

## **Forgiveness is an Ugly Beast**

In the minds of far too many people forgiveness seems to be an ugly, despicable beast that one must be afraid of or avoid at all costs. This “beast” is scorned and ridiculed because of unrequited anger, hatred and vengeance that have built up in the hearts of individuals. We would have far less murders, robberies, divorces, rapes, molestations, etc, in our country, if people would just allow themselves to forgive. In the minds of these angry people, forgiveness must be transformed from an ugly beast to a gentle creature.

Some people are afraid to forgive because they believe forgiveness would require them to communicate or reconcile with those who caused them pain. There are some who would not forgive because they have become poisoned over the years by the anger and pain leaving only revenge and hatred. They have allowed the pain and anger to distort their thinking and reasoning process. In their minds, the anger provides power and protection for their wounded heart.

I believe that far too many people misunderstand what forgiveness is all about. In a previous article on forgiveness I wrote that “forgiveness is not trying to ignore an incident. That’s indifference. Saying, "Let’s just forget it," without offering a basis for forgetting is not to a way to deal with the problem. It is ignoring the problem. Forgiveness is not indifference. Forgiveness is also not agreeing with the wrong. Some people think saying, " I forgive you" really means "I agree with you. What you have done isn’t wrong". That’s not the case. When Christ forgives us, He doesn’t pat us on the back and say our sin is ok.”

Furthermore, forgiveness is not reconciliation. Forgiveness can facilitate reconciliation but it does not require it. Sometimes it is not wise to reconcile or to restore the relationship to its original state before the pain occurred. If reconciliation is “required,” then it would not be true forgiveness. It is my view that true forgiveness frees the hurting one to think objectively what should be the next step to take. Should I move away or should I get closer? Should I end the relationship or should it be mended? For a person who has been severely abused over many years, restoring the relationship to its original state might lead to death, hospitalization, mental illness, or prison. There are many wounded people who are still in love with their perpetrators, but they wisely decide not to reconnect because it would truly be dangerous to them.

Refusing to forgive and harboring anger and pain is very detrimental to the human body. It suppresses the immune system making the individuals susceptible to diseases. Anger causes an increase of chemicals in the body that should they remain elevated would be harmful.

In an article on Better Health Channel, it states that “the constant flood of stress chemicals and associated metabolic changes that accompany recurrent unmanaged anger can eventually cause harm to many different systems of the body. Some of the short and long-term health problems that have been linked to unmanaged anger include: headache, digestion problems, such as abdominal pain; insomnia, increased anxiety, depression, high blood pressure; skin problems, such as eczema; heart attack, and stroke. Many married couples who argue and fight a lot are causing more physical harm to themselves than blows and cuts. Ohio State University's Institute for Behavioral Medicine research on the

effect of anger reveals that women are impacted in very serious ways. “. . . Even after husbands and wives have stopped arguing, the battle may still be raging within the woman's body. It can do so for hours, altering her hormone levels and weakening her immune system to the point where illness could gain a foothold. . . . Blood analysis showed that among women who reacted negatively to their husbands' withdrawal during the arguments, the average levels of epinephrine, norepinephrine, cortisol and prolactin all rose. The more negative the wife's response and her husband's withdrawal, the greater the rise of the levels of the hormones. If those hormones levels stay up long enough, they can have immune consequences," explained Ronald Glaser, professor of medical microbiology and immunology.”

Far too many religious leaders heap loads of guilt on hurting people if they do not reconcile with their perpetrators; particularly spouses who have been abused by their partners. Some spouses have been taught that they are to endure, in spite of the pain. They say that is true love. They must stay even after contracting a sexually transmitted infection or having been hospitalized due to wounds from the perpetrator. These religious leaders have forgotten the Apostle Paul's admonition which is “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18) The phrase “as far as possible” suggests that it is not always possible to have peace with everyone but you must do your best to do so. When you have done all you can and peace is impossible to attain, move on. Yes, move on with your life without the one who is causing pain.

Let us learn how to forgive. Our country would be better for it.

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