

## **We Believe Part 18**

It matters what we believe and perhaps never more so than what we are talking about today. In the Apostle's Creed we declare: **I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy, apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

This morning we are focused on these four words from the Creed, "the forgiveness of sins." We believe in the forgiveness of sins. It's the greatest news possible, that our sins can be forgiven, but before we say we believe in forgiveness, we must first recognize and admit that we believe in sin.

Sin in the bible means "to miss the mark." Sin is the violation of God's law and commandments. We believe sin exists because if we are honest, we have sinned. In some form or fashion we have broken God's law and his commandments. The bible says, "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" **Romans 3:23.** We believe in sin because we've sinned and missed the mark. .

It's not only that we have sinned, we've done things that were wrong, breaking God's commandments, but by our very nature we are sinners. Without committing a sinful act we are sinners. King David, in his great Psalm of repentance confessed the truth for all of us when he said, "**Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.**" **Psalm 51:5** Our very dna is stained by sin. What makes me say that? The bible tells us that sin and death came into the world through one man, Adam. When our father Adam sinned, he brought sin and its consequences upon the entire human race. It's like a mutation. Sin marred us and now personally afflicts each one of us. The apostle Paul said it like this: "**... just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin... in this way death came to all men, because all sinned**" **Romans 5:12**

Sin poisoned all of humanity and now we all sin and we all die. Not only do we bear the

consequence of Adam's rebellion but now we all share in the rebellion. Sin and rebellion is bound up in every human heart. I noticed as I was studying, the apostle says sin entered through one man, meaning Adam. He doesn't blame Eve but Adam. Eve was deceived by the serpent, but Adam wasn't deceived. He didn't fall victim to the devil's arguments, he made a choice to disobey God and rebel against the Lord's command. That's that sinful nature that afflicts us. We are just like our father, Adam. We choose to rebel against God and his commands, even when we know it will cost us everything, even when we know it is self-destructive. We believe in sin because we are born sinners.

We believe in sin because even when we try to do the right thing, we find that sinful nature pushing us too far. "Let's start a campaign that says 'say no to hate.' The next thing you know we are screaming "I hate those haters, let's run them out of town!" Sin is bound up in the heart of human beings and we can't balance it or subdue it on our own. Peter Kreeft wrote, "Our history and our lives are largely the history of hurting, the history of victimization. Ever since the fall we have had this terrible, inescapable, senseless addiction to hurting each other. No matter how hard we try, we cannot break the habit." We can't seem to do the right thing. The apostle Paul said, **"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing...when I want to do good, evil is right there with me."** Romans 7:18-21

We believe in sin because we've seen sin and its' consequences. We believe in sin because we are participants. We've committed sin, we've been victims of sin. We believe in sin because by our very nature we are sinful. Of course, none of us want to admit we are sinners. We try to ease the seriousness of our sin by comparing ourselves to others. "I'm not that bad." Or we try to blame someone else for our sin. Every serial killer's mother says the same thing. "He's a good boy. He doesn't deserve this. It's not really his fault. He's not a killer." But the Scripture is more honest than we are. The bible says, **"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."** 1 John 1:8. Let's face it. Let's be honest. We aren't good boys and girls. We've all missed it. We've sinned against God's commands.

We have to face the truth. We can't compare ourselves to others to determine if we are sinners. We aren't grading on the curve, we have to look into God's word. Paul said, **"Through**

**the law we become conscious of sin.” Romans 3:20** He said, **“I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’” Romans 7:7** We don’t know we are sinners until we look at God’s word and it tells us not to lie and we realize, “I am a liar” or “I’m an adulterer, I’m a thief, I’m a sinner.”

We look to God’s word and see ourselves and our sinfulness. The same thing happens when we look to God himself. The bible says we are lovers of darkness more than light because our deeds are evil. None of us want to stand in the light of God’s holy presence because we know it will expose our sin and wickedness. Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up and he cried out “Woe is me, I’m undone, I’m ruined! I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” Peter met Jesus along the Sea of Galilee and said, “Depart from me for I am a wicked man.” When we get around Jesus and the Father, or his word, we realize we are sinners.

Why am I trying so hard to make this point that we are sinners? Because we have to face the truth about ourselves and our sinfulness. We have to believe in sin in order to see our need of salvation! We have to admit we are sinners in order to cry out to God to deal with the sin in our life. **Sin left un-dealt with will kill us!** Sin separates us from God and will condemn us to hell for eternity.

We don’t want to face our sinfulness or face God, but it’s like not wanting to see the doctor because we don’t want to hear bad news. He has to show you the results of the MRI or the x-ray so he can show you the cure. We have to face the bad news, the truth of our sin in order to face the good news, the truth of his forgiveness and salvation!

Michael Horton wrote, **“Unless we clearly preach both Law and Gospel, we will fail in the ministry of the Word, for we must be brought to total despair of our own righteousness before we can receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Apart from the knowledge of our utter nakedness and corruption, we will not seek the clothing that God has provided. Who needs forgiveness but transgressors?” ... Michael Horton**

Here is the reality. We are sinners in need of a Savior. Our own efforts at being good and righteous have fallen short and missed the mark. We are naked and corrupt, stained with sin. Lying to each other or to our children or to our congregations, telling them the stain is not that

bad or like the story of the Emperor's new clothes, denying the truth of our nakedness isn't doing anyone a favor. Sin left un-dealt with will separate you from God and send you to hell. The law shows us our sinfulness and we have to do something about it. But what can we do?

