

A Loving Father's Response

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February 22, 2009

If you have your Bibles you can turn to Luke 15, [where] we [will] continue to look at the parable of the prodigal son.

J.I. Packer, in his book *Knowing God*, speaking of the love of God, writes this:

God was happy without man before man was made; He would have continued happy had He simply destroyed man after man had sinned; but as it is He has set His love upon particular sinners, and this means that, by His own free voluntary choice, He will not know perfect and unmixed happiness again till He has brought every one of them to heaven. He has in effect resolved that henceforth for all eternity His happiness shall be conditional upon ours.

Thus God saves, not only for His glory, but also for His gladness. This goes far to explain why it is that there is joy (God's own joy) in the presence of the angels when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10), and why there will be 'exceeding joy' when God sets us faultless at the last day in His own holy presence (Jude 24). The thought passes understanding and almost beggars be-

lief, but there is no doubt that, according to Scripture, such is the love of God.”¹

As we look at the parable of the prodigal son, we are going through it at a slow pace because it is so incredible. In the beginning of [Luke] 15, there were some scribes and Pharisees who were grumbling that Jesus was receiving repentant sinners. So, Jesus, in order to correct their faulty, selfish thinking, volleys at them three parables: the parable of the lost sheep [see Luke 15:4–7], the parable of the lost coin [see Luke 15:8–10], and the parable of the lost son [see Luke 15:11–32]. All three parables describe something of value that is lost, sought after, retrieved, and then rejoiced over when found. All three [parables] picture the joy of God, the saints in heaven, and the angels of heaven, who rejoice when even one sinner repents.

Jesus describes the prodigal in [the third] parable in such a way as to make him as repulsive as possible to the scribes and Pharisees. He crafts the parable to make the prodigal so hideous that they winc[e] in disgust [when they hear of him]. [We learned that] the prodigal fell into the sins of being impatiently greedy, of not caring about others, of presuming upon God's grace and mercy, of hiding from accountability, of thinking that sinning would make him happy, and [of] living for the day with no concern for the morrow. [Then we saw that] his sin led him to suffering, but God used this suffering to humble him. Sin impoverished him, brought him low, defiled him, left him wanting, left him friendless, and blinded him to his own true condition.²

Then we began to look at God's grace, [in the form] of repentance, in this man's life. We learned that repentance is a gift of God. It starts in the eternal purposes of God. God chose some unworthy sinners, before the foundation of the world, [and] He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our

¹J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 113.

²You can listen to the sermons in which these topics are discussed by going to:
<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/Year/2009>.

sins. The Father orchestrates events to bring the gospel and the sinner into contact with each other, uses the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds to the truth so that we can understand the gospel and believe, supplies us with saving faith, [and] grants us repentance. All of these things are the work of God [in] the sinner before the sinner even knows what's going on. This is why repentance is a gift of God.

In addition to that, we saw that when [God] grants repentance to a sinner, that sinner then begins to seek the blessing of God like never before. The sinner is broken over the treachery of [his] sin against God like never before. [He] turn[s] from [his] sin to follow Christ like never before. [He is] moved to confess [his] sin[s] like never before. [He is] humbled like never before. This is where we left off. We left off in the text where we learn that the prodigal came to his senses. That is the hinge [up]on which the whole parable turns: he came to his senses, which means he repented of his sin.

Look with me in your Bibles at Luke 15 and follow along. I am going to read [Luke 15:]11–22.

And He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned

against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves. . . .

Just stop there. That’s as far as we’re going to get. Look here at this section in [Luke 15]:20–24. As I studied this, guess how many kindnesses of God toward repentant sinners I found? Six. Yeah, isn’t that interesting? We’re only going to look at the first three this morning.

