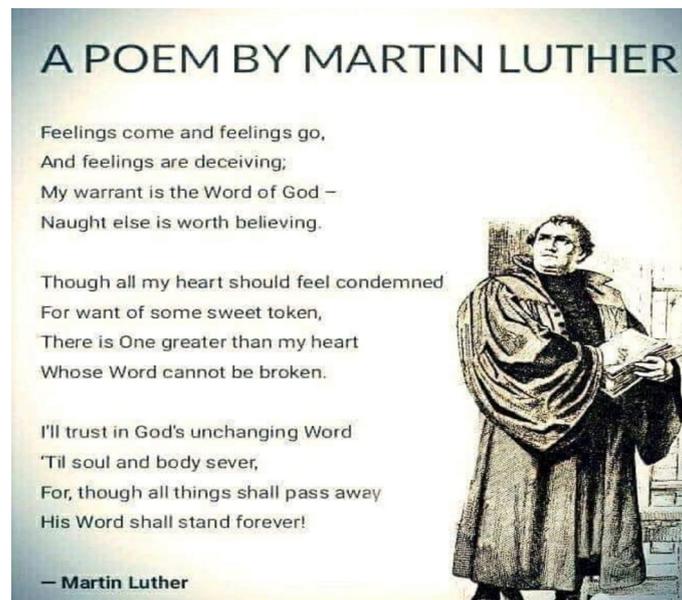


“FAITH, FEELINGS & FORGIVENESS” (Romans 10:9-17)

Our minds are all too easily affected by emotions. These feelings can persuade us that we aren't truly forgiven. However, Christianity is a religion of forgiveness. God longs to forgive sinners! Forgiveness is the very heart of the Christian message. For without forgiveness of sins there can be no eternal life, no eternal resurrection, and no hope. Forgiveness of sins is the key to true peace and satisfaction. The Psalmist cried, “*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*” (Psalm 32:1) A Christian missionary arrived in India in 19th century. When he got off the ship from England a group of local leaders met him. They told him that in their country there were many religions and millions of gods. Then they challenged him, “what is different from you religion from all the religious beliefs that we have here?” That was a great question and it required a great answer. The missionary looked at them and said “I can answer this simply with two words – **COMPLETE FORGIVENESS.**”

One of the greatest mistakes is to let our feelings determine our beliefs on whether we are truly forgiven. As believers, we are called to live by faith and not our emotions, “*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*” (2 Cor. 5:7) And yet, so many of us choose to live by something else - our feelings. The Christian life is one that requires us to walk a life of faith over mere feelings. It takes discipline to objectively differentiate between *faith* and *feeling*. That discipline comes from saturating our minds with the Word of God, “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*” (Romans 10:17) We must remind ourselves not to simply believe everything we feel. Feelings are not facts!



Martin Luther was once asked, “Do you feel as if your sins were forgiven?” Luther famously replied, “No, I don't feel that they are forgiven, but I know that they are, because God says so in his Word.” Luther famously wrote a poem to sum this up,

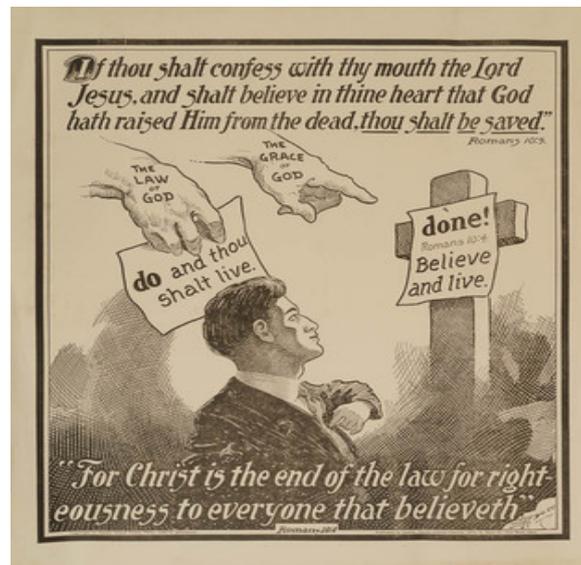
*Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God
Naught else is worth believing.*

Luther understood a very important principle. We are not forgiven because we feel forgiven. Forgiveness is based on a fact rather than simply a feeling. Luther pointed out that the Apostle Paul never wrote, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt feel saved;” but rather, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*”

BASIS OF FORGIVENESS

It is vitally important that we address the root of the problem, which is the basis of true forgiveness of sins. The Epistle of Romans deals with this great doctrine in detail. In Romans 10 the Apostle Paul makes clear that salvation and forgiveness is found in faith alone in Christ alone:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (Romans 10:9-11)



Paul describes in a wonderfully succinct statement two simple steps for full forgiveness, “*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*” Paul is teaching here that what we confess with our lips and what we believe in our heart must match up. Confessing with our mouth only may fool others but it will never fool God. Paul is also emphasizing the public character of the confession (cf. Titus 1:15-16). This confession is outward of the reality of our inward faith in the heart. One is simply the root, the other is the fruit. There are a number of things that must be observed in this verse:

(a) It is belief in Jesus Christ as the exclusive way of salvation. It is not belief in a few generic ideas about morality that saves a man but faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Now I know people like to dilute this requirement but they have no authority in which to do so. It was Jesus Christ who testified, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me?*” (John 14:6). It would only be narrow-minded to preach this if there *were* many roads to God. But that’s not the message of the Bible.

