

Focused Discipleship

Forgiveness - Part 3 Live with the Memories

LL continue on p. 10

Key Words: Memories, Memorials

Memories are Permanent

Introduction: One of the hardest obstacles to forgiveness may be the feeling that “I am unable to forgive because I can’t forget what they did – abuse.”

- A. It is one thing to forgive from the heart, it is another thing to learn to live with the memories of the hurts we received or caused.**
- B. It is one thing to forgive and another thing to live with the consequences whether it was caused by you or caused by others.**
 - 1. True, the painful events may be in the past, but the consequences and loss from them can continue into the present and affect our quality of life or the lives of others.
 - 2. Often, it feels like it just happened yesterday, especially deep wounds like an affair, abandonment or abuse.
- C. Often the counsel given to those who have been hurt is “to forgive and forget,” “Put it behind you and move on” (a form of denial), “Don’t let it bother you” (repress your emotions). “You shouldn’t feel that way” (shame).**

Why do you believe the “forgive and forget” counsel is given?

What biblical reference is offered to support this?

How effective do you believe this counsel is?

Have you ever been told this and what was your response?

- D. One of the reasons the “forgive and forget” advice is preached, taught or counseled may be because the speaker, counselor or friend does not know**

what to do with your memories. They are sincere but not skilled in the area of forgiveness.

1. Often you are made to feel guilty (bad, shame) because you may not be able to block out of your mind the person and events you have had to forgive. “What’s wrong with me?”
 - a. The logic is If you have really forgiven them you should be able to put it behind you and move on as if nothing happened.
2. One of the first things you can tell a person who is struggling with their memories is that you hope they never forget. This may come as a shock to them but you have reasons for stating this.

What would you guess are some of the reasons for telling a person not to forget?

Recall the life of Joseph (Gen. 37-50). What do you think Joseph’s response would have been if he were told to forgive and forget (cf. Gen. 50:20)?

E. Understand that the practice or discipline of forgiveness has nothing to do with forgetting. This is a big shock to most believers because of a lot of false teaching on this subject.

1. Remember, God designed our brains so that all memories are stored in your brain by electronic impulses and chemical transference. It is on your hard drive.
 - a. Memory: Your mind can store 600 memories a second which works out to 1,419,120,000,000 (trillion) bits of information in 75 years. The mind stores all that is recorded, thus it is almost physically impossible to forget.
 - b. True, memory can be blocked out through denial, suppression, repression, disassociation or splitting off in the mind, thus preventing one from dealing with what they did or what was done to them. The mind will do anything necessary to keep from feeling pain.
 - c. Intentional blocking of memories prevents one from using biblical tools to work through to healing and glorifying God.
 - 1) Matt. 5:16, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

- d. Yet, the mind may block memories until the person is able to deal with them.
 - 1) A friend's wife had totally blocked out memories of being sexually abused as a child. Something triggered these memories later in life at which time she was able to deal with them biblically.
 - 2) Emotions do not live in time. Body memories activate present physical feelings of past abuse.
- 2. (Therefore) Memory is not a function of the spirit. It is a biological function of the brain.
- 3. It must be remembered that a Christian's brain functions the same way physically as a non-Christian's brain.
 - a. This is a surprise to many theologians. They think something mystical happens to the physical memory function either at salvation or after some deeper life experience. This is not supported in scripture.
 - b. They fail to understand that only our spirit is born again (John 3:6). Therefore, the mind must be renewed (changed) over the course of time through repeated exposure to the Word of God (Rom. 12:2) coupled with obedience (James 1:25; 2 Peter 1:5-7).
 - 1) The Greek word "transformed" in Romans 12:2 is reflected in the English word "metamorphosis" (which describes the process of a caterpillar spinning a cocoon and a butterfly emerging). It is a total change from the inside out (2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:16). We need to be transformed in our mind, not our spirit.
 - 2) Phil. 2:12,13, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation [into everyday life] with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."
- 4. The use of the Biblical tool of forgiveness does not destroy the brain's physical function of memory that God designed. God, instead, gives us biblical tools to deal positively with memories.

