

# FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING

By

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What the Roman soldiers had just done to Jesus would be called torture of the worst kind. Yet, as He faced certain death on the cross, and in extreme agony, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” To the end, He practiced what He had preached, that we are to forgive those who sin against us. (Luke 23:34, Matt. 6:12)

“If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt. 6:14-15). Jesus had no sins to be forgiven, yet he forgave the soldiers who treated him so cruelly.

The popular slogan says, “Don’t get mad, get even.” Get revenge. The natural man says that someone must pay. You hurt me, then, you deserve to be hurt. Some doctors estimate that up to 80% of people’s illnesses are caused by stress, much of which is due to deep-seated anger, hate, old grudges and resentment of offenses that have never been forgiven.

The danger of such bitterness is that it eats like an acid to produce more bitterness, destroy peace, raise blood pressure, corrode relationships and to create a barrier to the Heavenly Father. Why is it so hard for us to forgive?

## IT TAKES HUMILITY.

How often have we heard something like, “I know I’m not perfect, but I certainly haven’t ever done anything so terrible as...” This is to say, I’m not a great sinner, not like the one who sinned against me; I deserve forgiveness but he (or she) doesn’t. We see the actions of others as evil, but our own flawed lives and actions we see as merely less than perfect.

The humanist doctrine that every one is basically good has been dinned into our ears for two generations until it is now part of the religious doctrine: God loves you as you are; He accepts you as you are. This says to me that I am basically a good person, good enough, and don’t require any extreme forgiveness. Why should I forgive that fellow who is so wicked? This is pride speaking, and puts one in the category of the Pharisee who prayed, “God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men.” But He failed to find justification in the eyes of God. (Luke 18:9-14)

When we think of sin we think of a serial killer or the political tyrant who has murdered millions, which makes us look good by comparison. The comparison should be with the pure and righteous God Himself, Who created us to be in His image. That thought is enough to humble the best among us and lead us to pray, like the publican, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

The verse that says “All have sinned,” means that all stand in desperate need of forgiveness, forgiveness so extreme that it cost God His only begotten Son. This leaves no room for pride. If God so forgave me of my evil transgressions against Him, then in humility, how can I not forgive those who sin against me?

#### TO FORGIVE IS NOT TO CONDONE.

Some may think that to forgive a person indicates that they condone his or her evil actions. Not so. We ask God to forgive because we recognize that we have sinned and that He will not condone our actions, yet will forgive us. “...The blood of Jesus his on cleanses us from all sin...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7, 9).

Forgiveness is not granted because we deserve it or because God has changed the rules and decided that the sin was of no consequence. Neither does it mean that He condones the sin. What it means is that God is merciful.

We are to show mercy in the same way, and forgive those who sin against us. Rather than indicating that we condone the act done against us, it reinforces the fact that the offense was sufficiently bad enough to need forgiveness.

#### SUCH MERCY IS NOT WEAKNESS.

A forgiving person sometimes may be thought of as weak and spineless. Some think it courageous to retaliate, get revenge, and make the other person suffer. But just the opposite is true.

When we ask forgiveness of God we do not think for a second that His forgiveness is done in weakness, but that it is due to His great power, perfect love, and tender mercy. In fact, it takes no power or courage to hate, to threaten, or to hold a grudge, but it takes real strength of character to show mercy to one’s enemies, or to forgive a great transgression.

It may bring some satisfaction to lick your wounds and recall grievances long past, and consider the prospect of bitter confrontations over the issue. The problem is that you are punishing yourself rather than the one who offended you. It is the strong person who refuses to stoop to the same level of those who cause him grief, and instead, seeks to lift them up to his own level with mercy and forgiveness.

#### FORGIVENESS IS LIBERATION

Offenses unforgiven are walls which block the free flow of thought as well as action Note the negative effect of Elie Wiesel’s motto: “Never forgive, never forget.” He and his tribe have never sought forgiveness through Christ, and are slaves to their own hate and hunger for revenge.

A wise person sees that not to forgive is to become a prisoner of one’s own pride and weakness. When you forgive another you may not change that person, but you open your mind to better and more positive thoughts, and free yourself from the chains of the offense which had bound you to that person.

Infinitely greater than this is the fact that by forgiving you open the door by which you may be forgiven. God took the first step in forgiveness, for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6, 8). It wasn't because we are full of lovely and attractive qualities that God gave his Son to die for us. Forgiveness through Christ was made available to us because there is no other way for us to have life. I am forgiven, not because I am good, but because God is good.

This is another reason it is difficult for some to forgive: they have never confessed their own sinfulness and had the joy of being set free by God's forgiveness for Christ's sake. "Just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col. 3:13). One who has seen himself as a sinner, fully deserving the penalty of death, and then has been forgiven through God's grace and mercy in Christ, is filled with a sense of deep humility and appreciation. A great burden of guilt has been lifted and in its place is a sense of freedom. That freedom and joy he gladly shares by imitating God and granting forgiveness to others.

Could it be that the reason you feel distant from God comes from holding a grudge against someone, and therefore you haven't the assurance of God's forgiveness?

"How many times must I forgive?" Peter asked. "Seven times?" That seemed generous enough. But Jesus answered, "seventy times seven." Don't even count! On Judgment Day all will hinge upon whether or not you are forgiven, and that may depend on whether or not you have been forgiving.

It's mandatory. We must forgive if we are to live eternally in the presence of Him who forgives us.

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