

Series: **STAPLES - September 27, 2009**

## **FORGIVEN**

**1 John 1:8-2:2, Matthew 6:14-15**

1. When I was a teenager, I was driving my Dad's 69 Mercury land yacht--waiting at an intersection—for a spot to get through. I thought that if I dropped it into first gear and floored it—I would not only get a fast start, but it **could** be exciting! So I did. It's hard to describe what happened next, but it sounded like a cement mixer under the hood.  
  
-I brought the car home and said, "Dad, I'm not sure, but I think there's **something** wrong with the engine in the car." He had it checked—and found out that the torque of that massive 400 engine had torn one motor mount right off—and the fan blade had shredded the plastic shroud over it.  
  
-When he asked how that could possibly happen I didn't exactly lie—well, yes I did. I told him, "Boy, I don't know, Dad. I was just trying to get through an intersection and, **Voila!**" I lied because I knew the underlying question was, **Who's going to pay for this mess?** And the answer? You!
  - a. One of the key questions in our world is: **Who's going to pay for this mess?** The companion statement is, **Somebody HAS to pay for this!** A drunken ship captain runs the Exxon Valdez aground in a pristine harbor in Alaska sliming the entire place with crude oil. Someone leaves a party drunk or high—and on their way home slams broadside into a van—permanently disabling two children. **Somebody has to pay for this!**
  - b. How many of you **get** this concept, **Somebody has to pay!** That phrase is at the base of the question we ask ourselves when the noise stops—and we're alone. "Have I **really, truly** been forgiven for what I've done—or is God waiting for a good opportunity to **make me pay?**" And **this** is what the Bible says about that:  
**But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.**  
(Romans 5:8-11 NLT)
  - c. The **Good News** of Jesus is that God saw the mess we'd made of everything—the collateral damage caused by greed, power, lust, hate, revenge, drunkenness, betrayal, oppression, pride, and jealousy.  
**Massive, incomprehensible damage.** To the question, **Who's going to pay for this?** God's answer was, **I will!** And that's why He came and entered into our pain and misery through Jesus—and paid for it with His life. The words to the song--**Jesus Paid It All**--are **true!**

-The word **forgive** comes out of *finance* language. When someone **forgives** your debt...well, they swallow the loss—and **you** don't pay. *Forgiveness*, at its core, mean "to choose **not** to make someone pay their debt." If the person I'm forgiving doesn't pay the debt—who does? I do. And that's precisely what makes forgiveness feel so unreal; so unreachable. It's crazy. It's insane. **Totally** unfair in a **Somebody has to pay** world. And yet it's the **only** path to healing in our world.

-How many of you think that the **make them pay** philosophy is working **really** well—you know, in places like the Middle East? Family quarrels? Divorces? How many of you think God's **let it go!** way might be the better way?

2. Now here's the problem. We can understand in our minds that God can do a mass forgiveness through Jesus' death—and offer friendship to people who have totally flipped him off—and are likely to do it again. But what about my personal failure? Anyone here besides me who can look back and say, "My sin has caused **permanent** damage; some people will **never** be the same?" What about that? Forgiveness has to get out of the realm of theory—and into our hearts!

-**Knowing** that you've been forgiven is one of the most life's most **priceless** gifts. Walking through life everyday—with this knot of pain, guilt and unforgiveness in your heart can kill you. John, one of Jesus' disciples—gives us the basics on forgiveness: **If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. (1 John 1:8–2:2 NLT)**

-This passage has some very profound things to say about sin—and about the games we play with it.

- a. This passage states what we **all** know to be true.

We will go to **unbelievable** lengths to excuse ourselves and protect our pride. Owning the truth—saying, "I knew it was wrong, I knew it would hurt others—but **I did it anyway**" is almost impossible for us to admit. So we play the game of **denial**. Our culture makes this quite easy. Have you seen some of the scientific articles justifying men sleeping around as an evolutionary **gene pool** problem—pursuing genetic survival? The psychological term for **fooling yourself** is **living in denial**.

-And if your quest is forgiveness—living in denial makes it worse. The only way to deal with sin is to face it head on—and **call** it what it is. If you can't call

pride—**pride**; if you can't call jealousy—**jealousy**; if you can't call greed—**greed**—then your chances of being forgiven and feeling forgiven are remote. We've got to **own** this stuff. If we don't, we never change. We just turn out the light and sit in the darkness.

-Think about it relationally. A friend publicly humiliates you—then comes to you and wants the relationship to be the same as always. When you describe the problem, their response is curt.

“You’ve just being over-sensitive. That’s not **my** problem!” Would that change your friendship?