God Can't Forget

I. Realize that the attributes of God prevent Him from forgetting.

A. God cannot do anything contrary to His attributes (character), for example,

1. Omnipotent – all powerful. Luke 1:37, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

B. One of God’s attributes is His omniscience - all knowing. Prov. 15:3, “The eyes of the Lord *are* in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.”

1. How can an omniscient God forget?
 - a. One prominent preacher stated that God is able to do what we cannot do, that is, to forget. How can an all-knowing God forget? God does not act contrary to His attributes.
 - b. Dr. David Seamans, “He has put it (sin) behind His back.”
 - 1) God does not have a back.
2. Jesus is God with a glorified body in heaven living with the memories of the cross.
 - a. After He ascended into Heaven, did Jesus forget how or why He was killed?
 - b. Those in heaven are constantly praising the Lord Jesus for who He is and what He did on the cross.
 - 1) Rev. 5:12, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”
 - 2) Jesus is referred to as the Lamb over 25 times in the book of Revelation.
 - c. Is Jesus is now walking around heaven asking the saints why He is called a slain lamb? He forgave those who killed him while He was still on the cross (Luke 23:34). He still remembers who did it and why it was done, yet He chose to forgive them.
 - 1) Remember, choosing to forgive an offender does not block out memory of what he did.
3. Our rewards will be based on what we did; whether good or bad.
 - a. 2 Cor. 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

- b. Rom. 14:10b, "...For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
- c. I Cor. 3:12-15, "Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. ¹⁴If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."
- d. 1 Peter 4:17, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God..."
- e. Remember, at the believer's judgment, the issue is not sin and punishment but works and rewards. The works referred to are acts of serving after salvation. There is absolutely no condemnation to those who are in Christ (Rom. 8:1).

How would you explain the apparent contradiction between God stating He will remember our sin no more and Jesus remembering His crucifixion and why He was crucified?

Can an omniscient God forget? What have you been told about this?

C. Problem: (But) How do you explain specific verses that seem to indicate that God does forgive and forget? In fact, they actually state He forgets.

"PROBLEM" VERSES

Jer. 31:34 "... for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Psalm 103:12 "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Micah 7:19 "He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities underfoot. Yes, You wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Heb. 10:17 "And their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more (quoting Jer. 3:34).

1. Understand God often uses human terms from our life experiences only to illustrate (explain) spiritual truths.
2. We only know about God through physical comparisons or analogies. (anthropomorphic)
 - a. Jesus compared the spiritual experience of the new birth to the workings of the wind.
 - 1) John 3:7-8, "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'⁸The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."
 - b. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is full of physical illustrations to explain spiritual realities (Matt. 5, 6, 7).
 - c. Jesus referred to Himself as bread (John 6:35), as light (John 8:12) a door (John 10:9) a road (John 14:6), a vine (John 15:1).
 - d. King David used physical objects to explain his understanding of God.
 - 1) Ps. 18:2, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." Note: six physical words to explain his picture of God who is a spirit.
 - 2) In order for David to understand God with his finite brain, he had to compare God to a "rock, fortress, refuge, shield, horn of salvation and stronghold." In reality, God is a spirit not a "rock." His solid strength, however, can be compared to a rock.
3. God uses our human memory system as an human illustration, an analogy. We forget stuff as if it never happened. But when God says He "forgets" in reality He still remembers but chooses not to bring it up against us again. An all-knowing God cannot forget!
 - a. Rom. 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..." (It isn't because He forgot it.)

What additional physical illustration does God use to explain Himself, His character and His works?

Technical Process of Forgiveness

II. Understand the technical process of forgiveness from God's perspective.

A. Old Testament description of the process: King David

1. King David pictured the technical process of forgiveness in the Old Testament.
 - a. Ps. 32:2, "How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute (put on their bill) iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."
 - 1) When God forgives fully, He does not hold the sin bill against them anymore because it is stamped paid. But it doesn't mean it never existed.

