

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 6

Understanding Forgiveness

We learned in the previous lesson that the Bible teaches us that sin is *“missing the mark,”* that we all fall short of the “glory” of God we were created to be. But in spite of that, the Bible also teaches that God freely forgives us.

I John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

As we look at the forgiveness of God, keep in mind the two following texts:

Psalms 50:21 *“These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as myself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.”*

Isaiah 55:7-9 *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Remember as we study forgiveness, God does not think as man thinks, and when we read texts like Psalm 7:11 that says, *“God is angry with the wicked every day.”* We need to remember God is not like us. God does not hold bitterness, animosity and anger in His heart like we do! Neither is He waiting on us to come crawling on our knees begging His forgiveness and if we don’t, there is *“hell to pay!”*

When the Bible speaks of God’s anger it is not like ours – *“getting mad and getting even.”* The word anger can be defined as *“extreme or passionate displeasure.”* Anger can mean *“getting mad,”* but it can also mean the passionate displeasure of heartbreak a loving parent feels when his child does something wrong. Instead of getting mad, the parent is heartbroken. As our Heavenly father, God feels this as well, but much more intensely.

Psalm 103:10-17 *“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. ¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. ¹⁴ For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. ¹⁵ As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. ¹⁶ For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. ¹⁷ But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children”*

This passage tells us *“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.”* and *“His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.”* This means God always, constantly and compassionately, forgives. We need to understand that forgiveness is not for God’s benefit. God does not need “closure” nor does He have a need to “get even.” To forgive in the original languages of the Bible means basically to *“let go, to disregard, or set free.”* Forgiveness is for our benefit – to free us from guilt. We need to know God forgives us, so the Bible promises *“if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”*

We say, “Father forgive me, I have done wrong!” – and God says, *“Its ok, I forgive you,”* when He actually forgave us before we asked, He never held it against us. The problem is, we have been deceived and don’t know that! So many times we don’t come to God because we are afraid He is angry with us, or He won’t forgive us even if we do ask. But God wants us to know that we are forgiven – that’s why Jesus cried from the cross *“Father forgive them”* - when no one asked and no one repented!

The author of “The Story of Redemption,” Ellen White, a noted Bible scholar, said it this way – *“That prayer of Christ for His enemies embraced the world. It took in every sinner that had lived or should live, from the beginning of the world to the end of time. Upon all rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God. To all, forgiveness is freely offered.”*

When we go to the cross and see that in spite of our sin - God is not holding bitter or resentful feelings towards us, but always and only compassion and love for us, if we don't resist, seeing His self-sacrificing love will transform our heart and change our mind about the way we live and about the way we see God! We will see Him with new eyes. We see for ourselves His goodness that leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). This is what it means to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb – to be drawn back to God so he can help us.

Remember what **John 3:16** says? *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Jesus did not die to cause God to love those He otherwise hated – He died because of the love that already existed in His heart!

And **1 Peter 3:18** tells us: *“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might **bring us to God.**”*

Jesus didn't die to change God's attitude toward us, but to bring us to God, to change us! Remember there are only two paths for us in this world -

Man's way – **Proverbs 16:25**: *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*

God's way – **John 14:6**: *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”*

Jesus shows us the way of unselfish love. But Satan attempts to deceive us into thinking that we are wise and self-sufficient and thus draw us away in subtle rebellion. But the consequences of that should be all too obvious – suffering, pain, and death.

While God loves us and freely forgives us – forgiveness, though it eases our guilt, will not cancel the consequences of sin. The only way to stop the consequences of sin is to stop the sin - then there can be no consequences! The problem is, we can't do that on our own. Only as we are willing give up our own selfish ways and begin to co-operate with God will this be achieved in our life.

We need to change and only by beholding Him can that happen. God saves us – not by forgiving us – but by changing us!

This is why we need to understand what is called the “unpardonable sin.”

