

SESSION 4

GOD IS FORGIVING



What rule did you break the most growing up?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLforgiving

God always forgives when I truly repent.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Sometimes forgiveness is hard—really hard.

“She walked out on our kids and our 20-year marriage to do what she wanted to do.” “We trusted this advisor, and now our life savings and retirement are gone for good.” “He hurt my daughter.” “He opened fire in a school.”

Those aren’t scenarios in which we expect to hear the word “forgiveness.” And why should we? Especially if the person who did wrong isn’t sorry. Wouldn’t forgiving such a person be the same as approving what he or she did? We can’t forget. We can’t trust the person any longer. So why should we forgive?

One answer to that question is to remember how much God has forgiven us. He forgives us when we walk away. He forgives us when we squander and abuse all that He has given us. He forgives us when we hurt His children—those He loves.

The short letter of 1 John shows us just how far God will go to forgive.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 John 1:5–2:2 (HCSB)

1:5 Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him.

6 If we say, “We have fellowship with Him,” yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth.

7 But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say, “We don’t have any sin,” we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

2:1 My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One.

2 He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.

Key Words

Fellowship (1:6)—The Greek root word means “common.” This term implies that those in fellowship with one another share things in common as part of their relationship.

Advocate (2:1)—One who stands beside. The related verb means “encourage,” “exhort,” “counsel,” or “comfort.” In John’s Gospel, it refers to the Holy Spirit, but here to Jesus.

Propitiation (2:2)—The Greek word refers to the appeasement of God’s wrath against sin through the appropriate sacrifice, which could only occur through the death of God’s Son.



What evidence do you see of darkness and light in your town or community?

QUESTION #2

1 John 1:5-10

God gave our world the wonderful gift of friendship, but He gave Christians specifically the additional gift of fellowship. Fellowship goes far beyond friendship; it's tied to something that unites us in a powerful way because of what we share in common. Fellowship points to the intimate spiritual connection between Christians—a connection that exists both in and through Jesus Christ.

The opening verses of 1 John tie our fellowship with God and with His Son to the eternal life we have in Him (vv. 2-3). And here's the interesting thing: if I have eternal life and fellowship with God, and you also have it, then we have fellowship with each other. With that in mind, how do we gain this fellowship with God? How do we access it? Only through the forgiveness that is available through Christ.

John used the metaphor of "light" when writing about God. He described God as having "absolutely no darkness in Him," which is a reference to God's perfection. Only God is truly perfect, and God's perfection makes Him the embodiment of righteousness. As the Righteous One, He exists in unapproachable light.

We are not perfect. Because we have sin in our lives, we are in darkness. And if we're living in darkness, we cannot possibly be living in the light as well—not on our own. But the great news for us is that Christ removes our sin and forgives us. Consequently, He moves us away from darkness and into the light of God and fellowship with Him.

We can look at God's forgiveness in two ways. We'll call the first one "judicial forgiveness," and it occurs when God—acting as the Righteous Judge—grants us salvation.

When we submit to Jesus as our Savior, we are forgiven and declared righteous by God (see Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 1:7). This is called "justification"; it's a one-time event that can never be repeated. Judicial forgiveness, then, establishes our never-ending relationship with God. Believers who trust in Christ not only escape God's wrath, but are granted everlasting life in heaven (see John 3:16) and an abundant life on Earth (see John 10:10).

That brings up an interesting question: *If God forgives my sin and brings me into a relationship (fellowship) with Him, what happens if I sin again? Do I lose that relationship?* Read on.

What emotions do you experience at the thought of confessing your sin?

QUESTION #3

BARRIERS TO FORGIVENESS



Circle any of the above obstacles that prevent you from repenting of your sin and seeking God's forgiveness.

What's one step you can take to begin knocking down those obstacles and move toward forgiveness?

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1 John 2:1-2

John wrote these truths so that we “may not sin.” As Christians, we are not to live in a way that’s characterized by disobedience. Still, the tendency toward sin remains powerful, and because it’s embedded in our very nature, we still can—and do—sin (see Rom. 7:14-24).

So, back to our question: *If Christ’s forgiveness brings me into a relationship with God, what happens when I sin again?*

As believers, we still possess Christ’s forgiveness even when we sin. Jesus is our Advocate before the divine court of God. He is at the right hand of God interceding on our behalf (see Rom. 8:34). This results in salvation, of course, but it also means the availability of ongoing forgiveness. In Christ, we *become* recipients of God’s forgiveness, and we *remain* recipients of that forgiveness.

Earlier, I mentioned judicial forgiveness, which occurs once when God grants us salvation on the basis of the work of Christ. The second way to look at forgiveness could be called “parental forgiveness.” This aspect of forgiveness is required each time we sin.

When a child is disobedient, his relationship with his parents is affected, but he does not cease to be a son. Similarly, when we fall short of obeying God, our relationship with Him remains intact. Since Christians are God’s adopted children, He does not cease to be our Father, nor does He disown us—although fellowship is broken.

We can return to full fellowship with God through confession and repentance (as we saw in 1 John 1:9). Jesus is ever our Advocate, lovingly standing on our behalf. **We can be—and will be—forgiven by God each time we sin.**

How do God’s character qualities (such as holiness, love, and justice) contribute to His forgiving nature?

QUESTION #4

Though Christians receive forgiveness, that doesn't mean we always feel forgiven. Three culprits are to blame for our continuing guilt and shame:

1. Satan accuses us (see Rev. 12:10).
2. Others don't forgive us.
3. We keep reminding ourselves of our past disobedience.

While the Spirit of God convicts believers of sin, His motive is to produce repentance. Since God completely forgives us, we should not allow the accusations of Satan, others, and ourselves to overshadow the truth of our good standing and forgiveness in Christ (see Rom. 8:31-34).

We can live free of those lies by living in the truth of God's forgiveness.

How can people get out from under the burden of guilt after God has forgiven them?

QUESTION #5

"There is ... a peace and rest that you may enjoy with reason and with your eyes open; having all your sins forgiven, your greatest and most aggravated transgressions blotted out as a cloud, and buried as in the depths of the sea, that they may never be found more."

—JONATHAN EDWARDS

LIVE IT OUT

How will you respond to God’s offer of forgiveness?

- ▶ **Step back for a self-evaluation.** As you pray this week, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any areas of unconfessed sin in your life. Confess those sins in that moment.
- ▶ **Let go of false guilt.** Seek out areas in your life where you are living under false guilt for sins already forgiven. Choose to believe and accept God’s offer of forgiveness.
- ▶ **Forgive when it hurts.** Be intentional about forgiving those who have wronged you—even if you don’t want to. Remember that your forgiveness can point others to the ultimate forgiveness in Christ.



You’ve broken God’s rules—a lot. But your fellowship with Him doesn’t have to remain broken. Seek Him and you will find true forgiveness and full restoration.

Forgiveness and Forgetfulness



Think what the apostle Paul must have felt during his final days. In that dark and terrible Roman dungeon, he wrote to his faithful disciple and coworker, Timothy: “At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me” (2 Tim. 4:16). Paul didn’t explain why, but we can speculate. There were many in Rome who had come to Christ through Paul’s ministry; yet, when he faced accusations by the evil Emperor Nero, many who knew about his incarceration deserted him. They were, no doubt, horribly fearful. Nevertheless, this betrayal was perhaps one of Paul’s most painful experiences.



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My group's prayer requests

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My thoughts