
“To Err Is Human, to Forgive Divine.”

Alexander Pope

When we trust in the abiding presence of Jesus Christ living within, we hold the power to forgive. It takes working through our emotions, submitting each one to the Lord as it arises. Some wrongs are harder to forgive than others. Yet, without exception, God will make it possible when we determine not to hold a grudge against another—or ourselves.

That does not mean we have to continue spending time with a person who insists on bringing toxicity into our lives. Poison and injury can come through negativity and dishonesty. We can establish boundaries with those behaviors that hurt our lives. Forgiving does not mean we accept damaging behavior. With the Lord’s help, we can separate the person from the behavior. This means we hold God’s love in our hearts for the person, yet will not tolerate bad behavior. God gives us that kind of strength and empowerment.

Forgiving ourselves for things we have done that brings harm to others or to our own bodies is the hardest work of all. A young man, whom I will call “Lloyd,” came to me with the sorrow of making a mistake that hurt another. He wept with shame, saying, “I’ve been a Christian since childhood. I just can’t believe what I’ve done!”

I encouraged his tears, telling him, “Tears help us heal.”

After giving space to what he was feeling, I asked, “Why do you think Christ allowed the Roman soldiers to nail him to the cross? By his own confession He could have called a legion of angels to save him.”

Lloyd thought for several minutes before saying, “He did it to be our Savior.”

I then asked, “When you think of Jesus choosing to die—embracing the role of Sacrificial Lamb wherein he could put an end to the practice of shedding the blood of innocent animals for the sake of human sin—how does it work for you?”

“I have always believed I will have eternal life through believing in Christ who offered Himself on my behalf,” Lloyd responded.

“What does it do for you right now, in this moment, Lloyd?” I asked.

“Well, it gives me a lot of peace when I trust in it,” He replied.

“Can you trust that Christ has forgiven the mistake you made?”

“In a spiritual sense, yes. But I do feel guilty for what I’ve done.”

“And shame?”

“Yes—and I’m humiliated!”

“Do you think you might be dealing with pride?” I asked. “Thinking we have more holiness and more strength than we actually do have, is pride. Once we repent after making a mistake, it takes humbling ourselves before God, reckoning with how much we need the Lord’s help moment-by-moment, in order to live this Christian life.”

Lloyd pondered for a few moments. I waited while he absorbed the truth of this, making it his own. Then he said, “How can I continue to be a witness to the good news of Christ after blowing it in such a huge way?”

I responded, “Lloyd, I have blown it, too. Every Christian has in some way disgraced herself or himself. Are we depending on ourselves, or are we depending on God to be the Perfector of our faith, the Redeemer of our souls?”

“I see what you are saying,” Lloyd said, “yet I could be seen as a hypocrite now. I have been a good witness until now. I don’t want to pretend to be something when it is a proven fact I have fallen on my face!”

I responded, “If you or I witness our faith, it does not mean we are proclaiming to be Christ, Lloyd. The truth is that Christ lives in us and is perpetually saving us from our sins. We don’t have to keep sinning. And, we don’t have to tell everyone what sins we have done. Sometimes a mistake is so blatantly obvious that we are humiliated in front of our loved ones. Even then, we can praise God and thank Him for what we are about to learn from the experience. Being human calls for growth in understanding our weaknesses and our faults. We grow in humility as we recognize that we aren’t what we thought we were, namely strong and reliable.

“As for continuing to minister to others, we can do it from our weakness. We can live a life of gratitude—knowing we are forgiven sinners. This is a much better place to be than to take pride in ourselves, thinking we have it all together, which would hardly bring lasting ministry to anyone,” I concluded.

As we ended our time together, Lloyd and I prayed. When we finished, the look on his face showed joy, peace, and relief. The joy Lloyd felt came from knowing the relief that comes from taking that trip back to Christ on the cross. I have done it often myself. It is there that we receive the power to forgive others for the hurt and harm we have experienced through them.

*“Trust not yourself, but your defects to know.
Make use of every friend and every foe.”*
Alexander Pope (1688-1744)