

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

GREAT BIBLE LESSONS **“Man’s Sin and God’s Forgiveness”**

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

From the Garden of Eden to the present hour, sin has been the one thing that has plagued mankind. We learn from Romans 3:23 (“All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God”) that no human has ever escaped the entanglement of sin. Ezekiel commented on the sad results of sin in Ezekiel 18:4 when he wrote, “The soul who sins shall surely die.” The saddest thing about sin is that it separates us from a holy and loving God. Isaiah wrote, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Is. 59:1-2). Paul spoke of the sad results of sin in Romans 6:23 when he said, “The wages of sin is death.” Solomon, who knew sin quite well, commented on its results on all people in Ecclesiastes 7:20, “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.” Sin is the perennial problem that has plagued mankind from the Garden of Eden until this present time.

Fortunately, however, that is not the end of the story. God made a way of salvation so that we can overcome sin. Yes, sin has sad and tragic results. But sin also has a remedy—one that is found in Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read how God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Jesus came to Earth, lived, died, and gave His life as a sacrifice. He was willing to be a propitiation [i.e., a substitutionary sacrifice] for our sins. Hebrews 2:9 states that Jesus “tasted death for everyone.” When Jesus died on the cross (Heb. 2:14) He conquered death, as well as him “who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” This is why 1 John 2:1-2 speaks of Jesus as being, “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” Peter described salvation through Christ in 1 Peter 2:24 (as he considered the words of Isaiah 53:4-5) by referring to Christ as He “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” Today as we think about sin’s tragic results, we need to understand that the story does not end there. God has made a way of forgiveness—a way that is found through Christ, Who provides the only way to salvation. In Acts 4:12 we read, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Jesus is the way to salvation.

For a few moments, then, let’s think about the topic, “man’s sin—and God’s forgiveness.” I especially want us to note today that God is a forgiving God. When someone reads the Old Testament, he might view God as being vindictive. He might see God as a fearful God. And there is no doubt that, at times, God can be fearful. But the heart and character of God is peace and forgiveness. Our God is a loving, forgiving God. The Scriptures teach us that the God we serve is ready to forgive! God is not a God Who **wants** to send people to Hell. God does not want **anyone** to perish, as 2 Peter 3:9 and 1 Timothy 2:4 explain. God wants all people to be saved. There is a beautiful passage in Psalm 86:5 that illustrates how God is ready to forgive. “For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and

abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.” God is pictured as One Who is ready to forgive. Consider the prodigal son, discussed in Luke 15. He went away into a far land, wasted his inheritance, and lived an ungodly life. He even found himself in a pig pen, wishing that he could eat pig slop. But he came to his senses and said to himself, “I will return to my father and become as one of his servants.” Do you remember the picture of how his father forgave him upon his return? The father saw his son coming from a long way off. He ran out to greet him, and he embraced him. He was ready to forgive the son of his sins. That is the picture we see of God in the Bible. God is a forgiving God. I love the words of Psalm 103:10-12, where the psalmist wrote of God:

“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

God wants to forgive our sins, and is ready to do so. I am reminded of another passage in the Psalms—Psalm 130:3, where the psalmist wrote, “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” Suppose that God had a chalkboard, and every time we sinned, He made a mark? On the Day of Judgment, who could stand? None of us could! All of us would be condemned because of our sins. However, in the next verse we read, “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” If God were to mark our iniquities, no one could stand. But there is forgiveness with God. We need to realize that the God of the Bible stands ready to forgive us of our sins.

We also need to know that God is One Who is ready to forget all our sins. The God Who is presented in the Bible is One Who wants to forget. He wants to be One Who puts sin behind us. In Hebrews 8:12-13 the writer quoted Jeremiah 31:34 to say, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” That is the picture we get of God from the Bible. God wants to forget our sins so we can put them behind us. When we say that God wants to forget our sins, that does not mean that He cannot remember them, but rather that on the Day of Judgment all of the sins we committed before becoming a child of God, or all the sins we committed after becoming Christians (yet were willing to repent of), will no longer haunt us. That is the beautiful picture of forgiveness depicted in the Bible. David understood this clearly after his sin with Bathsheba. He said in Psalm 51:1-2, “According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” This depicts God as forgetting our sins. He washes them away and blots them out so that they no longer can haunt us any more. God said to the people of Isaiah’s day in Isaiah 1:18, “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.’” What a beautiful thought—that our sins, which once were as red as scarlet, will be made as white as snow. That is the idea behind God forgetting our sins. Thus, the God we see in the Bible is ready to forgive us, and wants to forget our sins.