B. New Testament description of the process of God's perspective:

1. The Apostle Paul described the same technical concept of forgiveness in the New Testament.
 - a. 2 Cor. 5:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting (imputing) their trespasses against them..."
 - 1) Christians' sins are no longer counted, imputed or reckoned against them anymore because Christ has taken them on Himself on the cross.
 - 2) 2 Cor. 5:19, "...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

C. The words "imputing" and "counting" are financial accounting terms.

1. Literal meaning: "To reckon (add) to one's account" or "to put on one's account" as either paid or due.
 - a. Because all our sin was put on Christ and paid for, we are instantly justified; it is not a gradual process.
 - b. The sin bill was due because it was on our sin account. Then Christ died on the cross and paid the sin bill in full. So, the bill was real and it was owed, but Christ paid the sin bill that was due and now the account reads, "Paid in Full!" It does not say, "It was never owed."
 - 1) Jesus' closing words on the cross were, "It is finished" (Greek, *tetelesta*) (John 19:30). In ancient papyri tax receipts, this word was

written across them meaning “paid in full.” Jesus was declaring for the world that His redemptive work was completed. He had been made to be sin for people (2 Cor. 5:21) and had suffered the penalty of God’s justice which our sin deserved.

- c. The results of forgiveness are like a bookkeeping function in God’s mind; the bill is paid and it’s not due again, but it does not mean the bill never existed. That is the reason Stephen prayed while he was being stoned to death, “Lord do not charge them [to their account] with this sin” (Acts 7:60). “Do not charge” literally means, “Do not put their sin on their account as a bill that is owed because it is now paid.”
- 1) If you have a \$400 gas bill due and a friend pays it for you, how much do you owe? NONE. The fact it was paid by someone else does not mean it was never due. Now that it is paid, no one can come back to you and ask for payment. But you have receipt that it was paid.

| Sin | Forgive | No Condemnation |
|------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Rom. 3:23 | 2 Cor. 5:21 | Rom. 8:1 |
| DUE | PAID | BALANCE DUE |
| \$400 | \$400 | 0 |

- a) Rom. 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
- b) 2 Cor. 5:21, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

God’s Memory of Your Sin

III. The Old Testament prophet, Ezekiel, best illustrates exactly what God chooses to do with His memory of your forgiven sin. This is the same choice you must make after you forgive or are forgiven.

- A. Ezekiel 18:22, (Referring to a wicked man who turns away from his sin)
“None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him...” in the future: no debt.**

B. Ezekiel 33:16, “None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him.”

1. The sin is not forgotten, but God chooses not to bring it up again against you as due (owed) ever again (Rom. 8:1). This is also a very important relational tool. When you forgive someone, you are not to bring it up against them again; however, forgiveness and trust are two separate issues.
 - a. Forgiveness is to be granted; trust may need to be earned over time.
2. God chose to pay the sin bill in full through the death of His Son. In His mind it is not as if you never sinned. He still remembers the sin as an omniscient God. But He also remembers His Son paid your sin bill in full and therefore, it will not be brought up to you or against you for payment.
3. That is the reason God expects you to forgive others just like you were forgiven (Matt. 18:21-35; Luke 11:4).
 - a. Col. 3:13, “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do.*”
4. It is not that you forget the offender’s offense. It is that you choose not to hold it up to him as if it was not forgiven. You forfeit the right to remind people as a way of punishment. The difference between forgiveness and trust will be addressed later.
 - a. Thomas Adams, a Puritan (1600-1700) said, “Sins that are forgiven are now as if they had never been committed.” This is a popular belief, but it is not biblical.
 - b. When we forgive, we forfeit the right to remind others as a way of punishing them or shaming them.

What takes a greater demonstration of grace: to forgive and forget or to forgive and remember and choose not to remember it against the offender?

Why would that be the case?

Practical Questions

IV. What do you then do with the memories of your own sin or other's offenses against you?

A. Treat memories of forgiven sin like you treat your old utility bills that are stamped "paid."

1. The receipts (memories) are reminders of bills that were due but are now paid, either by giving forgiveness (stamp their bill paid) or by receiving forgiveness (stamp your bill paid). I John 1:9
 - a. Jesus on the cross cried out "It is finished". This is the same word found in the papyri receipts for taxes meaning "paid in full". Redemption work was completed, He was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and had suffered the penalty of God's justice which sin deserved.
2. Memories are designed to remind you of the biblical tools you used for your healing and freedom and for His glory. It's your choice.

B. Use memories of forgiven offenses as present reminders of God's grace and mercy whether you are granting or receiving forgiveness.

