

Can I Be Forgiven?

Have you sinned? I have. We all have. There is no one righteous, we all fall short when compared with the ideal, Jesus Christ, the only human who was able to live a sin free life. But now in spite of all our sin there is a way for us to be righteous through faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:21-23 But now apart from the law, a righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all those who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;

Everyone has a problem with sin, even the best of us. Fortunately for us God really cares for us and doesn't want anyone to be lost. He is patient with us and seems to us to move slowly, but his moving slowly is in order to give us a chance to repent.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some count slowness; but is patient with us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

If an all powerful God wants you to be saved, you have a good chance. But He loves us so much that He gave us free will. I can reject his salvation if I want and so can you.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE DONE REALLY BAD THINGS CAN STILL BE FORGIVEN.

If God can forgive the apostle Paul after what he did, God can forgive you or me. Paul did terrible things to believers in the early church putting both men and women in prison and even voting to condemn them to death, yet he was forgiven and became an apostle. You can be forgiven, even if you have done bad things, terrible things. Here is what Paul did in his own words.

Acts 22:3-4 I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict tradition of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both

men and women.

While he was on the way to Damascus to arrest the Christians there, Paul saw a vision of Christ. Once he saw the vision, he repented and God forgave him. In the following verse Paul speaks of how that Christ's being able to forgive someone as bad as him, "the chief of sinners", shows that Christ can forgive us.

1 Timothy 1:14-16 The grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. The saying is faithful and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. However, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might display all his patience, for an example of those who were going to believe in him for eternal life.

IN ORDER TO BE FORGIVEN, WE HAVE TO REPENT

We do not deserve to be forgiven, it is because of God's great grace and mercy that He can forgive us. A drowning man who has been thrown a rope, must reach out and grab the rope and hold on to it. God wants to forgive us and He can forgive terrible sins, but there are some things that we must do to receive His forgiveness. The drowning man must realize that he needs to grab the rope, similarly we must believe that we have sinned and need to be saved.

Once we come to believe in God and realize that we have sinned we become sorry. But a thief or a murderer can be sorry, sorry that he got caught. It isn't enough to be sorry, we need to repent. Repentance is believing that you have sinned, admitting it, being sorry and then determining not to do it again. Peter convinced the Jews that they had just crucified the Messiah, the one they had been hoping and praying would come and deliver them. They were very sorry and asked Peter what to do and here is what he said.

Acts 2:37-38 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

ONCE WE REPENT AND TURN TO GOD, WE SHOULD BE BAPTIZED.

In response to what Peter said many of the Jews repented and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and the Lord added to the church those that were being saved.

Acts 2:47 So many of the Jews repented and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and the Lord added to the church those that were being saved.

ONCE BAPTIZED, OUR PAST SINS ARE FORGIVEN.

The Apostle Paul (whose name was Saul before his conversion) said this about his baptism.

Acts 22:12-16 One Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews who lived in Damascus, came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' In that very hour I looked up at him. He said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth. For you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'

When Paul had his vision and his sight restored, he was baptized to "wash away his sins". Clearly washing away his sins means that he was forgiven of them.

When we repent and confess and are baptized, our sins are forgiven and we become new creatures in Christ, clean and holy, through His blood and sacrifice, not through our own righteousness.

Romans. 6:3-4 Or don't you know that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism to death, that just like Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

ALTHOUGH NEW CREATURES WE WILL STILL SLIP AND SIN SOMETIMES.

We live in a wicked world, some of it is going to rub off on us, we will slip and sin. All of us sin, the only human who ever lived a sin free life was

Jesus. Fortunately for us Jesus has provided a way for us to be forgiven when we do slip and sin by dying on the cross for our sins.

1 John 1:7-10 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we haven't sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The Greek text from which this was translated uses a verb tense for 'cleanses' which means something that continually goes on and on. Christ's blood continually cleanses us as we go through life.

WHEN YOU FALL DOWN, GET BACK UP AND KEEP GOING.

When you are learning how to skate and fall down, get back up and try again or you will never be able to skate. When you slip and fall into sin, repent and pray for forgiveness and get back up and go on with your life, don't ever give up!

Proverbs 24:16 for a righteous man falls seven times, and rises up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity.

About the time I think I have one sin mastered, another will sneak up and blind-side me. A wise man is one who asks God for help in every endeavor, realizing that none of us can really do anything without God's help.

Psalm 19:12-14 Who can discern his errors? Forgive me from hidden errors. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Then I will be upright. I will be blameless and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, LORD, my rock, and my redeemer.

WE NEED TO FORGIVE OURSELVES

When we have fallen and gotten back up, Satan likes to bring up our past sins and mistakes and lay a heavy burden on us, a burden of false guilt and shame. Once God has forgiven us, we need to forgive ourselves, to forget our mistakes and quit dwelling on our past sins. We think, 'If I had done this, or if I hadn't done that, then --- wouldn't have happened'. We cannot undo the past.

