behavior. To repent is to be aware that we are wrong in our hearts and in our ways before God. There must be regret for things done by us that were wrong, wicked, corrupt or displeasing in the sight of God. There must be a certain sense of our personal guilt and of our behavior that makes us want to ask God for forgiveness and mercy, and to ask for His help in bringing about a change in our way of life.

In the Old Testament, it was the sacrifice of the spotless lambs and the confession of the people before God of their sins and failures. Today it is the One Sacrifice of Christ on our behalf which has satisfied the heart of God forever, and no more sacrifices for sin is required. But as under the Old

Covenant, repentance of sins was the key to forgiveness, also under the New Covenant repentance of sins is still required.

The people of God under the Old Covenant were forgiven, and continued to be forgiven because of their repentance, and because of the love of God toward them. It cannot be contested that the people of God of the Old Covenant, and the people of God of the New Covenant still need forgiveness, and still must repent when they have failed and sinned before God. The prophet Isaiah put it this way.” Seek; the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:6,7).

It is also interesting to note that earlier in this same chapter the prophet revealed that God would make an Everlasting Covenant of the sure mercies of David, and that it would reach the nations that knew not God and they would run unto the One who was that witness of God unto the world. Of course, it was another prophecy of the coming of Christ and that He would draw all men unto himself from every nation.

All of this is rooted in the Love of God and His abundance of mercy for them that come to Him in repentance and who indeed want to be forgiven. The apostle John put it this way: “God is Love” (I John 4:16). The essence of the Gospel is about the love of God, and that our forgiveness is based, upon the love of God. This is why we refer to the Gospel as “Good News”. It tells us that God loves us and will not destroy us, and that a full sacrifice has been made through Christ on our behalf. John said, “we love Him because He first loved us” (I John 4:19).

The real foundation of our salvation will always be love. Because of this fact, we are encouraged to love one another. Our lives should be governed by love and not by hate. As has been mentioned before in previous chapters, Jesus showed his love and forgiveness on numerous occasions to certain

individuals whose lives were certainly not spotless. A most interesting example was in regard to the woman at the well in Samaria. There seems to have been a divine impulse of love that moved Jesus to go to Samaria and arrive at the well of water at the same time that a Samaritan woman had come to draw water from the well. In (John 4:4), It is written that “He needed to go through Samaria”. It appears to have been indeed a providential meeting.

The Jews in general had no contact with the Samaritans because of religious differences. So, when the woman reached the well and Jesus asked her for a drink of water, she was amazed and said: “How is it that you being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9). Jesus responded by saying to her, that if she knew the gift of God, and who he was that was asking a drink from her, she would ask him for a drink of living water. Then Jesus revealed that he knew all about her. He told her to bring her husband, and then added that the man she was with was not her husband and that she had been married five times before. The point of it all was that this woman had a strong spiritual interest in the things of God in spite of her past and her present life style. She was indeed waiting for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus revealed to her that He was the Messiah and she believed in Him and spread the news throughout the area that the Messiah was at the well. Apparently, the woman at the well was loved by Jesus because of her spiritual interests and faith in the coming of the Messiah

It is still all about love which is the reason behind forgiveness. The compulsion that Jesus felt to go to Samaria and meet the woman at the well was certainly because of love. The Samaritans were to receive the knowledge of the Messiah and of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus visit to the well and his sharing with the woman the knowledge of the gift of God which was salvation through Him who was indeed the Messiah. She believed and shared the knowledge of her meeting with Christ to the people in the city. They responded by coming out of the city to meet Jesus for themselves and then also believing in Him.

Jesus was constantly speaking about love and showing love in his many encounters with the people. A most interesting account was when a lawyer (interpreter of the law of Moses) asked the question, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25) Jesus responded by asking the man what was written in the law. The man responded by saying "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself" (verse 27). Jesus acknowledged that the man had answered rightly and told him to do as it was written and he would live. The man in seeking to justify himself, asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered him by telling him the parable about the good Samaritan who saved the life of a man who fell among thieves, who beat him severely and robbed him, and left him to die on the roadside. Jesus said that two men passed by the man and kept walking on their way. He said that one man was a Priest and the other one a Levite. Both were religious figures of the Jewish faith. But the Samaritan man whose people were not held in high esteem by the Jews because of their religious positions; he stopped and helped the man, by binding up his wounds, and taking him to a nearby Inn, and paying for his care there by the Inn keeper, and committed himself to pay any more money that might accrue during the man's stay at the Inn. Jesus asked the lawyer who was the neighbor to the man who had been hijacked on the road. The lawyer had to admit that it was the one who showed mercy to the man in need. Jesus told the Lawyer to go and do likewise.

This account could also be an example of love for our enemies in their most difficult and tragic circumstances. Jesus was making it clear that the word neighbor does not necessarily mean someone close to us in a physical location, or a good friend of ours, or someone in our residential community.

Jesus was making it clear that love is not just a good feeling, it is an action that displays the desire to care for another person in the time of their greatest need. We can certainly take a lot from this account. We cannot just say we are religious and have all the outward appearances, but fail to follow

the paths of righteous behavior which has its essence in love. Again, it all starts with love, God's love toward us which has given us forgiveness, and our love toward Him in thankfulness for His love. We are then to show our love toward others in appreciation of God's love toward us. We are indeed to love God and our neighbor as ourselves.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN A RIGHTEOUS MAN SINS

Perhaps the most disappointing thing to ever see is when a righteous man has sinned. It puts a blot on his record of good works and godly behavior. His life had been a light for others to see and a pattern for others to follow. When he sins, for whatever reason or in whatever way, it sends shock waves among those who looked up to him. Some who looked up to him as a model to follow in paths of righteousness are discouraged in their own attempts to follow the Lord. Some become confused as to how that could happen to one whose record for so long had been blameless. Some even brand him as a hypocrite and speak harshly about him to others.

Sin is never a pleasant thing to see or to hear about in the life of one who has been righteous in so many ways. But there is a caution given to us by Jesus. He said clearly to us “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1). We must be careful not to be so self-righteous that we fail to see the blots in our own lives. We certainly can judge whether something is right or wrong, but we are not to pass judgment on the character of another, when the whole story is not clear in our own eyes as it is in God’s eyes. Jesus in speaking of “judge not” used the word “brother” in referring to one whose life we may find fault with. One who is a brother indicates family. We must walk in love, especially toward someone who is indeed part of our family in God.

Are we then to ignore the reality of someone else’s sin as if they never happened? Of course not. But to some degree, we are to show love and respect not for the evil that was done, but for the one who has failed. The apostle Peter, put it this way “Love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). We really have no true message to the world of forgiveness of sins if we who have been forgiven, have a non-forgiving attitude toward someone among us who has sinned. We must never forget that

the evil one is still active and seeks to influence the hearts and minds of men in innumerable ways to try to get them to sin. So, when a righteous man sins, there is more than meets the eye as to how it happened and the source of the inclination. In the midst of some of his personal struggles Paul said; “O wretched man that I am” (Romans 7:24). We know that the righteous can fail, and sometimes may even sin, but sin shall not have dominion over him because forgiveness still remains and recovery from his failures always comes.

The apostle Paul also said; “The mystery of lawlessness is already at work” (II Thessalonians 2:7) In the Old King James version the word “iniquity” was used in place of “lawlessness”. It existed before man was created. It was present in the Wicked One, who was cast down from heaven. It then showed itself in the temptation of Adam to sin. And since the beginning of sin in man in the garden of Eden, it has continued to this day. It is good to keep in mind that in this life we will never be able to totally figure out all the ways men are snared and led into sin.

