

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-25 Christian Life: Forgiving Yourself

Take a minute and ask yourself, “What Bible character would I like to meet in heaven?” Who do you expect to see in heaven? Who do you think would be surprised to see you there? This lesson is the first in a series on ‘Living the Christian Life.’ The first step toward living such a life is becoming a Christian in the first place. How does that happen? The apostle Paul said, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). But sometimes, even though you know God has forgiven you, you may have trouble forgiving yourself for the sinful things you have done.

The New Testament tells many stories and events that occurred in the life and ministry of Jesus and his disciples. The Old Testament records the lives of the prophets and the way people responded to their message. Many of the accounts give some detail on the struggles people faced in Bible times. They also show the guidance and instruction God laid out for his people to follow. Some men and women failed God and came short of his intention for their lives. Others obeyed and followed God’s direction. We read stories of small people who became large by the power of God. We meet heroes and villains, people winning and losing. We read both of God’s patience with the actions of people and his judgment. Often we don’t get the complete story. We wonder why they made the decisions they did or why they took the path they chose.

Have you ever wondered what you would have done if you had lived in Bible times? What if you had walked in the sandals of Bible characters? Perhaps you have seen the mistakes they made and have thought, “I may have done the same thing.”

The story is told of a young boy who went to church all his life. He went with his parents each day of worship. He attended small groups that discussed the Bible and the life of Jesus and his disciples. He listened at home as his parents and friends related their experiences with God. He always said, “When I get to heaven I am going to ask Peter, ‘Did you ever walk on the water again?’ And I’ll ask Noah, ‘Did you ever worry that you would run out of food on the ark?’”

This young boy grew up and had a family. He shared these same stories with his children and grandchildren. As the imaginary story goes, after a long life the man died and was greeted by Peter at the gates to heaven. Peter welcomed him and enquired whether there was anything he wanted to ask. The man looked at Peter with excitement and said that he wanted to meet the prodigal son. When Peter asked why, he said, “Because I was a lot like him. I wanted what was mine no matter the cost to others.”

So Peter looked in his book. As he flipped the pages he told the man that the prodigal son was not there. So the man asked about the rich young ruler, who went away sad after talking to Christ. Peter again looked down the columns on the pages and again answered that no rich young ruler was there. Being a bit surprised with Peter’s answers, the man asked again, “How about the dishonest tax collector, the woman taken in adultery, or the thief on the cross?”

Peter looked up from the book, walked over to the elderly man, and put his hand on his shoulder. Looking him in the eyes, he said kindly, “Son, I could not find those people you mentioned, because in the Book of Life we have only one column in which to list people who enter heaven. That column is titled, ‘the Bride of Christ.’ Here you are known for who you are, a child of God, not for what you have done.”

Sitting down with the man, Peter continued, “You see, I was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. I walked on water and in the name of Jesus I healed the sick. I cut off the ear of a guard in defense of Jesus and sadly...,” he paused. “I later denied three times that I knew him, even though I did. The look that Jesus gave me when I denied him the third time still burns in my heart. And for years I remembered his look of disappointment. Each time a cock crows, I remember Jesus’ prediction that I would deny him” (Luke 22:54-62). I don’t know if I could have forgiven myself, without Jesus’ kindness to me before he left us. He asked me three times, just like I denied him three times, whether I loved him. Each time I answered yes, he told me to feed his lambs and tend his sheep. I could forgive myself because he had forgiven me. I had been redeemed. My name was changed from Simon to Peter, the rock. Whoever confesses that Jesus is Messiah, the Son of the living God, like I did that day, becomes a part of that Bride of Christ” (Matt 16:16-18).

Though the story about the man and Peter is an imaginary one, it teaches a profound truth. Often in life people are known by the mistakes they have made. Someone says, “There goes that thief.” Or, “Be careful, he’s a liar.” And, “Look at her, she broke up that guy’s marriage.” It is easy to identify ourselves and others by the wrongs in our lives and not see ourselves as the Bride of Christ. Because we see people reaping the results of their sins, does not mean that God has not forgiven them. God sees you differently than you may see yourself.

The Scriptures teach that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (Matt 8:44). He lies about us to others and even to us about ourselves. Satan seeks to destroy your sense of self-worth and your confidence in what Christ has done for you. But the real danger comes when you believe the lie he has told. Often that lie comes through a friend or family member, even someone you trusted. Pastors and leaders often encounter people who are depressed by the lies others are telling about them. Satan tempts them to take their own life, because they are “no good” or “the family would be better off if you were dead.” Anyone whose sins are covered by the blood of Christ is made worthy and redeemed. God sees them as though they have never sinned at all. As a counselor, you can say, “If God has forgiven you, you must forgive yourself. Ask him to help you, and he will.”

Christian counselors should not allow people to continually dwell on their wicked past. It can even be a temptation for someone to take pride in how bad they were. They may be giving glory to Satan more than to God, who has saved them. Our God loves the sinner, while hating sin. There is a true saying that goes like this: “The devil knows your name but calls you by your sin; God knows your sin, but calls you by your name.”

As a minister, you must encourage people using David’s words in the Psalms: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ... He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 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” (Ps 103:8, 10-12).

This lesson is **important** because it illustrates the fact that once a person is redeemed, their past is forgiven and not remembered any more by God. God sees their sin covered by the blood of Jesus. Though people may find it difficult to forgive themselves, God will help them to overcome the lies Satan whispers in their ears. The Holy Spirit in us is greater than the devil that is in the world.

The **main truth** of this story is that to live the Christian life, a person must know that their past is forgiven. Each day God gives strength to forgive ourselves and to overcome evil.

Let's **review** this lesson by answering these questions:

1. How does God see those whose sin has been forgiven? [Pause]
A. If you said, "He sees them as the Bride of Christ, washed in his blood," you are right.

2. Who can you name, other than Jesus Christ, that has not sinned and come short of God's expectation? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "No one, all have sinned and come short of God's expectation," you answered correctly.

3. How will we be known in heaven? [Pause]
A. If you said that we will be known as redeemed children of God, not by what we have done, you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this story, paying special attention to the scriptures about Peter. Share the important message of God's forgiveness with someone you know. Ask God to help you find someone who is discouraged. Memorize this verse and teach it to that person too: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). Rename any people in your life that you have labeled by the mistakes they have made or are making. Rename yourself from "sinner" to "a sinner saved by grace."