



John 2:2

New International Version of the Holy Bible

I Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” I John 2:2

“*Atoning*” is a big and important word. Some translationers translate this Greek word as: sacrifice, payment, or cover. While each word conveys a different emphasis, all center on the fact of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. I like the word COVER for that ties us to the Old Testament church and is easy to understand. The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later in the temple contained a box called the Ark of the Covenant. It contained a copy of the covenant which God made with his people at Mt. Sinai. On the great Day of Atonement the chief priest, after having sacrificed a lamb for his own sins, would take the blood of another lamb and enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood upon the lid or cover of the ark for the sins of the people. This ceremony was repeated year after year and was a picture of things to come, a picture of the future. The blood of the lambs and goats couldn’t take away sin. But, in the fullness of time, God sent his Son who became the Lamb of God which takes away sin. When Christ died on Calvary and shed his blood, our sins were covered forever. We know exactly what the psalmist means when he writes: **“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.” Psalm 32:1** Also, just as the lid on the Ark of the Covenant covered the commandments which were in the ark, so Christ now covers the commandments for us so that they can no longer condemn or accuse us. He covers both the commandments and our transgressions of the commandments. That’s why St. John writes: **“He is the atoning (covering) sacrifice for our sins . . . ” I John 2:2**

Our text brings us to the topic of today: *“I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”* Our Catechism says that this is the chief doctrine of our Christian faith.

Do you know why so many people hate the Bible and find no comfort in reading it? It is because they do not believe in the forgiveness of sins. Remove this glorious doctrine and everything in the Bible becomes law. If there is no forgiveness of sins, then God is no longer love but hate; salvation is no longer by grace but by works; and the Christian religion becomes just one religion among many which teach that man has to save himself by what he does. Blessed are all of you who say with conviction: *“I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”*

I. The results of Such a Faith

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. This has changed our whole attitude toward God. The unforgiving are filled with fear and suspicion and want to get away from God and his presence. This moving away from God goes all the way back to Adam and Eve. After Adam and Eve had sinned in the garden and before they heard the promise of a Savior, when God came into the garden they tried to hide themselves. It was only after the promise that they were glad God had come and rejoiced in his presence.

The Bible teaches that God is almighty, knows everything we do and think, and is present no matter where we go. To the unbeliever this is a constant threat. But to us who believe in the forgiveness of sins, God’s presence, knowledge and power become a constant comfort and joy.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. This has changed our whole way of life. When Luther preached what St. Paul had emphasized,

namely, that people are saved by grace alone and by faith alone without the works of the law; the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church accused him of preaching lies. They claimed it would ruin the nation and that those who believed that salvation is by faith alone would resort to all manner of sin and evil. Just the opposite is true. An example of this can be found in Luke chapter 19: when Zacchaeus found Christ and discovered that salvation was a free gift, he paid back all those whom he had cheated and gave one half of his possessions to the poor. We love him because he loved us first. We serve him because he served us first - Jesus even gave his life as a ransom for us.

Why do the habitual sinners (*like the habitual drunkard*) keep on in their evil ways? It's precisely because they have not grasped this central truth of the Christian religion, that God in his grace forgives us our sins. When these habitual sinners are asked whether they believe that God in his love is ready to forgive them all their sins they usually reply: "*I guess so,*" - "*I hope so,*" or "*I'm not sure.*"

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. That's why we love Christ and try to serve him with all our might. When a slave was set free by his master, his friends asked him: "*Where are you going to go?*" He replied: "*Nowhere.*" They asked: "*What are you going to do?*" He replied: "*What I have been doing.*" "*What then is the difference between being a slave and being free?*" they demanded. "*The difference,*" he said, "*is that as a slave I had to do these things. Now I want to do.*" That's the big difference. Since we are forgiven in Christ we are no longer slaves but free people. We no longer try to keep the commandments because we have to but because we want to. We serve God not out of fear but out of love.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. This empowers us to forgive one another. Two important questions are: "*Do you believe that you are a sinner?*" "*Do you believe that Christ died for your sins?*" The

answers to these two questions are crucial. A person who considers themselves perfect will expect their mate to be perfect also. A person who doubts their own forgiveness in Christ will have real trouble forgiving those who hurt them. While money and sex may be the cause of some problems in the home, they are not the chief cause. The chief cause of all problems in the home is a wrong attitude toward sin and forgiveness. The reason so many couples live happily together as husbands and wives is because they believe that while still a sinner - forgiveness in Christ gives them the power to forgive one another. The reason Christian parents and children live together in happiness is because they believe in the forgiveness of sins and they forgive one another. The reason pastor and people work together harmoniously in the congregation is because they believe in the forgiveness of sins and forgive each other. Sinners do not expect perfection in others and as forgiven sinners they can forgive each other.

A teenage boy took his parents' car, stole all the money he could find in the house, and drove away. The parents didn't know where he was for three months. When he had spent the money and wrecked the car, he came home sick, miserable, and repentant. The parents forgave him and took him back into the home. The congregation forgave him and prayed that the gracious Lord would keep him and them from all temptations of the devil in the future. We forgive each other because we believe God has forgiven us.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. This moves us to build churches and to support new missions. Note that our text declares that in Christ there is forgiveness for everyone. **“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” I John 2:2** Why do we build churches and support missions? Because we believe in the forgiveness of sins, that Christ is the payment for the sins of the whole world.

