

"God in Christ Forgave You"

Text: Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2

(Colossians 3:16-17) **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, our society has become unserious. That's a hard observation to deny when T-shirts that proclaim *"There are more than two genders"* can only be ordered by specifying men's or women's sizes. Hard to deny when we pay an athlete more than \$3M... *per game*. Again, *to play a game*. To entertain. At least athletes tend to laugh about it and openly admit how silly it is to get paid that much to play a game. Many actors and entertainers are also paid an obscene amount of money to engage in make-believe. Many of *them*, however, seem to think that what they do is significant and meaningful, often describing their own movies as "important." The reality is that if it all went away, society and morality would experience an immediate upgrade.

That's not all that makes us unserious. It is a decidedly unserious society that believes biological men can have babies, that *identifying* as something *makes* you that thing (man, woman, dog, cat, vacuum cleaner?), and that hiring should be based on skin color and gender rather than merit and work ethic.

It's just a fact. The evidence of society's general slide into the silly and surreal is everywhere. Pick almost any aspect of life in America and you'll find evidence. In so many ways we have become not just unserious, we are boldly going where no society has gone before.

Not so with our God, which explains why it will always be a challenge for us to elevate when we approach God's Word – to shift gears mentally so that we don't subconsciously begin lumping this (the study of God's Word) with that (the silliness of thought and life in our world today.) To borrow a baseball metaphor, we want to transition from the world unserious to the Word serious.

This is our goal as we turn to our text for this morning, found in the Fourth Chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Church in Ephesus. There our God will teach us something about that which could not possibly be more serious: our sin, and how we obtain forgiveness for that sin.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. ^{5:1} Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

This is God's Word. Thank God for giving us pure, holy, *serious* words that bring life and peace to sinner like you and me. That God would bless us through the study of his Word this morning, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

The silliness problem we examine this morning is not just "out there." It's embarrassing how shallow and superficial Christians can be, including you and me. We too spend way too much time and energy on that which truly means nothing. We fret over dents in our fenders, downswings in our pension plans, and the dust on our furniture. Do you suppose we play such games because we are too lazy to move up – too lazy or too unwilling to expend the effort necessary to elevate to the place where things really matter? There are, of course, good wholesome temporary blessings that God gave us for our enjoyment – like coffee in the morning and meat on the grill – but God takes pleasure in a much different "aroma." God takes pleasure in his Son, who, according to the inspired words of our text, **"loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."** That is the sort of thing that pleases our God. That is what to him is a **"a fragrant offering."** Even in the face of ridicule and torture at the hands of his own creation, the perfect obedience of God's Son was and is a source of pure delight to our Holy God.

That is the plane to which we need to rise and on which we need to walk. Only with our hearts and minds appropriately elevated are we ready to direct our attention to some very simple words in our text – words that were given in the context of a sentence, but words that are worthy to be considered on their own merit. Block out all else for a time and focus on these simple, serious words from verse 32 in our text: **"...God in Christ forgave you."**

These are not difficult words – neither in English nor in the Greek from which they were translated. There is no question about these words, nor is there serious scholarly doubt or debate about what they mean

to say. They say exactly what they mean and mean exactly what they say: **"God in Christ forgave you."** Therefore, really the only way that these words can fail to communicate to us exactly what our God wants them to communicate would be for us to fail to seriously consider these words and to soberly apply them to ourselves, individually. To avoid that, we now examine them, one by one.

Who is it, first of all, that has declared this forgiveness? **"God."** This is the best of all possible news because, in the end, no one else matters. God is both your judge and jury. If God has nothing against you, nothing and no one else in all creation can condemn you. And our text assures us that God has done just that, *he* forgave you.

Note that word **"forgave."** Again, there is no debate about this word. No "variant reading", no serious question or scholarly debate about what it means. It means *forgave, absolved, pardoned*. Unlike some English words, Greek words are very specific and relate most accurately *exactly* what the writer intended. The Greek form of this verb (*forgave*) indicates a positive assertion made regarding an act carried out in the past. In other words, this forgiveness is a done deal – God forgave.