1. The Apostle Paul remembered the great hurt Alexander the coppersmith caused him.
 - a. 2 Tim. 4:14a, "Alexander, the coppersmith, did me much harm..." (Acts 19:33-34). He opposed Paul's message.
2. Then Paul remembered and reported to Timothy what he did with the memories of Alexander's sin.
 - a. 2 Tim 4:14b, "...the Lord will repay (revenge) him according to his deeds" (i.e. God's revenge).
 - 1) Paul transferred (sent) Alexander over to God (remember, forgive means to send away) and he left God with the responsibility to do to him what He saw fit. Paul did not believe revenge was wrong, but he knew Who was responsible to take the revenge (Rom. 12:19).
 - 2) Paul combined the two things together; both the memory of the event and what he did with it.
 - a) ill.: Just like a cowboy who has two guns. The gun in the left holster represents the memory of the sin that was done to him. The gun in the right holster represents the memory of what he did with the sin (forgave it). In reality, the barrels of the two guns should be taped

together so that when the gun representing the sin is pulled out, the other gun representing forgiveness is pulled out, too.

- b) Tie the offense and the forgiveness together in your mind. Take control (2 Cor. 10:5).
- 3. Apply the same sin-forgiveness procedure whether the sin was done to you (grant forgiveness) or by you (receive forgiveness). It works both ways.
- 4. Most of the pain from a hurt received or a sin done continues to hurt because of a failure to recall what was done (sent away to Jesus) with those hurts. Choose to not bring the offense up in your meditations unless you also replay in your mind what you did with it, we forgive or receive forgiveness.
- 5. You must come to the point of accepting the losses and choose to grow through them. Often forgiveness is not the issue. It is the refusal to accept the loss and see the value.
 - a. You will have to come to the place in your life where you can even see the benefit of the pain and loss like Joseph did.
 - 1) Gen. 50:20, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive."

C. Distinguish between true and false guilt in your mind. Why? They feel the same.

- 1. True guilt means that we are worthy of (deserve) blame (the sin bill is owed) and it should result in confession, repentance and forgiveness.
 - a. 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful [to His promise] and just [in His nature] to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - b. David experienced true guilt after he numbered the men.
 - 1) 2 Sam. 24:10, "David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men and he said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, Lord, I beg You, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.'"
- 2. If we still feel guilty after confessing our sin to God, at that point we are now experiencing false guilt, which is a feeling (not fact) that we are still worthy of blame.

- a. False guilt means we still take moral responsibility for actions, events and situations that either we did not do or we did but they have been confessed, repented of and forgiven (Rom. 8:1).
 - 1) Often people put meanings on things that did not happen and wrongly judge you for it.
3. All feelings of guilt must be tested by truth from Scripture, reality and history. Why?
- a. Again, emotions are not subject to truth or reality. You can know God loves you but you may not feel it.
 - 1) Feelings are not bad. God created them. They give us the beautiful color of life.
 - b. We have to test emotions like we are to test prophets with biblical truth and reality.
 - 1) 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, believe not every spirit [or feeling], but try the spirits whether they are of God because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”
 - 2) 1 Thess. 5:21, “Prove [test] all things; hold fast that which is good [and true].”
 - 3) John 8:32 “And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free”.
 - c. False prophets *sound* good and *feel* right but need to be tested.
 - 1) They are lie based.
 - d. Guilt feelings *feel* true when they are false or lie based.
 - e. Whether it is Satan or your own self-talk of condemnation, you will hear it as if it is in your own voice, not Satan’s. just like Peter did when he rebuked Jesus (Matt. 16:23).
 - f. “guilt complex” is not about real guilt but imagined guilt. It can be developed by people who were raised by harsh parents. It carries with it the need to be punished (Helping, pl 66).
4. Believing the lie you are still guilty and you were not forgiven can destroy your quality of life and result in depression more than the actual sin.

- a. It can lead to addictions to cover the emotions of false guilt and its close friend, shame.
- b. All addictions tend to be shame-based.

