

"Forgiving Yourself"

Many Christians feel the sting of shame and guilt. They worry over sins long forgiven by God and cannot forgive themselves. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, In Search of the Lord's Way. And in this study we're going to learn how to forgive ourselves.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way, where we search the Scriptures. We want to know God's will and share His wisdom. Thanks so very much for letting us into your busy life. We really appreciate hearing from you that you're watching or listening. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

A troubled person once came to me with a serious problem. He said, "Years ago I committed a terrible sin. And I'm so ashamed that I can hardly talk about it. I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive myself. I feel so dirty, he said, as if I'll never be clean. He said, I became a Christian a few years ago, and it seemed to help. But, ever so often, I remember that sin and I feel lost all over again. I don't feel fit to be a Christian."

Well his problem wasn't God's ability to forgive the penitent believer, but in his ability to forgive himself. While God is very willing to forgive, some people fail to feel forgiven. People believe what they tell themselves, even if what they say is mistaken. A person who has never forgiven himself feels shame in his heart every day. When David sinned with Bathsheba, he admitted in Psalm 51 and verse 3, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

David felt the hand of God upon him because of his sin. He said in Psalm 38 verses 3 to 4, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there's no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they're too heavy for me." Your sins may be too heavy for you too, but there is a God-given solution to a guilty conscience! There is an answer.

Well we offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy, a CD or a tape of our study, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or by e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, if you like, call our toll-free telephone number. Now we'll pay for the call. And that number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song. We'll read from Psalm 51 verses 10 to 17, and then we'll learn how we can forgive ourselves.

Our scripture reading today is a Psalm of David, Psalm 51, verses 10 through 17. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And sustain me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're thankful that You are full of grace and love and forgiveness. Help us Father to turn from sinful ways and to do what is right. And to do Your will always on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Galatians chapter 6 verses 7 to 8 reveals an undeniable truth: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Now sin causes the worst heartaches of mankind. A person can't selfishly live to please his flesh and expect to find the blessing of God. Every sin is a terrible offense against God, but sin also harms the one who commits it. Sin is both an offense against God and against one's self. Proverbs 8 verse 36 says, "But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death." When people transgress God's will, they live with the sting of guilt and the reality that they could do such a thing.

The conscience is a God-given function of the heart. The conscience works as a moral monitor that praises us or condemns us. The Bible describes this function in Romans 2 verses 14 to 15. God's word says, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

Now when a person sins, his conscience pricks his heart, causing him a lot of pain. This pricked conscience causes a person to be grieved at himself; and he can lose all respect for himself by his sins. The prodigal son, you remember, no longer felt worthy to be called the son of his father. You might think the conscience is a bad thing, but the prodigal son's conscience and the terrible effects of his sin were what brought him to his senses. God didn't give us a conscience to punish us, but to keep us from doing what is wrong and to encourage us to do what is right. When we fail to listen to our conscience, we end up hurting ourselves.

Now everyone has a conscience, but not every conscience uses the word of God as a basis for what is right and wrong. Many people sin against God and don't even know what they did was wrong. They rely on their own experience or their own judgment rather than take the time to study the Scriptures and learn what God says about the matter.

Now over time, sin begins to harden the conscience. The Bible warns in Hebrews 3 verses 12 to 13, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it's called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Now I worry far more about the person whose conscience is past feeling than the person who feels great sorrow for sin. You see, when a person gets past feeling, it's not likely that he will want to repent. If a person sees no need to repent or won't repent, he won't get right with God.

Now of all of God's blessings, nothing is more valuable than forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't the same as forgetting. Forgiveness is "forgetting against." When God forgives, He no longer counts our sins, or our transgressions against us (2 Corinthians 5 and verse 19). Yes, those sins happened; but they don't matter. God promised in Hebrews 8 and verse 12, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."

David by inspiration wrote in Psalm 103 verses 10 to 12, "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." When God forgives, He no longer thinks of us in terms of our past iniquities. He removed them from His mind, but He keeps us close to His heart. Forgiveness ends the shame and guilt by blotting out the offenses once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2 and verse 24). Forgiveness puts to death the old man of sin (Romans 6 verses 4 to 7) and it makes all things new (2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17).

Well let's learn from God about how to forgive. You see forgiving yourself means that you will no longer hold your past sins against yourself, so you can find peace. Now if God can and forgive you, and has forgiven you, then can't you forgive yourself.

Repentance always comes before forgiveness. You can't find healing from God until you correct your broken ways. And if you haven't made a change in your heart and life, you'll find it hard to forgive yourself. You must repent. And many people seek forgiveness but they don't change. You'll not find peace if you're unwilling to repent. And if you commit the same old sins over and over, you'll keep on enduring the same old guilt and shame over and over.

