

## Forgiving the Unforgivable

*If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father, who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? -Matthew 5:23-25, 43*



A dear Christian lady wrote, "I wish God would inspire you to write a message on forgiveness. I really have trouble forgiving people when they hurt me. I've prayed and struggled with this for years."

She continued, "I heard a preacher say that when you tell a person you'll forgive them, but you won't forget it, you didn't forgive at all. Then I heard another say that if someone hurts you, but doesn't ask you to forgive them, you don't have to forgive them. How could you forgive, if they don't ask forgiveness?"

"I'm afraid I don't agree with either one. I know according to God's Word we have to forgive in order to be forgiven. Pastor Marr, pray that I'll overcome this unforgiving spirit."

### Unforgiveness isn't the Problem

That's right, dear one, your unforgiveness isn't the basic problem. It's you!

Now, I know that's not the answer you wanted to hear. But it's the only answer I have for you. We have a basic problem, all of us. It's ourselves. We love ourselves. We don't love that other person. Nor can we honestly say with much assurance that we really love God. Our love for Him is shallow and superficial at best.

Because we love ourselves, we're easily hurt. We're readily angry. We tend to get bitter and even hateful. There are times when deep inside we would prefer to destroy rather than build. Now you know I've gone too far!

### You're a Good Person

This doesn't describe you at all.

You're really a very good person who just happens to have a little difficulty with forgiving people who hurt you. After all, who doesn't?

So you go right on being unable to forgive others. And really not being quite able to forgive yourself either for not being able to forgive them.

Now, face it, dear one. So long as you're basically a good person who just happens to be the victim of imperfect heritage and surroundings, you're going to have trouble forgiving others. You're going to expect them to behave themselves as you think you would -to be as good as you are!

These thoughts or expressions are dead give-aways: "I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't act like that. I wouldn't behave that way." They show up your *self-righteousness*. "Self-righteousness," you explode! "Not me." Listen, my dear friend, we have no clue what awful sinners we really are, how undeserving we are of God's forgiveness -- or of anyone else's. And until we learn, we'll never do well at forgiving others. So ask God to begin showing you your awful, hopeless depravity and sin.

Now, as the sinners we are, we *can't* forgive!

And, worse than that, we can't change, and we can't *learn* to forgive readily. Not us. Now, there's Someone Who can do it all.

**Let's face Reality!**

But before we talk about Him, I want to talk about our need to face reality -to stop playing our self-righteous games of pretense.

We need to face the fact that our sin of unforgiveness may be more serious than the offender's offence.

That's right! What could be a more terrible thing to face than that God wouldn't forgive you because you don't deserve it? What awful harm are we doing to others, and to ourselves, when we fail to forgive people because *they* don't deserve it?

And why do we fail to forgive? -Because our pride has been hurt. Our dignity. Our self-esteem. Our good name. Our vanity.

We can't stand it that the other person won't admit he's wrong. But we're just as much trying to prove we're right as he is. And we're sure not going to forgive him until he knows how he's wronged us! No way. Then we're never going to learn to forgive God's way. We have to forgive just the same when the offender *won't* recognize that he's offended as when he does. Even if he doesn't *want* to be forgiven.

Some people have never learned to be wrong. And some never will. They just can't admit they're wrong. So if you wait for them to admit they're wrong, you'll wait a lifetime and still never hear it. Don't let them keep you down at their level. Remember that your offense of unforgiveness even of those who seek no forgiveness may be greater than their offense against you. That's right, greater.

## God's Forgiveness is Free

Now, you may question why we should forgive those who are unrepentant if God doesn't. First, God loves the sinner. He's married to the backslider. He has no problem with loving the unlovely because He *is* love. That's why he loved you and me. But we do have difficulty loving others. And when we say we can't forgive them, we say we can't really love them freely.

Second, God's forgiveness is part and parcel of His redemption, cleansing, and reception of the forgiven child new-born into His family, and the beginning of His transformation of them. The only way he could provide these wondrous gifts to the unrepentant would be to force them upon them against their will. And this, because of His own prior commitment, He neither will nor can do.

## Forgiving the Unforgivable

Now, there's something more to face realistically.

You must forgive even *the most unforgivable*. If you can't forgive the most unforgivable, you can't really forgive anyone!

In every individual case, you need to see how really unforgivable the offender is. Don't pretend he's better than he is. See him as the sinner he is, just as you see yourself as the sinner you are. See him as the foolish, unkind, thoughtless, or whatever, person he really is. Otherwise you'll remain enmeshed in those games of pretense, living where the God of truth and reality does not live. And you'll try to forgive a little where only a lot of forgiveness will do.

You need to forgive, not a make believe nice person who has been victimized by his circumstances, but that nasty, undeserving person who simply doesn't deserve forgiveness. And for this only *God* is able!

Yes, we need to see ourselves as we are. We need to see the person who has offended as he really is. But then, we need to look away from ourselves and the offender to the Lord Who alone has what it takes to love and forgive the unlovely and the unforgivable.

## It's not our Forgiveness but His Life

"In Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). "*We are complete in Him*" (Colossians 2:10). "*Christ Jesus ... is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption*" O. "*Christ ... is our life*" (Colossians 3:4). "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Colossians 1:27). "*Without me, ye can do nothing*" (John 15:5). "*We are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*" (Philippians 3:3).

We'll not really be able to forgive so long as we live in our independent selves or look to our independent selves.

But we are *in Him* as He is *in us* once we are His children by faith. We can rest at peace at home in Him, relying on His life and power working in us to do what we can never do.

## **Let Go! Die!**

**Living in this reality, living in union with Him, we can learn to let go, relinquish everything to the Lord: our rights, our anger, our bitterness, our hatred, our loyaltylessness, our frustration, our self-righteousness, yes, our very lives. Just let everything go to Him. Let go over and over again in each new circumstance whether it is one demanding deliverance from unforgiveness, or anger, or fear, or anxiety, or whatever else.**

**We must die to ourselves and all our rights. Our dignity. Our good name. Our popularity. Our prestige. Our propriety. Our property. Yes, even our awful self-righteousness. We can hold onto nothing to possess it for ourselves. At best we are only stewards of that which is good.**

## **We Can't. He Can**

**To try to love the offender is futile. We can't. To try to forgive the offender is to live in frustration. We can't. We must allow the Lord to change us from the inside out until we're able by His enabling to gladly, freely turn the offender over to Him Who does love him, to work the very best he'll allow Him to do for him.**

**If He enables us to forgive, it's only with the love with which He first loved us and forgave us when we deserved neither love nor forgiveness.**

**If He enables us to forgive, it's only by the mighty life of Christ within, and His all-encompassing love.**

**The extent of our capacity to forgive will be directly proportionate to the freedom we give the Lord to live His life in us.**

**My dear friend, no matter in which direction we look, the answer to the Christian's questions and concerns are all in Christ Himself. He is our life. We have no other. To look elsewhere is to remain frustrated. He is our hope. There is no other.**

**It is His life, living in our life that alone makes everything different, that makes all things possible.**

**But, really now, isn't that better -a million times better- than simply learning a superficial technique of how to forgive?**

**Well, isn't it? Then...?? ?**

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