D. Stop re-confessing your past sin that has already been forgiven (John 1:9).

1. Distinguish between condemnation and conviction.
 - a. Condemnation (after forgiveness) can come from Satan (Rev. 12:10), from others (Rom. 14:10-13) or from oneself (1 John 4:20, 1 Cor. 4:4).
 - b. Conviction can come from the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), through people (Gal. 6:1, Matt. 18:15-17) or from Scripture (Ps. 119:9).
2. Your memories of past forgiven sin are not designed by God to promote re-confession.
 - a. If you reconfess a past confessed sin a thousand times, that is 999 times too many.
 - 1) Satan can use memories to motivate you to reconfess because of the feeling you were not forgiven.
 - 2) Rev. 12:10, "Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.'"
 - b. Scripture does not say, "If we *re-confess* our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins..." (1 John 1:9).
3. Re-confession of past forgiven sin only reinforces the presence of a lie that the sin was not forgiven in the first place and results in increased depression and false guilt.
 - a. Satan would love for you to reconfess your sin to attempt to convince you that God did not forgive you.
 - b. You cannot neutralize false guilt by re-confession because you have not dealt with the lie behind the feelings of guilt.

4. In relationships, if you have sinned against a person, confess it once.
 - a. State “I was wrong for ...” Do not say, “Sorry” or “I apologize.” Neither of those acknowledges it was wrong, they avoid responsibility.
 - 1) We are not told to say, “I’m sorry” or “I apologize” to God.
 - b. If they refuse to forgive you, then say, “I look forward to the time you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”
 - 1) Do not shame them for their failure to forgive. They may need time to heal first.
 - c. If they remind you of your past offense that you have confessed and asked forgiveness, you can state, “What I did was wrong and I hope someday you can forgive me.” DO NOT defend yourself. Often this leads to an argument, not healing.
 - d. If others remind you how you have hurt them, tell them, “Thank you for letting me know how deeply I hurt you.” Acknowledge their pain, if possible.

E. Reject the unbiblical practice of self-forgiveness.

1. People who teach or practice self-forgiveness do so because they still feel blame (guilt) after they have confessed their sin to God or someone else and they do not know what to do with the remaining memories or guilt feelings.
 - a. They still feel guilty and feel they are still worthy of blame after confession and therefore, they conclude they need to forgive themselves.
2. They know academically and biblically they are forgiven by God. They will even say, “I know God has forgiven me but I can’t forgive myself.” Why? They still feel guilty.
 - a. Remember feelings are not subject to truth. If people do not feel forgiven, they conclude they must not be forgiven.
 - b. Dr. Ray Rooney muddies the waters by stating, “What you’re really talking about when you speak of forgiving yourself is accepting the offer of Christ to forgive and move beyond your transgression.”
 - 1) True, they accept Christ’s forgiveness in their heads but cannot move on because of the remaining guilt feelings. The embedded lie is not dealt with (AFA Journal, May 2018, p. 27).

3. Feelings can respond to thoughts that may or may not be recognized mentally.
 - a. Emotions are responders to thoughts whether they are true or not. Emotions are a result and not a cause.
 - b. The key question is what thought is feeding these guilty emotions that feel truer than truth?
 - c. Behind every feeling of false guilt is an embedded lie.
4. How do you deal with the remaining feelings of guilt even when you know God has forgiven you?
 - a. Identify the lie.
 - 1) 1 John 1:9 clearly states you are forgiven, then the Apostle John adds a word picture "...and washes us from ALL unrighteousness." The fact is, we are spotless. But the lying emotion is responding to a hidden lie that states you are still guilty and dirty and deserve shame.
 - 2) Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). "God is not enough for you."
 - b. Renounce (disown) the lie. See it for what it is. "I renounce this lie in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."
 - 1) 2 Cor. 10:4,5 – Take charge (control) of your thoughts.
 - 2) Jam. 4:17, "Resist Satan [and his lie] and he will flee from you."
 - c. Replace the lie with truth. "I am totally washed clean from my sin and I do not face any condemnation from God for past confessed sin (Rom. 8:1, 31-39). I am not a sinner, I am a saint who sins from time to time (1 John 1:9) but my identity is saint.
 - 1) Christians are referred to as saints over 57 times in the New Testament. "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi" (Phil. 1:18), not "To the sinners in Philippi" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2). But they are referred to as sinner only three times.
 - d. Choose to live out the truth.
5. Do not confuse sadness over past sin with blame or guilt. Sadness over sin is a normal emotion that is part of life. Regret is normal but should not be allowed to control. Seek to learn from past sin and grow through it.
 - a. Past forgiven sin produces high appreciation for God's mercy and grace.

