

## **FORGIVING OTHERS – THE KEY TO PEACE AND HEALING**

**LAST MONTH I SPOKE ABOUT SOMETHING WE ALL DO, GIVE AND RECEIVE ADVICE. FOR SEVERAL MONTHS TONIGHT’S TOPIC HAS BEEN ON MY MIND, BUT GOD WOULD TAKE ME IN ANOTHER DIRECTION. BUT TONIGHT IS THE TIME. LIKE THE BAPTIST PREACHER WOULD SAY, “IT’S LIKE FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES AND I’VE GOT TO LET IT OUT.” BROTHERS I WANT TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING WE ALL “MUST DO,” FORGIVE. THE TITLE OF TONIGHT’S TALK IS “FORGIVING OTHERS -THE WAY TO PEACE AND HEALING.”**

**WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS? A GOOD WORKING DEFINITION OF FORGIVENESS IS, “REMEMBERING A PERSON’S WRONG ACT AGAINST YOU, BUT NOT HOLDING THE PERSON ACCOUNTABLE.” WHEN WE HAVE BEEN SEVERELY WRONGED WE TEND TO NEVER FORGET WHAT WAS DONE TO US. IF YOU HAVE TRULY FORGIVEN THAT PERSON, WHEN THE THOUGHT ENTERS YOUR MIND, YOU MUST NOT HOLD ANYTHING AGAINST THAT PERSON. TO PUT IT ANOTHER WAY, FORGIVING A PERSON IS “CLEARING HIS RECORD” WITH US AND TRANSFERRING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY PUNISHMENT TO GOD. ROMANS 12:19, STATES “VENGENANCE IS MINE SAYS THE LORD, I WILL REPAY.”**

**WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT? FORGIVENESS IS NOT LETTING SOMEONE OFF THE HOOK BY SAYING, “YOU DIDN’T DO ANYTHING WRONG.” FORGIVENESS IS NOT DENIAL THAT A HURTFUL SITUATION EXISTS, AND IT ISN’T DENYING THE FACT THAT YOUR FEELINGS ARE HURT. AND FORGIVENESS DOES NOT MEAN YOU ACCEPT THE PERSON’S BEHAVIOR.**

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR US TO FORGIVE OTHERS? BEFORE ANSWERING THAT QUESTION, I BELIEVE THERE IS A QUESTION THAT WE NEED TO ASK OURSELVES. DO WE WANT GOD TO FORGIVE US WHEN WE SIN AGAINST HIM? IN MATTHEW 6:14, JESUS SAID THAT IF WE REFUSE TO FORGIVE OTHERS, GOD WILL REFUSE TO FORGIVE US. THE POINT IS, WHEN WE REFUSE TO FORGIVE OTHERS WE ARE DENYING OUR COMMON GROUND AS SINNERS IN NEED OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS. GOD’S FORGIVENESS OF SIN IS NOT THE DIRECT RESULT OF OUR FORGIVING OTHERS, BUT IT IS BASED ON OUR REALIZING WHAT FORGIVENESS MEANS. IT IS EASY TO ASK GOD FOR FORGIVENESS, BUT DIFFICULT TO GRANT IT TO OTHERS. WHENEVER WE ASK GOD TO FORGIVE US FOR OUR SIN, WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES, “HAVE I FORGIVEN THE PERSON WHO HAS WRONGED ME?” GOD GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTS US EVEN THOUGH WE DON’T**

**DESERVE IT. BECAUSE GOD FORGIVES US EVEN WHEN WE HAVE IGNORED OR REJECTED HIM, WE SHOULD GRACIOUSLY FORGIVE OTHERS.**

**SINCE SOME ACTS THAT ARE COMMITTED TOWARD ME ARE MORE GRIEVIUS THAN OTHERS, DON'T I HAVE A RIGHT TO NOT FORGIVE THAT PERSON? GOD HAS NOT QUALIFIED ONE SIN AS BEING MORE GRIEVIUS TO HIM THAN ANOTHER AND HE HAS NOT QUALIFIED ONE SIN COMMITTED AGAINST US AS WARRANTING FORGIVENESS AND ANOTHER NOT. FOR EXAMPLE, GOD IS NOT SAYING, "IF A PERSON LIES TO YOU AND STEALS FROM YOU, YOU SHOULD FORGIVE HIM, BUT IF THEY MURDER A MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY, YOU CAN HOLD THEM IN UNFORGIVENESS." HE IS SAYING TO FORGIVE EVERYONE, ALWAYS.**

