

SESSION 2

How Can God's Forgiveness Become Real?

Overview

In our last session, we learned how we can be confident that our relationship with God is secure and unchangeable, regardless of our emotions, experience, or “performance” as His followers.

In this session, we will cover how we can continue to experience God's forgiveness on a daily basis. First, we will look at our need for forgiveness, and we will discuss why many Christians' relationship with God has so little effect on their day to day activities. Then we will look at the problem: what is it that keeps believers living under a heavy load of guilt, not experiencing the forgiveness God offers? Finally, we will look at how we can live in constant communication with God, experiencing His forgiveness and direction every day of our lives.

REAL FAITH

Getting Started

Bible Memory Verse:

I John 1:9

Review the Faith Principle

Faith is living as though the Bible is true, even when I do not feel it is true.

2 Corinthians 5:7 We live by faith, not by sight.

Hebrews 11:6a And without faith it is impossible to please God.

Galatians 3:11b The righteous will live by faith.

Romans 14:23b Everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Phil and Sue

Phil's behavior baffled Sue, his younger sister. While in college, Phil received Christ and helped Sue make the same decision. Now, ten years later, their lives are so different. Phil doesn't seem to care at all about what he does wrong. He says he's forgiven, and he excuses breaking God's laws by talking about God's grace. He doesn't seek to develop his relationship with God at all, and he keeps his distance from others as well. His co-workers, friends, and the women he's dated all wonder why he is so indifferent.

It seems to Sue that nobody tries harder to obey God's laws than she does, but she feels guilty all the time. She drives herself, her kids, and her husband crazy by trying to be perfect and make everybody happy. When she fails to measure up, she can't forgive herself or others. She's trying so desperately to do what is right, but the harder she tries, the worse she feels.

- **Why doesn't Phil's Christianity seem to affect his life?**
- **Why does Sue's Christianity make her so miserable?**

Discuss: **What would you say to Phil?**

What would you say to Sue?

Jesus meant for the Christian life to be an adventure. In John 10:10 (NAS) He said, "I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly" (that it might be full and meaningful). Some Christians truly seem to experience this life of meaning and purpose that Jesus talked about. They seem to know where they are going, and they enjoy the journey. Unfortunately for many other believers, the Christian life is anything but an adventure. For some it is drudgery. For others, their relationship with Jesus has almost no effect on their day-to-day activities.

- ◆ **Why do you think some Christians experience the "abundant life" while others do not?**

What Gets in the Way?

Two key factors must be addressed if the believer is to experience a life of meaning, purpose, and effectiveness for the kingdom of God.

1. We possess a sin nature.

How is our sin nature described in the following Bible passages?

- ◆ Romans 3:10-12
- ◆ Isaiah 53:6
- ◆ Jeremiah 17:9
- ◆ Romans 3:23

NOTE: *Sin is not just a matter of cheating, lying, immoral behavior, etc. These actions are only the results of an attitude of sin. A simple definition of sin is doing what we want instead of what God wants—both in actions and attitudes.*

The Bible is clear that everyone is sinful. Each person is born with an attitude of rebellion towards God. Each person has a natural tendency to rebel against God rather than follow Him.

2. We do not naturally live by faith.

According to the following Scriptures, what has God given to believers in Christ?

- ◆ Colossians 1:13-14

- ◆ Psalm 103:12

- ◆ Romans 8:1

Believers in Christ are no longer condemned for their sins. God has given all Christians His unconditional love, forgiveness, and acceptance. Unfortunately, these truths are diametrically opposed to everything we have been told by our culture, our emotions, and our circumstances. Rather than believing these Biblical truths by faith, our natural tendency is to live as though we are not loved, not forgiven, and not accepted.

Therefore, even though God desires for all Christians to experience the abundant life, all Christians face the daily challenges of a natural tendency to rebel against God and a natural tendency to believe what we are told by our emotions, our circumstances, and our culture. These attitudes, left unchecked, result in a lifestyle of independence from God.

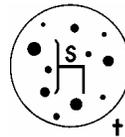
Three Kinds of People

To get a better idea of what this lifestyle of independence from God looks like, let's take a look at the words of the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Corinthian church (a church in which the Christians were living like non-believers), Paul describes three kinds of people.

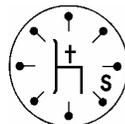
Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3 and note the following spiritual conditions of people:

(The circle = a person's life, the † = Christ, the S = self, and the chair = the control center)

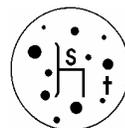
- **Natural** (1 Corinthians 2:14). This is the non-Christian. He does not understand the things of God. They seem foolish to him.



- **Spiritual** (1 Corinthians 2:15-16). This is the Christian who is Christ-controlled, empowered by the Spirit of God.