We are given some behind the scenes look at the attempt of the evil one to get Job to sin. Job was an extremely righteous man of whom God was well pleased. His life was so upright and devoted to God that Satan wanted to try to get him to sin by cursing God. His approach to God was basically the fact that everything is always going so well for Job and that he of course had so much and was surrounded by a spiritual wall that Satan could not break through. Satan basically challenged God to take the wall down and let him attack him in various ways and he would then surely curse God. God allowed the Evil One to come against Job in many ways but his life was to be spared. Job then suffered in so many terrible ways. He lost everything: his wealth, his children, and was smitten with boils all over his body. His wife finally came to him and said, “Curse God and die” His wife was saying the same words that Satan had said to God. He had said that if Job suffered enough hard-ships he would curse God and die. Job responded to his wife with these words “You speak as one of the

foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity" (Job 2:10).

Job refused to speak evil against God and accepted the good he had received along with the bad he was now receiving. The point of this reference to Job is that the mystery of iniquity starts with something beyond our eyesight. There is some influence behind it all that we cannot see, but the origin of it all is the evil one himself. Satan still works behind the scenes to interfere in the lives of men to cause them to sin or stumble or to turn away their hearts from God. There is more behind the failures of man than meets the eye.

Another example of an attempt to get a righteous man to sin was recorded in the life of Joseph. He was chosen by God to be used in a most special way to protect and shield the family of Jacob in Egypt during a time of great famine in the land. Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery because they were jealous of him having the coat of many colors given to him by their father to show him that he was the favorite among them. Also, Joseph shared with them his dreams of him becoming honored above them by God, and literally being given the rule over them. The account is recorded in Genesis 37.

Before Joseph became a ruler in Egypt he went through a difficult period, even a moment of great temptation to sin. It happened after he was brought into Egypt by the Midianites to whom he was sold by his brothers. They sold him to an officer of Pharaoh who was the Captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph quickly gained favor with this officer who recognized his unique attributes and the sense that God was with him, so he put him in charge of his household. The captain's wife set her eyes upon Joseph and wanted him to lay with her. Even though he refused to do so, she accused him of attempting to rape her, and she had grabbed his coat when he broke away from her and used it as proof that he had been with her. Even though Joseph had refused to lay with the woman and was

falsely accused of attempted rape, he was cast into prison by her husband Potiphar. It certainly can be imagined that behind this attempt to get Joseph to sin was the workings of the evil one in his attempts to interfere with God's plan to lift Joseph to a higher place as it had been revealed to him previously by the Lord. Joseph did not sin, but he was certainly put in a position to do so. If he had sinned, he would have been another righteous man who failed. Joseph did end up in prison although falsely accused for something he did not do, but nevertheless he was blessed of God even in prison. In prison he rose to prominence because the person in charge of the prison saw something special in him that caught his attention. He was then given more responsibility even to the extent of helping to oversee other prisoners who were there.

Everything that God had revealed to Joseph did come to pass through his interpreting dreams of servants of Pharaohs who were imprisoned while Joseph was there. He interpreted their dreams and it came to pass as he had said which later reached Pharaoh who had dreams that troubled him and no one could interpret them. Joseph was brought to the ruler's attention by one of his servants who was in the prison with Joseph when he interpreted their dreams. After Joseph was brought from the prison to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, he was lifted to a high position which put him in place to help his family who would come to Egypt during the time of famine. Joseph's life had its high points and its low points, but he never wavered in his faith in God, nor did he fall into sin.

But Joseph's story is not the only story of a righteous man called for divine purposes who did accomplish much to the glory of God. Yet some of them failed in some disappointing ways. The bible tells us of many who failed and turned from the high road and went to the low road in the course of their journey upon earth. The capacity to sin is still very possible even among righteous men. Jesus told us in the Lord's Prayer to say; "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13). Some may never face the challenges that others may face, and when some do fail, we must have compassion and show love and not be too harsh in our judgment. Paul said; "Brethren,

if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

Even Paul himself indicated that he had his own struggles trying to be righteous in every way at all times. He said, “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good” (Romans 7:21). He mentions a law working against the law of his mind, and says; “O wretched man that I am” (verse 24). He of course states that the answer comes through Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:1-3) There continues to be a war going on within them that believe, even though they belong to God. However, it is still the redemption through Christ that we rely upon. We are not yet perfect, but the promise is, that we shall be.

Perfection is still yet to come. The new birth is the beginning of the new life we are granted to have in Christ. There is an obvious change that we become conscious of when we accept Christ as our Savior. There is also a new person that others begin to see in us. We begin our journey in righteousness and improve in every area of our lives and personal behavior. Yet, we are not instantly made perfect. It is a process and will only be completed in the world to come. Paul put it this way; “For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (I Corinthians 15:52). He was speaking of the resurrection. He says the dead shall be raised incorruptible. It is only after death that our full perfection in Christ will be revealed. The Apostle John put it this way; “Now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him” (I John 3:2).

It is very clear that neither the righteous of the Old Testament, or the righteous of the New Testament are perfect in every way and without encountering any taint of sin in their lives before God. Forgiveness was given in Gods mercy under the Old Covenant and it is still given under the New

Covenant in Christ. Beyond the grave all of God's people will be changed and brought into full perfection in Christ our Savior and we shall be made like He is, and never sin again.

In the mean time we seek to perfect our lives from day to day, in our attitudes, our ways of expressions, and in our definitive reflection of the Christ within us. We are to love one another and remember that we are the family of God upon the earth; not yet perfect, but seeking to become more and more like Jesus in our spiritual journey. In the meantime, there is granted to us "forgiveness".

CHAPTER FIVE

SAMSON FORGIVEN

During a bleak period for the Israelites who had been under the rule of the Philistines for forty years, something unusual and of a supernatural nature happened. It was the miraculous birth of Samson that had been foretold by the visit of an Angel from heaven who came in the form of a man with an awesome countenance.

A little background of the birth of Samson is important for our understanding and appreciation of who he was and why he entered the history of the Israelites. The people of Israel had sinned greatly as they had done many times before, and turned away from the Lord to live in unacceptable ways before Him. God's anger rose to the point that He allowed the Philistines to overcome them and to rule over them for a period of forty years. Then the Lord's heart toward his people moved Him to show His mercy to them again, and manifest His power through raising up a Deliverer from among them whose distinct presence and power would be undeniable.

This man would be special, and a separated one from among the people. He would be consecrated from his birth and set apart from the people. In fact, the Angel had said that he was to be a Nazarite to God from his mother's womb. The Angel said to his mother; "Be careful not to drink wine or similar drink and not to eat anything unclean, for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines" (Judges 13:4,5).

Some servants of God are called after they grow into maturity upon the earth. Samson was called before his birth and separated unto God for a most special mission: to make a powerful statement to the Philistines that he was without a doubt, a servant of the; Most High God. Samson's mother had been barren and unable to conceive any children when the Angel from heaven appeared unto her and told her that she would conceive and bear a son and that he would be a Nazarite, "A Separated One" from his conception, and that he would bring deliverance to Israel from the grip of the Philistines.

Actually, the Angel appeared twice; first, to the woman who then shared the event with her husband Manoah, who wanted the facts to be confirmed to him by another visit from the Angel. He prayed to God that his desire might be fulfilled, and God granted to him a second visit of the Angel. He came again and told Manoah that everything his wife had told him was true. Then Manoah offered a burnt sacrifice to God and the Angel entered the flames and ascended back to heaven and Manoah and his wife fell on their faces before God, totally in awe of what they had just seen.

The Angel had made it clear that Samson was to be separate in his appearance and in his lifestyle and behavior. His hair was not to be shaved, he was not to drink wine, nor eat any unclean thing. His way of life was to be righteous and his commitment to God was to be complete. After he reached maturity, "The Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him" (Judges 13:25). The Lord was beginning to acquaint Samson with His presence in ways that he would be able to recognize.

