

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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DO YOU TAKE GOD'S FORGIVENESS FOR GRANTED?

by Lee Moses

No greater gift has ever been bestowed upon man than the forgiveness of God. Man of his own free will chooses to sin. When man sins, he violates the very nature of God; thus necessitating man's punishment and eternal separation from the presence of God. God is rightfully displeased when man makes this choice that compels God to do what His holiness and justice demand. Yet, regardless of how horribly man may sin against and repulse God—He extends **forgiveness!** The God of the universe who is perfectly holy and just is also *“Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin”* (Exodus 34:6-7). Such forgiveness as He extends is unequalled and incomparable: *“Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds”* (Psalm 36:5).

Unfortunately, far too often people take God's forgiveness for granted. For whatever reason, they neglect and spurn the greatest gift they have ever been offered. There are various ways in which this occurs.

Some simply refuse to acknowledge the existence of God and the blessings He bestows (compare with Psalm 14:1). Others realize God exists, but are misled into believing that God's forgiveness is received by grace **only**. They think that God universally or randomly bestows forgiveness, regardless of whether or not a person has obedient faith. They fail to acknowledge that there is personal responsibility in receiving God's forgiveness. They remember *“For God so loved the world”* and *“should not perish but have*

everlasting life,” but seem to forget *“that whosoever believeth should not perish”* (John 3:16, emphasis LM). They remember *“For by grace are ye saved through faith”* (Ephesians 2:8), but conveniently forget that *“faith without works is dead”* (James 2:20, 26). May we never forget our personal responsibility to respond to God's offer of forgiveness; may we never hear wisdom's voice say of us, *“I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded”* (Proverbs 1:24).

While some mistakenly believe they have sinned so severely that God could never possibly forgive them (contrast with Ezekiel 33:14-16; 1 Timothy 1:15), others live under the false notion that God **owes** them forgiveness. They say such things as, “I've never killed anybody or anything like that. I try to be a good spouse, a good parent, and a good citizen. If God cannot see fit to forgive me of whatever sins I have committed, I'm not going to bother myself with Him.” However, God **owes** no one forgiveness. Indeed, He paid the greatest price ever paid by offering His perfect Son, but it was not a price He owed:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8; compare with Isaiah 53:4-12; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Again, when we sin, it is a choice **we** make for which **we** are responsible. That price God paid through Christ was not His debt, but ours. How small a token it is that we have merely to obey the Gospel to receive the great gift of forgiveness! (Romans 6:16-18; Hebrews 5:9).

Sometimes children of God, those who have obeyed the Gospel of Christ by submitting in faith to baptism (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27), take God's forgiveness for granted. They are aware that *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). But instead of allowing God's faithfulness and forgiveness to motivate them to overcome temptation, they use it to rationalize **succumbing** to temptation. One might rationalize, “I'll just go ahead and commit this sin—I can repent and confess later, and God will forgive me.” But did that person truly ever **repent** of anything? It seems that he had the same attitude as he committed the sin as he did confessing it. Repentance can be defined as “a change of mind that leads to a change in life”; but if the one “repenting” is merely doing what he planned to do when he entered into sin, there is no change of mind and there will likely be no change of life.

For some, it may be the case that they give no thought to forgiveness whatsoever. Life seems to be moving along just fine, thank you, and they see no need to receive forgiveness from God. They may even reason that God demonstrates His pleasure in them by blessing them so abundantly. Indeed, God is the Source of every blessing they receive

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(Psalm 65:9-13; Philippians 4:19; James 1:17; et al.). But God's blessings may not be a demonstration of His pleasure, but a testimony designed to call man to Him: "[God] in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:16-17).

Generally, the temptation is greater for one to forget God when he is being blessed than when he is not. God warned the Israelites of the inherent dangers in the prosperity He would grant them, urging them in particularly in such times to remember Him, lest they forgot the Source of their blessings "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17). This is why those who live in prosperous nations should especially guard themselves against a callousness against gratitude.

