

Future Sins Forgiven in Advance: The Fundamental Error of Hyper-Grace

When Jesus died on the cross, He paid for every sin that you and I and the rest of the human race will ever commit, from Adam's first sin until the very last sin that will be committed on this planet. But that doesn't mean that God forgives our sins before we commit them. That is not taught anywhere in the Bible, and when the Lord says that He forgives us and remembers our sins no more, He's speaking of the sins we have committed at the time He forgives us.

The New Testament is totally clear on this. As it is written in 2 Peter 1, the believer who goes backward spiritually rather than forward "is blind and shortsighted because he has forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins" (2 Pet. 1:9b; the ESV reads, "having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.")

What sins did God forgive when we asked Him to save us and cleanse us? He forgave our past sins, our former sins, the sins we committed before we were born again. As explained in Colossians 2, when we put our faith in Jesus and became children of God, He cancelled "the handwriting of ordinances that was against us and contrary to us, and He took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). The Complete Jewish Bible explains that "He wiped away the bill of charges against us" and the New International Version reads, "having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."

Under God's holy law, we accumulated a massive amount of spiritual debt, with each new sin we committed adding to that

debt. And it was a debt we could never repay, especially since the standards of God's law continually reminded us of our failures and shortcomings. But the moment God saved us, He forgave us that debt—some scholars refer to it as an IOU—and then He brought us into a new and better covenant, one in which His laws are written on our hearts and He remembers our sins no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

So, when we look to the Lord for salvation, He forgives every sin we have committed up to that point and He even forgives us for who we are: lost, rebellious sinners. But He does not forgive us for our sins before we commit them. This is clearly stated in many passages and it makes perfect spiritual sense as well.

When you put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord and you asked Him to forgive you for all your sins, what sins did you mean? Perhaps you said something like, "God, I confess to you that I am a sinner and have done many wrongs things in my life, and I ask you to forgive me and wash me clean."

Is that how you prayed? I said something similar to the Lord, and He met me right where I was as a heroin-shooting, LSD-using, rebellious, hippie rock drummer. I was clean and forgiven and washed at that very moment. Totally! And all the guilt I had been feeling in previous weeks as the Holy Spirit was convicting me of my sins was totally gone as well. What amazing grace!

But it didn't dawn on me to say, "And Lord, while we're at it, could you please forgive me for all the sins I plan to commit tomorrow and for the rest of my life, along with the sins I don't plan to commit?"

I bet it didn't dawn on you to say that either. Why? It is because we understand that forgiveness is for what we have done, not for what we will do.

In the same way, if I sinned against my friend and let him

down, I would go to him and say, "Please forgive me for being irresponsible and causing you pain. I was wrong and I make no excuses." But I wouldn't say to him, "And since I'm confessing and you're forgiving, I ask you to forgive me in advance for every sin I will ever commit against you in the future as well." Of course not.

You might say, "But isn't it different with God, since He sees the future the way we see the past?"

Not at all, even though He inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15) and knows the beginning from the end (Isaiah 46:8-10). But when it comes to forgiveness, He only forgives people for what they have done, not what they will do. Consequently, there is not a single verse in the Bible where God forgives a person's sins before they commit those sins. Not one.

To repeat: Jesus paid for all our sins when He hung on the cross, which means that for all of us living after the cross, He paid for our sins before we were ever born. But He does not forgive our sins until we come to Him asking for mercy, and when He forgives us, He forgives what we have done.

To give you a simple analogy, let's say I put \$1 million into a special account for your education, telling you that whenever you incur a debt for tuition or textbooks or living expenses while you're in college, you can just send me a text with the amount and I'll transfer the funds into your account. The funds are there and the provision is made in advance, but the funds aren't transferred until the debt is incurred.

In the same way, forgiveness covers whatever "debt" we have incurred, which is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt 6:12) in the Lord's prayer. (Remember: The Sermon on the Mount is for disciples—for followers of Jesus—according to Matthew 5:1.)

Look at every single prayer for forgiveness recorded in the Bible, and you will see that people (and nations) only ask for

forgiveness for what they have done, not what they will do. Then look at every single time that God pronounces a person or nation forgiven in the Bible and you will see that, without exception, it is for sins that person or nation have already committed, not for future sins.

I know that some teachers today say that, "God doesn't forgive in installments," and it sounds very powerful. But that teaching has no basis in Scripture. In fact, the entire Bible is against it.

That being said, it is true that God doesn't save in installments, meaning that the moment He says, "I forgive you," you become a child of God and you pass from death to life, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God, from condemned to not guilty, from wicked to righteous, from lost to saved, from having a debt of sins bigger than Mt. Everest to being totally and absolutely forgiven—all in a moment of time. That is grace in action. That is the power of the blood of Jesus. It is a free gift, and it is yours forever.

That also means that if you sin tomorrow and get upset with a coworker, you do not become unsaved and go back to death, back to the kingdom of Satan, back to being condemned, back to being wicked and lost. Instead, as a child of God who is still in the "forgiven" column—meaning, God looks at you as His beloved child, a former guilty sinner whom He has pronounced forgiven—you now need to apply the blood of Jesus to your life and receive fresh cleansing. But you do not do this as a lost sinner being saved. Rather, you do it as a child of God who is in the "saved-righteous-holy-forgiven" column, freshly applying that source of forgiveness, the blood of Jesus, to your life again.