**HOW DO WE FORGIVE PEOPLE WHO HAVE OFFENDED US? WE MUST LOOK AT FORGIVENESS FROM GOD'S POINT OF VIEW; TRY VIEWING THE OFFENDER AS AN "INSTRUMENT" IN GOD'S HAND. JESUS COULD HAVE BECOME BITTER TOWARD THOSE WHO BEAT HIM AND NAILED HIM TO THE CROSS, BUT HE LOOKED AT THEM AS CARRYING OUT THE PURPOSE OF GOD FOR HIS LIFE; HIS RESPONSE, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO." (LUKE 23:34)**

**FORGIVENESS INVOLVES A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE OFFENSE RATHER THAN A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE OFFENDER. LOOK AT THE OFFENSE AS A SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF YOUR PERSONAL CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, INSTEAD OF HAVING THE ATTITUDE THAT "PEOPLE LIKE YOU MAKE ME SICK." TURN IT AROUND AND LOOK AT IT WITH THE ATTITUDE THAT "PEOPLE LIKE YOU MAKE ME MORE LIKE CHRIST." AS A RESULT OF THE OFFENSE, OUR PROPER ATTITUDE BECOMES THE IMPORTANT CONCERN.**

**WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL LIKE FORGIVING OTHERS? THERE ARE TIMES WE DON'T FEEL LIKE FORGIVING THOSE WHO HAVE WRONGED US. IT IS EASIER TO ACT OUR WAY INTO FEELING THAN TO FEEL OUR WAY INTO ACTING. HAVING A NATURE OF NOT FORGIVING OTHERS BRINGS ABOUT BITTERNESS, AND BITTERNESS HAS BEEN LINKED TO STRESS-RELATED ILLNESSES BY SOME MEDICAL RESEARCHERS. BY FORGIVING OTHERS, WE FREE OURSELVES SPIRITUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY. FORGIVENESS IS AN ACT OF OUR OWN PERSONAL WILL IN OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL, TRUSTING GOD TO BRING EMOTIONAL HEALING.**

**HOW DOES OUR FORGIVING OTHERS IMPROVE THEIR LIVES AND OURS? (1) WHEN SOMEONE INTENTIONALLY OFFENDS US, WE HAVE A SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE THE POTENTIAL FORGIVENESS OF GOD TO THEM. THEY SEE OUR OPENNESS AND LOVE TO THEM, AND CAN COMPREHEND THE SAME OPENNESS AND LOVE THAT GOD HAS TOWARD THEM, IN SPITE OF THEIR OFFENSES. (2) WHEN SOMEONE UNINTENTIONALLY OFFENDS US, IT INDICATES PERSONAL DEFICIENCIES WHICH THEY MAY NOT BE AWARE OF, BUT OUR CONTINUED OPENNESS TOWARD THEM MAY PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A PERSONAL HELP TO THEM IN THE AREAS REVEALED BY THEIR OFFENSES.**

**BROTHERS AS LONG AS THERE IS BREATH IN OUR BODIES WE ARE GOING TO DO THINGS TO OTHERS THAT WE WILL NEED TO ASK THEM FOR FORGIVENESS. LIKEWISE, OTHERS WILL DO THINGS TO US. SOME WILL ASK US TO FORGIVE THEM AND OTHERS MAY NOT SAY A WORD. THE THING WE NEED TO REMEMBER IS THAT LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO HARBOR UNFORGIVENESS IN OUR HEARTS. MAKE UP IN YOUR MIND TONIGHT THAT YOU ARE GOING TO “CLEAN THE SLATE” AND REMOVE ALL UNFORGIVENESS FROM YOUR HEART. AGAIN, I CLOSE WITH THE WORDS FROM JESUS, “IF YOU WILL NOT FORGIVE OTHERS, NEITHER WILL I FORGIVE YOU.” FORGIVE OTHERS AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT, BECAUSE IT REALLY DOES.**