

Melva's Corner



Freedom From Fear Are You Ready To Be Forgiven?

July 23, 2007

(I John 3:1)

Central Truth: “Your past has no business determining your future. You’ve taken personal responsibility but now you are “responsibly forgiven” by God who loves you. Because you feel at one with Him again, you are free to feel at one with yourself.”

There is no wonder that people feel a sense of failure and unworthiness. All around them others say things that attack and tear down their self-esteem. It seems everyone is daily evaluating everyone else. As people seek to survive, they fight against the fear that they are just “not good enough” to succeed.

Do you remember the first time you were afraid? What about the general feeling of uneasiness as if the world were somehow hostile to you? Do you recall the first person you ever “fell out with” and the sense of alienation you felt? How about the last time you really felt guilty over something you did wrong? If you’re like me, thinking about these times is painful.

Would it help if you understood more about where negative emotions like fear, hostility, loneliness and guilt come from? Would it help to know what God has to do with it all? Is He friend or foe? Can these negative emotions be replaced by positive ones like good self-esteem, a sense of being forgiven and belonging, and real peace in your life?

Because forgiveness relates to who we are and who we really want to be, I want to explore with you the question: Can I be forgiven?

Dr. Charles Siburt, a skilled counselor, says:

When we are bogged down in guilt and the gospel comes and knocks on the door and says, "Open up your house because I'm coming to you today," what do we say? "Oh, no, I'm sinful Lord. You can't come in my house. You can't sit at the table with me. Look at me." That's the problem. We look at ourselves and try to believe and to convince God that our salvation depends on us. It never has and it never will. It depends upon faith. It depends upon God. It depends upon our looking into His face and saying, "I think you mean it. I think you mean what you say; and I think you have the power (and desire) to rescue me from my own self-destruction and rebellion against you. I'm going to trust you."

Dr. Paul Tournier was a Swiss psychiatrist. After years of trying to encourage discouraged persons, Tournier wrote his best seller, *Guilt and Grace*. He believed guilt could only be cured by love. He also believed that forgiveness was not an idea or a concept, but a person named Jesus.

I heard a story told by a young preacher one day concerning grace. It went like this:

A contest offered to give one million dollars to anyone who could swim from the West Coast of the United States to Hawaii. Though impossible to accomplish, several great swimmers entered. All ultimately failed. One got much farther than the others, but when he was about to go under for the last time someone threw him a life preserver and he was saved. The preacher went on to say, "That's how it is with God. We try our best, give it our all, and finally — after we've done all we possible can — God steps in and does the rest." The Bible says it the way, "Let the weak say I'm strong."

In the audience sat an older and wiser man, K. C. Moser. He gently corrected the younger preacher:

Son, I didn't like your illustration. You had that man going down for the third time and then he was thrown a life preserver. If you think that's the picture of Jesus Christ saving us, you're mistaken. Now, if you'd had him dead and the one had reached down, pulled him out and brought him back to life again, then you would have had a picture of Jesus Christ. We

weren't going down for the third time. We were dead in our sins. There was no life left. Dead men don't reach out and grab life preservers. Jesus Christ pulled us out and brought us back to life.

John, one of the first twelve men to follow Jesus, wrote:

"This is how God showed his love to us: He sent His only Son into the world to give us life through Him. True love is God's love for us, not our love for God. God sent His Son to be the way to take away our sins." (I John 4:9)

God's forgiveness isn't partial. It's complete. The past is over and gone. King David committed adultery and murder. He was consumed with guilt and asked for forgiveness. **(See Pslam 32 and Psalm 51)** God later described David as His servant and one who **"kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes."** (I Kings 14:8) God forgives and forgets! When we are forgiven, we are free to concentrate on what He has done, not on what we have done.

After he became a Christian, the Apostle Paul no longer thought of himself as a blasphemer, persecutor of Christians, or violent man, but as one who had received the amazing grace of his God. Like him, you can lay aside your fears that you have too many sins or that your sins are too terrible for God to forgive. Paul writes that we are no longer a "slave to fear" but a true child of God. **(Romans 8:14-17)**

The forgiven enjoy their freedom from guilt and fear and appreciate the gift of God's grace. John writes: **"The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God."** (I John 3:1) We begin to understand that God loves us and experience the promise that **"perfect love casts out all fear because fear has to do with judgment."** (I John 4:18)

When we trust that God has forgiven us, and truly feel forgiven, only then do we begin to understand the amazing grace that makes His forgiveness possible. When we understand this gift we are able to trust Him to help us with the future. God knows our situation and our difficulties to overcome. Each time we fall He will pick us up again.

Dr. Charles Allen tells of a businessman who had trouble forgiving himself:

I reminded him that Jesus said to become as little children. I asked if he remembered falling down and hurting himself when he was a little boy . . . what did you do? He went crying to his mother, she kissed the bruised places and, in some mysterious manner, the pain would go away and he'd feel well again. I suggested he take his bruised heart and hurting conscience to his heavenly Father.

Your past has no business determining your future. You've taken personal responsibility but now you are "responsibly forgiven" by God who loves you. Because you feel at one with Him again, you are free to feel at one with yourself.

Although we are loved and valued, we need repeatedly to forgive ourselves for the bad things we do. We can do that because God keeps on forgiving us as we keep on talking to Him about our mistakes. (see **I John 1:5-2:2**) When we have forgiven ourselves, we will be able to love others because we realize how much we are loved. Love is the signal that we have actually released the guilt that condemns us. Love is our signal to the world that God's power is a power within us and that His grace has reached us. It's then that the words of the apostle John find true meaning and our lives true hope:

God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we're free of worry on Judgment Day — our standing is identical with Christ's. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life — fear of death, fear of judgment — is one not yet fully formed in love. We, though, are going to love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. He loved us first.

Because we often have difficulty understanding His grace and accepting this love, I'd like to offer three suggestions that I hope will help you believe in God's forgiveness, rely on His grace, and live in His love.

- First, try to help someone else experience forgiveness by sharing this message of grace. Sometimes we don't really understand a message well until we share and talk about it with others.

- **Second, stay in the Word of God, focusing on His love. The Book of John is a great place to start.**
- **Third, let other believers love you. We all need to feel the human hands of God's love. Take my word for it; being loved is a wonderful experience.**

Scriptural References:

"The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God." (I John 3:1)