The beginning of the use of the power resting upon Samson started after he was attracted to a young, Philistine woman. She caught his attention and he could not forget her and wanted his parents to arrange a marriage between the two. Although his parents resisted at first, they later yielded to his request and did set up the culmination of the marriage in a way common to the

Philistine people. We are told in the scriptures that God was behind the whole situation to bring “An occasion to move against the Philistines” (Judges 14:4).

Prior to the marriage culmination ceremony, which would require a feast of seven days which Samson would bear the expense for, on the journey to the preparation for the event Samson was met by a Lion that roared against him and mounted an attack. But the Spirit of God came upon him and he ripped the lion apart with his bare hands. His parents were not aware of this event on the journey and Samson kept it to himself. When Samson returned again to the area, he noticed that something unusual had happened inside the carcass of the Lion. There was a swarm of bees inside the remains and a honey comb was there full of honey. The bees had built a nest and produced honey within the lion’s carcass. Samson took the honeycomb and later shared some of the honey with his parents on the way back to the seven-day feast. When he returned to the feast, he presented a riddle to the men attending the ceremony that simply said “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet” (Judges 14:14).

Samson told the riddle to the thirty Philistine men who attended the feast to present to them a challenge. He offered thirty sheets and thirty changes of garments if they could give an answer that would solve the meaning of the riddle. If they could not give the right answer to the meaning of the riddle, they would owe him the payment of the thirty sheets and the thirty changes of garments. A timeline was set by Samson for the riddle to be solved, and that was to be by the end of the seven-day feast.

The Philistine men could not come up with the answer, so they told his wife to get the answer from Samson or, ‘We will burn you and your father’s house with fire’ (Judges 14:15). The woman was under great stress and fear and wept and pressed Samson for the answer to the meaning of the riddle. She questioned his love for her as she begged him for the answer to the riddle. Finally, Samson told

her the meaning and she told the Philistine men, who told Samson the answer which greatly stirred up his anger. He went out to a place called Ashkelon and under the power of the Spirit he killed thirty men and took their garments and sheets and gave them to the thirty men at the feast. Samson being still in anger departed from the area and returned to his father's house.

It took a while for his anger to settle down and he felt calm enough to go back to his wife. When he returned to their dwelling, he found out that his wife had been given to another man, a companion of Samson. The woman's father thought that Samson was never coming back and that he hated his wife because of her telling the Philistine men the meaning of the riddle. The woman's father, offered another daughter to Samson to be his wife. But Samson's anger was stirred up again and he left the house and captured foxes and tied their tails together placing torches between their tails and releasing them into the fields of the Philistines. The flames from the tails of the foxes set on fire cornfields, vineyards, and olive trees. The reaction of the Philistines was to destroy Samson's wife and father by burning them up. This act of the Philistines caused Samson to respond again in anger and he killed a large number of them and then left the area.

More and more, Samson was seen to be a great problem and danger to the Philistines and their rule over the Israelites. The Philistines wanted to capture and destroy Samson, so they gathered a large number of men and camped in the area of Judah. The rulers of Judah met with those leaders of the Philistines who camped in the area told them that they wanted revenge upon Samson for his killings among their people and for the havoc he was causing among the Philistines.

When the leaders of Judah heard the complaint of the Philistines, they took a large group of men to meet with Samson where he was camped out. They told him of the presence of the Philistines in their area and that they wanted him to be delivered to them. Samson agreed to be bound and delivered to them, but wanted the Israelites not to harm him in any way. They bound him securely

and tied his hands together. The Jews then brought him back to the area in Judah where the Philistines were camped. When the leaders of the Philistines saw Samson being brought to them in bonds; they shouted out against him, but the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the bonds upon him snapped and broke as if they were nothing but threads. And Samson saw a jawbone of a donkey and used it as a weapon and killed a thousand men with it. He again manifested his awesome power from God and struck even more fear in the hearts and minds of the Philistines. They could no longer easily oppress the Israelites or trouble them unnecessarily because of the presence and power of Samson.

Although the Philistines still remained the overlords of Israel, Samson had broken their force and made them aware that the God of the Israelites was with him in a most powerful way. After these events, Samson held the position of the Judge of Israel for twenty years. It is important that we do not forget the good and worthy works of Samson over this period of time as a Deliverer and as a judge over the people and a fearsome presence to the Philistines.

We are told that things did change over time. Samson's inclination toward Philistine women began to surface again. He went to the town of Gaza and saw a prostitute that caught his attention, so he slept with her. There were Philistine men who were aware that Samson was there and hid out to ambush him and kill him. Samson arose at midnight and left the woman's place by breaking down the doors and then breaking through the gates of the city. He then carried the gates to the top of a hill and threw them down. This great display of power kept the Philistine men at bay and they feared to go after him. At another time Samson's urge toward Philistine women brought him into contact with the woman called Delilah. She seemed to have captured his heart and he could not stay away from her. The Philistine Lords wanted to try to find out the secret of Samson's power and what would cause it to leave him. They pressed Delilah to find out the secret and they gave her money to do so.

When Delilah pressed Samson for the secret, he played with her a number of times, but none of the things he told her were true, for each time she tried to apply them he rose up in power and broke free from any entanglements she put upon him. She pressed him so intensely and then questioned his love for her, so he finally told her of his consecration to God and the sign of his consecration was his unshaven hair. He told her that if the sign of his separation unto God was removed, the power would leave him and he would be simply like any other man.

The Philistines were hiding out around Delilah's house and when Samson fell asleep and she shaved his head, the Philistines stormed the house and captured Samson. After they bound him, they put out his eyes and placed him in prison, and put him in chains, and had him grinding in the prison mill. What a pitiful condition the great Nazarite, the great warrior, and Judge of Israel was in. The shame, the helplessness, the bondage, and the blindness, and under the complete control of the Philistines. We can only imagine the shame that he felt before God for the paths that he had taken that put him finally into this condition. We must believe that there was sorrow and repentance in his heart. The scriptures tell us that, "However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaven" (Judges 16:22). Over a period of time, the sign of his separation unto God was visible again.

The Philistines at this time of Samson's captivity wanted to have a great celebration in the sacred building of their god to give praise for the defeating and humiliating of Samson. They had him brought out of prison and put on display before the large gathering of people attending the event, to show him in a shameful way and to mock him as they exalted their god. However; Samson had asked the young man who brought him up out of prison to place his hands upon the two main pillars of the temple. There were people on the upper and lower levels of the building. Samson, with his hands upon each post of the building supporting the huge balcony, "Called upon the Lord. Saying "O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes" (Judges 16:28).

God did remember Samson. It was not just his present circumstances that defined his full life. Much had gone before that was honorable and of great benefit to the people of Israel. We must see the whole picture of a person's life who may have failed at some point, in some way, to properly evaluate who they truly were in spite of their failures. God strengthened Samson as he pushed against the huge pillars of the religious structure of the god of the Philistines and everything began tumbling down and large numbers of people were killed. In fact, it was about three thousand people who died in the crashing of temple. Samson also died with his enemies, but he died being honored by God, and obviously forgiven by God, for God granted his mercy and power to him, "one more time".

CHAPTER SIX

DAVID FORGIVEN

It is written that God said of David; “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22). When David was officially chosen to replace king Saul, he was selected from among his seven brothers because his heart in the sight of God was special. He had a heart toward God from his youth, and godly instincts that in God’s sight qualified him to be the next king of Israel.

Having a heart toward God is unique among men and sets a man apart from other men because his affection and longings are toward God and not toward the things of man. It is written that “Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). Enoch walked so closely and continually with God that, suddenly God took him and he disappeared into thin air into the realm of God to be permanently with the Lord.

