

The Christian's Attitude Toward The Past



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

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Learn how God wants His people to view and deal with things that have happened in the past

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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The Christian's Attitude Toward Past

What is your attitude toward the past? That is, what is your mindset toward the things that have happened in your life that you can never go back and change? Do you view the past from a Biblical perspective? Or, do you allow the past to frequently hinder the way you live your life presently?

Everyone has a “past.” And, everyone has something in their pasts that causes them to struggle. This is simply because we live in an imperfect world. You are imperfect. You make mistakes. People around you are imperfect. They also make mistakes. Things happen to us that causes hardship, suffering, grief, etc. Even more, the good things we have experienced in life also can present real challenges for how we live our lives today.

Certainly, the past does provide many challenges to how we live presently. Having an improper attitude toward the past will lead to many improper responses to the past. This can include: Holding grudges, seeking revenge, living with extreme/debilitating guilt, failing to move forward by consistently living in the past, failing to live joyously in the Lord and accomplish His works, resting on past successes rather than striving to do more in the Lord's service, etc.

Those who are Christians need to learn how to deal with and respond properly to the past. The past is a powerful tool that the devil uses to hinder Christians (and all people) from serving the Lord.

Fortunately, God has given us what we need to know in order to overcome the past and live for Him in the present!

As we begin this study, let's learn from the apostle Paul's statement in Philippians 3:12-14. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Think about it. Paul had quite a past that he could have allowed to hinder him from serving God. He could have allowed his past failures to hinder him. He could have allowed his past successes to hinder him. He could have allowed the past treatment from other people to hinder him. Instead, Paul was focused on serving Jesus Christ and pressing toward the ultimate goal of Heaven – and he was determined not to allow the past to hinder him in that effort!

We would all do well to have the same attitude toward the past Paul had. The purpose of this lesson is to cause us to evaluate our attitudes toward the past and encourage us to deal with the past properly. In this lesson, let's consider three main areas regarding the past and discuss what the Christian's attitude should be toward each one: Our own past failures and successes, past events and experiences, and the past actions of others.

Past Personal Failures And Successes

There are many times when the Christian has sinned (failed to do what is right). There are also many times when the Christian has done what is right in God's sight. Both of these situations present personal challenges for the Christian to live for God. The attitude that you have toward both of these situations is absolutely critical to living in the way that is pleasing to God *today!* Therefore, let's spend this first part of our study focusing on these situations

and considering some step-by-step responsibilities that you have toward past personal failures and successes.

Grieve over past sins

Whenever the Christian considers the sin he/she has committed in the past, there should be grief experienced. God never desires for His people to view their past sin in a positive way. In fact, the only way that a person will ever be able to correct his/her sin and be right with God is to first acknowledge and grieve over the sin that has been committed.

Since the Christian has died to sin (Romans 6), he/she should not view any past sin favorably. Any sin he/she has committed in the past should cause grief. And, the Scriptures teach that the right kind of grief leads to a beneficial outcome. Consider 2 Corinthians 7:8-12. “For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.”

Before considering the sorrow that is referenced in this passage, understand the context. Whenever Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians, he addressed many different areas in which the Corinthians needed to make corrections in their lives. He spoke of their divisiveness, of their acceptance of a man who was involved in fornication, of their taking one another to court, of issues regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage, of issues

involving meat that had been sacrificed to idols, of issues over spiritual gifts, of issues about the resurrection, and instructed concerning the collection for their needy brethren. There were many issues these Christians had in their lives they needed to change.

Now, in this second letter, they had evidently made some/all of these changes. Verse 8 makes reference to the sorrow they had experienced after reading what Paul wrote in his letter. Then, verse 12 makes reference to the one “who had done the wrong” (perhaps a reference to the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who had been living in fornication). But, I want you to notice that this correction was aided by their experience of godly sorrow.

Notice that Paul contrasts two types of sorrow that an individual might experience whenever he/she fails to do what is right (commits sin): Worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Worldly sorrow would include a sorrow for getting caught/being exposed as being wrong. It would be focused on the physical/earthly consequences of a sinful action. However, this type of sorrow will steal your focus away from the spiritual aspects of your sin and will not lead you to the proper response to your sin. Rather than leading you to repentance and eternal life, worldly sorrow will lead you to spiritual “death.” This is likely because worldly sorrow will only try to correct sin so as to remove its physical/earthly consequences. It is simply not focused on the spiritual consequences of sin (which are far more devastating).

