LD 21 QA 56; Isaiah 53:4-6; I John 1:5-10; I Believe in Forgiveness I. Defining Sins II. Forgiving Sins

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, everyone likes the idea of forgiveness until you are called upon to forgive someone who sinned against you. Forgiving others is costly! When you forgive others you are letting go of your rights- refusing to hold an offense over the head of the one who offended you. We think that refusing to forgive somehow gives us power- but in actually it is the one who forgives that shows the most powerful restraint and mercy. We can illustrate this by thinking of a family who confronts an inmate who has killed their loved one. The family stands and looked the convicted killer in the eye and says- I forgive you! I do not hold your actions against you anymore. Holding a grudge is easy- forgiveness is hard! Often this act of forgiveness softens the inmate as well as gives peace to the grieving family. But today we are going to be considering forgiveness in the context of our relationship to God. Basically we will see what we have done that needs to be forgiven- and what does it mean to be forgiven. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ secures the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

**I. Defining Sins**

In our first point we consider what is this thing called “sin” that needs to be forgiven. What is sin and how do we sin against God? Children, do you know what sin is? Can we pick up sin and examine it under a microscope? We talk about sin a lot- but do we really understand what it is? Sin has been called a lack of conformity to God’s Law. Basically, sin is any breaking of God’s commandments. Although we use the word “sin” to describe any breaking of God’s Law, the Bible actually uses many different words to describe what sin is and what sin does. In our reading from Isaiah 53 we read the words – transgression and iniquity. A transgression is “Pesa” in the Hebrew- meaning a guilt or rebellion. Iniquity is the word “aon” meaning mischief, perversity and depravity. So to sin includes both moral failing and rebellion. Other words in the OT include the idea of missing the mark and breaking the rule. In the NT, we have one main word- “harmaritia” used to describe sin. Here sin is clearly an act of disobedience and rebellion against God’s Law. Sin is bad- wickedness and evil. To sin is to err- to wonder away and go your own way. To sin is to do what is right in your own eyes- to rebel against your rightful king. But sin is not just an action, it is also a desire. To sin is too long for what you aught not to have. It is craving- a hungering desire for what is unnatural or to covet what God has not given. As QA 56 reveals, we have a sinful nature that is striving and craving- desiring things that it should not. So a sin is not just an action, but even the desire for a sinful thing is also included. For example, a drunkard who looks longingly at the red wine in the cup. Or a married man who looks longingly at the wife of another has already committed adultery in his heart. Sinful desires and the longing of the flesh are then included in the realm of sin. Not just stealing but coveting your neighbor’s possessions as well. Jesus makes this clear in His Sermon on the Mount- that the heart is where sin begins. Sinful desires are what make us unclean and impure! And it is those sinful desires that lead to wicked words and actions. When applying the 10 Commandments to our lives, we see that Jesus applies these laws in both wide and deep ways. Covering all of life and covering all of our being. Heart and hand, body and soul. Our nature and our actions are all included. So a sin is any desire or action that lacks conformity to God’s Law. Wanting or doing something in the wrong way or for the wrong thing. Paul puts it like this in Rom. 7, the good I want to do I do not perform, but the evil I want to avoid I find myself doing. So sins of commission- sinful works that we do; as well as sin of omission- good works we fail to perform- are also part of the equation. So to be clear, sin is not a external object that can be scientifically studied. Rather, sin takes what is good and turns it bad. Sin takes what is white and turns it black. Sin takes the truth and twists it into a lie. The consequences then of fall into sin are these- we are born with a sinful nature and we commit daily sins. Because of our fallen desires and decreased ability, we are always falling short. Like a high jumper who is lame in both feet- we keep hitting and knocking over the bar. Our writing is smudged by the ink of our fallen nature. We sin because we are born sinners. Even the best we can do is as filthy rags as Isaiah 64 reveals. We are dirty, polluted- covered in our shame. Our sins are like scarlet- blood red on our hands. We stand guilty before the Holy One- and God’s wrath is upon us. Now the first application is clear- we have to believe and confess what is true! We all have a sinful nature and personally commit daily sins. We have to be convicted of this truth- and confess it! As we see in I John 1:10- if we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and the truth is not in us. No Christian will ever say- I have no sin! No believer will ever assert that they are without fault! So lets compare two men and their response- first a president who says “why do I have to repent or ask for forgiveness, if I am not making mistakes. I don’t think I have every asked God for forgiveness”- verses the Apostle Paul who says that he is the “chief sinner.” One is the proper response of a follower of Christ and the other not. We need the Holy Spirit to give us the ability to see this truth- so that we might feel the prick of the conscience! I am a sinner- woe is me- I am undone! I come from a wicked people and my own lips are unclean! In order to believe in forgiveness- we have to first believe that we are the ones who need to be forgiven! As Nathan would say- you are the man! You need to see your actions rightly!

