



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 19.2 – The Doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins

God's Solution to Our Sin Problem

Even though many of our sins are sins against other human beings and even against ourselves, in reality all of our sins are against God, who has commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to love Him most of all. By committing adultery and murder, King David sinned against many people, but in his psalm of penitence he said to God: **“Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight”** (Psalm 51:4). God hates sin, and He is the only One who has the right to punish us for our sins, since He is holy and just.

Since all of our sins are against God, God is the only One who can forgive sins. The scribes at Jesus' time were actually correct when they said: **“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** (Mark 2:7). The most wonderful thing about God is that He does forgive sins. The Lord God Jehovah (Jahveh) revealed His name to Moses in this way: **“And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin’”** (Exodus 34:6-7).

David understood this, for he wrote: **“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgives all your iniquities”** (Psalm 103:2-3). Another psalm declares: **“If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You”** (Psalm 130:3-4). The prophet Micah wrote: **“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity?”** (Micah 7:18).

Jesus compared His heavenly Father to an earthly king whose servant owed him such a huge amount that he could not possibly pay it all. Jesus said: **“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt”** (Matthew 18:23-27). Our sins against God are like huge debts that can never be paid. But God forgives all these sins, no matter how many and great they may be.

But must not the holy God who hates sin punish sin in holy justice? Yes, God must punish sin. He cannot ignore sin, or act as though sin has not happened. This is the wonder of God's love and compassion. God found a way to punish sin and save sinners. Already in eternity God planned His solution to our sin problem, and as soon as sin entered the world through the sin of our first parents, God announced His solution. The solution was the sending of His own Son as the Seed of a woman to take on Himself all human sin and be punished as the God-man in place of sinful human beings. Without the Son of God being the substitute for the human race under the punishment of God there could be no forgiveness of sins for anyone. The apostle John wrote: **“Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake”** (1 John 2:12).

Over and over again the New Testament proclaims the truth that God forgives sins for only one reason: Jesus was punished for our sin in our place when God poured out on Jesus, His Son, the full wrath and hatred of God against sin. Without Christ's suffering in our place on the cross there could be no forgiveness for anyone. The apostle Paul proclaimed it plainly in his recorded sermons. For example,

he summarized his message in Antioch of Pisidia with these words: “**Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man (Jesus) is preached to you the forgiveness of sins**” (Acts 13:38).

In his letters Paul repeated this same truth. “**In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace**” (Ephesians 1:7). “**And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you**” (Ephesians 4:32). “**And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross**” (Colossians 2:13-14).

God cannot and does not forgive sins by simply saying the word of forgiveness. His Word of forgiveness is based on His action of punishing His Son, Christ Jesus, in our place. Without the suffering and death of Jesus there is no forgiveness. The letter to the Hebrews simply says: “**Without shedding of blood there is no remission**” (Hebrews 9:22). In the Old Testament ritual, which God established, there could be no forgiveness without the shedding of animal blood. But this animal blood did not actually take away any sins. The bloody animal sacrifices portrayed in advance the true sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross that removed sin. “**Now, once at the end of the ages, He (Jesus) has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**” (Hebrews 9:26).

For this reason, Martin Luther wrote in his *Large Catechism*: “*We could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the LORD Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart. Apart from Him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge*” (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 440).

Questions

1. In what way are all our sins against God?
2. Who is the only one who can forgive sins?
3. Prove from Scripture that God truly does forgive sins.
4. What parable did Jesus tell to explain the forgiveness of sins?
5. How has God punished all human sin?
6. Why is God able to forgive our sins?
7. Why was Jesus’ death on the cross necessary before God could forgive us?
8. What was the purpose of the bloody animal sacrifices of the law?
9. Why are such bloody animal sacrifices no longer necessary?
10. In what way is Jesus a mirror of the heart of God?