The longsuffering of our God is yet another proof that He is a forgiving God. All the way back to the time of Numbers 14:18, where the people had been steeped, the Bible says that God is longsuffering, gracious, and merciful. We know that God is longsuffering because of passages such as 2 Peter 3:9, where Peter wrote, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” How do we know that God is a longsuffering and forgiving God? Here’s how. Stand in front of the mirror and gaze at yourself. The very fact that God has given us as sinners a second chance is proof

of His forgiving nature and longsuffering character. But we also know that God is long-suffering and forgiving because, in His infinite mercy, He made a plan for man's salvation that was built upon His love. Consider Romans 5:6-8 in this regard:

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

When humanity was steeped in sin, God sent His Son to Earth to die for us. God's forgiveness is seen in the fact that He was willing to make a way of escape for us. Think about the beautiful words of John 3:16, where the forgiveness of God comes into full view: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” If that is not love and forgiveness, then what is?! Think about what Jesus once possessed. In John 17:5 Jesus prayed to His Father, “Glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” Jesus sought the closeness and oneness that He had experienced with God prior to coming to Earth. In John 1:1-2 we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” God and Christ existed together from eternity. Yet Christ gave that up. As John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” That is the love of God, and the forgiveness that we find only in God.

However, we also can know that God is a forgiving God because of the examples we see of His forgiveness in the Scriptures. I am thankful that we have the Bible because not only does it tell us about God's great wisdom, but it also tells us about people who sinned and were forgiven. We need to read such things. We need to know of people to whom we can relate, and of whom we can say, “That person did something similar to a sin I've committed, but God was willing to forgive him, so I know He will forgive me, too.” Here are some examples.

David is the prime example of a person who had been forgiven of his sin. Psalm 51:1-2 says, “Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness, according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” What is the background to these statements? David's thoughts are clearly penitent in nature. David weeps because of his sin, and prays for God's forgiveness. The background of David's sin is found in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. At a time when kings usually went out to war, David had remained in his palace. He saw beautiful Bathsheba bathing on the rooftop of her house. He lusted after her, and said in his heart that he would take her. He thus had sexual relations with her and took her to be his own. Then he had her husband Uriah killed. David told one of his princes to place Uriah on the front line, and then at the heat of the battle to draw back from him. In this we see adultery, murder, and an illegitimate child who was born as a result of David's adultery. David was found to be in sin. Nathan the prophet came to David and told him a tender story that pointed out David's sin. The king then admitted that he had sinned. But I am thankful this example is contained in God's Word. David, even though he had sinned, was still a friend of God. He still was able to repent and make that right.

Another example is found in the case of Adam and Eve. When we think of people who succumbed to the devil's temptation, yet were able to overcome their sin, Adam and Eve are a wonderful example. In Genesis 3 we see God placing them in the beautiful Garden of Eden. God had taken care of everything for them. In fact, He gave them just one negative command: “Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that stands in the midst of the garden.” But they still ate from that tree. As a result, they were

cast from the garden. Sin entered into the world, and people ever since have been sinning because of their personal choices (Rom. 5:12). But even though Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis 3:15ff. promised that through Eve's seed, salvation would be brought through the Christ. Even though we see a sad scene in regard to their sin, we still see how God was willing to forgive them.

There are some New Testament examples that encourage us in a similar manner when we succumb to sin. I am thankful that the example of Peter is included in the New Testament because it provides a powerful example of a man who sinned, yet who was forgiven. In Matthew 26:75 we read, "And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So he went out and wept bitterly." Peter was always one who was quick to speak. Jesus had promised His disciples that He (as the Shepherd) would be struck down, and that the sheep (Christ's followers) would be scattered. But Peter assured Christ that he would accompany Him all the way. Jesus said, "No you won't. When they strike Me, all of you will be scattered." Peter thought that he was tough, and that he could withstand anything. In the end, however, when the rooster crowed, Peter realized that the Lord had been right all along. Suddenly Peter found himself in sin. People in the court of the high priest asked him three times, "Are you with Jesus?" But Peter said, "No, not me!" At one point, the Bible says that Peter even cursed, and that he vehemently denied even knowing the Lord. Talk about sin! There it is! Peter—one of Christ's most-devoted followers—stabbed the Lord in the back. Yet Peter was forgiven. I am thankful that John 21:15-17 is found in the Bible. Jesus is having breakfast with His disciples after His death but prior to His ascension. He asked Peter if he loved Him. Peter assured Him that he did. Jesus asked a second time. Peter assured Him that he did. Then Jesus asked a third time, "Do you love Me?," and said, "Then feed My sheep." That passage provides a fascinating testimony to Peter's restoration, as well as to the fact that any child of God who sins can be restored. Can you imagine doing anything worse than what Peter did? He denied the Lord in His direst hour! Yet Peter was forgiven and restored—and went on to do a great work in the kingdom. We need to realize today that there were people in the past who sinned, yet who were forgiven—just as we today can sin and be forgiven.