- b. There’s another game we play with sin, particularly in our culture. John puts it like this:

**If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.**

**(1 John 1:10 NLT)**

It’s the illusion that I get to decide what is—and what isn’t sinful. Sometimes people say things like, “There are no moral absolutes.” I.e.--rightness and wrongness--is determined by what I **feel** is right, not by what the Bible says is wrong.

-People do all kinds of tricky things with what the Bible clear says. “It was wrong in **that** culture—but we’re more enlightened. And I want to say, “**Really? We know better than like Jesus and Paul?**” This reminds me of a **Peanuts** cartoon that showed Charlie Brown practicing archery. What he would do is shoot an arrow at the side of the barn--and then run up and draw a bullseye around it.

-You can play games with truth—but you can’t do it and find forgiveness. John the Apostle is pretty blunt here.

His point in saying **his word has no place in our hearts** is that when you choose to reject what God’s Word says and replace it with what fits your fits **your** personal agenda and lifestyle, you’ve lost your moral compass.

His point is that when you choose to reject what God’s Word and replace it with what fits your fits **your** personal agenda and lifestyle, you’ve lost your moral compass. To justify the way you’re living—you’re willing to call God a liar—and there is no way home from there!

- c. And this is **very** specific about how to find forgiveness. And it’s quite simple.

**But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.**

**(1 John 1:9 NLT)**

-Sometimes you and I would rather live with a heart full of garbage--and it goes on day after day after day. It stinks. It contaminates. It spoils our lives. It hurts others. God says, **JUST CONFESS IT! OWN IT!**

-Know what it means to confess? The word is *homologeo*. It means to **say the same thing as God is saying**. And it's very simple. It doesn't say "wait until you're so sorry, so sick inside, loathe yourself so much you want to die." It says "Just **admit** it. Agree with God."

-We live in a culture of victims. And when it comes to sin, you can **declare** yourself a victim. "Wasn't **me! Not me?**" You can **always** find something or someone to blame—but there's a price tag. Helplessness. And we place ourselves in a prison where circumstances and others are the wardens. Confession is the key to the jail cell! Saying, **I'm** responsible. **I** made the choices. It's **me! I'm** the problem!—owning that sets us free to make better choices!

-And there's something God does. It says that He is **faithful**--and **just**—that is, He will **do what He promises to do**. Not only will He forgive our sins—He washes away the stains; restores the warmth of friendship. And we have the weight of guilt lifted from our conscience.

Question: Why would we try to prove our innocence when we can have **that**? Is pride worth it?

- d. This passage goes on to say that God's plan for us is that we **don't** sin. In other words, Jesus didn't give his life on a cross in our place to say, "Go ahead! Indulge! Have a great time rebelling—cause I'm here for you to clean up the mess every time."

-Sin is deceptive—**and** destructive. It will ruin everything that's good about your life! God's Spirit comes to live in us to help us overcome this stuff and live differently.

-But perfection? That's not realistic either, is it. So Jesus is our **Advocate** with the Father. An advocate is a lawyer who represents people in a court of justice. When we goof up, stray, fail—and then confess what we've done, He represents us—steps between us and God's judgment on sin. Based on his payment for all our sin, we are declared, "not guilty."

3. Let's talk for a few minutes about what forgiveness is. At its core, forgiveness is an act of giving. It means to grant a pardon. If you've been granted a pardon for a crime you've committed—can you be tried for it again? No. The debt has been cancelled. When God forgives us, He declares us pardoned—or **justified**. He chooses not to **make us pay**—because someone else already did. His Son—Jesus. The Bible gives us a great image for this. Let's read it:

