

# The power of forgiveness

*This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbig sandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of April 4-5, 2009.*

**By Michele Mischnick**

BIG SANDY, Texas—As we examine ourselves in preparation for Passover, are we learning to forgive? The Bible gives us a lot of instruction about forgiving.

Paul wrote: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you (Ephesians 4:32).

Peter wrote: If you do well and suffer for it by taking it patiently, this is acceptable with God (1 Peter 2:20).

Of course, they were reflecting the teaching of their mentor Jesus Christ. (When we reflect the teaching of our Savior, we are reflecting the teaching of God the Father because Jesus came to do His Father's will.)

Jesus Christ said a lot about forgiveness.

In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus gave a sample prayer, which is often called "the Lord's prayer." Notice what He said about forgiveness: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (verse 12).

Jesus followed up the sample prayer with the following statements in verses 14-15: "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Jesus taught His disciples that they needed to receive daily forgiveness as much as they needed to receive daily bread. But they needed something else: They needed to *EXTEND* daily forgiveness.

Jesus wants us to move forward past offenses (whether real or imagined). He wants us to move into a lifestyle of forgiveness.

A few years ago I read a helpful book titled *Total Forgiveness* by R.T. Kendall. I would like to share with you some information from the book.

## **Wrong perception**

Mr. Kendall listed some things that are NOT parts of total forgiveness.

- Total forgiveness is not approving what they did.
- Total forgiveness is not excusing what they did.

- Total forgiveness is not justifying what they did.
- Total forgiveness is not pardoning what they did.

As Mr. Kendall wrote on page 13: "A pardon is a legal transaction that releases an offender from the consequences of their action, such as a penalty or a sentence. This is why we do not ask that the guilty rapist be exempt from punishment. He needs to pay his debt to society, and society must be protected from him."

- Total forgiveness is not reconciliation.

Reconciliation requires the participation of two people. Reconciliation is not required, but forgiveness is.

- Total forgiveness is not denying what they did.
- Total forgiveness is not blindness to what happened.
- Total forgiveness is not forgetting.

As Dr. Kendall wrote on page 18: "Love doesn't erase our memories. It is actually a demonstration of greater grace when we are fully aware of what occurred—and we still choose to forgive. God doesn't literally forget our sins. He *chooses* to overlook them."

- Total forgiveness is not refusing to take the wrong seriously.

As Dr. Kendall wrote on pages 18-19: "Some people may think that in order to forgive they must dismiss a wrong or pass it off as inconsequential or insignificant. But that is only avoiding the problem, possibly trying to make forgiveness easier. The greater victory for the one who does the forgiving is to face up to the seriousness—even the wickedness—of what happened and still forgive."

- Total forgiveness is not pretending we are not hurt.

### **Clearer picture**

Now let's look at Mr. Kendall's list of what total forgiveness really is.

- Total forgiveness is being aware of what someone has done and still forgiving them.
- Total forgiveness is choosing to keep no record of wrong.
- Total forgiveness is refusing to punish.
- Total forgiveness is avoiding to tell what they did.
- Total forgiveness is being merciful.
- Total forgiveness is graciousness.
- Total forgiveness is an inner condition.
- Total forgiveness is the absence of bitterness.

- Total forgiveness is forgiving God.

As Mr. Kendall wrote on page 32: "Although we often do not see it at first—and for some it takes a long time—all of our bitterness is ultimately traceable to a resentment of God . . . Deep in our hearts we believe that He is the one who allowed bad things to happen in our lives."

- Total forgiveness is forgiving ourselves.

As Mr. Kendall wrote on page 34: "It is anything but *total* forgiveness if we forgive God and those who hurt us, but we are unable to forgive ourselves."

### **Unforgiving spirit**

Mr. Kendall also gave a list of some consequences of harboring unforgiveness in our hearts.

- The Holy Spirit is grieved.

Paul gave some good advice in Ephesians 4:30-32.

- You are left to yourself.

As Mr. Kendall wrote on page 88: "A refusal to forgive means that God stands back and lets you cope with your problems with your own strength."

- You force God to become your enemy.

James 4:4 says: "Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

As Mr. Kendall wrote on page 90: "The reason God treats you like an enemy is because, by not forgiving others, you are really saying, 'God, move over; I want to do Your job!' You crown yourself judge, jury and executioner, and you presume to take God's place."

- You lose the potential of your anointing.
- You lose authentic fellowship with the Father.

### **Praying for enemies**

Mr. Kendall gave a helpful list of five stages in praying for our enemies.

- **Duty:** The first level is strictly based on obedience. You are doing it because you feel you have to.
- **Debt:** You have reached the second level when you are so conscious of what you have been forgiven of that you cannot help but pray for your enemy.
- **Desire:** You begin to pray for your enemy because it is what you really want.
- **Delight:** This takes desire a step further. It is when you love doing it. You get joy from praying for and blessing your enemies.
- **Durability:** This means that what you took on as a lifelong commitment

becomes a lifestyle. The thought of turning back or praying in a different way is out of the question. It has become a habit, and it no longer seems like something extraordinary.

As someone once wrote: To the spiritual person, the supernatural seems natural.

What began as a duty and once seemed insurmountable is now almost second nature.

When done properly, praying for others is done in secret. Only the angels know. It is quiet intercession.

### **In conclusion**

I want to conclude this article with a quote from Mr. Kendall found on page 182. He wrote:

“Forgiveness is not *total* forgiveness until we bless our enemies—and pray for them to be blessed. Forgiving them is a major step; *totally* forgiving them has fully been achieved when we set God free to bless them. But in this, we are the first to be blessed, and those who totally forgive are blessed the most.”