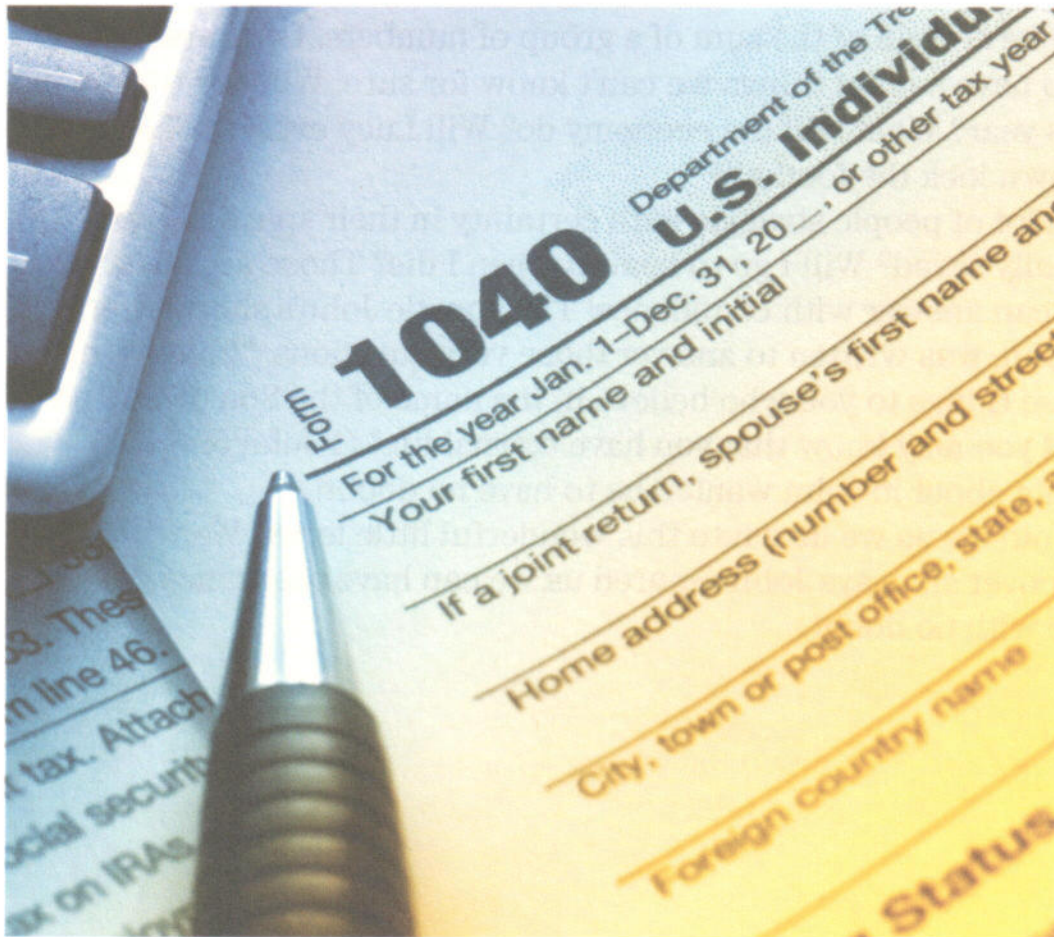


SESSION 1

Sure of Forgiveness



QUESTION 1:

What are some sure things you can count on happening in life?

THE POINT

We are forgiven when we confess our sin and walk with Christ.

THE PASSAGE

1 John 1:5–2:2

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Can we be sure of anything? Some philosophers will tell you we can't. After COVID-19 arrived last year and shook up the everyday routine of our lives, nothing seemed certain.

We can have assurance, though. God desires for every believer to have assurance of salvation. Sadly, many Christians struggle daily with doubt as it pertains to their eternal destiny. Some even believe it's impossible to know with certainty that a person is eternally saved. At other times, believers who are not sure of their salvation find themselves plunged into the depths of doubt and despair, uncertain of whether or not God has truly forgiven them. Others allow their own self-condemnation to smother the assurance God desires for them to have.

But we can be assured of assurance! The apostle John stated this clearly in 1 John 5:13: "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." We have God's assurance of eternal life even as we have the assurance of our forgiveness.

1 John 1:5-7

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him.

6 If we say, “We have fellowship with him,” and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

7 If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

The character of God is the foundation for our forgiveness. When John wrote, “God is light,” he described the very nature of God. Since He is *light*, “there is absolutely no darkness in Him.” To describe God as *light* refers not only to His holiness but also to His moral goodness. In His perfect righteousness and goodness, God determines the terms for our forgiveness. God’s terms are clear: we are forgiven when we confess our sins and commit our lives to walk with Christ.

