

26. February 2021

“God wants to forgive”

Ezek 8:21-28

'If the wicked, however, renounces all the sins he has committed, respects my laws and is law-abiding and upright, he will most certainly live; he will not die. None of the crimes he committed will be remembered against him from then on; he will most certainly live because of his upright actions. Would I take pleasure in the death of the wicked - declares the Lord Yahweh - and not prefer to see him renounce his wickedness and live? 'But if the upright abandons uprightness and does wrong by copying all the loathsome practices of the wicked, is he to live? All his upright actions will be forgotten from then on; for the infidelity of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, he will most certainly die. 'Now, you say, "What the Lord does is unjust." Now listen, House of Israel: is what I do unjust? Is it not what you do that is unjust? When the upright abandons uprightness and does wrong and dies, he dies because of the wrong which he himself has done. Similarly, when the wicked abandons wickedness to become law-abiding and upright, he saves his own life. Having chosen to renounce all his previous crimes, he will most certainly live: he will not die.

At first, one might be tempted to follow the logic of those who think that the Lord is not behaving properly in this case.

When we hear the text, we may ask why the one who did good before is not credited with it. Is it not peculiar that, conversely, the one who has done wrong and at some point realised his wrong should be forgiven?

But these considerations cannot stand if we follow the logic of the Lord.

Our Lord wants to forgive, that is why he always keeps the door open for the one who wants to change his life, realises his wrong and tries to walk in the ways of God in the future. God credits him with repentance.

Repentance means: to change one's life completely, to give up wrongdoing, to do what is right and thus to walk in the truth. This offer of repentance exists for man at all times.

The Holy Scripture says: *“If only you would listen to him today! Do not harden your hearts, as at the rebellion, as at the time of testing in the desert”* (Heb 3:7-8).

Repentance, then, means to leave the ways of mischief, to right the wrong as far as possible, to listen to God, and from now on never again to tread the path of mischief. God's grace will carry the person - even beyond his weakness.

The other case is the reverse. This is a person who knows the right way and acts accordingly. Perhaps he has learned it from childhood, but then he abandons these ways. His whole being begins to darken. For those for whom he used to bear good witness, he becomes a fright, a bad example. Others who trusted him are bitterly disappointed. It is not for nothing that it is said that an apostate Christian, for example, is worse than any pagan. He knew the good but did not remain faithful to it!

So while in the former case a path opens from darkness to light and the grace of God becomes visible in this person, it is different with the one who leaves the ways of God. The darkness of sin has taken hold of him. It may be that he remains in this state, and his soul becomes darker and darker, that he cannot break away from this state again.

The emphasis of the text is on God's willingness to forgive. This is the decisive statement of God.

“Would I take pleasure in the death of the wicked - declares the Lord Yahweh - and not prefer to see him renounce his wickedness and live?”

How great God's willingness to forgive is becomes especially visible through the coming of Jesus. In order to get to know Jesus, he does not have to show his good deeds, but to respond to the Lord's invitation. It follows that man repents and, with God's help, abandons the evil ways, receives forgiveness of guilt and can now begin to live truthfully anew.

What God has said naturally also applies to the new covenant. Whoever has once recognised the truth, has followed the Lord, should never again forsake his ways. For then the same thing would happen that was mentioned in the text above.

But we see how much God offers his forgiveness to man. Through the death of Christ on the cross, we can always receive forgiveness for our sins when we have

become weak in our walk. However, our will should not turn away from God, for this can have a tremendously heavy effect on man.

Therefore, it is good to heed the admonition in Scripture that we should be watchful and not be deceived! Instead, we are called to fully walk the paths of repentance and accept the purification of the Lord on the way of discipleship.