Instead, the only kind of sorrow for past sin that will help you reach forward and live for God is to experience godly sorrow. This type of sorrow results whenever you have the appropriate view of sin. Therefore, you need to understand that your sin has separated you from God. You need to understand that your sin has made you the enemy of God. And, you need to understand that your sin will result in eternal punishment in Hell fire. This type of sorrow is focused on what truly matters and will lead to the proper response to sin. It is focused on doing whatever God instructs so that the spiritual consequences of the sin will be removed. Therefore, godly sorrow leads to repentance!

Correct past sins

Whenever the right kind of sorrow is experienced regarding sin (as previously described), an individual can take the appropriate actions to have his/her sins forgiven. So, as a Christian who is trying to deal appropriately with your past sins, you need to allow your godly sorrow to produce the appropriate response to correct your past sins.

First, recognize that you have sinned. There is no lasting value to be gained from denying the reality of sin in your life. In a general sense, Romans 3:23 says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Then, 1 John 1:8-10 identifies that Christians commit sin (after becoming Christians). “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

Denying these truths may help you to feel better about yourself temporarily. However, denying this reality will not help you correct your sin. It will not help you restore your relationship with God. It will not help you restore your relationships with others. It will leave your conscience troubled (if you acknowledge your sin in your conscience). It will rob you of the joy of being a Christian. But, on the other hand, there is much to be gained from acknowledging your sin and doing what you are required to do in order to correct it. You will be forgiven of that sin. You will be reconciled to God (and often with others). You will have a clean conscience. And, you will have the hope of eternal life.

Second, recognize that you (if you are truly a Christian) have obeyed the gospel’s plan of salvation previously to become a Christian and be forgiven of your sins. Therefore, you have heard the teaching of God’s word (Romans 10:17), believed (John 8:24), repented of your sins (Acts 2:38), confessed Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and been baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (Mark 16:16). If you have not obeyed these commandments, you are *not* a true Christian and you have not had your sins forgiven by

God! So, in order to correct your past sins, you need to obey these God-given commandments.

Third, perhaps you have obeyed these commandments in the past so as to become a Christian and be forgiven of your sins, but you have sinned since that time. Once again, you must be obedient to God’s instructions in order to correct those sins and be able to move beyond them. But, how do you correct the sins you have committed since you have become a Christian?

The Scriptures teach that the following things are involved. (1) You must repent of your sin. To repent is to look on your past sin with abhorrence and determine that you will live differently in the future. In Acts 8:22, the apostle Peter commanded a Christian who committed sin to “Repent” of his wickedness. (2) You must confess your sin to God. Whenever the apostle John was writing to Christians about sin, he said, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). (3) You must pray to God and ask Him for forgiveness. Not only did Peter command the Christian who sinned to repent of his wickedness; but, Peter also commanded him to “pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22). (4) Finally, if your sin is of a public nature (i.e. if it is known to other people besides just to God), you should confess your sin to whoever is knowledgeable of the sin. James 5:16 instructs, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

Once you comply with these instructions, you are forgiven of your past sins/failures. But, before we focus on moving beyond these past failures, let me emphasize that you absolutely must *not* move beyond your past failures until you have taken the steps God has instructed you to take to be forgiven of your sin. Until you do this, your attempts to move beyond your past sin will be in vain (because you will not have a right relationship with God)!

Move beyond forgiven sins

Now that you have taken the appropriate steps to correct your past sins, you do need to move

beyond them – rather than allowing them to hinder you from serving God in the future. You see, it is possible to become so grieved by sin that you have difficulty moving forward. You might think, “How could God ever forgive what I have done?” “How could other people ever forgive what I have done?” While it is good to view your sins in this kind of serious way, you must also fully embrace the truths God has revealed concerning His forgiveness!

This is an area in which we can greatly benefit from the apostle Paul. In Acts 26:9-11, Paul summarized what he had done prior to becoming a Christian. “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.”