That God does not smite sinners on the spot does not show that He has forgiven them. It merely shows that He

has forbearance. But the Scriptures ask the question, "And thinkest thou . . . that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:3-4). "Forbearance" refers to a **temporary** cessation or pause before something disagreeable takes place.¹ "It points to a truce, not a peace. . . . God's forbearance is wonderful, and eloquent of his deep concern for people. But it is not forgiveness."² "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise (to come again in final judgment, LM), as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, **but that all should come to repentance**" (2 Peter 3:9, emphasis LM).

Indeed, God is a wonderfully forgiving God; but this does not mean that every person is guaranteed God's forgiveness: "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgres-

sion and sin, **and that will by no means clear the guilty**" (Exodus 34:7). Instead of taking God's forgiveness for granted, let us ever crave and be appreciative of God's forgiveness, living lives to His glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). God will pardon abundantly, but there will come a time when it is too late for pardon:

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:6-7).

¹"Anochee," in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 86.

²Leon Morris, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), pp. 112-113.

THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY

by Randy Robinson

John Mellencamp lamented in song over twenty years ago, "I fight authority; authority always wins." Indeed authority is a powerful force with which to be reckoned. In the case of this songster, his perspective is easily noted as one who is rebellious against authority as indicated by his lyrics, "I've been doin' it (fighting authority) since I was a young kid, and I come out grinnin'." Mellencamp expressed an attitude that was held by many of his generation and in fact, is still held today by some in each generation. Even the word "authority" causes some today to bristle. In the last two or three decades, society has attempted with a great deal of success to ingrain in us the concept that authority is bad—that it is wrong, and that it stifles our liberty and creativity. Those who espouse this view do so on the premise that accepting and respecting authority is an admission of inferiority. We have heard much in the

past few years concerning respect. It was once common thought that respect was like trust; it was something that had to be earned. No one was entitled to be respected if they had done nothing to earn that respect. The age of entitlement has changed that view. Few people now believe that they should "earn" anything; that they are entitled to whatever they want and should someone be reluctant to give it to them, that person is guilty of showing disrespect. We have even altered the common vernacular and introduced into the English language the terms "dissed" and "dissing," indicating that someone had been shown disrespect.

Almighty God deemed it necessary and appropriate to establish the concept of authority in every aspect of life on earth. Therefore, as we move farther away from God culturally, it is no surprise that the concept of authority has been met with great resistance and often, even contempt. Paul explained

the role of civil authority as God instituted it, “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation*” (Romans 13:1-2). It is significant to note that the word translated “power” is the same word which Jesus used to describe His ultimate power [*exousia*] (Matt. 28:18). Paul corrected those who believed that they had power or authority in and of themselves by explaining that whatever authority they had was given to them by God. This remains the case today. It is God’s will that human beings obey the properly instituted laws of the land. Note this is not merely a directive for Christians—all people are subject to these laws, just as all people are subject to the laws of God.

Speaking of the laws of God, today when the subject of religious authority is broached, there is likewise a desire on the part of many to deny that God has authorized certain things in the realm of religion. These people would love for us to believe that we are “on our own” when it comes to how to please God in areas such as what one must do to receive the promise of salvation, how to offer acceptable worship, how the church should be governed, etc. This by no means, is a new way of thinking. The writer of Judges [presumably Samuel] described the nation of Israel in the days of the judges, “*In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 21:25). How eerily similar this is to what we often witness today; in that people, although claiming to have a desire to please God, still want to preach and practice the way that they see fit.

To do this, they first must reduce the significance of the Bible by denying its inspiration. The Bible has been under attack for two centuries by those calling themselves “scholars.” They have attacked the authorship of the

Bible by questioning Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy). They have also claimed that Isaiah 40-66 was written after the captivity in order to be able to deny supernatural revelation. Isaiah named the king (Cyrus) who would free Israel from their captivity approximately 150 years before this king was even born (Isa. 44:28). It is quite telling that these studies into the Bible’s authenticity are called “hypotheses” and “theories.” It is evident that these scholars did not wish to accept the Bible’s claim of inspiration as legitimate and their “studies” reflect their disdain for the Bible’s authority.

