

Jesus and Forgiveness



David Wilkerson January 1, 1979

The most difficult thing in all the world for Christians to do is forgive. For all the talk in the church about forgiveness, restitution, and healing, there is very little of it truly demonstrated. We all like to think of ourselves as peacemakers, lifters up of those fallen, always forgiving and forgetting. But even the most deeply spiritual today are guilty of wounding brothers and sisters by not showing a spirit of forgiveness.

Even the best of Christians find it hard to forgive those who injure their pride. Let two good Christian friends have a "falling out," and you have a lifetime grudge going. They seldom admit it, because they cover their unforgiving spirits with a facade of courtesy calls, nice words, and an invitation to "come and see us sometime." But it is never the same again. We really don't hate that other party; we just seem to be saying, "I've got nothing against him, but just keep him out of my hair. Let him go his way, and I'll go mine." We simply ignore people we can't forgive.

The most difficult person to forgive is someone who is ungrateful. You loved someone without being loved. You sacrificed to help a friend in need, only to be criticized or taken for granted. The person you went out of your way to help shows nothing but ingratitude and selfishness in return. Your good intentions are misinterpreted, and your good deeds are misconstrued as being selfishly motivated. In disbelief, you exclaim, "How can they be that way, after all I've done for them? So that's what I get for being so big-hearted?" Do we ever forgive that ungrateful person? Hardly ever. We smile at them, wave a greeting from a distance, but we determine to "never do anything for them again."

We find it nearly impossible to forgive anyone who deceives us. We are most anxious to be forgiven our own lies and failures, but nothing infuriates us more than to discover someone has lied to us. It is considered a breach of trust. We so quickly lose respect for that person. If we do forgive, it is always qualified with, "I'll forgive you this time, but if you ever lie to me again, you've had it with me."

We can't forgive those who tell us we're wrong. Convinced we have a good reason for everything we do, we find it nearly impossible to forgive the person who suggests we have made a mistake. Rather than take an honest look at what that person is saying to us, we go into a long, involved explanation, justifying our actions. The closer our critics are to the truth, the less likely we are to forgive them for bringing it to our attention.

A bank clerk gave me ten dollars too much. I smiled, returned the ten dollars, and said, "Young lady, you made a little mistake. You gave me ten dollars too much." She exploded. Her cheeks flushed with anger as she replied, "What do you want, a medal for honesty? Everybody makes mistakes." That's just like so many of us. We don't like to be reminded of our mistakes, and those who remind us, even in love, receive a cold shoulder instead of thanks.

The majority of Christians don't know the first thing about handling criticism especially printed or written criticism. A critical letter ignites all kinds of wrath. We sit down, and, point by point, retaliate like a wounded bear. The pen floats on a river of poison ink. We want to set the record straight. We will not be maligned or misunderstood. We are ready to defend, at all cost, our honor and our honesty. What masterpieces of defense we pen! Wounded pride makes us very eloquent in proving our point.

Even those of us, who have learned never to answer our critics and to file all written criticism in the wastepaper

basket, find it difficult to honestly forgive the author of that criticism. In effect, we are saying, "I'll not fight back, but someday God will get you for that! You'll pay, someday!" Rather than forgive and forget, we let our resentment smolder for months and even years, just waiting for an opportunity to meet that critic face to face and "tell them off."

Believe it or not, we must learn to forgive God first. God has never sinned against anyone, but that does not stop us from holding a subtle grudge against Him. We come into His presence to pray, so often, with something bothering us deep inside, about the way He has not done what we thought He should.

A teen-age girl confessed to me, "Sir, two years ago my mom and dad were killed in a car crash. They were both ordained ministers, and they were the best, most godly parents a teen-ager could ever have. For the past two years, ever since the day of their funeral, I've held this little grudge against the Lord. I wondered how He could allow them to be killed in such a violent way. Doesn't God protect His own? I can't pray anymore with real trust in Jesus, because I carry in me this idea He failed me. What can I do? I guess you can say I've been mad at the Lord."

A young couple I know, who reside in a southern state, has been carrying a grudge against the Lord for nearly ten years. Their beautiful five-year-old daughter died shortly after being stricken with a brain tumor. They grew bitter. They did not quit going to church; they still went through all the motions. But they no longer believed in the effectiveness of prayer. They are afraid to disown God; afraid to call Him a liar or an unfaithful Father. But there is no question about their deep-seated grudge against the Lord. They have never forgiven the Lord for "taking away their only child."

I find this subtle spirit of unforgiveness toward Christ everywhere I go. A young lady in Wisconsin asks, "How can I ever pray in faith again? I've been so lonely, and I need a Christian husband. I began to claim every promise of the Bible. I exercised faith, I fasted, and I wept. I know my life is pleasing to God. But it just all collapsed. When I finally met a nice young man and thought he was the one God sent to me, he dropped me and took off. He won't even talk to me now. Does God really answer prayer? What do I have to do to get an answer? I don't want to blame God, but why did He allow me to get hurt? Why do I have to live alone when all I want to do is give my love to someone?"

Almost every Christian at some time in his life has had to face this problem. A prayer goes unanswered for weeks and months even years. An unexpected illness or tragedy claims a loved one. Things happen that have no rhyme or reason. Then faith begins to waver. But the Word makes it very clear that a wavering person will never receive anything from God.

Jesus understood this tendency in His children to hold grudges against heaven when mountains aren't moved on schedule. He warned Peter not to ask anything when standing in God's presence, unless he was forgiving.

"And when you stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your father which is in heaven many forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25)

I believe Jesus is saying, "Don't stand in God's presence asking for mountains to be removed or for forgiveness of your sins, if you have a secret grudge in your heart against heaven. Get it out! Let the Spirit of forgiveness flow through you. Cry out God is faithful! He has not failed! He will answer! He will supply! Submit yourself and ask Him to forgive you for allowing these doubts to spring up."

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