However, I also want you to consider his words in 1 Timothy 1:12-16 to learn how Paul dealt with moving beyond these past sins. “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

Just like Paul experienced, you must understand what it means to be forgiven by God. For instance, Acts 3:19 says, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” It is my understanding that the idea of your sins being “blotted out” comes from a common practice between creditors and debtors (see Albert Barnes’ notes on Acts 3:19). A creditor would record the debt of another on a table covered with wax.

Then, whenever the debt would be paid, the creditor would smooth the wax and remove every trace of the debt. This is the same way God forgives you whenever you comply with His commandments. Every trace of your sin is removed! In fact, Matthew 18:23-34 pictures God’s forgiveness as completely erasing a debt you had against God which had previously been unpayable.

Under the New Covenant (the New Testament), God promises, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Hebrews 10:17). Ephesians 1:7 says the following concerning those who are in Christ (Christians). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” Therefore, forgiveness is a blessing that Christians should enjoy in Christ. Christians do not have to live with the weight of past sins that have been corrected. Instead, Christians can move beyond (and should move beyond) their past sins because they have been forgiven of them. God truly does not remember them any more!

God is willing to forgive your past sins (whenever you comply with His instructions). Don’t hold yourself back for what God is allowing you to move forward from! For instance, in Jesus’ parable about the prodigal son who wasted all of his inheritance (Luke 15:11-32), consider what happened when the son came to his senses and returned to his father. The son confessed his failure and asked only to be welcomed as a hired servant. However, the father gave him the best of what he had and held a feast in his honor, rejoicing that his son had returned! That is how God views you whenever you come back to Him!

Learn from the past

I want you to think back to what we established in Acts 26:9-11. Whenever Paul made this statement concerning the sins he had committed in persecuting the church, he was a Christian. Why is this significant? It is significant because the Christian should remember the past in order to use it to deal with the present more effectively – just as Paul did.

One way the Christian can use the past to help him/her live for God more effectively in the present

is that he/she should learn from the past (both successes and failures). Now, there are many ways the Christian should try to learn from the past. For one, the Christian should learn from the past of others. For instance, 1 Corinthians 10 speaks about some mistakes the Israelites had made (which are recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures). Verse 6 says that “these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.” Verse 11 repeats the same kind of idea. Similarly, Romans 15:4 says that the things that “were written before were written for our learning.” So, you can and should be learning from the past successes and failures of others.

Then, as you consider the scope of this lesson, the Christian can and should learn from his/her own past (both successes and failures). Particularly, I want you to consider a couple of passages about learning from your past failures. Proverbs 26:11 says, “As a dog returns to his own vomit, So a fool repeats his folly.” Someone who does not learn from his/her past mistakes is foolish – while the person who does learn from past mistakes is wise. Consider Proverbs 24:16. “For a righteous man may fall seven times And rise again, But the wicked shall fall by calamity.” There is a constant attitude of pressing forward present in the righteous. He/she learns from the past in order that he/she might live more effectively in service of the Lord in the present and future!

It has been said that those who do not know the past are doomed to repeat it. So, while we do need to move beyond our past failures and successes, we also need to remember the past so that we can learn from it. Learn from the past so that you can avoid making the same mistake(s) again. Learn from the past so that you can imitate the same successes. This is one way you can use the past for good (even if the past was not so *good*).

Use the past as a motivator for the future

Another way you can use the past to help you serve God presently and in the future is that you can use it to motivate your service to God. You see, the past is a powerful motivator. Past failures can motivate us to live for God now. And, past successes

can motivate us to repeat them and even improve upon them.

For instance, Jesus commended the actions of a sinful woman in Luke 7 – because she was using her past failures to motivate her present service for Him. The context shows this woman going to great expense to wash Jesus’ feet with fragrant oil – even washing them with the hair on her head and kissing them. While others criticized her actions, Jesus commended her – and recognized that she was motivated by her recognition of her past failures. Consider verse 47. “Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

Paul recognized the same thing in 1 Timothy 1:12-16. Paul knew that he could only be forgiven of his past failures by the grace and mercy of God. He saw himself as the chief of sinners (the worst of all sinners) and that he could only serve God because of God’s willingness to forgive! In addition, consider what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 15:9-11. “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

Again, observe Paul’s recognition of his past failures. However, notice the statement that he makes concerning the grace God had shown toward him. He said, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain.” Paul knew that he was nothing without God. So, his past failures were used to help him develop and maintain a love for God. Then, Paul was determined that the grace God had shown to him would not be in vain. That is, Paul was determined to use God’s grace to motivate him to do the things God desired from him.

