**MOVING FORWARD**

**WITH AN UNFORGIVEN PAST**

Sunday School Lesson 9

*FORMER THINGS*

Joshua 24:19

4/3/2022

**Introduction:** We were originally going to look at guilt this morning, but I believe it’s time to cover the topic of an unforgiven past. Let’s quickly recap what we have covered so far in our first eight lessons on former things. In the first lesson, we looked at the dynamics of the past. In the second lesson, we looked at the power of the past. In the third and fourth lesson, we looked at the deception of nostalgia. In the fifth and sixth lesson, we looked at how to deal with our regrets. In the seventh and eighth lesson, we looked at the shame that comes as a result of our regrets. Turning now to this topic of unforgiveness, let me first remind you again that if we confess our sins, the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us of them and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The Lord forgives us because He loves us. Let me also remind you that as Christians we are commanded to forgive. Our love for the brethren should prompt us to offer that forgiveness to them. It is a shame that this topic even has to be covered, as it would not be an issue if we simply obeyed the Bible and forgave those who wrong us in this world. Nonetheless, we understand that we may have to endure through this life while carrying around regrets and disappointments that others won’t forgive us of. Let us consider the following thoughts as it relates to this topic of an unforgiven past:

1. **YOU MUST RECOGNIZE THAT YOU CANNOT FORCE SOMEONE TO FORGIVE YOU.**
2. **Notice that the offender is simply instructed to seek and ask for forgiveness from the Lord first and then from those whom he has wronged (James 5:16; Ps. 32:5; Nehemiah 9:2-3; Matt. 5:23-24).** As we go down this road of studying unforgiveness, let us first remember the simple truth that the offender is instructed only to seek forgiveness from the Lord for wrongs that he has done and then to seek forgiveness from others whom he has wronged as well. How many times do we have to confess a specific sin before the Lord? The answer is one because we know that He has forgiven us and forgotten our transgression against Him. How many times are we instructed to go to a brother and seek forgiveness for a wrong that we have committed against him? The Bible does not give us a specific number, but it just simply tells us to go and confess our faults. However, we don’t find any examples in Scripture that incline us to think that we are to keep asking for forgiveness for the same wrong over and over again. When the Lord told Peter to forgive seventy times seven, He was not talking about forgiving the same sin that many times but forgiving seventy times seven trespasses against him.
3. **Notice that while the offended party is instructed to forgive, he is the only one who can make the choice whether to forgive or not (Gen. 50:15-18; Col. 3:13; Eph. 4:32; Mk. 11:25; 18:21; Dan. 9:9).** It is a very frustrating thing to ask for forgiveness and to have that request denied. Yet, what can a person do if the offended party will not forgive him? Certainly, we must understand that you cannot force anyone to forgive you. Many times, we may even make the situation worse by trying to strongarm someone into offering us forgiveness. Also, what does it say about us if we feel a great need to make a person forgive us? Are we doing it for their benefit or for our own? If we are being honest, we often want them to forgive us to help us appease our shame and guilt that we are feeling. We may also want them to forgive us so that we can enjoy the friendship again that we previously had with that person. It is rarely the case that we want them to forgive us because we are truly concerned that they will not get answered prayers unless they offer us forgiveness. We must be patient with the offended party and understand that it is ultimately their choice whether to offer us forgiveness or not.
4. **YOU MUST REALIZE THAT ANGER IS AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO YOUR OFENSE.**

