**Shelter-In-Grace**

**Part 2**

**Finding Refuge in FORGIVENESS**

**1 John 2:12**

**SEE INTRO FROM WEEK 1**

Let’s open our Bibles to ***1 John 2:12*** and find refuge in the gospel of unconditional forgiveness. ***“I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.”***

As a gospel-believing preacher, I probably get asked more questions about forgiveness than any other subject.

* Am I really 100% forgiven?
* What if I sin and don’t repent?
* What if I backside?

Forgiveness seems to be a blind spot for many people…including Christians. We just can’t get it into our thick heads that God HAS (past tense) forgiven us completely and for all time. We have an extremely difficult time receiving unconditional forgiveness.

* That just sounds too good to be true!
* Nothing comes for free!
* There must be a price to pay! (*FYI There was – and JESUS paid it all!*)

The grace of God has many expressions, and we’re covering some of them during this series, but forgiveness is one of the biggest!

Miss forgiveness and you’ll miss grace!

One way to reject grace is to treat forgiveness as something other than a gift. Sadly, many do. They think they have to DO certain things before God will forgive them. They think this way for a couple of reasons—one of them being something Jesus said.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said in ***Matthew 6:15, “If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*** Did you know this isn’t good news? This is bad news that should make us shake in our boots because it links God’s forgiveness to our own. It isn’t grace, it’s law. It’s quid pro quo and tit for tat. It’s something you must give to get.

Why did Jesus—who was grace personified—preach law? Because some people need to hear the bad news before they’ll really appreciate the good. Some people will NEVER value the gift of grace until the law has been allowed to do its condemning work.

How does the covenant of law do its condemning work? Here’s just a few examples:

* 2 Corinthians 3:7 says it’s a covenant that’s the ministry of death.
* Galatians 4:24 says it’s a covenant from Mount Sinai that creates slaves, not sons.
* Romans 3:2 says it’s a covenant that reveals sin but doesn’t fix it.

Jesus said he came to fulfill the law and on the cross he did exactly that. In the act of paying for the world’s sin, he forgave those who had sinned against him. See the connection? The very condition for forgiveness that Jesus preached in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, he himself satisfied on the cross.

***Romans 10:4*** says, ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”***

Maybe you’ve heard that “God won’t forgive you if you’re harboring unforgiveness in your heart.” Under the law that Jesus preached, that was true. But the law-keeping covenant was fulfilled at the cross. Those who maintain we must forgive to be forgiven are confused about the finished work of Calvary. They’ll draw your attention to those scriptures that say forgiveness is conditional, while ignoring those that say it isn’t.

When Jesus was on the cross dying for our sins, He cried out, “It is finished.” What did He mean when He said that?

The phrase “It is finished,” comes from a single Greek word that was an accounting term. So, it doesn’t mean merely that a thing has concluded. It doesn’t simply indicate that the curtain has come down and the show is over or “The End.” No, to declare a thing finished is to decree that all has been accomplished, everything formerly lacking has now been supplied.

* The wound has been healed.
* The obligation has been met.
* The debt has been completely satisfied.

In other words, performance-based religion has been finished, put to an end.

Under the Old Covenant people were blessed or cursed based upon their performance of keeping the laws.

This was unfortunate because keeping those laws were impossible.  If you just broke one of them, it was as if you broke all of them.

The result of breaking them were the curses found in Deuteronomy 28.

Sadly, performance-based religion can still be heard in many churches today!

One of the most popular examples of a performance-based religious doctrine is… “IF you don’t forgive, THEN God won’t forgive you!” It’s always if—then.

It sounds so right but it’s completely contrary to the New Covenant of grace.

Jesus has set us free from performance-based religion!

Under the New Covenant we don’t perform to be blessed or cursed.