We are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. John underscored this by looking at this truth from two sides.

1. **Darkness.** “If we say, ‘We have fellowship with him,’ and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.” The idea of walking refers to a person’s way of life. If anyone lives a life of continual, unrepentant sin and claims to be forgiven or to have fellowship with God, he is tragically mistaken. The way he lives—continually choosing to sin—points to the reality that he is not in fellowship with God.

The gospel has the power to change a person’s life. “It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). When we embrace the gospel, His power leads to transformation. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

The gospel's powerful work in our lives is what moves us from darkness (sin) to light (salvation). "He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). The ones whose lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel are transferred to the kingdom of the Son and their sins are forgiven!

C.H. Spurgeon observed, "This change is radical; it gives us new natures, makes us love what we hated and hate what we loved, sets us in a new road; makes our habits different, makes our thoughts different, makes us different in private, and different in public."¹ Such radical change means walking in darkness is contrary to God's terms for fellowship.

2. **Light.** "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." When we turn from darkness and walk with Christ, we are assured of forgiveness. To walk in the light is to live a life consistent with the will of God. Of course, this does not mean we are perfect, but that the trajectory and the purpose of our lives has become the pursuit of God. We are assured of forgiveness when fellowship is the longing of our heart.

ENGAGE

List some consequences of walking in darkness:

List some benefits of walking in the light:

Tony Evans wrote: “Every week, people have the habit of taking clothes to the cleaners that have been soiled. The job of the cleaners is to freshen them up and get them smelling good again. Jesus has a cleaning service. He picks up dirty people who have allowed their lives to take a turn down the wrong path. At his cleaning service, Jesus knows just what to do to wash you and make you clean again.”² Jesus is the one who “cleanses us from all sin.” This is the beautiful message of the gospel: Jesus gave His life to cleanse sinners like you and me. If you are turning from darkness and pursuing holiness, then don’t doubt God’s forgiveness toward you. We are forgiven when we confess our sins and walk with Christ.

QUESTION 2:

How should we understand the images of light and darkness in these verses?

1 John 1:8-10

8 If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

KEY WORDS: Confess (1:9)—To confess means “to say the same thing,” “to agree.” To confess our sins means to agree with God about our sin.

In verses 5-7, John gave us a darkness/light contrast to underscore that we are forgiven when we turn from darkness to light. In verses 8-10, the apostle used a similar negative/positive pattern:

1. **Deception.** “If we say, ‘We have no sin,’ we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Failure to admit sin is a mistake of the highest order. Why would a person fail to recognize and confess sin?
- **Self-righteousness.** A self-righteous attitude says, “I’m not that bad; as a matter of fact, I’m pretty good compared to some people. Therefore, I have nothing to confess.” When sharing Christ with a young man, I asked him if he had ever sinned. He stated without hesitation, “No!” I started with the Ten Commandments and asked him if he had ever lied, stolen, or lusted. His answer reflected the self-righteousness of our day. He said, “Of course I’ve done those things, but I thought you were talking about murder and adultery. You know, stuff like that.” Before our conversation was over, he saw how he had broken the entirety of the law of God; sadly however, his pride still would not allow him to confess his sin to God.
 - **Self-deception.** Air Florida Flight 90 crashed into the Potomac River on January 13, 1982, killing 78 people. The conditions were snowy and icy. Even though they knew better, the pilots convinced themselves that further de-icing of the plane was unnecessary.³ They were tragically wrong. We can convince ourselves that our sins are no big deal, but we’d be woefully wrong. People deceive themselves when they try to justify and make excuses for their sins. One day the deception of the self-deceived will come tragically upon their own heads. Worst of all, to deny one’s sin is to call God a liar.

QUESTION 3:

In what ways do we sometimes deceive ourselves about our own sin?

2. **Confession.** The opposite of deception is confession. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Humble confession leads to forgiveness. We are forgiven when we look at our sin in light of Christ’s righteousness and willingly confess our sin for what it is: wickedness against God Himself.

We see the contrast between self-righteousness and humble confession in Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and tax collector:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:10-14).

You have no reason to doubt forgiveness when you confess your sin and walk with Christ. The trustworthy character of God secures the promise of forgiveness. I’m sure you have heard it said that a promise is only as good as the person giving it. Consider then, who is making this promise? God is “faithful and righteous,” and His promises are true.

QUESTION 4:

How has God’s forgiveness impacted your life?

1 John 2:1-2

1 My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one.

2 He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

KEY WORDS: Advocate (2:1)—An advocate is a person who “helps,” who “provides aid.” Jesus is a legal counsel to defend Christians, particularly from His position in heaven.

