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FORGIVEN

We all know the feeling. You've said or done something hurtful to someone you love dearly. The words echo in your mind; you would do almost anything to be able to reach back and snatch them from the air. The image of the deed haunts your every waking moment; you see yourself committing the act again every time you close your eyes, and nothing you do will erase the picture. Finally, you go to that loved one and speak those words that come sometimes so hard: *"I was wrong. I'm sorry."*

And then you hear that precious reply: *"I forgive you."* What joy! What a burden lifted! To be forgiven means to be made whole and right again in the sight of the

one we have offended. We no longer need fear their anger, their rejection. The relationship that had been broken is restored; two parties that had been separated by a wrong done are reunited. Until we have been forgiven, we simply cannot rest.

A loving God created us with this deep-rooted desire to be forgiven when we do wrong. Without such a desire, we would not seek out God's forgiveness, which He has made freely available in His Son. Without this need to rectify our situation, we could not have a relationship with God, for all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Nor could we have any form of relationship with one another, for we would routinely injure and shame each other with

impunity.

This eager craving for redemption from wrong is what we sometimes call “conscience.” It was that portion of the character of Adam and Eve that awakened in the garden when *“the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked”* (Genesis 3:7). It was not their physical nakedness of which they were ashamed, but rather their nakedness in sin, being exposed in their transgression before the all-seeing eye of the Creator. Their consciences were offended by their violation of God’s command, and they sought to hide themselves behind aprons of leaves.

The wail of a shattered conscience can be bitter indeed. Think, for example, of Esau who, having foolishly sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, realized only afterward the shamefulness of what he had done: *“He found no*

place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears” (Hebrews 12:16-17). Esau’s conscience cried out to be restored to his position as the firstborn of his father. How miserable he must have been to come to recognize at last that the deed could not be undone!

We might also call to mind Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Son of God into the hands of lawless men for thirty pieces of silver. Judas, upon seeing that Jesus had been condemned to death, cast the wretched ransom at the feet of the chief priests, saying, *“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.”* After this, he went out and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). Judas could find no way to remedy his crime, no means for rejoining himself with the One with whom he had often shared bread.

And consider Simon Peter, who boldly scoffed at Jesus’ prophecy that he would deny his Master, yet did indeed deny Him even

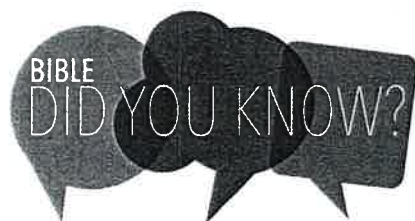
with cursing. When the rooster crowed and *“the Lord turned and looked at Peter”* (Luke 22:61), how Peter’s conscience must have howled in anguish within him at the knowledge that he had indeed denied Christ! How tormented his soul must have been when he wandered off by himself, weeping bitterly!

Oh, but how sweet for Peter to know at last that his sin had been forgiven him! Doubtless these things were in his heart when he wrote by inspiration: *“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins”* (1 Peter 4:8). Once separated from his Lord and Savior, Peter found forgiveness. His conscience was at peace.

Peter stated, *“There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus*

Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). If you are not a child of God, surely you recognize that you stand condemned to death because of sin (Romans 5:12). Won’t you consider accepting his forgiveness, humbly obeying His Son’s command to believe and be baptized for the salvation of your soul (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38)?

— Michael D. Rankins



“Stolen water is sweet; and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’ But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.”
Proverbs 9:17-18



DIRECTIONS: Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.

1) Bible Reading Challenge

Ephesians 3:4-5 "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." It is amazing how simply by reading the word of God we can have the same insights and understanding as the apostles! That means that when we read, we can have the same level of faith and courage and patience and strength as the apostles as well! This month the challenge is to read as many new testament books in their entirety as you can. By reading the whole book, you will be able to see a fuller context which provides a richer meaning and bring a stronger level of understanding to gain all the insights into spiritual wisdom they had. What a blessing! Start reading and see how much your understanding grows!

2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

John 10:7-17

"So Jesus said to them again, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.'"