

Can You Forgive Me Now?

Ephesians 3:14-21

St. Paul prays to God the Father for the Ephesians and for us.

He prays that we may have the Holy Spirit in our inner being and that Christ may dwell in our hearts.

Does he think we are a bunch of heathens? That Jesus is not in our hearts and that we do not have the Holy Spirit in us?

We may act like it at times.

The Ephesians had their issues. Paul mentions sexual immorality, covetousness, foolish talk, crude joking, and drunkenness – all things that should have no place in the life of a Christian.

Which brings the Law close to home, because it is not just the Ephesians who have problems with these things. There is sexual immorality, covetousness, foolish talk, crude joking, and drunkenness in our day, in our homes, in our lives.

But being a Christian isn't about living a perfect life. None of us can do that. What we need is faith that God forgives us.

Did you know that there are different kinds of faith? There is faith in faith. It is what it sounds like. It is a belief that it is your commitment itself that saves you, not what you are committed to. Is that the kind of faith St. Paul is praying for us to have? That it doesn't matter what you believe in as long as you sincerely believe in something? No, faith in faith is not what Paul is praying for.

There is also faith in feelings. If you have a positive feeling toward God, God will have a positive feeling toward you. This usually centers around some emotional or religious experience you had. Now, it's not a bad thing to have positive feelings toward God. But the thing about emotions is that they change. What if you come to the point where you are not feeling very saved? What then? Is that the kind of faith St. Paul is praying for us to have? A faith that is only as certain as the way we are feeling at any given moment? No, faith in feelings is not what Paul is praying for.

One more off the mark kind of faith – faith in works. We all know this is not the way to go, but it may be the one we struggle with the most. We all know that our works won't save us. But what if God does most of the work in salvation with all that Jesus stuff, and then we do our little part by putting our faith in Him and living a good life?

I would be the last one to discourage faith in God and living a good life. But if we see our act of giving our heart to Jesus as something we need to do, and that living a good life contributes even the tiniest bit toward making God love us, it is still not true faith.

Faith is God's gift. And it is not created by preaching against the other kinds of faith. Proclaiming the gospel is the only way to create true faith, as God's gift.

And so that is what Paul shares with the Ephesians. He tells them what he is praying for them, and then he preaches it into them. It's not that they or we don't have Jesus and the Holy Spirit in us, but that other things are getting in the way of the fullness of God.

We can't have the fullness of God if our faith is misplaced or uncertain. We can't have the fullness of God if are not sure that He freely forgives all our sins.

And so Paul proclaims Jesus – who He is and what He has done for them. He does not tell the Ephesians what they need to do. He tells them of what God the Father has done for them in Jesus.

What he writes to them is for you also. He gets right to it in chapter 1: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing ... he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, ... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...* (Vv. 3-8).

He hits it home again in chapter 2: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ... For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Vv. 4-9).

In chapter 3 we find our text – Paul praying for the Ephesians and us that grasp the extent of God's love for us in Jesus. It is a love that is certain, not changing as human feelings often do. It is a love based on His commitment to

us, not ours to Him. And how committed is He? Cross committed – giving His all to forgive all our sins. And how complete is His forgiveness? Can you name a sin you have committed that Jesus' blood didn't pay for? Can't do it. Jesus died and rose again to forgive you all your sins.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more or less. His love for you is complete. His forgiveness is complete. There is nothing you need to do. Jesus has done everything for you.

Well, I guess there is one thing you can do. Remind yourself that you are a child of God. As The Father looks at the rainbow and remembers His covenant with you, you can remember your baptism and be reminded of the gifts you received.

One parting word of God through Paul in Ephesians 5: *Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having washed her by the washing of water with the word* (Vv. 25-26).

Christ loved **you** and gave Himself up for **you**, that He might sanctify **you**, having washed **you** by the washing of water with the word. Amen.