



EXPERIENCING FREEDOM AND PEACE FROM MENTAL TORMENTORS

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INTRODUCTION

A powerful tool in Satan's arsenal is his ability to enslave the people of God by inducing them to harbor resentment and unforgiveness.

It is apparent that unforgiveness among believers fosters ungodly behavior, affording the enemy additional inroads into their lives. This, in turn, can have a devastating effect on the church, damaging the effectiveness of the gospel message.

This strategy, however, will work only if God's people refuse to humble themselves and forgive one another.

What will it take to reverse this destructive trend? The words; "Forgive me."

Think about it. . .

Pray about it. . .

Act on it.

The Power Of Forgiveness

Mercy – The Only Way Out

Matthew 18:23-35 tells of a certain man who owed a huge debt he couldn't repay. Jesus directed the parable to Peter in answer to his question concerning how many times should he forgive a brother who sinned against him. It underscores the importance of forgiving others.

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a human king who wished to settle accounts with his attendants. When he began the accounting, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents [probably about \$10,000,000]. And because he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and his children and everything that he possessed, and payment to be made. So the attendant fell on his knees, begging him, Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. And his master's heart was moved with compassion, and he released him and forgave him [cancelling] the debt.

But that same attendant, as he went out, found one of his fellow attendants who owed him a hundred denarii [about twenty dollars]; and he caught him by the throat and said, Pay what you owe! So his fellow attendant fell down and begged him earnestly, Give me time, and I will pay you all! But he was unwilling, and he went out and had him put in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow attendants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and told everything that had taken place to their master. Then his master called him and said to him, You contemptible and wicked attendant! I forgave and cancelled all that [great] debt of yours because you begged me to. And should you not have had pity and mercy on your fellow attendant, as I had pity and mercy on you?

And in wrath his master turned him over to the torturers (the jailers), till he should pay all that he owed. So also My heavenly Father will deal with every one of you if you do not freely forgive your brother from your heart [his offenses] (AMPLIFIED BIBLE).

The first attendant (or servant) in the parable owes a tremendous sum of money. Although he pleads for patience, he pledges to repay everything. Obviously he cannot. Add to that a possible prison sentence: thus it would make it impossible for him to pay his debt. At bottom, he is at the mercy of the king.

Hearing the plea of the indebted attendant, the king, moved with compassion, forgave the debt. Up to this point, this is a feel-good story. We sense relief for the man who has been given a new lease on life, especially if we have been in debt ourselves. But this is more than a story about owing money. Jesus wants his hearers to be involved in the story in order to impact those who are listening.

Anger Management Gone Awry

The story assumes an unusual turn when the forgiven man exits the court room and enters the city streets. It would seem he would be so overjoyed for such abundant mercy that he would be ready to extend that same compassion to others. But as the narrative bares, this is not the case at all. He suddenly turns on a fellow attendant who owes him only a small pittance of money and demands payment. This man also pleads for mercy and adequate time to repay his debt, but the first attendant refuses, and orders him pitilessly thrown into prison.

Pride Before The Fall

We marvel that this man reacts with such callousness, seeing he has been forgiven so lavishly by the king. How could he not show compassion to his fellow man?

I believe several things should be observed in the wicked servant's response to the king and to his fellow attendant. First, although he seems humble and remorseful before the king, he displays an underlying attitude of pride in saying he will repay everything. Apparently he has little desire to repay the loan until he is brought before the king. Most scholars agree the debt is so enormous that the attendant would not live long enough to repay the debt.

Second, his harsh demands toward his fellow servant suggests he feels justified before the king by his own plea, therefore his debt was forgiven. So, emboldened by his success, he decides to turn his good fortune into financial gain by extracting unjust payment from his debtor. Unwilling to be patient or to show mercy, he has his fellow servant thrown into jail. This, I sense, owes to his inability to perceive it was pure grace and mercy that erased *his own debt*.

Since he himself has not shown mercy, he will not now be given mercy before the king again. Not only will he be imprisoned, but he will also be delivered to the tormentors until he pays his debt in full. What a tragedy! What could have been a happy ending for all becomes a nightmare. A man has been bullied and thrown into prison for a small debt that could have easily been forgiven. And the unforgiving servant's actions deprive his family of their husband and father, a parent who will spend the rest of his life in prison tormented that he could have enjoyed freedom if only he had forgiven his fellow man.

