



Teaching Letter 36

Receiving Forgiveness

“. . . be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you” (Matthew 9:2 NKJ).

The verse for today reads in its entirety: “Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’ ” The man and his friends came expecting physical healing, and he received that plus much more.

Having our sins forgiven is something to “be of good cheer” about. However, as a counselor and minister, I have met many people who—although they had confessed their sins—still felt unforgiven. Their sins were forgiven, but they for some reason had not accepted their forgiveness. They did not have the “good cheer” Jesus spoke of. In fact, they had considerable torment.

Receiving God’s forgiveness is like receiving a gift. Someone hands you a gift; you reach to take it and you say “Thank you.” God has extended the gift of forgiveness on the basis of our confession and repentance, and we receive it by saying, “Thank You.” It is received by faith, because we have believed God’s Word about confessing, repenting and being forgiven. And we also know it is granted on the basis of Christ’s shed blood on Calvary and on His righteousness—not our own.

Were we to be relying on our own righteousness in order to receive forgiveness, that would be a delusion. Isaiah wrote that “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (64:6 NKJ). Neither you nor I will ever merit God’s favor or forgiveness. Everything we receive is based on Christ, and God has determined it to be that way. However, we do not grovel in our own unworthiness, because in Christ we have been exalted with Him.

Through His worthiness, through His righteousness, through His shed blood, and through His acceptance of us we can freely receive our forgiveness.

The Apostle John wrote: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 NKJ). That means He forgives and cleanses us the first time we ask. Sometimes that truth reaches only our head and does not penetrate our heart. It’s the truth that reaches and resides in our heart that will set us free. That’s the deep-level knowing that Jesus meant when He said, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32 NKJ). So, if we find ourselves repenting over and over and over for something we did, we need the truth of God’s forgiveness to reach our heart.

Before we go any farther, if you want to receive God’s forgiveness for something, think for a moment what that is and then pray this prayer with me. Maybe you have already repented for it, but you find yourself asking for forgiveness again and again. Decide now to settle the matter. I pray that the truth of God’s forgiveness will over ride and even eradicate any feeling of being unforgiven or of needing repentance. I believe God will do a work in your heart and you will know a change has begun in you as you pray this prayer:

“Father God, I believe Your Word which says I am forgiven. I receive Your forgiveness for _____ (name it) based on Jesus’ shed blood on Calvary and based on Jesus’ worthiness—not mine. Thank You for forgiving me. Let the truth of Your love and forgiveness settle deep in my

heart. Let any lie I may have believed be replaced by Your truth. I thank You now, and I declare—I AM FORGIVEN. In Jesus' Name. Amen."

Some people have difficulty forgiving themselves for something they have done. I've written about this before, but it bears repeating. Failing to forgive ourselves when God has forgiven brings torment and bondage to our soul. Maybe what we did was major and has had long-lasting and far-reaching effects. Because the consequences of our behavior were significant, it has been difficult to let go of guilt. Maybe reminders are all around. We must remember, however, that Jesus took our guilt and shame on the Cross. He bore them and has released us from them. Satan delights in reminding us of our past. Someone has said when he does that, we should remind him of his future.

Peter denied knowing Jesus three times following Jesus' arrest. He repented with bitter tears; but in the days following, Peter may have had difficulty forgiving himself. This is understandable from a human perspective. He truly loved Jesus and he truly had repented; however, Peter had lost much of his former boldness and direction. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus said to Peter: "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail . . ." (NKJ).

Satan's plan for Peter was total destruction. Jesus's plan was strength for the trial and restoration of full freedom and joy in relationship. Our failings and our sins do not have to destroy us or our faith. It is God's plan that we become stronger through our testings—even our failures. Forgiveness and restoration are provided if we will receive them.

Jesus came to Peter and others of the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee one morning following His resurrection. This was the third time Jesus had appeared to His disciples. This time He came apparently to restore and recommission Peter. John wrote: "So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' He said to him, 'Feed My lambs'" (NJK).

Jesus asked Peter this question two more times. "Peter, do you love Me?" It was a grievous process of questioning for Peter; however, Jesus' was

leading Peter to full restoration. Peter had denied Jesus three times. Jesus led Peter to proclaim His love for Him three times. Jesus' words, "Feed My sheep" and "Feed My lambs," were to Peter a closing of the door to what occurred in the past and a re-launching to the mission to which Jesus had called him.

Jesus came to Peter, and He comes to you now. If you have not fully let go of something you have done, Jesus wants to settle the issue. You have repented, and He has nothing against you. *Let it go.* Don't carry the burden of it any longer. Don't let it hinder the good future Jesus has for you. Take a quiet moment and say, "I let it go."

Although Peter affirmed to Jesus that he loved Him, Jesus was re-establishing Peter in Jesus' love. By telling Peter to "feed My sheep," Jesus essentially said, "Peter, I still trust you with the mission." Our failures, sins and weaknesses do not disqualify us from God's purposes and callings for us. He forgives and restores. We move forward, confident in His love and His forgiveness.

Solomon wrote: "For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity" (Proverbs 24:16 NKJ). Solomon also said, ". . . there is no one who does not sin. . ." (1 Kings 8:46 NKJ). The good news is—we can get up, we can repent and we can have the help of the Lord to walk on, restored to right standing and good confidence with God.

David wrote: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1 NKJ). We are truly blessed!

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GOD'S WORD FOR TODAY

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