

## Publishing Editor's column

*THE* Apostle Paul presents himself as the supreme example of forgiven sins because he had persecuted believers, even to death, before his conversion. He says: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:15,16). On this basis no one, however badly they sinned before baptism, need doubt that their sins were forgiven when they put on Christ at baptism. Paul himself, though recognising that he could fall away from the Truth (1 Cor. 9:27), never doubted that his sins before baptism were forgiven, and approached his death in quiet assurance that he would receive eternal life (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

But what of sins committed after baptism? Recently I received an anonymous letter from one who said he had come to realise the inadequacies of his earlier life in the Truth. He cites worldliness, failure to appreciate spiritual things, and failure to respond to the mercy of God by showing true gratitude to God and tolerance and understanding towards others, saying, "I feel so unworthy of the Father's forgiveness and acceptance at the hands of Jesus in that day. Surely I don't deserve the greatest gift it's possible to have".

Our correspondent is right, he does not deserve eternal life, but nor do any of us. If we reflect honestly on the past we find much to shame us; accepting that we do not deserve to be in the Kingdom is a necessary step to being there. For an example of gross sins committed after accepting the Truth we think of David. His adultery with Bath-sheba was bad enough, his attempt to hide his sin by causing the death of the faithful Uriah worse, yet he was forgiven on repenting. Paul says his resulting thankfulness is an example to all of the blessedness of sins forgiven: "David . . . describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Rom. 4:6,7).

Paul is not speaking only of sins committed before baptism, for David was a man after God's own heart already when he sinned. He assures us that we do not need to worry about past sins if we have repented of them and sought forgiveness. We are assured that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jno. 1:9), so we can forget "those things which are behind . . . reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Phil. 3:13). We can "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). Having sought forgiveness, we can go onwards trying to serve God, knowing our sins are forgiven. Being justified by faith applies not just at baptism, but later, when we seek forgiveness, and look forward to receiving immortality in a body freed from the weaknesses that now beset us.

**Tony Benson**

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*Publication of articles in The Testimony does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine, as defined in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith.*