Forgive As You Have Been Forgiven

Ephesians 4:30-5:2

Have you watched people who are really serious about physical training? They do all kinds of things to make their body stronger so they can perform well in life. Runners will run dragging a sled with weights on it so they will grow stronger and stronger. However, when it comes time to compete or to function in life, the person loses the sled. Without the added weight, this person can run. He/she does not just run but he/she runs very well. Did you see anyone in the Olympics run while dragging a sled? No, each runner shed all of the added weight possible. Even their clothing was at a minimum. They did not want to drag any additional weight so that they could do well in their given sport.

O, what Christian people could learn from these athletes. Many will try to compete in life but they absolutely refuse to do so without dragging that weighted sled around. In fact, many will add weights to the sled they are dragging around. They add weight every day and then wonder why life is such a drag. Can you imagine how such a person could run if he/she would just let go of that sled? Wow! That person would take off like a rocket. But, as long as this person drags that sled, he will trudge along through life suffering more every day.

Not only does this person suffer by dragging the sled, he disappoints his coach. His coach has taught how to train and has told the runner how to excel but the runner refuses to listen to the coach but will continue to do things his way. This disappoints the coach because the coach really wants this person to do well. How much does the coach really care? The coach is the runner’s Father who really wants this person to run well. This person is grieving his father/coach who really wants him to do well.

Many think this is silly. Why would a person continue to drag the sled around? Some people get so used to pulling the added load that have forgotten how to open their hand (and Heart) and let go. Christians often do this even though it does not seem to make sense. In this situation, the father/coach is God the Father and the sled with weights on it is failure to forgive. At this point many will take exception to what I am saying but I urge you to stay with me.

We need to look at this matter of failure to forgive from two perspectives. First, and most importantly, is its effect on God. Then second, we need to consider the effect of failing to forgive on ourselves. Ephesians 4:30 says not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God who has sealed you for the day of redemption. Let’s consider that phrase, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.” We all agree that this does not sound like a good thing to do. Grief is an emotion of intense sadness and an expression of the sorrow caused by one’s enemies. It also refers to being forgotten, such as when man forgets God. It is intense sorrow.

You do not want to be considered an enemy of God. That is a very dangerous position. We should not want to cause the Holy Spirit sorrow. Why would anyone want to hurt God? Note also that the Holy Spirit has sealed the believer for the day of redemption. That seal cannot be broken but we can cause Him sorrow. Consider how would feel if you have done great things for someone and then that someone did things that really hurt you emotionally. That is what God feels when a believer does some of these things listed here in our Scripture passage.

Sin is sin and it all grieves the Holy Spirit. But, Paul points out a particular sin. We can see that in verse 4:32. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Do you see the two things? First be kind and compassionate. That is hard enough but then he said to forgive and not just to forgive but to forgive in a manner that Jesus has forgiven you. I will be among the first to admit that this is difficult. We are called to be kind and compassionate to whom? No one was singled out so that leaves pretty much everyone. Be kind and compassionate to everyone.

Then forgive people in the same way that Jesus has forgiven you. How has God forgiven you? He has forgiven every believer of ALL sin. What would our spiritual lives be if we turn this around and God was to forgive us like we forgive? We have a sin against God (and all sin is against God) but God said, “That does it. I cannot forgive that person. You do not know what she did. Did you hear what he said? After what I did for her and she said bad things about me and my dog.” This list could go on and on. But Praise God, He does not forgive like that. No matter what you have done and what you have said, if you trust Jesus, God says, “Forgiven.” What wonderful news that really is.

Stop to consider what your forgiveness cost God. His Son died a terrible death to pay for your sin. Stop and consider how precious that gift of forgiveness is. Then stop and consider how insulting it must be to God when His children will not forgive another. Your sin cost the life and suffering of Jesus. Why do you count as so great the minor sin of another toward you? Keep in mind that God paid the sacrifice for the sins of that person, as well. If the great God has forgiven someone, why can a person refuse to forgive what God has forgiven?

We must also keep in mind that Scripture says to be kind and compassionate. We know what that means. I do not need to define these words nor do I need to expand on this passage. Or do I? This can be so difficult. There are some people that this command difficult. Yes, they make it difficult but they do not make it impossible. It is not impossible because of what God has already done for you. We know what it means to be kind. This is kindergarten stuff.

