

Totally Forgiving Ourselves (Matt 6:8-13; Mark 12:30-31)

Reference - 'Totally Forgiving Ourselves' by R.T. Kendall



A. Guilt

1. To grow in our Christian walk we need **three areas of relationship** in our lives to be put right: (i) relationship with God - accepting God's forgiveness; (ii) with others – forgive others; (iii) with myself – forgive ourselves.

'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' (Mark 12:30-31)

We forgive in proportion to how much we love, and we hate in proportion to how much we withhold forgiveness.

Relationship	Forgiveness	Great Commandment
i) With God	Accept God's forgiveness	Love God
ii) With others	Forgive others	Love your neighbour
iii) Toward myself	Forgive myself	As yourself

2. *Have you ever felt guilty at the thought of forgiving yourself?* What I have done is so horrible that I do not deserve to be set free from guilt. I must pay for my failure. I must get just punishment. It is totally unfair for me to be totally forgiven.
 - i) The implication of forgiving myself is, *not only letting myself off the hook completely, but also setting myself free from any punishment.* Apostle Paul had persecuted, even tortured Christians (Phil 3:6; Acts 22:4-6; 26:10-11), but he went on to say, *'This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize of what God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.'* (Phil 3:13-14).
 - ii) Paul not only knew he was forgiven, he had to forgive himself – *'For I know of nothing against myself (my conscience is clear, NIV), yet I am not justified by this; but he who judges me is the Lord. (1 Cor 4:3-4)* Paul was so free from guilt over his past. He refused to go where God Himself declared *'No trespassing allowed.'*
3. **1 John 4:18** – *'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who hears has not been made perfect in love.'*

'Fear has to do with punishment. (KJV)'

People living in fear are obsessed with the idea of punishment. Fear is its own punishment. When we live in fear, we live under the fear of future punishment by God. If that's not enough, we punish ourselves by beating ourselves black and blue. If that too is not enough, we take it out on others. We fear justice isn't going to be carried out on those who have been unjust to us. So, we take God's place and take it upon ourselves to punish them. *'For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the LORD.'* (Heb 10:30) But God has already judged our sins by punishing Christ in our place, and He has declared us forgiven and righteous!

B. Why you must forgive yourself

1. It is God's command. This is the will of God for you. This is what God wants from you. *It pleases God.* It is sin not to forgive yourself (Eph 4:31-32). God has paid such a high price to forgive your sins. So when you carry the burden of guilt, it does not honour the blood of Jesus one bit. It grieves God when we hate and punish ourselves for our sin. God doesn't say, *'You need to feel sufficiently guilty before you can be truly forgiven.'* God wants you to be totally free! *'A bruised reed he will not break'* (Matt 12:20)

2. Satan does not want you forgiven or to forgive yourself. (Whatever Satan wants you to do, do exactly the opposite, and you will do pretty well.)
 - i) Satan loves your misery. Your bondage makes him happy. You are no threat to him when you are under the torment of guilt from the past, fearing God's punishment, punishing yourself, or punishing others. Such a person is an accident waiting to blow up.
 - ii) Open door to Satan – Apostle Paul wrote, *'I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.'* (2 Cor 2:10-11) My unforgiveness is an invitation for the devil to move in and do what he wants with me.
 - iii) How? The unresolved torment, fear or anger has only two places to go - self-righteousness and self-pity, the ugly twin. They kill our future in God.
3. The only right attitude towards yourself is to learn to love yourself in the grace of God. There is a difference between 'loving yourself' by faith and obedience to God's word, and being a 'self-centred lover of self'.
 - i) A blessed person is one who has truly forgiven himself. *'Bless (happy) are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.'* (Ps 21:1-2 c.f. Rom 4:7-8)
 - ii) This leads to the blessing of peace. Great peace follows when we forgive others. There is equally true when we forgive ourselves. It may be sudden or incremental.
 - iii) It is good for your physical, emotional, mental health. Holding grudge will injure our health – high blood pressure, heart disease, arthritis, etc. It is difficult for God to use us if we are conflicted on the inside and falling apart!
 - iv) When you have totally forgiven yourself, it brings the right kind of confidence God can use. Often people who haven't forgiven themselves do not look into people's eyes directly. They look down. Peter 'wept bitterly' after denying Jesus three times (Matt 26:69-75). Seven weeks later Peter was fearless as he preached Christ. How! Peter knew he was totally forgiven, so he totally forgave himself.
4. The degree to which you forgive yourself can directly lead to your usefulness to God.
 - i) Our spiritual health is dependent on our relationship with the Holy Spirit. *'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.'* (Eh 4:30) When we are filled with anger and bitterness, we grieve the Holy Spirit. The key to cultivating the presence of God is knowing 'God is with you and He is for you', and 'God is pleased with you.'
 - ii) Forgiving yourself totally will help you to love other people. Some people don't like themselves. This is not a Christian virtue. It is not surprising that these people struggle to like other people. When you forgive yourself fully, your perception of yourself and also others change. People who forgave themselves are likable or easy to get along with. If you have a problem of people generally not liking you, the place to begin may be forgiving yourself - totally.
 - iii) It will free you from being paralysed by the past, and enable you to fulfill what God has called you to do. Forgiving yourself fully is keeping no record of wrong against yourself. Don't be afraid! Forgiving yourself is refusing to point the finger at yourself in a way that keeps you feeling guilty.

