

# THE ART OF FORGIVENESS

by  
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## PASSIVE AND AGGRESSIVE EMOTIONS

There are two kinds of emotions, passive and aggressive. The *passive emotions* are things like grief, guilt, loneliness and depression. Those sorts of emotions come when we feel like we are helpless victims of things or events. Things have overcome us. Then there are *aggressive emotions* of anger, hate and resentment. Statistics indicate that there are different physical diseases related to passive and negative emotions.

The diseases that are related to the *passive emotions* are those that have to do with the feeling of being subject to attacks from the outside. In other words, things like cancer, that you're being attacked by something. It has been discovered that grief, guilt, loneliness and depression seem to release certain secretions in the body that weaken the immune system. So if a person has cancer, or another disease resulting from the destruction of the immune system, it doesn't do a whole lot of good to pray for the healing of the diseases if you don't pray for the healing of those passive emotions. That may be the real healing that's required, and if that is healed, the actual disease may very easily respond to prayer.

The person who is subject to aggressive emotions is more prone to heart-attack or stroke, with the related diseases like hypertension, headaches, migraine headaches. The one who succumbs to aggressive emotions tends to be subject to overload, taking on too much, and the pushy sort of approach to life.

## WE THINK FORGIVENESS IS ABOUT OFFENSES

So, how does this relate to forgiveness. We need to forgive those that we think have offended us and we need to forgive ourselves for what we think offended others. Now, I say *thought*. How many times we think someone has *offended* us? But that is a lie we tell ourselves? The truth is that we only *thought* that they offended us

Forgiveness is the deep and profound realization that while the event did occur in fact, the offense occurs only in our imagination inside of our minds. Imagination means to create an image of something in our mind. We cannot experience being offended unless we draw upon our imagination to create an image of an offense. The event can occur. That is a fact. But in order for there to be an offense, I must be able to create an image of the event as an offense.

Let's use a typical example of a person waving a voodoo finger at you. Has he offended you? In order for you to feel offended, you must have the capacity to create an image of you being offended, and what is required to create an image? Memory from the past. You have to drag up things from the past as the building blocks, the construction material, from which to create an offense in the present. If you did not rely upon the past, you could not be offended in the present.

So Jesus said, "Come follow me and let the dead bury the dead. Judge not by appearances, but judge righteous judgment. Judge not that ye be not judged, for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall also be judged."

Our imagination can be our greatest asset and at the same time our greatest liability. The same is also true about guilt. We have to create an offense in our imagination. Now, I may have done something to you in the past. In order to be cluttered and scattered, polluted and distracted by my guilt, I have to be constantly carrying with me my colostomy bag of negative memories.

## JUDGMENT IS ARROGANCE

Both guilt and anger are *arrogance*. In fact, they are the ultimate arrogance. Guilt is saying my judgment about myself is higher than God's. In the same way, if I am angry at you for an offense, it is saying that my judgment of you is that God has made me better than you.

What is God's judgment of me? Because of my faith in His infinite, complete and eternal atonement, He has already taken upon Himself all my sins and forgiven me. He holds me eternally in the arms of His love. Eternally means without beginning or end. And His forgiveness is free of charge. He has not come into the world to condemn the world, so when I choose to do so, I do so in my pride and vanity, even when I condemn myself.

There is an old saying: "Guilt and resentment are the company we keep to fill the void created by the lack of love." If we were busy loving someone, we wouldn't have the time to be recreating those images from the past and keeping them fresh. But, we say, "Wait a minute. I have a right to be angry at this person. Look what he did to me."

When I pretend to be something I'm not, like, for example, I'm more important than you, or I'm less important than you, or that I'm dignified, or that I'm pretty, or that I'm ugly -- I am pretending to be something that I'm not! So what am I, if I'm not all of those things?

## WHO AM I?

I am a child of God -- that's who I am. That's the truth, and everything else is simply a disguise I wear. There is an old saying: "We're all traveling incognito, disguised as ourselves, when in fact, we are children of God." So, when I pretend to be something I'm not, I can readily imagine that you can offend me. If I know who I am and what I'm about, I cannot be offended by you because you cannot offend who I really am. You cannot hate me. You can hate who I think I am, or you can hate who you think I am, but you cannot hate who I am, because I am a child of God.

