

## How Can I Ever Forgive Myself (Part 2)

Forgiving ourselves may be one of the hardest things we ever strive to do. As we learned in our last article, it is so much easier to forgive others than to forgive ourselves. So, how can we accomplish it?

Last week we stated five things forgiving ourselves is not. Let's remember that list.

Forgiving yourself is not...

...acting like you didn't do anything wrong or "that bad."

...getting away with sin.

...shifting blame or avoiding responsibility for sin.

...avoiding consequences

...getting rid of your sorrow and mourning.

So, that's what forgiving ourselves is not, what is it? I think a big step in actually being able to accomplish self-forgiveness is knowing what we are striving for. So, before we actually take a look at any steps to forgiving ourselves, let's describe what we are actually doing. This will take two articles. I'll include five points in each one.

### Forgiving yourself means...

#### ...owning your sins.

Though this is probably clear from what we claimed forgiveness is not, we need to state it positively. Forgiving yourself is not shifting blame, avoiding responsibility, or minimizing your sin. It is looking your sin full in the face and owning it. Notice David's ownership of sin in **Psalm 51:3-5**. He claims his sin is ever before him. He isn't hiding from it; it is staring him in the face. Further, he knows what it has done to his relationship with God, and he knows God is justified in whatever judgment He brings on him. Finally, while David is not expressing a statement of doctrine in **vs. 5**, he is expressing his own sense of sinfulness. It is as if he was a sinner since the moment of conception. David had tried to ignore his sin according to **Psalm 32:3-4**, but that only led to turmoil and trauma. Only when he owned his sin was forgiveness possible.

#### ...accepting God's grace.

Apart from God's grace through Jesus Christ, there is no forgiveness. You actually have no power to forgive yourself of anything. You can only forgive yourself by recognizing that nothing can pay for your sin but the blood of Jesus. Therefore, if you will forgive yourself, you have to rely wholly on God's grace. In **Psalm 32:5-6**, David explains that when he confessed to God, God forgave him. In **Psalm 51:7-9**, David once again demonstrated that real forgiveness comes from God's hand. If forgiving yourself means dealing with your sins in love instead of ignoring them, as we learned last week, then in order to forgive yourself, you have to accept God's love (**I John 4:19**).

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

Paul was not a persecutor, blasphemer, or insolent opponent (**I Timothy 1:13**). Those were things he had done, but he had been forgiven. He didn't have to define himself or the entirety of his life by those things. Was he still sorry for them? Sure. Did he regret having done them? Always. But he did not have to view himself as those things. Instead, he could accept the overflowing grace of the Lord in faith and love (**I Timothy 1:14**). Forgiving yourself means no longer defining yourself by your worst moments.

But at the same time, if you are like me, what you try to do is offset your sins with good works. We say, "Well, I know I did that wrong thing over there, but look at this good thing I did over here." In this way, we hope to pay for our sins. This is actually an attempt to avoid the need for forgiveness. And it will always lead to a problem. Once we realize the heinous nature of sin, we will learn that no amount of our good works will offset our sins. If we try to define ourselves by our best moments, we'll always come up short. Forgiving ourselves means we don't define ourselves by what we've done either good or bad.

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

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**, ESV). You are not worthless because of your sins. You are not worthwhile because of your righteous acts. You are worthwhile because God defined you as worthwhile when He paid the price to purchase

you from your sins with the blood of His Son. And He did that fully knowing what a sinner you would be (**Romans 5:6-8**). Forgiving yourself doesn't mean ignoring your sins; rather it means refusing to ignore God's love for you even though you sinned. Define yourself by that. You are a beloved child of God. You are the person He sacrificed His Son to save.

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

When you realize how heinous your sins are, you'll realize you can't pay for them. Forgiving yourself means simply letting the debt go. It means realizing Jesus paid the debt on the cross. **Hebrews 10:18** says, "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin" (ESV). That is, when you recognize you have been forgiven, you can quit trying to gain forgiveness through your offerings to God. Instead, you can simply draw near to Him in your forgiveness. Don't "go to church" to pay for your sins. Don't take the Lord's Supper to pay for your sins. Don't even get baptized to pay for your sins. You can't do anything to pay for your sins. Forgiving yourself means recognizing you can't pay, so you bring them to Jesus and let Him pay for them. Everything else we do is merely striving to draw closer to God. And why wouldn't we want to be closer to the one whose grace has provided forgiveness and the power to forgive ourselves?

That's not all there is to forgiving ourselves. But that is all we can fit in this article. Next week we'll continue defining what it means to forgive ourselves.

--Edwin L. Crozier