

## ***The Sure Word Bible Studies*** ***Lesson 6***

### **Understanding Forgiveness**

In the previous lesson we learned that sin is “*missing the mark*” and that we all fall short of the glory of God. Many people realizing they have sinned against God and having been taught that they must have God's forgiveness if they are to be admitted into heaven are very concerned about God's forgiveness. But the good news is that even though we all sin and fall short of God's glorious ideal, the Bible assures us that He freely forgives.

**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.”*

Throughout this study please keep in mind the following text:

**Isaiah 55:8,9** *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says 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.”*

As we study God's forgiveness we must remember that He does not think and react the same way men do. When we read texts like Psalm 7:11 that says, “*God is angry with the wicked every day,*” we need to keep in mind that when the Bible speaks of God's anger it is not the same as ours, “*getting mad and getting even.*” In fact, one meaning of the word anger given in the dictionary is “*extreme or passionate displeasure.*” Therefore, anger can mean “*getting mad,*” but it can also mean the “*passionate displeasure*” of anxiety and heartbreak a loving parent feels when their child does something terribly wrong. Most often, rather than getting mad the parent feels grieved and often broken hearted. In the same way, as God's children, when we do something wrong, our Heavenly Father is not mad at us, but grieved and broken hearted even more because He loves more deeply.

**Psalm 103:10 - 14** *“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward 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 pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”*

**Verse 17** *“But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,”*

This passage tells us three important things.

1) God *"has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities."* In the previous lesson we learned that God does not inflict punishment for sin, but that sin punishes sin.

2) *"Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him."* The Lord is like a loving father who cares deeply for his children and understands they make mistakes because they are immature with lots of learning and growing to do. Most of us, especially those who have children can relate to that.

2) *"His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting."* This says that God always has, and will continue throughout the endless ages of eternity, to constantly and compassionately forgive. That is the nature of true love and God is love.

The word forgive in the original languages of the Bible basically means to *"let go, to disregard, or set free."* That means to forgive is letting go whatever I would normally feel one owes me or is obligated to do as a payment for an offense or a debt. If I "let it go" that means they are not expected to do anything as a condition of my forgiveness for an offense against me. For example, if someone owes me money and can't pay and I forgive the debt, they are not expected to pay me back, ever. I willingly take the loss. If someone offends me, to forgive means I will let it go, I will not hold animosity in my heart against them. I will not make an attempt to get even or get back at them in any way. And though the pain of what they have done is so great that I cannot forget, I will never mention it to them, I will not gossip to others about what they have done to me, I will treat them as though it had never happened.

That is how God forgives and how He would have us forgive as well. When we say, *"Father forgive me, I have done wrong!"* God's reply is always - *"you are forgiven."* Actually we were forgiven before we asked. God doesn't have to "let go" because He never held our sin against us in the first place, remember what we read earlier in Psalm 103:10 - 14.

Many times the problem is that we have been deceived about God's forgiving nature and don't know that! How many times have we been reluctant to come to God because we fear 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! In the book, *"The Story of Redemption,"* E.G. 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."*

What a beautiful thought! When we go to the cross we can see that in spite of our sin God does not hold bitter or resentful feelings towards us, but always and only compassion and unconditional love. And if we don't resist, seeing God's self-sacrificing love will transform our heart and change our mind about the way we live

and about the way we see Him! We will experience for ourselves *"the goodness of God that leads to repentance"* (Romans 2:4). This is what it means to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb – to be reconciled to God. Note the following verses that clearly state why Jesus died:

**John 3:16** *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

**Romans 5:8** *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

**John 12:32,33** *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die."*

**1 Peter 3:18** *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,"*

Christ suffered the death of the cross that He might *"bring us to God,"* not to bring God to us. Believing of the lies of Satan we turned away from God. God never turned away from us and from the beginning desperately wants us to turn back to Him. How bad does He want us? Enough to die for us! And He did!

**1 John 4:8** *"We love Him because He first loved us."*

Jesus did not die to compel God to love those He otherwise hated or to forgive those who otherwise would not be forgiven. He died because of the love and forgiveness that already existed in His heart! To show us that we are forgiven even before we ask. Jesus didn't die to change God's attitude toward us, to satisfy an angry God who demands a blood sacrifice before He will forgive! No, Jesus died to bring us to God, *that we might be changed!* To change our attitude towards God! To win us back to love and trust our Heavenly Father.

It's important to realize the forgiveness of sin is not for God's benefit. God does not need "closure" nor does He have a need to "get even" with those who have wronged Him. God does not hold bitterness, animosity and anger in His heart like men do. Neither is He waiting for us to come crawling on our knees begging His forgiveness and if we don't, there is *"hell to pay!"*

Forgiveness is for our benefit. First, when we forgive and we "let go" of those feelings of revenge, animosity and bitterness against those who have wronged us, it brings peace and healing to our own heart and mind. On the other hand, when we have wronged another and we are remorseful and are forgiven for the wrongs we committed, that helps free us from our own guilt that can eventually consume us. That's why we need to know God freely forgives our sin against Him, so the Lord promises that *"every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men."* (Matthew 12:31)

Remember there are only two paths for us in this world -

**Man's way - Proverbs 16:25** *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."*

**God's way - John 14:6** *"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

While God loves us and freely forgives us, forgiveness, while it gives us much needed release from guilt, will not cancel out the consequences of sin. The only way to stop the painful consequences of sin is to stop the sin. Then there can be no unpleasant consequences! The problem is, we can't do that on our own. Only as we are willing to trust and co-operate with God can this be achieved. God saves us - not by forgiving us - but by changing us!