Likewise, you should use your past failures to motivate you to love and serve God. You must remember the grace God has shown toward you. And, the only way you can remember the riches of His marvelous grace is if you will reflect on the things God has forgiven you for! Therefore, you can use your past failures to help you remember the great

price that was paid for your salvation, to live with thanksgiving for God, to give your life entirely to God's service, and to demonstrate the same kind of mercy toward others who have sinned.

Do not rest on past successes

Up to this point, we have predominantly been discussing past failures – and how each Christian should respond to those past failures. However, an improper attitude regarding past success can be just as harmful as an improper attitude regarding past failures. It can lead us to think, “I’ve done enough good for God.” “Now I can put it on ‘cruise control’ for the rest of my life.” Or, we can even begin to think that the good we have accomplished is enough to make up for our past failures – and forget that we are saved by God's grace (rather than by our own meritorious deeds). However this may be expressed, this sort of ungodly attitude toward past successes will hinder us from being effective in the Lord's kingdom.

The simple fact is that no one will ever do enough to earn the forgiveness of his/her past failures. Remember, the debt God forgives when He forgives sin is a debt no one could ever repay. Therefore, the Christian must recognize his/her need for continual loving service. Rather than trying to earn his/her salvation, the Christian is focused on accomplishing good works in the service of God because of the grace and mercy God has shown!

Furthermore, please consider some passages which plainly teach that God expects you to continue doing good. You simply cannot stop living for God whenever you think you have done “enough.” In John 15:2, Jesus compared His disciples with branches on a vine. Particularly, He stated that “every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” So, God “prunes” you after you accomplish good works – so that you will accomplish even more good works! In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul expressed the need to practice self-discipline. Especially notice that Paul realized if he failed to discipline himself, he would “become disqualified” – even after all the good things he had accomplished in God's service.

You must recognize the constant need to press forward in your service to God. You must not rest on your past successes/victories for Christ. Instead, you must continue zealously serving God throughout your life – recognizing that rest comes whenever life on this earth is over, not before (Revelation 14:13)! Like Paul, you should say, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Philippians 3:12).

Past Events And Experiences

Another area of the past that the Christian will need to develop the proper attitude toward is the events and experiences that are in the past – as there are many things that have happened or that will happen in our lives. Some of these are pleasant. Some are unpleasant. However, some of the things that we experience and that threaten to hinder our service to God are not particularly the result of the actions or inactions of anyone around us. For example, perhaps you are struggling with the death of a loved one. Perhaps you are struggling with a past disease or injury you have experienced. Perhaps it is another kind of event or experience. As you identify the past events and experiences you have struggled with, let me suggest a few general things to help you deal with them. Now, as we discuss past events and experiences, I will be intentionally vague – because everyone has different experiences (though there are some common events and experiences for all mankind).

View all past events and experiences from a Biblical perspective

Take some time to identify those events and experiences in your past that you struggle to overcome. Now, I want you to challenge yourself to search the Scriptures for everything that you can apply to those situations. You see, you must learn to view all of those things you have experienced in the past from a true Biblical perspective.

For instance, the death of a loved one is something that every Christian has probably experienced. These events can leave us heartbroken, depressed, angry, etc. – and seriously harm our service to God because we are so consumed by these things. So, in this case, the Christian needs to spend time with the Scriptures to form the proper attitude toward death. As you do, you learn to accept that physical death is promised to everyone who is living on this earth (Hebrews 9:27). You learn that your loved ones who have died want you to live your life in God’s service (Luke 16:19-31). You learn to view the occasion of death as an opportunity to evaluate your life and see whether you are prepared for your own death (Ecclesiastes 7:2). And, you learn that death is not the end of a person’s existence (Luke 16:19-31).

