

The Forgiveness of God

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Psalm 32:5 Text:

וְאַתָּה נָשָׂאתָ עוֹן חַטָּאתַי כִּלְהָ

Psalm 32:5 Translation:

“And as for you, you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah”

The forgiveness that God grants to the sinner is the heaven on earth. No one can know peace with God apart from receiving this divine gift of forgiveness. The forgiveness of God can further be explained in a number of ways.

1. Necessary

Because mankind has committed transgressions and is guilty of sin, he needs God’s forgiveness. He has fallen into iniquity and has the full guilt and punishment of his wrongdoing pressing against him before the bar of God Almighty. All have sinned and none are righteous. By nature, all human beings have turned away from God and have no impulse to fear God and worship God rightly. All have thus rejected the glory of God and have trampled on the glory of Christ. Every sin manifests itself as a revolt against the kingship of God. Every lawless deed, every wicked thought, and every selfish motive rises up in rebellion against God’s holiness. For all of these reasons and much more, we see that the forgiveness of God is utterly necessary. And not just a few of the outright rebels need forgiveness but every single human being — who is infected with the terminal disease of sin — alive needs God’s forgiveness.

2. Available

In his marvelous mercy and glorious grace, God has made His forgiveness available to sour sinners and revolting rebels. God stands ready to forgive. He longs to lift up transgressions off of the sinner’s account. He desires to cover the sins of the penitent and make atonement for them. He wishes to not impute the twisted iniquities of the sinner so as to ensure his condemnation. But God, as a tender father, makes his forgiveness readily available to every person who humbly comes to him in true confession. God turns away none who really repent.

3. Complete

When a sinner comes to God in confession and repents of his sin, the wonderful promise of Scripture is that God forgives the guilt of the sinner’s sin. What a hopeful and complete promise! When the sinner makes known his sin before the omniscient King and when he uncovers his shameful iniquities before God, the unspeakably glorious promise is that God Himself lifts up the guilt of that sin. He takes the punishment of that sin and removes it far away and no longer holds it against the penitent sinner. He receives complete cleansing. He receives a full forgiveness. He enjoys the wonderful pardon. God forgives not part of the rebel’s wrongdoings. God does not remove part of sin’s penalty. When the sinner comes to God and confesses, God takes all the sin, all the guilt, and all the penalty and lifts the burden entirely off of the sinner. What a complete cleansing!

4. Eternal

As the horrid thief on the cross who hung next to Jesus pleaded for cleansing and forgiveness, the gracious Savior responded mercifully to him and promised that today he would be in paradise. True repentance brings eternal inheritance. True confession guarantees heavenly blessings. When God forgives, he makes a promise of pardon and he can never lie, retract his Word, or fail to fulfill His promise. Thus, when God forgives, he finally, fully, eternally forgives. When he washes, he thoroughly, completely, and eternally washes. Thus, the forgiven sinner can enjoy the eternally enduring blessednesses that shower upon him.

5. Irrevocable

All the promises of God are yes and cannot ever be changed. God cannot lie or change His mind. He cannot deceive or manipulate. When God forgives, he irrevocably forgives. When he washes, he thoroughly washes so as to never permit that sin to be held against the sinner again. When God forgives, it cannot be revoked. Though a human leader may revoke a promise, not so with God! Though human courts may repeal a decision, not so with God! Though a committee of power may overturn the ruling of a lesser dignitary, not so with God! God cannot revoke His promised forgiveness. He cannot remove His promise of blessing. His forgiveness granted to the repentant is irrevocable.

6. Freeing

As one who found himself stuck under masses of stone and rubble hopeless to ever free himself, the omnipotent arm of the Divine comes and removes all the heavy materials so the man is completely freed from the weight that held him down, so it is with God's forgiveness. He lifts the sin off of the sinner. He takes it up and removes it entirely from the saint. God leaves no remains but completely cuts off the sin and its sentence because He frees the sinner from its overwhelming weight. The burden is lifted off. The coat of shame is removed and the pack of putrid filth is taken off. The sinner who humbly seeks the forgiveness of God finds a freeing forgiveness so as to find the weight which once pinned him down is now removed by God's very own hand.

7. Atoning

Peasants who revolt against the king deserve death. Those who break the judicial law reside under its sentence, its curse, and await its punishment. So it is with God. But when God forgives a pleading sinner, he promises to cover that sin. This covering is called atonement. God atones for the sinner's iniquity. To cover is to atone; to atone is to appease; to appease is to eliminate penalty. God covers a sinner's penalty when the sinner confesses his sin. A sinner who misses the mark of God's prescribed standard should find himself naked and uncovered to face the storm of God's wrath yet God Himself makes a way for the sinner to find a covering. When the sinner confesses, the divinely instituted covering protects entirely from the thunderstorm of God's righteous wrath.

The reason the sinner can receive atonement is because the divinely instituted covering is God Himself. God's justice demands punishment. Yet Jesus Christ was displayed publicly as a propitiation so as to bear the Father's wrath and thus divert it away from the heart of the penitent sinner. Thus, God provides an atonement — a covering — by being the covering

Himself. Thus, in a wondrous mystery, God bears God's wrath so that the penitent sinner can find a covering. The Lord Jesus Christ is the atonement Himself by being the Lamb, unblemished and spotless, who gives His life for those who are His own. This, then, shows why God's forgiveness is atoning. The wrath is poured out. The Father manifests His justice. The sinner, however, is not the recipient of divine fury but the covering — the atonement — is Jesus Christ in the sinner's stead. This is the glory of God's forgiveness.

8. Exclusive

Forgiveness from God cannot be obtained by merit or wishes. No ceremony or cult can create cleansing. The forgiveness from God is only found in Jesus Christ. This shows, as the Bible frequently purports, that Jesus Christ alone is the one way that sinners can find reconciliation with God. He alone cleanses. He alone suffices as their substitute. He alone brings rebels to the Father as His blood purchased atonement for them. The Scripture speaks of man's need of being forgiven by God. Man needs to hear *God* say that the guilt of sin is removed. God only does this one way. There is one door. There is one gate. There is one mediator. The forgiveness that God grants — the complete, the freeing, the eternal, the saving, the sufficient forgiveness — can only be found when Jesus Christ engulfs the sinner with His righteous robe of purity. God forgives sinners only in Jesus Christ.

9. Joyous

An element of God's cleansing that must not be overlooked is the joy that derives from God's free forgiveness. How many are the happy blessednesses bestowed upon the forgiven sinner! How heavenly is the cleansing! How marvelous is the singing of the forgiven man! The heavy hand of God that once pressed down heavy upon him now is removed, lifted, and exchanged for the tender, merciful, and kind hand of the Father. He who receives pardon and who trusts in the Lord finds himself surrounded by the covenantal lovingkindness of God. The blessings of God's faithful, steadfast, truthful, eternal, irrevocable, and saving love produces eternal joys! The Scriptures speak of the forgiven saints rejoicing in the Lord and shouting loudly in God. They must sing for joy who were once crooked and twisted but now are upright and holy. O let the forgiveness that God gives to the penitent produce heavenly songs of joy on earth!