Many of the modern day “scholars” also possess the same antipathy toward the Scriptures. They have redefined inspiration by saying that the men who wrote the Bible were inspired the same way that Shakespeare was inspired to write plays, Mozart was inspired to write music, and Rembrandt was inspired to paint. While this explanation may appease a postmodernistic society which includes feminists, atheists, scientists, and the ACLU, they have yet to answer satisfactorily the apostle Paul who stated, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God . . .*” (2 Timothy 3:16; emphasis RR), as well as the apostle Peter who stated that “*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (2 Peter 1:21; emph. RR). The phrase “they were moved” comes from the Greek word *pheromenoi*, literally meaning “carried” or “borne.” This language clearly indicates that the writers did not speak for themselves, but were speaking **for God**. Jesus while here on earth declared that His words, which are the words by which we will be judged, originated with the Father (John 12:48-50). He later declared that those things spoken by the Holy Spirit also originated from the Father (John 16:13).

If the Bible could be shown to be merely the works of men, then we would not be subject to its objective authority. It is the same argument used

by those prosecuting the Nazi war criminals in the late 1940’s. The Nazi officers attempted to deflect criticism of their atrocities by claiming that their laws allowed for the slaughter of the Jews and that they were merely obeying their laws. The Nuremberg prosecutors rightfully rejected that claim, recognizing that there is a higher authority (God) Whose objective law superseded the self serving German laws which condoned such barbarism. A post-modernistic society desires to operate under a philosophy which states either explicitly or implicitly, “Everything I do—is OK with me.” This is the height of subjectivism. It allows for people to ignore what the Bible says about the plan of salvation. It allows for the installation of women into leadership roles, including pulpit preaching. It allows for the broadening of fellowship with anyone who *claims* to be a follower of Christ. The Bible has spoken concerning all of these issues and more, yet we see more and more people, including our own brethren rejecting and ridiculing Bible authority by calling it “pattern theology,” and referring to those who maintain the Biblical plan of salvation as “five-steppers.” The New Testament was originally written to the members of the first century church. This has spawned a view that 21st century Christians are exempt from these directives and examples. It absolves brethren from obedience to commands such as The Great Commission, it also concludes that the prohibition of women in leadership was limited to the first century; some have even claimed that this prohibition was limited to Corinth itself (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). When authority is flouted, then anything goes and anarchy results. God, Who is a systematic God of order (1 Cor. 14:40) cannot be and is not pleased with this rebellion. Those who fight God’s authority will one day realize, like John Mellencamp realized, that “authority always wins.”

“THE 7-UPS”

(Author Unknown)

1) WAKE UP . . . DECIDE TO HAVE A GOOD DAY! *“This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it”* (Psalm 118:24).

2) DRESS UP . . . THE BEST WAY TO DRESS UP IS TO PUT ON A SMILE! *A smile is an inexpensive way to improve your looks. “...The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart”* (I Samuel 16:7).

3) SHUT UP . . . SAY NICE THINGS AND LEARN TO LISTEN! God gave us two ears and one mouth so He must have meant for us to do twice as much listening as talking. *“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction”* (Proverbs 13:3).

4) STAND UP . . . FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN! Stand for something or you will fall for anything. *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:9-10).

5) LOOK UP . . . TO THE LORD! *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”* (Philippians 4:13).

6) REACH UP . . . FOR SOMETHING HIGHER! *“ . . . press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:14).

7) LIFT UP . . . YOUR PRAYERS! *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Philippians 4:6).

[EDITOR’S NOTE: We thought this was an excellent piece. We might add to point #6 that you want to be certain

that what you believe is the truth! Some have stood for what they believed in, and in so doing stood for error (Acts 26:9; Romans 10:2). *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be rebates?”* (2 Corinthians 13:5). *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good”* (1 Thessalonians 5:21). But once you have the truth, *“Buy it, and sell it not!”*]

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GOD’S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD’S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God’s word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men’s doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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