We are taking great care with these words for a reason. The devil, as they say, is often in the details. What we find here is that there is no devil in any detail. This is purest, sweetest, simplest gospel. It speaks to every single one of you and says as clearly as can be said, *"God has pardoned you."* Note also what this simple sentence does *not* say. It does not say, *"...may forgive"* It does not say, *"...will forgive."* It does not even say, *"...goes on forgiving."* It says *did, done, accomplished*. It is a fact - an accomplished act according to the decree of the only One who makes the rules. **"God... forgave."**

You and I can never hear those words too often. That is true not only for what they say or declare, but also because of what they indicate. What they *indicate* is that we had a serious sin problem. God doesn't need to forgive that which is holy and righteous. Only *sinner*s need to be forgiven, a fact that ought to do wonders for the guilt that still plagues us. Whenever we are truly honest with ourselves, we see failure to live up to God's perfect standard. Yet that honest analysis and humble admission is critical here. The only thing that can really corrupt or destroy God's perfect plan is for man to deny his sin – which is, incidentally, the world's solution to sin, to pretend that sin isn't really sin.

That's not God's way. God's way is for his children to honestly evaluate their thoughts and actions as they look into the perfect mirror of his holy

law, and to admit absolute failure. Without that simple admission, God's forgiveness seems silly and pointless to man.

This is a truth that needs to be personal, not just general. So to bring that point home in a personal way, think for a moment not of the bulk of sin, but of sin individually. Think of a particularly troubling sin that you committed in the weeks or months just past. God forgave *that* sin. Think of that sin which, in your estimation, is the worst sin you have ever committed. God forgave *that sin too*. The magnitude or depravity of sin cannot change or nullify that simple, powerful **"God... forgave."** God has declared that the debt of every sin has been paid.

Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? This may be the only time in your life when something that sounds too good to be true is nonetheless absolutely genuine.

How is all of this possible? It is possible by virtue of two additional words in our magnificent little sentence: **"in Christ."** God forgave every single one of your sins because he piled every single one of those sins on his Son, Jesus Christ. God did not, could not, simply overlook or ignore sin. Divine justice demands that payment be made for every sin. **"God forgave"** only because Jesus carried all sins to the cross and paid for them there with his very lifeblood. He left no sin behind. **"God in Christ forgave..."**

One word we have left to examine, and examine we must, for if this last window of doubt is not closed and latched, the devil will most certainly crawl in to sow the seeds of doubt in your heart. It is the word **"you"** – **"God in Christ forgave you."** The doubt that Satan would sow in your heart is that Christ perhaps died to pay for *other* sins, but not *your* sins. He forgave others – "better people" – but not *you*. In fact maybe he forgave some of your lesser sins, but there is some doubt as to those big ugly ones.

So God in our text assured us of just who has been forgiven: **"you."** But how can I know that this "you" means *me*? There is but one test, one qualification that you must pass before you can be sure that God has also declared *you* not guilty in Christ: You must be a human being – a member of the human race and part of this sinful world. That is the only test, the only qualification. Pass that test, and you can know with absolute certainty that these words are spoken also to you. Scripture unequivocally, universally, and repeatedly states: **"God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not charging their sins to their account..."** (2 Corinthians 5:19) If you are part of **"the world,"** then you

have been reconciled to God by the life and death of Jesus Christ. God has forgiven *you*.

With this simple sentence you can now shout down the devil himself. He is powerless against these simple little words of truth. They carry us to that higher plane – to a nobler, holy, serious walk with our God here in time, and on into eternity.

As we now walk along that high road, our text offers us some inspired guidance, for we still have this sinful old Adam clinging to our holy and perfect new man. We can still be confused as to the perfect, holy will of the God that our *inner being* (as our new man is also known) longs to serve. We can be drawn, inexplicably, back into the silliness and depravity from which we have been rescued.

Verse 30 of our text offers a rather startling insight into what we are still capable of doing, despite what our God has already done for us. There we read that we should not **"grieve the Holy Spirit of God."** The word **"grieve"** means just what we would expect it to mean: to *"cause pain"* or *"make sad."* Hard to imagine that we could be capable of such a thing. Yet there is, again, no doubt as to what these words say and mean. How then could we do such a thing; how is it possible for a human being to **"grieve the Holy Spirit"**?

