

## How Can I Ever Forgive Myself (Part 3)

We've all sinned. We've all fallen short. We've all missed the mark. Now what? No doubt, we know salvation comes from Jesus and we've taken our sins to Him on the cross to forgive. But when He forgives us, do we forgive ourselves. That is the hard part.

In last week's article we recognized five defining traits of forgiving ourselves. Let's remember those before we move on.

Forgiving yourself means...

...owning your sins.

...accepting God's grace.

...not defining yourself by your worst moments or your best moments.

...defining yourself by God's love for you.

...no longer trying to pay for your sins.

Before we start examining some steps to self-forgiveness, let's finish this look at defining it. This week's article will provide five more defining traits of forgiving ourselves.

**Forgiving yourself means...**

**...setting yourself free to behave differently.**

Some people fear this set of articles and the comforting teaching found in them because they believe it is giving permission to sin. That is simply not the case. Forgiving yourself is not giving yourself permission to keep on sinning. Consider the woman caught in adultery in **John 8:1-11**. For her, forgiveness did not mean continuing in adultery. Rather, it meant she could go on her way and sin no more. If this woman defined herself by her worst moments of adultery, she had no reason to ever stop. No matter how she might live from now on, she was just an adulteress. But if she defined herself by God's love and quit trying to pay for her sins, she could simply draw close to God. She was set free from the sin that separated her from Him and was now allowed to draw close to Him. Forgiving yourself doesn't mean overlooking or continuing in your sins; it means breaking the chains that bind you to your sins.

**...doing right just because it is right.**

If forgiving yourself means no longer trying to pay for your sins and also no longer trying to cover up your sins, then it also means doing what is right simply because it is right. You aren't doing right to earn anything. You aren't doing right to impress anybody, least of all God. You are doing right because you hunger and thirst for righteousness (**Matthew 5:6**). You are doing right because you want to be like God (**I Peter 1:15-16**). You are doing right because it is right. You have no ulterior motives, nothing you are trying to accomplish, nothing you are hoping to achieve other than doing what is right. It means doing the next right thing simply because it is the next right thing.

**...you can stop punishing yourself.**

This is similar to no longer having to pay for your sins. Forgiveness means there is no longer any condemnation (**Romans 8:1**). If you are like me, you sometimes think you can make everything okay if you punish, berate, and belittle yourself enough. Perhaps you can beat yourself up enough for you, everyone else, and God to see you've been through enough, now you've paid your debt to society, your victims, and God. The fact is the debt you owe is death, eternal death (cf. **Romans 6:23**). You can't pay that cost. But Jesus can and has. He dealt with your sins. He took your stripes (**Isaiah 53:5**). Why not let Him? If He won't punish you because He has forgiven you, why don't you do the same for you?

**...accepting blessing from God.**

This is more than the earlier claim that forgiving yourself means accepting God's grace. In that point, we were talking about the basis of forgiveness. In this one, we're talking about life after forgiveness. When you don't forgive yourself, you seek your own punishment which generally means you sabotage your own life. You can't imagine that you should have any blessing in your life ever again. You can't accept blessings or enjoy them because you think your sins mean you should never have them. God has forgiven you in Jesus so He can bless you with every spiritual

blessing (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). Further, He is the good Father who wants to give you good gifts (**Matthew 7:7-11**). Forgiving yourself means seeking and accepting God's other blessings for your life without sabotaging them.

**...letting everyone else deal with their own thoughts and feelings about your sins.**

I wish I could say that forgiving yourself meant everyone else would also forgive you. It doesn't. Certainly, you must seek forgiveness and reconciliation with others (as I assumed you would in the first article of this series based on **Matthew 5:23-24**). You may seek their forgiveness, beg for their forgiveness, cry for their forgiveness and they may never forgive you. Further, they may cry foul because you claim God's forgiveness for yourself and claim to have forgiven yourself. You may want to proclaim, "But **Luke 17:3-4** says they have to forgive me." Yes. But that is between them and God, not between them and you. Forgiving yourself means not basing your life on what anyone but God thinks of you. You are asking others for mercy. That means you don't deserve it. That means they may not give it. That means you cannot demand it. But you can forgive yourself based on God's grace, not based on their struggle. Forgiving yourself means letting others have their struggles while you walk hand in hand with God. Forgiving yourself means it is no longer your business what anyone else thinks of you. As much as it depends on you strive for peace with all men (**Romans 12:18**). But when others refuse to reconcile and pursue peace, leave that between them and God. You don't need to let that hinder walking in God's forgiveness and forgiving yourself.

You are allowed to forgive yourself if you are forgiven in Jesus Christ. You don't have to live under the dark shadow of your sins for the rest of your life. Starting next week, we'll learn some practical steps to forgiving yourself.

--Edwin L. Crozier