

INTRO: Jesus Christ forgave us for so many things and often for so many years, but for some reason we often find it difficult to forgive one another - this should not be. If we are to be the kind of servants God expects of us, we too, must learn to forgive and live in harmony with brothers and sisters in Christ. Over the years I have seen and heard of others that for one reason or another have extreme difficulty living in harmony with others for various reasons, though in most of these cases, both claim to be Christian. How many have been shopping and see someone that you have ill will against and decided to look the other way or to quickly dart into another aisle so there will not be a confrontation? In most cases, we have trouble forgiving because we think WE have been offended in some way, it is ALWAYS the other person's fault. Someone said something about US that hurt our feelings, someone did something that causes US to hurt or be inconvenienced, in some way WE have been affected and therefore it is difficult for US to forgive and go forward with that individual. Do not misunderstand me, there are times when it may seem impossible or at least may seem the wisest course of action to not associate in certain ways with others so as not to cause further damage, but we must ALWAYS be ready to forgive and forget that alleged injustice that was done against us, even if it was intentional.

In the horrors of Ravensbruck concentration came in 1939, Corrie Ten Boom was living. Over 90,000 women and children perished in Ravensbruck and in the clothing of a dead child a prayer was found which read as follows: **O LORD, REMEMBER NOT ONLY THE MEN AND WOMEN OF GOOD WILL, BUT ALSO THOSE OF ILL WILL. BUT DO NOT REMEMBER ALL OF THE SUFFERING THEY HAVE INFLICTED UPON US: INSTEAD REMEMBER THE FRUITS WE HAVE BORNE BECAUSE OF THIS SUFFERING, OUR FELLOWSHIP, OUR LOYALTY TO ONE ANOTHER, OUR HUMILITY, OUR COURAGE, OUR GENEROSITY, THE GREATNESS OF HEART THAT HAS GROWN FROM THIS TROUBLE. WHEN OUR PERSECUTORS COME TO BE JUDGED BY YOU, LET ALL OF THESE FRUITS THAT WE HAVE BORNE BE THEIR FORGIVENESS.** In comparison, is our issue with others as severe? Cause in most cases if we look, we will find the root of our discomfort with others amounts to very little, often our "feelings" were hurt because we misunderstood or refused to understand the position of others. Too many times we are not willing to be hurt or offended for the cause of Christ - I am grateful Christ was not that way.

A. There are certainly times when it would appear we are hated for no reason, there are times when the reasons behind the conflicts are not fully understood, there are times when we are hurt in many areas because of the tension and it may be best to part ways or at least to change the relationship, but it is never right to not be forgiving. Jesus Christ forgave those that killed Him and He could have just as easily prayed destruction upon their heads and it would have come, justifiably so - but He did not. There are individuals that I have known in my life that seem to have a knack for causing dissension even though they claim to be Christians, but I have found it is wiser to simply tolerate them in small doses in order to maintain a relationship that works. I can honestly say I do not hold anything against them, but for the sake of my relationship with Christ and with them, it is simply wisest to not associate extremely close with them if that relationship might cause problems in my walk or even their walk with Christ, however there is no resentment nor animosity towards them and I can associate with them as necessary without playing the hypocrite. Paul and Barnabas had some disagreements in their walk with God, yet I do not see where they despised one another, not did they speak ill will of one another, even to others; but, Paul went one way and Barnabas went another and they both were successful in the kingdom of God. Actually the gospel of Christ was spread more quickly because of their separation. We can work out the issues between brothers and sisters in Christ and we must be ready and willing to forgive.

B. But one may ask, how about those that perhaps are not Christian and really do "hate" us, how do we handle this? **TRUE STORY: RABBI MICHAEL WEISSER LIVED IN LINCOLN, NEBRASKA. AND FOR MORE THAN 3 YEARS, LARRY TRAPP, A SELF-PROCLAIMED NAZI & KU KLUX KLANSMAN, DIRECTED A TORRENT OF HATE-FILLED MAILINGS & PHONE CALLS TOWARD HIM. TRAPP PROMOTED WHITE SUPREMACY, ANTI-SEMITISM, & OTHER MESSAGES OF PREJUDICE, DECLARING HIS APARTMENT THE KKK STATE HEADQUARTERS & HIMSELF THE GRAND DRAGON. HIS WHOLE PURPOSE IN LIFE SEEMED TO BE TO SPEW OUT HATE-RIDDEN RACIAL SLURS & OBSCENE REMARKS AGAINST WEISSER & ALL THOSE LIKE HIM. AT FIRST, THE WEISSERS WERE SO AFRAID THEY LOCKED THEIR DOORS &**