The story appalls us that he responded in such an ungodly way. Doubtless Jesus wants us to see ourselves in the wicked servant. As we peer closer into the parable we may see a side of ourselves we do not like.

Failing to forgive others is a capital crime with our Lord. Moreover, he says that if we refuse to forgive others, He will not forgive us. A sobering statement, indeed! It should exhort us to forbid unforgiveness taking root and remaining in our lives.

Jesus ends the parable in Matthew 18 by saying that “the Father will also deliver us to the tormentors if we do not forgive our brothers.” What does that mean? Allow me to interpret with a personal story.

The Power Of Forgiveness

After my mother’s death I had a falling out with my father. Not long after she died, my father began seeing another woman. Shortly thereafter she moved into my parents house with him and they began living together. Because such action went against my Biblical beliefs, I conveyed that to my father. His actions caused much anger to build up in me. As a result, I refused to visit or even talk with him. Because I felt justified in this approach, I was convinced that God felt the same way.

During this rift with my father, I wasn’t timid in letting it be known that I was unhappy with the way he was behaving. I continued to justify my actions thinking I was right and that God, the Bible, and all of Heaven was on my side.

Deep inside though, I had second thoughts. As the months crept by, my spiritual fervor waned. It became harder and harder to study, to pray. On more than one occasion, my wife and my sons asked me to mend my relationship with my father, yet I felt strongly I was right in what I was doing.

Almost a year passed since I had spoken to my father. I could not forgive him for how he had begun living with another woman out of wedlock – something that was against everything my own mother

believed in. It was at this point in time the Spirit of God was trying to get my attention.

Apparently He was not as much in agreement with me as I had supposed. It was then I began to feel convicted that I should talk with my father, to mend our relationship. I thought about how I would go and tell him how wrong he was, that he was living in sin, that I was against what he was doing. This was a good start, I reasoned. Nonetheless, I was in no hurry to approach him.

On one occasion while I was working in my office, the Spirit of God spoke to me in a powerful way. I remember the day as if it were yesterday. I suppose God was tired of my putting off making things right with my father. I felt suddenly moved to call him. But, even as I was fighting back tears, anger welled up in me again, so I refused to make the call. It was then that God spoke to my heart. I felt Him telling me that until I forgave my father I would continue to be tormented by feelings of anger and bitterness. I sensed Him say that as long as I hung on to the bitterness against my father, I would be in danger of losing my spiritual effectiveness. I was on a downhill slide that was not only hurting me spiritually, but it was also affecting my family – especially my sons. It was time to make the call.

I looked at the phone and after sometime pressed the button in my contacts list that said “Dad.” “Hello,” came the answer on the other end of the phone. His voice seemed a little weak and feeble. “Dad,” I said. “May I come to your house and speak with you?” Without any hesitation, he said, “Sure, come on over.” I thanked him and hung up the phone, taking a deep breath. In a few minutes I was heading toward his house.

On the way I was thinking about what to say. The Lord had already made it clear to me that I was not to say anything to my dad about

how he was living or how I felt about it. As I pulled into the driveway of his house, I told the Lord that I would simply tell him that I did not agree with his lifestyle, but that I would forgive him.

It is amazing how quickly and how much God can say in the time it takes to turn into a driveway, switch off the engine, and step out. Within that brief span of time, He completely changed what I had decided to say to my father.

Once I knocked on the door, Pat, his lady friend, invited me in. Sitting in a reclining chair, my dad didn't attempt to get up, he looked rather frail, I thought. I found out later that he was unable to walk very well because of a leg injury.

Suddenly, I was overwhelmed with compassion for him. All of those things that had been pent up in me suddenly melted away.

Everything that I had been wanting to tell him didn't seem to matter now. I knelt down beside his chair, took his hand and said: "I am sorry for the way I've treated you. Will you forgive me?" That was it. That is all that God wanted me to say. It felt right, and I felt right. A load was lifted, replaced by unspeakable joy. He pulled me close to him and began to weep. He had forgiven me. At last the tormentors were gone. Once again I felt the warmth of the love of God flood my soul.

Forgiveness is a powerful weapon against the enemy of our souls. It must be practiced many times during our life's journey if we are to walk in freedom from the tormentors. We cannot truly express the love of God to the world unless and until we forgive those who offend us.

Why Should I Forgive?

Apart from being the right thing to do, as our conscience attests,

consider several reasons why we need to forgive others.

