

Should One Be Uncertain of God's Forgiveness?

By Raymond C. Faircloth

A few Christian groups teach that they are not **permitted to know if they have received God's forgiveness until** Christ returns for the coming judgment. So the purpose of this Study is to attempt to show that this view is not only unscriptural but also psychologically damaging to the believer.

Our High Priest and Advocate

Our Father in heaven has provided the exalted Jesus as our sympathetic high priest who paid off the death penalty deserved by all of us because of Adam's sin. Jesus administered his sacrifice so that those who through faith and baptism into him are acquitted with reference to this death penalty and redeemed from our previous state of alienation from God. Therefore, all our past sins are wiped away. Yet, contrary to the above teaching, Jesus continues as our advocate and intercessor each time we sin, provided we express our repentance:

❖ “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone **sins**, we have **an Advocate with the Father**, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

❖ “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to **make propitiation for the sins of the people**” (Heb. 2:17).

On that basis, all such sins are also wiped away and we can have full confidence in our position before God and our relationship with Him.

❖ “But Christ came as High Priest of **the good things to come**, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation” (Heb. 9:11).

What would be the point of having a high priest who is our advocate and intercessor standing before the Father if we are never sure that we are or will be acceptable to Him. Indeed such a position seems to be contradictory and cruel. In fact, we can certainly be assured of God's forgiveness.

Self-Examination

Although the following passage refers to the Lord's Supper, the examination of spoken of here concerns ones attitude toward one's fellow Christians—“the body.” (Please see Gordon Fee's comments in the *New International Commentary of the New Testament*). The principle that can be taken from this passage is that if one continues to examine these attitudes in oneself and repents of them one will not need to receive discipline (judgment) from God. So the Christian is going through a daily process of judgment by using his godly conscience:

❖ “Let a person **examine himself**, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning **the body** eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But **if we judge ourselves** truly, *we would not be judged*. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world”

(1 Cor. 11:28-32 ESV).

NOTE: The KJV and NKJV have some wrongly added phrases in this passage.

The Judgement Is Not for Life or Death Issues

❖ “For we must all appear before the *judgment seat of Christ*, **that each one may receive the things done** in the body [*of Christians*], according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

There is nothing here to prove that this will be a simultaneous appearing before Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus already knows the character and worthiness of each Christian who will appear before him; so they do not need to appear for any judgment in the court of assize sense. The Christian “shall not come into judgment” that is related to immortal life just as Jesus showed:

❖ “... I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and **shall not come into judgment**, but has *passed from death into life*” (John 5:24).

There is no reason to imagine that this is proleptic. The Christian, because of his faith, has already passed from being “in Adam,” because of the death sentence incurred by Adam, and into life “in Christ” as John says in his first letter:

- ❖ “We **know that we have passed from death to life**, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 John 3:14).
- ❖ “...but **the gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Because this is a gift bestowed on us because of our faith it cannot be earned as a reward. However, it is the future Kingdom rewards that we are earning now.

The Christian Has Been Freed from the Death Penalty

- ❖ “There is therefore **now no condemnation** to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me **free from the law of sin and death**” (Rom. 8:1, 2).

Coupled with Jesus’ words that the Christian has “*passed from death into life*” it is evident that the Christian now has the gift of “life of the age to come.”

The Christian’s Sins Are Already Forgiven

- ❖ “I write to you, little children, because **your sins are forgiven you** for His name’s sake” (1 John 2:12).
- ❖ “But if we walk in the light as He [*God*] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to **cleanse us from all unrighteousness**” (1 John 1:7, 9).

Each time a Christian commits a sin and repents Jesus acts as the advocate so that God will forgive.

The Christian Is already Enrolled in the Kingdom

- ❖ “And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose **names are in the Book of Life**” (Phil. 4:3).

Additionally each Christian has his/her name written in heaven (Heb. 12:23). He/she is unconditionally (other than leaving God) promised the crown, and will sit on thrones. So the objective is not to have one’s name enrolled in heaven, but rather to not have it blotted out of the book of life. The sins are already blotted out:

- ❖ ““This is **the covenant** that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” then He adds, “**Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more**”” (Heb. 10: 16, 17).

The Christian is already in the New Covenant. For Jesus to begin a future judgment of the worthiness of his brothers would then be a breaking of the covenant by Jesus.

Appearing at the Judgment Seat Is for Rewards

- ❖ “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be **repaid at the resurrection of the just**” (Luke 14:14).

Jesus spoke of the grading of rewards according to one’s works of faith (Luke 19:17-19); and Paul speaks of the Christians reward:

- ❖ “Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for *the Day* will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and **the fire will test each one’s work**, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive **a reward**. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; **but he himself will be saved**, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

So it is the work of the faithful Christian that will be assessed by Jesus. His/her salvation is already assured even though he/she must experience tribulation and remain faithful.

Conclusion

The position taken by some as expressed at the beginning of this study gives a very negative reflection of our Father in heaven and especially fails to take into account His mercy on those who seek a right relationship with Him in spite of their human failures because of weakness. In Jesus' illustration of the prodigal son the father is symbolic of God as our Father. When the son returns to him, the father welcomes him joyously—all is forgiven. (Luke 15:20, 21).

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