Here is the good news. We believe in sin, but we also believe in the forgiveness of sins! The Psalmist declared **"If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."** Psalm 130:3-4. Here is the good news, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** 1 John 1:9

He is willing to forgive us of our sins if we will acknowledge and confess our sins. So what does that mean that he will forgive our sins? There are a couple of ways to think of forgiveness in light of what Christ did for us on the cross. We can think of forgiveness in a legal sense. Jesus paid a debt, a penalty that we owed. We used to sing a chorus that said, "He paid a debt he did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay. I needed someone to wash my sins away..." That's the reality. He paid the debt I owed. He settled it by exchanging his life for mine. The penalty for all my sins, he paid in his own flesh. Someone had to die and he took my place and secured my forgiveness and my pardon.

Paul writes, **"He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code...that was against us...he took it away, nailing it to the cross."** Colossians 2:13-14. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* bible translates the verse like this, **"Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's Cross."** Think of it like this: the arrest warrant that listed every sin you ever committed and including the very nature of sin that you bear, that was nailed to the cross! That means your sins were forgiven, your debt settled, the price was paid, the warrant canceled. That's what forgiveness means in a legal sense.

There is also the idea of forgiveness in the sense of reconciliation, the restoring of a relationship that has been broken and torn. In order for the relationship to be healed and forgiveness to do its' work, someone has to take the initiative to be reconciled. Someone has to approach the other party and take the steps to restore the relationship. If forgiveness is offered but not accepted, the relationship remains broken. Both parties have to agree to restore the relationship.

The prophet Isaiah declared, **"But your iniquities have separated you from your God;**

**your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” Isaiah 59:2** Our sin is like a barrier, a wall we’ve built on our side that separates us from God. But God took the initiative. Reaching out to us in love he took the extraordinary steps of sending his only son to break down that barrier, to tear down the wall that separated us. He offers forgiveness to us so we can once again be reconciled to God and in relationship with him. The bible says, **“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” 2 Corinthians 5:19.** God shows us our sin so we can realize how desperately we need his forgiveness.

Perhaps the greatest picture of forgiveness and reconciliation is the story Jesus told of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The son takes the share of the estate that was coming to him and leaves his father and goes off into a foreign land and wastes his inheritance and his life. Abandoned and alone he is starving, broken by his own choices and his sins. The bible says he came to himself and realized he needed to go home to his father. He would repent and ask forgiveness of his father. He would tell him he knew he didn’t deserve to be called a son any longer because by his choices he had sinned and shamed his family, but if he could just be a servant in his father’s household, he would be content. He headed for home and while he was still a long way off, the father, who no doubt had been watching for his son every day, saw him and ran to him. The father forgave the son and called for a robe to be placed upon him and shoes for his feet and a ring for his hand.

What a picture of reconciliation and grace. Like the prodigal son, we have sinned against God, our Heavenly Father. We have rebelled against him and left his presence, going to live as we choose until we finally realize how broken and messed up, how destitute and desperate we are and we decide to try to go home. Perhaps we can find mercy and grace. And like the prodigal son, if we come to our heavenly Father, if we repent and run to him, he will forgive our sins.

Remember the quote I read from Michael Horton who said, “apart from the knowledge of our utter nakedness and corruption, we will not seek the clothing that God has provided. Who needs forgiveness but transgressors?” Here is the ultimate example. The prodigal has to realize he is a transgressor and needs forgiveness. He has to admit he is a sinner in need of a savior. No more denying the truth, he is utterly naked and corrupt and needs the robe of mercy and forgiveness that the Father is offering. We believe in sin, but thank God, we believe in the

forgiveness of sins!

Peter Kreeft wrote, “What is called the forgiveness of sins is really the forgiveness of sinners... forgiveness dissolves the glue that sticks the sinner to the sin. Sins are inevitably burned in the eternal garbage dump called hell, or Gehenna,, the valley of burning. Sinners are too if they stick to their sins, if they hold on to their garbage. God and the sinner must freely cooperate to dissolve the glue that sticks the sinner to the sin. It is like a reverse epoxy: both parts must mix together for this anti-glue to work. God forgives, and that dissolves the glue from the side of sin; and the sinner repents, accepts God’s forgiveness, and that dissolves the glue from the side of the sinner. God takes all sins and nails them to the Cross, justly forgives them by his Son’s sacrifice. His part is done; we are forgiven. The gift is given. Our part is to receive the gift, to repent.” Peter Kreeft

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. God has done his part now and offers us this free gift of forgiveness and grace. Our part is repentance and faith. We repent, admitting that we are sinners and that we cannot save ourselves. We repent and admit we don’t want to go on living in rebellion against God. And then we act in faith. Faith is receiving the gift. Faith is believing that he will truly forgive when we ask.

Let me quote from Peter Kreeft again. **“We are to pray for forgiveness in the double conviction that we need it and that God wants to give it. We need it as much as the lost sheep needed the shepherd, and God longs to give it to us as much as the shepherd longed to bring his lost sheep home. We need him as much as the prodigal son needed his father and he wants us as much as the father of the prodigal wanted his son home. More, infinitely more.” ... Peter Kreeft**

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. But it does us little good to recite the creed if we don’t act upon our belief. He is ready to forgive. He has provided forgiveness and reconciliation for you. The price has been paid, the debt settled, but you must repent and believe. You must come to him in faith. Are you ready for the glue of sin to dissolve from your side? Come in faith, repent, and experience this new life.