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1. **Notice that anger is a valid response to being wronged, and it is possible to be angry without sinning against God (Genesis 27:45; Deut. 9:8; 1 Kings 11:9; Neh. 5:6; Ps. 79:5; Ephesians 4:26).** When you wrong someone, you can expect their anger as a normal and valid response. How many times do we find in Scripture where the Lord was angry because He had been wronged by His people? There are many examples of this throughout the Bible. Thus, we should not be surprised when a wronged individual is angry with us. Ephesians 4:26 shows us that anger in and of itself is not a sin. Again, this is obviously true because of the anger of the Lord. Now, that does not mean that every person who thinks they have been wronged is justified to be angry, as they might find that they themselves were actually the ones in the wrong. We’ve probably all had this happen where we were angry at an offense only to find out that we misunderstood the situation. However, if the offense and the offending party is clearly in the wrong, then the offended party is justified by the accompanying anger.
2. **Notice that the offender has no authority in Scripture to rebuke the anger of the one he has offended unless that person is sinning against the Lord (Ex. 32:19-22; 2 Sam. 19:40-43; Jonah 4).** This is something that we must consider carefully. I’ve seen this situation take place where the offending party attempts to rebuke the offended party for being angry by the wrong that was done against them. This is only appropriate if the offended party is actually the one in the wrong, as noted above. An example of this would be Jonah. He was very angry at the Lord because he perceived that the Lord had wronged him. Of course, the Lord had no need to ask for forgiveness, as He is always just and right. Thus, the Lord rebuked Jonah for his anger. This also happened in the Garden of Eden when the Lord rebuked Cain for his anger caused by the rejection of his sacrifice. On the other hand, when Moses broke the ten commandments as a result of his anger, none of the people could say anything against him. If you have any desire to see forgiveness take place for your past actions, do not rebuke justified anger.
3. **YOU MUST RECEIVE THE REBUKE/PUNISHMENT THAT ACCOMPANIES YOUR OFFENSE.**
4. **Notice that the submission to rebuke or punishment is not contingent upon forgiveness being offered (Psalm 25:18; 99:8; Exodus 10:17; 2 Samuel 12).** We find nowhere in Scripture that tells us that we only have to accept rebuke if forgiveness is accompanied with it. The truth of the matter is that we may have to deal with the consequences of our past whether we are forgiven of them or not. Some people get confused between forgiveness and mercy. The Lord can forgive us and yet still choose to withhold his mercy. The best example of this is David. He was forgiven by the Lord for his adultery and murder, but he still had to face the punishment that accompanied his sin. This is the principle of sowing and reaping. When it comes to seeking forgiveness from others, we must accept the punishment that accompanies our wrong, even if the wronged party does not offer us their forgiveness. Some folks resist rebuke or punishment because they do not see forgiveness come along with it. Our responsibility is to accept what we have reaped regardless of the demeanor of the person we are seeking forgiveness from.
5. **Notice that mercy, grace, and compassion are hopeful things. If we don’t receive them, it doesn’t mean that we haven’t been forgiven (Psalm 78:38; 85:7; 86:16; Daniel 9:9; 2 Chronicles 7:14).** We cannot demand these things from the Lord or from others. God gives out His mercy, grace, and compassion with great measure. He is very generous because He loves us dearly. Sometimes, we show our entitled attitude when we expect others to show us mercy when we seek forgiveness. If you are a parent, you’ve probably seen your child seek forgiveness from you with an expectation that you would ease up on the punishment. When you don’t, they then choose to get mad at you, and it shows that there is still a problem that has not been dealt with. We should not seek forgiveness just for the hopes of getting a release from the consequences of our wrong. We seek forgiveness because we have wronged someone. Of course, for the person who truly has not been forgiven by someone else, you are likely not going to find any mercy, grace, or compassion from that individual. You must accept this and press forward.
6. **YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT SOMETHING THAT IS EARNED.**
7. **Notice that forgiveness is not meant to be a “wait and see” decision (Psalm 86:5; Luke 7:42-43; Colossians 3:13; James 5:15; Luke 23:34; 17:4).** For thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive! This is an amazing characteristic of our Lord. He does not offer forgiveness with a wait and see approach. He stands ready to forgive. Of course, it is somewhat different compared to others giving forgiveness because the Lord can actually see our hearts and minds. Others do not have the benefit of knowing whether we are sincere in seeking forgiveness or not. Nonetheless, the Bible makes it clear that forgiveness is to be given when it is requested. Thus, we understand that forgiveness is a gift. It is not something that we can set out to earn. Many people struggle with moving forward from an unforgiven past because they think that they have to somehow earn a person’s forgiveness. If forgiveness can be earned, then it is not the Godly forgiveness that we find in the Word of God.
8. **Notice that our desire for reconciliation ought to rest on the restorative power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; John 16:13; Romans 8:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:11-13; Ephesians 4:4).** As believers, we are all part of one Spirit and one body. As a result, there is no place for unforgiveness among the body of believers. Thus, if you find yourself in a place where you are dealing with an unforgiven past, do not focus your efforts on earning a person’s forgiveness. Instead, focus on letting the Spirit of God work in you and make you what you ought to be. If the Spirit is working in you and in them, then there should be a reconciliation that inevitably takes place. The reason why we don’t see this happen often is that we aren’t focused on growing in grace and truth through the Holy Spirit. To put this as simply as possible, we must focus on ourselves. Even if you never get forgiveness from that individual that you desire it from, the Lord has forgiven you and wants to use you to accomplish His will.