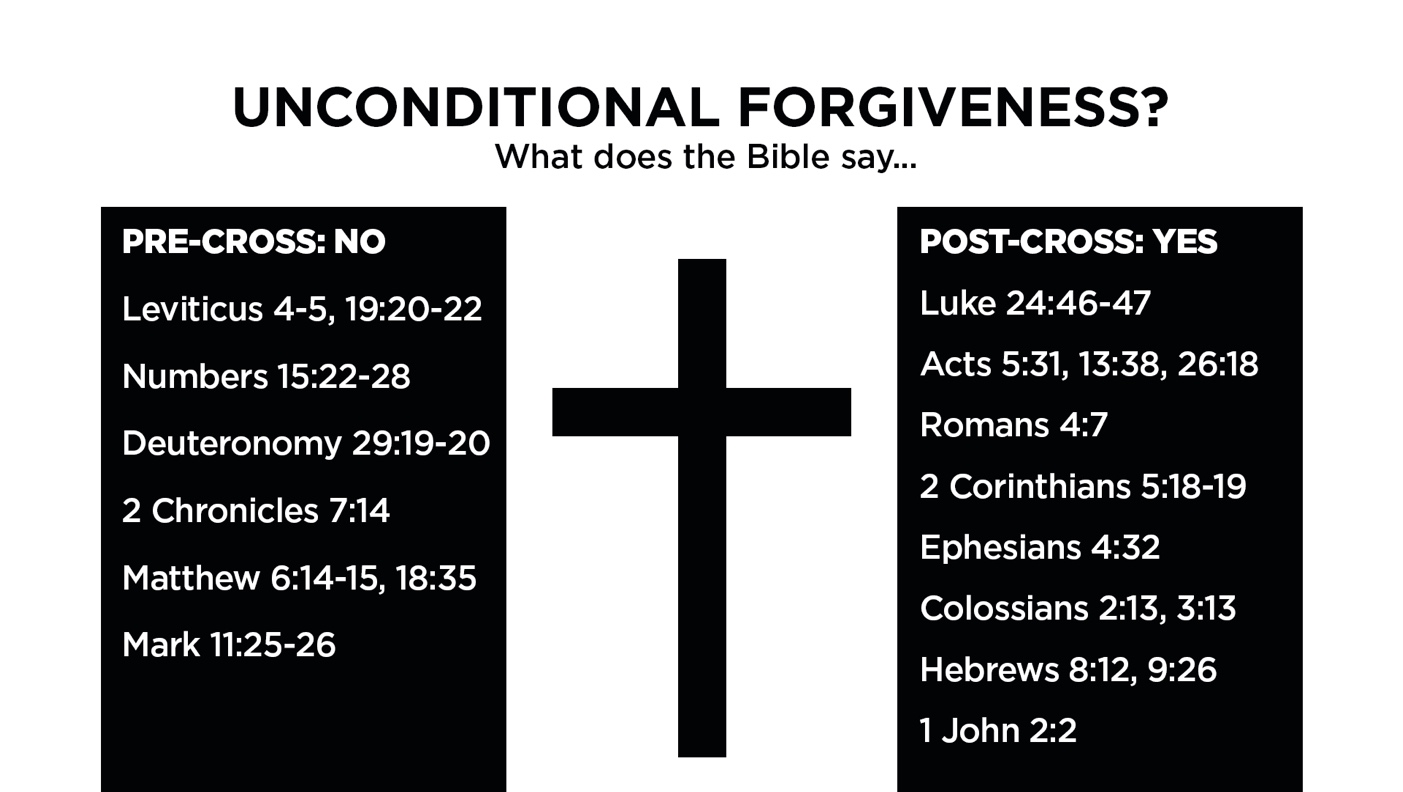
We’re ALREADY blessed because of Jesus' finished work on the cross.

We don’t forgive to be forgiven…we forgive because we’re TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY FORGIVEN!

In other words, performance is FINISHED!

Like never before, we need to have a whole Bible theology but that doesn’t mean “read everything indiscriminately and hope for the best.” That would be like going to the medicine cabinet and swallowing every pill in sight. A whole Bible theology means you read the written word through the lens of the Living Word. It means you filter everything you read through Christ and his finished work on the cross.

Look at the screen and you’ll see a consistent pattern of preaching conditional forgiveness prior to the cross (pre cross) and unconditional forgiveness after the cross (post cross).

Before the cross Jesus preached forgiveness as a law to be kept, after the cross look what he said...

***Acts 26:18*** says, ***“Open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may RECEIVE forgiveness of sins*** (as a gift) ***and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”***

The cross changed everything!

Consider three wonderful truths about the gospel of unconditional forgiveness. Without question, you can find refuge in these things:

1. **Forgiveness isn’t something God DOES, it’s something He’s DONE.**

On the day he rose from the dead (post cross), Jesus immediately began to preach a different message from the law-based sermons he’d delivered before the cross (pre cross). Remember that before the cross Jesus preached conditional forgiveness; forgive to be forgiven. But after the cross he preached this:

***Luke 24:46-47*** says, ***“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”***

Now take a moment this week to check that passage in your own Bible. What does it say? Does it say “repentance FOR forgiveness” or “repentance AND forgiveness”? The difference is huge! Repentance FOR forgiveness is what John the Baptist preached. It’s forgiveness conditional on you turning from sin. It’s a verb for a verb.