You should also learn to view human suffering from a Biblical perspective. Once again, the past sufferings that have been experienced by yourself or a loved one can hinder you from serving God (if you allow it to do so). However, whenever you view suffering from a Biblical perspective, you learn that suffering is only in the world because of the devil and man’s decision to sin against God (Genesis 2-3). Furthermore, you learn that the only way to truly escape suffering is to devote your life to serving God (Romans 8:18-39; Revelation 21-22).

Learn from past events and experiences

As you consider the events and experiences you have endured in the past that try to hinder your service to God, you must determine to learn what you can from these things. You see, just as we considered regarding your own past personal failures and successes, you need to dedicate yourself constantly to learning from the past (see 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 again)! And, there are some things that you can learn even from the events and experiences that you have endured in your life.

In every situation you have experienced, you need to consider what lessons you might be able to take from them (before you move on from them). For instance, although you have no control over the death of your loved ones, you can use their deaths to learn about what is most important in your life – and use it as a time of reflection and evaluation. In addition,

when you or a loved one experiences health difficulties, you can be reminded of the frailty of life and seek to utilize your time on this earth in God’s service. Finally, you can reflect on the sufferings you have experienced – and learn how God has enabled you to overcome all of those sufferings and consider how you have become stronger now that you have endured them (James 1:2-4).

Reach forward

Whatever experiences and events have transpired during the course of your life, you can determine that you will not allow them to hinder you from serving God. You can choose to press forward! You must determine that you will not allow Satan to use any situation that has happened in your past to pull you away from God and cause you to lose your soul! After all, if you allow that to happen, you will only be defeated by the same thing twice! Once whenever you struggled with it throughout your life. And, once when you suffer for all of eternity because you allowed it to hinder your service to God.

Again, consider Paul’s attitude in Philippians 3:12-14. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Choose to press forward to the prize of Heaven. Don’t allow anything to hinder you from serving God!

Past Actions Of Others

One final area of the past to consider is the past actions of others. After all, we live in a world in which we have relationships and interactions with others. Many times, those interactions and relationships are positive. However, there are several times when we are hurt by others (either intentionally or unintentionally). Therefore, the attitude we have toward the past actions of others is important in

determining how we will respond to them – and if we will allow the past actions of others to hinder our service to God.

Correct the erring

If someone has sinned against you in the past, you need to care enough about the individual's soul to go to that person and try to identify the sin to him/her. However, let me be clear, you do *not* do this because you are hurt or mad. Instead, you do this because of the love that you have for his/her soul, recognizing that his/her soul is now in jeopardy of Hell fire!

You see, you have personal responsibility to warn the individual you know to be living in sin! For instance, the prophet Ezekiel was told (in Ezekiel 3:16-21) that if he failed to warn the wicked of his wickedness, he would be held personally responsible for their destruction. However, if he warned the wicked, he would deliver his soul – whether the wicked would repent or not. In the same way, God gives you the responsibility to warn those who are in sin (including those who have sinned against you) about the consequences of sin and point them to the salvation in Jesus Christ. This includes both those who are Christians and those who are not.

For an individual who is not a Christian, you can use this as an opportunity to teach him/her the gospel of Jesus Christ. You can teach him/her about the action that was committed against you from a Biblical perspective. Show him/her why the action is condemned by God. Then, if you are given the opportunity to do so, you can use that as an opportunity to study more about what God teaches concerning forgiveness and His plan of salvation! In all things, point that individual to Jesus Christ out of concern for his/her soul – that he/she might find forgiveness.

Then, for an individual who is a Christian, consider what Jesus said in Matthew 18:15-17. Follow this three-step process in correcting those who sin against you. “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three

witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

Forgive the penitent

Now, once you have fulfilled your role and preached God's message to the one in sin, he/she will have a choice to make. Either he/she will repent and seek forgiveness or he/she will continue in the sin. Let me deal with the first situation first. Let's suppose that the individual does repent and seek forgiveness (doing what God requires for forgiveness). What should your attitude be toward the past offense once the offender has done this (even though he/she can never go back and undo all of the pain and suffering you may have experienced)?

