

How Can I Ever Forgive Myself (Part 5)

Forgiving ourselves is tough. We are intimately acquainted with every flaw, not just of action, but of thought and attitude within us, but not so with others. Because our insides don't match the outsides of those around us, we can live continually in the shame of not measuring up. But that was not God's intention. God sent Jesus so we might be forgiven. When we are in Christ, we are forgiven by God. We can accept His forgiveness. We can forgive ourselves.

However, since we struggle so much, it is good for us to learn a practical means of accepting that forgiveness. In this series we've talked about what forgiving ourselves does not mean, what it does mean, and now we are looking at how to go about doing it. We've already learned two steps in this process.

Step #1: Own your sin.

Step #2: Own *all* your sinning.

Let's continue our look at forgiving ourselves.

Step #3: Accept yourself where you are.

You are a sinner. You might as well accept it. You are just like everyone else around you. But if you are like me, you want to fight against that. You want to be something else. You want to be perfect. You want to be the example for everyone else to follow. You want to be the lamp to everyone else's feet and the light to their path. You want to be able to tell everyone, "Look at me. Be like me. Live like me."

This is a dangerous place to be. Not because it pushes you to obey God, but because it pushes you to deny your disobedience. **Proverbs 28:13** explains that if you try to cover your sins, you will not prosper. Additionally, not accepting where you really are pushes you to try to establish your own righteousness. That is, you don't obey God out of love for Him and His sacrifice for you. Rather, you obey in an attempt to prove how good you really are, as if you can make up for your sins. **Romans 10:3** explains that if you try to establish your own righteousness, you will not submit to God's. Further, not accepting where you are pushes you to contempt for others because the only way you can be their light is if you can convince yourself you are better than they are. **Luke 18:9** says Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector because of those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and, therefore, viewed others with contempt.

If you are like me, you think the only way to be pleasing to God is to be perfect. But look at **Romans 9:30-33**. It explains part of the problem the Jews had with Jesus. They couldn't fathom being pleasing to God through any means other than perfectly keeping His law. Therefore, they stumbled at the thought of being made righteous by faith in Jesus. We're saved by Jesus, not by our own perfection. Don't stumble over Him as the Jews of Old did.

And don't forget **Mark 2:17**. Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (ESV). When you refuse to accept where you are, you are like a person hiding your gaping wound from the doctor. You fear if you accept where you are and start letting it be known, God will turn His back on you. Not so. It is only when you accept that you have a gaping wound that the Great Physician is free to start working on it.

Step #4: Mourn the loss of your ideal self.

This ties in with the last step. Few of us are willing to accept where we are because being that honest is painful. You have a picture of the ideal you. It is what you want the world to see and believe about you. It is what you want to see and believe about you. Now that you have owned all your sinning and accepted where you are, you will naturally be filled with sadness.

As much as you wish it were otherwise, there will never be another day you can look back on your life and say, "I didn't sin." Whatever your sins have been, you will never be able to look back and say, "I didn't do that." Sadly, instead of mourning the loss of their ideal self, many look around for sins that they haven't committed. Then they spend all their time rejoicing that they didn't commit those things like other people. Remember the Pharisee in **Luke 18:11**. He didn't mourn his sinfulness; he rejoiced that he could think of sins that he hadn't committed.

But when we come face to face with our sinfulness, own all of it, and then accept we aren't what we wanted to be, there will be some natural sadness and mourning. This mourning is important. As Jesus said in **Matthew 5:4**, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (ESV). Don't run from this sadness. Don't try to numb the mourning. Only those who mourn will be blessed.

Mourning is the natural process by which we say goodbye to something that we wanted to hang on to. When we mourn the loss of a loved one, it is the process by which we let them go even though we wanted them to stay. Just so, mourning the loss of our ideal self is the process by which we let that image go. As hard and painful as it is, it is this goodbye process that sets us free to move on. Mourn the loss of your innocence. Mourn the loss of your perfection. Mourn the loss of your strength. Sit in these feelings of sadness. Talk to other safe people about them. They'll understand, they are mourning as well. Don't medicate your sadness or try to escape it with addictions, acting out, fantasy, lies, or more sin. Bring it to God and bring it to His children.

Saying goodbye is what sets you free to enjoy the blessings of leaning on God for strength. It is what sets you free to be justified in Christ. It is what sets you free to attain the righteousness that comes from God by faith. Don't run from your mourning. Embrace it. Sit in it. Endure it. Grow from it.

Forgiving yourself is a tough process. It takes time. Don't rush it. We'll learn more about it in coming articles.

--Edwin L. Crozier