(b) This word “*believe*” is more than intellectual belief that Jesus is the Son of God. The devil and his angels believe that, “*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble*” (James 2:19). True saving faith is a faith that produces good fruit. It is a faith of absolute trust from the heart in who Jesus Christ is, what He did for us on the Cross and by His resurrection, and His absolute sovereign Lordship in our lives. Paul makes belief in the resurrection the touchstone of orthodoxy here, “*and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead.*” This is because the literal resurrection of Christ is the supreme validation of God’s acceptance of the finished work of the Cross. When Jesus cried out, “It is finished,” He really meant it! There is nothing for us to do but trust in Him. As Pritchard notes,

“We must be perfectly clear on this point. Christian faith is not a blind leap in the dark. We are called to believe in something—not just anything. But first and foremost, in Jesus Christ. This is paramount. We must know who He is, why He came, why He died, why He rose from the dead, and how He can be our Lord and Savior. I am not suggesting that we must pass a theology exam in order to be saved, but we must know something about these truths if our faith is to rest on the right foundation. Faith must be grounded in the facts of divine revelation. Faith rests on facts, not on thin air.”

(c) It is confession of Christ as the “*Lord Jesus.*” This is where many stumble as they like the fact that He is their Saviour to take away their sins. But they don’t want to acknowledge Him as their Lord. They are like Baalam who cried, “*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!*” (Num. 23:10) Such people want to have the death of the righteous in everlasting life but don’t want to live the life of the righteous!

(d) A man or a woman who truly believes “*shalt be saved.*” This is not some hopeful aspiration but an absolute guaranteed fact underwritten by the authority of God Himself. We are saved from all sin – past, present and future. **If we feel that our sin is so bad God won’t forgive us, we are doubting His power and promises.**

GUILT OF THE PAST

The human memory is a strange thing. It constantly brings up sweet but also bitter memories of the past. Many professing Christians are haunted by guilt from past sins. It leads many to feel unclean, ashamed and even unforgiven. However, this guilt is unnecessary for the penalty of sin it has been washed away in the blood forever. The Puritan minister Richard Baxter warned about the emotional toll of carrying unnecessary guilt: “That sorrow, even for sin, may be overmuch. That overmuch sorrow swalloweth one up.” There are some professing Christians that exclaim that they can never forgive themselves for what they have done. But the Bible never teaches that we forgive ourselves. D L Moody pointed out the absurdity of self-forgiveness, “I want to ask you this question: If sin needs forgiveness - and all sin is against God -how can you work out your own forgiveness?”

The amazing thing is that God fully forgives our sins, “*And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*” (Hebrews 10:17) This Greek phrase translated “*no more*” is actually a **double negative** (*ou me*), which describes the strongest negation in the language to show the impossibility of this happening. One writer makes this commentary on the point,

“The statement that God will remember sins no more (Hebrews 10:17) means that He will no longer call them back to memory with a view to condemning the sinner (cf. Romans 8:1). Since God is omniscient He remembers everything, but He does not hold the forgiven sinner’s sins against him or her. This verse has been a great help to many sinners who have found it hard to believe that God really has forgiven them (cf. 1 John 2:2).”

We are not under probation, “*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 38:17b). Micah uses a metaphor to illustrate how far God has done this, “*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 7:19) Corrie Ten Boom had a saying that many people have come to love: “When God forgives your sin, He buries it in the deepest sea and puts up a ‘no fishing’ sign.”

The Psalmist was particularly aware of the complete forgiveness of the sins of the past. He rejoiced,

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; (Psalm 103:1-4)



The Psalmist describes God’s view of those sins, “*As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.*” (Psalm 103:12) This idiom of East and West is an expression used to illustrate that God’s forgiveness has no limits. It is perfect, complete, and eternal.

