

**More on Forgiveness
Matthew 18:21—35**

God's offer of forgiveness went out to the whole world at His Son's death on the cross. At His death, the Father was appeased and His wrath was turned away from mankind. The offer of forgiveness is also being extended to the whole world. In this case the offended party (God) is forgiving the wrongdoers (man) when man has no desire to ask God for forgiveness. Normally the offender would plead for forgiveness from the person who he wronged.

When the offender reaches out to accept God's forgiveness then complete reconciliation has occurred. God is reaching out to mankind showing His willingness and ability to forgive his sins. When a person believes and accepts this offer of forgiveness then that person is reconciled to God.

To sum up what God did for us we can see redemption as the vehicle that deals with sin. Through Christ's work on the cross we who are saved are no longer slaves to sin but of righteousness (Romans 6:6, 18). Reconciliation deals with man. Man was at enmity with God but Christ's death, burial and resurrection appeased (propitiated) His anger so that those who believe could experience reconciliation. Propitiation (Romans 3:24—26; 5:10—11; 1 John 2:2) is directed toward God the Father. It satisfied or appeased His anger at man because he is a sinner.

When studying forgiveness in Scripture it is important to understand its various aspects. There is forgiveness between man and God and between man and man. There are also distinctions that need to be made when speaking of Israel as a nation or individuals within Israel or members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Individual Israelites prayed for their forgiveness when they sinned by not obeying the ordinances of the Mosaic Law (Nehemiah 9:13). David is an example in Psalm 25:18 when he prays asking for God to forgive all his sins. Nationally, Israel also turned away from God by turning away from the Law. National Israel is identified with the leaders of Israel. When the leaders decide to worship idols, Israel is accused of turning away from God. When the leaders neglected observance of the Sabbaths, Israel was condemned of disobeying the Law. Even when Israel is not following God there were always a few individual believers. On the other hand, even if there was a majority of believers within Israel, the nation could still be in disobedience if the leaders did not obey God.

As Daniel prayed in Daniel 9:20 we can see he is not only praying for his own personal sin but for the sin of the nation of Israel. All the blessings and curses for the nation of Israel were laid out in Leviticus 26. When Solomon's temple was being dedicated all these national blessings and curses were reiterated. When Israel turned away from God they were cursed. When they prayed, confessing their sin God would forgive them and bless them (2 Kings 8:31—53). There was a direct connection with Israel's relationship with God and how He treated them.

Today in this age of Grace we no longer need to confess our sins and hope God forgives us. This is because we who are believers already stand in the place of forgiveness and we always will (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). Instead of the admonition to forgive or else you won't be forgiven we are told to forgive because we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32). The assumption is that we will always be living in God's forgiveness. This is in contrast to individuals in Israel who always needed to be willing to forgive a brother.

The limit of God's forgiveness

There is a limit to God's forgiveness. The offer of forgiveness will last only so long and then there will be judgment against those who rejected His forgiveness. When Moses struck the rock the second time against God's direction he had to pay the consequences and was not allowed to go into the Promised Land. When

Israel rejected the offer of the Kingdom and stoned Stephen, they were not forgiven of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. There were no other opportunities for them to have the Kingdom set up. When the Tribulation comes to a close, the opportunity for unbelievers to accept God's forgiveness will disappear. God is merciful and longsuffering but there is a limit and eventually man will be judged. Anyone who has rejected God's offer of forgiveness will be condemned to eternal damnation.

Confessing sins for forgiveness

There are many solid Bible teachers and preachers who apply 1 John 1:9 to us in this age. They say that when we sin we need to confess that sin and then God will forgive us. When we sin it breaks our relationship with God and this, they say, is how we can maintain a proper relationship with God.

This is what happens when the wall between Israel under the Prophetic program and the Body of Christ under the Mystery program is violated. This verse actually refers to Israel and tells individuals within the nation of Israel how to have a relationship with God. Under the Kingdom program when an offence was committed, the offender needs to be confronted and reprovved of their sin. This process is laid out in Matthew 18:15—20. If the offender repents of their sin then the victim is to forgive the offender. It is at this point that God will forgive the one who has offended another Jewish brother. God's forgiveness is always contingent upon the offender asking for forgiveness.

According to 1 John 1:9 the offender asks to be forgiven and the response is that God will forgive them. All through the Old Testament Israelites needed to take a step of action before God would forgive them. This verse cannot refer to us in this Age of Grace because we are already forgiven of all sins past, present and future. What sin do we still have laid to our account? We do not need to confess our sins to have them forgiven. If this were the case we had better make sure to confess them all or we will not be fully forgiven. Imagine how our constant asking for forgiveness must sound to God when He has already forgiven them. We need to accept by faith what he says through Paul in Ephesians 1:7, that we are forgiven.

The context of this verse shows that the one who is to confess is walking in darkness. Only unbelievers are walking in darkness. This is their position in relationship with Christ. It is impossible for a believer to walk outside of the light of Christ (Ephesians 5:8). This verse has nothing to do with us in this age but fully applies to those under the Gospel of the kingdom. It will have special significance to those who are going through the Tribulation as they will once again be subject to the Good News of the Kingdom.

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