

The Power of Forgiveness

By E.J. Waggoner

Apples of Gold Library, No. 12, May 1894

In this article, Waggoner clearly lays out one large difference between the everlasting gospel message that was brought in 1888, and the so-called gospels. The everlasting gospel brings creative power. When God speaks forgiveness, his creative word changes the suppliant, so that he goes away a changed man, no longer a slave to his sin, but free from it.

One of the most common expressions to be heard among professed Christians when speaking of religious things, is this,

“I can understand and believe that God will forgive sin, but it is hard for me to believe that he can keep me from sin.”

Such a person has yet to learn very much of what is meant by God’s “forgiving sins”. It is true that persons who talk that way do often have a measure of peace in believing that God has forgiven or does forgive their sins, but through failure to grasp the power of forgiveness, they deprive themselves of much blessing that they might enjoy.

Healing and Forgiveness

Consider the following miracle:

Matthew 9

³ And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; your sins be forgiven you.

⁴ And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

⁵ And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think you evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Your sins be forgiven you; or to say, Arise, and walk?

⁶ But that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins, (then said he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house.

⁷ And he arose, and departed to his house.

⁸ But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

Bear in mind that the miracle was written for us:

John 20

³¹ These are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.

The scribes did not believe that Jesus could forgive sin. In order to show that he had power to forgive sins, he healed the palsied man. This miracle was wrought for the express purpose of illustrating the work of forgiving sin, and demonstrating its power. Jesus said to the palsied man,

Matthew 9

⁶ ...Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house.

This was done that they and we might know his power to forgive sin. Therefore the power exhibited in the healing of that man is the power bestowed in the forgiveness of sin.

A Permanent Change

Note particularly that the effect of the words of Jesus continued after they were spoken. They made a change in the man, and that change was permanent. Even so it must be in the forgiveness of sin.

The common idea is that when God forgives sin the change is in himself, and not in the man. It is thought that God finally ceases to hold anything against the one who has sinned. But this is to imply that God had a hardness against the man, which is not the case. God is not a man; he does not cherish enmity, nor harbor a feeling of revenge.

It is not because he has a hard feeling in his heart against a sinner that he forgives him, but we cause the sinner has something in his heart. God is all right, the man is all wrong, therefore God forgives the man, that he also may be all right.

When Jesus, illustrating the forgiveness of sin, said to the man, “Arise, take up your bed, and go unto your house,” the man arose obedient to his voice. The power that was in the words of Jesus, raised him up, and made him well.

That power remained in him, and it was in the strength that was given him on removing the palsy that he walked in all the time to come, provided, of course, that he kept the faith. This is illustrated by the Psalmist, when he says:

Psalm 40

¹ I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

² He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

Life in the Word

There is life in the words of God. Jesus said,

John 6

⁶³ The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

The word received in faith brings the Spirit and the life of God to the soul. So when the penitent soul hears the words, “Son, be of good cheer, your sins be forgiven you,” and receives those words as for living words of the living God, he is a different man, because a new life has begun in him.

It is the power of God’s forgiveness, and that alone, that keeps him from sin. If he continues in sin after receiving pardon, it is because he has not grasped the fullness of the blessing that was given him in the forgiveness of his sins.

In the case before us, the man received new life. His palsied condition was simply the wasting away of the natural life. He was partially dead. The words of Christ gave him fresh life. But this new life that was given to his body, and which enabled him to walk was but an illustration, both to him and to the scribes, of the unseen life of God which he had received in

the words, “Your sins be forgiven you,” and which had made him a new creature in Christ.

Life in the Blood

With this simple and clear illustration before us, we may understand some of the words of the apostle Paul, which otherwise are “hard to be understood.” First read

Colossians 1

¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light;

¹³ Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son;

¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

See the same statement concerning redemption through Christ’s blood, in *1 Peter* 1:18-19; *Revelation* 5:9.

Mark two points: we have redemption through Christ’s blood, and this redemption is the forgiveness of sins. But the blood is the life. See *Genesis* 9:4; *Revelation* 17:13-14.

Therefore *Colossians* 1:14 really tells us that we have redemption through Christ’s life. But does not the Scripture say that we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son? It does, and that is just what is here taught.

Titus 2

¹⁴ [Christ] gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity.

Galatians 1

⁴ [He] gave himself for our sins.

In giving Himself, He gives his life. In shedding His blood, He pours out His life. But in giving up His life, He gives it to us. That life is righteousness, even the perfect righteousness of God, so that when we receive it we are “made the righteousness of God in Him.”

It is the receiving of Christ’s life, as we are baptized into

His death, that reconciles us to God. It is thus that we

Ephesians 4

²⁴ ...put on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,

Colossians 3

¹⁰ ...after the image of Him that created him.

Righteousness is Spoken

Now we may read *Romans 3:23-25*, and find that it is not so very difficult:

Romans 3

²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

²⁴ Being justified [that is, made righteous, or doers of the law] freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;

²⁵ Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission [sending away] of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

All have sinned. The whole life has been sin. Even the thoughts have been evil. *Mark 7:21*. And to be carnally minded is death. Therefore the life of sin is a living death. If the soul is not freed from this, it will end in eternal death.

There is no power in man to get righteousness out of the holy law of God, therefore God in His mercy puts His own righteousness upon all that believe. He makes us righteous as a free gift out of the riches of His grace. He does this by His words, for He declares—speaks—His righteousness into and upon all who have faith in the blood of Christ, in Him is God's righteousness,

Colossians 2

⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

And this declaring or speaking the righteousness of God upon us, is the remission or taking away of sin. Thus God

takes away the sinful life by putting His own righteous life in its place. And this is the power of the forgiveness of sin. It is

Hebrews 7

¹⁶ ...the power of an endless life.

Walking in the New Life

This is the beginning of the Christian life. It is receiving the life of God by faith. How is it continued? Just as it is begun.

Colossians 2

⁶ As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.

For

Romans 1

¹⁷ ...the just shall live by faith.

The secret of living the Christian life is simply that of holding fast the life which, received at the beginning, forgives the sin.

God forgives sin by taking it away. He justifies the ungodly by making him godly. He reconciles the rebel sinner to himself by taking away his rebellion, and making him a loyal and law-abiding subject.

It is sometimes said,

“But it is difficult to understand how we can have the life of God as an actual fact; it can’t be real, for it is by faith that we have it.”

So it was by faith that the poor palsied man received new life and strength; but was his strength any the less real? Was it not an actual fact that he received strength? “Cannot understand it”? Of course not, for it is a manifestation of

Ephesians 3

¹⁹ ...the love of Christ that passes knowledge.

But we may believe it, and realize the fact, and then we shall have an eternal life in which to study the wonder of it.

Read again and again the story of the healing of the palsied man, and meditate upon it until it is a living reality to you, and then remember that

John 20

³¹ These are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.