The first kindness that God shows is that God seeks sinners. We see in [Luke 15:]20 that [the prodigal] got up and came to his senses. We already saw, from [Luke 15:]17, that he came to his father because he came to his senses. He has been brought to a place where he sees himself rightly. He is living in the land of sin. He has totally defiled himself. He is in a famine. He is really headed for hell. There he is, in the country of sin, having insulted his father, shamed his family, rejected the Law of Moses, despised his inheritance, squandered the rest of his inheritance on prostitutes and loose living, and you can just see him there all poor, dirty, ragged, and smelling like pigs. No one is giving anything to him [see Luke 15:16]. He comes to his senses, by God’s grace, and turns toward home.

Maybe for days, weeks, [or] even months—we don’t know [how long it takes him to get home because] we don’t know what distant country he was in—he is walking home. He doesn’t have a horse, or a camel, and can’t ride in a cart. He’s walking because he doesn’t have a penny to his name. He’s kind of like a stray dog. He’s hungry, his stomach is growling day and night, he’s scavenging for food. Maybe he just eats grass to fill the void. Or, if he gets lucky he can eat a couple grasshoppers. Maybe a few kind travelers take pity on him and give him some meager rations, but

he's no longer the proud, cocky, arrogant, self-serving, self-focused young man he was when he left. He is changed. He is humbled. He is thankful for every little kindness extended to him. He is different than he ever was before. Why? [It is] because God's grace has entered his life. God's grace has changed him. He is different now, and he is headed toward home.

As he enters into the land of Israel, I'm sure he saw things, and smelled things that reminded him of growing up and all the good that he had while he was living at home. I'm sure he felt shame upon shame well up within him at how he could be so foolish [as] to leave his country, his father, so much goodness, [and], really, destroy himself. He climbs the crest of a hill, and he knows he is now on his father's land, the land that would have been his if he hadn't forfeited it. He's almost home when something so wonderful and so amazing happens. Look at the middle of [Luke 15:]20: "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him."

What does this tell us? I thought about this. The prodigal has been living in some distant country, who knows where. He has lost everything [and] has been feeding pigs. It's not like he sent an announcement, [saying], "I'm coming home on such-and-such a day, at such-and-such a time." No one knows where he is. No one knows he is coming home. How could it be that the father just happens to be outside, looking in the right direction, at just the right time? There *are* 360 degrees to the compass, and even if you were out there day after day, looking, just think of how difficult it would be to see somebody a long way off, before [that person] is even recognizable. How is it that the father sees him and knows his son so far away, on the right day, at the right time, [looking] in the right direction?

Remember, the father represents God. God knows everything. God knows when a sinner is going to repent, and come to his senses, and return to home because He is the one who extends saving grace so that [the sinner] repents and turns home. The Father is looking in the right direction because He knows His son is coming home that day, at that time, [from] that direction. The Scriptures say "there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have

to do” [Hebrews 4:13]. He knows where [the prodigal] has been, [and] He knows where you are, too. He sees you at work, He sees you at home, He sees you when the lights are on and when the lights are off. You’re never out of His sight. He sees all of us, even when we’re living in the land of sin, even when we’re using all the goodness that He has given to us—His grace, His mercy, life, His gifts, our wealth, whatever—all those things He has given to us, He sees us when we are living in sin, when we are rebelling against Him, when we’re not living for His glory. He sees it all. Yet, even though He knows all these things about us, the moment we turn from our sin to Christ, He is looking in our direction. There He is on the horizon.

[In the parable], the prodigal is coming up, and he is so far away you can only see the top of his head. The father knows it’s him. [The prodigal] walks a little further, and pretty soon his shoulders appear, and then the rest of his body, and then you can see his legs. He’s still so far away that no mortal eye could see him, but the father does, and the father knows who he is. It’s his son, who is coming home. John 6:44 and 65 tell us that no one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws [him] and grants [him] repentance. So, the Father is drawing the son.