In Matthew 12:30-32 Jesus says: *“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”*

To understand blasphemy against the Holy Spirit we must understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Note the following -

1. He teaches - John 14:26 – *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things”*

2. He convicts / warns - John 16:8 - *“And when he (the Holy Spirit) is come, he will reprove (convict) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”*

3. He guides to all truth - John 16:13 - *“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth”*

— So, “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” has to do with how a person relates to the Holy Spirit’s work. “Blasphemy” is the Greek word “blasphemeo” and it means “to abuse” “to denounce” “to injure.” Therefore, once a person is taught, convicted, and warned by the Holy Spirit, if they then turn away and shun Him, He is injured, He is put down, He is grieved. Compare the following texts:

Ephesians 4:30: *“And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”*

Isaiah 63:9,10: *“In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed (grieved) his Holy Spirit.”*

We cause grief, emotional pain, to the Holy Spirit when we rebel, when we resist His work for us. In other words, it breaks His heart! It breaks God’s heart! It’s not about breaking His law and making Him angry – it’s breaking His heart and making Him hurt!

The Bible talks about this kind of behavior in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews 6:1-8: *“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, **let us go on to perfection**; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”*

“Let us go on to perfection” (Perfection is from the Greek “telios” meaning to grow up or maturity). The danger for the Christian is that he fails to grow and becomes complacent.

Hebrews 10:26-27: *“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”*

This does not mean one sin, but to continue to willfully keep on sinning after we have been convicted and warned by the Holy Spirit about our sin. The unpardonable sin is not a single act - but simply a continual, persistent rebellion against the work of the Holy

Spirit upon the heart as He tries to (1) teach us – (2) convict us of wrong and right - (3) to warn us of the consequences of sin. When the Holy Spirit brings truth to the heart, one of two things happen: 1) The heart responds or 2) the heart hardens.

When the Holy Spirit speaks, we hear Him the loudest the first time. But if we resist the Holy Spirit long enough, we come to the place we can no longer hear Him at all – His voice gets quieter and quieter and quieter, we have resisted and rebelled until there is no remedy, no way back. Here is a real danger, everyone, even Christians active in the church, need to be aware of.

Matthew 7:21-23: *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

It is possible for even active Christians to deceive themselves with the idea that we are fine just the way we are. We must be careful that we do not rationalize and justify some “pet” sin until we convince ourselves we are not doing anything wrong. Because once we have completely severed our conscience the Holy Spirit can't reach us and there's no more God can do to save us.

Matthew 13:15 says, *“ For this people's heart is waxed gross, (hardened) and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”*

At this point it is not that God **won't** forgive us or help us change but that **we don't feel the need because we think we're o.k. just as we are!** There are three basic reasons a person falls into this dangerous position - (1) We become indifferent – we don't care (2) We become too busy – we don't take the time (3) We become opinionated / hard-hearted – we refuse to change.

But now let's go back to Matthew and answer our original question. This time let's notice the setting in which Jesus made His statement about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 12:22-24: *"Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."*

The point is, when one comes to the place that they turn against the work of the Holy Spirit even to the point of calling it demonic – as these men had - how can God convict that person of sin and thus allow them to receive the pardon and help that He makes so freely available?

When we come to the place that we no longer hear God's Spirit speaking to us, there is nothing more God can do. The working of miracles, or the fear of punishment will not change our heart. The Lord says: *"not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit."* It will only be by *"the still small voice"* of the Holy Spirit that we are convicted of the truth! Only by a willingness to listen and follow the truth will we be saved at last! Let none of us think we are safe from this ever present danger – Today, while our hearts and conscience are still tender - Let us continue to submit to God's Sweet Holy Spirit - that still small voice inside that says – *"this is the way, walk ye in it."*

Remember, we are not saved by being forgiven, but by receiving a new heart and right spirit, by being "born again," receiving the regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

Response Questions –

1. It is clear to me that sin draws me away from God. Yes ___ No ___
2. It is clear to me that God has forgiven my sin. Yes ___ No ___
3. It is clear to me that only with the help of the Holy Spirit can I overcome sin and live a righteous life. Yes ___ No ___

4. Today I want to make the commitment to turn from man's way of death and take God's way to life – that God can renew hope in my heart once again. Yes ___ No ___

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