The Bible says in Colossians 3 verse 5 to 10, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. And in these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you've put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

My friends there are four things that you can do to forgive yourself. First, be sure you've genuinely repented. Repentance is not only a turning away from sin; it's also a turning to and toward God. The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the living God (1 Thessalonians 1 verse 9). Now you'll have a hard time forgiving yourself if you fail to fill your life up with God.

You remember the Lord Jesus taught in Matthew 12 verses 43 to 45, "That when the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. And then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. And then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and they dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation." If we fail to fill our lives with Christ, we'll fall victim once again to sinful ways.

Second, if you wish to forgive yourself, focus your attention on what you have become not what you were! The apostle Paul was guilty of a number of terrible sins before he became a Christian. He was guilty of violence, and murder, slander, and blasphemy. He persecuted the church beyond measure and cast people into prison for their faith.

In 1 Timothy 1 verses 12 to 16 Paul said, "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy, Paul says, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, (and then he says) of whom I am foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Now Paul couldn't change his past, but that was not his focus. Paul said he was "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3 verses 13 to 14). He focused on what God was doing in his life and what God wanted him to do. Knowing God's forgiveness, he could put his past behind and focus on the will of God. He could say, "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15 verses 9 to 10).

Oh my favorite saying is this: "I'm not all I'm going to be; I'm not all I ought to be; but, thank God by His mercy and grace, I'm not what I used to be." God is more interested in what you are becoming in Christ than in what you used to be. You can't change the past, and it's not necessary for you to do so to

forgive yourself. What you can do is change yourself and your attitude toward the past by becoming the person God wishes you to be.

Third, listen to me now, trust God rather than your feelings. Now feelings represent perceptions, but they're not always true to reality. Feelings accurately reflect how we perceive things to be but not always do they reflect reality. You'll remember the brothers of Joseph sold him to some slave traders, and Joseph went to Egypt. The brothers, however, claimed a wild animal killed Joseph and they dipped his coat of many colors in blood.

And the brothers lied to their father Jacob. Well Jacob tore his clothes in grief, he wore sackcloth and mourned for his son for many days. He refused to be comforted. And Jacob said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol (that is the grave) to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him (Genesis 37 and verse 35). Now Jacob thought Joseph was dead, but Joseph hadn't died. He was very much alive. And Jacob was mistaken. He believed the brothers' report but he didn't know the truth.

And people often feel un-forgiven, even when God promises to forgive, and that's in black and white in the Bible. So trust God, not your feelings. Trust the Bible to tell you the truth. God never lies. God can and He will do what He has promised. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." But he also said in John 8 and verse 36, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." I like what Martin Luther wrote, he said "For feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving; my warrant is the Word of God, Nothing else is worth believing."

Fourth, draw close to God. If you wish to be at peace with God, don't flirt with the sins of the world. The Bible says in James 4 verses 7 to 8, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he'll flee from you. Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." When God rules in your heart and your life, when you choose to draw near to God and you say no to the devil, you'll find your life growing better and better.

The Bible says in James 4 and verse 4, "Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." You see, it's the double-minded fellow who wants to be a friend to God on one side and a friend of the world on the other, but who never finds peace or assurance. My friend, if you want a clear conscience, "submit to God." When you draw close to God and you start resisting the devil, you'll find the strength to live a righteous and holy life. You'll find the things that tempted you aren't as appealing as they used to be. You can forgive yourself, and God can help you. Let Him help you find peace. Let's pray together. Father we're so thankful that through Your mercy and grace and Your love, You give us Your forgiveness. And Father help us to find peace in what You have done for us. And Father help us to turn always from sin and to do Your will. And may we do it on this earth as it's done in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

People think they can get away with their sins, but there always are two who know we have sinned no matter how secret. God knows and we know. David thought he had hidden his sin with Bathsheba, but it wasn't hidden from his own heart.

David said in Psalm 32 verses 3 to 5, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I didn't hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; and You forgave the guilt of my sin."

God does indeed forgive us so that we might be able to forgive ourselves. When we get right with God, we find the grace that we need to get right with ourselves. Forgiveness takes place in the heart of God, and it is an act of mercy and grace—it's a gift. You can't earn it. Mercy takes place when God does

something for us that we're not capable of doing for ourselves. And so your salvation, your forgiveness, is the gift of God.

But you have to accept that gift from Him. And that means being honest with yourself and honest with God in confessing the sin. To become a Christian, we must trust God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We must turn from sin and turn to God; you see, that's repentance. We must be willing to confess Jesus as Christ and Lord before others; and we must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins. Christian baptism is an immersion in water of a penitent believer. And if you need to do these things, why not contact a nearby church of Christ and get your heart right with God.

Well we hope you've benefited from today's study. I've enjoyed meeting many of you, and you've all said such nice things to me. If you want a free printed copy, or a CD, or a tape of this message, "Forgiving Yourself," mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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Please worship with one of the churches of Christ in the area that's served by this station. The church of Christ loves people, and you'll be glad you got to know them. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's word with us and tell a friend. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.