



I Believe

...in the forgiveness of sin...

Whenever one talks about forgiveness, there are hundreds of "What If" Questions. "What about this situation?" "What about this?"

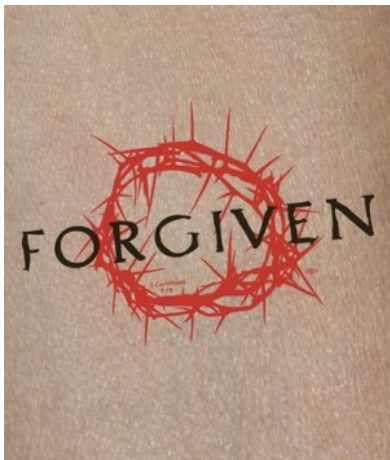
We could never answer all these questions in a single sermon but hopefully the message prompted us to understand that forgiveness is central to God's activity in the human realm. Martin Luther considered this part of the creed to be one of the most important statements in the creed.

But what is forgiveness? And who is the God who offers this to us and seeks reconciliation with a stubborn and sinful humanity?

In his book *What's So Amazing About Grace*, Philip Yancey writes that unforgiveness "plays like a background static of life for families, nations, and institutions. [Unforgiveness] is sadly our NATURAL human state.... We nurse sores, go to elaborate lengths to rationalize our behavior, perpetuate family feuds, punish ourselves, punish others-all to avoid the most UNNATURAL act of forgiving." In our society, REAL forgiveness is rare.

It's true. We often say we "bury the hatchet." But, we also tend to keep a "map" that carefully marks the spot where it's buried so we can dig it up when we need it.

To make clear, forgiving is not forgetting. The Bible does bring us this good news. Psalm 103:12 says that God has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.



"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
2 Corinthians 5:17

Micah 7:19 reminds us that God has compassion on us. "You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!"

Corrie ten Boom has put it like this: "God has taken our sin. He has thrown it into the sea of forgetfulness, and he has posted a sign that says, 'No fishing allowed.'

Isaiah 43:25 states, "I--yes, I alone--will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again."

He never thinks of them again. Actually, the Bible never says He "forgets". Instead, the Bible says He has not "counted" them against us. He has chosen not to remember them against us, not to bring the back up, never again to condemn us with them.

We also see that forgiveness is not condoning or dismissing or pretending.

Forgiveness does not let the offender off the hook. Forgiveness is "releasing." It's rarely easy, and it is always extremely costly. There is never forgiveness without suffering, nails, thorns, sweat, and blood.

What better example do we have of God's forgiveness than Jesus hanging on the cross and praying for the very people who pounded the spikes through His hands and feet?



This is my blood of the covenant,
which is poured out for many for the
forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:28

God reassures us in 1 John 1:9 that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The only sin God will not forgive is the sin we will not confess.

Again, the good news is that Jesus was willing to pay the price of our indebtedness. His forgiveness of us was costly. It cost Him everything.

In the end, Christianity shouts forgiveness. David wrote, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." Psalm 86:5

What does someone owe you? How costly will it be for you to forgive?

In the Lord's Prayer he teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US." Again and again he who would die for our sins calls us to release the debts of others—to forgive.

Do you recognize your need for forgiveness? Do you understand that God wants to forgive you? Do you know that God calls you to forgive?

How can Christ's love and forgiveness "set us free"?

Does God forgive our sins, excuse them, or overlook and forget them?
Psalm 130:1-8