David was chosen by the Prophet Samuel from among his older brothers by the guidance of God. He was anointed with oil, “And the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward” (1 Samuel 16:13). The life of David was filled with many unique and wonderful manifestations of the power and presence of God that was with him continually. As a shepherd he faced a lion and a bear with a slingshot and a staff, and killed them both to protect his flock. He later faced Goliath with unshakeable faith and brought him down to the ground with only his slingshot. His consciousness of God and of the anointing that was upon him held him steady in the midst of those difficult challenges.

When David became king, he ruled the people with dignity and godly behavior and with great power as the leader and warrior in charge of the armies of Israel. Through most of his years as king of

Israel and leader of their military, his service to God and to the people was blameless. His sensitivity of heart toward the people was evident in most of his reign as king. In fact, a large part of the book of Psalms was written by David and even today we feed upon his words of spiritual instruction and ways of faith in our walk with God. The Psalms make it so clear, that his heart was indeed inclined toward God and focused on pleasing the Lord. We need to appreciate the fact, that so much of what David did and said in his life and in his writings have helped to guide us in our journey of faith today.

Was David totally blameless, and without sin all the days of his life? No, and might I add, “neither are we”. The time did come in David’s life when he did fail. We all know the story of Bathsheba, the married woman that was naked upon a top level of her house and was washing herself there and was seen by David, who saw her from the roof top of the palace, and was immediately attracted to her and wanted to have her brought to him. Her husband was a soldier in the army of Israel and was away at war at that time when David faced the temptation presented to him when he saw Bathsheba bathing in an unenclosed area of her home and could be seen from the roof of the palace.

Apparently, the temptation was so great at that time, that David felt that he had to have the woman brought to him in the palace; and he lay with her. In their encounter together Bathsheba became pregnant and informed David about it. David in wanting to cover his tracks in the encounter with Bathsheba, had her husband Uriah brought back to him that he might tell him to go home and spend some time with his wife. But Uriah was a dedicated Israelite and committed to the army and would not go home to be with his wife, but remained with a group of soldiers in front of the king’s house. When David learned that Uriah had not gone home to enjoy being with his wife, he had Uriah brought to him again and questioned him about it, and learned that the man’s devotion to the army was so strong that while others were on the front lines fighting, he felt he could not go home to spend time with his wife. David then tried another way to get him to go home by getting Uriah drunk and

thought that might make him want to go home and be with his wife. Uriah still would not leave the other soldiers who were on the palace grounds.

Finally, David called his Commanding Officer and told him to put Uriah in a top fighting force and send that force close to the enemies walled bastion and then draw back from Uriah and let him die in battle. Something was happening deep within David that was becoming more obvious day by day. The godly and God conscious man was beginning to show wicked and evil inclinations that had not appeared before in his life. It seemed like everything was going haywire in his heart. When we read the many accounts of David's activities in the two books of Samuel before he sinned, and read the Psalms that he sang before God as he played upon his harp; we are indeed surprised that one so righteous and of instinctive holiness could drop so low to do such wrong.

His commander followed the king's commands and included Uriah among his top warriors who drew near to the enemy walls of defense and then withdrew some of his warriors from Uriah, to let him fight with less support which led to his death, and the death of some others on the front line of attack. The commander brought back the news to David and he received it well; and had Bathsheba brought back to him, and she became his wife.

David thought everything would now be alright and he could look forward to the birth of his child that Bathsheba was carrying, and enjoy the presence of his new wife. But suddenly the Prophet Nathan came to see him and told him a story that really was a picture of his unnecessary and unacceptable behavior. Then the Prophet let him know that God was greatly displeased and that David would suffer the consequences. There would be much trouble in the land. He also told him that in his own house and family things would be chaotic and that he himself would be embarrassed and shamed, and that the child that Bathsheba was carrying would die. The words of Nathan hit

David like a stone, and he admitted his sins, and then the Prophet said; “The LORD also has put away your sins” (II Samuel 12:13).

Although his sins were put away, and forgiveness had been given, things would not be easy as the future unfolded. But in the midst of it all God’s mercies toward David would still prevail. After the first child of David through Bathsheba had died, she became pregnant again and bore a son and called his name Solomon. The scriptures highlight this event by saying, “Now the LORD loved him” (II Samuel 12:24). The birth of Solomon and God’s favor toward him was the beginning of the continuance of the royal line of David in a most impressive way. Solomon grew up to follow the path of his father in a most noteworthy and influential way. Many things happened to disturb and distress David and to interfere with his rule over the people. One problem was among two of his sons. One son had an affair with his brother’s sister and then soured on her and put her out of his place in shame. Her brother Absalom, heard of the affair and the disgrace his brother caused his sister and in revenge, he killed him. These matters grieved David, but before he could get past these matters, his son Absalom began to make plans to take the kingdom out of his father’s hand. He wanted to replace his father as the king of Israel.

Absalom was unique, and he had a striking appearance, and certainly appealed to the people and began to draw their attention to himself. He was engaged in an effort to attract attention to himself and away from his father David. He planned and plotted and schemed to make himself look like a better leader for the people than his father David was at that time. As a Judge and counsel among the people he plotted endlessly to unseat David from the throne. As Absalom’s popularity increased, David’s life and rule became at risk and he had to leave the palace, and with a gathering of his supporters he went into hiding.

Absalom took advantage of David being absent from the palace and came to the place of his father's rule and gathered his concubines to himself and in a public display, he engaged with them sexually in the sight of the people. At this point, God's ways and workings entered the picture as Absalom was humiliated later, by getting his hair caught in the branches of a tree and his donkey departing from him leaving him hanging on the branches. David's men were able to capture Absalom and kill him. This was a difficult time for David. He had been humiliated by his sons, in the conflicts that ended in disgrace and death to one of his sons, and later in the rebellion and killing of his son Absalom.

This was a heart wrenching time for David. But after the death of Absalom he came back to Jerusalem and recovered his position as the ruler over the people of Israel. He was then able to refocus on his spiritual intentions to glorify God and to bring the people back to the Lord. His desire was to build a temple for the Ark of the Covenant, and a place for sacrifices, and for the worship of God. The Lord would not allow David to build the temple saying that his hands were filled with blood, but that his son Solomon would be granted that privilege. David then focused on gathering all the material that would be needed for the building of the temple. His heart was always focused on honoring God, in spite of his personal failures which has become a sad thing for all of us to read about.

Yet it was not the end of the way of righteousness for David, nor has it been the end of his influence upon believers of his time or believers of our time today. Yes, he was a man after God's own heart; one who was respected greatly by those who believe, and even Jesus was not ashamed to be called many times, "The son of David". One place in particular is recorded in the book of Matthew when the people cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Chapter 21:9). We cannot focus on the worst of David, when God and Christ honored the best of David. He was a godly and very special servant of God, and he knew that he was forgiven and

that mercies would follow him. In fact, He said; “Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me bless His holy name! Bless the LORD O my soul and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities” (Psalm 103:1-3).

David was in great anguish over his sins before God. And he prayed sincerely and continually for God’s mercy toward him. He said in Psalm 51:10; “Create in me a clean heart, O GOD”. Our sins do not continue to linger with us in the sight of God. He removes them from our life and from our identity in his sight. He does not focus upon them, nor does he see them as part of our being. Remember, when David was confronted by the prophet Nathan and David acknowledged his sin, the prophet said that his sins were put away. In God’s sight they did not remain to tarnish him. God would not let his failures ruin his appearance before God. When our sins are forgiven, in God’s sight they are gone and do not follow us in our walk before him. Sins that are forgiven by God are forgotten by God. This truth is verified throughout the scriptures.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOLOMON FORGIVEN

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that after the death of David and Bathsheba's, first son, she conceived again and bore another son named Solomon. It was written that, "The LORD loved him" (II Samuel 12:24). From the beginning of Solomon's, life he was loved by God. He was selected to be the heir to the kingdom of David. After David's death, we are told "Then Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established" (I Kings 2:12). His beginnings as the King of Israel was in every respect, phenomenal. It is note-worthy to read that "Solomon loved the LORD, walking in His statutes of his father David" (I Kings 3:3). There was a sincere and deep devotion to the Lord and a desire to follow in the steps of his father in his commitment to God.

