

Can God Forgive Me For What I've Done?

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Josh was filled with emotion as he sorted through his father's belongings. After a long battle with heart disease, it was hard to believe his father was gone. Reflecting on the past fifteen years, Josh had plenty of regrets. He always had a rebellious streak; dishonesty and disrespect at work had cost him more than one job. Famous for his numerous exploitative sexual encounters, drinking binges, and extravagant spending, Josh's life was now in shambles. He couldn't help wondering if his outrageous escapades had been too much for his father, hastening his death.

But even at the end, Josh's father told him he loved him. He seemed to be thrilled every time Josh visited him at the hospital. Now he would never be able to visit him or talk with him again. Feeling very alone, tears began rolling down his face. Just before he died, Josh's father asked him to start attending church again. Josh had agreed but wondered if there was any point. He doubted that God would forgive him for all he had done.

Will God Really Forgive All of My Sins?

God knows we are not perfect. We make mistakes. (Romans 3:22-23) David lied, murdered, and committed adultery yet God forgave him and identified him as "chosen". (I Kings 8:16). Paul persecuted, tortured and ordered the murder of Christians. At times Paul failed to do good things and described some of his actions as "evil". (Romans 7: 19, 25). He called himself the "worst of sinners" (I Timothy 1:15) yet knew he was forgiven and his salvation secure (Ephesians 1:13-14). If a man who considers himself to be the worst sinner was saved, you can be saved no matter what your sins are. James said, "We all stumble in many ways." (James 3:2) If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar. (1 John 1:10)

In spite of our mistakes, God promises total and absolute forgiveness to those who accept him. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) When God forgives us for our sins, we are forgiven immediately. (1 John 1:9) Because God always keeps his promise, it's not necessary to continue asking for forgiveness. Once a sin is blotted out or erased, it is irrevocably gone. It will never be counted against us.

Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him. (Romans 4:7-8)

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Why does God forgive us?

God forgives us because he loves us. No matter what we do, God will continue to love us. (Eph. 3:17; 1 John 3:1; John 3:16) God forgives us because he has the power to wipe the slate clean. Jesus intercedes and communicates with God on our behalf. (Hebrews 4:14) With the forgiveness of our sins, we are promised absolute salvation--not a salvation determined by how close we are to the Christian ideal. God offers kindness, tolerance and patience. (Romans 2:4) God's love is that of a father who loves his children even when they misbehave. He is patient with us because he wants us to be in heaven with him forever. (2 Peter 3:9; 15) As a loving parent, God will not rest until we are home with him forever.

How long does forgiveness last?

God sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins. (Colossians 2:13) Christ died so our sins could be removed forever. They are completely blotted out and we will not be confronted by those sins again. Christ made

the payment on our behalf. Like civil courts here on earth, there will be no double jeopardy. We will not be tried again for sins for which payment has already been made.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. (Romans 3:23-25)

Is there a sin which cannot be forgiven?

Mark 3:28-29 and Luke 12:10 identifies sin against the Holy Spirit as an unforgiven sin.

I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin. (Mark 3:28-29)

And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. (Luke 12:10)

The term blasphemy refers to injurious, defaming and evil speaking against the person said to be blasphemed. An example is given in Acts 19:9 when Paul was speaking in the synagogue: *But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them.* When persons malign the Holy Spirit, the Spirit ceases to be with them and they are no longer able to recognize truth. In Matthew 12:22-32, the Pharisees and Scribes were unable to recognize God's will even when it was fully displayed and attributed Jesus' work to Satan. They were so caught up in their own personal agenda, they could not hear the message of Jesus. Jesus told them, "He who is not with me is against me. . . anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come."

The reason such a sin is unforgiven is:

1. Every sin for which one can repent can be forgiven.
2. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven because the heart becomes so hardened that repentance is impossible.
3. Therefore, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgiven because the heart is unrepentant.

In order to commit this sin, one must have a heart so hardened that it is impossible to repent. If you can repent of the sin, it is not the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

When we ask God for forgiveness, what does God ask of us?

God asks that we believe that our salvation comes from him with the sacrifice of his son as payment for our sins. He does not require that we fully understand the process, just that we know the source.

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (Acts 10:43)

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24)

God asks that we acknowledge or "own" our sins and be sincerely sorry for what we have done. Sincere remorse means commitment to avoiding the sin in the future. We are also asked to confess our sins to others and pray for each other. (James 5:16)

Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out. (Acts 3:19)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

An agent is a person acting or doing business for another. Because we are God's agents or ambassadors, he wants us to model his forgiveness by forgiving others. In other words, he wants us to pass it on so that others can understand how God's love works.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13)

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

A Bible Story of Forgiveness

In Luke 15:11-31, Jesus told a story about a loving father to the tax collectors and sinners who gathered to hear him. The story goes like this:

There was a man who had two sons. The younger son asked the father for his share of his inheritance. The father granted the request and gave him his portion. The young son set off to a distant country and eventually squandered his money on wild living. The country was ravaged by a great famine and the son found himself living in poverty.

In desperation, the son took a job feeding pigs. He was so deprived of food that he began to crave the pig's food. At that point, the son "came to his senses" realizing that the hired hands on his father's estate were better fed than he. The son decided to go back to his father, tell him he was sorry and ask him to let him work as a hired hand. As he returned home, his father saw him from a distance and ran to him, kissing and hugging him. The remorseful son told his father how sorry he was for his actions. The father reacted by telling the servants to bring his a fine robe, sandals and a ring for his finger. A magnificent feast was prepared to celebrate the son's return.

This story illustrates God's complete forgiveness. He is the loving father and we are the children who are always forgiven after we make foolish choices. When we "come to our senses" (Luke 15:17), we realize what God offers us—unfailing love and a place with him forever. Like the father in this story, he always rejoices and receives us with open arms when we return.

Forgiveness Quiz:

Mark each of the following items true or false:

1. _____ Sins today are different than those in bible times.
2. _____ When we commit a grave sin, we must ask God to forgive us over and over.
3. _____ Even when God forgives us, our sins will be reviewed again on the judgment day.
4. _____ God asks us to forgive others in order to be forgiven.
5. _____ We are God's agents "doing business" for him.

Thought Questions:

1. Why does God forgive us?

2. How long does forgiveness last? How do we know?

3. When we ask God for forgiveness, what does he ask of us?

4. Why is God's forgiveness contingent on our forgiveness of others?

5. Are you able to confess your sins to others as outlined in James 5:16? What makes this hard to do?

6. How is Josh's story similar to the story that Jesus told in Luke 15:11-31?