So when I pretend to be something I'm not, I can very easily believe that you have offended me; so I will want to attack you to protect my image I hold of myself.

If you don't know who I am and you attack who I think I am, I can then attack you back to protect this image I hold of myself -- and that's what anger and guilt are all about. It's the friction of two frictions. So, when I know who I am and what I need, I teach only love.

## WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

So, what is forgiveness? Let me give a few definitions of forgiveness:

- Forgiveness is merely setting aside the clutter and scatter of collected images from my past -- including all the images of the offenses I have created on others, and the offenses I think others have pushed upon me.
- Forgiveness is realizing that while the event occurred in fact, the offense occurs only in imagination, in fantasy. So, forgiveness is seeing spiritual reality. It is looking upon the things that are unseen, rather than looking on the things that are seen. We tend to look upon the things that are seen, but God looks only upon the things that are unseen. "Judge not by appearances, but judge righteous judgment" -- that's what the whole business of forgiveness is all about.

So, instead of seeing the event as an offense which occurs only in imagination, we focus on the reality, which never changes.

## FOCUSING ON ONE OF THREE WORLDS

There are three worlds in which we can live:

- (1) the world of *facts*,
- (2) the world of *fantasy*, and
- (3) the world of *spiritual reality*.

1. The *world of facts* are the *events which occur*. People voodoo you on the freeway, people forget your anniversary, people forget Valentine, people forget to say thank you, people do all kinds of things. That is a fact.
2. The *offense is fantasy*. We have to create that.  
Now which do you live in, the *world of facts* or the *world of fantasy*?
3. Or, do you live in the world of *spiritual reality*? *Forgiveness is seeing the world of spiritual reality*.

## WHAT MAKES FORGIVENESS DIFFICULT

Now how do you get there from here? Most of us make it very difficult to forgive, so let us first discuss what makes it so complicated; then we will consider some steps that we can take to make it very simple.

Let's take a couple more definitions about forgiveness: Forgiveness undoes what fear creates. What does fear create? Images. If I'm afraid, I'm always creating images based upon the past. The images we carry over from the past to protect us in the present and future prevent us from having a *direct experience* of the present and future. We are doomed to remain prisoners of our memories of guilt and anger. We can't have a real present and a real future because we experience the present and future by rerunning the past. So forgiveness undoes what fear creates. Anger and guilt are the company we keep, created by the lack of love.

Now, one more principle: In order to understand forgiveness, we need to understand this principle: "*We either act out of love or we act out the call for love.*" In other words, obnoxious behavior is acting out the call for love. All obnoxious behavior is the call for love. We are either acting out of love or we are acting out the call for love.

For example, let's say you've done something to me and I create an offense out of that. In other words, I fear that you are attacking my image. Let's say that you say "Merkle, that was a terribly confusing lecture tonight, why don't you let Dr. Cott teach after this?" You see I can create an offense out of that event and justify my attacking you to protect who I think I am. If you, in turn, create an offense out of my defensive reaction, you will be acting out of your fears. I would be confirming your belief that you need to be fearful and you say, "See, I was right."

Then what happens? Together we create a prison that enslaves us both. What's that prison? The prison of our own imaginations, the friction of two frictions. So, I draw from my imagination to justify my fear of you. When I act out my being afraid of you, that justifies you being afraid of me. So, we attack each other and live unhappily ever after. In the same way, guilt is when we attack ourselves in order to justify our fear.

## FORGIVENESS IS SEEING THAT THERE IS NO OFFENSE

When we take the opposite point of view, there is no need to attack. My non-attack of you, my non-defensiveness, my non-imaging, my non-sharing in your images demonstrates that there is nothing you need to fear -- there is plenty of love to go around. Perfect love makes fear unnecessary. My forgiveness demonstrates

that there is nothing to fear. That is an explanation of the biblical principle that "perfect love casts out fear." Perfect love creates no images. Perfect love lives in the present. Perfect love heeds reality. You may never forget the event, but you can release the interpretation of it being an offense.

So forgiveness is not releasing the person for what they did, it's releasing my images or thoughts about what they did. Forgiveness is knowing that although they did do it, they didn't offend me. They only offended who I thought I was.