WORRIED THEMSELVES ALMOST SICK OVER THE SAFETY OF THEIR FAMILY. BUT ONE DAY RABBI WEISSER FOUND OUT THAT TRAPP WAS A 42-YEAR-OLD CLINICALLY BLIND, DOUBLE AMPUTEE. AND HE BECAME CONVINCED THAT TRAPP'S OWN PHYSICAL HELPLESSNESS WAS A SOURCE OF THE BITTERNESS HE EXPRESSED. SO RABBI WEISSER DECIDED TO DO THE UNEXPECTED. HE LEFT A MESSAGE ON TRAPP'S ANSWERING MACHINE, TELLING HIM OF ANOTHER SIDE OF LIFE...A LIFE FREE OF HATRED & RACISM. RABBI WEISSER SAID, "I PROBABLY CALLED 10 TIMES & LEFT MESSAGES BEFORE HE FINALLY PICKED UP THE PHONE & ASKED ME WHY I WAS HARASSING HIM. I SAID THAT I'D LIKE TO HELP HIM. I OFFERED HIM A RIDE TO THE GROCERY STORE OR TO THE MALL." TRAPP WAS STUNNED. DISARMED BY THE KINDNESS & COURTESY, HE STARTED THINKING. HE LATER ADMITTED, THROUGH TEARS, THAT HE HEARD IN THE RABBI'S VOICE, "SOMETHING I HADN'T EXPERIENCED IN YEARS. IT WAS LOVE." SLOWLY THE BITTER MAN BEGAN TO SOFTEN. ONE NIGHT HE CALLED THE WEISSERS & SAID HE WANTED OUT, BUT DIDN'T KNOW HOW. THEY GRABBED A BUCKET OF FRIED CHICKEN & TOOK HIM DINNER. BEFORE LONG THEY MADE A TRADE: IN RETURN FOR THEIR LOVE HE GAVE THEM HIS SWASTIKA RINGS, HATE TRACTS, & KLAN ROBES. THAT SAME DAY TRAPP GAVE UP HIS KU KLUX KLAN RECRUITING JOB & DUMPED THE REST OF HIS PROPAGANDA IN THE TRASH. "THEY SHOWED ME SO MUCH LOVE THAT I COULDN'T HELP BUT LOVE THEM BACK," HE FINALLY CONFESSED. Folks, if that could happen in Lincoln, Nebraska, couldn't that happen in other places, especially in our little world? Sometimes we simply do not know what has happened in the life of that individual that we think has ill will toward us or treats us badly, but can we not, but should we not love them with that kind of love Jesus Christ spoke about. A benevolent love that simply prays good will to others. The angels at the birth of Christ sang "**good will toward man**" - that is love, in the right sense, to all.

C. Would like to mention something briefly about the text as well...in verse 23 "**If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you..**" It did not say that you have something against your brother, for as a Christian you should have cleared that up a long time ago, rather you know someone has something against you, for whatever reason. The text says to go to that person, that brother or sister and be reconciled unto them before you continue with your offering unto God. Did not say to confront that individual and cause even more harm, rather do what is necessary to be reconciled, to get back on good terms, with the offending party.

1. But someone will also say, but they will not reconcile, even though I try and this is sometimes the case; but this does not stop us from doing what we should do. At least, we can show that person that we have no ill will toward them and will treat them as a brother or sister in Christ, even if they are not ready yet. If each of us, as Christians, do as we should and have the attitude we should have, we can resolve any issues that may arise between each other. As said so many times before - if somehow we both got to heaven and if there was some kind of unresolved issue between one another, how would we act? Do you think you will be able to walk down another street when you see certain individuals coming your way? Don't believe heaven will be like that - therefore get those issues resolved now and then you can walk down the streets of heaven side by side enjoying one another's presence.

CONCLUSION: As previously stated, so many of our disagreements and conflicts begin as minor issues that are blown out of proportion and there is nothing and no one in this life that is worth losing our salvation over. The longer an individual takes to clear up a conflict between a brother and sister in Christ, the more it will eat at the heart and the more horrible it will seem to become. So if you know there is a problem, the Word of God says fix it first and then your mind will be free to present your offering unto the Lord. The assumption would be, the Lord will not accept that offering if you have not done your part. If we do not learn to forgive, that "hurt" will eventually turn into bitterness and that bitterness may result in our losing salvation and missing heaven and nothing is worth that. **THE TRUE STORY OF ELISABETH ELLIOT. HER HUSBAND, JIM ELLIOT WAS A MISSIONARY TO A SOUTH AMERICAN TRIBE OF INDIANS. AFTER ONLY 27 MONTHS OF MARRIAGE HE WAS MURDERED BY THE INDIANS HE WAS TRYING TO HELP. YEARS LATER, SHE REMARRIED AND HER SECOND HUSBAND DIED OF CANCER. AT ONE POINT WHILE SHE WAS A WIDOW SHE ACTUALLY WENT BACK TO SHARE GOD'S LOVE WITH THE SAME TRIBE OF INDIANS THAT HAD MURDERED HER HUSBAND. HOW WAS SHE ABLE TO DO THAT? BECAUSE SHE FOUND IT IN HER HEART TO FORGIVE.** "**Be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.**" Also look at Genesis 13:8 concerning Abram and Lot - do what is necessary to work out those differences. If there are issues with a brother/sister in Christ, I beg you to get that reconciled today - do not wait until it is too late!