C. False Guilt and True Guilt

Much confusion can be resolved by distinguishing between false guilt and true guilt. We must identify and dignify what is from God – conviction over 'true guilt'. We must detect and reject what is not from God – self-condemnation over 'false guilt'. If we can do these two things, we are well on our way to totally forgive ourselves.

1. What is false guilt? It is a sense of shame in our hearts that God did not put there. (pseudo-guilt or counterfeit guilt which is untrue or a lie). There is no sin involved. Holy Spirit does not convict you over 'false guilt'. However, false guilt is real. It is painful. It can be torturous. The irony is that often we don't

feel guilty when we actually sin before God - which we should so that we can come to God and be free - but we often feel guilty with pseudo-guilt. After David sinned terribly with Bathsheba, he did not feel much guilt for two years until he was confronted by Nathan the prophet!

2. Where does false guilt come from? The 'flesh' (unregenerate soul), or the devil and demons. Sin and an imperfect upbringing gave us a broken psychological blueprint, so we are vulnerable to false guilt. Satan is an expert in making us feel guilty (Rev 12:10).
3. These are some examples of false guilt, which are not from true sin, but we can condemn ourselves.
 - i) We feel guilty for not visiting a friend or calling him often enough. The sense of obligation leads to feelings of guilt.
 - ii) We set aside a day to do a lot of work, but we wasted the whole day because we were ineffective, and we feel guilty.
 - iii) We can feel guilty over a hobby we really enjoy in case we enjoy it too much. We are afraid of possible idolatry or of loving our hobby more than Jesus.
 - iv) We feel guilty for not liking certain people. How unchristian not to like everyone!
 - v) We do NOT deal with pseudo guilt by (a) repression or denial (b) overreaction (c) control or manipulation. A guilt trip never brings us closer to God.
4. How can Christians deal with false guilt? We identify and recognise it as not coming from God. Do not be controlled by it. Do not respect it by giving it time. It is not a sin to feel 'pseudo guilt', but if we let it control us then it becomes a real problem.
 - i) We can have pseudo guilt toward God. 'I have let Him down when in fact I haven't.' We set a standard God doesn't require of us. 'Praying certain hours a day, reading certain chapters of Bible a day, etc.' If we are motivated by pseudo-guilt rather than love and desire for God, we need to stop and assess ourselves.
 - ii) We can have pseudo guilt toward people when we feel we've let them down. Children can feel guilty when they do not make the grades their parents expect of them.
5. Some heart-wrenching examples of false guilt are:
 - i) A father reversed his car out of the garage, and did not see his two-year-old son. He ran over the child and killed him. The father blamed himself forever. But this was not a true sin.
 - ii) A young man in the military was ordered to shoot and kill their enemies in battle. He could get over his sense of guilt for taking human lives.
 - iii) A man in his fifties made a bad investment decision and lost most of his life savings. He blamed himself for ruining the lives of his wife and children.
 - iv) What should these people do? All these people are affected by a powerful sense of guilt. Some of them wonder if God punished them. Where does this come from? This sense of guilt is not from God. Was God punishing them? No, we live in a fallen world. *'Time and chance happen to them all.'* (Eccl 9:11)
6. How about when true guilt is involved?
 - i) Confess your sin before God sincerely and then receive with both hands the forgiveness God offers you (1 Jn 1:9) 'Feeling guilty' after God forgives you is false guilt. Admit 'not forgiving yourself' is sin. Then refuse to dwell in it ever again! Esteem the pleasure of God higher than pleasing ourselves or others. (C.f. Jn 5:44) Dignifying pseudo-guilt is dishonouring Christ's blood.
 - ii) False guilt should be treated like temptation. Recognise for what it is, then refuse it and resist it. Refuse to think about it (James 1:13-15).
 - iii) Jesus never felt any guilt of any kind – except when our sin was laid upon Him on the cross. He wants total freedom from guilt for you and me.