



By Jeanne Sheffield Estrada, Th.D.

## ARTICLE 6: I Can Forgive, But I Can't Forget

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In working through these articles, you are now past the half way mark across your Freedom Bridge. In doing so, Jesus is taking you through so many steps showing you several deep rooted issues that many of you have experienced in unforgiveness praying that you will reach the finish line with us. Be committed to stay on this journey because there are some more steps to take until we finally reach our destination called "The Restoration Place," the place where you will come to finally forgive.

Today's topic, "I Can Forgive, But I Can't Forget" is a phrase you may have heard or even repeated several times by someone else or the exact phrase repeated over and over in your own mind. We need to take a look at this phrase and see how this is not what Jesus taught us. We need to look at what the Bible teaches us to re-train our thoughts and our reactions.

Forgiveness is like getting pregnant. Either you are pregnant or you are not. Neither can you "sorta forgive." It just doesn't work. Forgiveness has to be complete. The process of forgiving does not require any special formula. The only requirement is your willingness to change the thoughts in your mind.

Have you ever said something to someone and later realized that the things you said were not true and you regretted having said what you did and wished you had never opened your mouth? In doing so did you lose the friendship of that person, and nothing could ever restore that relationship from then on? I have, and I struggled with forgiving myself for months. Although I had prayed for God to help me forgive myself, I could not do it. Finally, out of the blue one day, an e mail appeared on my computer from that person I had offended saying, "I forgave you a long time ago." It gave me such a lift to read those words, and I realized then that I had made myself miserable for nothing. This experience taught me several lessons. One is to watch the way I react to a situation or event that is upsetting to me; another is to watch the words that I say in response to another person; to remember that the other person is listening to me. Most importantly, God is listening to me. And no matter what a person may have done

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or may not have done, I must be slow to anger, slow to speak, and I must have the right mind to forgive if need to.

I believe that one of the greatest gifts of all is our power to choose the thoughts we put in our minds. The freedom to choose can release us from our self-imposed jail cells. It can release us from the enemy, Satan, ourselves and our own attachment from the past.

Forgiveness puts us in the flow of love. It reminds us that love is our only reality and love is everything and everywhere. Love is all there is.

Former Dwight Eisenhower once described his unique method of forgiving those who wronged him: "I make it my practice to avoid hating anyone. If someone is guilty of despicable actions, especially towards me, I try to forgive him. I used to follow a practice somewhat contrived I admit...to write the man's name down on a scrap piece of paper, drop it into the bottom drawer and say to myself, "That finishes the incident, and as far as I'm concerned with that person. That drawer over the years became a sort of private wastebasket for crippled up spite and discarded personalities. Besides, it seemed to be effective and helped me avoid harboring useless black feelings." Eisenhower may have been a good president, but it is quite questionable that he never knew the first thing about true forgiveness. He may have tucked away many names away, but he never forgave them. What a difference!

Like Eisenhower, many people confuse forgiveness with forgetting, which results in disastrous consequences. Forgetting our sins or someone else's only gives us temporary relief, not lasting healing. The writer of Hebrews says, *"See to it no one comes short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble; and by it many be defiled."* Hebrews 12:15

The Bible tells us again in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13 that we are to forgive one another just as God in Christ has forgiven us. Doesn't the Bible teach us that when God forgives, He forgets? If God can forgive the entire world of its sins, why should we find it so difficult to forget our relatively petty injuries toward one another? Take in this scripture...*"As far as the east is from the west, so far He has removed our transgressions from us."* Psalm 103:12. God also says, *"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*

Our sin creates an indebtedness to God whom we owe the One who created us for the transgressions we have committed. Remember Christ's death paid our sin debt in a transaction that was named to the cross with His only begotten SON.

When you become a Christian, God takes the debt you owe Him and nails it to the cross with Jesus and declares it "paid in full". But just because we still have our sin nature caused by the fall of Adam, it does not mean that God reneges on His promise to forgive our sins. Listen to what the apostle John wrote, *"And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* I John 2:1.

Lewis B. Smedes, the author of the book "Forgive and Forget" says, "Forgetting is a function of the brain; forgiveness is a function of the spirit."

We may not recall all the events that happen in life, yet all of those experiences are errantly recorded in our memory banks and could resurface at any time. Here's the bottom line. Forgetting offenses is not possible, and neither is it profitable. Are we to put them in the forefront of our minds? NO! God wired us to remember our experiences, so there must be positive benefits to remembering our sins. Are you familiar with how much Apostle Paul persecuted the Jews? As much as he wanted to, Paul could never forget his past after his conversion. He still remembered the faces of those who died and suffered. Forget his past? Impossible! Yet, he was overwhelmed by God's gracious act of forgiveness. God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you." One of the things God abhors is pride and one way God encourages humility is to allow us to remember our mistakes. Paul made his life an example by telling others that if God could forgive him, He could forgive anyone. His transformed life still speaks loud and clear today generations long after his death.

My friend, make the decision to let little things pass and don't let them grow into an unnecessary grievance. Proverbs 19:11 says, *"A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook transgression."*

Recall your own failures. Are you perfect? Absolutely not. There is only ONE. My friend, everyone has their own struggles and faults, as well as you. Jesus said it so clearly when he said, *"Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but you do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"* (Matthew 7: 1-3.)

Remember your decision to forgive. The best remedy for painful memories is not forgetting the offense, but your willful decision to release and forgive it. If you're going to remember a wrong, make sure you also remember how you dealt with or are dealing with that wrong. Realize that healing memories take time. Obviously, time cannot heal the wound of a serious offense. It's like a doctor telling you that you have cancer then says, "Don't worry about it. Time heals all things." What would you think? You would be appalled to say the least. Yes, healing can come with the passing of time, but only after the proper surgery and treatment. In the same way time can diminish the sting of past memories if we've properly forgiven another person. How? By making sure you have let go of the rope that ties them through the act of forgiveness.

Friend, if you have been putting off asking Jesus to help you forgive someone who has hurt you or even yourself, why not ask Him to help you right now by praying with prayer?

#### **Let's Pray:**

Dear God, please help me to see like you see and to forgive like you forgive. I know you can see inside of my heart and you are not pleased with what you see. I know that your word teaches me that if I do not forgive you will not forgive me. Please come into my heart right now and help me untie the rope I have against this person and myself. Forgive me of my sins so that I can be free to live with you in eternity forever. In Jesus name,

Amen