

FORGIVENESS AND THE ABUSER



True story. The lady was about 60, a wonderful friend and Christian minister. She discovered that a close personal friend of the family had for years sexually molested her 10-year-old granddaughter.

The courtroom trial was both public and horrible. The child herself had to testify. As far as I know, the man is still in prison for his crimes. Which is good.

WHAT IS IT TO FORGIVE?

A VERY important distinction must be made at this point. We forgive the human being. God alone forgives the sin. When we forgive someone, we do not in ANY way try to excuse what happened – to minimize the hurt received – or to somehow convince ourselves that maybe it was not all that bad. No, it probably was all that bad.

However, choosing to forgive (that word “choose” is important) means we let the person go. We let them go of OUR continuing judgment against them. We choose to let God be their judge. We let go of our hunger for vengeance. We let them off our hook. We turn them loose. Naturally speaking, if some man molested my daughter, I would want to kill him.

My friend was finally able to forgive the abuser. I am not sure her husband ever did. Choosing to forgive though means, we give up the right to exact our own retribution. We entrust the payback to our judicial system, or if that fails, to the hand of God himself. God says in his Bible, “Vengeance is mine. I will repay.”

WHY FORGIVE?

To forgive is our choice. It is not based on feelings. It is an act of obedience to Jesus Christ. The primary reason we forgive is the imitation of Christ. He has forgiven us our MANY sins. Therefore, we must also forgive. In fact, Jesus taught that we must forgive – or our own forgiveness may be lifted from us.

Secondarily, choosing to forgive heals our soul. One reason Jesus taught that we are not to sit in judgment on others is because we are not equipped to handle it. Not just because we never

know the COMPLETE truth about someone else – but our souls cannot stand up under the weight of carrying judgment.

As a pastor for many years now, I have seen with my own eyes the physical and mental torment of those who refuse to forgive. We have a small healing ministry at our church. Prior to almost ANY prayer for healing, we gently encourage the person receiving prayer to forgive those who have injured them. Often, just that act of forgiving brings the healing they seek.

HOW TO FORGIVE?

It would be nice if those who sinned against us came begging our forgiveness, acknowledging their wrongs done to us. That almost never happens. We cannot wait for the abuser's apology. We must forgive whether the other ever straightens out.

Of GREAT help is to distinguish the person from the sin. Our job is to forgive the person. God alone forgives the sin (which he accomplished in the cross and blood of Jesus Christ.)

A friend taught me the following illustration. Think of someone who has mistreated you. Naturally, when you think of him, you immediately think of the evil he has done you.

Now picture him wearing a solid black robe – the robe representing the evil he did. Next, picture that black robe, representing the sin, being lifted off him, and placed on the floor. Can you picture the offender as separate from his offense? Again, you are not asked to forgive the offense. You are to forgive the offender.

THE PROCESS?

Say out loud with intention, "Lord Jesus, for your sake, I forgive _____ and I let him go."

That is it. Then as often as the remembrance of that person resurfaces, together with the familiar feelings of injury and outrage, say it again. And again. The first day you may say it 500 times. The next day only 300 times. The following day, maybe just 50. And so on. You get the picture.

I do not mean to glibly suggest that to forgive is easily chosen. Some things done to people are almost unimaginable. It may be that prayer for inner healing, deliverance from evil, as well as professional therapy is needed before the choice to forgive can be made.

However, we must not confuse the WILL to forgive with FEELING our way to forgiveness. Feelings will eventually follow our thoughts and choices. But if we let our feelings lead as to when and if we will forgive, we might never do so.

LIMIT ACCESS BY THE OFFENDER?

A young woman told me of her physically abusive father, who, now that she was married with children, wanted to be involved in her life again. She said, "I have forgiven my dad, but I just don't want him in my life anymore. Does God require that I let him back in?" I told her "no."

God does not expect us to return to the scene of abuse if there is ANY question of it happening again. And in situations like my friend, whose grandchild was molested, even if the man should get out of prison, there is no reason to be in his presence ever again. But nevertheless, we must forgive.

Jesus stayed out of harm's way on several occasions, until he knew it was his time. ONLY then, did he permit himself to be harmed, and then out of love for us, and for his Father's will. Not because he had no choice.

A FINAL STAGE OF FORGIVENESS.

That initial decision to forgive is what God requires of us. Having made that choice to forgive, there are further steps in Christ we grow towards.

Perhaps it is best the offender should never be seen or communicated with again. Even so, the healing love of Christ within will EVENTUALLY soften us to the point where we can ask God, with freedom and joy, to forgive the offender as well. This will be joined with our sincere prayer that the salvation of Christ might reach even him. May it be so, Lord! Amen.