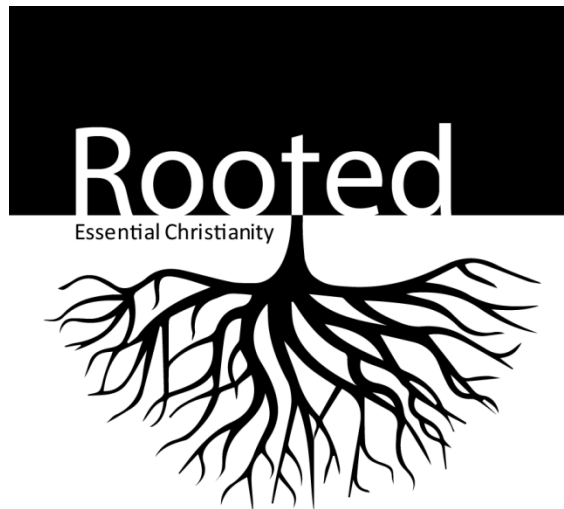




The Apostle's Creed

Part 9 – Can I Be Forgiven?

Romans 5:6-11

I believe in the forgiveness of sins.

Sin has fallen on hard times. No one wants to consider himself a sinner. Even among Christians sin has been receiving a makeover. The language and categories of Scripture defining sin as lawlessness are being replaced by more therapeutic language. For instance, in conservative evangelical circles sin is being defined more and more as brokenness.

Certainly sin *causes* brokenness. Sin is the cause of physical, relational, and emotional brokenness throughout the world. Everywhere in the created order

that we see decay and futility we can be sure that we are looking at the brokenness caused by sin. But we must not confuse the fruit with the root. Brokenness is not a synonym for sin. Sin, writes J.I. Packer, “is lawlessness in relation to God as lawgiver, rebellion to God as our designer, guilt in relation to God as judge, and uncleanness in relation to God as the Holy One.”

The Bible teaches and experience abundantly confirms that we are all, without exception, sinners. All of us carry within our hearts a love for sin. Our bodies and relationships bear the consequences of sin. And our souls are condemned by the curse of sin. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” writes the Apostle Paul (Rom. 3:23). What is more, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23).

So what are sinners to do? Is forgiveness possible?

1. What is sin?

- Sin is lawlessness. To be a sinner is to be a breaker of God’s law. To sin is to rebel against God. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* calls sin “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of the law of God.” This definition is drawn from the Scriptures which repeatedly teaches that “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4).
- Daniel 9:8-12
- Psalm 51

2. What has sin done?

a) The moral ruin of sin

- Paul uses several words in the present passage to describe sin and sinners: *weakness* (moral frailty), *ungodliness*, and *enemies*. Augustine observed that the blindness of sin is so great that sinners glory in their blindness (Rom. 1:18ff). Sin impacts the moral composition of humanity so that all people are born with a natural preference for sin. Indeed sinners are spiritually “dead” (Eph. 2:1).

b) The relational destruction of sin

- Sin has made us enemies of God. The great need of humanity is not moral improvement but reconciliation to our Creator (vv. 10-11). David acknowledges that he was conceived in iniquity (Psalm 51). That is, he was born a sinner. Paul tells us that we are by nature “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3).

3. Is forgiveness possible?

a) God's design in our forgiveness

- Vs. 6 – “At the right time” – The emphasis here is on God's sovereign providence. Jesus died at the precise time which fitted God's purpose. “The atonement was no afterthought. This was the way God always intended to deal with sin; he did it when he chose” (Morris, 222).

b) God's means for our forgiveness

- Vs. 8c – “Christ died for us.”
- In this very simple clause Paul summarizes the Christian gospel.
- God could not simply overlook or otherwise ignore sin. To do so would make him less than just; less than holy; less than God. Specific action had to be taken in order for sinners to be forgiven. Atonement had to be made. The whole pattern of redemptive history adheres to the truth that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Heb. 9:22).

c) God's motive in our forgiveness

- Paul's argument beginning in verse 6 is that Jesus died on behalf of ungodly people. He died for people still in their sins; people who were weak (moral frailty) and enemies of God. To emphasize his argument and ensure no misunderstandings Paul points out that one may understand why someone would die for a friend. God's love, however, was demonstrated in the fact that he sent his Son to die for those who hated him. This is the great unexpected aspect of Christ's death. No one dies for evil people. “Very rarely” (vs. 7) refers not to very few people but rather is a reference to the difficulty in finding anyone willing to do such a thing.
- God loves because he is love not because there is something lovely in sinners. There is nothing in sinners that calls forth love from God. There is nothing so appealing about sinners that God cannot resist loving us.
- Vs. 8 – There are a complex of motives behind God's choice to redeem sinners. For instance in Romans 3 we learn that Jesus died to vindicate the righteousness of God. Elsewhere we learn that God forgives his people for his own glory (Isaiah 53). Here we are called to consider the great love of God. He spared not his own Son but gave him up for us while we were still his enemies. How do you know that God loves you? He demonstrated the depth of his love by sacrificing his dearly loved Son for you.
- Vs. 11 – *Reconciliation*, with justification and redemption, is another important theological term in Paul's expositions in the way in which God saves sinners. The three terms are closely related to the extent of being near synonymous. But while *justification* emphasizes judicial action, *reconciliation* is more personal and relational. It has to do not with acquittal in court, but with the overcoming of hostility between two alienated persons. Paul's point in verses 1-11 is that both justification and reconciliation result from Christ's sacrifice. This reconciliation language by the way is another uniqueness of Biblical revelation. It does not appear in the language of other religions because in them God is not conceived in terms that make such a way of speaking appropriate. Muslims do not imagine that they could ever become God's friends. But in the Christian gospel we who were God's enemies become, through faith in Christ, his friends. As with justification, Paul uses reconciliation both for what Christ did for us at the cross and for what happens between us and God when we believe in Jesus [2 Cor. 5:19-20].