One who doesn’t understand this might conclude that the prodigal came to his senses on his own, is turning home, and the father just happened to be out there on the right day looking in the right direction, and just happened to see him even though he couldn’t. No. A lot of people think this way about their salvation. They think, “I knew I was living in sin. I could see that I was living in sin. My heart began to convict me. I began to be really concerned about the direction of my life. I thought, ‘You know, I need to seek out the truth here,’ and so I started looking into different truths, different religions, [including] Christianity. I came to believe the Bible was true. I understood the gospel. Once I understood that God exists, the Bible is true, and the gospel [is true], then I believed in Jesus and was saved, and then God received me.”

Hear me now: That has never happened in the history of the world. No one has ever sought God on his own. Ever. [People] won’t do it. They won’t

do it. No one, independent of the grace of God, has ever sought out the Lord. [Do] you remember that text right before the Christmas text in Isaiah 9:6? Right before that, it talks about [how] the Gentiles who live in the land of darkness will see a great light [see Isaiah 9:2]. John, in his gospel, in the first chapter, alludes to that, and he says this in John 1:5: "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it." He goes on to say in verses 10–11: "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." That is how men respond to Jesus apart from the grace of God. They don't receive Him.

John goes on to say in John 3, right after Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus, how men, unaided by the grace of God, respond to the Light.

This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [John 3:19–20]

Men love darkness. Men love sin. Men don't want to come to Jesus. They *will not* on their own. You say, "Well, why is that?" [It is] because Jesus is holy. Jesus is just. Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead [see 2 Timothy 4:1]. In their mind[s], though convoluted, though twisted by sin, [men] think, "Well, if I go to Jesus, He'll judge me. If I go to Jesus, He'll cast me into hell. If I do that, He'll control my life. I don't want anybody controlling me." But they don't even realize they're already a slave to sin and Satan. They're already held captive by Satan to do his will [see 2 Timothy 2:26]. They're already blinded by sin. The wrath of God already abides on them [see John 3:36]. Hell is waiting for them. They *will* perish, unless they repent. They are like people walking in darkness who run away from their own good. They think in their minds, "If I run to Christ, it won't be good, but if I'm the master of my own soul," which they aren't because

Satan is using them, “things will be great.” No. Satan is holding you in his arms because he is going to take you down with him to hell.

There are people who seek Jesus, but they seek Him for the wrong reasons. There is the person who says, “My marriage is bad. I’m going to come to church and see if God will fix my marriage.” Or, “My children are out of control, so I’m going to go to church to see if they’ll fix my children.” Or, “My business isn’t doing [well], so I’m going to go to church and maybe God will bless my business.” Or, “I have some disease, some sickness, and if I go to church, God will maybe make me clean because I go and sing some songs, give some money, and sit and listen to the sermon.” Listen, that’s not coming to Christ. That’s just robbing more of God’s grace to use for yourself.

Paul, in the beginning chapters of Romans, goes to great lengths to explain our dire circumstances before the grace of God invades our lives. He says [that] though God reveals Himself to all men—in their conscience, through creation, by putting His law in their hearts—men take that truth and they suppress it in unrighteousness [see Romans 1:18]. “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” [Romans 1:25]. Then Paul sums up after this long section of explaining the desperate condition of mankind, and he says [of] how men are:

THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE. THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING, THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS; WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS; THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE

THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN. THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES. [Romans 3:10–18]

Men left on their own never, *never* seek Jesus. It is only when God, by His grace, invades their lives that they come to their senses, and they realize, “I’m in trouble. I need to turn from my sin. I need to run to Christ.”

I know you may be thinking, “But wait a second, Pastor Jack. Right there in the text [in Luke 15], the prodigal came home. He came to his senses. All I know in my life is [that] I got a clue, I sought God, and then He found me.” No, no, no. You can’t throw away all the Scriptures [that] say men don’t seek God. You say, “Well, aren’t there some that say that men seek God, too? Can’t I believe those [verses] and just not think of the other ones?” No. You have to figure out how they’re both true, [which] is this: Men on their own don’t seek God, but when God supplies the grace, then they seek Him in response. God is the one who seeks us. Unaided by saving grace, we never seek Christ.

