

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOW TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

Relationships are one of the joys of life. Talking to, working with and interacting with people are the nuts and bolts of everyday living. Our relationship with God is the most important relationship of all.

In the same way that we have been born into our natural families and have a relationship with our earthly fathers, so, too, we have been born into the family of God through Jesus Christ. We have a relationship with God the Father. Nothing can change our **blood** relationship with our earthly father, and nothing can change our **blood** relationship with our heavenly Father. Our relationship with God is secure because of the blood of Jesus Christ.

However, the **quality** of our relationship with people and the degree of closeness in friendships can vary depending upon the behavior of the people involved. We can see this through the following example of a situation that could occur in a father-child relationship.

Suppose you are a teenager who has just received your driver's license. It's Friday night and your father gives you the keys to the new car. At midnight, you return home after a fun evening with your friends. You confidently pull the car into the driveway, only to hear the sickening sound of the scraping metal. Your heart sinks as you realize that you have just hit the mailbox with your dad's new car! You park the car in the garage and immediately check the rear bumper for damages. To your surprise, there isn't a scratch on the car. You look to heaven and whisper a heartfelt, "Thank You, Lord."

You quietly walk out to inspect the damaged mailbox. You slip into the house and tiptoe upstairs. As you fall off to sleep you are battling with the question, "Should I tell Dad?" The next morning you decide not to mention anything about the mailbox. Since there wasn't any damage to the car, your dad will assume some vandals sideswiped the mailbox during the night. Besides, if you did tell your dad, maybe he wouldn't trust you with the car in the future.

What you don't know, however, is that your dad saw the whole incident! He was sitting in the darkened living room, looking out the picture window, waiting for you to arrive safely home. He saw you knock out the mailbox. He saw you check the mailbox. He saw it all. At breakfast, he is waiting for you to tell him all about it. When you don't say anything about it, how do you think that affects your relationship with him?

A. RELATIONSHIP VERSUS FRIENDSHIP

Answer the following questions based on the incident described in the car/mailbox illustration above.

1. How do you think the father feels? _____

2. How do you think the child-parent *friendship* has been affected? Do they still have close fellowship? _____
3. How do you think the child-parent *relationship* has been affected? Do they still have a father-child relationship? _____
4. What should the teenager do if he wants to restore their friendship? _____
5. What do you think will happen to the friendship if the teenager never says anything to his father about the mailbox? _____

6. Do you think the father still loves his child? _____
7. Our relationship with our heavenly Father is similar to our relationship with our earthly father. Our heavenly Father knows everything we think and sees everything we do. God loves us and is willing to forgive us if we will be honest and confess our sin to Him. Read 1 John 1:6-10 and see what parallels you can draw from this story. _____

B. HOW DOES GOD SEE ME?

God the Father loves us more than our earthly father does, and He has given us certain instructions to obey. These instructions are not intended to restrict us or to keep us from having fun; they are actually for our good. God knows what is best for us, and His commandments are designed to enable us to live life to the fullest.

Although the quality of our friendship with God can change according to our behavior, our right standing with God is not based on our goodness or on our behavior. Our right standing with God is based solely upon the love of God and the blood of Jesus. How does God see us?

1. 2 Corinthians 5:21

According to this verse, what are we made? _____

RIGHTEOUSNESS: Righteousness is a big religious-sounding word, but its meaning is very simple. The righteousness that God bestows upon us is simply the ability to stand before Him without any sense of guilt or inferiority, as though we have never sinned. God credits

us with His righteousness.

How righteous is God? _____

2. Hebrews 10:14

When Jesus offered Himself for our sins, what did this do for us in God's sight? _____

3. Hebrews 10:17

Is God keeping a record of your sins? _____

4. 1 John 1:7

As we walk in the light of God's Word, what does the blood of Jesus do for us? _____

5. Romans 8:1

To whom does this verse say there is no condemnation? _____

Like a father, God loves His children. He does not condemn us or hold a grudge against us. At the same time, however, God is not a spineless mass of spiritual mush, either. He does not wink at sin, but He offers forgiveness to those who will confess and forsake it.

C. HOW DOES GOD DEFINE SIN?

1. 1 John 3:4 _____

THE LAW: As we have seen in the previous chapter, the law referred to here is the law of love.