Quite simply, you have the responsibility to forgive that individual. In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus said, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Ephesians 4:32 says that you must be “kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

But, what does it mean for you to forgive someone who has sinned against you in the past? Can you just give “lip-service” to forgiveness (saying that you forgive) and still hold a grudge or treat someone in a negative way that reflects your knowledge of that past sin? No! This is certainly not the way you desire God to forgive you. Instead, God has said that your debt against Him has been entirely wiped away (go back and review Acts 3:19 and Hebrews 10:17). In fact, Jesus' parable in Matthew 18:21-35 that demonstrates God's wonderful forgiveness also identifies your responsibility to show the same kind of compassion and mercy on those who have sinned against you! Verse 35 warns that there will be grave consequences if you will not, from your heart, forgive others of their sins!

Think back to Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (referenced earlier in this lesson, from Luke 15:11-32). After God demonstrates His willingness to forgive in this parable, Jesus draws our attention

to the prodigal's older brother. In doing so, Jesus teaches us that we must rejoice whenever a sinner returns to the Lord rather than treating that individual with contempt!

Move forward from all others

Throughout the Scriptures, God clearly teaches that you must forgive those who make their lives right with God and repent of the sin they had committed. But, not everyone will repent of their sin whenever you identify their sin to them. What should your attitude be in these situations?

Generally-speaking, the Christian must still consider Paul's words in Philippians 3:12-14 (as we have already considered). Recognize that, as he was writing these words, Paul was likely in Roman imprisonment for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he was enduring hardship because of someone else's unrighteous actions (actually, he was imprisoned because of the unrighteous actions of a number of people). The likely time of this imprisonment corresponds with the events of Acts 21-28. Therefore, these chapters can help us understand the false accusations others made that resulted in his arrest, the corrupt actions of two governors, and the plot the Jews made to kill him. Still, after enduring all of this mistreatment from others, Paul preached to these people and moved forward! He was focused on pressing toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!

Now, what if Paul had determined not to press forward until these unrighteous people who had harmed him chose to repent of their sins? Don't you think Paul *could have* become discouraged? Don't you think Paul *could have* given up on serving God? Don't you think Paul *could have* demonstrated hatred toward those who did him wrong? But, that would not result in the salvation of his soul. And, that would not help anybody else be saved either. He pressed on!

I believe that we should apply the principle of Matthew 10:14 to this situation. In Matthew 10, Jesus sent His twelve apostles out to teach others (an event known as the "Limited Commission"). Verse 14 says, "And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet." So, Jesus plainly

indicated that *not* all people would listen to God and repent of their sins. However, instead of becoming discouraged by that, His apostles were to continue to preach and move on from those who rejected their preaching.

In the same way, when individuals do not repent of their sins, you must not allow their sin to hinder you from serving God. You must keep pressing forward. You must do what God requires of you, regardless of whether the one who has sinned repents. You must keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2)! When Jesus "was reviled," He "did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). While God does not require you to forgive those who have not repented, God does require you to move on and not allow those past sinful things to hinder you from serving Him – committing all vengeance and wrath to Him, refusing to repay "evil for evil." (Romans 12:17-21).

Conclusion

Has this lesson described your attitude toward the past? Have you dedicated yourself to forgetting those things which are in the past in order to press toward the goal of Heaven? Dear Christian, please do not allow Satan to lure you away from God by things that have happened in the past. You cannot go back and change anything about the past. But, you can choose to rise above all these things and live faithfully for the Lord today!

Study Questions

What are some things in your past that you struggle with?

List some initial impressions from Philippians 3:12-14.

Why is it important to reach forward from those past events and experiences?

1. Past Personal Failures And Successes

Why should you grieve over your past sins?

What does God require you to do in order to correct your past sins?

How can you move beyond the sins you have been forgiven of?

Why is it important to learn from the past?

How can you use the past as a motivator for the future?

Why do you need to refuse to rest on past successes?

2. Past Events And Experiences

Why is it important to view all past events and experiences from a Biblical perspective?

Why should you learn from past events and experiences?

3. Past Actions Of Others

Why do you need to correct those who are in sin?

What should you do for those who are penitent?

What should you do whenever someone is not penitent?