Do you remember what Jesus said in [Luke] 19? (We haven’t got [ten] there. We’ll be there in three or four years.) [Luke] 19:10 [says]: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Sounds like a parable of a lost sheep, a lost son, a lost coin, doesn’t it? We’re lost; He comes looking for us. The sheep does not find itself. The coin doesn’t leap out of the dust, and say, “Here I am.” The sinner never finds himself either. God seeks him out. Do you remember what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well? He said this in John 4:23: “An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” God seeks out worshipers.

The question is this: Has the Father sought you out? Have you come to your senses? Have you turned from your sin? If God has done that, you need to rejoice. You need to praise God. You need to thank [Him] for how He has saved you, how He has given you what you need to see the dire circumstances you were in, the direction you were headed in, and has turned

you around by His grace. But maybe you have not come to your senses yet. You need to do that. God commands you to do that. You need to realize that if you think you can [just] call yourself a Christian, come to church, sing some songs, do some good deeds, and make it to heaven, [you're wrong]. You can't. No one gets to heaven by good deeds. I don't care how many good deeds you do, you'll never get to heaven by your good deeds [see Galatians 2:16].

[It is] like those people who have [a] "God Bless America" sticker on their car, but they aren't blessing God, they aren't obeying His Word. They just want more grace, more grace. Yeah, you can come to church, you can try to get more grace from God, but if you want *saving* grace, you come in God's way and God's way alone. You have to turn from your sin and believe in Jesus, that He died on the cross, was buried, and rose again for your justification and that in receiving Him and believing and trusting Him to save you, then you get that exceeding, abundant grace that we sang about earlier.

If you're out there, and you're thinking right now, "I know I don't know Christ," you know why. *I* don't know why, but God does and you do. You know your sins are, right now, right there, [on] the screen of your mind. You see them, you know what they are, and you don't want to turn from them, whatever they may be. You want to be religious, and there's a part of you that doesn't want to go to hell, but there's another part of you that says, "I just don't want to submit to Christ. I don't want Christ reigning over me, my family, my hobby, my business, my..." whatever. If that's you, you need to see [that there are] some bad, dark clouds on the horizon. They're coming your way from the east, so you better flee to the west. If you don't, you will perish, and no amount of good intentions, good works, church attendance, Bible reading, or giving will save you. You have to run to Jesus. He is the only one. "Look, there on the horizon, the prodigal is coming home," is what God will say the moment you turn to Christ. The *moment* you turn to Christ, God will be looking in your direction to save you and receive you. But while you live with your back toward Christ, all

you're going to see is judgment, doom, hell, [and] wrath. The moment you turn from your sins, [you will see] grace, mercy, love, and compassion. The Father will receive anyone who turns to Him in faith.

You say, "How do we know this?" That brings us to our second point: [We know He will receive us when we turn to Him in faith] because God is compassionate toward repentant sinners. Look at [Luke 15:]20. The father [saw] the prodigal on the horizon, and felt compassion on him. You say, "Are you sure? I mean, isn't this the son [who] acted so shamefully? Isn't this the son [who] wished his father was dead? Isn't this the son [who] took his inheritance early, despising, rejecting, forfeiting his land inheritance so he could have the cash now? Isn't this the son who rejected the Law of Moses, who hid from accountability, who went into a distant country, who squandered everything he had on immoral living? Isn't [he] that same son?" Yes, [he is] one and the same. "Well, then, how is it that the father feels compassion [for] him?"

Do you remember what the Lord declared to Moses when He put him in the cleft of the rock? Moses said, "Lord, show me Your glory," and do you remember what God said? [He said], "You can't see My glory. It would kill you. But I'll stick you into the cleft of the rock, I'll pass before you with My hand over you, and when I go by, I'll let you see the afterglow." Do you remember what the afterglow was? It was God saying, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin" [Exodus 34:6]. That was God's self-description and glory, that He forgives sinners. When it says [that] He felt "compassionate," [it] is a Greek word that describes gut emotions—heaving, heavy, gut emotions.