In discussing forgiveness, the bottom line is to realize that the Holy Spirit is doing the work, therefore, we have nothing to do but accept the true reality of the Spirit. When a person says "I'll forgive you, but I'll never forget," what they're doing is assuming that the event was the offense. They're saying, "I'm big enough to overlook it, but I won't forget it," which is not really forgiveness. Forgiveness is releasing the clutter and scatter that interferes with my connection with God. So as long as I retain the clutter and scatter of guilt and anger, I am interfering with and polluting my connection with God.

When we are caught up in anger and guilt, we usually want to talk about the imagined offense. If you want to release your anger, it usually does not help for you to tell me all about it. Sometimes it might, but usually it only recreates and keeps thrashing your imaginations, the memory of the event and the pain of the offense. Let me talk about two things that make forgiveness difficult.

## **WE THINK FORGIVENESS MEANS SACRIFICE**

The first thing that makes forgiveness difficult is our belief that who I am can be hurt or wronged and what I need can be taken away. Now can who I am be hurt? No, only the images I hold of myself can be hurt. And, can what I need be taken away? Only what I think I need can be taken away. So yes, who I think I am and what I think I need, can be wronged. So, what do I, a spiritual being, really need? I need to master the art of being loving. That's all I need. And all these other things can be added unto me. I need to master the art of being an instrument of God's loving activity in the world.

The second thing that makes forgiveness difficult is that we believe forgiveness is a sacrifice. In other words we believe that in order to forgive we have to give up something. Now, if when we forgive, we give up something that truly benefits us -- is that a sacrifice? No, of course not. If when we give up something we really need, which is being loving by loving, it is love which will return to you. In turn, if we give up something we don't need, like anger or guilt, it will benefit us. So, what do we have to lose? I'll say that again. If I give up something and it benefits me, that is not a sacrifice. But thinking forgiveness is a sacrifice makes forgiveness difficult. The truth is that we don't want to give away our anger and guilt for fear that we won't have it for company when we need to feel pitiful?

## **FOUR STEPS TO FORGIVENESS**

So in summary, I offer four suggestions about how to forgive:

- (1) Realize that the problem of guilt and anger exist only in imagination. Now once I realize that, it brings the real problem back to where it belongs. Where? To me. The problem no longer exists "out there". If I know that the problem exists only in my imagination, I know that I cannot blame anyone else for my anger and my guilt. I have to come back to myself. I see these problems as something I have created and am sustaining. Having anger or guilt gives me a rating scale to tell me how well I am doing in a competitive world of survival. It is very easy for one to identify as an angry, aggressive, pushy person. Isn't that correct? So it gives me an identity, a purpose and a worth. Likewise, if I am a guilty person, that gives me identity. Oh, what a wretch I am. So, the *first step* in forgiveness is to *realize that the problem only exists in imagination*.
- (2) I have a choice between my way or God's way of seeing. A person may misinterpret that I'm saying there is no guilt. But what I am really saying is God's way of seeing is that the guilt has been forgiven. And I

have a choice to either see my way or God's way. So I need to ask myself, "Do I wish to continue seeing in my way or do I wish to make a better choice? Do I wish to judge by appearances or do I wish to judge righteous judgment? Since anger and guilt keep me excited and agitated, do I wish to choose that stimulation by remaining guilty and angry or do I choose to experience inspiration and joy by letting go of both. Forgiveness gives me inspiration and joy. "Choose ye this day whom ye shall serve." So I have a choice. I can choose to remember the events that you did to me or that I did to you, on the one hand, or do I choose to see the truth, "that this is the day the Lord has made." As Paul said: "It is no longer you, but Christ who lives in you." So, the *second step* is to realize that *I have a choice*.

- (3) The *third step* for forgiveness is to *realize that forgiveness is a gift that comes to me, not a gift that I give to someone else*. I'm not doing another person a favor by forgiving. I'm doing myself a favor. To say, "I forgive you" is a put-down of another person. So if you don't say, "I forgive you," what do you say? You say, "I am deeply sorry for the event that occurred." And many times it is better off not to say it verbally, but to yourself.
- (4) And, the *fourth step* for forgiveness is to *realize that if it is a gift to me, not a gift I give to someone else, where does the gift come from? It is a gift that comes from God through Christ, mediated by the Holy Spirit. I do not forgive anyone. I only let go and receive the gift of the present and the future.*

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For more information, visit:

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