The Lord came to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask! what shall I give you?" (II Kings 3:5). Solomon did not ask for riches or long life or great dominion; he simply asked for an understanding heart to properly lead and judge the people. His prayer pleased God and the Lord said "I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any arise after you" (I kings 3:12). God also said that he would give Solomon riches and honor beyond any Kings of his day. God made an absolute and divine commitment to make Solomon a King like the world had never seen before and would never see again. God also added; that if Solomon would walk in His ways and keep His statutes and commandments as his father David had previously done, the Lord would lengthen his days upon the earth.

The things that God said to Solomon began to show themselves in his rule over the people. It soon became obvious to the people that his wisdom was amazing, and sometimes astonishing to them. The knowledge of his words and ways of thought, began to spread among the people and then

beyond the people of Israel to other nations surrounding them. So impressive was his knowledge, insight, and good judgement, that kings from other countries began to visit him bringing gifts, jewels, and treasures of various sorts to hear his counsel and to listen to his conclusions about a multitude of things. Even the Queen of Sheba came from Ethiopia to hear his words. She said of him “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom” (I Kings 10:6). She went on to acknowledge the hand of God upon him and that he was divinely chosen to sit upon the throne of Israel.

Solomon also did complete the task of building the temple of God, which was built in a unique way for that day, and the precise details of the construction of the temple is recorded in the book of I Kings. After the building of the temple, Solomon made a massive number of sacrifices unto God in the dedication of the temple. In the dedication of the temple, he made a most sincere prayer of dedication of the building to God. At the time of the dedication and the conclusion of the prayer of Solomon, the presence of God descended upon the temple and filled it with His glory in a most overwhelming way. And the people knew that God had accepted the temple, and the prayer of dedication of it, by Solomon. The Lord made it clear that His presence would remain upon the temple from that day forward.

It took Solomon seven years to build the temple of God. But it took him thirteen years to build his own house and other unique facilities. The details of those constructions are found in I Kings chapter seven. There was certainly much gold, and many valuable jewels and stones in the construction of both the Lord’s house and the house of Solomon. His fame continued to capture the attention of the people of that time. His government was unparalleled by any government of that era. His organization of different parts of his ruling bodies were impressive. His armies, his resources, his wealth, and his prominence was unmatched by any ruler of any kingdom at that time. It is written; “King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (I Kings 10:23).

As an important afterthought regarding the dedication of the temple; Solomon's prayer of dedication is of deep significance for us to remember what the state of his heart and mind was toward God at that time. He spread his hands toward heaven and acknowledged God's dominion in heaven above and in the earth below. He acknowledged God's mercy and His keeping the covenant with His people. He spoke of God's faithfulness to his father David. He asked that God would hear the prayers of the people who prayed in the temple or toward the temple. He mentioned the word; "Forgiveness" five-times, under a multitude of circumstances, and transgressions among the people. Solomon was asking God to forgive Israel according to His mercies and His covenant; that whatever the sins of the people might be, that when they would cry out to the Lord and repent, that God would indeed forgive, and not only did he pray for forgiveness toward the children of Israel, but also , even if a stranger from outside the nation of Israel came and prayed toward the temple that God would hear them and also forgive them as well. Solomon believed in the great mercies of God and of His willingness to forgive.

After Solomon built the temple and his own house, the Lord appeared to him a second time and basically told him to walk like his father David, in the integrity of his heart, and in uprightness, to do all according to God's commandments, and keep His statutes and judgements. God said that if Solomon would follow the path of righteousness, that He would establish his throne and rulership and the continuance of his reign over Israel, (I Kings 9:3-5). Then the Lord added a strong warning, "But if you turn from following me" verse 6; then followed the punishments that would come. Which would be the bringing down of the kingdom, severe judgements against the people, and a turning away from the people by the Lord. God specifically noted in the transgressions that would lead to his anger against the people, would be, when they would turn away to worship other gods.

Years passed with Solomon worshipping and honoring God with many feasts and sacrifices. Things went well for quite some time and then things started to go haywire for Solomon. It appears

that Solomon had a great fixation for women. We are told that “King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh” (I Kings 11:1). God had previously warned the children of Israel not to intermarry with women from other nations because they would turn their hearts away from the Lord to worship other gods. This interest of Solomon in women from other nations that worshipped other gods, appears to have been the pivot point in Solomon life. It started with Pharaoh’s daughter and then expanded to many women from many nations who worshipped other gods. Even though this had been strictly forbidden by God, Solomon seems to have gone to extremes in his fixation on women outside of Israel. Not only did Solomon accept these women as his wives and concubines, but he also built for them their idolatrous places of worship in the land of Israel. We are told in, (I Kings 11:4), that, “His wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God”

What a strange and unanticipated turn in the heart and mind of the wisest man upon the earth. It is still difficult for us today to understand how his superior mentality could become so marred and twisted as to turn him away from common sense, and divine intuition, and lead him so far away from God. This certainly reminds us that no matter how devout and committed to the Lord we may be, there are always pitfalls along the way. We must be alert and aware at all times of the possibility of our own failures and foolish corruptions. Something strange and unusual happened in the mind of Solomon which the book of Ecclesiastes written by him, may shed some light upon. Some scholars think that this book gives us a glimpse of his state of mind at the time of his going astray mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The book seems to indicate that he wanted to find out about life in a personal way. We might say that he wanted to try this, and try that, and experiment with many different things and then draw his own conclusions. He seems to have gone on a wild spree of basically doing any and everything that came into his mind at that time. The book unfolds with not an even-flow at all. He seems to have had a whirlwind of questions in his mind that led him to the

conclusion; “This is also grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:17). He was saying in effect “this is crazy”. He said he had set his heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.

Solomon seems to have come to the point that he had pretty much lost his appreciation of life. In fact, the book begins with the words; “All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). There are some comments about looking to God and being aware of the need to do right in His sight. A few passages here and there speak of the need to fear God; but in spite of those references here and there, his focus was so much more engaged and involved in his search for answers in a personal way, that it took him to the point of real depression.

The things he was going through in his mind in his search for knowledge and wisdom through personal experience and engagement led him nowhere but to the point of despair. His state of mind was certainly not as it had been in previous times and in effect it led him nowhere. So many things had gone haywire in Solomon’s life and his wild search was in the latter stages of his life, which indeed was “madness”. He even said “I hated life” (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

But I must say that it appears that some change of heart came to him toward the end of his days. It seems that a number of verses scattered throughout the book of Ecclesiastes emphasized the importance of focusing upon the Lord, and Solomon concludes the book by saying: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

I believe we may conclude that Solomon came into a repentant state of mind and that God accepted him and forgave him for all his folly and sins.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PETER FORGIVEN

The introduction of Jesus to the people began with John the Baptist. John was “The voice of one crying in the wilderness” that had been prophesied by the prophet Isaiah, (John 1:23). John was calling the people to repentance and baptizing them to signify the washing away of their sins. He was crying out for righteousness among the people and for a returning unto the Lord. When Jesus came to him to be baptized, John told him that he needed Jesus to baptize him as he recognized who he was by the revelation of the Spirit. Jesus encouraged him to follow through with the procedure. When Jesus came up out of the water, “John saw, the Spirit of God descending upon him like a dove, and alighting upon Him, and suddenly, a voice came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:16,17).