**You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to**

**the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15 NLT)**

- a. People thought differently about crosses back then. The Romans would crucify people in places where everyone could see them die as a form of intimidation; “You’d better not mess with Caesar!” It was pretty hard **not** to witness a crucifixion.
- Above the head of the person nailed to the cross was a list of the charges against them. People would walk along the road, “Why’s **he** being crucified?” The sign told you: a thief, an imposter, a rebel or a murderer.
- This passage says, “The list of charges against you and me, all the scummy things we’ve ever done, were nailed to **Jesus**’ cross. This is a real bummer for Satan and his gang—because one of his best weapons against us is accusation. In fact he is called **the accuser**. To kill our joy and effectiveness—he humiliates us—tortures us—with our failure and stupidity and guilt. God trumps him by nailing that same list to his cross—removing it as a tool of humiliation.
- b. Notice the language here. He forgave **all** our sin—past, present, future. All of it. He **cancelled** the written charges against us. He publicly shamed the powers of darkness with this one act. No one expected that the same One offended by our sin and failure would come and pay for it himself!
- c. When God forgives...when we forgive...this is what happens.
- \*It starts with a decision to forgive, not feelings.** If you read the record of our defection from God in the Garden, you’ll see a decision on God’s part to forgive. It was completed at the cross when through Jesus, He paid for it.
- \*God forgets our sin.** That doesn’t mean that God gets Alzheimer’s; He refuses to rehearse it and replay the resentment every time He deals with us.
- \*God’s goal is reconciliation. Friendship.** But it takes two to be reconciled. For reconciliation to happen, we have to admit our failure and choose to open our hearts to God. If we don’t do that—we will never feel God’s forgiveness.
- \*God’s ultimate goal is restoration.** His ultimate plan is to restore **everything**, make **all things** new! All we’ve lost, all that sin has stolen, all the damage done to us, to Him and to others gets totally redone. It starts now—and is completed when Jesus returns.
- d. How do we **know** that this forgiveness has taken place? Well, how do we know Jesus is real, that He’s the Son of God and that He rose from the dead? Part of that certainty comes from looking seriously into the historical record and the accuracy of the biblical records we have. Part of it is faith. Trust. Saying, “Jesus—even though it sounds so unbelievable that you would love me and give your life for me—I **choose** to believe you. Every time I am reminded of my failure and guilt—I will come to your cross.

I **choose** to believe that **If I will confess my sins to You, You are faithful and just to forgive me of my sins and to cleanse me from all wickedness.**

You've told us to forgive our enemies; I believe that's what **You** do! So I believe you and **not my feelings!**"

4. In closing, I want to talk about some of the barriers to **feeling** that you're forgiven-- even when you ask for it.

a. Sometimes we don't feel forgiven because we haven't been honest about our sin. In our home we say, "Come on—say the words...!" And they are? "**I was wrong—and you were right.**" **Try it with me. I was wrong** is this little tiny phrase that our arrogant hearts virtually **refuse** to say. See, we want to feel good, feel accepted—feel that God is our friend—without ever humbling ourselves before Him.

-To **confess**—say the same thing as God says about sin—means that we don't excuse it, play with it, use kinder, gentler words to make ourselves look better. We call it what it is. "I cheated! I was obnoxious. I intentionally gossiped because I wanted to **hurt** them! I committed adultery. I was greedy and selfish. I abused my power squashed someone smaller than me!"

-To sugar-coat what we've done is to **deny** that we've sinned. And that's what God's Word warns us about. It's not like we'll shock God if we admit it—but we **need** to shock ourselves—and just **call it what it is.**

b. Sometimes we struggle with feelings of not being forgiven because we've never made things right with people we've hurt. Imagine someone running another person down on the street—then driving off. As the person lies there broken and bleeding, the driver prays from their car, "God—I really shouldn't have done that. Please forgive me and restore my sense of inner peace, okay?"

-Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector who'd spent his life ripping people off. When he met Jesus—he vowed that he would repay the people he'd cheated **four times over!** The point is that you can't hide the trail of blood sin leaves.

-There have been a number of times in my life when I have had to go and make things right with people. People I'd hurt, used or treated with disrespect. I've had to ask my kids to forgive me for being crabby or unreasonable. I once went to a boat manufacturer and offered to pay for a boat I'd stolen from the place where they dumped rejects. How many of you think I probably had fun doing that? It's messy, uncomfortable, inconvenient and humbling—but it brings freedom!

c. Sometimes we struggle with feeling unforgiven because we don't stand up to the one the Bible calls, **The Accuser.** Anyone know who that might be? It's Satan. The Bible says that he accuses God's people day and night.

-In fact, you might recognize his voice. Have you ever had thoughts in your heart that sound like this: “How can you **possibly** call yourself a Christian? How can God even stand the sight of you? You’re just scum. You’ve done so much damage...” Anyone ever heard that? It’s important to know—**That’s not God!** God does not verbally abuse, accuse, berate or belittle.

-Sometimes you have to identify the voice as Satan’s—and tell him to just get out of your life. Say, “**I belong to God, paid for by the blood of His Son—and if you have a problem with me, go talk to HIM about it, you coward!**” Recognize the voice—then place yourself under the forgiveness of Jesus!

- d. Sometimes we don’t feel forgiven simply because God is invisible. Sin, on the other hand, is **very** visible and tangible. What I’m going to suggest may seem **way** outside your comfort zone—but I’m going to say it anyway. In the context of praying for healing, James, an early leader, writes this:

**Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.**  
(James 5:16 NLT)

-Sometimes it’s helpful to talk to another believer you trust about the guilt you’re struggling with—and have **them** look you in the eye and say, “In the Name of Jesus—based on the price He paid for my sin and yours—I declare you **forgiven! Go in peace!**”

We as Followers of Jesus have this powerful opportunity to incarnate the forgiveness and the grace He offers to people who make terrible mistakes and wreck their lives. And I think there is tremendous power and meaning in being His eyes, His ears, and His voice!