**II Corinthians 3:18** *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

As discussed in a previous lesson, we need to change and only by consistently coming to the Lord and beholding Him can that happen. As we contemplate His love and grace, His forgiveness and compassion we will find that the Holy Spirit begins to change us so that we begin to reflect His nature, we become more and more like Jesus!

At this point we are ready to study what is called the *"unpardonable sin"* so many are concerned about.

**Matthew 12:31 - 32** *"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come."*

The unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In order for us to begin to understand blasphemy against the Holy Spirit we must first understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Note the following:

1. He teaches - **John 14:26** *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things"*
2. He convicts / warns - **John 16:8** *"And when He (the Holy Spirit) has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"*
3. He guides to the truth - **John 16:13** *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth"*

*"Blasphemy" is the Greek word "blasphemeo" and it means "to abuse" "to denounce" or "to injure." That means that once a person is taught, convicted, and warned by the Holy Spirit of God, if they then turn away and shun Him, He is injured, He is put down, He is grieved as suggested in the following texts:*

**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 bore them and carried them All the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit;"*

**Ephesians 4:30** *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."*

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has to do with how a person relates to the Holy Spirit's work. When we rebel and resist His work for us we cause grief and extreme emotional pain to God. In other words, it breaks His heart! It's not about breaking the 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 discussion of the elementary principles 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, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned."*

*"Let us go on to perfection."* Perfection is from the Greek "telios" which means "grown up" or "being mature." The danger for the Christian is that one becomes complacent and fails to grow to spiritual maturity.

**Hebrews 10:26,27 warns:** *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries."*

If we were to do a word study of this verse we would learn that this does not mean committing one sinful act. If it did none of us would have any hope. But according to the Greek tense it means to *"willfully keep on practicing sin"* after we have been convicted by the Holy Spirit that it is wrong. The New Living Translation (NLT) Bible

correctly translates it this way: *"if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth"*

Therefore the unpardonable sin is to be understood, not as a single act - but the continual, persistent rebellion against the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart as He attempts 1) to teach us, 2) to convict us of right and wrong, and 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 usually hear Him the loudest the first time. And if we continue to resist the Holy Spirit long enough, His voice gets quieter and quieter and quieter and we will eventually come to the place we can no longer hear Him at all. At this point there is no more God can do. It is at this point, when we have resisted, made excuses and rebelled until there is no remedy, no way back, it is then that we have committed the unpardonable sin. This is a very subtle danger, anyone needs to be aware of. According to Jesus this warning applies to religious people as well, even Christians -

**Matthew 7:21 - 23** *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"*

Even active Christians must be careful that they do not rationalize and justify some "pet" sin until they convince themselves that they are not doing anything wrong. Because once a person has completely severed their conscience the Holy Spirit can no longer reach them and there's no more that God can do to save them. Jesus spoke of people who did this -

**Matthew 13:15** *"For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."*

It is not that God won't forgive them or help them change, but that they don't feel the need to change because they think they're o.k. just as they are!

There are three basic reasons a person slips into this dangerous position, 1) They become indifferent - they simply don't care 2) they are too busy - won't take the time or 3) they become opinionated / hard-hearted and 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 one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."*

The issue here is that when a person comes to the place that they turn against the work of the Holy Spirit 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 forgiveness and help that He makes so freely available? As much as He would like to, He can't.

As previously stated, 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 the 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 and our characters changed. 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 in it."*

And remember, forgiveness as important as it is to our well being, is not the key issue. We are not saved by simply being forgiven, we are saved by God creating in us a *"new heart and right spirit,"* (Psalm 51:10) Jesus referred to this as being *"born again"* (John 3:3). Actually in the original Greek it is *"born from above,"* not *"born again."* Clearly this a work of regeneration done in us by the Holy Spirit.

**Titus 3:3 - 7** *"For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

Now that we have a better understanding of sin and forgiveness, we want to better understand the final consequence of sin, death. The Bible tells us: *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23) And in another place: *"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and*

*enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." (James 1:13 - 15).*

We will take a closer look at this death in the next lesson.

**Response Questions:**

1. It is clear to you that sin separates and draws us away from God.      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

2. It is clear to you that God has forgiven your sin.      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

3. It is clear to you that only with the help of the Holy Spirit can you overcome sin and live a righteous life.      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

4. Do you understand that we must be more than just forgiven, but we must be "*born from above*" and given a "*new heart and right spirit*" to be saved?      Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

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