But this isn’t what Jesus is saying here. He doesn’t use verbs for repentance and forgiveness, but nouns. He’s saying, “From now on, forgiveness isn’t something God DOES, it’s something he’s DONE.

This becomes clear when we read ***Luke 24:47*** in the KJV: ***“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”***

Forgiveness that HAS already taken place is called remission. When were our sins remitted? On the cross. During the Last Supper, the Lamb of God said he’d take away the sins of the world when he died.

***Matthew 26:28*** says, ***“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”***

Where was the Lord’s blood poured out? At the cross. Where were all your sins forgiven? At the cross.

1. **Forgiveness isn’t a reward based on your confession, it’s a free gift based on His crucifixion.**

Forgiveness in the new covenant is a noun not a verb; it’s a gift not a work; it’s trusting not trying. It’s something God gives, not something he does. (He’s done it already.). This can be hard for us to understand because this isn’t how the world works.

Think about it. When you sin against someone, your relationship with that person comes under strain. There’s the THING that comes between the two of you. To be reconciled you need to deal with the THING. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23 (pre cross) that if you’re bringing your gift to the altar and you remember your brother has some THING against you, go and deal with that THING. He said in Luke 17:4 (pre cross) that if your brother sins against you and repents, “Send that THING away.”

That makes sense. Right? But here’s the thing. God isn’t like you or me. He doesn’t wait for you to act before he does his thing with your THING. That THING that was between you and him—your sin—he dealt with at the cross. Since God isn’t limited by time or space, he didn’t need to wait for you to start sinning before he forgave your sin. He’s already forgiven you…BEFORE. Before means “during the period of time preceding, prior to or previous to.” The truth is, he forgave you BEFORE you confessed…BEFORE you repented…BEFORE you were born…BEFORE you even realized you needed to be forgiven.

To forgive literally means to send forth or send away. Your sin hasn’t merely been overlooked or covered up; it’s been removed from you as far as the east is from the west. If you were to go looking for your sins, you wouldn’t find them. They’re gone!

***Hebrews 9:26*** says, ***“But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”***

At the cross, the sins of the world were sent away. This is why the risen Lord said we’re to proclaim forgiveness as a done deal rather than a favor to be earned.

Think about it. The disciples were probably blown away when they heard this. First of all, there’s Jesus standing among them when he’s supposed to be dead. Second, he’s preaching something that seems totally at odds with what he’d said earlier in his Sermon on the Mount.

With the old covenant fulfilled and the new just beginning, Jesus had to get his disciples up to speed quickly. He did this by opening their minds so they could understand scripture (Luke 24:44-45). He explained how the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms all reached their fulfillment in him. They pointed to a day that had now dawned, namely, the new era of grace.

On the cross the law was fulfilled, grace was revealed, and verbs became nouns. Forgiveness was no longer conditional on you doing A, B, and C. Forgiveness became a free gift paid for by the blood of the lamb.

How fitting, then, that the first people to hear this new message of unconditional forgiveness were the men of the Sanhedrin, the same men who’d condemned Jesus to shed the very blood that paid for that forgiveness.

***Acts 5:31*** says, ***“God exalted him [Jesus] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might GIVE repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.”***

In other words… repentance is a gift! Forgiveness is a gift!

To the religious mind, grace is scandalous. Grace sounds like blasphemy. Grace disrupts our neat little plans and programs.

The men of the Sanhedrin had the apostles flogged and ordered them not to preach Jesus. Of course, the apostles ignored this and years later, when Paul joined their ranks, he too began to preach the new message of unconditional forgiveness.

***Acts 13:38*** says, ***“I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.”***

Do you see it? No hooks, no qualifications, no conditions, no bait-and-switch. Just good news delivered pure and straights.

1. **We don’t beat ourselves up for forgiveness, we look to the cross and say, “Thank you, Jesus!”**

Maybe you’re struggling with sin and carrying truckloads of guilt. Maybe you wear shame like a heavy jacket. The solution to your problem is standing on a hill 2,000 years in the past. On the cross Jesus became the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

***1 John 2:2*** says, ***“And He Himself is the PROPITIATION for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”***

Propitiation is a big word, but it simply means Jesus became the sacrifice that satisfied completely. He turned God’s wrath away from the sin that was in you and me by taking our sin to the cross.