How have you dealt with true guilt and false guilt? What was the result?

F. Distinguish between a quick glance or a constant gaze in the rearview mirror of the past.

1. A glance at the past is as appropriate as glancing from time to time in the rearview mirror of your car.
 - a. King David said after he acknowledged his sin, “and my sin is always before me.” Perhaps it was because the consequences of his sin were ever before him.
2. Your gaze or focus should be on the present and future just as you look out the windshield of your car to see where you are going. If you drive forward looking through the rearview mirror or just your side mirrors, you will ultimately crash.

What would a glance or a gaze look like as it relates to past forgiven sin?

How would a person’s life be different if it was reversed?

G. What positive benefit is there to my memories of past sin?

1. Seek to make your present relationships a trophy (example) of one who has experienced grace and mercy based on giving or receiving forgiveness. Build a display case in your mind of your forgiven sin. The Apostle Paul did this.
 - a. Paul used the past memory of his sin as a trophy (example) to the church of God’s perfect patience and mercy.
 - 1) 1 Tim. 1:12-16 “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; ¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. ¹⁶And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate his perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

- 2) Note: v. 13 He remembered the depth of his sin – “a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent aggressor” (violently arrogant).
- 3) He still believed in his mind he was the worst sinner that ever lived (v. 15 “to save sinners, of whom I am chief”).
 - a) “I am” (present active indicative) being the chief of sinners right now. He was not doing those things now but the fact remains that he did them. Paul believed that no one had ever sinned any worse than he did-he was the worst of the lot.
- 4) Why did God choose Paul? “That in me, first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering (perfect patience) as a pattern (trophy) to those who are going to believe on Him...” vs.16.
- 5) If the worst of the worst can be saved and forgiven, anyone can.

Would you agree with Paul’s assessment of being the worst human being on earth? Who would you say was worse than Paul?

Why do you believe he felt that way even knowing the huge atrocities many of the Old Testament kings committed? (CF 2 Kings3:21)

- b. Paul’s past memory of his sin gave him a huge appreciation for grace, not guilt. Grace is free to remember what guilt tries to forget.
 - 1) I Cor. 15:9-10, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit (qualified) to be called an apostle. (Why?) Because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”
 - 2) His past was simply a backdrop (frame) on which to display his life as a trophy of God’s grace in his life.
 - 3) You cannot appreciate who he was if you do not know what he had been.
- c. Paul’s memories greatly motivated him to maintain a humble attitude.
 - 1) 1 Cor. 15:9, “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

- d. The only thing Paul put in his past, not to be brought up to brag about, was his self-righteous accomplishments in Judaism.
 - 1) Phil. 3:13, “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead.”
 - 2) Dr. Robert Lightner, associate professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, “Paul refused to be controlled or absorbed by his past heritage (not sin) (vv. 5-7) or his attainments (v. 8). (BKC, NT. P. 661)
 - a) This verse is often misused and quoted totally out of context and in ignorance of the rest of Paul’s testimony in his other letters. Paul did not forget his past sin. He chose not to focus on his past accomplishments (Phil. 3:4-8).
 - 3) Paul recalled his past sins and used the memories of them in appropriate ways in his letters (I Tim 1:13). He did not mention those memories in every letter.
- e. Joseph also never forgot the evil done to him by his brothers but he assigned a positive purpose to his brothers’ past offense.
 - 1) Gen. 50:20, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.”
 - 2) Sadly, his brothers never processed their sin and it was always in the back of their minds.
 - a) Gen. 42:21, “Then they said to one another, “We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore, this distress has come upon us.”
- 2. Use your memories of forgiven sin as a basis for your present expressions of love for God. This is in contrast to feelings of guilt, shame or fear.
 - a. Jesus illustrated this principle with a forgiven prostitute.
 - 1) Jesus explained to Simon, the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) the process of using memories of forgiven sin as motivation for love. At Simon’s dinner party, he failed to fulfill the normal custom of having a servant wash his guests’ feet. A harlot came and washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and wiped His feet with her hair and was continuously kissing His

feet, a sign of utmost respect, submission and affection. Simon was shocked. He knew for her to touch Him disqualified Jesus to go into the temple. Then Jesus spoke to Simon while looking at the woman.

