

1 John 1:5-10

"It's okay...just forget about it." Chances are you've heard words like these many times. And you and I also have probably said words like these many times. "It's okay...just forget about it." These words may be the most common form of absolution today. Rarely do we hear, except in church, the words, "I forgive you." Rather, in the home, at the workplace, at school, and among friends and neighbors, when an apology is offered; when someone says, "I'm sorry," the typical response is: "It's okay...just forget about it."

Why do you think that is? Perhaps we're afraid of the words, "I forgive you." To say, "I forgive you," implies that you sinned against me; that you hurt me; that you offended me. Perhaps we don't want the person to feel bad about what they did, so rather than say, "I forgive you," we pass off their sin as no big deal with, "It's okay...just forget about it."

But is that real forgiveness? What if you went to the doctor with a ruptured appendix and he told you, "It's okay...just forget about it?" That's not what you're looking for, is it? The doctor may be attempting to make you feel better, but that's not his job. Something is wrong and you've come to him so that the wrong is properly taken care of. It's not "okay" to have a ruptured appendix, and there is no way that you're going to be able to go home and just forget about it. It will continue to be a problem and only get worse until it is taken care of.

When someone wrongs us and then comes to us with an apology, what that person needs is not a brush-off; not an attempt to make him feel better by minimizing his wrong. That person needs real forgiveness. When we confess our sins to God here in church we tell Him that we are sorry that we have offended Him with our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. What if His response was, "It's okay...just forget about it?" No real forgiveness. No absolution spoken through the pastor. No, "For Jesus' sake I forgive you all your sins." Just "forget about it." Could you? Could you forget about it? Could that thief dying on a cross forget about his miserable life? When he pleaded with Jesus, "Remember me Lord!" had Jesus told him, "Just forget about it," that man would have perished in hell. He needed to hear, and did hear, words of absolution. "Today, you shall be with Me in paradise!" Were God to tell us, "It's okay...just forget about it," the one thing we could never do would be to forget about it...because we would not know if we were truly forgiven.

Friends, that is not how God speaks to us. When Jesus appeared to His disciples behind locked doors on Easter evening, He did not say, "Men, I know you denied Me, you forsook Me, you all abandoned Me in Gethsemane; it's okay...just forget about it." No! He said, "Peace be with you," and He showed them the marks of the nails. In 1 John 1 the Apostle writes, "If we confess our sins, (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Nowhere does the Apostle say, "God says, 'It's okay...just forget about it.'"

For one thing, it's not okay. It's not okay that we sin. We may treat our sins with little seriousness, but God does not. Even one "little" sin would have sent Jesus to the cross. We may not give real absolution to those who sin against us because we don't want to make a big deal out of it; and we may believe that our own sins are no big deal; but the Apostle tells us that sin is a "big deal" to God. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," he writes, "And the truth is not in us." "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us." "But...if we confess our sins...He forgives us our sins."

God never says it's okay that we sin, and He never tells us to just forget about it as though no harm was done. The cross is always put before us here in church to remind us that it is not okay that we sin--God died because of our sinfulness, and we dare not forget that. The baptismal font stands here in the center of the church to remind us that we are sinners who are forgiven. The Lord Jesus meets us in bread and wine with His body and blood to bring to our remembrance His death for us. We don't pass off our sins as if they were nothing serious. We look to these holy things and rejoice that God deals with our sins. He doesn't pass them off. He forgives them. He doesn't treat our sins lightly. His blood was spilled into the ground on account of our sins, and His blood is given here for you in all seriousness because of our sins so that we are cleansed of them.

The following true story may help us better understand these words in 1 John 1. Daniel was in his early forties. He was having lunch with a friend in a restaurant. He confided in his friend that after fifteen years of marriage he was going to leave his wife. "I found someone younger and more attractive, and when I'm with her she makes me feel alive." Daniel was a baptized Christian, and he knew there would be consequences. His decision would damage his wife and their three children. "Even so," he said, "The force pulling me toward this woman is too strong to resist." And then he asked his friend the question which had been eating at him, "Do you think God can forgive me for what I am about to do?"

If you were Daniel's friend, what would you say to him? We wouldn't tell him, "It's okay," would we? And we wouldn't tell him to just forget about the consequences of his sin, would we? Here's what God says to Daniel through His Apostle: "If we walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice the truth." How dare Daniel talk about forgiveness when he has no intention of turning from his sins. Christ may have died for Daniel's sin, but Daniel wants no part of Christ. Rather than living in the truth of God's Word, he intends to live in the darkness of sin.

How dare anyone claim to be a Christian, is what the Apostle is saying, if he has no desire to leave his sinful ways behind! Here in the Lord's Supper is God's truth, and righteousness, and forgiveness; and you and I should not come forward to eat and drink if we have no desire to amend our sinful life. God deals with our sins here in all seriousness, and unless we're serious about living a life of repentance, we should remain in the pew.

"But if we confess our sins," writes the Apostle, "If we walk in the light"...if we are sorry that we have sinned and intend by the grace of God to change our sinful life through Christ, then this Sacrament is for you and me. No "It's okay...just forget about it" up here. This is real forgiveness. This is the blood of God poured out for you. This is the flesh of your Savior given for you to eat for your salvation. If you believe that you are a sinner; if you realize that your sinful actions are a serious matter; if you desire God's forgiveness in Christ Jesus, and His help and strength to live as His forgiven disciple, then this Sacrament is for you.

Should Daniel, (the man in our story), come up in his church to receive the Lord's body and blood? He may be looking for, "It's okay...just forget about it," but what he'll be eating and drinking at the Communion Table is judgment upon himself. Unless he repents of his sinful intentions, he is not entitled to Jesus' forgiveness. "If you withhold forgiveness from anyone," Christ told His disciples, "It is withheld."

Friends, if we care to admit it, oftentimes you and I act like Daniel. Knowing something is wrong and sinful we stubbornly walk into it anyway. Thank God that He is merciful. You and I will never hear

from Him that it's okay, we can just forget about it. Rather, His Word of Law calls us to repentance, and His Word of Grace and Supper of Forgiveness bring us back to our Savior. And here with our Savior we have cleansing of all our sins. We have the peace with God which those nail marks purchased. We have real hope. We have eternal life. All this is yours now in Christ Jesus not because you try to avoid sinning, but because God forgives your sins; not because you repent so well, but because Jesus died for you.

In Christ...in His blood for you, it is okay, not that we sin, but that your sins are washed away. In Christ we can forget what is in our sinful past and live with thanksgiving in His pardon and peace. This absolution...this forgiveness is yours in Christ today. Let's, by the grace of God, bring that forgiveness into our homes, into the places where we live, and work, and play. You are truly forgiven...Jesus says so. Now we can tell those near us, who sometimes hurt us, those same wonderful words, "I forgive you." Amen.