

Forgiven and Forgotten – But Remember

by

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"I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins." Isaiah 43:25 (NASB)

My friend Greg and I had an interesting discussion about the fine line Christians should walk between our daily recognition of how totally unworthy we are to be loved by Christ, but still live joyfully in the realization of the complete, outlandish, unusual, and comprehensive grace that He has given to us. Do you think we take God's grace for granted, and not feast on it every day, as we should? Without a doubt most of us do, and what a shame that we forget the price Christ paid for us with His own life to give us this grace that we should enjoy. He wants us to enjoy Him, and His grace. It is His gift to us and we cannot progress in our spiritual growth into our intimacy with Christ through any other means. But, seeing God's grace clearly requires the desperation of seeing what our life would be without it to really appreciate it. That is where we have to understand that we have a responsibility because of God's grace to have a healthy awareness of our pre-forgiven state to best understand and appreciate His forgiveness.

Here's where I'm going with this: I believe the sweetness of God's grace is best understood through a *"broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart,"* as is mentioned in Psalms 51:17. King David understood this as he penned these words while looking at himself in the mirror. He was completely in touch with the reality of his ugliness, having murdered a loyal soldier to cover up his sin with the man's wife. But it was in *this broken and contriteness* that he also penned his appeal to God in the same chapter, *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!"* What we see is desperate repentance in David, and this is the kind of regret that does an about face in life. This is the kind of regret God is looking for. In the end, God gave the forgiveness to David that he requested. However, it was not because David deserved it or could demand it, but rather because he was desperate for it, he had no personal hope without it, and he was completely aware that without God's mercy and grace to him, it was over. He was in full agreement that he had sinned and didn't deserve forgiveness. This is an important recognition. Next he appealed for God's mercy, which is absent of pride or self-defense. Through his sorrowful repentance, David was desperately in touch with his need for God's complete forgiveness, for limited forgiveness was not enough to match his need and sin. What happened? God responded according to His own character rather than the insufficiency of David's character. God's character is to give *steadfast love and abundant mercy and to remove our forgiven sin from His memory*. God doesn't think like we do or act as we do. He is true to Himself. In other words, God forgave David for His own sake because of who He is, as mentioned in Isaiah 42:25, rather than because of who David was. David was "graced" by God. But, David knew that he must live a changed life from that point, and the memory of his offense and God's forgiveness would be a powerful reminder to help him do this.

It is a fine line that we must walk in the freedom of God's grace while being broken. Like David, we need to

learn how to live with both. As a men's ministry pastor, I minister to a lot of men and I see their struggle with imbalance in these two areas. They often fall one way or the other, and struggle with balance. Those who do find balance are able to recognize they must nudge their perspective one way or the other to return to where they need to be. So, let's try to identify how we can nudge ourselves back into the balance God would want us to have by using both the aspect of *the freedom of forgiveness and grace, and remembering what we were forgiven from*. Let's start with a common problem with men, which is a misunderstanding of the term "brokenness."

"Brokenness" is often viewed as an ugly condition by most men. They think it means shattered, damaged or destroyed. It conveys to them failure, and most men fear failure for they think it makes them appear repulsive. But this is not how God sees it. He sees a man who has been broken of himself and his self-importance as beautiful, and a man who is ready to be rebuilt into a man after God's own heart. The initial entry into brokenness often requires a shattering of the man in some way, and this is difficult, for his pride and ego battle against it. This is where the discipline of the Lord can be painful. But our pride and ego keep us away from God's unconditional love and our ignorance of our true condition has to be educated. When brokenness comes, we see healing and being put back together into a man after God's own heart is the result. Brokenness is when a man has died to his own self-importance and is not afraid to admit his flaws, for like David, he knows that he has been put back together by God's grace. In his brokenness, a man looks at his own flawed condition rather than others, and sees the grace of God more clearly. If we cannot look at our life and see these flaws, and we all have them, we are like the man James spoke of in his Epistle:

"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does..." James 1:23-25

Grace is "*the perfect law, the law of liberty,*" and we must never forget that we formally lived in bondage to a performance driven law and was delivered from it. Think about the Leper who was healed by Jesus. He was miraculously healed of his disease and was given a new life. Even so, do you think he would have ever forgotten that he was once a leper, and it was Jesus who healed him? He could look in the mirror and see smooth, healthy skin where there was once rotting flesh, and the memory of that condition would always remind him that he had been touched by Jesus. Likewise, the broken man remembers the condition he was saved and delivered from, for he has no doubt that he too once had a rottenness in his life. This is a critical perspective for keeping us grounded in God's grace and not take it for granted. However, there is that imbalance thing that sometimes swings too far to the other side in us and we have to counter-balance it. For instance:

There is a mistake many men make which is to think that God will love them only if they perform for Him. They just can't do enough to make themselves feel comfortable that God loves them. So when they make a mistake, they go overboard with their self-condemnation. They get into self-pity and hang out there. In fact, several of these misguided fellows think that it is the place where they should live. They think it defines "brokenness." But it doesn't. It is far from it. There are other words for this condition such as "*defeated, shattered, damaged*"... the very things that men fear. These men are misguided to think that they should embrace this perspective and live defeated lives to please God. Wrong! This is not a man after God's own heart. This is not a man who reflects Christ. This is a false leading by the Accuser to convince a man that he

should live in this state and that it is God's will. As a Christian man, we are a joint heir with Jesus Christ. We are members of the royal priesthood ... a holy nation set apart for God's purpose, a member of God's family. This defeated state is not an identity that God wants us to embrace, and we counter it by living **noble lives**. Yes, I said *noble*.

Now many of you may think that I am trying to pump men up by giving them a new way of looking at themselves so they will feel better. In a way, I am. But the aspect of *nobility* that I reference is when the King of Kings laid down his crown and washed the dirty feet of men whom He loved, but didn't deserve it. It made no difference to Him. When He was on His knees washing those feet, He was no less King of Kings because of His humble act. His humility did not get in the way of His royalty, nor how He saw himself. He chose to do this rather than it being required of Him. Likewise, the nobility that I encourage men to embrace is the nobility of Jesus Himself who lives in them, and **this is where the grace emphasis brings balance to the self-condemnation** of a wrong self-identity and the practice of living it out. Therefore, as you hear me say all the time, the right identity and balance that we find for ourself is found *when we abide in Christ*. Why is this? It is because it is He who is in control, and it is His characteristics that surface in our life. They bring the balance we need.