I know that some of you have children [who] have gone astray to incredible degrees. (Some of you *are* those children who have gone astray to incredible degrees.) [They are] children who have sinned against, lied to, stolen from, [and] rejected their parents time and time again. The parents keep reaching out, keep praying for them, and pretty soon, after be-

ing abused, and abused, and abused, [the parents] finally say, "Listen, it's over. Grace ends. No more forgiveness. No more money. No more kindness. You're on your own." God *never* does that. Ever. When a sinner has turned from sin to Christ, he instantly gets the smile of God. It's part of God's nature. He *always* forgives those who repent. He forgave all of Nineveh, that whole pagan town, when they repented [see Jonah 3:5–10].

Look at [Luke 15:]20. We are told that the father *ran* toward the prodigal. Think about this: God, running toward the sinner? In that culture, older men didn't run. They don't run in our culture, either, but especially in that culture, [older men] didn't run because it was undignified behavior. You had a long tunic on, which made it very difficult to run. In order to run, you'd have to hike up your tunic, and expose your bare legs, and that was just not something you did. But here [in Luke 15:20] the son is a long way off, he has just entered into the father's land. The father has been waiting, he sees [his son] on the horizon, and then gut-wrenching compassion wells up within him. He hikes up his tunic and begins to run toward the prodigal. The prodigal is probably looking at the dust of the road, [thinking], "Oh, is [my father] even going to receive me? Is he even going to accept me? Is he even going to...? I deserve to be stoned to death according to the Law of Moses [see Deuteronomy 21:18–21]. I've been such a fool!"

James Stewart, in his book *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ*, comments: "Daringly Jesus pictured God, not waiting for his shamed child to slink home, nor standing on his dignity when he came, but running out to gather him, shamed and ragged and muddied as he was, to his welcoming arms."³ This is the picture of God. The moment you turn from your sin, God will run toward you. Compassion wells up within Him, [and] He sprints toward the sinner.

The prodigal looks up, and what does he see, but his father running toward him with tears streaming down his face [and] his arms open wide. Look at [Luke 15:]20: "He embraced him." Literally, the text says, "He fell

³James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 77–78.

on his neck.” Do you see what Jesus is saying here? When a sinner repents, the Father runs toward [him]. Here, the prodigal, shamed, not knowing [the reception he would receive], hears these steps, sees his dad, and his dad just collapses on his neck, weeping. Though [the prodigal] is clothed in rags, and he’s still dirty, smelling like pigs, [his] father embraces him. Not only that, [Luke 15:]20 goes on to say “and kissed him.” The Greek indicates that [his father] kisse[d] him repeatedly.

Stephen Charnock, in his [book] *The Existence and Attributes of God*, says:

[God] enters into a peculiar communion with poor earthly worms, plants His Word, invites us by His benefits, admits us into His presence, is more desirous to bestow His smiles than we to receive them, and acts in such a manner as if He were willing to resign His scepter into the hands of any that were possessed with more love and kindness to us than himself.⁴

The father is clinging to the prodigal, weeping, [and] kissing him. You [can] imagine how the prodigal felt at this moment. How shamed he must have felt. He probably just stood there. I mean, what do you do? You know what you’ve done. You know how foolishly you’ve behaved, and now your father is extending all of this kindness toward you that you don’t deserve. That’s what happens when you turn to Christ. That’s what grace is. God extends all this kindness to you that you don’t deserve. The moment you turn from your sins, God runs to you, embraces you, [and] kisses you with grace. His emotions are welling up within Him to do you good.

When [Solomon] died, his kingdom [was] divided into two kingdoms. Ten of the tribes formed the kingdom of Israel to the north. [This kingdom was] also referred to as Ephraim in the Old Testament. Ephraim, under the leadership of Jeroboam, instantaneously, as soon as the kingdom[s] split,

⁴Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol.2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 450.