**II. Forgiving Sins**

But praise God, that is not where we are left- for we believe not only in the presence of sins but in the forgiveness of those sins! To forgive is to release- to let something go. When God forgives us, He no longer holds our sins against us. He forgets them- remembers them no longer. In forgiveness, our God no longer brings up the sins that we have done but rather he buries them. He casts them as far as the east is from the west- He plunges them into the sea. The barrier that our sins caused is removed, the broken relationship is restored. Although we were once in line for judgment, we are now reconciled. Taken off death row, set free and brought home. The stain of our transgression is blotted out. Lets read Isaiah 1:18. By the forgiveness of our God, that which was dirty is made clean. The debt has been paid so that the account is now balanced. We now owe nothing to the wrath of God because payment has been made. As we read in I John 1:9- if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But what is the basis of our forgiveness? What is the grounds by which a holy God can take away our pollution and make us clean- or to remove our debt and restore our account? Well, as QA 56 puts it, because of Christ’s satisfaction. As I said before, forgiveness is costly. To forgive someone you are giving up your own right to appeasement. The debt that the sinner owes is dropped- the expense is taken off the books. We find this very exchange in our reading from Isaiah 53- He bore our grief- carried our sorrows. Wounded for our transgressions- crushed for our iniquities. Instead of carrying our own debt- Jesus takes on those debts for us. Instead of being crushed by our own iniquities- Jesus was crushed in our stead. What we should have paid, Jesus offered in our place. He became sin for us- by His shed blood we become clean. This is the great work Jesus performs- the great benefit we receive. As we confess in the Lord’s Supper- by His broken body and shed blood He secures the complete forgiveness of all our sins. Here again we highlight the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Jesus had to suffer and die in order for us to be forgiven. But the manner of His suffering and death is of such worth that He only needed to do this work once. Complete forgiveness of all our sins was secured when He died- once for all. So no other payment would be needed- nothing more and nothing less than this one sacrifice. As is the name of Jesus; so is His work. He is Jesus meaning our Savior- for He saves His people from their sins. The consequence of this sufficient work is clear. The Father forgives- the broken relationship is mended- the debt is paid- that which was lost has been restored. My sins and my sinful nature will no longer be held against me. Instead of a sinner, the Father now sees a son! Only the one offended can offer this gift. Since our sins are an offense to God- it is He who must offer us this peace which He does based on the work of Jesus. As we read in I John 1:7- the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. And echoed in Acts 10:43- everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.

Being forgiven is one of the greatest blessings that belong to God’s people. But this blessing also changes us- being restored to God means that we want to live in light of this truth. As QA 56 puts it, those who have been forgiven of their sins will now strive to fight against remaining sin. We do not sin so that grace can abound, but rather we seek to live out the truth of our forgiveness. In other words, being forgiven is not an excuse to keep on sinning! Or I could say- those who are truly forgiven will not have the desire to keep sinning! Being forgiven does not mean that we have ceased to sin. We still do things we wish we wouldn’t. So the struggle continues- we need to fight the sinful desires that still remain. Putting to death the old man that lingers on. This is the very thing that Christ is and will do by His Spirit- making his forgiven people to become and act like His holy bride. So we pray- forgive us because we need to daily be forgiven- and help us to flee from sin and avoid the lure of the devil. Secondly, receiving forgiveness enables us to freely forgive others. As we also pray- forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. Those who have been forgiven by God will be quick to forgive others. We acknowledge that we have freely, graciously and abundantly forgiven. God has forgiven us so much- of many great sins. We will not hold the small offenses of our neighbors against them. We have freely been forgiven- so we will freely forgive. The third response to being forgiven is simply this- joy! We rejoice in the fact that we have been forgiven. I am forgiven- I will never fall into judgement- my sins will never be held against me! What joy shall fill my heart!

To conclude, the concept of forgiveness is one that is sometimes marred by controversy. How can you forgive someone for what they have done? In marriage, past sins are held over the heads of others for years. In society and on social media, past transgressions are drudged up and flaunted for all to see. We often warn our children- the internet never forgets! Whatever you put on there will be there for all to see- and you can’t take it back! Praise God the even if the internet won’t or can’t forgive- we serve a God who freely and graciously forgives our sins! Jesus Christ secures the complete forgiveness of all our sins. Remember that this phrase is a declaration of faith. I believe in the forgiveness of sins- I believe that God has forgiven my sins! As I John 1:9 puts it- He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Repentance requires faith- I trust that God will do what He says! When I repent, He will forgive! If I have repented- I have to trust that He has forgiven me! It is in this truth that we find our lasting comfort!