

FORGIVENESS

**who
needs
it?**

Man's Standard

Everyone has some idea of good and evil, but no two people have exactly the same standard. What we tend to do is set up a standard of good which we can measure up to, and a standard of evil that does not include our activities.

For example, the drunkard thinks there is no harm in drinking, but he considers it a sin to steal. The greedy man cheats in his business everyday and satisfies himself by thinking, "Everybody cheats in business, but I don't get drunk as others do."

The upright, moral man justifies himself by looking down on drunks and cheaters, but never considers how many sinful thoughts and desires he hides in his heart. He forgets that while man looks only at outward conduct, God judges the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

We congratulate ourselves for not doing the evil someone else does, yet we overlook other sins in our own lives. All this only proves that people do not judge themselves by one fixed standard of right and wrong. Instead they adopt a standard that tolerates them while condemning others.

God's Standard

There is a standard by which all will be judged: it is the righteousness of God. All who fall short of this standard will be eternally condemned. A person's conscience is awakened when he realizes that what counts is not comparing himself with others, but with God's perfection. He begins to understand that God sees his sin, and he finds himself guilty and ruined. He no longer attempts to justify himself by trying to find someone worse. Instead, he is anxious to know if it is possible for the God who condemns sinners to actually pardon him.

The Law

The Scribes and Pharisees were very moral and religious people who were greatly shocked when they caught a woman in the sin of adultery. (Read John 8:3-11.) They said the Law of Moses demanded that she be stoned. Depraved man is always comforted by finding someone worse than himself. By accusing another he forgets his own evil. He actually rejoices in the iniquity of others (see 1 Corinthians 13:6).

Grace

Like the Scribes and Pharisees, we often glory in the fall of another. But we cannot bear to see God exhibiting grace, which is so opposed to our thinking that we consider it an injustice. Grace is God's full and free forgiveness of every sin, without demanding anything in return. We don't exhibit grace, and don't want God to either!

Therefore it is humbling to admit that we are entirely dependent upon grace for salvation. Nothing we have done or can do will ever make us worthy of grace. The truth is, *our sins are the only claim we have on grace!* The Scribes and Pharisees could not understand this. Not willing to admit that they were sinners, they wished to accuse Jesus of being unjust if He acquitted the woman; and if He condemned her, they would say He was not merciful. "She should be stoned," they said, "What do you say?"

Guilty Verdict

Their sentence was just. The woman was guilty. The law was clear. Man may easily condemn, but who has a right to execute justice?

Jesus tells them, "He who is without sin ... let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7 NKJV). Since every one of them was a sinner, none of them could. They were all under the same sentence as the woman: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The accused and her accusers were all guilty. It was no longer "she should be stoned," but "all should be stoned."

In this sad condition would you do the same as the Scribes and Pharisees did? When their consciences convicted them, they walked away from the only One who can forgive. Adam did the same thing in the garden; he hid himself from God when he knew he was guilty. He turned away from his only Friend just when he most needed His help. It is the same today. Man is afraid of the only One who is ready to pardon.

You may be able to persuade yourself that you are not so bad. You can always find others worse. But are you a sinner? God says so, whether or not you agree: "All have sinned, and fall short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23). Then death is God's sentence: "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). If we only heard that God was just, there could be no hope.

But He is both “*a just God* and a *Savior*” (Isaiah 45:21). He condemns, and has the power to execute. The only question that remains is: “Can He pardon?”

Pardon

“And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.” She was standing before the only One who was “without sin,” and who therefore could cast a stone. The law had already condemned her. What would He do? This was a moment of intense anxiety for her. Jesus alone had the power of life and death. Man didn’t dare cast a stone; would He? “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.”

The message of grace to the sinner is the same today. But it is only to the sinner who stands consciously convicted before the Judge. The self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees did not hear it. They were convicted, but they did not stay to confess their sin. Rather, they ran to bury their convictions in more good works. They would not put themselves on the same level with the adulterous woman, who got this blessed word of peace!

If you desire to have God’s full and free pardon, you must first take your place as a guilty sinner – alone with Jesus, consciously self-condemned. You have no one else to trust, no one else to compare yourself with. You cannot do any penance or make any resolutions that will change your life. You cannot make yourself better before you come to Him. As the song says, each one must come “Just as I am” – condemned before the only One with the power to judge *and* forgive.

Unconditional Forgiveness

The Lord did not give the woman a conditional pardon. He did not say “I won’t condemn you, if you don’t sin any more.” No! He gave her full and complete forgiveness first. To have power over your sins, you must first know that they have been forgiven by God through Christ. If you try to master your evil before you know the forgiveness of God, you will fail. That’s why Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you,” before He said, “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Our relationship with the Savior must begin with, “Neither do I condemn you.” Then

our peace will come from faith in the blood of His cross, by which He has made peace. God's estimate of our sin is much greater than our own, but He has provided the blood of His Son to pay for our sin. The more I am able to see myself as a guilty sinner, the more I will value that precious blood which was shed to make peace for me.

May you know the peace and joy of having all your sins forgiven through faith in the blood of Jesus, and the victory over those very sins which hold you captive.

— *J. N. Darby, edited.*

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