

# FORGIVENESS FOR THE GREATEST SINNERS

*adapted and modernized from John Flavel (c. 1627-1691)*

**D**ID Christ die? And did He die the violent, painful, shameful, cursed, slow, and forlorn death of the cross? Then surely there is forgiveness with God and plenteous redemption for the greatest of sinners that by faith apply the blood of the cross to their poor guilty souls. So speaks the apostle: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14). "The blood of Jesus Christ...cleanseth us from all sin" (1Jo 1:7). Two things will make this clear.

First, there is enough power in this blood of the cross to satisfy God for the greatest sins.

Secondly, the power of it is designed and intended by God for believing sinners.

How clearly do both these points appear in the Word?

***First, there is sufficient power in the blood of the cross to make satisfaction and wash away the greatest sins.*** This is manifest, for it is precious blood, as it is called. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...But with the precious blood of Christ" (1Pe 1:18-19). This preciousness of the blood of Christ is due to that union it has with the Person, "who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom 9:5). And on that account it is called the blood of God (Act 20:28); and so, it becomes royal, princely blood. Yes, due to the dignity and power of it, greater than any other blood that was created or shall ever run in any other veins but His. The blood of all the creatures in the world, even a sea of human blood, bears no more proportion to the precious and excellent blood of Christ than a dish of common water to a river of liquid gold. On the account of its invaluable preciousness, it becomes satisfying and reconciling blood to God. So the apostle speaks: "And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col 1:20). The same blood which is redemption to them that dwell on earth is confirmation to them that dwell in heaven. The power of this blood makes guilt vanish and shrink away as the shadow before the glorious sun. Every drop of it has a voice and speaks to the soul that sits trembling under its guilt better things than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:24). It sprinkles us from all evil, including an unquiet and accusing conscience (Heb 10:22). For having enough in it to satisfy God, it surely has enough in it to satisfy conscience.

Conscience can demand no more for its satisfaction, nor will it take less, than God demands for His satisfaction. And in this blood is enough to give both satisfaction.

***Secondly, as there is sufficient power in this blood to satisfy God and the conscience for the greatest guilt, so it is just as clear that the virtue and power of it is intended and designed by God for the use of believing sinners.*** Such blood as this was shed, without doubt, for some weighty end, that some might be the better for it. Who they are for whom it is intended is plain enough from Acts 13:39: "And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

That the remission of the sins of believers was the great thing intended in the pouring out of this precious blood of Christ appears from all the sacrifices that prefigured it to the ancient church of Israel. The shedding of that typical blood (of the symbolic sacrifices) spoke of God's intention of pardon. And the putting of their hands upon the head of the sacrifice spoke of the way and method of believing, by which that blood was then applied to them in that way and is still applied to us in a more excellent way. Had no pardon been intended, no sacrifices would have been appointed.

Consider further, this blood of the cross is the blood of a surety<sup>1</sup> that came under the same obligations with us and in our name or place shed it; so, of course, it frees and discharges the principal offender or debtor (Heb 7:22). Can God exact satisfaction from the blood and death of His own Son, the surety of believers, and yet still demand it from believers? It cannot be. “Who,” saith the apostle, “shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died” (Rom 8:33-34). And why are faith and repentance<sup>2</sup> prescribed as the means of pardon? Why does God everywhere in His Word call upon sinners to repent and believe in this blood, encouraging them so to do by so many precious promises of remission; and declaring the inevitable and eternal ruin of all impenitent and unbelieving ones who despise and reject this blood? What, I say, does all this speak, but the possibility of a pardon for the greatest of sinners, and the certainty of a free, full, and final pardon for all believing sinners? Oh, what a joyful sound this is! What ravishing voices of peace, pardon, grace, and acceptance come to our ears from the blood of the cross!

The greatest guilt that ever was contracted upon a trembling, shaking conscience can stand before the efficacy of the blood of Christ no more than the sinner himself can stand before the justice of the Lord with all that guilt upon him.

Reader, the Word assures thee, whatever you have been or are, that sins of as deep a dye as yours have been washed away in this blood (if you believe in Christ). “I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious; but I obtained mercy,” says Paul (1Ti 1:13). But you might object, “Paul’s was a rare, unique instance, and I find it hard to imagine any other sinner shall find the like grace that he did.” No question of it at all, if you believe in Christ as he did! For he tells us, “For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1Ti 1:16). So, upon the same grounds that he obtained mercy, you may obtain it also.

Those very men who had a hand in the shedding of Christ’s blood had the benefit of that blood afterwards pardoning them (Act 2:36). There is nothing but unbelief and hardness of heart (refusal to repent) that can bar thy soul from the blessings of this blood.

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**John Flavel (c. 1627-1691) was an English Presbyterian minister.**

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<sup>1</sup> **surety** – legal representative who agrees to take on another’s obligations.

<sup>2</sup> **repentance** – Repentance to life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sins and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ does with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it to God, with full purpose to strive after new obedience. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 70; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)