From this point forward, John began to declare to the people that Jesus was the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Lamb of God, the Savior of the world. Among the many followers of John were two brothers named Andrew and Simon. After hearing John declare that Jesus was the one to follow, they both began to follow Jesus, and they would become “fishers of men” as Jesus later declared unto them. Jesus also said that Simon would be called “Cephas” which means a stone or a rock as stated in John 1:42. Later, the translation was simply “Peter” which also means a stone or rock.

These passages give us early insight to the type of man that Peter would eventually become. He would become as solid as a rock, and a very strong and unshakeable messenger of the gospel of Christ. Not only would Peter become a follower of Christ, he would be given the title and the position of an Apostle of Christ. His faith and boldness began to appear when he asked Jesus to let him walk upon the water, which he did briefly and then began to sink as the wind became boisterous and his

faith wavered; but Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him and said, “O ye of little faith, why did you doubt” (Matthew 14:31). He had started well and only began to sink when he became fearful and his attention shifted from his instinct of faith to a sense of fear. But the important point is that he was the first and only disciple to start to walk on water. His potential in the realm of faith was starting to appear.

Peter followed Jesus continually, and along with the other disciples, he healed the sick and cast out devils, and demonstrated the power of the Lord. He saw and heard many things that Jesus said and did in his ministry upon earth. Peter’s devotion to Jesus and his spiritual boldness was definitely obvious as he continued following Jesus. In fact, Peter was highly favored by Jesus to be with him on the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus was transformed in his presence and in the presence of James and John. “He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun and His clothes became as white as the light, and behold, Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Him” (Matthew 17:2,3). Then a voice from heaven said “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him! Verse 5. Although they were filled with fear, God reassured them that they should not be afraid, and Moses and Elijah disappeared and only Jesus remained in their view.

None of the other disciples had the great honor to behold Jesus transformed and to see Moses and Elijah standing by him and conversing with him and to hear God’s voice telling them to focus on Jesus, not on Moses and Elijah. The old was past and Jesus was to be the new voice, and the new one to follow. He was the only begotten of the Father and was to be the center of attraction to them and was also to become the way of salvation for the whole world. Peter was favored by Jesus and was chosen to see who Jesus really was and compared to the previous great figures of the Old Testament: He was to be the true focus of his disciples and their message was to be centered in him.

All these experiences were surely in the memory of Peter when Jesus was approached by the officers and chief priests and Pharisees when they came to arrest him. Peter was prepared to fight for Jesus and defend him. In fact, as this group pressed forward toward Jesus, Peter cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants as they tried to arrest Jesus. (John 18:10). Jesus picked up the servant's ear and put it back in its place. The Lord was not resisting arrest, but was prepared to follow through with his mission of redemption for the world. Peter had previously said to the Lord, "I will lay down my life for Your sake" (John 13:37). However, Jesus responded by saying also, at that time, "The rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times" {John 13:38). Jesus had also said in Luke 22:31 "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren".

These are important verses for us to remember because they reveal that Satan was in the background and was active in seeking to turn away Peter from the Lord. But Jesus had already prayed for him before he failed, and that he might not give up, but be changed and be a great help to his brethren. We are reminded in these scriptures that even if we fail, we are not to let our faith for recovery also fail. There is always hope for restoration with the Lord. Jesus knew that Peter's denial of him was soon to come even though Peter could not see it as possible at that time. Actually, it does not seem that any of the other disciples could anticipate this kind of failure and denial of the Lord by Peter.

After the arrest of Jesus, he was taken to Caiaphas the high priest, and Peter followed secretly and entered the palace of the high priest and sought to hide himself among the servants within the building. Some of the people within the palace recognized Peter and confronted him, and then his denials began. When a young maiden also remembered seeing him with Jesus also pointed out that she knew he had been with Jesus; Peter's denials became more intense, and then the rooster crowed. It is difficult to understand his change of mind and heart after hearing so much, and seeing so much of

the glory and divinity of Jesus for him to deny knowing him. But; forgiveness was already predicted because Jesus had said that He had prayed for Peter before he even failed.

Peter would still be a rock like Jesus had before declared him to be. After the resurrection when Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James entered the tomb of Jesus, an angel told them that Jesus was risen from the dead and that they were to tell his disciples; “And Peter” (Mark 16:7). Peter was not lost nor was his part in the spreading of the gospel. He would go on to receive the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and would be at the gate of the temple to raise up the cripple man who had been their begging for alms for many years. This man had never walked in his life, but Peter lifted him up in Jesus name and the man jumped and leaped and walked around in the sight of the people, praising God in the presence of all the people who were at the temple at that time. Then Peter preached to the astonished crowd of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and that he was indeed the Son of God and that they should all repent and be converted. Many believed that day and Peter’s prominence among the apostles in Jerusalem increased more and more. He indeed was becoming the rock that Jesus said he would be. He continued to be honored by the Lord and then his preaching of the gospel finally had him imprisoned. But the believers at that time were continually in prayer for him (Acts 12:5). He was chained to two guards and during the night while he was asleep, an angel of the Lord came and awakened him and told him to rise up, and when he did the chains fell off and the doors of the prison were opened and he found himself outside the prison and, at first thought it was all a vision, then the angel disappeared and Peter realized that he was truly outside of the prison, and he returned to the followers of the Lord and told them of the miracle of his deliverance by the hand of an angel.

Peter continued to be a powerful influence among the Jewish converts and even among converts from the Gentiles who believed. He even became acquainted with the apostle Paul and continued to have great influence among the early believers in Christ. The two Epistles written by Peter are a

source of encouragement and faith to us who believe, even today. Peter later gave up his life for the gospel of Christ according to church tradition. It is believed that he died in Rome and was crucified there for the sake of the gospel. Jesus had said to Peter, "When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish, This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God"(John 21:18,19).

Here again, we have the truth of forgiveness displayed in the life of Peter who had declared that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). He declared this before he so terribly failed in denying having ever known the Lord. However, after his failure and repentance, we must admit even today that he was a Rock. Peter's life tells us that sometimes one with a high divine calling can also go through a brief period of failure and sin against the Lord. Yet, that is not the whole story of his life. God sees more in us that is to His glory than others can possibly see. He knows the full story of who we are, how we have failed, and what were the circumstances, and how to restore us once again to high ground in His grace and mercy.

After the resurrection and his appearance to the disciples; Jesus asked Peter "Do you love me?" He asked him that question three times. (John 21:15-17). Jesus knew that Peter did love him in spite of the damaging denials before his crucifixion. Peter had denied the Lord three times, so the Lord asked him if he loved him three times. He was given the opportunity to reaffirm his commitment to the Lord the same number of times as his denial had been. The latter affirmations of his love for the Lord wiped out the previous denials completely. Jesus knew the true heart of Peter in spite of the attempts of Satan to totally turn him away from the Lord. The calling that was upon Peter's life remained even after his denials. The Lord still told Peter to feed His sheep. Peter was one of the great shepherds of the sheep of the Lord, and did go on to prove it. He was indeed truly, forgiven.

CHAPTER NINE

PAUL FORGIVEN

Paul, whose name had been Saul, was a deeply committed Pharisee. The Pharisees were prominent among the religious leaders of the Jews during the time of Jesus. They were in close contact with the High Priest Caiaphas and had great influence among the people as having a high standard of religious principles. They were very strict in their religious demands among the people and set themselves and their views as the right interpretation of the scriptures. But Jesus called them, “Hypocrites.” He said they “Neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.” (Matthew 23:23).

He went on to say that they were “Blind guides, who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.” He continued to call them hypocrites because so much of their emphasis was the outward appearance of righteousness, but within, they had serious problems. He said they appear righteous to men but inside they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. They were also part of the group of religious leaders who arrested Jesus and turned him over to the Romans to be crucified. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Pharisees were the chief persecutors of the followers of Christ. They authorized certain groups of men to seek out the followers of Christ and those who were declaring his resurrection and to arrest them and even stone them to death. Saul was a most dedicated member of one of these groups.

