

Forgiveness Can Not Erase the Past

Description

Forgiveness Can Not Erase the Past

A study related to the SDA
Sabbath School Lesson for 2021, 3rd Quarter
Rest In Christ
Week 4
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This week's lesson is entitled, "The Cost of Rest." It discusses how we can find rest after committing sin. Tuesday's lesson is entitled, "Forgiven and Forgotten?", and discusses the example given to us in 2 Samuel of King David's choice to sin with Bathsheba and the cover-up that he orchestrated, ultimately resulting in the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. David eventually repented after God sent Nathan the prophet to relate to him the story of the poor man and his lamb. God, through the prophet Nathan, helped David realize the enormity of what he had done to Uriah, and to God too. David found rest in the forgiveness of God after he truly repented and turned from his sin with the help of the Holy Spirit and God's grace.

The lesson does not brush over the consequences of David's sin. 2 Samuel tells us that the sword would never depart from David's house.

While we can be forgiven after we repent, the truth is, some consequences of sin can never be reversed. All we can do, and all God can do, is make the best of whatever the situation leaves us. Thankfully, God promises to do this for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Our choices forever change what the future will be. Not only for us but for everyone else too. Any choice, like where you choose to take a job for example, just WILL affect the course of your life. Different choice – different life. And obviously, this is also the case with the choice to sin.

Forgiveness can never wipe out the reality of the past. In the case here in 2 Samuel with King David, no amount of forgiveness for David would ever affect Uriah, because Uriah's reality was over. Uriah's friend's and family's lives were forever devastated by David's sin. Now, to be clear, forgiveness definitely impacts the future for all who are affected by sin, which is everyone, but forgiveness will never wipe away the tragedy caused by our choices to sin. This is just a reality due to the linear nature of time.

Justification cannot erase the permanent effects of sinful choices either.

Some think that to be justified means that God will see me "just-as-if-I-never-sinned." But, since it is impossible for our futures not to be impacted by our choices in this moment, that idea is completely out of touch with reality. The only way God could make things "just-as-if-I-never-sinned" is to go back in time and cause me to make a different choice (in the case of sin, the righteous choice), therefore causing a different reality to commence.

But this cannot happen, because, first of all, God can't cause me to make any choice...I can only do that for myself. Second, time is just the change of events from one moment to the next. Time is a one-way street, and even God cannot go back in time to do anything. I know it is common for people to imagine that God is outside of time and able to go to any moment past, present, or future. But where in Scripture does it say anything like that about God? The truth is, the scriptures don't present God as a time traveler. They present him as a real being within time and space. As one example, consider this passage from Jeremiah. The context is that the northern kingdom of Israel had apostatized and now Judah had apostatized as well. God was greatly troubled over this and the following passage is the beginning of Jeremiah's record of what God said to him about it. It is Jeremiah 3:6-7.

⁶ And the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Do you see what she did? – Apostate Israel, she went up upon every high hill and beneath every spreading tree, and she prostituted there. ⁷ And I said, 'After she has done all these things, she will return to me,' but she has not returned and her false sister Judah saw it." Jeremiah 3:6-7

This shows God dynamically interacting with his people in real time. In this passage, God expresses to Jeremiah that he had hopes and expectations regarding what Israel would do, but that his hopes and expectations were disappointed. If God was outside of time and had the whole history of the universe as a single timeless object before him, he wouldn't be able to have a time-bound experience like the one described here. But the fact is, God can have hopes and expectations, and since we have free will, we can make choices that run contrary to what God expected and what he hoped for. If you have a hard time accepting this truth, please prayerfully consider what God is saying here in Jeremiah 3, especially verse 7. And also consider whether it is right to impose a theology onto this text or whether honesty requires us to let the text dictate its own theology to us.

This is just one of many passages that clearly portray God as experiencing time moment by moment as we all do. And there is no scripture that says that God is outside of time.

Time is actually just a fundamental part of reality. The past is the past. It does not exist anymore, and it cannot be undone. The past is gone; all we have from it is how it has shaped the present. This includes our present memories of what happened in the past and the present consequences of our past choices and actions.

Furthermore, the future does not exist yet. All that we have is the present moment, and our choices each moment necessarily affect the course of our lives in the future.

And this is why it is so important to stop sinning. Every choice we make affects everything else going forward. This will be the case forever into eternity. This reality does not change when Jesus returns. It literally can't change when Jesus returns. It just is what is true about material reality. We can't change the past, and our choices today affect the future.

This may sound obvious, but as we've already mentioned, many people believe that God exists outside of space and time. Many think that God could change the past if He wanted to. But again, there is no evidence of God either changing the past or being able to change the past written of in the scriptures. We have no reason to think this.

This brings us to the point of the gospel. One reason God allowed Jesus to come to earth was to suffer the full out effects of sin, which ultimately resulted in Jesus' torture and death. The purpose here was to make us aware of the terrible end result of sin (Romans 6:23) – that sin would lead to the torture and death of an innocent and loving man – Jesus. God allowed this so it would wake us up and bring us to the realization that we actually have to make right choices every moment from now to eternity if we want to live eternally.

And while this may sound daunting, it really isn't when you stop and think about it. If I can make the right choice in this moment, then I can make the right choice the next moment, and the next, and the next. All I really have to concern myself with is ****this**** moment, because, as we just said, ****this**** moment is all that we have to deal with.

Forgiveness is given when we truly repent and turn from our sin like David did. God gives us His grace, His unmerited love and favor, and teaches us about truth and reality. This will transform our minds, so we CAN think and act righteously in the present. Ellen White said "Righteousness is right doing." (Christ's Object Lessons, page 312). When we have learned to love the truth, God will then trust us to make right choices for the future. We are justified once we stop making choices to sin. And although being forgiven and justified will not change the past, it will affect the future! Thus, the gospel isn't about changing the past, it is about changing us now, in the present!

For a deeper study, please see "Battle for Today," by Teresa Wilde, "The Power of Forgiveness," by Trent Wilde, and "Sabbath School 3rd Quarter 2018 Week Nine: Justification."