

FORGIVENESS

Means No Judging!



*“I don’t play the condemnation game,
Not because I don’t love the spirit of competition,
But simply because unconditional love has none.”*

Curtis Tyrone Jones

*“Before you judge someone else,
Stop and think about all that God has forgiven you for.”*

Joyce Meyer

The forgiveness that defines our lives affects the way we interact with others. If it doesn't, we aren't living the faith we profess to have. Sometimes it may feel like the world is one gigantic testing ground, and perhaps it is. Every time we profess our faith, we run the risk of encountering a person who hates us for it. Every time we make a mistake, we leave ourselves open for attack. Every time we are reminded of the times we failed in the past, we invite that dreaded condemnation into our heart. The answer to all these things is the opposite of judging. It is love, love that flows from the cross, through our forgiven lives and into the world around us. The very definition of forgiveness includes an agape (the highest, completely unconditional) form of love. To be forgiving means that we have to give up our claim to restitution, give up our resentment, and eliminate any account of the offense in our hearts. No human can do that without understanding that we are merely being asked to do what Jesus did for us on the cross. We did not deserve it any more than the one we offer it to does. We cannot repay it, and therefore should not expect others to repay us. Forgiveness is love. And, “We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:19-20)

GOD IS OUR EXAMPLE FOR FORGIVENESS WITHOUT CONDEMNATION

“If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins,

O Lord, who could stand?”

Psalm 130:3

There is not a person in this world that could stand up before God as sinless and without blame. We can strive to have good lives and even godly lives, but we can never obtain true perfection. Jesus taught that even if we sin in our heart or our mind, we still sin. Who can claim to be perfect? In truth, none of us. This is the foundation for the forgiveness we offer others and ourselves. We cannot offer what we do not have, and we have complete forgiveness... complete. God does not keep a record of our wrongs. He throws them to eternity. Psalm 103:12 says He throws them as far as the east is from the west. This is our example. This is the type of forgiveness that we enjoy, and the type of forgiveness we are expect to offer.

Please read Hebrews 8:12.

How does God treat our sins?

This verse isn't saying that God will have an epic form of amnesia. It isn't that our omniscient God can in any way forget what has happened. This is a choice. God chooses to throw our sins away from Him and see us as righteous and redeemed because of the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. This is a choice. He 'remembers' it no more.

Have you ever struggled with 'remembering' what someone has done to you, over and over and over? If you have, how does it make you feel?

When we relive that hurt, even just in our own remembering of the event, the pain because renewed and the hurt or anger rises up again almost as if the wounds were fresh. How is that counter-productive to forgiving?

Jesus taught about forgiveness many times. One of the most memorable experiences may just be his interaction with the woman caught in adultery. Please read how Jesus handled the sins of the people involved in this situation. Please read John 8:1-11.

Who brought this woman to Jesus?

What did Jesus do when they began to question him about how to treat the woman who was caught in her sin?

No one knows what Jesus was writing in the ground. Some people believe he was writing down the sins of each and every man who stood in accusation. Others believe he was writing the commandments and leaving the men themselves to realize their sin. What he wrote is not as important as what he said. He said, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

What did the accusers do when he said this?

Why do you think they left?

Deuteronomy 17 says that the witnesses to the sin had to stone her first. In this case, the accusers would have to admit that they had either slept with the woman or witnessed the act.

Interesting how their fire for her condemnation faded when faced with their own involvement in her sin.

What did Jesus tell the woman after all her accuser left?

Notice that Jesus does not condemn the woman, but he does not excuse her sin either. He commanded her to leave her life of sin. God forgives us, but He requires that we leave our life of sin. If we are a forgiven child of God, sin should be an accidental and rare incidence. Our lives should no longer be defined by our sin but rather by our forgiveness and relationship with God.

FORGIVENESS INCLUDES FORGIVING OURSELVES!

Often, we forget that forgiving without judgment includes forgiving ourselves. Maybe we don't condemn ourselves most extreme sense of the word, but when we judge our future potential by our past failures, we are condemning ourselves. When we think of ourselves as being less than who God says we are, we are placing ourselves under our own judgement. And when that judgement contradicts what God's word declares about our lives, we are setting ourselves up as a higher authority than the God of the universe. When we wear our mistakes like a scarlet letter on our chest we are ignoring or belittling the cleansing power of the cross.

Please read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.

According to verse 17, what are we?

According to verse 19, what has God done for the world?

How does He treat our sins?

Because of this wonderful truth, how are we treat the sins of others and ourselves?

We are no longer defined by our past mistakes. God's forgiveness makes us new. If He washes us clean, we are completely clean. So let's stop picking back up the sin that God has removed. God has forgiven us. It is time we forgave ourselves.

A LACK OF CONDEMNATION DOES NOT MEAN WE CONDONE SIN

Forgiveness is not a free pass toward a lifestyle of sin. Yes, we are forgiven and that forgiveness is complete, but forgiveness does not make sin any less of a sin. It can be hard to navigate between exposing sin and condemning. And yet, the Bible tells us that we need to expose sin and call it for what it is at the same time that we are extending forgiveness and acceptance. You may have heard it said many times, "Love the sinner, but hate the sin." If we are trying to live forgiveness that doesn't stem from unconditional love, this is not possible. However, if we have left our judgmental attitude at the foot of the cross, we can love as Christ loved and accomplish this often difficult task.

Please read Galatians 6:1-10.

According to these verses, what are we to do when we see someone caught in the snare of sin?

How does carrying each other's burdens live out the unconditional love of forgiveness?

Verse 4 warns about comparing ourselves to others. In the context of this verse (and in the context of the discussion on forgiveness), we see this as thinking better of ourselves because our sins are not as bad as someone else's (at least in our own opinion). How does this type of comparison destroy forgiveness and agape love?

We have talked a lot about the love of forgiveness in this lesson. I hope that you have seen through God's word that judgement belongs to God and not us. This is a hard lesson to successfully live out every day. It isn't a natural instinct to lovingly and unconditionally forgive. Instinctively, we want to lash out when someone hurts or offends us. Even babies respond this way. The same is true of our spiritual man. When we are spiritual babies (new to the faith or immature in it), we forget, perhaps momentarily, to flee an uncharitable attitude. As we grow closer to the Lord and mature in our Christian walk, this will become easier, but perhaps never truly easy. We need to develop an attitude and a life that leans on God for strength. One of the greatest challenges to this type of forgiveness is our desire to be proven right. If we can let go of that desire to be vindicated, we will learn a lot about the grace of God. Forgiveness can't just be a word we say or an exercise we occasionally entertain. We need to practice it daily. As we grow closer to God, we will begin to reflect His character more and more. When we get to know our Savior, we will understand the intense depth of his love for us. This love was proven to us on the cross. Forgiveness and love are inexplicitly connected together. If we are to show the world the forgiveness of God, we must also show them His love. And that starts with choosing how we respond to sin, insults and failures.

As we end this week's lesson, please take some time to search your heart. Is there anyone whom you need to forgive? Is there anything in your past you need to forgive yourself for? Use the space below to either make a list of the people and circumstances you need to offer forgiveness for or to write a prayer asking God to help you forgive.