

SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2011

Oxymoron

We have all heard of various oxymoronic terms that are commonly used. For instance:

- Freezer burn
- Jumbo shrimp
- "Found missing"
- Deafening silence
- Genuine imitation

These are all self-contradicting terms. I have a new one to add to the list.

Unforgiving Christian

If you are a true Christian, then you must forgive others. Forgiven people must be forgiving people. That's because, as fatally flawed people, we are going to sin. We are going to hurt one another, whether it be intentional or unintentional.

Husbands will offend wives, and wives will offend husbands. Parents will hurt their children, and children will hurt their parents. Family members and friends will offend one another.

We might ask, "What if the person who has hurt does not deserve forgiveness?" My response would be, did you deserve to be forgiven by God? The answer is no.

Therefore, since God has so graciously forgiven you, you should in turn forgive others. The Bible tells us, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

You may have heard of Corrie ten Boom. During World War II, Corrie, along with her elderly father and sister Betsy, were sent to concentration camps by the Nazis for hiding Jewish people in their home. Corrie's father rightly believed that the Jews were God's chosen people and that, as a Christian family, they should do what they could to help them as the extermination of Jews began throughout Germany.

The Gestapo became aware of the ten Boom family's activities and told them to turn over the Jews they were hiding and stop offering sanctuary to them or else risk being sent to the concentration camps. The ten Booms refused, and they were all arrested.

Corrie's father and sister both died while incarcerated. But Corrie was released because of a "clerical error," which was really God's providence. She went on to live a long life traveling the world as a self-described "tramp for the Lord," telling people that there was no pit so deep that God was not deeper still.

She tells this story in her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*:

It was a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbrück. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there—the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsy's pain-blانched face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

Corrie ten Boom gave us an example to follow. The example of forgiving people, whether we feel they deserve it or not.

One final thought. When you forgive a person, you set a prisoner free . . . yourself!