Perhaps, however, the clearest (and most encouraging) example of someone who sinned yet was forgiven is Simon. In Acts 8, we see how Simon heard the Word of God preached by Philip, an evangelist who had come into the area to spread the Gospel (Acts 8:1-12). Simon subsequently became a Christian. Prior to this, however, Simon had been a magician. When he saw Philip perform a genuine miracle, he offered to buy with money the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter said in Acts 8:20-22, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." Simon had just obeyed the Gospel. Yet he got greedy based on his prior life, and as a result he sinned almost immediately after having become a Christian. He was told that if he remained in that sin, he would be lost. But he had hope—because he could repent and pray to God so that his evil thoughts and actions could be forgiven. Here, then, we see a child of God who sinned, yet who was able to take advantage of what we recognize as "God's second law of pardon." If we are willing to repent of sins that we commit after becoming Christians, we can be forgiven!

But we today need to understand that while God is a forgiving God, and while there are examples of His forgiveness in the Bible, we should never take sin lightly. Forgiveness comes to us at a high cost. Sin is not something in which we should dabble. It is not some-

thing in which we should ever want to get involved. In fact, we should run from it—partly because of the high cost of sin. Forgiveness caused our Lord and Savior to have to leave Heaven in order to come to Earth. Surely any child of God (or person who believes the Bible) would say, “I want to go to Heaven. I want to live where God is.” But can you imagine Jesus leaving Heaven (thereby giving up all that Heaven had to offer) in order to live here among those of us who are afflicted with sin and sorrow—and eventually dying because of our sins? Think of the words of 2 Corinthians 8:9. I do not believe it would be possible to illustrate the high cost of forgiveness any more beautiful than this passage does. Paul wrote, “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” Jesus lived in Heaven. Yet He gave that up. Out of the ivory palaces He came to Earth. Think about what it cost Jesus. Forgiveness demanded that He live a perfect life. Can you imagine trying to live a perfect life? Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Think again of 2 Corinthians 5:21. When we think of forgiveness, we must remember that it demanded that Christ live a perfect life. God made Christ, “who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” He was sorely persecuted, and was tempted by the devil. Yet forgiveness demanded that He live a perfect life. The text of 1 Peter 2:22 tells us, that Christ “committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.” John the Immerser once proclaimed upon seeing Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29).

The fact that Jesus left the halls of Heaven, and that He had to live a perfect life, is not the single greatest cost of sin and forgiveness. The greatest cost is that Jesus suffered a horrible death in order to provide forgiveness for each one of us. When we think about the tragic results of sin, and how God is so forgiving, it should make us come to a sober realization that sin is not something with which to be toyed. Think about what Jesus had to suffer so that we could have the hope of Heaven. Hebrews 9:22 says that “without the shedding of blood, there is no remission [of sins].” In Matthew 27:46 when Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,” do you understand the answer to that question? **We** are the answer to that question! Jesus was forsaken by God because He took upon Himself the sins of the world (1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21). Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14 teach that there is forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation “in Christ.” But look at the words of Jesus as He was about to institute the Lord’s Supper. In Matthew 26:28 we see the cost of forgiveness. Jesus said, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Think about Christ and all that He endured. Think about how He had to walk up that hill to Golgotha. Think about the suffering He endured as He was mocked, laughed at, and spit upon. He was slapped in the face, and a crown of thorns was placed on His head. His back was beaten with many stripes. He then had a purple robe placed on His body and removed. He was laid on a cross, and had nails driven into His hands and feet. He had to hang in agony on the cross for hours before He died. **That** is the cost of forgiveness! How thankful to God we should be that it was paid for us by Christ. And what a sober realization it should bring us regarding the horror of sin.

