



What Christians Believe
The Apostles Creed
(12) I Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins
Psalm 32
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Introduction - Chinese Christians accept the Apostle' Creed

Five thousand miles away from Worcester on the wall of a church building in the city of Chengdu you'll find a big poster 2 feet tall and one foot wide. The heading reads, "Our Identity", and underneath, in Chinese, are six points to help everyone understand what the church believes. The second point begins...

2. We are Christians, (wait for it...) *We accept the Apostle's Creed.....*

Isn't that wonderful! Right in the middle of communist China is a church that believes in the Apostle's Creed, just as we do; and just as every true Christian Church does. Well folks, we're nearing the end of the Apostles Creed, in this sermon series and today we have the line: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins"

Forgiveness is the Big Message of the Bible

The "forgiveness of sins" is The Central Message of the Bible. John the Baptist went around telling people to repent and get baptised, why? So their sins would be forgiven (Mark 1:4) When people brought a paralysed man to Jesus, the first thing Jesus did was not to heal him but to forgive his sins - because in the eyes of Jesus, forgiveness for the soul was more important than healing for the body On the day of Pentecost the crunch point of Peter's sermon was: "Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, (WHY?) for the forgiveness of your sins.." (Acts 2:38)

Forgiveness of sin is the big message of the Christian faith, that is why this line is in the creed: "I believe in the forgiveness of sin." This morning I want to outline three kinds of forgiveness we affirm when we say "I believe in the forgiveness of sin"

- There is Gospel forgiveness
- Daily forgiveness,
- Personal forgiveness

(1) I believe in Gospel Forgiveness

The first kind of forgiveness, we are affirming, when we say "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" is

Gospel forgiveness, the forgiveness God holds out to us as a free gift in the Gospel, through the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to spend most of our time here.

It is a truly wonderful thing to know that all our wrongdoing is forgiven: "Blessed (happy, joyful, contented) is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. (Psalm 32:1-2)

And this forgiveness was made possible, through the terrible suffering, death and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Christ... suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18)

Why was it so costly to forgive our sins? Why was the death of the sinless Son of God necessary to forgive our sins? Couldn't God have devised an easier way to pay for sins?

- Ask us to write our sins on a kite and let them fly off into the atmosphere?
- Command us to wash in a holy river?
- Or just issue the decree "your sins are forgiven!"

Why the suffering of God's beloved Son? Why?

Suppose your doctor prescribes a cure to you: they go into great detail about dire procedures are going to be necessary to save your life, and they assure you that the remedy will be wonderful. But they never tell you what's actually wrong with you! They never tell you why such extreme procedures are required! You are not to agree with the drastic remedy until you understand the diagnosis, are you?

In the same way, you and I will never understand why it took the suffering of the sinless Son of God to wash away our sins, until we understand how serious our sin is.

Let's spend a few minutes in the doctor's surgery, and listen to the bad news before the good news!

(1) Our sin is serious because our sin runs so deep and wide

The Bible uses more than ten different words to describe sin, because it runs so deeply in our hearts and lives:

- Sin is active rebellion against God's commands
- Sin is breaking the standards we set in our own consciences for everyone else
- Sin is aiming at the target but falling short
- Sin is wrong thoughts such as hatred
- Sin is wrong words such as lies
- Sin is wrong attitudes such as jealousy
- Sin is wrong actions such as theft
- Sin is not only things we do, but things we fail to do, such as neglecting to help someone we could easily have helped.

- And Sin is not only things we do, it is our very nature, our tendency to do wrong: we are sinners by nature as well as sinners by practice

“All have sinned and come short of God’s glory” says the Bible (Romans 3:23) “There is no one righteous no not one” (Romans 3:10) “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

If you do not believe that our sin runs deep, think of all the devious tricks we use to excuse our sin. Take just the sin of speeding, disobeying the law of the land:

- We might DENY it – I never speed
- We might JUSTIFY it – I was in a hurry, an emergency
- We may MINIMISE it – I only went 5% over the limit
- We might COMPARE OURSELVES WITH OTHERS – I’m not like the guy who just sped by at 90!
- We may BLAME others– the slow driver
- We might GLORIFY ourselves – I am such a good driver, it was OK for me speed —but it wouldn’t be a good idea if that poor driver did!
- We GENERALISE our wrongdoing– everyone does it!

Our sin is serious because it runs so deep!

