



The Futility of Forgiving Yourself

One of the most well-known, yet false, concepts is the need for believers in Christ to “forgive themselves.” Yet, if it is necessary for a believer to “forgive self” in addition to receiving God’s forgiveness, then a believer is actually saying that God’s plan for forgiveness is insufficient. Here is why:

1. Receiving God’s forgiveness is not a matter of “feeling forgiven,” rather, it is a matter of trusting God and His promises (Romans 5:1-2, Colossians 1:21-23).
2. Since God says there is no condemnation (no guilt, but complete forgiveness) for one who is in Christ, then believers should not trust personal feelings (Romans 8:1). Instead, they should trust God’s Word. Forgiveness from God is a matter of faith, not feelings (Hebrews 11:6).

When God says that He forgives a believer and provides cleansing from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9), what more could a mere mortal do to complete His work?

The “need” to “forgive yourself” typically indicates that one has a sense of guilt over past sins. Feeling remorse over past sins is not necessarily detrimental, especially if it reminds a person of the consequences of sin and helps one not to repeat previous mistakes. However, dwelling on personal failures or being controlled by feelings of guilt over previous sins are contrary to God’s plan for a believer to face and deal with past sins.

God’s plan for a believer to be an overcomer in Christ involves a confession of one’s sins to Him (1 John 1:9) and, if necessary, a confession of sin(s) at an appropriate time to others (based on Proverbs 25:11; Matthew 7:12; James 5:16). Inherent to authentic confession is repentance (Proverbs 28:13, 2 Corinthians 7:9-10), which is a turning away from sin to follow Christ. In following Christ, a believer will put off old ways of thinking, speaking, and acting in order to put on Christ-likeness in every dimension (Ephesians 4:22-24), all of which contribute to an on-going renewal of one’s mind (Romans 12:2).

“Forgiving self” is an expression of natural wisdom and is an outgrowth of humanistic philosophy. God’s Word has only two perspectives on forgiveness:

1. A person needs to be forgiven by God (Colossians 1:13-14, 1 John 1:9).
2. A believer is to forgive others, following the example of God’s forgiveness in Christ Jesus (Matthew 18:32-33, Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:12-13).

NOTE: For an expanded study on the subject of “Forgiving Yourself,” go to [Rejecting Popular Untruths](#).

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Romans 5:1-2, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Colossians 1:21-23, And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Romans 8:1, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 11:6, And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Proverbs 25:11, A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Matthew 7:12, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

James 5:16, Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Proverbs 28:13, Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

2 Corinthians 7:9-10, As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Ephesians 4:22-24, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Romans 12:2, Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Colossians 1:13-14, He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 18:32-33, “Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’”

Ephesians 4:32, Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:12-13, Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.