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FORGIVE

by Darryl Cope

An interesting word: forgive. I was certain I knew what it meant. I have preached on this word many times in 50 years of preaching. One might even say I have pontificated on this word because of my certainty of its meaning. After a series of lessons on the subject of forgiveness, I was approached by a 12-year-old girl with a request. She wanted me to preach a lesson on forgiveness. My initial reaction was, "what on earth am I going to say that I haven't already said?"

Being one of my favorites, I did not want to let her down, but again, what am I going to say?

I figured it was time to start from scratch. Let's look at the word all over again. Before we re-examine the word forgive, think on this:

The age-old saying, "first learned, best learned" is only half true. This old proverb is only valid if what we first learn is correct. Really the proverb could be, "first learned, hardest to change".

I was told of a test given to two groups of people in different parts of the country. There were a hundred people in each group and they were asked to describe in detail what they were shown on a big screen. The images were flashed on the screen for just a fraction of a second, and everyone responded with their description of what they had seen. All two hundred people were wrong. The first image was an ace of spades and, interestingly enough, everyone got that part right. The sticky part was the color. The color of an ace of spades is black. Everyone knows that, but the color flashed on the screen was red. That presents a problem for our subconscious that must make a split second decision to recall what was actually seen. Of course, red is not an option. Our paradigm will not allow it. For those unfamiliar with the term "paradigm", it is how we see the world; our interpretation of what we see based on what we are certain of. The second image was flashed and everyone responded, again, incorrectly. The image displayed was a Bengal tiger. Again, every answer was correct as far as the animal, but not with color. All answers were the same: orange, white, and black. Wrong. The image displayed was green, white, and black. Again, in the millisecond allowed for a decision, our preconceived view will not allow for a green tiger. They don't exist.

All my life, or at least since I have been conscious of the meaning of such words, I have seen forgiveness as a reaction to an action. In other words, you can't forgive until an offense occurs. If that be the case, why does the root word, "give" have the prefix, "for" meaning up front. Good examples of its usage elsewhere would be: forehead, forearm, forethought, and the list goes on. It seems a foregone conclusion; we need to rethink this concept of forgiveness. The principle is not aftergiveness. It is forgiveness. What we need to emulate is the kind of giving that results in our redemption.

Let's try something here. Consider how would you feel if you saw someone in need of something, or better yet, you saw that they were going to be in need of it and you wanted to help, so you gave them whatever was needed out of the kindness of your heart; a wedding gift, a beautiful table setting, perhaps. Much later, you see them using it proudly as their own. Are you angry and resentful, or proud that they value your gift and are putting it to good use?

Well, that is one perspective. Now let's try another.

You see someone in desperate need of help. You have the means or solution but even though you would like to help, you don't really want to lose whatever it is you could give them or have it broken. You give in and loan it to them. Much later, long after it was to be returned, you see them using it proudly as their own, or worse yet you see it discarded or in disrepair. How do you feel this time? Are you pleased you were able to help, or angry and resentful?

I made a decision many years ago that I would not loan anything I was not willing to give away, primarily because quite often that is, in reality, what you are doing. I suppose, in fact, what I was doing was forgiving.

Forgiving means giving ahead of time; giving up front. For many, that can be a paradigm shift.

My concept of "aftergiving" resulted in the passion of the moment interfering with my decision-making process. The Lord, on the other hand, had planned, decided, and given, long before the event needing the forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not a reaction to anything. It is a carefully thought out plan, prepared well in advance, held in store and then applied liberally as salve to a wound.

The giving that results in our salvation began long before the sin that needed it. That giving was done in preparation of the need.

The first giving in forgiving was the commitment to the plan of salvation and as the apostle Paul insures us in Ephesians 1 was before the foundation of the world.

Then came the giving of the promise of redemption to Abraham "through your seed".

Then Word gave up the form of God to become flesh and be born as Jesus.

Then God gave that only begotten son, Jesus, for my sins.

Then I was born.

Then I sinned.

Now, after all the giving has been done in anticipation of my need, is the forgiveness applied.

Our forgiving should first be our giving ourselves to the Lord, then His forgiveness can, through us, be liberally applied to any who need it.