

## What's Good About God: His Forgiveness

*1 John 1:8-9*

**B**illy Graham has told that the night he came to Christ, he did not have any tears. But when he went home, he looked out of the window at the North Carolina sky and cried over his sins and said, “Oh, God, forgive me.” Then the most wonderful peace swept over him. “From that moment on,” he said, “I’ve known my sins were forgiven.”

Corrie ten Boom once wrote, “The Bible says that when you bring your sins to Him, He will blot them out like a cloud. Did you see that cloud this morning? It is gone. It will never come again. It has absolutely disappeared forever.”

What’s good about God? For the last couple of weeks we’ve named a couple of things which reveal God’s goodness to us: His Creation and His Grace. The thing we look at today has been a part of our lives since birth, though we may not have always known it. All of us have asked for it at one time or another, either from God or from someone else. Without it, we become overburdened with guilt. With it, we have freedom and joy. This one thing is another aspect of God which is good: His Forgiveness.

Forgiveness can only come to us from a good God. It does not come from Satan, nor does it come to us as the result of our own efforts. Forgiveness is not bestowed upon us as the result of our works, even though there is something we must do in order to receive forgiveness. These are the facts which help us to agree on our subject today: *We can know the goodness of God through His forgiveness.*

We could talk about forgiveness and the goodness of God all day long—and never *really* say anything, never come to any logical conclusion, never come to any definite action, unless we ask “How?” There is only one way, and there are many, many Scriptures to tell us that one way. First John 1:8-9 is one of those passages. Let’s read it:

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These verses tell us about forgiveness. But they also tell us something else. They tell us that we *cannot* know the goodness of God through His forgiveness *by denying our sin.*

We are all prone to do that. It’s much easier, and doesn’t demand too much of us, if we deny that we are sinners. But the Scriptures plainly teach that denial of sin

brings self-deception. That's what we're taught in verse eight: "*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*" If we deny that we have sinned we are only fooling ourselves. There are several ways to deceive ourselves concerning sin.

### **1. We can claim that we are not sinners.**

But God says we are! "*Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good—no, not one*" (Psalm 53:3). "*All we like sheep have gone astray*" (Isaiah 53:6). "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away*" (Isaiah 64:6). "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).

And these are merely a few of the Scriptures which emphasize that we are sinners. We can claim that we are not sinners all we want, but that won't change anything. We can reason and rationalize with convincing logic, yet nothing will change. God teaches us through the Scriptures that we are sinners, and our denying that fact is merely an exercise in self-deception.

### **2. We can ignore our sin.**

But ignoring a burning building won't put the fire out. Ignoring a raging fever won't bring the body temperature down. Ignoring your yard won't keep the grass from growing. Ignoring the weeds in the garden won't get rid of the weeds. Ignoring our sin won't change anything, either.

### **3. We can pretend that God means someone else—not us.**

We are like the disciples in John 13. When Jesus said that one of them would betray Him, the Bible says that "*the disciples looked at **one another**, uncertain of whom he spoke*" (John 13:22). Do you sit in your comfortable pew and listen to the preacher's sermon, and go home trying to guess who the preacher was talking about?

Listen! I'm not talking about your neighbor or about the person you don't like, or even about the people you do not associate with. I'm talking about you, and I'm talking about me. The Scriptures point out clearly that we *all* have sinned.

### **4. We can believe that we are above sin.**

We might say to ourselves, I'm really too good to sin. My background is too refined. I had a good upbringing. My daddy raised me right. We deceive ourselves

into thinking that just because *we* see ourselves as being better than everybody else, that everybody else thinks that, too! But none of us has the right to set ourselves up on a pedestal like that.

The Scriptures tell us that God is no respecter of persons. He doesn't care about our opinions of ourselves or our upbringing. He wants us to know that we are sinners, and that He offers that marvelous forgiveness to us all.

