

Forgiving Self

Key Verse

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins..." 1 John 1:9a

Basic Biblical Understanding

Have you hurt someone you love, sinned repeatedly, or made a huge mistake? Are you struggling to let go of the past? You're not alone. Maybe you heard a talk show host, a pastor, or a friend say, "You have to forgive yourself." On the surface, that response sounds right and seems comforting.

You might be surprised, however, to realize that there is nothing in the Bible about forgiving yourself. Forgiveness means to pardon someone, to release them from a debt, or to cancel an obligation. God can forgive you because your sin debt was against Him. Others can forgive you if your offense was against them. You can forgive others if their sin was against you. But you cannot forgive yourself. Faced with that reality, what should you do with your sins?

- We are told to repent of our sins (Matthew 4:17).
- We are told to forsake our sins (Proverbs 28:13).
- We are told to confess our sins (1 John 1:9).
- We are told to forget what lies behind, reach forward to what lies ahead, and press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).
- We are called to remember who we are in Christ, holy and beloved, seated in Christ at the right hand of the Father (Colossians 2-3).

There are many instructions for moving beyond our sin but forgiving ourselves is not one of them. Forgiving yourself is a concept of secular psychology that attempts to meet your own needs through your own flesh. In essence, it says that your forgiveness through Christ, your identity in Christ, and your promises from Christ are not enough to move you beyond your past. However, if Jesus is not enough, you and I cannot make up the difference. The idea of forgiving yourself is a path of false hope that comes at the expense of rejecting God's Word.

What should you do? If you're a Christian and you've sinned against someone, confess that sin before God and thank Him for the forgiveness you have in Christ. Turn from that sin and trust that God will help you live obediently. If possible, go to the person you offended and ask him/her to forgive you. Romans 12:18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." You cannot control their response, but you can be obedient to God's Word.

What if you still feel bad after doing all that? In that case, you have to learn to see yourself as God sees you. Fill your mind with truth (Philippians 4:8), take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), and refuse to let Satan rob your future even if He's already wrecked your past. Believe what God has said in His Word and stand firm in truth.

Verses (ask God to show you how they apply to your life)

- "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow..." Isaiah 1:18a
- "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

Helpful Questions and Application

1. For Christians, Jesus has forgiven our sin debt (past, present, and future). If you're struggling to move past a certain sin, ask God to help you realize what's holding you back.
2. Your ability to walk in the freedom of forgiveness is directly linked to your [identity in Christ](#). Read over your [identity](#) and pray through the parts that are hard for you to believe.

Additional Resources

Scripture references: Romans 3:23; Psalm 103:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17

WordTruth article: ["Rejecting Popular Untruths"](#)
["The Futility of Forgiving Yourself"](#)