We need to turn our past over to God, repent of our sins, trust Him to forgive us and guide us and go forward with the ministry He has given us.

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, if it is so that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I don't regard myself as yet having taken hold, but one thing I do. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT JUDGING OTHERS

Sometimes in life we will be called upon to judge someone. Supervisors have to evaluate employees. Teachers have to grade students. Judges have to sentence convicted criminals. We must be very careful not to be harsh, cruel and unfair, but instead be honest, just, kind and merciful. The way we judge others is the way we will be judged. We all need the mercy and forgiveness which comes to us from Christ, if we will follow him.

Matthew 7:1-2 Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you.

When we do have to judge someone, we need to be wise, merciful and kind. I know of a lady arrested for substance abuse who was sentenced to public service. She had to wear a bright orange jump suit and go along the highway picking up trash with other similarly dressed people. She was terrified that someone from work or some of her friends or family would see her. Such a punishment strongly motivated her to not do it again and made the roadways more beautiful. The judge who sentenced her was both wise and merciful, he could have sentenced her to jail, but instead he taught her a good lesson and made the country more beautiful at the same time.

WE MUST NOT TAKE VENGEANCE

I have forgiven those who have sinned against me, at least I think I have. But what about those who sin against someone you love? What of the parent whose child has been abused and murdered? Forgiveness is not easy, it is very hard. It's easy to say "I forgive" but hard to mean it. I admit to being very angry at the arrogant woman in the big black Cadillac who almost

backed over my crippled wife assuming she would jump out of the way (she couldn't move fast). Notice, I said woman, I don't think "lady" describes her. But as a Christian, I am obliged to forgive her, even if she doesn't deserve forgiveness. I must leave vengeance in God's hands and I pray for God to help me forgive those who have sinned against me and against my family.

Romans 12:17-19 Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honorable in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men. Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, 'Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.'

CHRIST SET AN EXAMPLE OF FORGIVENESS

Christ set the example of forgiveness by praying for those who were crucifying him. Forgiveness is hard enough when someone who has wronged us comes to us and asks for forgiveness, but Christ forgave the men who were crucifying him, even though they didn't ask. They weren't sorry for what they were doing.

Luke 23:33-34 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified him there with the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing.'

The name Christian means "Christ like". If we are going to be like Christ, we need to follow his example and forgive others. To be like him we need to forgive other people, even our enemies. To be like him we need to care for other people and to be humble, meek, gentle, patient and kind. Remember He said that the greatest among you will be the servant of all. This does not mean be weak, sometimes we have to be very strong to resist evil and to protect others. If a wolf is attacking a sheep, we may be the one who God plans to stop the wolf.

Colossians 3:12-13 Put on therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, humility, and perseverance; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, if any man has a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so you also do.

When we are persecuted or treated unfairly, we need to set an example of forgiveness. God may use our suffering and our forgiving spirit to lead someone else to be saved, perhaps even one of our persecutors.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Christ said very plainly that if we don't forgive others, we won't be forgiven.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

My response to this is the same as that of the epileptic boy's father to Christ.

Mark 9:23-24 Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes'. Immediately the father of the child cried out with tears, 'I believe. Help my unbelief!'

I want to forgive, but it is hard, Lord, please help me forgive those who have sinned against me and my family. I forgive, please help me to forgive.

If you harbor past wrongs and hurts in your heart they can fester and become malice and hatred, just like pus in a wound can fester and become gangrene. God wants us to forgive and go on with our lives for our own good.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, outcry, and slander, be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God also in Christ forgave you.

If you harbor hatred in your heart you become a murderer and murderers don't go to Heaven. If you don't forgive someone who has hurt you, you are allowing them to continue hurting you. Do you want them to keep on hurting you or do you want to be healed.

1 John 3:14-15 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. He who doesn't love his brother remains in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him.

ASK GOD FOR THE STRENGTH TO FORGIVE

The ability to forgive is a gift from God. We humans don't naturally choose to forgive, it's much more comforting to see the one who has hurt us get what

he or she deserves. Ask God for strength to forgive. God can provide all the strength we need, but we have to ask. Before asking remember, God loves me, but he also loves his other children, even the ones who have sinned against me. He may hate what they are doing, but He wants everyone to repent and to turn to him so He gives them plenty of opportunities to repent and to choose to do good before his patience finally runs out.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your worries on him, because he cares for you.

We can forgive with the strength that God gives us.

Philippians 4:12-13 I know how to be humbled, and I know also how to abound. In everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in need. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

As forgiven, clean, holy and new creatures in Christ, Jesus has given us useful and important work to do. We are to be God's ambassadors to the world, imploring them to be reconciled to God. Another meaning for gospel is Good News. Our message of forgiveness of sins and eternal life is good news. We have the privilege of telling people the good news which can save them and the privilege of helping them get to know the source of every blessing, God.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and having committed to us the word of reconciliation. We are therefore ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

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