

PHASE THREE: WALKING IN FREEDOM

LESSON SIXTEEN:

God had given us complete forgiveness for our sins. We see that forgiving someone doesn't excuse the harm done or justify their actions, but it breaks the bondage of offense and allows us to live in freedom. We don't hold God accountable for the free will actions of others, and we let go of self-condemnation. Romans 12:17-18 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Matt. 22:36-40, Isaiah 1:18-19

NEW LIFE FREEDOM LESSON 16

Last time, we started the process of asking forgiveness for the wrongs we've done to others by examining why we need to do it and how to begin. This time we'll look at what is involved in forgiving those who have wronged us. This may be harder for some to do, especially if there was sexual, verbal or physical abuse. We'll get into what this forgiveness means, but first, we need to think about God's forgiveness to us.

Romans 3:22-24 says, "We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in His grace, freely makes us right in His sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty of sin." It may be easier to think of how someone else has "fallen short", but Paul reminds us that we're all in the same condition. Rather than trying to keep score by comparing another person's sins to ours, we need to focus on God's amazing love for us that gives us a clean slate instead of what we deserve. Jesus explains this to His disciples in Matthew 18:21-35. Take time to read this and think about how to apply it to your life.

This doesn't mean that we deny the wrong that was done or the damage it caused. It doesn't excuse the actions. It doesn't tell us to just forget all about it. Forgiving is letting go of the offense and leaving it in God's hands. When we hold on to unforgiveness, we're often tied up in thoughts of bitterness, helplessness or revenge. Even if the other person never takes responsibility or asks us to forgive them, we can still be freed from carrying this weight around.

Paul spoke to the members of the church in Rome about this issue. In Romans 12:14, he said, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." It might seem impossible to take that further step of blessing the one who's hurt us. Again, this isn't about what they deserve, it's about the relief we can have when we are willing to be obedient to God and release it all to Him.

Paul continues in verse 17, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.” The world expects us to get even, even encouraging us to stay focused on the pain to build anger and resentment. This just keeps us stuck in a cycle that never ends until one person says that’s enough. Because of the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, we can be the one to stop it. Verse 21 says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” This shows us the war that’s going on inside. Every time we choose to forgive, we win another battle.

One of the biggest benefits we have when we forgive others is an increase in peace. Read Colossians 3:15: “And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body, you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.” This isn’t something we have to create by ourselves, we just make room for Jesus to come in and fill us with His peace. When we spend time thinking about all He’s done and thanking Him for all of the changes He’s making, we add gratitude to peace for even more freedom.

There are times when we may want to hold God accountable for the harm we’ve received. We may want to ask Him how He could have allowed this to happen. God gave all people free will, and that means we have the ability to choose how we use that will. Using it selfishly can result in the damage we’ve received as well as the damage we’ve caused. Pain and suffering can come from these choices, but 1 Peter 5:10 offers us some hope. “In His kindness, God called you to share in His eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So, after you have suffered a little while, He will restore, support and strengthen you and He will place you on a firm foundation.”

Look at the four things this verse promises. God will restore the peace that was taken away, He will support us when we feel unable to go on, He will provide the strength to do the work necessary to become whole, and He’ll replace the shaky foundation we’ve made from trying to be in control with a solid one He’s made Himself. These are His gifts to us because He loves us, and they’re benefits we have when we accept a relationship with Him.

The Israelites were told they had to use their free will when it was time to go into the land God had promised them. Joshua 24:15 tells about this choice. “But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” They had been warned that things wouldn’t go well for them if they didn’t choose God, but He didn’t force them to follow Him. He doesn’t force us or anyone else either. In Psalm 119:30, we see what decision David made. “I have chosen to be faithful; I have determined to live by your regulations.”

Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is yourself. The devil loves to plant thoughts in our minds about all of our failures. He drags in his favorite weapons of guilt and shame to keep us stuck in a hopeless mindset. But God has a different way of dealing with this. In Isaiah 1:18, He says, “ ‘Come now, let’s settle this’, says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, I will make them white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them white as wool.’ ” He takes our stains out completely.

Notice the last part of the last verse in this passage about the greatest commandment from Matthew 22:36-40: “ ‘Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?’ Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord Your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and all of your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important : ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” Jesus tells us that we must love ourselves, and that includes forgiving ourselves as He has forgiven us. Let go of that self-condemnation and watch what God can do.

Scripture references

Romans 3:22-24, Matthew 18:21-35, Romans 12:14,17 and 21, Colossians 3:15, 1 Peter 5:10, Joshua 24:15, Psalm 119:30, Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 22:36-40