

Fanning it into Flame
Sunday, December 12, 2010
Forgiveness

When I was a kid there was a saying: *Sticks and stones can break your bones but names will never hurt you.* The truth is that names can hurt you. No doubt we can all remember with great clarity the words that sunk deep into our hearts like an arrow. Years later that memory can pop up and create the same twinge in our spirit. Words are powerful. Proverbs 18:21 states that life and death are in the power of the tongue. We can bless and we can curse. While this is a very powerful message, we'll save that for another time. I want to key in on the results of the inflicted pain and our need to walk in forgiveness.

Sometimes people don't forgive because they feel justice would not be served. *"This person wounded me and they need to pay."* We use terms like, "You owe me an apology." They are indebted to us and we don't want to let it go until we get paid. The problem is that our unforgiveness does not bring resolution, but rather binds us up in the process. The very thing we think is serving to pay for what was done to us actually serves to bind us up instead. People will use unforgiveness as a boundary to stay separated from the offender. They don't want to restore the relationship and feel that holding onto the offense keeps them at bay. The problem with this is that the wall that has been built up in order to protect you also serves to lock you in. I believe that's why Jesus was so pointed on this subject. When he taught the disciples to pray what we have come to call The Lord's Prayer, it is immediately followed with ***"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*** I don't believe it's a "tit for tat" scenario, but rather we put ourselves in a position of being unable to receive his forgiveness.

If you can't forgive someone, you have to ask yourself the question, "Have I been forgiven for my sins by God?" If you have, then you no longer have a right to say that you can't forgive. Rodney Hogue, in his power-packed 81 page book, ***Forgiveness***, states that forgiveness starts by acknowledging that an offense has taken place and not acting as though it doesn't bother you. Own up to the fact that you are offended. Acting as though something doesn't bother you is not the same as walking in the freedom of forgiveness. We can be kidding ourselves. We need to deal with it or it will deal with us. Randy tells of a person who didn't want to forgive someone who had sexually abused her because she thought that it would mean that she would have to live her life in such a way as if the action had never taken place. He goes on to say: *Forgiveness doesn't remove or delete offenses from our lives. Forgiveness doesn't mean that you go into denial and forget this ever happened to you. It isn't that you are somehow wiping this event from your life, glossing over the wrongs others did, nor developing a memory lapse of the pain you have suffered. Forgiveness will not erase your memory clean. What forgiveness does is to remove the power of that memory over your life."*

John 20:21-23

21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! **As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.**" 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 **If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**" (NIV *emphasis mine*)

God placed a high premium on forgiveness and paid for our sins against him by sending his son to die in our place to set us free from the penalty of sin. He wanted us to live in freedom. That's not a freedom to do anything you please, rather it is to live according to the design he had for us. That design is to be like Jesus. We are to live like him, love like him, forgive like him, and act like him. In and of ourselves that's impossible, but it's not our trying to be like him through our own efforts. It's receiving his spirit into our lives through our confession of him as Lord and Savior and allowing him to work in and through us. We become one with him. His strengths become our strengths. We'll be spending more time on this great subject. In the mean time get a jump on things and forgive everyone who has wronged you. You can do it in Christ!