

# 5 HOW TO FIND GOD'S FORGIVENESS

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**IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THESE QUESTIONS:**

- Why is God willing to forgive our sins?
  - What is the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross?
  - What does God require for entrance into heaven?
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## FORGIVENESS

In a book called *The Sunflower*, a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust, Simon Wiesenthal, recalls a remarkable experience that happened to him while in a concentration camp. One day he was taken to a dark room in the camp hospital. Inside, a young German SS officer, horribly wounded in combat, lay dying on a bed. Covered in bandages, the soldier almost looked like a mummy. He expressed to Wiesenthal his desire to confess his evil deeds to a Jew, a member of the race he had helped to slaughter.

The German explained how he had joined the Hitler Youth against his father's wishes, how he had fought at the Russian front, and how he and his SS unit had callously and cruelly murdered many Jews. Wiesenthal wanted to run away, but the officer grabbed him tightly and concluded his confession by asking Wiesenthal to forgive him. He said, "I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without your answer I cannot die in peace." Wiesenthal wrote that he stood there for some time, staring at the German's bandaged face. In the end, he pulled away and left the room without saying a word. He could not forgive the German and left him to die in his pain and guilt.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

Wiesenthal faced a terrible dilemma that most of us never will. My point in sharing this story with you, though, is to contrast humankind's weakness and seeming inability to forgive at times with God's heart of love and supernatural capability of forgiving sinners. When I speak of sinners, I mean the whole gamut—from those who have tried to be good but failed to those who have seemingly delighted in evil. If you have any doubts about the Lord's mercy, recall what Jesus said, even while Roman soldiers crucified Him: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Prior to becoming a follower of Christ, the apostle Paul violently and fanatically persecuted early Christians. He hounded and arrested them, even consenting to their deaths. Yet he found forgiveness. Read his own words: "Here is a saying that you can rely on and nobody should doubt: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I myself am the greatest of them; and if mercy has been shown to me, it is because Jesus Christ meant to make me the leading example of his inexhaustible patience for all the other people who were later to trust in him for eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

## JESUS SUFFERED AND DIED FOR US

God is more willing to forgive than we can imagine! We can be sure because Jesus Christ, God's Son, suffered the penalty we deserved to pay. You see, God is holy (separate from all that is wicked) and hates evil. He has no choice but to punish sinful behavior. At the same time, God in love did not want to consign the entire sinful human race to an eternity separated from Him. There was only one solution.

That way out was not the establishment of another major religion with rites, rituals, and requirements. Two thousand years ago, the peoples of the world had innumerable religious systems and worshiped many gods. Sadly, their practices often promoted idolatry, terrifying superstitions, immorality, and a wide assortment of evil acts. Even among the Jews of Jesus' day were great religious hypocrisy and falsehood.

The answer to humanity's sin problem was for the Lord himself to pay the penalty on our behalf. That is why Jesus, God the Son, came to earth—to suffer the punishment we deserve.

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Notice His words: “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Although completely innocent, Jesus suffered for our sins, took our punishment, satisfied divine justice, and purchased our freedom from sin.

We truly owe our forgiveness and salvation to Jesus Christ. It is because of His sacrifice that God the Father so willingly offers to wash away the guilt of our sins and make us into new people. And because Jesus rose from the dead and is alive to this day, we can enter into a personal relationship with Him. Over and over again, the Bible talks about knowing Christ. This, my friend, is what real Christianity is all about!

## GOD REQUIREMENTS

You are right in thinking that God does require something of us if we are going to be forgiven, know Christ, and enter heaven. However, it is probably not what you think! God does not expect us to try to prove our own goodness to Him because, frankly, none of us can ever do enough to satisfy His righteous demands. He does not demand that we belong to a certain religion or practice an austere way of life.

Does this surprise you? To experience forgiveness and enter into a personal relationship with Christ, God requires only two things of us: (1) repentance and (2) faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. Let us talk about what these words mean.

### Repentance

Repentance is the first step to finding forgiveness. When Jesus was on earth, He told people, “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Repentance is not just feeling bad or sorrowful about our mistakes, errors, and sins; it is an internal decision to turn away from them and turn to God. Prisons and jails around the world are filled with people who are sorry they were caught but who have not repented of their sins. Given their freedom, some would go out and commit the same crimes that got them into trouble in the first place.

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When we repent, we see all our sins (large and small) as God sees them—as acts of rebellion, as falling short of His requirements, as

breaking His moral law. We do not consider it a small thing that we have offended the God who made heaven and earth.

