

Chapter 4 [Excerpt]

Forgiven to Be Filled

Several years ago in Canada I had just completed a seminar lecture on God's forgiveness when a man approached me. He looked about 60 years old, but it was hard to be sure because of his haggard appearance. His eyes were dull and lifeless, his face was covered with deep creases leading down to his slack mouth, and his shoulders were stooped. When he spoke, his voice came forth in a low drone.

"Mr. George," he said, "I really want to believe that God forgives me, but I don't seem to be able to accept it. How can you know that God forgives your sins?"

"Edward, I just spoke for over an hour on God's total forgiveness in Christ. Were you here for the lecture?"

"Yes, I heard what you said, but I just can't believe that God really forgives me." Wondering if Edward was really a Christian, I took some time to find out. He told of how he had accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord at a very early age. Edward's understanding and answers were all solid regarding his personal faith in Christ: He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Christ lived in him, and that he was going to spend eternity in heaven after his death. The source of his doubts had to lie elsewhere.

"How long have you been struggling with these doubts about God's forgiveness?" I asked him.

"Ever since I was a child," Edward said sadly. "When I was young, I did something *very wrong*.

Every day since then I have begged God to forgive me, but I just can't believe that He has."

I could hardly believe my ears. "Edward, how old are you?"

"Sixty-two."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have been begging God to forgive you for over 50 years?"

He looked me in the eyes with that helpless expression and nodded. "I should have been serving Him for those 50 years, but I have wasted my life. That's why I'm asking you if you think God could ever forgive me."

At the time, I thought that Edward's was a unique story. I have since come to know that many, many Christians share the same bondage. They have committed some sin that seems to be ever a part of their present, even as the years roll by. It is constantly on their minds, like an ever-present black cloud hanging over them. After a while, guilt becomes an accepted part of their lives; to lose it would be almost like parting with a precious family heirloom.

A Christian like this will never mature. He will never, as long as he is held in the bondage of guilt over a past sin, experience all that Christ has intended for us to experience through His indwelling life. Let me express this in a straightforward manner: *Until you rest in the finality of the cross, you will never experience the reality of the resurrection.*

[Excerpt from *Classic Christianity*]