- **Worldly or Fleshly** (1 Corinthians 3:1-3).



- ◆ **How many of your sins were in the future when Christ died for you?**

Discuss: What has Christ done with the sins you will commit tomorrow or next year?

Relationship versus Fellowship

The Bible is very clear that believers have received forgiveness for all of their sins, past, present, and future. Sin does not affect the Christian's **relationship** with God. It does, however, affect the believers **fellowship** or communication with God. For example, a son's relationship with his earthly father is permanent. No matter what the son does, he will always be the child of his father. Suppose, however, he rebelled against his father and angrily left home in spite of his father's efforts to reach out to him. (Read the story of the godly father and his prodigal son in Luke 15:11-24.)

- **Would he still be his father's child?**
- **What would happen to their fellowship?**
- **Would his father still love him? Would his father forgive him?**

As we discussed in the previous session, the believer's relationship with God is permanent (John 10:27-29; I John 5:11-13; John 6:36-39). But, what do we do when our fellowship with God is interrupted? What do we do when we sin?

Restoring Fellowship with God

According to 1 John 1:9, what are we to do when we sin?

Confession means agreeing with God about our sin. When God brings to your attention that something you have done is wrong, simply confess it to Him.

Confession means agreeing with God about our sin.

There are four aspects to confession:

1. **Agree** with God that you have sinned (1 John 1:9).
2. **Thank** God that He has already forgiven you (Romans 4:7).
3. **Repent** by turning toward God and away from sin, trusting Him to change your attitude and actions (Philippians 2:13).
4. **Trust, by faith,** that you are completely forgiven and cleansed by God.

KEEP SHORT ACCOUNTS:

When you become aware of sin, confess it right away. Do not let sins accumulate. You do not have to be out of fellowship with God for long!

By confessing your sins whenever God brings them to mind, you can maintain your fellowship with God. You do not have to live with an ongoing sense of guilt, fear, or

shame. You can daily experience the forgiveness that is already yours through Christ!

The Importance of Restitution

There will be times when you will need to make restitution for your sin. You will need to go to the person you have sinned against to make something right or to ask his forgiveness. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus commands us to be reconciled to others. Failing to do so may reap serious consequences.

Once you have asked forgiveness of the person or made whatever restitution is necessary, you can continue to experience God's forgiveness.

What if I still feel guilty?

Have you ever confessed a sin and felt like God did not forgive you?

Satan wants to keep Christians from experiencing the abundant life. How does he do this? He convinces them to live based upon their feelings, and their feelings tell them that they are condemned and not forgiven. **This is another instance where the Christian must operate by faith.** When feelings of guilt remain even after you have confessed your sin to God, you must decide to live according to God's truth rather than Satan's lies (see Revelation 12:10). God's Word makes it clear that Christians can experience the forgiveness that is theirs through Christ by simply confessing those sins. Once you have confessed your specific sins to God, any guilt that remains is from Satan or from a lack of trust in God's promise of forgiveness.

Sometimes people have difficulty distinguishing whether their feelings of guilt are from God or from the enemy. Something that can help you tell the difference is that God points out *specific instances of sin* (e.g. "Your outburst of anger toward that person was wrong"), while Satan accuses in *vague generalities* (e.g. "You're such a bad person"). In addition, God wants to bring you to a place of forgiveness and freedom, while Satan wants you to become mired in fear, guilt, and shame.

SUMMARIZING CONFESSION

- ? **Confession is an expression of faith.** Confession does not result in more forgiveness, since Christ has already forgiven us once and for all (Hebrews 10: 10-18).
- ? **Confession is a response to God's love for us.** Confession is an expression of faith and an act of obedience, which results in God making real, in our experience, what He has already done for us through the death of His Son.
- ? **Confession keeps us in fellowship with God.** If we refuse to confess our sins, we become "fleshly" and walk in the shadows instead of in the light of God's love and forgiveness (I John 1:7).

Application

Take some time tonight to get alone with God.

1. Ask God to reveal any unconfessed sin in your life.
2. Write these sins on a sheet of paper and confess each one to God. You can be totally transparent, since this is just between you and God.
3. After you have confessed these sins, write out God's promise of forgiveness from 1 John 1:9 across the list.
4. Destroy the list and thank God that He has forgiven all your sin.
5. Seek to make restitution to, or ask forgiveness of, those whom God brings to mind.
6. After you have confessed your sins, any guilt that remains comes from Satan, not from God, because God's forgiveness is complete. The Bible clearly states that God "has removed our sins as far away from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).
7. Read Jeremiah 31:3, John 3:16, Romans 5:8, and Romans 8:38-39. After reading these passages, claim by faith that God loves you unconditionally and will always love you unconditionally.
8. Before Session 3, read the Supplement in the back of this notebook– **"Can We Trust the Bible?"**