- e. There’s one more reason why we may not feel forgiven—and it’s the biggest one. Want to know what it is? **We** won’t forgive. We’re holding onto junk about others—sometimes grudges that have evolved into full-blown bitterness cancers. And we wonder why our relationship with God seems cold and distant.
- Jesus was **very** straightforward about this. Right in the prayer He taught his disciples He said:

**...[A]nd forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.**  
(Matthew 6:12 NLT)

-Just in case people thought, “Oh, that’s just a cool think to put in a prayer” he says this **after** the prayer:

**If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.** (Matthew 6:14-15 NLT)

-One day Peter asked, “How many times should I forgive someone who sins against me?” Jesus’ **short** answer was, “Don’t count!” And then He told a story about a servant who owed a king a ridiculous amount—impossible to repay. When threatened with going to prison while his family worked off his debt—he begged for mercy. And to **everyone’s** shock—he got it. The king wrote off his debt—which meant **he** paid this staggering amount of money himself. Unbelievable!

-So, this guy whose eyes are still red from bawling—fresh from being forgiven—goes out and demands repayment from a guy who owes him a few bucks. This debtor pleads for mercy. But instead of mercy—he threw him in prison. Well, this injustice got back to the king—and the debt this guy was so relieved to get rid of—was dumped back on his shoulders.

And he ended up in prison. Tortured. Probably by his own stupidity. Jesus says,

**“That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”**  
(Matthew 18:35 NLT)

-The message is pretty clear. When we come to God and ask forgiveness—the **reality** is that our sin, and the damage that it has done and will continue to do long after we’re gone—is an **immense—absolutely unpayable** debt. We don’t like to admit that—but it’s true. And in his mercy, He forgives the debt—which means that **He** pays for it.

God the Son was unjustly accused, beaten, humiliated—and then pinned to a cross naked—publicly. And our debt, the penalty for our sin—was **paid in full**. The price-tag? Literally—incalculable. Numbers don’t go that high.

-The point of this story is that when people like us have had the horrible things we’ve done paid for in blood—and **we refuse to forgive** other people the little debts they owe us? Something is **deeply** wrong down in the gratitude center of our lives. When we refuse to show forgiveness—it means we either haven’t been forgiven ourselves—or we really don’t understand forgiveness. Our heart is off course. We’ve lost the plot. The bottom line is that when we have an unforgiving heart--feeling the grace and the freedom and the wonder of forgiveness—and the reconnection with God probably won’t happen.

-And the only way to be released from your filthy jail cell—is to do what Jesus calls us—**begs** us to do. **Choose** to forgive. In fact, forgiveness is the **only** way to be free from the hurt others cause you. That’s why **God** forgives.

**Q & A**

5. There are some times when, to help me forgive others for what they've done—or to receive forgiveness for what I've done—I think about Jesus—particularly scenes from the *Passion of the Christ*.

-If you're struggling with resentment—and feelings of revenge for someone who hurt you—thinking about them, in fact, fills you with rage. You think, I could *never* forgive them! Think about Jesus' death and ask, *Was it enough?* Think about the person who hurt you—if they went through what Jesus went through—would it exact enough revenge?

-And when you think about evil things you've done—almost too painful to bring into your mind, let alone be forgiven for--think about Jesus' suffering and ask, *Was it enough?* Think about how the soldiers punched him and kicked him around—treating him like dirt. Think about the cruel, sick beating he took with the scourge—as his back was torn apart, and the blood spattered all over the pavement. And think of him laying there on the cross as 7 inch nails were driven through his wrists and feet—and as He hung—gasping for breath--blood dripping onto the ground. Until his final words, *paid in full*. It's *finished*.

-Then ask: *Was it enough?* Was that enough suffering for the one who hurt you? And was it enough payment for what you've done—for your shameful failure? If it was—then *receive* it as the gift God longs to give to you. You can be *free! Really free!*

-As we close this morning—I want to do something we've done before. You have a piece of paper—and a pen or pencil. At the front, where we will receive communion, is a cross. On the piece of paper, write *your* list that needs to be nailed to the cross, whether it's the list of things you'd like to leave in the past—or the list of people you are, today, *choosing* to forgive. And as you take the bread and cup, whisper to Jesus, "Lord, *IT WAS ENOUGH!*—I receive the gift you died to give."