Back in the days when there were neither planes nor trains the governor pardoned a man who was to be executed for some crime. The letter of pardon had to be delivered by horseback. The rider started out with haste since it was only two days before the time of execution. But the rider met all manner of unexpected obstacles. The horse stepped in a hole and broke a leg. Undaunted, the rider continued on foot determined to deliver the letter of pardon, but the rains came and the creeks ran rampant. In spite of hail and high water he pressed on. Hungry, wet, bruised and totally exhausted, he reached the prison only a half hour before the execution. When the warden had read the letter of pardon he looked at this wet, hungry, exhausted man and asked: *“Why did you risk your life for this scoundrel? Why didn’t you let him die? Are you a relative?”* *“No sir.”* *“Are you a friend?”* *“No Sir.”* *“Do you know the man?”* *“No sir - All I know is that I was once to die and was pardoned of my crime.”*

So we, too, were once to die – even an eternal death – but by God’s grace we were pardoned of all our crimes. That’s why we are interested in missions, in spreading the good news that Christ the Savior has come and that God the Father for his sake has pardoned sinners everywhere.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins. This gives us comfort at the time of our death. Most of you have at some time stood at the grave of someone who was near and dear to you. Of course we miss them. But what a comfort to stand at the grave and say within your heart: *“I believe in the forgiveness of sins. All is well with his soul.”*

Death no longer frightens us. We know that sooner or later we will also die. But like Christ himself we commend ourselves into our heavenly Father’s hands knowing that heaven is our home.

**What though the tempest rage, Heaven is my home;
Short is my pilgrimage, Heaven is my home.
And time's wild wintry blast, soon shall be overpast;
I shall reach home at last, Heaven is my home.**

**Therefore I murmur not, Heaven is my home;
Whatever my earthly lot, Heaven is my home;
And I shall surely stand there at my Lord's right hand.
Heaven is my fatherland, Heaven is my home.**

Lutheran Hymn number 660 verse 2 and 4:

II. Why We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins

Do you believe that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you your sins? I pray that instead of saying: "*I hope so*" or "*I guess so*" you will be able to say: "*I know so.*"

Our text says: "**He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.**" I John 2:2

1. Don't argue with God. Let it be, and praise the Lord. John the Baptizer, pointing his followers to Christ, declared: "**Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" John 1:29 St. John wrote by the inspiration of God: ". . . **the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.**" I John 1:7 Already in the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah declared: "**We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way. . .**" Isaiah 53:6 Christ became our substitute. He suffered what we should have suffered, paid what we should have paid. That's why the psalmist rejoices: "**The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. . .**"

he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. . . as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:8, 10, 12 How far is the east and how far is the west? If you went west, how far could you go . . . 1000 miles? - 2000 miles or 100,000 miles? - One million miles? Obviously there is no end. So when the psalmist says that the Lord has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west, he means they are gone forever. We believe in the forgiveness of sins because the Bible assures us that God richly and daily forgives us our sins.

2. We believe in the forgiveness of sins, secondly, because of the great sacrifices God brought in giving us his Son. “He is the atoning sacrifice (payment) for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” I John 2:2 “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 During the last war a father and son were walking down a street. When he saw a gold star in one of the windows, he asked the people living there what it meant and they said: *“This means the parents living there had a son who was killed at front.”* A little later, the youngster saw the evening star rising above the buildings. Pointing at the star he asked, like youngsters will: *“Did God also lose a son at the front?”* After some thought, the father remarked: *“He certainly did.”* As God looked down from heaven and saw people fighting a losing battle against the devil, sin and death, he sent his Son into this world to fight for us. He fought hard and well and then finally died at the front. Who can begin to describe Christ’s suffering as they whipped, mocked, and crucified him while he fought for us at the front. Do you think for a moment that the Father would send his only Son into such agony and then not forgive us our sins? In love he sent his Son, and in love he now forgives us.

3. Thirdly, we believe in the forgiveness of sins because Christ himself demonstrated forgiveness. When the Pharisees brought an adulterous woman to him and wanted to stone her, Christ, seeing her repentant heart, said to her: **“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”** **John 8:11** Even though Peter let Christ down when he needed him the most at the time of his trial (*even though Peter declared that he didn't know Jesus Christ*) when Christ met him on the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection, he forgave him everything. We read in the 21st chapter of John: **“Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”** Jesus asked. **“Yes, Lord,”** he said, **“you know that I love you.”** Peter replied. Jesus then said: **“Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs . . . take care of my sheep.’”**

Because we believe in the forgiveness of sins we rejoice with exceeding joy as Christ even now invites us to come to him again.

**Come, you sinners, one and all,
Come, accept his invitation;
Come, obey his gracious call,
Come and take his free salvation!
Firmly in these words believe;
Jesus sinners will receive.**

**Jesus sinners will receive.
Also I have been forgiven;
And when I this earth must leave,
I shall find an open heaven.
Dying, still to him I cleave –
Jesus sinners will receive**

(Lutheran Hymnal #324 verses 4 and 5)