

**More than Conquerors: In the depth of the sea! (Micah 7:19)**

The Bible is very expressive when it comes to speaking about how God can forgive our sins. It uses many descriptions to tell us how our sins are both forgiven and forgotten. Here is a sample of these great promises. Our sins are 'forgiven,' (Ps. 32:5); 'washed thoroughly' and 'blotted out' (Ps. 51:2, 9); 'forgiven and covered' (Ps. 85:2); 'washed whiter than snow' (Is. 1:18); 'taken away' (Is. 6:7); 'put behind his back' (Is. 38:17); 'laid on him' (Is. 53:6); 'remembered no more' (Jer. 31:34); 'pardoned' (Jer. 33:8); 'destroyed' (Rom. 6:6); 'purged' (Heb. 1:3) 'borne for us' (1 Pet. 2:24); 'washed away' (Rev. 1:5). What glorious news this is! In Christ we are truly forgiven! Our sins are cancelled! God will not hold our guilty past against us!

The prophet Micah has a very dramatic way of telling us this. He says that God has cast our sins 'into the depths of the sea' (7:19). So how deep is the sea? Far out in the Western Pacific Ocean, two hundred miles from the island of Guam, lies the deepest part of the earth's oceans. It is called the Mariana Trench. It is more than 1500 miles long and over 40 miles wide but it is its depth that is awesome. It plunges down into the ocean bed for some 35,800 feet. By comparison, Everest, the world's highest mountain, is 29,000 feet in height. That means that the Mariana Trench goes lower into the ocean bed than the peak of Everest stretches up to the clouds. At that frightening depth the pressure from the waters above is more than eight tons to the square inch!

While these geographical facts and figures compel our attention, the theology of our forgiveness is even more wonderful! When we are 'in Christ' as his redeemed people, our sins are truly forgiven. God has thrown them into the depth of the sea, never to be resurrected! They are buried forever in the vast abyss of God's unfathomable love and mercy. What great, good news the gospel brings! Our guilty past is both forgiven and forgotten!

A few months after his evangelical conversion in May 1738, John Wesley went to Herrnhut in Germany. He wanted to see the headquarters of the Moravians, the German Christians who had helped him so much in his search for spiritual assurance. He met the Moravian hymn writer Johann Andreas Rothe. Wesley had learned German and enjoyed singing the Moravian hymns. He translated many of them into English, including one of Rothe's great hymns that begins:

*Now I have found the ground wherein  
Sure my soul's anchor may remain...*

One of the verses expresses the biblical teaching on how our sins are forever lost in the vast ocean of God's forgiving love.

*O Love, Thou bottomless abyss  
My sins are swallowed up in Thee  
Covered is my unrighteousness  
Nor spot of guilt remains on me.  
While Jesu's blood through earth and skies  
Mercy, free boundless mercy, cries.*

**The Revd Dr Herbert McGonigle,  
Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology and Church History  
at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, England.**