

Sunday, May 14, 2023 am

WILL GOD FORGIVE ME?

Today I want to address a question that many of us struggle with from time to time. We look at our lives and see struggles, weaknesses, inadequacies, and even failures. We struggle with self-worth because of this. And it often leads to a feeling that we are irredeemable. In other words, we believe that we cannot be forgiven. But that is simply not the case. In this lesson, I would like to look at some examples and thoughts about this subject. It is a good reminder for each of us.

I. Great examples of forgiveness

- a. **Paul** – 1 Timothy 1:12-15. Most who have read the Bible are familiar with Paul's former life. Prior to his conversion, he persecuted Christians.
 - i. His former conduct is introduced in Acts 7:58-60 where he consented to the stoning of Stephen. Acts 8:1-3 points out that he made havoc of the church,.. Acts 9:1 finds him still breathing threats against Christians as he goes to the high priest requesting letters to go to Damascus so that he could arrest Christians and bring them bound to Jerusalem to face punishment.
 - ii. The rest of Acts 9 records his conversion as he was on the road to Damascus and was struck blind and confronted by the Lord. He was told to go into the city and await instructions concerning what he needed to do. The Lord then appears to Ananias, a prophet, in a vision and tells him to go to Saul who was waiting. Ananias is hesitant because of Paul's history, but the Lord says, "*Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.*" (Acts 9:15-16). Ananias goes, Paul obeys the gospel (Acts 9:18, 22:16) first and then begins the rest of his life as an ardent advocate for Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles alike.
 - iii. Obviously, Paul's former life was something he never forgot – Galatians 1:13-15ff. 1 Corinthians 15:9, calling himself the least of the apostles, *he called himself unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*
 - iv. BUT, he did not let it keep him from obeying the gospel, NOR from God forgiving Him! AND, lest we forget, he did NOT dwell on his past – Philippians 3:12-14. In ALL of the previous passages, Paul concludes with God's merciful forgiveness – Acts 9:15-16, 22:16, Galatians 1:15-16 – God used him to preach to the Gentiles; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, "But by the grace of God, I am what I am..."; 1 Timothy 1:14-16 – the grace of the Lord was exceedingly abundant.... BUT notice vs. 16, *However, for this reason I obtained mercy, **that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.***
- b. **Manasseh** – 2 Kings 21 records the reign of Manasseh, king of Judah.
 - i. He was the son of King Hezekiah, who was a very good king. Hezekiah reigned as northern Israel fell to Assyria. Because of his righteousness, Judah and Jerusalem were spared. In fact, God miraculously delivered the city of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, the Assyrian general, by killing 185,000 soldiers in 1 night, leaving them without an army.
 - ii. Manasseh became king at the age of 12 and reigned for 55 years. He is a tragic king whose conduct undid everything his father had done to return Judah and Jerusalem to God. And he did even more. Some of Manasseh's rebellion against God includes:
 1. He rebuilt the high places Hezekiah had destroyed. (21:2-3).
 2. He raised altars to Baal and worshipped all the host of heaven (21:3) - astrology
 3. He even built idolatrous altars in the house of the Lord (the temple) (21:4-5, 7).
 4. He made his sons "pass through the fire" (21:6) – that is child sacrifice
 5. Practiced soothsaying, witchcraft and consulted mediums.

6. "He did much evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke Him to anger" (21:6)
 7. 21:9, concerning the people of Judah and Jerusalem we read, *But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.*
 8. 21:16 – he also "*shed much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another,...*"
- iii. As a result of Manasseh's evil, the LORD determined that Judah and Jerusalem WOULD fall. (21:11-16)
 - iv. 2 Chronicles 33:1-9 somewhat parallels the above chapter. BUT 33:10-19 records later events in his life.
 1. 33:11 records that he and the captains of Judah's army were taken by hooks and chains and carried to Babylon.
 2. 33:12-13 – while in affliction Manasseh humbled himself greatly before God and prayed to Him. God listened and forgave. He even brought Manasseh back and restored him to his kingdom. "*Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*"
 3. Vs. 14-16 records him reversing much of the damage he had done in rebellion against God. He fortified the city, took away the foreign gods and altars, and repaired the altar of the LORD, and offered sacrifices. He also "commanded Judah to serve the LORD their God."
 - v. Like Saul (Paul), we find one whose conduct was so egregious, he deserved everything that happened to him. One like that might today be described as, "irredeemable". But God forgave him and restored him.
 - vi. Manasseh shows how God can welcome someone BACK, if they will but repent and return to Him (cf. Acts 3:19).
- c. **Peter** – is another interesting study. We know what he becomes and even his loyalty to the Lord while serving Him.
- i. Luke 5:8 describes him as the Lord is about to call him. He rightly knows who the Lord is. But realizing this he early on tells Jesus, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" He demonstrates his loyalty throughout his life though often with overconfidence.
 - ii. However, one of the events he is known for is how he denied Jesus 3 times. Peter of course denies that he would do this – Luke 22:31-34. But, as the Lord had predicted, Peter denies Him 3 times, and at His worst possible hour. Luke 22:54-62. Imagine the picture, as Luke records after the rooster crowed that Jesus looked at him and he remembers his words.
 - iii. After this, Peter is devastated (Luke 23:62). BUT, Jesus would forgive and restore him (John 21:15-23). And we know where Peter is. NOTE his hope as he opens his first letter some 30 years later (1 Peter 1:3-5).
- d. **The prodigal son** – Luke 15:11-32. Jesus even taught a parable showing the mercy of God. We know it as the parable of the Prodigal Son. The father is likely representative of God who in vs. 20 is looking for his son to return. When he does, broken and humiliated, the father welcomes him with open arms. In fact, he not only welcomes him, he RESTORES him. Recall that all the humiliated son wanted was to be a servant. This parable was in response to criticism that Jesus was "receiving sinners" (15:1-2).