But let’s also examine the **requirements** of forgiveness—which, for people who have not yet become children of God, are clearly given in Acts 2. When the Jews realized that they had crucified their own Lord and Savior, they cried out, “What must we do?” (Acts 2:37). In Acts 2:38 Peter told them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Thus, initially if a person wants to be forgiven of his sins, he must hear God’s Word (Rom. 10:17), believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn. 8:24), repent of his past sins (Lk. 13:3), confess Jesus as the Christ (Rom. 10:10), and then be baptized in water. Mark 16:16 could

not be any clearer. Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." There, two conditions are set forth—belief and baptism. The person who does these things will be forgiven and saved from sin.

But what about **after** a person has become a child of God? What happens after a person has obeyed the Gospel, but then sins? What must that person do to be forgiven? What can a Christian do to deal with the sins he commits as he matures and grows? The first thing a sinning Christian must do is be willing to confess his sin. The word "confess" presents an interesting idea. Sometimes I think we get the idea that when we are talking about confessing our sins, we have in mind saying something like this: "God, You may not know this, but..." That is not what confession means. The Greek word for confession means "to lay alongside of." God has a record of our sins, and thus knows what we have done. When we confess our sins, we are "laying alongside of" that record **our admission** of something that God already knows. Look at 1 John 1:9—"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness— "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord." David likewise said, "I have sinned" (2 Sam. 12:23). Balaam said in Numbers 22:34, "I have sinned." Even Judas said it in Matthew 27:4. He realized his sin—and then he went out and hanged himself.

However, confession of sin, although important, is not the final step. To be forgiven, we also must repent and turn from those sins. In Luke 13 we see how some people had come to Jesus to ask Him if certain people were sinners. Pilate had mingled some of the people's blood with their sacrifices, and some of them had been killed by a tower that had fallen on them. Certain people wanted to know if those people were worse sinners than all others. But Jesus said (taking the emphasis off those who had died, and placing it upon those who were asking the question), "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (vs. 3). In Acts 3:19 we read, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." In Acts 17:30 we find, "These times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent." Thus, we not only must own up to our sins and confess them, but we also must be willing to repent and turn from those sins.

Then we must be willing to pray to ask God for forgiveness. In Acts 8:22 Simon was told by Peter, "Pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." That is such an encouraging passage. If we sin and fall short—and we all do—the good news is that we can confess our sins, repent, pray to God, and be forgiven. James 5:16 says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Today, then, we need to understand that being in sin is a horrible situation in which to live. No one wants to die in sin. Can you imagine living and dying in sin—and being lost eternally? How horrible that would be. But the God of the Bible—the God of Whom we read in Scripture—is a loving and forgiving God. God wants **you** to be saved. In 1 Timothy 2:4 we read of God, Who "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Have you dealt with sin in your life? Have you obeyed the Gospel? Are you a child of God? If not, why not remove the tragic results of sin in your life by being obedient to Jesus. If you are a child of God, yet you are living in sin, you can be forgiven if you will be like Simon and be willing to repent and pray. We pray that God will give you the strength and courage to overcome sin in your life.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “MAN’S SIN AND GOD’S FORGIVENESS”

1. According to Romans 3:23, what problem plagues all mankind?
2. What does Ezekiel 18:4 say will happen to the soul who sins?
3. According to Isaiah 59:1-2, what does sin do to humankind?
4. What, according to Romans 6:23, is “the wages of sin”?
5. John spoke of Jesus as being, “the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn 2:1-2). What is a “propitiation”?
6. What did Paul mean in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he wrote that God made Christ, “who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”?
7. According to Hebrews 4:15, what did Christ **not** do?
8. What, according to 1 Peter 2:24, did Christ do for us?
9. According to 1 Timothy 2:4, what does God want?
10. According to Psalm 86:5, what is God ready to do?
11. What does Psalm 103:10-12 tell us about God?
12. What specific traits of God’s character are described in Numbers 14:18?
13. What trait of God’s character is described in 2 Peter 3:9?
14. According to Romans 5:8, what did Christ do, and for whom did He do it?
15. In Acts 8:18-21, what sin did Simon commit?
16. In Acts 8:22, what did Peter tell Simon to do after he had sinned?
17. According to John 1:29, who is Christ?
18. What does Hebrews 9:22 tell us about forgiveness of sins?
19. According to Paul’s statements in Ephesians 1:7, whose blood cleanses us of our sins?
20. According to Matthew 26:28 for what purpose did Christ shed His blood?
21. What five things must a person who is not a Christian do to become one and be saved?
22. If a person becomes a Christian, but then sins, what three things must that person do to be forgiven of such sin?
23. What important message is contained in 1 John 1:9?