

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

WHEN FORGIVENESS IS UNWANTED

By Warren King

Should a Christian forgive those who do not seek – or even desire – to be forgiven? The knee-jerk answer from many Christians is ‘of course’, and they proceed to point to Jesus on the cross. But while such an answer seems righteous and – well, forgiving – it misses the whole point of true forgiveness.

Now, if by ‘forgiveness’ we mean that we harbor no ill-will toward those who have wronged us then, yes, we should ‘forgive’ everyone. As Paul reminds us (quoting the inspired advice of Solomon), **“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink”** (Rom. 12:20). We should be proactive in doing good, even toward those who have wronged us. But that is not forgiveness.

And such kind treatment of our enemies must go beyond the mere outward behavior toward them. Feeding them should not be a cover for bitterness and hatred. As Jesus put it, **“Love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you”** (Matt. 5:44). This takes kindness to a whole new level. We are to genuinely love them – with all that entails (patient, kind, etc. from 1 Cor. 13). But that is not forgiveness.

Some say that forgiveness is not so much to help my enemy, but to help me – that I must learn to ‘let it go’ in order that I might find inner peace. And there is certainly an element of truth to that. As Paul wrote, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”** (Phil. 4:6-7). Inner peace is important, and it can only be found by ‘giving it to God’. And yes, that applies to anxieties caused by our enemies. We need to ‘let it go’ when someone wrongs us and move on with our lives. But that is not forgiveness either.

To learn the true meaning of forgiveness, one must look to the perfect example of forgiveness – to God Himself. For while God is good and kind and loving toward all (an example for us), He does not forgive all (an example for us).

And why does He not forgive all? Because most people do not want His forgiveness. Regardless of the reasons (and there are many), most people have no interest in a close relationship with God. And forgiveness is all about relationship!

When we come to God on His terms (think faith, repentance, baptism, walking the walk), we are forgiven of our sins – and the relationship that was lost because of our sin is restored. Thank God for His forgiveness!

But God never pretends that all is well when it isn’t. And neither should we. Just as true love is kind and patient, true love also **“does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth”** (1 Cor. 13:6). In the same way, true forgiveness will not give an offender a free pass, acting as though nothing is wrong. This approach may make us feel warm and fuzzy and righteous – but it does the offender no favors. It masks the sin and provides them with a false sense that all is well when it isn’t. A close relationship cannot exist when there is sin between us. That’s true for God, and it’s true for us.

And what about Jesus on the cross? Didn’t He forgive those who crucified Him? Well, He loved them. That is why He allowed them to drive the nails through His feet and His hands. And He harbored no ill-will toward them. In fact, He asked His Father to forgive them.

Yet fifty days later, God still held that sin against those who crucified Jesus (Acts 2). It wasn’t until some 3,000 of them came to believe on Jesus, repented of their sins, and were baptized that the prayer of Jesus was answered, and God forgave those 3,000 of their sin.

God, and those who have His heart, will forgive any who sin – if the offender is willing to repent of that sin. As Jesus Himself put it, **“If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him”** (Lk. 17:3). The rebuke part of that command can be difficult. And perhaps that is why some would rather jump to the forgiveness part – and make it unconditional. It’s just easier that way. But that’s not how Jesus framed it; and it’s not how we should frame it, either. We dare not attempt to make ourselves more righteous than God. For the sake of the offender, God’s forgiveness is conditional. Ours should be as well, and for the same reason.

May God grant us hearts of courage to rebuke the sin, and hearts of compassion to love the sinner – just as He does. ■

“He Loafed Into Second Base”

By Jim Deason

I once was a passionate Atlanta Braves fan. Now, at best, I would call myself a “casual” fan - meaning that I usually check the score from the night before, watch what the rookies are doing, and occasionally read a little about the game through Bleacher Report. I caught myself doing that this morning and read the following line, “Herrera roped a would-be double to right, but he loafed into second base and was tagged out by Dansby Swanson.” Way-to-go Swanson (he’s a Brave).

But I want you to think about what Herrera of the Phillies did, “he **LOAFED** into second base.” That is something NO ONE, especially someone calling himself a professional, should EVER DO!!! His manager, no-doubt, had indigestion all night long; he probably couldn’t wait to get him into his “office.”

But I wondered, considering second base to be the midpoint of life, just how many Christians are doing the same thing, i.e., “loafing into second base”?

It seems that we can be passionate about sports, family, our jobs, etc., but often very little passion is demonstrated toward the Lord’s work, evangelism, the process of growing people. How many are “loafing into second base”?

Well, I’ve just rounded third and I’m headed home. I probably don’t have the energy/steam I once had when I raced for first base, but I hope I am focused and passionate about reaching home. There is one thing I don’t want to be caught doing, and that’s LOAFING. Neither should you. We just might be called out before reaching home. What a shame if that should happen. ■

The Danger of Assumption

By Stan Cox

When the wicked in the world engage in evil without suffering consequences, what do we think? Do we think that this not fair? Do we think that God is not fair? Do we think that God is evil? Some have gone beyond thinking it, and have actively said as much.

God has something to say on the matter. In Psalm 50, He speaks to the wicked regarding their evil works. Consider His words: **“These things you have done, and I kept silent; You thought that I was altogether like you; But I will rebuke you, And set them in order before your eyes. “Now consider this, you who forget God, Lest I tear you in pieces, And there be none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God”** (Psa. 50:21-23).

It is a mistake to *assume* that God is anything at all like the wicked. Though He does not always work in ways we understand, we know two truths absolutely. **One**, those who **“forget God”** will eventually pay for their sin, (cf. Rom. 1:28-32). **Two**, the one who **“orders his conduct aright”** will be saved by God (cf. 2 Thess. 1:5-7). ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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