### **5. We can blame somebody else.**

That is what Adam did, when he blamed his sin on Eve. Eve blamed her sin on the serpent. Children do this a lot when they know they are guilty. They blame somebody else for something they have done. But God sees through our protests, looks all the way to the heart, and there He uncovers the truth about our sinfulness.

### **6. We can make excuses.**

This is perhaps the easiest way to deceive ourselves. We may know we're guilty, so we try to hide behind an excuse. We may blame our sin on our environment, or our heredity, or our temperament, or even physical conditions. We might loudly protest that someone else led us astray. William Barclay wrote that it is characteristic of us all that we try to shuffle out of the responsibility for sin. But the truth still remains—we are *guilty!*

Making excuses will not bring us the forgiveness of God. No, you cannot know the goodness of God through His forgiveness if you deceive yourself into thinking that you either have not sinned, or somehow aren't responsible for your sin. If you fail to face the reality of sin, then it becomes impossible for you to know the reality of forgiveness.

There is only one way to know the goodness of God through forgiveness—by confessing our sin. First John 1:9 reads, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* Look closely at that verse. We learn that

### **Confession brings forgiveness.**

What is “confession”? It is a simple admission that what you have done is sin. That's tough to swallow at times. Our English word “confession” is derived from two Latin words, one which means “together” or “with” and another which means “to agree.” When you confess your sin, you are agreeing together with God that

what you have done is sin, that you have sinned because you are a sinner. That simple admission must come first, but that is not all that must come.

It is much easier to say “I am a sinner,” or “I have sinned,” than it is to name a particular deed and say “that is sin, and that is what I did.” It is much easier to say “I am a sinner” than it is to say “Sometimes I get angry enough to kill somebody, and that is sin.” “I lust and that is sin.” “I abuse my body, and that is sin.”

What is your sin? Is it pride, lack of faith, anger, love of pleasure more than love of God? Whatever it is, confess it before God—name it—call it what it is. Then claim this promise of God that He will forgive. If we confess our sins, the result is forgiveness and cleansing.

Now, your confession must be sincere. To be sincere, your confession must involve repentance. The Scriptures are full of promises of forgiveness for the one who truly repents. “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*” (Isaiah 55:7). “*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy*” (Proverbs 28:13).

You see, if you make any confession of sin without realizing that you are guilty personally, and that personally, you must repent, then your confession is not acceptable before God.

But when we confess our sins, we can know the goodness of God, by receiving forgiveness. This is what happens to us:

First of all, ***our sins are forgiven***. God’s forgiveness wipes out the past. We are pardoned and declared “not guilty.” As far as the books are concerned, our sins are taken away. It is as though we had never sinned. God forgives us of our sins. That’s how ***good*** He is!

Second, ***we are cleansed from all unrighteousness***. God makes the future new for us, so that we are even promised forgiveness for our future sins if we will confess them, too. We are cleansed, purified, made ready for a future of service and fellowship with God.

We cut ourselves off from God’s forgiveness when we hang on to our sin and refuse to confess. The forgiveness of God can come only when we humbly and

openly confess before God that we have sinned in a specific way. You cannot have forgiveness for your loose tongue until you confess that sin—for your hatred of or bitterness toward another person until you confess that sin—for your lack of faith in God to care for your every need until you confess that sin.

You and I can have forgiveness today, not by denying our sin, but by confessing our sin, and asking God for forgiveness. It is truly difficult to believe that God is good when we are stumbling in the darkness and confusion of unforgiveness. It is difficult to know that God is good when we are weighted down with guilt. But through God's forgiveness we can know exactly how good God really is!

Forgiveness will not come to you by proxy. It will never be forced upon you. You cannot earn it. Your responsibility—and mine—is to confess our sins. God does the rest. He forgives us, cleanses our hearts and lives of all unrighteousness.

Today is the day you can know the goodness of God because He has forgiven you! We can know it as Peter knew it after he had denied Christ. We can know it as David did after he confessed his sin with Bathsheba. We can know it as Judas never knew it. We can know it today as our very own because God really is a good God, and He longs to express His goodness toward us today.