Sin is like a lightning rod; it attracts wrath. Throughout Old Testament history flashes of judgment would occasionally vaporize some poor soul. But on the cross Jesus took the sin of the world and obliterated it in one mighty blast of judgement. That’s why Psalm 30:5 says, “For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime.” He was cursed for a moment, so we could be favored forever. He paid the ultimate price so that we could live totally forgiven and completely free.

Your sins have been done away with. They’ve been blotted out, abolished, canceled, and dismissed. They’ve been fried as if by lightning. This is supposed to make you really happy!

**Romans 4:7-8** says, **“Happy are those whose wrongs are forgiven, whose sins are pardoned! Happy is the person whose sins the Lord will not keep account of!”**

Did you know we’re supposed to be the happiest people on the planet? Yet many aren’t? They’re racked with guilt, unable to forgive themselves or others because they haven’t seen the lightning rod of the cross. They haven’t heard the good news that Jesus’ sacrifice is the once-and-final solution for their sin. Instead they’ve been led to believe that God’s angry with them. They’ve been sold a counterfeit brand of forgiveness that comes straight from Sinai instead of the real forgiveness that comes from Calvary. They’ve heard bad news which only releases anxiety and fear, not joy and peace.

If God’s love is unconditional, then his forgiveness must be unconditional too. And it is! If you believe God loves you but hasn’t totally and completely forgiven you, then you develop an inferior identity that’s always apologetic and never confident. Being forgiven is part of our new nature. When we only get a revelation of God’s unconditional love and not His unconditional forgiveness then we end up knowing His nature but not ours. His forgiveness isn’t doled out in proportion to our acts of repentance or confession or good behavior. It’s lavished upon us according to the riches of his grace. You only need to look at Jesus to know this is true.

You need to treat God’s forgiveness the way you treat his love—as a gift received by faith from start to finish. You don’t need to beat yourself up to get it; you just need to look to the cross and say, “Thank you, Jesus!”

I can hear it now. “But won’t I lose his forgiveness if I continue to sin or mess up? What about the sin I did just last night?” Like all your sins, that one was dealt with at the cross. It wasn’t recorded as a red check mark next to your name because God isn’t in the business of imputing sin. It’s human nature to keep score, but it’s not God’s nature. God is love and love keeps no record of wrongs. If you were to ask him about last night’s sin, he’d say, “What sin? I have no record of that sin. Stop looking for it and look to Jesus.”

If you’re battling with sin, guilt and condemnation, remember these three things: THANK. TURN. TRUST.

* THANK God for the finished work of Jesus on the cross.
* TURN from sin so that it doesn’t reign in your life. (Romans 6:12)
* TRUST God for wisdom and new ways to think and act. (James 1:5)

It’s that simple!

I can hear some of you right now! Some of you are freaking out that this message of unconditional forgiveness will lead to more sinning. You imagine that after hearing and believing in once-for-all forgiveness, Christians will begin setting world records for sin. Well, let’s remember that many believers seem to be sinning just fine without understanding the gospel of unconditional forgiveness. So, maybe we should consider the possibility that God’s unconditional grace will offer a different outcome.

Why do you believe that tempering God’s forgiveness will motivate people to stop sinning? God never motivates us by withholding His forgiveness. That would be fear-driven motivation. No, the gospel is the opposite. God’s forgiven us of all our sins, and our forgiven state is an inspiration to think and act in new ways that fit with who we truly are as saints.

***2 Peter 1:9*** says, ***“For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins.”***

Running after forgiveness is like shopping for air. Air is free! God’s already given us all the air we’ll ever need. You just need to open your mouth and breath it in. It’s the same with his forgiveness.

Forgiveness isn’t something to pursue, it’s something to possess and in Christ we have it.

The gospel is the emphatic declaration that you have been completely and eternally forgiven through blood of the Lamb.

Are you ready to receive this gift from God?

Please say this prayer:

*“Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love for me, for sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for all my sins. His precious blood washes me clean. You raised Him from the dead. He’s alive today. And I thank You all my sins are forgiven. I’m righteous by the blood. I’m under Your favor. And I thank You Father that surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life from this day forth. I thank You for a new Spiritual identity. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

Once you’ve accepted Jesus into your life, your entire position in God’s kingdom changes—you’re no longer a sinner, but a new creation in Christ and an heir of God.

It’s very important for you to continue hearing about Jesus and your new identity in Him, and to learn of all the blessings that He purchased at the cross for you to enjoy.

To help you in your grace walk as a believer, we encourage you connect with us here at Calvary Church.

**Today’s Confession: Today I choose to find refuge in God’s unconditional forgiveness.**