

Read also Colossians 2:2:1-2, 6-16a. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

Did you hear it?

“I want (believers) to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, *which is Christ himself*. . .” (Col 2:2).

Did you hear Paul's words?

“You were dead because of your sins . . . Then God made you alive with Christ, *for he forgave all our sins*” (v. 13).

Do you realize that in forgiveness . . .

“*He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. So don't let anyone condemn you . . .*” (v. 14-16)

Do you realize the blessing you have been given and the power of forgiveness? The past is in the past. It doesn't define you. The question about forgiveness is, how do you get it?

- Is it conditional?
- Do you have to repent to get it?
- When, exactly, does God give His mercy?

Let's go back to the Old Testament and take a look. READ Numbers 14:3-20.

Here you have people who had been freed from slavery in Egypt by amazing miracle upon miracle and they are scared to death to embrace the freedom. So they began to talk of stoning those who said “how wonderful is the land of freedom.”

In the “Conversation with God” study we talk about what stood out as we listened to the story. Last week the first person to answer said, “I heard about myself—I saw myself complaining, even though God is with me.” Many heads nodded in agreement.

What about you? Would you have been with Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb? Or would you have been like the rest of those people ready to head back to the good ole days of slavery?

The people sinned. Does God have a right to be angry? Is his complaint legitimate? legitimate?

In your mind, how do you define sin? Is it like this list? (things like fear, anxiety, looking back, greed, selfishness, grumbling, discontent, envy, ambition, pride, etc.) As you watch all of these words appear, do you think, yep, that's my problem?

Yet when God talks about their sin, God does not list this list that you see on the wall. Did you catch the definition of sin from God's perspective?

Here it is: **“How long will they refuse to believe in me? How long will they despise me?”**

Out of the sin of unbelief all these other symptoms grow. These things are symptoms—indications or signs of unbelief and refusal to entrust oneself to God.

Someone said when God promised something in His name, it meant that no name is higher. Thus to challenge God’s trustworthiness it is a major offense. Unbelief is an offense to God’s name. And yet we all seem to struggle with it.

The Bible says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Ro 3:23).

So is forgiveness conditional? Do we have to repent—stop doing all those things—before God will forgive us?

That’s like an ill person saying, “if I can just get rid of these symptoms I’ll get well.” I might treat a fever with an aspirin but unless I treat the infection, I will not get better. We might fight the symptoms of this sin or that, but unless we address the source, which is unbelief, we are not really going to be very successful.

In this passage God gets right to the bottom line: “these people despise me because they do not believe me.” When Moses recognizes God is angry enough to wipe these people out, he steps in and reminds God of His character, and says,

“Please Lord prove that your power is as great as you have claimed when you said, ‘The LORD is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion . . .’” (Nu 14:17).

Moses could have been proud. He could have abandoned the people and said, “Yeah, kill them and start over with me!” But he didn’t. Moses became our mediator when he intervened: (Nu 14:19)

“In keeping with your magnificent, unfailing love, please pardon the sins of this people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt.”

So God said, “**I do forgive, just as you have asked**” (Nu 14:20).

Did the people ask for forgiveness? No. Did they turn away from their sin? No! Yet God forgave.

Do you grasp the magnificence of that? The people have not changed. They did not repent. Someone stepped in and asked on their behalf and God granted it.

It’s a common assumption that repentance is necessary for forgiveness: we repent, then God forgives. But the truth is, we repent *because* we have been forgiven. To best grasp it, let’s look at some familiar stories:

1. **The paralytic man** (Mt 9:2): Jesus forgave the man brought to him then he healed him. Perhaps Jesus was concerned with full healing of both body and soul.
2. **The woman caught in adultery**: First Jesus forgives her sins; then he instructs her to go and sin no more. She did not have to repent first. Jesus simply said, “Woman, has no one

condemned you? Then neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and do not sin again” (John 8:10-11).

3. **The crucifixion:** Were the men crucifying him repenting and begging for His mercy? No! But he said Father forgive them. He wants to break the chain of revenge and violence that has entrapped them. If He had cursed them instead, then unrepentance will remain our state forever.

Do you see the absolute brilliance of God in forgiving us? It is the only thing that brings hope. Jesus’ forgiveness is actually “sin-breaking.”

I struggled this week to find a way to help us see and *feel* the love in this. The only way is to look closely at Jesus.

Jesus did not want to go to the cross. He feared it. Think about him—in the neighborhood, going to the same church (synagogue), teaching, healing these people, but they did not accept him. Everyone needs to be affirmed, acknowledged, and esteemed, yet the religious leaders even plotted his demise.

On the night of his betrayal Jesus was deeply distressed; he dreaded the cross even to the point of death. His friends didn’t even notice. Despite his love He got rejection.

I am sure you have had times of rejection and betrayal. Jesus fully understands. He’s stood in your shoes.

Then there was the shame and utter humiliation of the cross. It’s hard to explain but perhaps this story will help. Pierre Van Paassen’s pre-World War II memoirs describe an act of mockery and humiliation performed by Nazi storm troopers on an elderly Jewish rabbi. Brought before them, they stripped him naked and forced him to preach his Sabbath sermon while at the far end of the room another Jew was being beaten to death. The rabbi asked permission to wear his yarmulke. They jokingly agreed. The rabbi, in a trembling, raspy voice preached his sermon before God while being poked and ridiculed and hearing the dying cries of his neighbor.<sup>1</sup>

Imagine that shame as Jesus endured the same sort of treatment. Jesus hated the shame, the victimization, the abuse, the public humiliation, the disgrace of hanging naked. It’s unfathomable. But He did it; He put up with it; He endured it. Why?

What if Golgotha was right out here on Wheatland Road, one of the busiest streets in Duncanville. Take all the humiliation you have suffered, multiply it a hundred times and you will have His. You probably gave in or ran away or numbed yourself to cope with your shame. He trusted his Father, endured the pain, finally crying out, “Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.”

He simply asked God, and God said, “Yes, I forgive them.”

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 199.

And as a result, you and I can stand before God naked and **unashamed**, restored to God, to whom we really belong—the one who truly can cleanse us because Jesus asked. “There is a fountain filled with blood that runs from Immanuel’s veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”

He breaks the power of our unbelief and shame. Do you realize the power of that forgiveness?

“When you were stuck in your old sin-dead life, you were incapable of responding to God. But God brought you alive—right along with Christ! Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. *So don't let anyone condemn you.*”

You are forgiven. Because of that now turn, let your lives be built on him.

AMEN