We are forgiven whether we believe it or whether we feel like it. So if you have truly put your faith in Jesus and asked Him to forgive you, the past is truly forgotten. God has forgiven (sent away or remitted the debt) of all your sin, past, present and future and placed the debt them on our Sin Bearer, the Lord Christ Jesus - Isa 53:6, 2 Cor. 5:21, John 1:29). The matter is settled eternally. Don’t try to dig up what God has buried. Leave the past in the past. Yes, we may remember the sin at times but we must make the conscious choice (enabled by the Holy Spirit) to cease remembering the sin and the guilt by focusing on God’s full, free and eternal forgiveness.

WHAT ABOUT FEELINGS?

The Bible never teaches that feelings have no role to play in the life of a child of God. Human beings are created to be emotional creatures. It is God who appointed for us, “*A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...*” (Ecclesiastes 3:4) King David cried that God would restore to him “*the joy of thy salvation.*” (Psalm 51:12) Jesus famously wept in John 11:35 at the death of His friend Lazarus. Living by faith doesn’t mean we ignore feelings. But our emotions are a gauge, not a guide.

It is faith in God’s Word that must always control our emotions, “*Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*” (Psalm 16:11) We must be careful not to reverse the order and let our emotions control our assessments and actions. Our feelings must always be regulated and, if need be, corrected by Scripture, “*Thou wilt shew me the path of life.*” So feelings *follow* faith, and faith *follows* the facts of God’s Word. Facts never change, while our feelings are almost always changing. We must always put our faith in God’s facts and let our feelings follow along as they will.



We get a classic illustration of allowing our feelings to override our faith in Genesis 42. Nine of the older sons of Jacob had returned home from Egypt. They brought a report about their terrifying meeting with the Prime Minister there and his insistence that Benjamin must return with them next time. For the first time in nearly 50 years, the sons of Jacob were telling the truth to their father and showing signs of a spiritual awakening. Instead of encouraging them to trust the Lord, old Jacob was consumed with his own self-pity, “*And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.*” (Genesis 42:36) Jacob had forgotten the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac and himself. He was judging merely by his feelings about the circumstances. There is not a single word of trust in God. The great irony in Jacob’s doubts was that God had already dealt with all his fears in a wonderful way. He was on the threshold of the greatest reunion of his life. Joseph and Simeon were alive and well, Benjamin was in no danger and God had already provided a way for his family to escape the famine. Our decisions should not be driven by our emotions, but rather these feelings should be an indicator of what’s going on inside us. Ligonier points out,

It should be obvious that Scripture calls us to be a people who feel what we believe, who not only know truth but experience it. There is an order to this. Our feelings and emotions must be governed and guided by truth. We are to fear the Lord, hate evil, love the truth, mourn over sin and injustice, and rejoice in our sufferings. These are not naked commands but precepts given by God in light of who He is and what He has done. We are supposed to feel the weight and the power of the truth revealed in Scripture. Theology should do more than inform us—it should warm and stir our hearts. And if it doesn't, then we have missed the connection that God's revelation is designed to make between head and heart. The key is not to pursue feelings themselves but to pursue the Lord Jesus Christ by looking to Him, knowing His ways, pondering His promises, and obeying His commands. Faith is what gives birth to feeling. The emotional component of the Christian life isn't always as present as we would like. It often lags behind. as the English Reformer John Bradford said, "Faith must first go before, and then feeling will follow."

CONCLUSION

We must never allow our feelings to control the fact that we are forgiven and eternally secure in Christ. Real faith denies the deceptions of feelings and lays hold on to the facts of the Word of God. Without faith, the Bible says it is impossible to please God. Unfortunately, we have many "Thomas Christians" (John 20:24-29) today who only believe what they can feel, see, hear, or touch. A man once came to the evangelist, D. L. Moody and said he was worried because he didn't feel saved. Moody asked, "Was Noah safe in the ark?" "Certainly he was," the fearful man replied. "Well, what made him safe, his feeling or the ark?" The inquirer got the point. "How foolish I've been!" he said. "It is not my feeling; it is Christ who saves!"

Our feelings fluctuate wildly towards God. Sometimes they change from moment to moment. They can be affected by external or internal pressure. But God's never do towards us. King David confessed in Psalm 73 that his emotions betrayed him and made him feel, "*envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*" (Psalm 73:3b) It was only when David entered the House of God and subjugated his emotions to the Word of God that he found a right understanding of the ungodly, "*Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.*" (Psalm 73:17) Faith in God's promises is the rock upon which we stand. Every day remind yourself of these two great promises:

The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. (Jeremiah 31:3)

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38:39)

Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not. God not only forgives the sinner, but He also forgets the sin. To enjoy the future, we must accept God's forgiveness for the past. The FACT that we are FORGIVEN should lead to us REJOICING in that REALITY. The Psalmist urged, "*Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*" (Psalm 32:11) It should make us want to reverence God more in our lives and seek to please

the King of Kings the more, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” (Psalm 130:3-4)

***My sin—O, the bliss of this glorious thought—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.***