First, it frees us from guilt. As we saw in the parable from Matthew 18, the tormentors Jesus spoke of not only affect us physically but also emotionally. Guilt robs us of peace of mind and prohibits us from seeing things clearly. Guilt causes us to condemn others, not to mention ourselves. Moreover, it leads us to withdraw inwardly, which only compounds and complicates our plight.

Forgiveness obviates God's discipline. In his Matthew commentary, John MacArthur states: "Where there is an unforgiving spirit, there is sin; and where there is sin, there will be chastening" (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7*, 394).

King David lamented, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my sides are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart" (Psa. 38:3-8).

God forgives us even as we forgive others. This is especially vital to the body of Christ, the congregation. Unforgiveness can have debilitating consequences in the effectiveness of a local group of believers if it is not dealt with quickly and decisively. Colossians 3:12-13 advises: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Probably the most important reason to forgive is that it is in God's nature and, therefore, it is in our nature as His children. How can we

not forgive when we consider the Great Act of forgiveness wrought on the cross of Christ? Even at the point of death He uttered words heard throughout the heavens and around the world: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34).

When Others Fail To Forgive Us

What if we ask someone to forgive us but they refuse? Their refusal may provoke resentment on our part. Perhaps because we are expecting that we will be forgiven.

God can often use rejection in order to teach us to trust Him. This leads us to greater spiritual maturity. The result, we are a more effective disciple for His kingdom. Take, for example, an incident in the life of Joseph found in Genesis 37.

From The Pit To The Palace

Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, was their firstborn. After many years of barrenness the Lord heard the cries of Rachel and gave her a son. In the story we are told that Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he was the son of his old age. Joseph, according to Genesis 37, was a “dreamer.” His dreams irritated his brothers. In his dreams, his brothers were seen bowing down to him, (first as sheaves in the field and then as the sun, moon and stars). This angered them greatly, so that they spurned Joseph and his dreams. Eventually their callous feelings induced them to fake his death, whereas they subsequently sold him to the Egyptians, into a life of slavery.

We are not told if Joseph asked his brothers to forgive him for his dreams, but we do know that they showed unforgiveness toward him by their actions. It is apparent, however, that God was pleased with Joseph and began to prosper him during his time in Egypt. Having

found favor with the Egyptian official Potiphar, Joseph was given charge over his household. During that time, Potiphar prospered greatly, albeit this wasn't all smooth sailing for Joseph. Potiphar's wife, by a false accusation of sexual advance, landed the young Israelite in prison. Though incarcerated, he once again found favor, this time with the prison guards. During his imprisonment, God gave Joseph wisdom to interpret the dreams of two prisoners. Two years later Pharaoh had a dream which troubled him greatly. Thus, it was brought to his attention that Joseph could interpret dreams. Immediately Pharaoh sent for Joseph. After hearing Pharaoh's dream, Joseph gave the interpretation according to God's direction. As a reward, Pharaoh set Joseph over all the land of Egypt.

As we read this condensed account of how God was working in the life of Joseph, we see God's favor as Joseph continued to prosper in the land of Egypt. Although the journey had not been easy, Joseph honored God in all that he did. This opened up many opportunities for him to glorify God among the Egyptians.

Because of his faithfulness, God enabled Joseph's family to avoid a coming famine by bringing them to Egypt where they prospered under Joseph's leadership. In the end, God mended the relationships between Joseph and his brothers.

Not knowing who Joseph was when they first came to Egypt (because of the many years of separation), his brothers were afraid when they discovered they would indeed bow down to the young ruler. They had never forgiven Joseph for what they considered were his arrogant and self-promoting dreams. Their jealousy and envy of him had now come back to haunt them. Their lies and deceit were revealed. Fearful for their lives, they begged for mercy. Joseph's response to them gives us insight into the power of forgiveness.

A Sheaf For God

As the story unfolds, Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen 45:4-5; 50:20).

It's hard to grasp the vastness of God's love and mercy for us. Who are we to question his ways? Let us purpose to walk in His love and forgiveness, to allow Him to use us for His honor and His glory.

