

July 21, 2019

Forgiveness of Sin

Matthew 18:15-20

18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

18:16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

18:18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

18:19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

18:20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

1. The Gospel of Forgiveness

The Apostles’ Creed can be written in kanji or kana in Japanese with just 200 characters and in English with about 100 words. It expresses the truth of the faith in very short words, and every word is important, and there is no unnecessary word. But if we dare to choose the central words of the Apostles’ Creed from it, it would be “I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord.” The faith taught by the Bible and the Apostles’ Creed is, in fact, in the confession that “Jesus is the Lord Christ.”

And in the grace given to those who believe in Jesus Christ, I think

the most important thing is “the forgiveness of sin.” The Cross of Christ and the Resurrection are for the forgiveness of our sins, and all of that we receive the Holy Spirit, are connected to the Body of Christ, and in the end, receive the resurrected body and the eternal life, and inherit the kingdom of God, is because we have the forgiveness of sin.

Christ said this before he returned to heaven; “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:46-48) Christ said that the whole Bible pointed the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ, and commanded us to proclaim the forgiveness of sin by his Cross and Resurrection, around the world.

The apostles preached according to this teaching. On the day of Pentecost Peter said, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.” (Acts 2:23-24), and spoke of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. And when people asked, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) Peter also said, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” as Christ said, “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.”

And those who repented and believed in Jesus Christ were baptized, added to the church, and practiced “the breaking bread,” that is the Holy Communion. Acts 2:41-42 says, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

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The apostle Paul also preached the same gospel. In Acts 13:38, Paul says, “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” The peace and joy that comes from the forgiveness of sins are written everywhere in the Bible. In Romans 4:7-8 Paul is preaching the joy of the forgiveness, quoting the word of David, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” In Rome 5:1-5, he says that forgiveness produces peace, and peace produces hope. He concludes that “hope does not put us to shame.” In Romans 8:34-39, “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.... Not all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” He proclaims high the confidence of the forgiveness.

The gospel has been telling us to be forgiven of sin by Jesus Christ, turned to God, and filled with the Holy Spirit from the first preaching

to today. There is no time when we need this message as we do today. Now is the time to turn to this gospel and receive a certain life and hope based on the forgiveness of sin given by Christ.

2. Church and the Forgiveness of Sin

Christ gave the church the task of teaching, making certain, experiencing, and practicing the forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness of sin is God's and Christ's, but God has given the power to deal with sins to the church, and has made it a channel for carrying Christ's forgiveness. Let's look at some of the Bible passages that teach it.

The first is Matthew 16:19. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Here "bind" or "loose" means the action of the forgiveness. It is said as in John 20:23, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." The "key" that opens "the kingdom of heaven" is "the forgiveness of sin," and the church receives the key from the Lord.

Matthew 18:17 says, "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." This teaches the church that it is entrusted with the task of treating, properly judging, and forgiving the spiritual sins of believers. Paul lamented that the believers could not solve the problem in the church, but to fight in court, "Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases?" (1 Corinthians 6:2). The church is in charge of dealing with the sins of

the believers and leading them to forgiveness and reconciliation.

James 5:14-15 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” It is written that the prayers of the elders bring healing of the sickness as well as the forgiveness of sin.

There are baptism and the holy communion in the church, and both are related to the forgiveness of sin. Baptism is called “the baptism of forgiveness of sins.” Christ clearly said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:28) when he instituted the sacrament.

The “fellowship” of the church is made up of being forgiven by Christ and forgiving each other. Forgiveness does not mean that we never see sins in others and just praise them. It also does not mean practicing as if there are no problems in the church. Even if you forgive people, you are not to be arrogant, such as “I am not wrong, but I am generous and will forgive those who are wrong.” True believers will seriously repent, deal with their sins. Also, I hope that the true church, as a whole, will seek for holiness while constantly repenting. The repentance of believing in the grace of Jesus Christ’s forgiveness is by no means a retrospective. It’s not a heavy duty just to blame yourself. It is a blessing that leads to the fellowship with God and with those who truly love Christ. It is a privilege of the believers. We learn in the church that “Christ has forgiven, so we will forgive

each other,” and we will share the joy of forgiveness.

3. Christians and the Forgiveness of Sin

We have to fear the fact when we think over that the task of bringing “the forgiveness of sin” to people is given to the church, and to the believers. What can we do to us who know our sins? If we could do it, how would we do it? To think about that, let’s recall the first disciples.

The disciples before Christ returned to heaven were the unreliable ones who abandoned and hid away Christ on the cross. Peter denies the Lord three times, saying, “Who is Jesus? I do not know the man.” When Christ was resurrected, they were unbelievers who did not immediately believe it. Paul, who later became an apostle, was once a wild man who ruined the church as a young Pharisee leader. He was capturing Christians and putting them into prison. Why did Christ entrust the gospel to such people?

That is because the gospel of forgiveness of sin can only be witnessed by those who have experienced it. Peter and Paul were able to preach Jesus Christ powerfully because they were forgiven sins by Jesus Christ. Christ entrusts the gospel not to innocent angels, but to the believers on earth who cannot live without the forgiveness of sin. This is because God wants to show the greatness of the forgiveness of sin to the world.

As before, I have heard the story of Rev. Yasuhiro Kanazawa of Osaka Disciples Church. He is a former *yakuza*. He became a Yamaguchi-gumi gang member, got involved in a violent conflict between the groups, got a lifetime in nine deaths, and decided to get out of the gang, but it did not go well. At that time, he was led to the

faith through his father's illness and death. Rev. Kanazawa's parents were Christians, and he went to church with his parents until he became a junior high school student and became a bad student. Rev. Kanazawa told us that his mother's prayer made him a Christian.

He told us from his experience, "I could do my life again. Anyone who can believe in Jesus can do it again. It will never be late." These words have no mistakes or problems, and people who walk on the front road of life have no weight. As soon as he entered high school, he stopped, joined the riot race, entered the Juvenile Classification Center, stimulants, cannabis, baseball gambling, so-called "dropouts," and walked the back road of life. Because it is the word has weight, truth and power.

Many of the people, called saints, had a sinful past. They were those who have struggled with their sins deep in the soul, even if they did not appear in a visible way. Augustine was, Martin Luther was. Also, it was revealed that her letter was published in 2007, that Mother Teresa also spent the dark time of the soul. But the Lord told Mother, "Come, be my light." Those who know the darkness of sin can be the "light" that best shows the grace of God. God makes those who need the most forgiveness of sins those who prove it.

"Naught have I gotten but what I received; Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed; Boasting excluded, pride I abase; I'm only a sinner saved by grace! Only a sinner saved by grace! Only a sinner saved by grace! This is my story, to God be the glory, I'm only a sinner saved by grace!" (by James M. Gray) With courage, we would also like to tell the joy of the forgiveness by Christ and to testify the grace by forgiving each other.

(Prayer)

Father God, without the grace of Christ, we only have sin. You gave us the opportunity to hear the gospel of forgiveness of sin and gave us the grace. Help us to believe, rejoice, and testify the grace. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask this trusting in the Father and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen.