

Forgive as God Forgives

By Charles Pogue

Once there were two brothers who were a couple of years apart in age. One day the older brother became very angry, and in his moment of rage he took a club and beat his younger sibling. The younger man recovered from his wounds, while the older one experienced deep sorrow and contrition, subsequently begging his brother to forgive the physical attack. The younger brother said he indeed forgave the older, but he took the club and hung it on the living room wall where it served as a constant reminder to the older brother of his cruel act. The sight of the large stick kept the older brother's guilt against himself continually stirred. It would be hard to convince any thinking person that the younger brother actually forgave the attack.

Oh that we would forgive as God forgives! When the Hebrews writer quoted the Prophet Jeremiah regarding the new covenant God would make with His people, these unforgettable words describe the boundless grace and forgiveness of God, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12). Those familiar words do not mean that God is incapable of remembering, but that once He forgives He will not bring up sins committed in the past anymore. They are blotted out, as it were, from His book of remembrance, and the previously guilty party stands justified in God's sight once more. Someone has said that justification means just-if-I'd- never-sinned. That is the forgiveness of God.

How many times has a brother committed an offense against another, and he too, like the older brother asks for, and is told he receives, forgiveness, but when at times the relationship is strained again, old reminders surface and are voiced to hurt once more? O that we would forgive as God forgives! When we learn to love as God loves, we *will* learn to forgive as He forgives!

When we hang on to old reminders (even if they aren't clubs) of the sins of another, we might as well be saying to the offender, "I expect you to commit the same sin again," and our incomplete forgiveness may just guarantee it. If the sorrow of the offender is real, and the repentance is genuine, so what if he does in his human weakness commit the same or a similar blunder again? Matthew records the following exchange between the Lord and Peter. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus said unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22).

While it was tragic that the older brother beat the younger with a club, the younger brother's hanging it on the wall stood between him and forgiveness. Old reminders, old memories held in reserve to bring up past indiscretions are stored like arrows in an arsenal, and when a new conflict arises hurling them reflects the shooter has not forgiven as God forgives. You know what? My guess is that for a long time in his life, the older brother didn't need to see the club hanging on the wall to feel remorse, but I am relatively sure that its presence stirred up another "R" word, resentment!