To illustrate, imagine moving to a region that has been struck by numerous ferocious hurricanes. Your new neighbors have recounted agonizing accounts of death and destruction inflicted by these gigantic storms, but you yourself have never experienced one. Then one day you hear a news bulletin saying that within forty-eight hours a massive hurricane is due to make landfall precisely where you live. How would you react? Would you call your friends and sponsor a “hurricane party” at your house or apartment? Would you stand out on your porch and dare the gale-force winds, rain, and hail to dislodge you? I doubt that you would take lightly the peril of your situation. You would begin to take appropriate measures to preserve your life and belongings. Repentance is that way. It’s the first step we must take to assure our salvation.

No one can make you repent of your sins. It is your choice. If you feel sorry for the wrongs you have done and desire to turn away from them, why don’t you just tell that to God right now? You can say something like this: *“Dear God, I understand now how I have offended You, and I am sorry. I do not want to continue in my sins.”* Obviously, though, just saying words is not enough. You must mean what you say.

## Faith

Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).

The point of Jesus’ statement is that we must put our faith in Him completely and unreservedly. He is not asking us to become more religious or to try harder to be good. He is saying that we must believe He really died for our sins and paid in full the debt we owed. Friend, this is the greatest news you will ever read! It is up to us to receive forgiveness and eternal life by faith as a free gift based on what Jesus did for us. When we do that, God performs an incredible miracle in our lives. All our sins are forgiven,

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washed away just as though we had never done them. We are adopted into God's family. We receive a new heart. We receive eternal life.

If you think about it, we employ faith all the time. If we fly in an airplane, we must have faith that the pilot and crew know how to safely operate the aircraft. If we undergo a complicated operation, we must have faith that the doctor has sufficient surgical experience to correct our medical problem. However, our faith is not completely without basis. It is supported by certain facts. The airplane pilots and crew have logged thousands of hours of flight. The surgeon has studied and trained for years to know how to use a scalpel on a human body.

Our faith in Christ is not just a blind leap in the dark either; it is based on facts. If you are convinced like I am that the Bible is God's Word and contains an accurate historical account of Jesus' death and resurrection, faith in Christ is not so difficult. It makes sense!

In fact, we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by completely trusting in Christ for forgiveness and salvation. Think about it—if we do so and this message of salvation is true, we gain eternal life, a place in heaven, and everlasting joy. If this free offer of salvation were false (which it is not), we would still end up happier than the average skeptic and unrepentant sinner because we would find ourselves dedicated to a noble purpose, living a moral life, and loving people the way Jesus did. On the other hand, if we stubbornly reject the offer of salvation and it really is God's plan for our deliverance, we lose everything. Life here on earth would be nothing more than a huge experiment, devoid of ultimate purpose and meaning. Moreover, we lose out on heaven.

## **Today Is Your Day To Experience Christ In Your Life**

Are you ready to trust in Christ and only in Him for forgiveness, salvation, and the gift of eternal life? The fact that you are still reading this book indicates that you are probably very serious about spiritual matters. You can be sure that the Holy Spirit has been at work to help you come to this point. I wish I were sitting next to you to tell you personally how happy I am for you. It is time for you to tell the Lord you are ready to accept His forgiveness and eternal life. I invite you to say this prayer:

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*“Father in heaven, I believe You sent Your Son Jesus to earth to die for my sins on the cross. I know that I cannot do enough good things to earn a place in heaven, so I am going to have to trust in You completely for forgiveness and salvation. Please wash away all my sins. I believe that Your Son rose from the dead and is alive right now. I invite Jesus to come into my life and be my Savior and Lord. I thank You for Your promise to save completely all who come to You. I thank You for washing away all my sins. From this day forward, I am a new person. A miracle is happening in my life right now. Please give me strength to serve You each day until I go to be with You in heaven. Amen.”*

**Questions for individual or group study:**

1. *Do you believe God is really willing to forgive sin?*
2. *Consider the author's statement: "We truly owe our forgiveness and salvation to Jesus Christ. It is because of His sacrifice that God the Father so willingly offers to wash away the guilt of our sins and make us into new people." Do you agree?*
3. *Why is it difficult for people to accept God's plan for salvation—repentance or turning away from sin and faith in Christ?*
4. *Have you asked the Lord to come into your life and be your personal Lord and Savior yet? If not, why?*

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