[created] a pagan worship system [see 1 Kings 12:25–33]. For [the reign of] nineteen kings, [through] nine different dynasties, the kingdom of Israel never had a single godly king. They never turned from their sin for [the duration of] a couple hundred years. They never did it. God, then, sent prophet after prophet after prophet to exhort them, rebuke them, [and] warn them to turn from their sins so that He could show compassion and love toward them. They wouldn't do it. So finally, He sent the Assyrians. In the words of Jeremiah, "He brought them into the land, and plowed under Israel like a field" [see Jeremiah 26:18]. People were slaughtered, killed, taken captive, and dispersed to many lands. The cities were burnt. The crops were chopped down. The land was left desolate.

Years later, the prophet Jeremiah writes these words to Ephraim, who has sinned, and sinned, and sinned, and is still in captivity, dispersed abroad. See if they sound familiar to you. Jeremiah 31:18–20:

I have surely heard Ephraim grieving, "You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained calf; Bring me back that I may be restored, For You are the LORD my God. For after I turned back, I repented; And after I was instructed, I smote on my thigh; I was ashamed and also humiliated Because I bore the reproach of my youth." [And then God says:] "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly still remember him; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him," declares the LORD.

Amazing, isn't it? To sin against the Lord for that long, and after all those years and years, God says, "Turn to Me. My heart still yearns for you."

Judah had a few good kings [during those same years, but] what happened? Who was the most wicked king that Judah ever had? [It was] Manasseh, the wicked, wretched, idol-worshipping son of good king Hezekiah.

Manasseh [did] so many wicked deeds it would take us a whole hour just to describe them all. He defile[d] the temple, pillage[d] it, [and] put idols *in* the temple. But this is what we read about Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:12–13:

When [Manasseh] was in distress, he entreated the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. When he prayed to Him, [God] was moved by his entreaty and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

We're going to see [Manasseh] in heaven.
Matthew Henry comments:

The prodigal came home between hope and fear. Fear of being rejected, and hope of being received. But his father was not only better to him than his fears, but better to him than his hopes. Not only received him but received him with respect.⁵

God is gracious toward sinners who repent. When they turn from their sin, and turn to Christ in faith, He gladly receives them. He *wants* to receive them. He *yearns* to receive them. He loves sinners. “God so loved the world” of what? [of] sinners—that’s all there are—“that He gave His only begotten Son” [see John 3:16].

Paul says in Romans 5:6–11:

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to

⁵Matthew Henry, *Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Luke 15. Available at: <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/MatthewHenryComplete/mhc-com.cgi?book=lu&chapter=015>

die. But God [unlike men] demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Did you see that? God, while you were an enemy, while you were a sinner, while you were hostile toward him, sent Christ to die for you. He didn't send Christ to die for you because He knew you would clean up your act. If you turn to Christ, the Father will run to you because His grace is greater than all of your sins. The sacrifice of Christ is greater than all your sins. Though you are an Ephraim, though you are a Manasseh, and though you are a prodigal all combined into one, the moment you turn, you get the riches of God's grace.

You say, "Well, if you do this, then what? What does that mean?" That brings us to our third point: God, out of kindness, forgives repentant sinners. The father runs to the prodigal, embraces him, kiss[es] him repeatedly, cling[s] to his neck, and then what happens? I'm sure [the prodigal] is overwhelmed. I'm sure he's speechless. What does he [do]? He thinks, "I [have] to say the speech that I formulated [when I was] living in the land of sin, when I came to my senses, that speech that I have been rehearsing in my mind over and over again as I walked down this dusty road." Look at [Luke 15]:21[-22]: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves. . . ." Just stop there. [The prodigal] couldn't get the other part [of his prepared speech] out. He couldn't say, "Make me one of your hired men." The father cuts him off in mid-sentence, [and] he begins to give orders for other slaves to serve his son. Do you see what has just happened here? Why doesn't the

father want to hear this confession anymore? All [the prodigal] could get out was, “I have sinned against you,” and that’s it. [The father is basically saying], “I don’t want to hear any more. Stop,” [and] he calls out to his servants.