- 2) Luke 7:47, “For this reason I say to you (Simon), her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little” or has forgotten what he has been forgiven.
 - a) “Have been forgiven” perfect tense verb. It happened sometime in the past but the results of the forgiveness continue into the present.
 - b) “For she loved much” Dr. John Martin states, “...The woman was not forgiven because of her love; rather, she loved because she was forgiven.” (p. 229, B.K.C., N.T.)
 - c) Her love for Jesus was as deep as her memory of her forgiven sin.
 - d) Jesus had forgiven this woman but did not forget her sin. Jesus was (is) God and He remembered what He had forgiven.
- b. Paul illustrated how he used memories of his forgiven sin to prompt his present love for the Lord and dedication to serve Him.
 - 1) 2 Cor. 5:14, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.
- c. Use your memories of forgiven sin as a motivation to love and to serve others now. Key: Loving and serving are not from a motivation of repentment to God but out of appreciation for receiving His forgiveness.
 - 1) You could not live long enough and do enough good to repay God or anyone else for your past sin nor could others live long enough to repay you for their past sin against you.
3. The concept of self-forgiveness can blunt your love for Jesus which should be a result of His forgiveness.

H. How should I pray when memories of past forgiven sins come to mind?

Steps to Love

1. Thank Him for the memory.
2. Thank Him for the forgiveness.
3. Love Him out of your gratefulness.

I. How should I pray when memories of others' sins against me come to mind?

Memories of Offenses

1. Thank Him for the memory.
2. Thank Him for the grace to forgive.
3. Thank Him for using it in your life for good.

J. What if I can't forget others' past sins?

1. Accept the reality you may never forget others' past sin.
2. Review what you did with it.
3. The Apostle Paul did not forget others' past sin.
 - a. 1 Cor. 6:9-11, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."
 - b. But notice what he did with those memories. He also recalled the process God took them through; washed, sanctified and justified (vs.11).

K. Do I have to trust those I have forgiven? NO!

1. Distinguish between granting forgiveness and earning trust.
2. We forgive offenders because of what Christ has done on the cross. The offender has to earn trust because of what he has done on earth.
3. Forgiveness you grant immediately as a gift to the offender.

- a. Eph. 4:26, “Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”
 - b. When an offender confesses his sin to God, that handles the “legal” part of forgiveness.
 - c. When an offender confesses his sin to those he offended, that handles the relational part of forgiveness.
4. Trust is what the offender earns over time as a partial effort to heal an offended one who is living with the memories and consequences of his forgiven sin. It is not punishment.
 - a. Rebuilding trust focuses on the relational part as a result of the offense.
 - b. Rebuilding trust is hard to do and takes time.
 - 1) Prov. 18:19, “A brother offended is harder to be won (back) than (to scale) a strong city.”
 - c. For those dealing with an alcoholic, violent or otherwise abusive person, it may be helpful to separate for a period of time and provide space and peace that will allow us to begin to heal personally.
 - d. Forgiveness implies you grant the offender an opportunity to rebuild trust.
 5. Trust is built on repentance which includes a changed heart (thinking) with confirming actions of the inward change.
 - a. King David had to learn the need to change his heart after his adultery.
 - 1) Ps. 51:16, 17, “For You do not delight in sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart - These, O God, You will not despise.”
 - b. David was willing to jump through hoops of performance but he saw clearly that God wanted a change of heart, not just a changed performance.
 6. Trust that is demanded by a former offender will only result in delayed rebuilding of trust. Those who demand trust have rarely earned it and may be frightened by the emotional separation they have caused by their offense.