Saul was present when Stephen was stoned to death for his preaching of the authority and dominion of Jesus. He boldly declared the resurrection of Christ. When Stephen was stoned to death, it was Saul who stood by holding the coats of those who were stoning him. Afterwards, his anger and hatred toward the followers of Christ is expressed in the book of Acts. It is written “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the LORD, went to the high priest and asked

letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the WAY, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”(Acts 9:1,2).

We have a pretty clear picture of the religious group called the Pharisees and also of Saul who was one of their devout representatives. He was bent on stopping the spread of the gospel and was determined to persecute those who were spreading it, even to death. But something happened on the road to Damascus while Saul was on his way to persecute more of the followers of Christ. We are told that, “Suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him; Saul, Saul, “why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, who are you LORD? Then the LORD said I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 9:3-5).

Jesus used an analogy, about a mule refusing to go in the right direction even though he was being goaded by his master with a rod. Apparently, Saul was fighting against the truth, even though the Lord was trying to lead him to it. But now suddenly, he became submissive and yielded to the reality of the truth and said “LORD, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 9;6} He had fought hard and long, but finally had to face the truth that Jesus was resurrected and that he indeed was the Lord. There was a divine calling upon Saul who would later become known as Paul to take the message of salvation through Christ to the Gentiles.

It is obvious that in spite of all the evil against the disciples of Christ that Paul had done, he was indeed forgiven. In this encounter with Christ, Paul was blinded by the light from heaven and was led into Damascus where he remained blind until a man named Ananias who was sent by the Lord came to him to restore his sight and to tell him of his mission from the Lord. Although Ananias at first questioned the fact that Paul was to be trusted after all the evil he had done against the disciples of Christ; the Lord assured Ananias by saying these words; “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear

My name before the Gentiles, Kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15,16). Ananias followed the Lord's instruction and told Paul that he would receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul was then baptized and was filled with the Holy Spirit and spent some days in Damascus and began to preach Christ in the synagogues, declaring that Jesus is the Son of God. It is said "Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:22). His absolute declarations and arguments that Jesus was the Christ was making such an impression upon the people in Damascus because of the way Saul had so fiercely fought against the gospel before.

Finally, the Jews in that area took counsel to kill him. The disciples of Christ in Damascus had to sneak Paul out of the city and he went to Jerusalem. When he reached Jerusalem the disciples of Christ there did not believe that he was now a disciple, but Barnabas, one of the respected followers of Christ took him under his wing and brought him before the apostles and told them he had seen the Lord on the road to Damascus and of his conversion, and calling by the Lord, and how he had preached boldly of Christ in Damascus.

Paul became a strong voice for Christ in Jerusalem until resistance rose against him to the point that his life was again in jeopardy and he had to be sent away to Tarsus. Later he ended up in Antioch and spent a year there teaching and preaching. He also expanded his ministry among the Gentiles and continued to share the revelation of the true meaning of the gospel as it was revealed to him by the Lord. His thirteen epistles were indeed revelatory in their interpretation of the gospel and they effectively set forth the true meaning of being justified by faith. One of the significant verses in this regard is found in Galatians 2:16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law. But by faith in Jesus Christ".

There were disagreements among the different groups of disciples who were both Jew and Gentile. Many of the early Jewish believers in Christ were still steeped very much in Jewish law and tradition, and were trying to follow the letter of the law and the tradition of the fathers, and were expecting the Gentile believers to do the same. In fact, it seemed that some early Jewish believers in Christ wanted the Gentile believers to adopt a Jewish mentality in all aspects of the law. They even wanted them to be circumcised, also to keep the Sabbath, and all of its ordinances. They wanted them to only eat certain things, and more or less become Jewish. There was to some extent a feeling among Jewish believers in Christ, that a Jewish believer was more acceptable to God than a Gentile believer in Christ.

It was the apostle Paul who said; “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28,29). Paul sought to make it clear that there is a new covenant, and we are not under the law, but under grace and that salvation is a spiritual matter. It is what happens within us and not a lot of visible observances of statutes and commands, because we all have fallen short of the glory of God, both Jew and Gentile, and only Christ can give us an acceptable identity before God.

The reason this is being emphasized in this chapter regarding Paul, is to help us have a deeper appreciation of who he was, and the great significance of his divine calling to take the message of salvation through Christ to the Gentiles with no Jewish demands or requirements. The message of Christ is not a Jewish message, it is a message to the whole world; As it is written: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The apostle Paul was the central figure who began to take the message of salvation to other nations therefore, it is important that we realize the impact that his ministry had among the early believers in Christ among the Gentiles, and that through his writings we are still enlightened in the knowledge of Christ around the world. Without Paul being forgiven of his early attacks against the disciples of Christ, there may not have been such a huge following of Christ around the world. In the course of his ministry, he suffered much, he bore much hardship and was finally confined to prison in Rome and appeared before Caesar to defend the gospel of Christ. He was said to have been crucified for his testimony and that his influence among the multitudes of people at that time both in Rome and throughout the empire had such an effect that in time, even Rome became identified with the church of Christ.

Paul gave everything he had for the sake of the gospel and we are still the beneficiaries of his labor, his writings, his sufferings and death for Christ's sake. He faced it all and gave his all that we might hear the gospel and believe. Thank God he was forgiven, that through his ministry the gospel would reach us, and now we too are now forgiven.

CHAPTER TEN

THE PRODIGAL SON FORGIVEN

Jesus drew many types of people to him at different times. He did not draw back from people even if their lives were spotted with evil in some form or another. This welcoming of the basest of people to hear him speak was disturbing to the more religious and pious Jews. Many of them were so self-righteous that they exalted themselves above those whose lives were less than perfect in their way of living. In Luke 15:1,2, It is written; “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, This Man receives sinners and eats with them”. Jesus responded to their criticism of him by telling them three parables. The first was related to a lost sheep. He highlighted the fact that if a shepherd had one hundred sheep and one was lost, that the shepherd would leave the ninety-nine, to focus on finding and restoring the one lost sheep back into the fold. Jesus made it clear that there would be rejoicing by the shepherd when the lost sheep was found. The lost sheep needed him more than the sheep that were safe and secure within the fold. He then said, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).

Jesus then told the parable of the woman who had ten pieces of silver and lost one, she would put all her attention on finding that one lost coin. When she found it, she would rejoice and say to her neighbors; “Rejoice with me for I have found the piece which I lost. Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Jesus was pointing out to the more just and righteous ones who were so critical of him for allowing sinful men and women to be around him, that repentance and turning to God by one sinner was far more

important than just giving attention to those whose lives were more upright and honorable. Jesus then told the parable of the prodigal son. At that point his emphasis centered on a family.

There was a father who had two sons. One wanted to have his portion of goods and inheritance given to him to simply go his way and do whatever he wanted to do. The other son was established at home, and in the paths of righteous and stable behavior. The prodigal and wasteful son began to party up a storm, and to do whatever he wanted to do, with whoever he wanted to do it with. He continued in that way of life until he finally wasted all of his wealth, and then a great famine hit the area where he had been living and he ended up working for a man by taking care of his pigs in the field. He had been at such a high level in goods and money, but finally after squandering his funds and being in the midst of a famine and shamefully living in the fields with pigs, he began to think.

Jesus said; "But when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15:17). And then in the next verse he said these words, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18,19). The prodigal son had hit rock bottom and was penniless and became deeply ashamed of his behavior and what it had finally cost him. Jesus pointed out that the son, "came to himself." He certainly had not been acting as he knew that he should have been acting. He had drifted so far from the standards of morality and proper behavior. But a change had come into his heart and mind. He was desperate to go back to his father and ask forgiveness and be at home again.

