

## HOW DO WE HEAL WHEN IT'S TOO MUCH TO FORGIVE??

December 7, 1941; November 22, 1963; April 20, 1999; September 11, 2001; and now April 15, 2007 – our list of infamous dates of national tragedies grows. Our hearts are broken for the lost lives, and even more for the families of those “untimely torn” from us. Our lives will never be the same. Yet each morning still dawns with the hope of a new day and we must go on and find a way to remember without bitterness; to believe that “these dead shall not have died in vain”. If we can learn and grow in our recovery process; indeed, if we can grieve one day at a time, perhaps we shall emerge from that process wiser, better than before. What better way to defeat the evil enemy who has sought to destroy our lives, our hope, our national unity?

Perhaps it is too early to even mention forgiveness, yet without it we shall become like the evil that has sought to destroy us. Such evil grows from bitter offense, from hearts of those who believe that vengeance is a more powerful force than mercy and forgiveness. Soon we must begin to look up and out of our grief and pain and find a way to release the awful burden and to finally begin the healing process.

Our modern culture of psychological “wisdom” has taught us to use the word “forgiveness” in an almost casual manner. The idea seems to have become a concept of “overlooking” offenses and putting them behind us, ignoring them as though they never happened. We talk about forgiveness, we agree with the concept, and most of us think we have forgiven. The interesting thing about true forgiveness is that most of us think we have forgiven when in fact we have only learned to deny, to “stuff” our feelings of grief and pain. Such forgiveness only leaves us more damaged, more bitter than before. Perhaps it is time for us to take a closer look at the Christian concept of forgiveness. Whether or not we profess to be active Christians, we owe ourselves a look at the concept of forgiveness as an act of perfect mercy *and* perfect justice.

Only by understanding forgiveness as a legal concept, can we begin to fulfill the human, God-given cry of our hearts for justice. Who could look at the terrible loss of the families of the young people slain at Virginia Tech and not cry out in our hearts for justice? In order to understand forgiveness from God’s perspective, let us look at a word picture that I call the “Court of Heaven”.

Let’s say that I have just lost a family member in such a tragic outpouring of evil as that which happened at Virginia Tech. Forgiveness is not about the person who perpetrated the evil. Forgiveness is now about me; about my life being destroyed or being healed. If I am to accomplish forgiveness, I must “write out my charges”, honestly pouring out from my heart the terrible thing that has happened, together with my feelings of outrage, anger, grief, pain and offense. The Judge of the Court of Heaven will read the charges, see the horror and grief of my heart, and will immediately deliver His ruling: “I find these charges to be legitimate – this is truly murder in the first degree! You have your indictment!”

As the Judge continues your Day in Court, He declares, “You must now decide what law you will invoke in this court. You must choose between two laws. As you decide which law you will invoke in this court, please take into consideration that there are at least fifteen people waiting in the foyer of the court with their charges written against you. When their cases are heard against you, you will be judged by the same law that you now invoke in this courtroom. With these facts in mind, consider the two laws from which you are to choose:

You may choose “The Law of Sin and Death”, a universal law that states, “the wages of sin is death.” If you choose to invoke the Law of Sin and Death, the death penalty will be declared and the person who murdered your loved one will be sentenced to **eternal** death. There will be no hope of forgiveness here or in eternity.

Remembering, however, that you are to be tried in this same court and will be judged by the law that you invoke, you may invoke “The Law of the Spirit of Life”. This law also cites the universal law “the wages of sin (any sin) is death.” **The death penalty must be paid**; a life for a life! This law also states that there was one perfect life, a life lived without sin, a life lived so that there was no sin of His own that he had to pay for. This one perfect life has been given as one perfect price; He has paid the death penalty once and for all for any person who will receive that payment as just price for his own sin and for the sin perpetrated against him. In accepting Jesus’ payment for this person’s having murdered my loved one, I effectively “send away” the power of that sin from my life. I am now free to forgive and live. The only other choice is to wear the terrible damage of that person’s act of violence on my own life, now and for eternity.

If we are to live and heal, there must be justice here and for eternity. How beautiful is that ultimate justice; the mercy that was bought with the terrible price of Jesus’ shame, torture and murder. How awesome is the victory of His resurrection, bursting forth from the grave with the keys of death, hell and the grave in his hand! In His death the price of all sin is paid, but in His resurrection we receive the power to rise up and live above the power of evil.

Psychological forgiveness brings the benefits of leaving the past behind and going on, wounded but determined. Eternal forgiveness brings forth true overcoming of the evil that daily seeks to destroy mankind, God’s creation. With forgiveness that was bought and paid for with such a price, we can move forward into true healing. With true healing we are free to remember our fallen loved ones for their lives and the joy they have given to all who knew them.