L. Do I have to automatically have a relationship with the one I have forgiven?

1. Distinguish between granting or receiving forgiveness and restoring relationships.
2. Understand that forgiveness is not the automatic restoration of relationships.
 - a. Forgiveness is a part of the process but is not the whole process.
 - b. Rekindling trust and learning to trust are the hardest parts of rebuilding relationships because of memories and losses of past hurts.
 - 1) Jesus forgave those who were killing Him, but it did not establish a relationship with them as Jesus did with one of the thieves on the cross.
 - a) Luke 23:34, "But Jesus was saying [to the executing soldiers], 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots dividing up His garments among themselves."
 - b) Luke 23:43, "And He said to him [the thief on the cross], 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'"
 - 2) Forgiveness is unconditional but relationships are conditional.
 - a) God loves everyone unconditionally, but He has established conditions for a relationship (John 3:16; I John 1:5-10).
 - b) Matt. 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

M. What is my responsibility in restoring the relationship?

1. Accept the responsibility to either go to one who has offended you or the one you have offended and seek to be reconciled. The reconciliation will include forgiveness, but it may also include restitution and rebuilding trust.
2. This is the strategy if your brother offends you.
 - a. Matt. 18:15-17, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

3. This is the strategy if you offended your brother.
 - a. Matt. 5:23-24, “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”
 - 1) The Greek word “reconciliation” is only used here in New Testament. *Diallagethi* has an added preposition “dia” to the regular Greek word for reconciliation. It means “together,” both feel reconciled. But in the end times people will be “irreconcilable” (2 Tim. 3:2).
 - 2) But it is not a guarantee it will work. 2Tim. 3:2 “irreconcilable”
 - b. If you have confessed your sin to God you have been forgiven (1 John 1:9), that is the judicial part of the offence. When you go to an offended brother and acknowledge your sin; that is the restoration of the relationship part of the offense.
 - c. If you confess your sin to God, you are forgiven by Him. Even if others will not forgive you, you are still forgiven by God (2 Tim. 3:2).
4. Choose to accept the reality to live with the consequences of others’ sin against you. You will live with them whether you forgive or not. Your only choice is to live free through forgiveness or stay enslaved in the bondage of bitterness. Like Jesus, you must take the offenses of others upon yourself and use them for your benefit and for God’s glory.
 - a. Is. 53:5, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”
 - b. Gen 50:20, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Keys for success

1. Realize forgiveness and memories are two separate things.
2. Remember God does not forgive and forget.
3. Choose not to bring up a forgiven sin against an offender.
4. Treat memories of forgiven sin like canceled checks.
5. Be grateful your sin debt is paid in full.
6. Test guilt feelings with truth.
7. Use memories as reminders of God's grace and mercy.
8. Glance; don't gaze in the past.
9. Be a trophy of mercy and grace.
10. Let memories keep you humble.
11. Use your memories as a motivation to love God in the present.
12. Accept the fact you'll never forget.
13. Grant forgiveness, earn trust.
14. Take the initiative to give or to receive forgiveness.

BUILDING MEMORIALS FROM MEMORIES

Small Group Questions

1. What experience have you had with being told to forgive and forget? How has it worked for you or anyone else you know?
2. How have you distinguished between true guilt and false guilt and what difference did it make in your life?
3. What are some of the lies Satan has attempted to instill in you regarding your past? How have you dealt with them? What was the result?
4. How would your life be different if you developed the discipline of recalling both your sin and what you did with it (i.e. forgiven)?
5. What is your life a trophy of today as a result of receiving past forgiveness? How could you use this to help another brother?
6. What patterns have you used to forget things either done to you or that you have done yourself? How successful were they? As a result, what would you recommend your brother do or not do from what you learned?
7. What experiences have you had in rebuilding trust? What did you do? How effective was it?
8. Describe a time when you did everything you could do to restore a fractured relationship and it didn't happen. What did God teach you through that experience?
9. What one thing you are going to do differently now? How can your group encourage you to follow through?

Bibliography

Lynch, Charles M. *I Should Forgive, But...Finding Release from the Bondage of Anger and Bitterness*. Nashville, Tennessee: Word Publishing, 1998.

Walvoord, John and Ray Zuck editors. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old and New Testament*. Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985.

Living Foundation Ministries ~ 611 NW R.D. Mize Rd. ~ Blue Springs, MO 64014 ~ 816-229-5000
Lfmlynch@yahoo.com ~ www.help4living.org