



## The Devil Wears Unforgiveness

Text: 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Breakaway Executive Director Timothy Ateek

1. When T.A. asked who you have bad blood with, what was the first name that came to mind?
  - a. What specifically led to the “bad blood”?
  - b. T.A. taught that bad blood robs you of joy. It complicates holidays, keeps you up at night, drains you, etc. How have you experienced this regarding this particular situation?
  
2. Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.
  - a. T.A. opened his message by focusing in on v. 11, how the Devil’s goal is to steal, kill, and destroy, and one of his main tactics is unforgiveness. Prior to this message, had you ever considered that there might be a spiritual dimension to your unforgiveness?
  - b. How did T.A.’s teaching on this aspect of unforgiveness influence your thinking about any unforgiveness you might be harboring?
  - c. How is Satan’s strategy of unforgiveness successful at robbing us of *intimacy* – with God and with others?
  - d. How is Satan’s strategy of unforgiveness successful at robbing us of *impact* – from being compelling witnesses to Christ and his gospel?
  - e. Conversely, how does a life of radical forgiveness, because we have been forgiven by God through Christ, *increase* our intimacy with God and others and *increase* our impact as witnesses for Christ?
  
3. T.A. shared four key truths regarding forgiveness: 1) Forgiven people forgive people, 2) Time doesn’t heal all wounds; it prolongs them, 3) Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling, and 4) Forgiveness is giving up your right to be right.
  - a. Which of these four was the truth you most needed to hear and why?
  - b. When it comes to dealing with conflict and disagreements, we will either handle them God’s way or our way. What is your most common strategy for handling conflict “your way”?
  - c. How is God’s way different than your way, and what specifically would it look like to begin trying to handle the situation you mentioned above God’s way?

Challenge: Think of someone with whom you have “bad blood”. Every day this week, call that person to mind and then read Luke 23:34. Make Jesus’ prayer your prayer. Replace the word “them” with the name of the person you are struggling to forgive. And then pray for the Holy Spirit to soften your heart. Ask for “eyes to see” the person you are struggling to forgive in the same way Jesus saw his tormentors: as someone who is confused and in need of love, forgiveness and grace.

Prayer: Before you dismiss the group, pray ...

- Thanking God for his grace and forgiveness through Christ
- For hearts full of compassion and forgiveness towards those with whom you have bad blood
- For wisdom and discernment on how to seek reconciliation if at all possible (Romans 12:18)
- That through your forgiving heart God would increase your intimacy with him and with others and increase the impact your witness has on those around you
- And that the Holy Spirit transforms your Grow Group into a community of forgiveness and peace.

## STUDY DEEPER

### Living Jesus' Prayer for Forgiveness

Luke 23:34: Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Could anything be more shocking and yet more beautiful than this prayer?

After being whipped, beaten, crowned with thorns, repeatedly mocked, spit upon, sneered at, and pierced with spikes through his wrists and ankles, while slowly suffocating as he hung on the cross, and as he was experiencing the nightmarish weight of the sin of the world upon him, Jesus assumes his tormentors are ignorant and prays for their forgiveness on this basis! When I recall that the one praying this is also the Creator of the universe, I am led to the conclusion that this is the single most shocking and single most beautiful sentence ever spoken in all of history. And it reveals the single most beautiful image of God in all of history.

If we let it, the beauty of this prayer, directed toward us (for our sin also put Christ on the cross) has the power to heal and transform us completely. But it also presents us with a breathtaking challenge – one we can only hope to fulfill as we're transformed by the beauty of God's grace.

We are repeatedly commanded in Scripture to follow the example of Jesus in all things (e.g. Jn 13:35; Eph 5:1-2; I Tim 1:16; 1 Pet 2:21, cf. I Cor 11:1). We are commanded to "have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had" (Phil 2:5, cf. I Cor 2:16). This means that the attitude Jesus revealed toward his enemies (including us) is the attitude we are to have toward our enemies, as well as to all other people. However heinous or threatening a person's behavior may be, we are to assume that "they don't know what they are doing." And we're to petition God for their forgiveness on this basis.

Nothing could possibly run more counter to the attitude that comes most natural to us in our fallen condition than the attitude Jesus reflected in his prayer. (This, undoubtedly, is one of the reasons the Lord gave us this example). In our fallen state, we most naturally replicate the original sin that pervades the rebellious human race. We "eat of the knowledge of the tree of good and evil," which is to say, we put ourselves in a position of judging people.

In our fallen, rebellious state, we don't instinctively assume the ignorance of others, especially if they are harming us. To the contrary, we usually assume their full responsibility and judge them accordingly.

Moreover, instead of pleading for God to forgive them, we are more inclined to feel righteous as we plead with God to exact vengeance upon them. Our “natural” fallen response to our enemies is not at all reflective of God’s attitude toward us, as revealed in Jesus’ prayer on the cross.

I encourage all of us to strive to cultivate the mind of Christ, especially in this area of assuming the ignorance of others and praying for their forgiveness on this basis. Of course there are special occasions and relationships where it is appropriate and loving to assess the responsibility of others (though it’s never appropriate to make a negative judgment about another’s intrinsic worth). When serving as a juror in a court of law, for example, or when parenting a child, one needs to try to accurately assess the extent to which another knew what they were doing. But in all other circumstances, and with regard to all other people, we are commanded to imitate Jesus, including the attitude he reflected toward his enemies on the cross.

However heinous a person’s behavior may be, and however threatening a person’s behavior may be, we are to refrain from judgment, assume their ignorance and hope and plead for their forgiveness.

This is perhaps the most difficult act of discipleship we could ever engage in. Yet, this is a key to unlocking the beauty of the Kingdom in our life. Though it always gives the demonic illusion of empowerment, there is in reality nothing more life-negating than our judging impulse. As we by God’s grace learn to refrain from judgment and instead hope and believe the best in others (I Cor. 13:7) while praying for their forgiveness, the love of Christ is unleashed in our hearts. The beauty of Jesus’ prayer then begins to become a beautiful reality in our life. We experience a depth of joy and freedom that we otherwise would not experience.

I encourage us to cultivate the shockingly beautiful attitude of Christ on the cross. Let us strive to follow the beautiful example of Jesus and pray:

“Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.”