

# It Is Written

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## A Friend Of Mine. . .

By Steven Harper

A friend of mine had a few questions about his/her spiritual condition. [This person shall remain nameless and without any type of descriptive terms that might identify him/her, out of respect for his/her privacy.] The following are the questions and my answers to “my friend.” This might be helpful to someone out there who happens to read this.

**Q1: Can God really forgive me?** This person elaborated a little more, explaining that he/she felt they had either sinned too much for God to forgive, or certain sins were just so terrible, they couldn't be forgiven.

**A1: Yes!** I know it is almost impossible for us to believe, sometimes, but God can forgive. According to the Bible record [God's word], He promised a new covenant [one to which all men are now accountable] and within that covenant promised, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Heb. 8:12; a quote from Jer. 31:31-34). God did not say He would forget their sins temporarily, or until they sinned again, or until they just sinned too many times; He said He would “remember no more.” As hard as that is to grasp, it is true, for God does not lie (Titus 1:2). As hard as it is to believe, God truly forgives and forgets. In fact, it is as if those sins never happened at all. Again, I know it is hard to believe or even conceive, but it is true, nonetheless.

And if you think your sins are just too numerous or too terrible, just remember that God offered forgiveness to “the world” [that means everyone, by the way] when He sent His Son to die for our sins (John 3:16). And since all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), that's a lot of sins to forgive! But God was and is willing to forgive. And He can. As Paul put it, “where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (Rom. 5:20). As hard as it may be for us to believe, we cannot out-sin God's grace — His willingness to forgive!

Know, also, that God has already forgiven some people we might not think He would forgive. He forgave a man who killed another man (Moses; Exod. 2:11, 12; Matt. 17:1-3); He forgave one of the early church's greatest persecutors — someone responsible for the punishment, imprisonment, and deaths of an unknown number of Christians (the apostle Paul; Acts 9:1-20; 22:4, 5; 26:9-11); and Jesus Himself prayed that even those who put Him on the cross as an innocent man would be forgiven (Luke 23:34). Yes, God can and will forgive your sins, if you turn from them.

**Q2: What about after I become a Christian?** I don't think I will be able to live a sinless life afterwards.

**A2: God still forgives.** Welcome to the reality of being an imperfect human being! None of us who become Christians are going to live the rest of our lives without sin; and if that is what you think being a Christian means, you have been misled.

John wrote to the early disciples and told them plainly, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1st John 1:8). We are only fooling ourselves if we think we won't sin, or haven't sinned, as Christians. He says again, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us” (v. 10). So, this is even more dangerous to think, for making such a claim would be calling God [who cannot lie] a liar, and it would be then obvious that the truth is not in us! So, yes, you are still going to sin as a Christian.

Does that mean you have to start all over and believe and be baptized again every time you sin? No, for John also gives us the answer God has given to us for peace of mind: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1st John 1:9). When we sin, as Christians, we pray to God for forgiveness of those sins (see also Acts 8:22-24) and confess those sins to God; He will then forgive. He promised!

**Q3: How many times will He forgive?**

**A3: He set no number.** Again: For us fallible, abundantly imperfect human beings, it is hard to fathom a measure of grace and mercy that simply says to a man or woman who failed, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,” or, “Repent...and pray God [that] the thought of your heart may be forgiven you,” or, “their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more,” but God said all of those things. While some religious organizations teach a confusing message of some sins being forgiven and others not possible to be forgiven, or some sins being forgiven only if never repeated, God did not ever tell man such nonsense.

As hard as it may be to grasp, God did not set a limit on the number of sins we may commit before He stops forgiving.

Now, that is not to say, as some have taught, that means no sin will ever affect our soul’s salvation, or that we can just continue to live a life of sin even after we become Christians. Paul nixed that idea as a possible question when he wrote, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom. 6:1, 2). His point was clear: Now, as Christians, we live for holiness and righteousness, rather than uncleanness and lawlessness (vv. 15-19). Yes, we may still sin as Christians, but not as a way of life; whatever sins we may commit should be an act of weakness or failure to avoid the temptation, rather than a purposeful choice. We should be striving constantly to avoid sin simply because we now live to please God, rather than our selfish, fleshly desires.

**Q4: I just can’t believe I can get to heaven; I don’t deserve it.**

**A4: Heaven isn’t limited to those who never failed.** This idea that Christians have to be perfect is, I believe, a lie of our adversary the devil. It is a lie, but he has successfully convinced so many people that it is true that some never even try to live for God and Christ, and many others who do become Christians to give up not long afterwards when they sin and are convinced they are a total failure. He doesn’t want us to know or believe God is merciful, and believe that no one will actually get to heaven.

May I just say that he likely is working so hard to convince mankind of this because he knows his eternal fate is already determined (Matt. 25:46), and wants to take as many of us as possible to suffer with him eternally.

But, again, we must note the fact of our imperfection: “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20); and: “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). In spite of this — actually, because of this, and because man had no means of removing the guilt of his sins without God’s help — God had the plan in place for our salvation even before we were created (2nd Tim. 1:8-10; 1st Pet. 1:20). You see, God knew all men would sin even before He created us, and yet He did it anyway. That, friends and brethren, demonstrates just how great and really incomprehensible the love of God is, how great His mercy, and how amazing His grace. You see, no man ‘deserves’ heaven. What we ‘deserve’ is eternal separation from God (Rom. 6:23), but God loved us so much, He has done all that He has to make sure we are not separated.

But the choice to accept His gift is ours to make. If we choose God, He will do the work of forgiving and saving us.

So, ‘my friend’ had some deep, important questions that I think many of us have had or do have even now. But God’s word has the answers. The question now is: Do you believe Him?