2. James 4:17 _____

3. 1 John 5:17 _____

4. Romans 14:23 _____

D. WHO SINS?

1 John 1:8,10 _____

E. WHO TEMPTS US TO SIN?

1. Matthew 4:1

Who is at the ultimate root of all sin? _____

2. James 1:13-15

Who never tempts us to sin? _____

Through what does the devil tempt us? _____

When does temptation become sin? _____

TEMPTATION: It is important to remember that temptation is not sin. To be tempted is normal for the Christian. Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, and yet, we know that He never sinned. When you are tempted, don't let the enemy make you feel as if you have already sinned. Resist the temptation, and you will not sin.

What is the result of sin? _____

F. HOW CAN WE RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO SIN?

1. 1 Corinthians 10:13

Are the temptations you face unique? _____

Does God ever allow you to be tempted with more than you can bear? _____

What does God always provide? _____

Is there ever any excuse for sin? _____

Describe a temptation you have faced and identify the way of escape that was available to you. _____

2. Proverbs 4:14,15

We can "nip sin in the bud" by avoiding certain relationships. What relationships are we to avoid? _____

When we are presented with an opportunity to sin, what does verse 15 say we should do?

3. James 4:7

What does this verse tell us to do in relationship to the devil? _____

What will the devil do? _____

4. Joshua 7:20,21

What tempted Achan to sin? _____

When could Achan have escaped the temptation? _____

What role did Achan's eyes play in his ultimate sin? _____

Describe the role of our eyes in yielding to or avoiding temptation. _____

G. WHAT DO WE DO IF WE SIN?

1. 1 John 1:9

This verse has been called the Christian's "bar of soap." What are we to do, according to this verse? _____

To confess our sins means to say the same thing about our sin that God does. To confess our sins is to agree with God that our action or attitude was wrong.

According to this verse, what will God do? _____

If we confess our sin, will God hold our sin against us? _____

2. Psalm 38:18

What are we to do when we sin? _____

3. Psalm 32:1-5

What happened to David when he did not confess his sin? (vv. 3,4.) _____

What happened when David did confess his sin? (v. 5.) _____

Have you ever experienced this? _____

Describe how you felt when you knew you had sinned and were not right with God. ____

Describe how you felt when you confessed your sin and received God's forgiveness. ____

4. Proverbs 28:13

If you cover your sins, what results can you expect? _____

If you confess your sins, what can you expect? _____

5. 1 John 1:7

If we walk in the light of God's Word, in a right relationship with God and with others, what are we promised? _____

Can you see that God wants to forgive and cleanse you from all sin? There is no greater sense of liberty than to know you are right with God and that there is nothing standing between you and your heavenly Father.

Satan does not want us to experience that freedom. He often works on our minds and

emotions with feelings of guilt or condemnation to make us feel as though we are not forgiven, as if God is holding our sin against us. We must receive our forgiveness by faith, based on the Word of God, and not on our feelings.

H. PERSONAL APPLICATION

It is so important to be honest before God. As you confess your sin before Him, you enjoy a loving friendship with the Lord. Unconfessed sin is like the sludge that clogs sewer pipes. Over a period of time, the sludge blocks the free flow of water.

Unconfessed sin, over a period of time, can block the flow of God's love, can cause a heart to harden toward God and develop a bitterness toward the things of God. The blood of Jesus continually cleanses us from all sin as we keep our hearts honest and pure before God.

Take a moment and apply 1 John 1:9 to your life, right now. If there are areas of your life where you have sinned and have not confessed them to the Lord, write them down on a piece of paper. Now, read 1 John 1:9. After you confess those sins and ask God to forgive you, write "1 John 1:9" across that piece of paper as an act of your faith and say out loud, "All of these sins are now forgiven, and I am cleansed from all unrighteousness!" Now tear that piece of paper into tiny pieces and throw those pieces away, never to be remembered. This is exactly what God does with your sin. He will remember them no more!

I. GROUP EXERCISE

Read Psalm 51:1-12 and discuss David's honesty before God.

Did David try to blame someone else for his sin?

Against Whom did David say he had sinned?

What was David's prayer after he had received forgiveness?