Atoning sacrifice (2:2)—The words mean that God has provided His grace through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross so that people can be accepted by God.

John assured his readers, “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous one.” The word for advocate literally means “one who is called to come alongside another.” It’s the counselor for one’s defense in a court of law, a person who intercedes for someone else. I can think of nothing more encouraging than to know Jesus is the one who stands up on our behalf. Imagine for a moment that you’re being tried before a judge. Your lawyer stands and pleads your case to the judge, and then amazingly, you discover your defense attorney is also the judge! This scenario portrays the reality of our relationship in Christ. You have no doubt of forgiveness when Christ is your Advocate.

The foundation of Christ’s advocacy is the blood He shed for our atonement. The reason for atoning is to appease an offended party. Jesus, through His death on the cross, satisfied the righteous indignation of God. However, we are not to compare God with a pagan deity who is reluctantly appeased because of blood being shed. On the contrary, God the Father provided the sacrifice Himself; thus, He satisfied His wrath by giving His only Son to die in our place. Christ willingly gave His life as our substitute.

Therefore, when we sin, Christ pleads our defense based on His finished work upon the cross, which the Father lovingly gave and received. This truth is truly good news! Christ died for the sins of the world. The extent of His atoning sacrifice is for everyone who believes—regardless of skin color, ethnicity, or economic status. He died so that people from every tongue, tribe, and nation could know Him and praise Him.

Patients often need blood transfusions after severe accidents or during surgery. However, the patients must be given a blood type that is compatible with their own. Mismatched blood can cause life-threatening complications. But researchers in Japan have developed artificial blood that possibly can be transfused into any patient regardless of blood type without that complication. Professor Manabu Kinoshita said, “It is difficult to stock a sufficient amount of blood for transfusions in such regions as remote islands. ... The artificial blood will be able to save the lives of people who otherwise could not be saved.”⁴

Better than any artificial blood, the blood of Jesus saves everyone who receives it. Those who come to Christ face no compatibility issues, and they will find no scarcity of supply. When you find yourself in doubt, depend on Jesus as your Advocate and your atoning sacrifice, the One who shed His own blood for you.

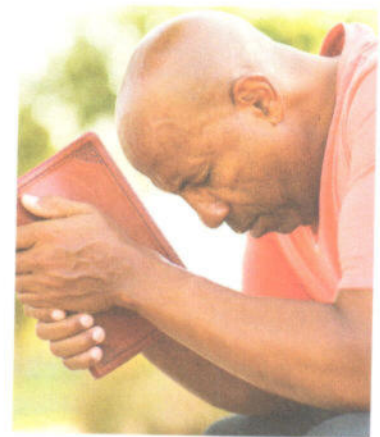
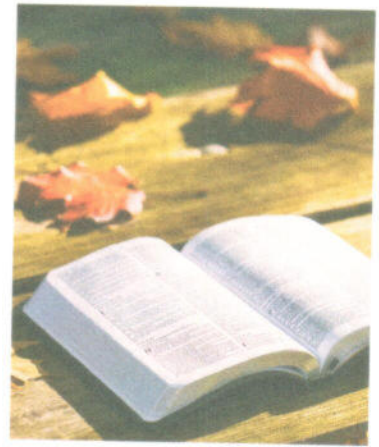
Turning from darkness, confessing sin, and having Jesus as our Advocate and the one who shed His blood to atone for our sins leaves no room for doubt. Therefore, we can be certain of forgiveness because we confess sin and walk with Christ.

QUESTION 5:

Why is it significant that Jesus was the atoning sacrifice for our sin?

LIVE IT OUT

- ▶ **Examine your life.** Paul wrote to the church at Corinth—“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves” (2 Cor. 13:5). Examine your life in light of the principles taught today. They will either encourage you as a believer or convict you as a nonbeliever.
- ▶ **Align your life.** Every day this week spend time in prayer using Psalm 139:23-24 as your guide: “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.”
- ▶ **Express concern for others.** Share your personal story of forgiveness with someone who needs God’s forgiveness this week. “Do not fear what they fear or be intimidated, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and respect ...” (1 Peter 3:14b-16a).



END NOTES

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon*, Volume 3 (Harrington, DE: Delmarva Publications, 2013), Sermon 130.
2. Tony Evans, “Forgiveness,” *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2009), 112.
3. Susan Miller, “37 years ago: The horror and heroism of Air Florida Flight 90,” *USA Today*, January 13, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/01/13/air-florida-flight-90-crashed-potomac-37-years-ago/2565245002/>.
4. Hajime Mikami, “Artificial blood developed for patients of any blood type,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, September 29, 2019, [asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201909290001.html](https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201909290001.html).