II. Thoughts about God and forgiveness

- a. **God WANTS to forgive you** –
 - i. Isaiah 1:18-20 – writing to a sinful and idolatrous Israel and Judah, we find the LORD pleading with them, "Come now, and let us reason together..." Israel is a GREAT example of the LORD's desire to forgive. He did everything He possibly could do to bring them back to Him. In most of the prophets that forecast imminent doom, there was always an invitation to return and be restored. While this is from the Old Testament, we should not dismiss it! Cf.

Romans 15:4. NOTE: We may be under a new law, but the character of God has NOT changed! That is why we can learn from passages like this.

- ii. This point is also emphasized in the New Testament:
 1. 2 Peter 3:9 – He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish
 2. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 notes that He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
 3. Hebrews 7:25 – He is able to save to the utmost those who come to God through Him. One of the observations is this salvation is available to ANYONE who comes to Him.
 4. John 3:16 notes that “whoever believes in Him should not perish...”

b. God has clearly provided a way for us to be forgiven

- i. Romans 10:9-13 – notice after the reminder, he quotes from Joel 2:32, the same passage Peter appealed to on Pentecost (Acts 2:21), “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”
- ii. If one has never obeyed the gospel, He provides a way. Acts 2:38, 22:16 – notice how when you “call on the name of the Lord” (culminating with baptism), your sins are washed away. Galatians 3:27-28 notes that in baptism we put on Christ and AGAIN it is available to all.
- iii. Even as a fallen Christian, you can return to Him. 1 John, which is clearly written to believers (Christians), he emphasizes this. 1 John 1:7 – if we are walking in the light. 1 John 1:9, when we sin, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us. Notice also 1 John 2:1-3 – “if we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”
- iv. The point is, no matter who or WHERE we are, we have opportunity to come to Him. Of course, we must be willing to repent and surrender to Him, but He is there and waiting! This was emphasized in 2 Corinthians 2:6-7 where they were called to forgive and restore the brother who had repented and returned. Galatians 6:1 speaks of one overtaken in a trespass being restored...

c. Consider the price He paid to make forgiveness possible –

- i. John 3:16 – God so loved the world...
- ii. Romans 5:6-9 – God demonstrated His own love toward us...
- iii. Philippians 2:5-8 – Jesus freely gave Himself for us. Matthew 20:28, He came to give His life a ransom...
- iv. From time to time, we remind ourselves about how horrific the crucifixion was. We also consider how Jesus lived and was treated AND mistreated. He did this so that we could be forgiven.

d. Forgiveness is not based upon merit.

- i. One reason we struggle with forgiveness is because we believe we don't deserve it. And there is a sense in which that is true. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death.
- ii. BUT that verse also reminds us of the gracious gift of God which is eternal life through Jesus.
- iii. The passages we have shown in this lesson establish that we CANNOT ever earn our salvation. It is God's grace that even makes salvation possible. Grace is the prime factor in our salvation.
- iv. BUT this does not dismiss obedience. Consider Titus 3:5 which emphasizes through mercy God saved us, but “not by works of righteousness which we have done.” Notice the qualifier – works we have done. God has given us clear instructions about what we need to do to be forgiven. Just know, they ARE available to us when we turn to Him.
- v. In considering God's plan of salvation and our forgiveness, the plan is simple. So simple, ANYONE can obey it. BUT, it is not easy! It requires a willingness to surrender to Him. But the one who does surrender, can live his/her life with hope.

e. Don't believe Satan's lies –

- i. The reason we believe we are irredeemable, and thus not worthy of forgiveness is because Satan has convinced us of that.
- ii. IF, what I have presented in this lesson is true, then your feelings are likely planted there by Satan. He is the one who wants you to believe you are unworthy.
- iii. Satan is your enemy. He wants to devour you – 1 Peter 5:8. He has always been a liar – John 8:44, describes him as a liar and the father of lies. Everything he does is to defeat you.
- iv. But you can overcome him – 1 Peter 5:9, James 4:7 – resist him and he will flee from you. Hebrews 2:14-15 notes how in Christ Jesus destroyed the power of the devil and has released us who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.
- v. The Bible says that God loves us. Consider Romans 8:31-39 where Paul notes that NOTHING can separate us from His love.

In this lesson, it is my hope that, we have seen, that no matter what our sins or condition, we can be forgiven. All we have to do is surrender to Him with an obedient faith and He will do what we cannot do for ourselves. What about you? Have you been forgiven of your sins? Are you struggling with this? If so, how can we help you to make yourself right with God? Think about it!