When he returned, his father received him back into the household with full acceptance. His father embraced him and kissed him and put the best robe upon him and a ring on his finger. Then the father prepared a feast to celebrate his return home. It was a joyful occasion and a most

emotional and touching story of the love of a father for his son who was lost, but was now found. But the elder son had been in the field when his younger brother had returned and had been so lovingly received by the father. When the older brother saw what had obviously happened, and that the status and position of his younger brother had been restored by the father, he was angry. In fact, he was so angry that he did not want to enter into the festivities for the return of his younger brother.

He said basically, that he had been loyal to his father and to the family name. He was always there, dependable, available, and committed to his father. He wanted to remind his father that not only was he committed to his father, but he had not at any time transgressed his father's commandments. He said in spite of all his commendable ways and record at home, he never had such festivities prepared for him like what had been prepared for his younger brother who had behaved in just the opposite way. He said his younger brother had wasted his resources and was involved with prostitutes, and had lived his life in a most despicable way. The older brother could not see how his younger brother could be so highly received again after living in such a lowly and degradable way.

The father's response was, that all that he had was indeed for his older son but, "It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32). These three parables of Jesus were to point out the need for those who have not failed or corrupted themselves, to be respectful of those who failed but were seeking to find their way back to the path of righteousness. The ministry of Jesus as set forth in the gospels show him again and again receiving all of the people who came to hear him. Also, in a number of places in the gospels, Jesus chided those who were so judgmental that they did not appreciate the fact that some were trying to find their way back to God by attending the gatherings around Him.

It is sad to say that in the family of God, there are some brothers and sisters who have gone astray. Some may have failed terribly, but the ones who have not failed must not be so harsh and

critical as to fail to accept them back into the ranks of fellowship. After all, family is still family, and the Father of all is still accessible to all that call upon Him. If we have not failed miserably, we should give thanks, but if a brother or sister in Christ has failed and has come back to the Father and admitted their failures and sins, we should receive them and not be judgmental. Who knows, we may yet fail at some point, or someone we have great respect for may fail.

The important thing is to remember that the family of God remains, the family of God, and the sacrifice of Christ has been sufficient to give us all a path to restoration, no matter how far we have gone astray, or how disgraceful we may have acted. The parable of the prodigal son makes this truth absolutely clear. When he returned in repentance, he was forgiven.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS FORGIVEN

The death penalty of the Roman empire was by crucifixion. It was the most severe judgment for truly high crimes; such as insurrection, murder, and other serious crimes against the government. Jesus had been arrested by the Jewish religious authorities for claiming to be the Messiah, the Chosen One, the Son of God. The religious rulers did not have the legal authority to execute Jesus, so their charges against him were raised to the level of a threat to the rule of Rome. The fact that Jesus was being hailed as the son of David put him in the lineage of the kings of Israel. So, the religious authorities of the Jews focused on that aspect of Jesus among the people. They said to the Roman authorities that Jesus was promoting himself as the king of the Jews. His claim of being in the lineage of David and that he was sent by God, was to be perceived as a serious threat to the rule of Rome.

Even though both of the high position representatives of Rome; Pilate and Herod did not believe the charges that were made against Jesus, the Jewish leaders pushed hard for his crucifixion. Finally, to please the Jewish religious leaders, Herod let the charges against Jesus stand and authorized his crucifixion.

We are told that Jesus was not crucified alone, there were two men; one on each side of Jesus who had committed crimes according to Roman law that justified their crucifixion. The great crowd of people who were watching the crucifixion were mostly made up of critics of Jesus who cried out against him. They said many degrading things about him. It is written, "And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself" if he is the Christ, the chosen of, God" (Luke 23:35). Even the soldiers got caught up in the ridicule against Jesus, and also mocked him saying "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself" (Luke 23:37). At that

point, one of the men being crucified with Jesus yelled at him in a sarcastic manner, and said to him, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us." (Luke 23:39). He apparently said this in a mocking way because the other thief on the cross rebuked him and said to him "do you fear God?" He said basically, we are in this mess because of the evil that we have done, and we are getting what we deserve. He emphasized the fact that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Apparently, this man had been listening to everything that was being said about Jesus, both the criticism and the praise. He was close enough to Jesus in their final hours together that he had some sense of the kind of man that he was. He must have come to the point of believing in him, for he said to Jesus; "Lord remember me when You come into Your kingdom." (Luke 23:42). Jesus remarkable response was, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Verse 43.

This thief, and perhaps even more than a thief, for he was being crucified; yet his past was swallowed up in a moment by the words of Jesus. He was about to be in Paradise with Christ. He did not have time to change his life and behavior. He was at the finish line, yet he was forgiven and granted eternal life. It is never too late to be forgiven. The corrupt and evil deeds of men can be forgiven in an instant and the past does not matter. A new life will be given and a new dimension will be given to those who turn to the Lord, even in the last moments of their lives.

We can be so absorbed with the evils and sins that have piled up in our lives that it can be hard to realize that it's all forgiven, when we turn to the Lord in a repentant state of mind. Sometimes the sense of our sins, linger with us, and the sense of condemnation seems to hound us. But God would have us to understand that even as with the thief on the cross; its all over, its past and gone, we are forgiven.

This book has been all about sin and the forgiveness of God. When we are forgiven of our sins, they become things of the past, and not a part of our lives in the present. The title of this book and the

scriptural basis of it is indeed the fact that “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us:” (Psalm 103:12). We know that the East is far from the West, even as the North is far from the South. They are opposites from one another. The point is, that God separates our transgressions and sins far from us when we turn to him for forgiveness.

When God’s forgiveness has been granted, our sins are no longer a part of our image before in his sight. Although some people who are quite self-righteous, may always see us in the error of our previous ways, God sees us quite differently. In fact, God refuses to see us in that way. A most important scripture in this regard says; “Indeed it was for my own peace, that I had great bitterness, but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back” (Isaiah 38:17). When God has forgiven us, he throws all of our sins behind his back, he does not let them stand in the way of His view of us. He looks at us as being not spotted and marred by the wrongs we have done, but he views us as acceptable in His sight because He has forgiven us. Some of us may feel that we have done some dirty and filthy things that cannot be washed out of our lives, but this is a wrong conclusion, for it is also written “Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Forgiveness is the greatest gift of God to us. It is meant to relieve our conscience from fear of judgment and condemnation in God’s sight. It gives us the peace of mind to stand before God with the sense of our acceptance by Him. It allows us to share the knowledge of God’s mercy and love with others, for we are all testimonies of his mercy. Let us give thanks for the mercies we have received from God and continue to share the knowledge of His mercy and love with others, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The reason behind all of our forgiveness is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In reality, our forgiveness has really been paid for by the sufferings of Christ. His sacrifice was

the ransom for the removal of our sins in the eyes of God. His sacrifice was sufficient for the sins of the whole world, let us forever give thanks for forgiveness.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thurman Faison is a former pastor and TV minister. After serving in the US Air Force, he began preparation for the ministry by studying in Canada at Eastern Pentecostal Bible College in Peterborough Ontario. After graduation he returned to the US and earned his bachelor's degree from North Central Bible College in Minneapolis Minnesota. He received his Master's degree from National Louis University in Evanston Illinois. Thurman has been retired and writing books in recent years to share his thoughts on spirituality. His approach is non-sectarian, and his desire is to freely express those things that he has found meaningful in his own spiritual journey. He lives in Florida with his wife Connie who is a retired Registered Nurse Educator.

Thurman has three previous books on Amazon;

"To the Spiritually Inclined"

"Be Spiritually Bold"

"The Spirit of Man"

