

"Forgiving Yourself"

Many Christians feel the nagging sting of shame and guilt. They still worry over sins that were long forgiven by God, but they don't know how to forgive themselves of their transgression. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is In Search of the Lord's Way. And in today's study we're going to learn how to forgive ourselves.

Welcome to *In Search of the Lord's Way*, where we search the Scriptures to find the Lord's way to be saved and to live the Christian life. Thanks so very much for letting us into your busy life. We really appreciate hearing from you that you're watching or listening to this program. And we want to be a part of your life each week.

A fellow once came into my office to talk. And soon he had tears in his eyes. He sat in a chair across from me and said, "Years ago I committed a terrible sin. I'm so ashamed I can hardly talk about it. I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive myself. I feel so dirty, as if I'll never be clean. I became a Christian a few years ago" he said, "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 what this man said is not uncommon; many people have a hard time forgiving themselves.

The problem is not God's ability to forgive the penitent believer, but in the believer's willingness to forgive himself. God is willing to forgive, but some people don't feel forgiven, or feel saved. A person who's 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 God's hand upon him because of his sin. He said in Psalm 38 verses 3 to 4, "There's 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 are too heavy for me." Your sins may be too heavy for you too, but there's a God-given solution to shame and guilt!

We offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy, or a CD of this study, 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. Or, if you like, call our toll-free telephone number. We'll pay for the call. And that number is 1-800-321-8633. You can also see this program on www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Psalm 32:1 through 5, and we'll consider how to forgive ourselves.

Our reading comes from Psalm 32, verses 1 through 5. This is a Psalm of David. "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! 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 did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; And You forgave the guilt of my sin." That was David's heartfelt thought about his own sins and I know that you may be thinking about yours. Let's pray together. Father, we're grateful that in Your grace and mercy You forgive us. Father help us as we strive to serve You. We confess to You Father our weaknesses and we're thankful for what You have done for us in Jesus Christ. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

When a person sins, he sins against God. But many ignore the harm that sin causes to the person who commits it. Sin is an offense against God, but it's also against one's self. The Bible personifies wisdom in Proverbs 8, and wisdom says in Proverbs 8 and verse 36, "But he who sins against me injures

himself; all those who hate me love death." Wisdom is God's revealed will for our lives. And when people go against God's wisdom and His will, they live with the sting of guilt and shame.

The inspired apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6 verses 7 to 8, "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." Sin is the cause of the worst heartaches of mankind. A person can't live for sin and self and expect to find the blessing of God.

The conscience is a God-given function of the heart. The conscience works as a moral monitor praising us or condemning us. The Bible describes this function in Romans 2 verses 14 and 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, and that causes pain. This pricked conscience causes a person to be grieved at himself; he can lose all respect for himself. 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 it was the prodigal son's conscience and the terrible effects of his sin that 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's 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 but don't realize what they did wrong. They rely on their own experience or their own judgment rather than to take the time to study the Scriptures and learn about what God says on the matter.

Other people allow sin to harden the conscience. And the Bible warns us 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." I worry far more about the person whose conscience is past feeling than the person who feels great sorrow for his sin. When a person gets past feeling guilt, it's not likely that he will repent. If a person sees no need to repent or won't repent, he likely won't ever get right with God.

Of all God's blessings, nothing is more valuable than forgiveness. Now forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. Forgiveness is "forgetting against." When God forgives, He no longer counts our sins against us (2 Corinthians 5 verses 19 and 20). As part of the new covenant God promises in Hebrews 8 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, that "He (that is God) 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 towards 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 the offenses from His mind, but He keeps us close to His heart.

Forgiveness ends the shame and guilt by blotting out the offenses and settling the matter once and for all by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2 and verse 24). Forgiveness means putting to death the old man of sin (Romans 6 verses 4 to 11) and making all things new (2 Corinthians 5 and verse 17). Now

when you forgive yourself, you forget your past sins against yourself. You no longer those hold sins against yourself, and you'll be at peace with yourself.

You cannot forgive yourself until you have made a change in your heart and life. That is you must repent. Many people seek forgiveness but they never leave their sins behind. You see, you'll never find peace if you're unwilling to repent. If you commit the same old sins over and over, you'll keep on having the same defeat and shame over and over.

The Bible says in Colossians 3 verses 5 to 10, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (And he says) 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 (he says) you must put them all away: anger, and wrath, and 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 the knowledge after the image of its creator."

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

The Lord Jesus warns us about giving up sin but not filling our lives with spiritual things. In the book of Matthew 12 and verses 43 to 45. He talks about this, He says, "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but it finds none. 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 dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation."

Second, to forgive yourself, focus your attention on what you have become not what you were! I'm not all I ought to be; I'm not all I want to be; I'm not all I'm going to be; but, thank God, by His mercy and grace I'm not what I used to be. The apostle Paul was guilty of terrible sins when he was Saul of Tarsus. He was guilty of violence, murder, slander, and blasphemy. He persecuted the church beyond measure and he cast people into prison for their faith.

In 1 Timothy 1 and 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 because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (Then he said) the saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, 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."

Paul couldn't change his past, but he didn't focus on the past. Paul said he was "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, (he said) 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. Now 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 and 10).

A person who forgives himself can say, "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 that God wishes you to be. And in doing this realize that no one is perfect but God. When you start living for God, you're no longer have to be ashamed of your past. You can be happy that you serve Christ.

Third, trust God instead of your feelings. Now feelings represent perceptions, but these feelings are not always true to reality. Feelings accurately reflect how we *perceive* things to be but they don't always reflect reality. You remember the brothers of Joseph, how they sold him to some slave traders, and Joseph went down to Egypt. Well the brothers, however, claimed that a wild animal had 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, he mourned for his son many days. And 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). Jacob believed Joseph was dead and he mourned, but Joseph wasn't dead. Jacob believed the brothers' report but didn't know the truth. Joseph was very much alive. And Jacob was mistaken and so were his feelings. Martin Luther wrote, "For feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving; my warrant is the Word of God, Nothing else is worth believing."

People often feel un-forgiven, even when God promises in the Bible to forgive. Trust God not your feelings. Trust the Bible to tell you the truth. God doesn't lie. And God can and He will keep His promises. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." But he also said, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed (John 8 verse 34 and then verse 36).

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 will 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 your heart and life, when you draw near to God and resist 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." Now it's the double-minded fellow who wants to be a friend to God and a friend to the world who never finds peace or assurance. If you want a clear conscience, "submit to God." And when you draw close to God and start resisting the devil, you'll find the strength to live a righteous and holy life. You'll find that things that used to tempt you aren't as appealing anymore.

My friend, you can forgive yourself, and God can help you. Won't you let Him? Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for Your grace and mercy to help us to forgive ourselves. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

People think they can get away with their sins, but there are always two persons who know how and when we have sinned and no matter how secret we make it. That is that God knows and we know. Now 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; And my vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. (Then he said) I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I didn't hide;' he said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'; and You (that is God) forgave the guilt of my sin."

I tell you, God forgives us so that we can forgive ourselves. We can rid ourselves of the old self and be born again. God can do away with our body of sin. And when we get right with God, we find peace with God and we find peace with ourselves. Forgiveness takes place in the heart of God; it's a gift of mercy. You can't earn it. Mercy takes place when God does something for us that we're not capable of doing for ourselves. Your salvation, your forgiveness, is the gift of God.

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

We hope that you've been blessed from today's study. I've enjoyed meeting many of you, and you've said such nice things to me. If you want a free printed copy, or CD 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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We ask that you please worship with one of the churches of Christ in the area served by this station. The churches of Christ love people, and you'll be glad you got to know them. 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.