Learning To Walk It Out

First Things First

A healthy and vibrant relationship with Christ is essential to walk in the power of forgiveness. Developing this vital union with Him will enable us to avoid the pitfalls and defeats the enemy schemes for us. Although we have been delivered from the power of sin, created anew, and have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are still susceptible to falling into sin. The Word of God cautions: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8). It also states in the next verse (1:9): "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The power to overcome is in Christ, extended to us when we confess our sins. Each time we stumble, we are reminded of our frailty and our need for total dependence on Him. Out of our weakness we begin to understand the incredible power of God at work in us.

The Power Of Grace

God's power is effected through our weakness. The apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 12 tells of "a thorn the Lord gave to him in the flesh." The reason, he says, was to prevent him from becoming conceited in light of the tremendous revelation he had been given by Christ. He pleaded with the Lord on three occasions and asked that it should leave him. He did not get the answer he wanted—i.e., the removal of the thorn—but he did receive a remarkable gift from God—the gift of grace. You may be thinking, "What's so special about grace?" What makes it special is what God said about it. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9).

Strength For Weakness

The sufficiency of God's grace is the power and ability to do His will. If Paul is willing to walk in the weakness of his flesh, God's resurrection power will work through him. Paul gets it! He says, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12: 9, 10). Our weakness, His strength: This is God's way.

Forgiving someone when they have wronged us doesn't mean that we condone their actions. What is at stake concerns our willingness to surrender our will to the will of Christ. This allows Him to handle the situation according to His plan and purpose for our life. By doing so, we experience the amazing grace that He provides for each of us. "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

I Can Forgive But I Can't Forget

This is a familiar phrase used by many people when they are confronted with the prospect of forgiving another person. It seems to make them feel better if they can couch it in these terms, especially if they are struggling with forgiving someone who, they believe, has unjustly wronged them.

It is true that we cannot easily forget events in our lives, particularly if they have exercised a negative impact on us. However, it is *how* we remember what happened that is important. If we see things from God's perspective, our memories can register positive rather than negative consequences.

Delivered For Good

In his letter to believers in Rome, Paul said that we are debtors, not to the flesh, rather to Christ and to the Spirit (8:12) Why? Because God has delivered us from the bondage of sin and death and transferred us to His kingdom. We have an obligation, therefore, to walk in His ways, submitting ourselves to His guidance.

Paul goes on to say that "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (8: 28). This underscores that no matter how difficult we may find it to do the right thing, He promises that He will work all things (which includes forgiving one another), for our good. They may not be good, feel good, or look good at the time, but the promise remains: *they will work for our good*. Observe one caveat: "all things work for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose." Loving Him means that we are walking in obedience to His plan and purpose for our life.

The Right Perspective

Forgiving another person affirms our love for them.

It also frees us to warm them with the love and compassion of Christ. Moreover, it enables us to pray for them, and it opens doors for Christ to work in their lives.

Our message becomes believable when others see in us the reflection of Christ. The manifestation of love and forgiveness is tangible proof of that reflection.

Forgiveness Is A Two Way Street

The emphasis up to this point has been focused on forgiving others. But what about forgiving ourselves? It is just as important to receive forgiveness as it is to extend it to others.

Let's examine forgiveness in light of our relationship with Christ. We know, for example, that we *do* sin and stand in need of daily forgiveness from Him. Thankfully the Word of God promises cleansing for our sins once we confess them. (1 John 1:9).

Once confession has been made, we must claim and appropriate His forgiveness by faith and move on.

Beware Of The Snare

One strategy of the enemy is to make us feel that we are not worthy to receive forgiveness, that what we have done is unforgivable. If we continue to think this way, a sense of guilt will begin to take root in us and prevent us from receiving the cleansing that Christ offers to us. The truth is that no sin is outside the width of God's grace that He cannot forgive (Heb 8:12).

Satan, the father of lies, wants nothing more than to keep us in the dark from knowing the truth about ourselves. God's Word proves

to be the most effective weapon we have when dealing with his lies. Handled correctly, it will keep us from being ensnared in his web. Surely the truth will set us free (Jn 8:32).

When we learn to forgive others and to forgive ourselves, we enter into the joy and peace that God gave us when he saved us. Nothing pleases Him more than to see His children walking in the ways of His Son, Jesus Christ. After all, we were made to be conformed into His likeness (Rom 8:29).

I will sing aloud of your steadfast love
in the morning. For you have been to
me a fortress and a refuge in the day
of my distress. O my Strength, I will
sing praises to you, for you, O God, are
my fortress, the God who shows me
steadfast love.

(Psalm 59:16-17)