Why? [It is] because [the prodigal] is forgiven, and when you’re forgiven by God, you’re forgiven all the way. He doesn’t want to hear it anymore. You go to God, saying, “Oh, Lord, please forgive my sins,” [and] if you’re a Christian, you’re forgiven. Isaiah 55:6–7 [says]: “Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts,” which is what the prodigal did, “And let him return to the LORD,” which is what [the prodigal] did, “And He will have compassion on him,” which [God] did, “And to our God, For He will” what? “abundantly pardon.” [That is] forgiveness. What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is to act as if the offense had never occurred. The father doesn’t want to hear about it anymore. He has forgiven [his son]. There [the son] is, clothed with the grace of Christ, and God the Father sees him as perfectly righteous in Christ.

What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 13:5 as he defines love? He says [that] love “does not take into account” what? “a wrong suffered.” Well, does Jesus love us? What was Jesus’ definition of the most extreme expression of love? “No greater love has any man than this, than that he” what? “lay down his life for another” [see John 15:13]. Who laid down His life for us? Jesus [did]. Is He willing to forgive us? Of course He will forgive us. The moment we turn to Him He forgives us. “God so loved the world that He gave His Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish,” that is, would have forgiveness [see John 3:16].

J. Wilbur Chapman, in his hymn “Our Great [Savior],” captures it well:

Jesus, what a friend for sinners!

Jesus, Lover of my soul.

Friends may fail me, foes assail me;

He, my Savior, makes me whole.⁶

He loves our soul, so He forgives us. He *has* to forgive us. As soon as we turn to Him, He is compelled to forgive us. Why? [It is] because this is the rule He has set up: “Anybody who repents and turns to Me in faith, I forgive [him].” He can’t deny Himself. He *has* to fulfill His promise. [When] you turn to Christ, you get forgiveness, and not just a little bit, either—[it is] all-the-way [forgiveness].

I talk to Christians who don’t really understand this, it seems, [even though] they say they do. If I ask them a question, give them a little theological quiz, and say something like, “Are Christians forgiven?”

Usually, out of their mouths pops this: “Oh, yes, we are forgiven all of our sins—past, present, and future.”

“Well, good. So, what’s the problem here?”

“Well, uh, you just don’t know. I feel so guilty. The Bible says that I’m going to give an account for every careless deed and word [see Matthew 12:36], and you don’t know my tongue. I have bad thoughts.” Their theology is good, but they’re not living it out.

Paul says in Romans 8:1: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” which in the Greek means, “no.” There is no condemnation. You will never stand before God groveling over your sins. They’re dealt with. They are perfectly dealt with in Christ. He has washed them away. You’re white as snow [see Isaiah 1:18]. You’re clean. He never sees your sins again. They’re done in the blood of Christ. You’re perfect, you’re clothed with Christ’s righteousness [see Isaiah 61:10]. No more condemnation! Ephesians 1:7 says: “In [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.” How rich is God’s grace? It is] infinitely rich. God has infinite grace. You have forgiveness according to God’s *infinite* grace, which means [you have] as much as you need.

⁶J. Wilbur Chapman, “Our Great Savior,” *Voices in Worship* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 2003), #560.

This is why, in Colossians 2:13–14, Paul describes believers in this way: “When you were dead in your transgressions,” that’s us before grace enters, “and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive,” notice God made you alive, “together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Let’s say that you’re a young married couple. You’re scrimping and saving because you want to have a home someday. You finally get [a] nest egg together [that is] just barely big enough to put a down payment on a house. The market is kind of high. You get kind of anxious, and you think, “You know what? Let’s just do it.” So, you buy this house. Right after you buy it [and] get settled in, you’re using every penny you can to make the payments, then all of a sudden the economy goes south. Pretty soon, house prices plummet, and now you owe more on your house than it’s even worth.