(2) Our sin is so serious because God is so holy

Our sin is so serious because, by contrast, God is so holy. “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.” (Habakkuk 1:13) “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.” (Isaiah 6:3)

(3) Our sin is so serious because it separates us from God

Since God is holy, and we are not, our sins separate us from him. “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.” (Colossians 1:21)

(4) Our sin is serious because it deserves the judgment of God

God is the supreme and just Judge of his universe so he must punish all wrongdoing, and the punishment for our sins is death, “The soul that sins will die” (Ezekiel 18:20) “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) ...death at the end of this short life, and death in the world to come (serious).

I’ll never forget going on a long car journey with a friend who was struggling with alcohol. It had been a beautiful journey, along Yorkshire roads between dry-stone walls, surrounded by beautiful countryside, through charming old-world villages. But when we arrived he said, “Roy, can I tell you what the ride was like for me? Whenever we approached a village pub I wanted to stop and have a drink, and after we passed it my mind was then consumed with that missed opportunity. And that’s how it went for the whole of the wretched journey”

You say that is an extreme example, a mind completely polluted by addiction to drink, making it impossible to enjoy life. But sin, in one way or another, messes up all our earthly lives. It not only separates us from God, it messes up our lives here and now! How much sorrow is caused by our wrongdoing!?

The doctor has finished his diagnosis! The condition is life threatening, and only the most serious procedures will save your life. But now, hopefully, we are ready to listen!

“Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18)

*On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross
The emblem of suffering and shame
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best,
for a world of lost sinners was slain*

This is the amazing Good News of the Gospel! That God so loved the world that he took the costly initiative, and sent his Son into the world to pay the penalty for our sins so that we could be forgiven for every wrong we have done, or will do, whether in thought or word or deed, whether in acts of commission or deeds of omission, whether deliberate or careless, whether great or small.

And the wonder is that this forgiveness is that it is offered to everyone as a free gift, through faith and repentance, “repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.” (Acts 2:38) “Everyone who believes in him receives the forgiveness of sins through his name “(Acts 10:43)

If you are follower of Jesus, be reminded that all your sins—yes even those sins—have been paid for in full. “Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”

And if you are not yet a follower, God offers you the free gift of the forgiveness of sins. Believe in Jesus and repent of your sins, and if you believe today, tell someone about it and then find a Bible believing church and then get baptised!

(2) I believe in Daily Forgiveness

Suppose someone says that because Jesus has paid for all their sins, past, present and future, it did not really matter how they lived today, because whatever they did wrong, God has already forgiven it!

Where is there thinking going wrong? On the one hand they are correct—all our sins, past, present and future have been paid in full by the atoning death of Jesus Christ! But what they are forgetting is that God hates all our sin, and he has put his HOLY Spirit in our hearts to help us to get rid of our sin, so that we can walk in fellowship with God and lives that please him day by day.

So when we say “I believe in the forgiveness of sins” we are also saying, “I believe in Daily forgiveness”

Day by day we should be turning away from our sins, repenting of our sins. And day by Day, as the Lord Jesus himself instructed us, we should pray “forgive us our sins” and as we do we have this wonderful promise: “If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Let’s repent of every sin, let’s not allow one sin to find a home in our minds and hearts or lives.

My wife and I were on a walk a few weeks ago when we came across a woodpile on fire under a tree, blazing out of control, and threatening the nearby house. We called the fire department, contacted the occupants and learnt that a gardener had made a fire that morning, and thought he had put it out, but in fact had left a few embers glowing. The wind flamed those dying embers into a fire that threatened life. That’s what could easily happen in our lives if we do not stamp out every sin, by the power of the Holy Spirit and his purifying Word.

(3) I believe in personal forgiveness

And finally, I believe in personal forgiveness. When we ask “forgive us our sins” says Jesus, in the same breath we are to say “as we forgive those who have sinned against us.” “Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13) If we have experienced the full and total forgiveness of God for all of our wrongdoing, then we should find it in our hearts to forgive those who sin against us.

One of the best Christian books on forgiveness has been written by Chris Brauns.

Chris came to our church weekend away a few years ago and he’s due to come next year. I interviewed him in June and asked him to share with us all what we should do if someone offends us, and this is what he said (Interview). The three points of the interview were:

- Show love to those who have sinned against you
- Never take revenge against them
- And if you have suffered an injustice at their hands, the Lord will sort it out

So when we affirm “I believe in the forgiveness of sins” we say:

- I believe in Gospel Forgiveness, God sent his Son into the world to pay for my sins and offer me the free gift of forgiveness!
- I believe in Daily Forgiveness—I want to live a repentant and holy life with God’s help
- And I believe in Personal forgiveness—extending to all who offend me the forgiveness that God has extended to me.