Our text gives us a partial listing of some of the human actions that bring this about. The list in our text includes ***bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice.*** Paul says simply: ***"Let all (these things) be put away from you."*** They no longer are appropriate. Such things just don't belong in the heart of God's children, let alone in our words or actions. They are not appropriate actions for those who have been forgiven.

Yet note well where it is in Paul's Letter that you find this list. It does not follow our beloved little sentence: ***"God in Christ forgave you"*** - causing doubt as to whether or not those who find such things in their hearts truly *are* forgiven by God. This list comes first. In writing to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul was acknowledging that such things did indeed rear their ugly heads in their hearts, for he did not say, *"Let there never be..."* A better translation of what he said would be: *"These things are present among you. Get rid of them. Stop it."* The presence of sin in the lives of the Christians in Ephesus did not nullify or cancel the fact that God, for Jesus' sake, forgave them. That is, in fact, what makes God's forgiveness so special, his grace so amazing. It is in realizing how sinful we truly are that the message of forgiveness takes on its true brilliance. It is in recognizing

the awful load of perversion and sin that Christ carried to the cross that we begin to understand the true and amazing power of those simple words: ***"God in Christ forgave you."***

Ignore the false prophets today who tarnish the splendor of God's forgiveness in Christ by justifying sin, styling it as "alternate lifestyles," "committed relationships," or "choice." The Christian faith is not about denying sin. It is about freely confessing our sins – all of them – and then rejoicing in the perfect forgiveness that is ours in Jesus Christ. Take no comfort therefore when man calls you good, nor when your own heart calls you good. Rejoice rather that ***"God, in Christ, forgave you."*** Amen.

^{ESV} **1 Kings 19:4-8** But he (Elijah) himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." ⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

^{ESV} **John 6:41-51** So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" ⁴³ Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. ⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me-- ⁴⁶ not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

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ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 11th Sunday after Pentecost – August 4, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 61 (Stanzas 1-2) (Red Hymnal-207 Melody)

"Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (1 Kings 19:4-8) We often wrongly imagine that God promises His children a sheltered and carefree life once they come to faith. Nowhere in God's Word are we told such a thing. We are instead promised the strength to survive, and even thrive, in the midst of hardship. Such hardship should never cause us to doubt God's forgiveness. So here we read that Elijah certainly suffered for the sake of God's Word, but he was given strength to bear up under the awful strain.

Psalm 121 (Supplement page 42) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (John 6:41-51) Jesus here continues his march into social/political obscurity. In man's eyes, he says all the wrong things and alienates all the wrong people. So it is with the Word of God. God's Word is no "respector of men." It establishes truth in uncompromising and unyielding terms, which sinful human beings naturally reject. Thanks be to the Holy Spirit for His gift of saving faith, and for the grace to cling to the unyielding truth that forgiveness is ours through faith in Jesus.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 779 (Brown Hymnal)

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven"

The Sermon – Text: Ephesian 4:30 – 5:2 (Printed on the back page)

"God in Christ Forgave You"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 763 (Lutheran Service Book)

"When Peace, like a River"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 50 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (29) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Picnic
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Michael Gurath is considering the call to Grace of Sleepy Eye, MN. Pastor Sam Rodebaugh is considering the call to St. John's of Okabena, MN. The opening service of the new school year at Immanuel Lutheran High School and College is scheduled for Sunday, August 25th at 3:00 pm in the fieldhouse.

Vacation Bible School – To those who gave so generously of their time, talent, and treasure during this past week's VBS – thank you!

Outreach Shirts – The deadline to order T-shirts and polos with the church logo and Bible passages has been extended to Aug. 18. The shirts are available in a variety of sizes, colors, and styles. Please consult the sign-up sheets on the mailbox table or direct any questions to Sandy Roehl.

Annual Church Picnic – Our Annual Church Picnic is scheduled for this morning following the worship service. The location is the same as last year - Hillside Park, Pavilion 1. See Cindy Ollenburger for directions. Please consider joining us, even if you were unable to bring food. There is always more than enough.

Myers – Fettig Wedding – The congregation is invited to the wedding of Nicole Myers and Griffen Fettig on Saturday, August 17. The site for both the ceremony and the reception is Venue Twenty5 in Mandan. Please see the announcement on the bulletin board for more information.