A lot of people are filing for bankruptcy, but you’re a Christian. You have to pay your debts. You keep making these huge payments on a house that isn’t even worth as much as you paid for it. Then you lose your job and you can’t pay your mortgage. [The] unemployment [rate] has skyrocketed, and you can’t pay your mortgage. You want to honor the Lord, you want to maintain your testimony, you’re humiliated, and then you realize you’re just going to have to go down to the bank, talk to somebody, and just tell [him] what’s going on because you want to honor the Lord, but you just can’t. Maybe [he] will give you more time.

So, you sit down in front of some guy in a suit, with a gold pen, [sitting] behind a big, red mahogany desk. He pulls out your paperwork and starts thumbing through it. He kind of [has] this smile on his face. You’re thinking to yourself, “This is no joking matter. This is my house. I have all of my savings put in there. What are you smiling about?” Then he opens a drawer, and he pulls out a little box. He opens that box, and inside there is a stamp. He rolls it in some red ink, and you realize, “You know what he’s going to do? He’s going to [stamp] on there ‘foreclosed.’ He’s going to

take my house from me.” You know that you signed papers saying he could do that. You know that that’s what’s right. You’re going to lose all of your savings, and all that you have when he thrusts that down. You say, “Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” and he just puts his hand up, and he [stamps your paperwork]. When he pulls [the stamp away from the paper], what’s there? [The words] “Paid in full.” He says, “The house is yours. Here’s your deed. Have a good day.”

That’s what Jesus does when we turn to Him in faith. All those sins that we’ve committed against Him have created a mortgage that we could never repay, mounted up so huge, so monstrous we could never pay it. The moment we turn to Christ in faith, He cancels out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us. He takes it away, and He nails it to the cross. This is what God does when we turn to Him in faith. We don’t deserve it.

Spurgeon wrote: “Should saddled vengeance seize my breath, I must pronounce thee just in death; And, if my soul were sent to hell, Thy righteous law approves it well.”⁷ But then grace enters, and grace says, “Though you deserve to go to hell, though you deserve to be foreclosed on by God, if you turn from your wicked way and your unrighteous thought, My Father will run to you. His grace, His mercy will embrace you. He will receive you happily, joyfully. He yearns for you. He will cancel out the certificate of debt—all of it—in one fell swoop.”

He breaks the power of canceled sin,

He sets the prisoner free.

His blood can make the foulest clean,

His blood availed for me.⁸

God seeks, God is compassionate, and God forgives repentant sinners to begin with.

⁷Charles Spurgeon, taken from the sermon “The Turning Point,” available at: <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/1189.htm>.

⁸Charles Wesley, “O, for a Thousand Tongues,” *Voices in Worship*, #202.

O, the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free,
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me.
Underneath me, all around me,
Is the current of Thy love,
Leading onward, leading homeward,
To my glorious rest above.⁹

I am so sorry. We are going to have to come back to this [in my] next [sermon] and learn more about the love of God. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You so much for Your kindness to us. Lord, if there [are people] here who [have] not run to Christ, the Rock, the Fortress [see 2 Samuel 22:2], the Shelter, and they are still living in the land of sin, and yet trying to extract some grace while they walk the fence, help them to realize they're not on the fence, they're just running away from You. For those who might think that living for themselves, living for their sin, not living for You as Lord and glorifying You with their [lives], is some sort of benefit, may they see it as the curse that it is, that they are held captive by Satan to do his will [see 2 Timothy 2:26], and he is dragging them to hell blindfolded. [Show them that] if they don't wake up, if they don't come to their senses and turn to Christ, they will perish. Father, grant them repentance, open their eyes, give them the grace they need to see. Rescue them, as You have rescued many of us already. And, Father, may we never forget that because of Your grace and Your kindness to us, You have sought us out, You have run to meet us, You have embraced us, and kissed us, and held us close because You are a great God and a loving Savior. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

⁹Samuel T. Francis, "O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus," *Voices in Worship*, #458.

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