

FORGIVENESS

A UNIVERSAL NEED



“If God were not willing to forgive sin,
heaven would be empty.”

German Proverb

“If we really want to love,
we must learn to forgive,”

Mother Theresa

While the world seeks to condemn us, God reaches down into the mud and muck of humanity and offers forgiveness. We cannot earn it and we should not hoard it, but we all need it... desperately. Perhaps, forgiveness is a topic that is overlooked more than it should be. We have the tendency to accept the forgiveness poured out for us on the cross and then call it good. While ‘forgiven’ defines us as Christians, far too often we forget about the momentous pull it should have on our life. We are forgiven by a loving Heavenly Father who sent his son as a willing sacrifice to pay the penalty for our sin. However, forgiveness doesn’t stop at the cross. God forgives our sins and then tells us to do likewise. In fact, Jesus warns us in Matthew 6:14-15, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” This “forgiveness thing” is fundamentally and eternally important. So, let’s dig in!

WHO NEEDS it ANYWAY?

Please read Romans 3:23-24.

How would you describe the glory of God? If you said perfection, I would have to completely agree. This passage of Romans tells us that we all come up short when we compare ourselves to perfection. Take some time to be honest with God for a moment. What areas of your life fall short of perfection? Are there sins in your life that are keeping you back? Make an honest list of your sins. (You don't have to share this list with anyone. This is just between you and God.)

Please flip a few pages over and read Romans 6:19-23.

How do we offer our bodies in slavery to our sins?

How can we offer our bodies in slavery to righteousness?

Paul says that both sin and righteousness lead in different directions. Sin leads to shame and death. Righteousness, a life lived in the forgiveness of Christ that strives after having a right relationship with God, leads to holiness and eternal life.

Fill in the missing words from verse 23:

“For the _____ of sin is death, but the _____ of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you notice, we *earn* death by a life of sin, but eternal life and forgiveness is a *free gift*. That takes the pressure off. But because it is a free gift, that doesn't mean that we have no responsibility regarding forgiveness. Let's take a look at our part of the deal.

HOW DO WE RECEIVE IT?

Forgiveness is a free gift. The whole point is that we cannot earn it. None of us are capable of ever reaching perfection or a life without sin. Even the Apostle Paul declared that he doesn't always do the things he knows and wants to do (Romans 7:18-19). However, just because we cannot earn forgiveness and we don't deserve it doesn't mean that we have no part to play in it. We read earlier in Matthew 6 that Jesus told us we would be forgiven with the same measure that we forgive. If we are unforgiving to the people around us, then God will be unforgiving towards our sins.

How does that truth inspire you?

Acts 3:19 says, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

What does Peter say must happen in order for our sins to be wiped out?

What is promised will come after repent and turn our hearts to God?

Please read 1 John 1:6-10.

Why can we not continue to walk in darkness and claim to have fellowship with God?

What must we do in order to be forgiven and purified from our unrighteousness? (Verse 9)

Confession brings healing and ushers in change. Alphonsus Liguori once said, “For a good confession three things are necessary: an examination of conscience, sorrow, and a determination to avoid sin.” Merely listing our sins won’t usher in times of refreshing and forgiveness. There needs to be a sorry and a determination to avoid that sin. Remember though that perfection is a goal that is not obtainable on this side of Heaven. That doesn’t mean that we don’t strive to move in the direction of it.

You previously listed the sins that were keeping you in bondage. That is confession. Now, according to Alphonsus, we must express sorrow for them. What means is that we understand that those sins, though they may be small in the opinion of the world, break God’s heart and keep us separated from His goodness. Take a few moments to pour out your sorrow over your sin to God.

If we ended here we would have the truth but not the freedom. Understanding and confessing that we have sinned is only the first part of this gift of forgiveness. Not only must we understand that we have been chasing after the wrong things, but we also must learn to embrace not only the truth but the freedom that comes with it.

Please read Romans 8:1-8.

According to verse 1, what is there now no more of?

Psalms 103:11-13 says, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.”

How much does God love us?

How does David describe the way God removes our sins from us?

Why do you believe God washes us from our sins?

Our God requires that we live according to His will and His word. He gives us rules and guidelines, not because He wants to limit our fun or enjoyment on this earth, but because His love for us is far too great to leave us bound up in our sins. Even though our sins pain His heart and bring Him sorrow (Genesis 6:6) He shows us compassion and love by completely removing the stain of those sins from our lives.

What does it mean to you that God no longer condemn us for our sins? (I would encourage you to think of how this truth affects you right now as well as it affects eternity.)

HOW DO WE USE IT?

Forgiveness was never meant to be hoarded or held for ransom. Remember when we read Romans 3:23-24 it said that we are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus”. We have been forgiven for free. When Jesus commanded his disciples to go and preach the gospel, he ended the command by reminding them, “Freely you have received, freely give.” The works of the Lord should never be sold or held for ransom.

How could we hold forgiveness for a ransom?

Any time we demand groveling, penance, or require that the people who wrong us jump through hoops, we are demanding payment for our forgiveness. But what about the payment of the asking? Perhaps forgiving a person who doesn't ask for it is the hardest act we can do. However, forgiveness is not only to set the person free that we offer it to, but it also sets us free. Agnes Sanford said, “As we practice the work of forgiveness we discover more and more that forgiveness and healing are one.” William Arthur Ward put it this way, “Forgiveness is a funny thing—it warms the heart and cools the sting.” When we forgive people who hurt us we are letting go of the hurt. Unforgiveness rots us from the inside out. It festers like a splinter that begs

to be removed. We can never experience freedom from the constant reminder of our hurt until we learn to forgive... even those who don't ask for it.

How can forgiving a person who doesn't even want to be forgiven set us free?

Forgiveness is a fundamental part of our Christian walk. It defines our relationship with God and marks us as new creations. But as much as it is meant for our blessing. It is also meant to flow through us and be a blessing to the rest of humanity.

Please read Colossians 3:12-15.

Why should we be a forgiving people?

Why are love and forgiveness connected?

Love is why God offers us forgiveness. Love is why we continue to forgive when we continue to walk away. Love is what sets us free and love is why we must share the gift of forgiveness. Hate will eat you up and steal the joy from your life, but love and forgiveness brings peace. If you are holding onto any past hurt, now is the time to let it go. Offer forgiveness even if it is undeserved and unrequested. Remember that forgiveness is a universal need. Share the answer for the pain in this world freely and often. Forgive.