

The Extent of God's Forgiveness

We know from Isaiah 59:1,2 that our sins separate us from God. In spite of this fact, the merciful God forgives those who come to Him in humble obedience. Unlike those of His human creation who forgive but often do not forget when others trespass against them, God forgives fully. The extent of His forgiveness is beautifully portrayed in various Bible passages.

The prophet Micah wrote, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19). According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's website, the deepest part of the ocean, the depths of the sea as it were, is Challenger Deep in the Western Pacific. At a depth of 36,200 feet, it is more than 20,000 feet deeper than the average depth of the ocean. To visualize this, get in your mind a picture of earth's highest mountain, Mt. Everest in the Himalayas. Although it towers some 29,000 feet, it still falls short of the deepest part of the ocean. If you could take Mt. Everest and try to plug up Challenger Deep with it, you'd still have 7,000 feet deep of ocean unaccounted for. That's the extent of the depths of the sea and Micah says that God's forgiveness is like casting sins into that watery abyss.

Psalms 103:10 states a fact for which we should all be thankful on a daily basis. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." Regarding the extent of God's forgiveness, the twelfth verse reads, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." If you were to start from where you are right now and travel north, you would go quite a distance and eventually reach the northernmost point of the globe. Upon taking your very next step, you would be heading southward. Were you to continue on this journey to the southernmost point of the globe, your very next step after you reached that point would be northward. On the other hand, were you to start from where you are right now and travel east, you would move in that direction indefinitely. Were you to begin traveling west, you would move in that direction indefinitely. East and west do not meet as north and south do. They are directions that are totally separate from one another. God's forgiveness causes our sins to be totally separated from our souls.

Hezekiah, king of Judah, wrote, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isaiah 38:17). When one throws something behind him, he is indicating that he doesn't want to see it anymore. To him, that which he has cast behind his back is in the past and is to be forgotten. This is God's mindset toward sin when men and women obey Him.

Isaiah 43:25 records the Lord saying, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." The Hebrew word translated, "blotteth" means, "to wipe out, obliterate, exterminate." Its primary meaning carries with it the idea of rubbing out something that has been written. When God said this through Isaiah, He was talking about sin and the fact that He would remove it completely from the souls of those who had repented and humbled themselves in obedience to Him.

These are indeed marvelous metaphors. We can take these beautiful portrayals of the extent of God's forgiveness one step further though and we can do so simply by uttering a name. It is, as the song says, the "sweetest note in seraph song, sweetest name on mortal tongue, sweetest carol ever sung, Jesus, blessed Jesus." What is the extent of God's forgiveness? It is readily seen in the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. Why would the Father give the life of His Son into human hands only to provide partial forgiveness of sin? Jesus said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." (John 10:17-18). Why would Jesus give His life over to the abuse and cruelty of those who hated Him only to partially forgive sins or perhaps to only have the power to forgive some sins but not others?

Paul quoted Jeremiah when he wrote, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." (Hebrews 8:12). Through the blood of Christ, God can wipe away sin, casting it into the depths of the sea, behind his back, separating it from the soul and blotting it out in its entirety. Through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a sinner will realize this forgiveness (Romans 10:17; John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Acts 8:36-37; I Peter 3:21). Why should we continue to bear the weight of sin when God can remove it completely?

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