But, to be compassionate is more difficult. When you see that difficult in a difficult situation what do you do? Do you pass by and look the other way? Do you quietly enjoy the person’s difficulty and go away with a chuckle? Do you openly heckle the other person? What did Jesus say? In Matthew 5:44 Jesus said to love your neighbor. He acknowledged that the world says to hate your enemy. This is one of several times that Jesus said “…but I say to you…” He knows that it is difficult to love your enemy but Jesus does not think like the world thinks and his followers should not. He has set a higher standard. Jesus said to love your enemy. If you love your enemy, you will have compassion on him. Do you remember my definition of love? Love is wanting what is best for another and doing what you can to provide that.

There are wonderful examples of this type of love in the Bible. In 2 Kings 5 we see a story of slaves and captivity and desperation all work together for the glory of God. It starts with Naaman who was the commanding general of the Assyrian army. He was highly regarded by the King of Assyria. He had raided Israel and taken many people captive. One of the captives was a Jewish girl that he pressed into slavery to wait on his wife. Naaman was a sworn enemy of the Jewish people and he had captured this girl, taking her from her country and her family.

Then one day Naaman noticed that he had contracted that deadly and dreaded disease, leprosy. This was a death sentence with a slow and terrible death. Leprosy is a disease that affects the nerves. They die so a person feels no pain. Because of this they often lose fingers and toes. They tend to lose eyesight and eventually die. What did this Jewish girl do when she learned that Naaman had leprosy? She could have celebrated that her captor was dying. She could have gloated that he was getting justice. What would you do? This girl reacted in a Christian manner, even though she had not yet met Jesus. She had faith in her God and she knew of a prophet who spoke for her God. She told her captor to go to Elisha and Elisha could cure her master.

Why did this girl do something to help the one who had enslaved her? She understood the concept of loving your enemy. She did as her faith told her. Her focus was not on getting even with Naaman. It was on the glory that could be given to God. She truly understood and lived out what she said that she believed. Because of how she responded, glory was given to the God that she trusted.

We have seen that forgiving is important because it shows faith in God. But, there is a worldly reason for forgiving and it is real and it is serious. Those who have trouble forgiving tend to drag that weighted sled around all the time and it drags them down. A person who does not forgive is limited in how much he/she can enjoy life. Perhaps you know someone who does not forgive well but holds on to many past offenses. That person cannot be joyful because their reason for joy has been replaced by memories of offenses. This causes physical illness as well as spiritual illness. A person who does not forgive will suffer more maladies than others. But worse yet is that this person puts unforgiveness between them and God.

What did God say about forgiving? This topic is addressed many times in Scripture. First in DT 32:35 and Romans 12:19 we are told that vengeance belongs to God. We are to forgive and God will deal with the offender. That is not our job. Do you think that you can do something better than God can? Why then do so many carry around a lack of forgiveness. Let go of it and let God deal with it. That is a big burden in life that a person need not carry but some refuse to lighten their load. God will carry those burdens. We need not carry them. He can do it better.

Then in Colossians and Ephesians we can read that we are to forgive as we have been forgiven. How have you been forgiven? Does the Bible tell you that God cannot forgive you because of what you have done or said? Of course not! God will forgive all sins of those who trust in Jesus. [REPEAT] If all of your sins are forgiven we are to forgive all offenses. Have all of your sins been forgiven? I hope so. If one, just one, is not forgiven you are enroute to the fires of hell. But Jesus has told us that all who believe in him will be with him for all eternity. Then why do we not forgive another. When we do not forgive, we are disobeying the word of Jesus.

Ephesians 5:1 says to be imitators of God. He sacrificed His Son for your sin. But keep in mind that He sacrificed His Son for the one who offended you, too. It is dangerous to say that what God did and said was wrong. That is what someone is doing when they refuse to forgive another.

Forgiveness can be very difficult but like all disciplines it gets easier when practiced. It doesn’t happen automatically. A person must decide to forgive. When that decision is made, then the believer is well on the way to being an imitator of God.