In the same way, in 1 John 1, John says to God's people (the "we" and "us" of his letter) that, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The Greek is present,

continuous as opposed to one fixed time, and it speaks of the pattern of our lives as believers. So, as saved, forgiven people, loved by the Father, if we sin against the Lord, we confess that to the Lord, receiving fresh cleansing and forgiveness—not the forgiveness of salvation but rather the forgiveness of relationship.

And should a believer walk away from the Lord and be restored in repentance, he or she is saved from death and the multitude of sins they have committed is covered (see James 5:19-20; note that the text does not say, “of course, their future sins were already forgiven”—quite the contrary). And in James 5:15, speaking of the sick believer receiving prayer for healing, in the event this person’s sickness was due to their sin, it is written “If they have sinned, they will be forgiven” (not, “they are already forgiven”).

On a practical level, it is very important to understand clearly that God does not forgive our sins before we commit them, since this false teaching opens the door to all kinds of deception and danger. You see, if I really believe that my future sins are already forgiven, in a time of weakness or temptation I might think to myself, “It no big deal if I do that, since I’m already forgiven, and therefore nothing could change my relationship with God, no matter what I do.” I think you can see how dangerous that could be.

To explain this further, we know God doesn’t dredge up our past to condemn us, reminding us every day, “You were a terrible wretch before you were saved and you did some really bad things. You should feel ashamed of yourself.” That is not our Father! We did do terrible things before we were saved and we did feel ashamed, but all that is forgiven and forgotten.

But what if I believed the same thing about my future sins? That would mean that when the Holy Spirit came to make me feel uncomfortable, warning me of danger, I would ignore the Spirit’s loving work, thinking it was my own mind or, worse

still, attributing it to the devil. "God already forgave me for this sin, so the Holy Spirit wouldn't convict me." And so, rather than heeding the Spirit's rebuke—which is meant to be a life-saving rebuke—I will plunge headlong into disaster.

It would be like a driver saying, "By faith, I've already arrived at my destination, so I can ignore these warning signs on the road." In reality, we ignore them to our own peril.

That being said, modern grace teachers make a very good point when they remind us that God deals with us as His children, which means we don't get saved one moment, lost the next moment (the moment we commit a sin) and then "resaved" the moment we ask for forgiveness. This kind of spiritual schizophrenia is not only totally unbiblical but totally maddening. Who can possibly live like this?

So it is crucial that we find a place of security in the Lord, remembering that we are saved by grace, not by works, by God's goodness, not by our goodness. It's also crucial to understand that when God forgives, He forgets—meaning, He doesn't keep a record of wrongs against us—and that when we are forgiven, we are really forgiven. And it's crucial to understand that Jesus paid the price for every sin we will ever commit, and when we come to Him in sincerity, asking Him to wash us clean, He will do it without hesitation. The price has already been paid.

This means if God isn't bringing up our past, we shouldn't bring it up either, and if He says we are forgiven, we really are forgiven. We must receive it, no matter what we've done and no matter how far we've fallen: "I am God's child and I am forgiven!"

We might deeply grieve over the sins we committed, and that is commendable. Could you imagine a husband who committed adultery against his wife not deeply grieving over his sins when he repented to God and to his spouse? We might feel smitten when we think back to some foolish thing we did in the

recent past, one that brought terrible hardship on us and others, and we might kick ourselves, thinking, “How in the world could I have been so stupid?” That is totally understandable.

But at the same time, we should know that God really has forgiven us, that He really does love us, that He doesn’t put us in the dog house, that we don’t need to get saved again, and that He does not want us to wallow in guilt. Just consider the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee, a respected religious practitioner, boasted to the Lord about his own righteous works. In contrast, the tax collector, recognizing his guilt, wouldn’t even lift his head. Instead, he beat his breast and prayed, “‘God, be merciful to me a sinner’” (Luke 19:13b).

Those simple words, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” were the only words that tax collector needed to pray, and Jesus says it was this man—the sinful tax collector, not the religious Pharisee—who went home justified. Amazing!

That is the grace of God, and to repeat, when He forgives, He forgets. As the Scriptures declare:

- “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and your sins, as a cloud” (Is. 44:22a).
- “Who is a God like you, bearing iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not remain angry forever, because he delights in benevolence. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread down our iniquities underfoot, and cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:18-19).
- “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD does not count iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Ps. 32:1-2).

- "... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34b).

And here is something remarkable. All these verses I just cited are from the Old Testament, with the authors still looking forward to the fullness of forgiveness that comes to us through the cross. How much more, then, can we be confident that our own sins are forgiven in Jesus, once and for all?

So we can rest assured that, as far as our salvation is concerned, we have been forgiven of our sins, and God remembers them no more. How mind-boggling is that? And as far as our ongoing relationship with God, forgiveness is applied whenever we need it and ask for it.

Unfortunately, because modern grace teachers fail to distinguish between the forgiveness of salvation and the forgiveness of relationship (some even mock the distinction), they teach erroneously that the moment you are saved, even your future sins are pronounced forgiven.

It is important that we confront the dangerous teaching that our future sins are pronounced forgiven the moment we are saved while at the same time helping to ground believers in the glorious forgiveness that we do enjoy as children of God through the blood of Jesus. {eoa}

Adapted from *The Grace Controversy: Answers to 12 Common Questions*.